

5-28-2021

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Andrew Woolford  
*University of Manitoba*

Wanda June  
*University of Manitoba*

Sereyvothny Um  
*Independent Researcher, Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

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### Recommended Citation

Woolford, Andrew; June, Wanda; and Um, Sereyvothny (2021) “We Planted Rice and Killed People:” Symbiogenetic Destruction in the Cambodian Genocide,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol. 15: Iss. 1: 44–67.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.15.1.1805>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol15/iss1/7>

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## **“We Planted Rice and Killed People:” Symbiogenetic Destruction in the Cambodian Genocide**

### **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful for interactions with Theodore Fontaine, David Courchene, Mary Courchene, Carrie Perreault, David Rundle, Daniel Highway, and other Indigenous Survivors and Elders who have helped shape our thinking. The paper has also benefited from the insight and support of Alexander Hinton, Xijuan Xia, Theresa de Langis, Chhay Visoth, Youk Chhang, Ros Sampeou, Ly Sok-Kheang, and Adam Muller. Research for this project was made possible by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Insight Grant.

# "We Planted Rice and Killed People:" Symbiogenetic Destruction in the Cambodian Genocide

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**Andrew Woolford**

University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

**Wanda June**

University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

**Sereyvothny Um**

Independent Researcher  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

"The most important thing is rice."<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, genocide scholars have given greater attention to the dangers posed by climate change for increasing the prevalence or intensity of genocide.<sup>2</sup> Challenges related to forced migration, resource scarcity, famine, and other threats of the Anthropocene are identified as sources of present and future risk, especially for those committed to genocide prevention.<sup>3</sup> We applaud these efforts, but approach the connection between the natural and social aspects of genocide from a different angle. Our research emanates out of a North American Indigenous studies and new materialist rather than Euro-genocide studies framework; meaning, we see the natural and the social (or cultural) as inseparable, deeply imbricated, phenomena. We argue that those entities designated natural are often engaged in co-constitutive relations with the social and cultural groups that are the focus of genocide studies. Simply put, groups become what they are through interaction—or symbiogenesis—with their natural world(s). Rather than forecast the prospects for increased genocidal destruction due to climate change, our project is to re-evaluate cases from the genocide canon to illuminate the symbiogenetic destruction apparent in these earlier events.<sup>4</sup> In the present study, we examine testimony that centers on the relationship between Khmer people and rice, including rice cultivation and consumption, as it was impacted by the Khmer Rouge. In so doing, we highlight the cultural consequences of social/natural death in the Cambodian genocide.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Weber Carlsen and Jan Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge* (Dec 2002–May 2003), interview 9, from Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, accessed July 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Martin Crook and Damien Short, "Marx, Lemkin and the Genocide-Ecocide Nexus," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (2014), 306; Damian Short, *Redefining Genocide: Settler Colonialism, Social Death and Ecocide* (London: Zed Books, 2016); Michael J. Lynch, Averi Fegadel, and Michael A. Long, "Green Criminology and State-Corporate Crime: The Ecocide-Genocide Nexus with Examples from Nigeria," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2020), 1–21; Jürgen Zimmerer, "From the Editors: Environmental Genocide? Climate Change, Mass Violence and the Question of Ideology," *Journal of Genocide Research* 9, no. 3, (2007), 349–351; Jürgen Zimmerer, ed., *Climate Change and Genocide: Environmental Violence in the 21st Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: Alex Alvarez, *Unstable Ground: Climate Change, Conflict, and Genocide* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2017); Jürgen Scheffran, Tobias Ide, and Janpeter Schilling, "Violent Climate or Climate of Violence? Concepts and Relations with Focus on Kenya and Sudan," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (2014), 369–390; Andreas Exenberger and Andreas Pondorfer, "Genocidal Risk and Climate Change: Africa in the Twenty-First Century," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (2014), 350–368.

<sup>4</sup> For discussion of the genocide canon, see Alexander Laban Hinton, "Critical Genocide Studies," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 7, no. 1 (2012), 4–15.

Two important qualifications are necessary. First, though our research project is influenced by Turtle Island (North American) Indigenous ontologies of relations between human and more-than-human life, having been “civilized” by our previous work on settler colonial genocide,<sup>5</sup> we do not draw an equivalence between Indigenous ontologies of symbiogenesis and those in other cultures. Instead, we seek to show what is distinct in each culture’s particular association with their more-than-human co-constituents. As well, our goal is to elevate and center the work of Indigenous Elders and scholars by allowing it to sensitize our approach and to equip us with another source of critical reflexivity.<sup>6</sup>

Second, our claim is not that symbiogenetic destruction is genocide. Whether exploring massacres of animal species such as cattle during the Rwandan genocide, the toxification of bodies of water such as Lake Winnipeg under Canadian settler colonialism, the loss of identity-bearing territories such as Mount Ararat, or the transformation of rice farming through the Cambodian genocide, our primary conclusion is not that the destruction of the natural world is in and of itself an act of genocide. We are sympathetic to such arguments<sup>7</sup> but we do not wish to add symbiogenetic genocide to a growing list of genocide sub-types that includes terms such as gendercide, urbicide, and ethnocide, among others.<sup>8</sup> Instead, symbiogenetic destruction runs in parallel with Claudia Card’s deployment of “social death”—what we refer to later in the paper as social/natural death—in that it describes a key relational stake, or that which is at risk, in genocidal processes. It draws attention to the group-producing relations with more-than-human entities that are integral components of the ongoing formation of group life.

In this paper, we focus on the relations between Khmer people and rice. Both Khmer and rice are dynamic rather than static categories. Each is itself a complex set of interactions. Khmer culture is produced through the actions of people who identify as Khmer, who do not always necessarily agree with what it means to be Khmer, thereby making Khmer-ness part of an ongoing set of negotiations.<sup>9</sup> This complexity goes beyond the level of the group, since each individual group member is involved in a process of identity formation, locating themselves in terms of what it means to be Khmer, but also refracting this identity through other intersecting sources of belonging, such as family, religion, and politics. Likewise, each individual is also a symbiogenetic composition of millions of microbiota that play roles in growth, digestion, and moods.<sup>10</sup> The groups we study are thus a multitude of associations comprised of further associations; meaning, we always face the danger of reification when seeking to contain their fluidity within our categorical terminology. When we speak of Khmer culture it should therefore be noted that we are speaking of the ongoing process of making Khmer culture.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the notion of settler colonizer researchers being “civilized” by engagement with Indigenous communities, please see Isaiah Wilner, “A Global Potlatch: Identifying the Indigenous Influence on Western Thought,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013), 87.

<sup>6</sup> In particular, we are grateful for interactions with Anishinaabe and Cree Elders, including Theodore Fontaine, David Courchene, Mary Courchene, and Betty Ross who have reminded us of the centrality of nature in our lives.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Tasha Hubbard “Buffalo Genocide in Nineteenth-Century North America: ‘Kill, Skin, and Sell,’” in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, ed. Andrew Woolford et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 292; see also, in general, Lauren J. Eichler, “Ecocide is Genocide: Decolonizing the Definition of Genocide,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 14, no. 2 (2020), 104–121.

<sup>8</sup> See Martin Coward, *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Adam Jones, ed., *Gendercide and Genocide* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 1; Mary Anne Warren, *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection* (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985); Andrew Markus, “Genocide in Australia,” *Aboriginal History* 25, no. 3 (2001), 57.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did they Kill?: Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Dorion Sagan, “The Human is More than Human: Interspecies Communities and the New ‘Facts of Life,’” *Fieldsights*, November 18, 2011, accessed June 4, 2020, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-human-is-more-than-human-interspecies-communities-and-the-new-facts-of-life>.

Likewise, rice is not a single thing. For example, there are approximately 2,000 strains of rice that are unique to Cambodia.<sup>11</sup> Each strain is itself a mixture of protein, fat, fiber, and sand ash. When milled, these properties are further transformed, as the white grain loses fiber, protein, and minerals. Isolating rice from its own web of relations entails analytical decision-making. Each plant from every strain of rice exists within a network of water, animal species, weather, and other factors. As Mak notes, a delicate and intricate balance sustains this network in Cambodia: “Rice-based farming systems in Cambodia incorporate rain fed lowland rice, dry season rice in some cases, animal production (cattle, pigs, chickens, and ducks), fishing (or fish culture) and other activities (such as palm sugar production, vegetable production, wild food collection and trade). Because of the close interaction of these components, a change in any one of them can alter the whole system.”<sup>12</sup> For the sake of making a clear argument, we will focus on the symbiogenetic destruction between Khmer and rice that occurred under the Khmer Rouge (KR), and its ruling faction of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), but, in truth, we are speaking to a much more diverse set of relational disruptions.<sup>13</sup>

### Genocide, Ecocide, and Symbiogenetic Destruction

Genocide studies takes group destruction as an essential wrong to be prevented.<sup>14</sup> What comprises the group is an ongoing topic of debate, with fault lines existing around the question of which types of group are to be included for protection.<sup>15</sup> The narrow framing of the *United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (UNGC 1948), which specifies “national, ethnical, racial, or religious groups” as those protected, has been criticized for ignoring political and class-based groups.<sup>16</sup> More capacious readings of the UNGC have since presented these four group types as examples of “stable and permanent” patterns of group life rather than a complete set of groups potentially targeted by genocide.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the issue of group types, genocide scholarship also diverges between what A. Dirk Moses describes as “liberal” and “post-liberal” approaches, with the former focusing on state-based, totalitarian forms of genocidal intent while the latter opens the door to consideration of “relations of genocide” into which genocide is structurally embedded rather

<sup>11</sup> Kent Helmers, “Rice in the Cambodian Economy: Past and Present,” in *Rice Production in Cambodia*, ed. Harry J. Nesbitt (Phnom Penh: Cambodia-IRRI-Australia Project, 1997), 2.

<sup>12</sup> S. Mak, “Continued Innovation in a Cambodian Rice-Based Farming System: Farmer Testing and Recombination of New Elements,” *Agricultural Systems* 69, no. 1–2 (2001), 137.

<sup>13</sup> Given the exploratory nature of this paper, we restrict our focus to the broader destruction of Khmer social relations under the Khmer Rouge. One could also drill down deeper to examine how specific minorities experienced symbiogenetic destruction, such as the Cham, or Indigenous groups living among the Khmer, such as the Mnong, Kuy, and Tampuan. Each group will have a distinct story of how relations with rice were impacted by the Khmer Rouge.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example: Frank Chalk, “Redefining Genocide,” in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, ed. George Andreopoulos (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 47; Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley, *Why Not Kill Them All?: The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Helen Fein, “Accounting for Genocide After 1945: Theories and Some Findings,” *International Journal on Group Rights* 1, no. 2 (1993), 79; Helen Fein, “Genocide, Terror, Life Integrity, and War Crimes: The Case for Discrimination,” in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, ed. George J. Andreopoulos (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 95–108; Michael Freeman, “The Theory and Prevention of Genocide,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 6, no. 2 (1991), 185–199; Ervin Staub, “Genocide and Mass Killing: Origins, Prevention, Healing and Reconciliation,” *Political Psychology* 21, no. 2 (2000), 367–382.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Powell, “What do Genocides Kill? A Relational Conception of Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 9, no. 4 (2007), 527–547.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example: Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Lyman H. Legters, “The Soviet Gulag: Is It Genocidal?” in *Toward the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide*, ed. Israel W. Charny (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 60–66.

<sup>17</sup> *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), September 2, 1998, ICTR-96-4, section 6.3.1, para. 516.

than necessarily explicitly expressed.<sup>18</sup> Christopher Powell adds to Moses's distinction that liberal approaches tend to view groups essentially as associations of individuals, making these individual lives the ultimate targets for protection.<sup>19</sup> Whereas for post-liberals the group is an entity valued in and of itself, in part because it is a carrier of culture, which is an accumulation of knowledge and practices that bring meaning to group members' lives. This post-liberal approach has been enhanced by engagement with Indigenous understandings of collectivity.<sup>20</sup> But it is also strongly influenced by Raphaël Lemkin's scholarship and advocacy in which the group is more than simply a gathering of individuals; it is a distinct cultural entity that through its mere existence contributes to our global diversity and therefore collective wealth as a species.<sup>21</sup>

Confounding contemporary studies of genocide though is the fact that the persistence of human groups appears more and more impacted by their relations with the natural world. The ecological damage suffered under the Anthropocene has introduced an epoch in which we can no longer draw neat dividing lines between human cultures and their natures,<sup>22</sup> if we ever could.<sup>23</sup> The human group is entwined with the natural world in a manner that makes their symbiogenesis an important topic of research for those committed to advancing group protection. This influence may spark a "post-humanist" approach to genocide, adding to Moses's typology.<sup>24</sup> Our preference, however, is to call it a "post-anthropocentric" turn, since we are not yet done with the human; rather, our goal is to better understand entanglements of the human and the more-than-human within genocidal processes.

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<sup>18</sup> A. Dirk Moses, "Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the 'Racial Century': Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002), 19–28. On "relations of genocide," see Tony Barta, "Relations of Genocide: Land and Lives in the Colonization of Australia," in *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*, ed. Isidor Wallimann, Michael N. Dobkowski, and Richard L. Rubenstein (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 237–253.

<sup>19</sup> Powell, *What do Genocides Kill?*, 528. For an example of the liberal approach, see Chalk and Jonassohn, *History and Sociology of Genocide*.

<sup>20</sup> See Barta, *Relations of Genocide*; Damian Short, "Cultural Genocide and Indigenous Peoples: A Sociological Approach," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 14, no. 6 (2010), 833–848; Andrew Woolford, "Ontological Destruction: Genocide and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 4, no. 1 (2009), 81–97.

<sup>21</sup> Raphaël Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944); Raphaël Lemkin, *Totally Unofficial: The Autobiography of Raphaël Lemkin*, ed. Donna Lee Frieze (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Douglas Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Anton Weiss-Wendt, *The Soviet Union and the Gutting of the UN Genocide Convention* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017); A. Dirk Moses, "Empire, Colony, Genocide: Keywords and the Philosophy of History," in *Empire, Colony, and Genocide: Conquest, Occupation and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 3–54.

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion of the Anthropocene, see Rodolfo Dirzo et al., "Defaunation in the Anthropocene," *Science* 345, no. 6195 (2014), 401–406; David Cecil Smith and Angela Elizabeth Douglas, *The Biology of Symbiosis* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1987); Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill, "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature," *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment* 36, no. 8 (2007), 614–621; Jan Zalasiewicz et al., "The New World of the Anthropocene," *Environmental Science & Technology* 44, no. 7 (2010), 2228–2231.

<sup>23</sup> Various authors challenge the nature/culture distinction. See Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay," in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. John Law (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 196–233; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Deborah Bird Rose, "Introduction: Writing in the Anthropocene," *Australian Humanities Review* 47 (2009), 87.

<sup>24</sup> Authors such as Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour are often included under the label "post-humanism" with varying levels of comfort.

Post-anthropocentrism pushes beyond the human as the measure of all worth.<sup>25</sup> Genocide studies has difficulty avoiding anthropocentrism entirely, since the human group remains our central unit of analysis. But what if we blur the boundaries of such groups so that more-than-human co-constituents are allowed in? By centering human and more-than-human relations within the genocide story, rather than isolating the experiences of human actors, we seek to decenter the human subject to explore what new insights can be brought forward through this displacement. In particular, our objective is to make room for a hybrid rather than asymmetrical understanding of human and more-than-human relations so that the latter is not simply held to be instrumental to the former. That is, we move beyond analyses in which a human group's relationship with land, plants, water, or animals is considered relevant only to the extent that these natural entities serve the physical subsistence and reproduction of the human group.<sup>26</sup>

Asymmetric genocide research is evident in early scholarship on this topic in which the natural world factored into consideration primarily as an object of human conflict. Culturally differentiated human groups were viewed to be in competition over resources, power, or other desired goods.<sup>27</sup> As well, it was noted that the natural world might be invoked in genocide ideology to advance the demonization or dehumanization of the targeted group, treating them as dogs, cockroaches, or beasts.<sup>28</sup> More recently, scholars have begun to reflect on the impact of ecocidal destruction and climate change on processes of genocide.<sup>29</sup> Ecocide is offered as an addition to the lexicon of destruction, and defined as "the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished."<sup>30</sup> Martin Crook and Damien Short bring this terminology into genocide research to describe the genocide-ecocide nexus as an interstitial space between genocide and ecocide.<sup>31</sup> We situate our current research project amidst this "in-between" space. But rather than focus on how larger ecocidal and genocidal processes sustain and reinforce each other, our work highlights the quotidian interactions through which humans form their groups with more-than-human counterparts, as well as the ways these relationships are impacted by genocide and/or ecocide.

The terms we rely upon to describe this process are symbiogenesis and symbiogenetic destruction. Both are built from the word symbiosis, which is derived from the Greek *symbiōsis*, meaning "a living together." In biology, symbiosis refers to two or more organisms sharing a

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<sup>25</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 6 (2019), 32. See also Adam J. Fix, Hugh Burnam, and Ray Gutteriez, "Toward Interspecies Thinking as a Collaborative Concept: Autoethnographies at the Intersection of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Animal Studies," *Humanimalia: A Journal of Human/Animal Interface Studies* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2019), 128–149.

<sup>26</sup> For exceptions, see Jennifer Huseman and Damien Short, "'A Slow Industrial Genocide': Tar Sands and the Indigenous Peoples of Northern Alberta," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 16, no. 1 (2012), 216–237; Woolford, *Ontological Destruction*.

<sup>27</sup> See, in general, Chalk and Jonassohn, *History and Sociology of Genocide*; Isidor Dobkowski, Michael N. Wallimann, and Richard L. Rubenstein, eds., *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000); Fein, *Accounting for Genocide*; Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> See, in general, John Hagan and Wenona Raymond-Richmond, "The Collective Dynamics of Racial Dehumanization and Genocidal Victimization in Darfur," *American Sociological Review* 73, no. 6 (2008), 875–902; Herbert C. Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Alexander L. Hinton, "Agents of Death: Explaining the Cambodian Genocide in Terms of Psychosocial Dissonance," *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 4 (1996), 818–831.

<sup>29</sup> Crook and Short, *Genocide-Ecocide Nexus*; Short, *Redefining Genocide*; Zimmerer, *Climate Change and Genocide*.

<sup>30</sup> Polly Higgins, Damian Short, and Nigel South, "Protecting the Planet: A Proposal for a Law of Ecocide," *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 59 (2013), 257.

<sup>31</sup> Crook and Short, *Genocide-Ecocide Nexus*.

close relationship. This does not need to be an equally beneficial relationship.<sup>32</sup> Mutualism, in symbiosis, describes the ways in which two species interact in relationship with one another toward their mutual benefit.<sup>33</sup> It contrasts with inter-species forms of competition, such as invasive species, or parasitism, where one entity benefits while the other is harmed.<sup>34</sup>

More recent discussion of symbiogenesis or sympoiesis—the process whereby complex systems are produced through inter-species relations—moves beyond the potential instrumentality of symbiosis.<sup>35</sup> It is a terminology developed in contrast to Darwinian, Hobbesian, and Malthusian notions of competition and survival. Peter Kropotkin, in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, used the language of symbiosis to demonstrate a natural tendency toward cooperation as a counterpoint to the naturalization of competition in laissez faire capitalism.<sup>36</sup> Following this approach, symbiogenesis has found purchase in the work of Lynn Margulis,<sup>37</sup> as well as in feminist studies of science that seek to dissolve the boundaries between the social and the biological.<sup>38</sup> With respect to the latter, Donna Haraway explains symbiogenesis through the example of Churro sheep in Dinetah (Diné or Navajo, territory).<sup>39</sup> Sheep and Diné co-exist in kin-like relations through which patterns of Diné pastoralism, gender relations, and clan organization are made possible. The forced cull of these animals by the US government in the 1930s was thus experienced as a world-destroying assault on the Diné way of being, which impacted not only the physical sustenance of the group, but threw cultural relations, particularly gender relations, into disarray.<sup>40</sup>

Symbiogenetic destruction is therefore the destruction of symbiogenesis. It is not intended to replace expressions such as ecocide or the genocide-ecocide nexus. Instead, it sensitizes genocide studies to the relations that proposed laws against ecocide intend to protect. It acknowledges that the groups protected by genocide are symbiogenetically formed through their connections to more-than-human entities, and that genocide impacts these connections in multiple ways that are detrimental to human groups and their more-than-human counterparts. Through this notion, one can better understand how inter-species mingling, which is important to how groups define themselves in cultural and symbolic terms, is placed in danger during genocidal processes.

#### *Becoming Groups Together: Symbiogenesis and the Things that make Us*

In his seminal essay, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour recasts the culture/nature divide as a result of a *modern* constitution—one whereby we, as self-styled moderns, agreed to treat

<sup>32</sup> Bradford D. Martin and Ernest Schwab, "Current Usage of Symbiosis and Associated Terminology," *International Journal of Biology* 5, no. 1 (2013), 32–45; Surindar Paracer and Vernon Ahmadjian, *Symbiosis: An Introduction to Biological Associations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Michael Begon, Colin R. Townsend, and John L. Harper, *Ecology: From Individuals to Ecosystems*, 4th ed. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 27.

<sup>34</sup> Paul W. Ewald, "Transmission Modes and Evolution of the Parasitism-Mutualism Continuum," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 503, no. 1 (1987), 295–306; Regina S. Redman, David D. Dunigan, and Rusty J. Rodriguez, "Fungal Symbiosis from Mutualism to Parasitism: Who Controls the Outcome, Host or Invader?," *New Phytologist* 151, no. 3 (2001), 705–716; Peter H. Thrall et al., "Coevolution of Symbiotic Mutualists and Parasites in a Community Context," *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 22, no. 3 (2007), 120–126.

<sup>35</sup> Beth M. L. Dempster, "A Self-Organizing Systems Perspective on Planning for Sustainability" (PhD diss., University of Waterloo, 1998); Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (Mineola: Dover, 1902).

<sup>37</sup> Lynn Margulis, *Symbiosis in Cell Evolution* (San Francisco: WH Freeman & Co Ltd, 1981). See also her previous ground-breaking article, published as Lynn Sagan, "On the Origin of Mitosing Cells," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 14, no. 3 (1967), 225–274.

<sup>38</sup> Norah Campbell, Stephen Dunne, and Paul Ennis, "Graham Harman, Immaterialism: Objects and Social Theory," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 3 (2019), 131.

<sup>39</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 91.

<sup>40</sup> See also Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

culture and nature separately, despite their numerous entanglements in our everyday lives.<sup>41</sup> For Latour, this constitution requires an act of purification that allows us to ignore the ways that our cultures overlap and engage with our natures, exemplified by the amalgams of culture and nature in climate change and disease spread. In the field of genocide studies, since Raphaël Lemkin first coined the genocide concept,<sup>42</sup> several scholars have seen culture as a foundational component of group life.<sup>43</sup> However, the intersection between natures and cultures has received less attention, though recent contributions to the environmental history of the Holocaust promise more consideration of multispecies intersections.<sup>44</sup>

Latour's innovation was not new to Indigenous scholars. As Kelsey Dale John remarks, such perspectives only appear new because of the attempted erasure of Indigenous knowledges and their exclusion from academia.<sup>45</sup> Indigenous scholars such as Leanne Betasmoke Simpson, John Borrows, Eve Tuck, and Glen Coulthard, among several others, have long emphasized how Indigenous peoples, languages, territories, water sources, plant life, the spirit world, kin species, and additional more-than-human actors are integral components of an intricate web of relations.<sup>46</sup> Latour's contribution thus might be better specified as one noting that non-Indigenous cultures are less separate from their more-than-human counterparts than they often imagine, even if the entanglements are perhaps not as cosmologically central as they are for Indigenous peoples.

If our cultural selves are formed through interactions beyond those with our fellow humans, what consequences does this have for the notion of the group that is central to genocide studies? The group is a word Latour argues is empty of content; it suggests a fixity, something that is complete, rather than something that is being formed. He prefers the term "associations," capturing what other scholars describe as the process of becoming through which a collective continuously forms itself.<sup>47</sup> Associations emerge through relations that include alliances, attachments, and other forms of multispecies mingling.<sup>48</sup> As Donna Haraway notes, processes of becoming are always ones of becoming *with*,<sup>49</sup> and this includes interactions

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<sup>41</sup> Latour, *Never Been Modern*; See also Jonathan Mark Anderson, "Transient Convergence and Relational Sensibility: Beyond the Modern Construction of Nature," *Emotion, Space and Society* 2, no. 2 (2009), 120–127; Bruce Braun, "Nature and Culture: On the Career of a False Problem," in *A Companion to Cultural Geography*, ed. James S. Duncan et al. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 151–179.

<sup>42</sup> Lemkin, *Axis Rule*.

<sup>43</sup> Moses, *Empire, Colony, Genocide*; Short, *Cultural Genocide and Indigenous Peoples*; Woolford, *Ontological Destruction*; Andrew Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment: Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States* (Lincoln and Winnipeg: University of Nebraska Press and University of Manitoba Press, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Jacek Małczyński et al., "The Environmental History of the Holocaust," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22, no. 2 (2020), 183–196; Jacek Małczyński, "The Politics of Nature at the Former Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22, no. 2 (2020), 197–219; Ewa Domańska, "The Environmental History of Mass Graves," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22, no. 2 (2020), 241–255; Tim Cole, "Expanding (Environmental) Histories of the Holocaust," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22, no. 2 (2020), 273–279.

<sup>45</sup> Kelsey Dayle John, "Animal Colonialism: Illustrating Intersections between Animal Studies and Settler Colonial Studies through Diné Horsemanship," *Humanalia: A Journal of Human/Animal Interface Studies* 10, no. 2 (2019), 44.

<sup>46</sup> John Borrows, "Heroes, Tricksters, Monsters, and Caretakers: Indigenous Law and Legal Education," *McGill Law Journal/Revue de droit de McGill* 61, no. 4 (2016), 795–846; Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Winona Laduke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999); Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011); Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), 1–40.

<sup>47</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27–42.

<sup>48</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 241–242.

<sup>49</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 60.

with more-than-human entities, whereby the latter contribute in diverse ways to the richness of the assemblage that is being produced.<sup>50</sup>

We do not discard the notion of the group, given its familiarity within genocide studies. But we understand groups as engaged in an ongoing process of becoming. As such, groups do not stand outside of nature, simply drawing upon it for sustenance, protecting themselves against its force, or mastering it for human betterment. Instead, they become the groups that they are through their relationships with a dynamic and active natural world.<sup>51</sup> Simply put, and with reference to our primary case study, one can hardly imagine Khmer as a group without rice. As we show below, the KR transformation of rice production altered many aspects of Khmer life, such as relations to work, family, and food. And the assault upon these relations negatively impacted collective vitality.

Building upon Claudia Card's understanding of "social death," a term she adapts from Orlando Patterson, one can conceptualize this loss of vitality as a form of social/natural death. For Card, social death is the fundamental harm of genocide.<sup>52</sup> Though genocide also destroys lives, at its root it kills the relationships through which collective identities are formed and from which existential meaning is derived. But her argument stops short of acknowledging the full diversity of relations that allow collective life to offer meaning to its constituents. The "cultural heritage" and "intergenerational connections" that are lost in genocide are not restricted to the human, but also include more-than-human relations that span across the life of the group.<sup>53</sup> Symbiogenetic destruction is thus a form of social/natural death, since symbiogenesis is a means by which humans and more-than-humans create collective vitality. It is the process of storying ourselves and our world together with our companions, kin, and others.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, symbiogenesis does not naturalize nationalism in a manner that echoes Nazi propaganda of "blood and soil;"<sup>55</sup> instead, it recognizes that culture and nature are conjoined in practices of co-imagination whereby the groups in which we find meaning and belonging are shaped by the more-than-human counterparts with whom we intersect.

When we speak of co-constitutive relations between humans and nature, we mean that the cultures of both the human and the more-than-human are transformed into something new when their lives meet. Vinciane Despret captures this symbiogenesis effectively when discussing the study of dogs. She writes: "I think that, for example, the ethology of dogs or cats is really helpful too because the question of nature and culture cannot really be raised, because even if all dogs behave in a certain way, it might be culture, but ... it's not a culture of the dogs. It's rather a culture of the history of dogs with humans that transformed both dogs and humans

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<sup>50</sup> This could be compared with the Guattarian notion of the group-subject, which is actively formed through self-organizing group members rather than an identity externally imposed. Such groups are formed through "transversality," which enables openness to new members and goals of mutuality rather than domination. See Simone Bignall, Steve Hemming, and Daryle Rigney, "Three Ecosophies for the Anthropocene: Environmental Governance, Continental Posthumanism and Indigenous Expressivism," *Deleuze Studies* 10, no. 4 (2016), 463. We are bracketing here the larger debate around the agency attributed to more-than-human entities, which will be addressed in our subsequent work. For more discussion of the debate on the agency of "actants" see Arianne Françoise Conty, "The Politics of Nature: New Materialist Responses to the Anthropocene," *Theory, Culture, & Society* 35, no. 7–8 (2018), 73–96; Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications," *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996), 369–381; Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> Kristin Asdal, "The Problematic Nature of Nature: The Post-Constructivist Challenge to Environmental History," *History and Theory* 42, no. 4 (2003), 71.

<sup>52</sup> Claudia Card, *Confronting Evils: Terrorism, Torture, Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 237–266.

<sup>53</sup> Claudia Card, "Genocide and Social Death," *Hypatia* 18, no. 1 (2003), 73.

<sup>54</sup> Brian McCormick, "Narrative Meaning and Multispecies Ethical Ontologies," *Humanalia: A Journal of Human/Animal Interface Studies* 11, no. 1 (2019), 73.

<sup>55</sup> Małczyński et al., *Environmental History of the Holocaust*, 187.

and created an artefact.”<sup>56</sup> This is the history that interests us in the study of symbiogenetic destruction—the cultures transformed by ongoing relations with a natural world counterpart, and the consequences for the human group when these relations, which become part of the group, are subject to genocidal processes. Despret refers to this elsewhere as the “miracle of *attunement*” whereby humans and more-than-humans form affecting and effected relationships with one another.<sup>57</sup> The human becomes a human with the more-than-human. More concretely, one could argue, the groups studied in genocide studies are also groups-with: in the present example, we can speak of Khmer-with-rice.

### A Note on Methodology

To capture elements of the relationship between Khmer and rice, as well as the destructive consequences of KR rice production policy, we rely on oral historical testimony drawn from multiple sources.<sup>58</sup> We do not present the information drawn from these sources to render a complete picture of the past but rather to illustrate a sample of Khmer practices of meaning making about the past in which rice plays a primary role. The stories people tell about their past and their relations with rice offer perspective on the ways Khmer imagine themselves as members of families, communities, regions, and the nation. In this manner, the natural world is a resource for meaning making, and thus an essential foundation to the group’s existence. As McCormick notes: “Because stories are ongoing, revisable, and able to incorporate complexity, narrative forms are ideal for thinking multispecies community in shared, overlapping worlds.”<sup>59</sup> Further, he adds: “Storied-places are sites of multispecies encounter. For a place to become a home, there must be successful negotiation amongst its denizens. Storied-places, then, are also multiple overlapping and entangled meaning-making practices that range beyond the individual.”<sup>60</sup> Following McCormick’s emphasis on story as a site for exploring the intersections of the human and more-than-human, we examined transcribed memories as interpretations of both the time before, during, and after the period of Democratic Kampuchea. We have reviewed testimony taken both soon and many years after the fall of the KR, including testimony from former cadre, victims, and others who do not fit neatly in either category. In total, as part of our broader research project, we examined over 110 transcripts, as well as a variety of other representations of the KR past, including memoirs, histories, documentaries, and movies. The frequency of rice in these narratives—as a source of labor, food, a family ritual, a community ceremony, among other associations—shows its relational centrality in the Khmer lifeworld. In different ways and different regions, Khmer people have shaped themselves alongside the fields of rice that support their existence.

### Rice/People

Rice has fed many cultures. Records of its production date back as far as 2,500 BCE. From its origins in China, it traveled throughout Asia and into Europe and Africa. It is a versatile crop that adapts to its environment. It is grown in both dry and wet regions. It adjusts to peoples, providing a storable food that carries the flavors of cultures while filling hungry stomachs. And people adjust to it, shaping their daily activities, homes, and family lives to its cultivation and consumption.

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<sup>56</sup> Brett Buchanan, Matthew Chrulew, and Jeffrey Bussolini, “On Asking the Right Questions: An Interview with Vinciane Despret,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 20, no. 2 (2015), 173.

<sup>57</sup> Vinciane Despret, “The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro-zoo-genesis,” *Body & Society* 10, no. 2–3 (2004), 125.

<sup>58</sup> Sources include transcripts translated from the Document Center of Cambodia’s “Promoting Accountability” Interviews conducted between 2000–2007, as well as Promoting Accountability Reports, Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia testimony from civil parties and witnesses for cases 001 and 002, video interviews conducted by Thomas Weber Carlsen and Jan Krogsgaard between 2002–2003 and available at the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center in Phnom Penh, as well as interview transcripts obtained from the Jorng Jam and Kdai Karuna oral history projects.

<sup>59</sup> McCormick, *Ethical Ontologies*, 72.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Rice is a member of the *Poaceae* family. Each rice plant produces multiple groupings of approximately 200 flowers called tillers. Fertilized by wind-borne pollens, the thousands of grains of rice take shape in the plant. Cambodia's wet rice strains are harvested from flooded rice paddies. The paddy is drained prior to harvesting, before the farmers cut the plants, often with a scythe or sickle, and let them dry. The dry plants are threshed against a slotted table that is placed over a tarp so that the rice seeds fall to the tarp to be collected. Milling follows to remove the husk, bran layer, and germ, resulting in white grains of rice.<sup>61</sup>

Khmer farmers have cultivated rice for more than 2,000 years. The era of the Khmer Empire was a period when irrigation and labor were organized to increase production. Nonetheless, small farm holdings cultivated by traditional methods, such as ox cart plows and hand threshing, remained the dominant practices. In the aftermath of the Khmer Empire, rice farming continued in this fashion. French colonialism (1863–1953) brought with it a push toward modernization, as large plantations were introduced in some regions, as well as inorganic fertilizers and machinery, all in an effort to build an export market, though many Khmer continued with traditional farming methods.<sup>62</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, the colonized region produced from 50,000 to 200,000 tonnes of rice per year for export. By 1940, Cambodia was the world's third largest rice exporter. Those farmers who produced rice for French export, however, found themselves poorly compensated for their work. They received only 26 percent of the profit, with the remainder going to intermediaries, transport, processing, and government taxes.<sup>63</sup>

Rice means more than profit for Khmer people. It is central to Cambodian subsistence and the cultures of the region. The English phrase "to eat," when translated into Khmer is *pisa bei*, literally meaning "to eat rice."<sup>64</sup> Though practices of rice production have shifted from time to time, rice has remained the staple of the Cambodian diet.

Rice is also spiritually salient to Cambodian life. The rice rituals of the Cambodian agricultural cycle are of particular significance. For example, the celebration of *Pchum Bin* takes place over two weeks at the end of the rainy season. To participate in the ceremony, Khmer who live elsewhere return to their place of birth to provide nourishment in the form of balls of rice to the lost souls released by the King of the Underworld. They do so to bestow merit upon and bless their ancestors, who may have become lost souls because of a burden of wrongdoing when living. But the ceremony is also an opportunity to participate in rituals of rebirth and renewal, as offerings made to the Buddhist Monks at the temples are acts through which participants themselves make merit. Rice is thus entwined in this ceremony that simultaneously mourns the dead and creates community cohesion.<sup>65</sup>

Many Khmer worship local spirits (*neak ta* or ancient ones). Some of these reside in natural spaces, such as mountains, fields, or mounds. Relationships are formed with *neak ta* through food offerings generously given in hopes that these powerful beings will not become angry and send sickness, floods, or other harms.<sup>66</sup> In this manner, symbiogenesis with the natural world is embedded into ritual practice. Courtney Work describes *neak ta* as "sovereigns of the land," who are "in and of the water and the land."<sup>67</sup> They are sometimes referred to as

<sup>61</sup> The lead author visited a rice farm in Siem Reap to observe traditional rice producing methods and to speak with farmers.

<sup>62</sup> Mak, *Cambodian Rice-Based Farming System*.

<sup>63</sup> Helmers, *Rice in the Cambodian Economy*, 3–4.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>65</sup> See Eveline Porée-Maspero, *Étude sur les rites agraires des cambodgiens* (Paris: Mouton, 1962) 315–359; Courtney Work, "Sacred Bribes and Deferred Violence: Buddhist Ritual in Rural Cambodia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 45, no. 1 (2014), 4–24; Judy Ledgerwood, "Buddhist Ritual and the Reordering of Social Relations in Cambodia," *South East Asian Research* 20, no. 2 (2012), 191–206.

<sup>66</sup> Hinton, *Why did They Kill?*, 106–107.

<sup>67</sup> Courtney Work, "Chthonic Sovereigns: 'Neak Ta' in a Cambodian Village," *The Asian Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2019), 74–75.

*manuss moel min coeñ* (people who we cannot see), among which are included the *mcâs djik mcâs tî* (owners/masters of water and land). They are the true owners of the territory with whom social relationships defined by fear, gratitude, and respect are formed.<sup>68</sup> These spirits help regulate respectful use of the land and its bounty, as mis- or overuse might result in negative consequences, such as misfortune or even death.<sup>69</sup> Drastic changes to rice production thus threaten a web of spiritual relations intended to foster respect for the land.

The cultural centrality of rice to Khmer society is broadly illustrated through Rithy Panh's film *Rice People* (or *Neak Sre*, which refers to people who live in a rural area and farm rice for a living), where the rice paddy is presented as a microcosm of Cambodian life. In Panh's film, a young couple worries about the coming harvest and their lack of land. They have seven daughters and for each the family will be expected to provide a dowry. Their fourteen acres of land amounts to only two acres per daughter. When the mother is bit by a cobra in the field, the fragility of their existence is made clear. Soon after, the father is stabbed by a thorn as he tills the muddy rice paddy, trying to get his rice planted in time. The thorn festers in his foot, leaving his wife, now recovered from her bite, and his daughters to "wake up the paddies." Before he dies from his injury, the father has a fevered dream of his rice fields and house on fire as KR cadre march past. He searches among them for his family and is struck to the ground by blows from a soldier. After his death, his wife tries to care for the rice paddies with the help of her older daughters, resulting in her breakdown as her obsessive care of the rice eclipses that for her children. The rice people, Khmer in Panh's film, live in the precarity of deep dependence on the rice harvest.

Though many strands connect rice to the Cambodian genocide, we will focus on three in this paper: Rice and labor, rice and family, and rice and hunger.

### The Rice of the Khmer Rouge

Rice and rice production have been discussed in several studies of the Cambodian genocide.<sup>70</sup> Many such studies focus on famine or the brutality of KR rice production policy. Our contribution to this literature is to bring the cultural centrality of rice into the foreground, to show how symbiogenetic relations between Khmer and rice were upset in Democratic Kampuchea.

The post-Independence (1953) government of Norodom Sihanouk, who abdicated his throne in 1955 to serve as Cambodian Prime Minister, retained many French land use policies. During this time, rice yields continued to drive the Cambodian economy. Indeed, the rice harvest reached record levels from 1963 to 1965 and, for a brief period, rice exports supported a positive trade balance. But US engagement in the Vietnam War in 1965 brought US forces in the region to 300,000 by mid-1966. As well, there simultaneously occurred increased conscription into both Saigon's forces and those of the National Liberation Front. All of these soldiers had to be fed and Cambodian rice was smuggled across the border for this purpose. Moreover, Richard Nixon's "secret war" in Cambodia, which began with a May 1970 invasion, impacted the rice

<sup>68</sup> Courtney Work, "'There was so much': Violence, Sovereignty, and States of Extraction in Cambodia," *Journal of Religion and Violence* 6, no. 1 (2018), 53.

<sup>69</sup> Matthew O'Lemmon, "Spirit Cults and Buddhist Practice in Kep Province, Cambodia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 45, no. 1 (2014), 34.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example Randle C. DeFalco, "Justice and Starvation in Cambodia: The Khmer Rouge Famine," *Cambodia Law & Policy Journal* 2, no. 45 (2014), 45–84; James A. Tyner, *From Rice Fields to Killing Fields: Nature, Life, and Labor under the Khmer Rouge* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2017); James Tyner and Stian Rice, "Cambodia's Political Economy of Violence: Space, Time, and Genocide Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79," *Genocide Studies International* 10, no. 1 (2016), 84–94; Stian Rice and James Tyner, "The Rice Cities of the Khmer Rouge: An Urban Political Ecology of Rural Mass Violence," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42, no. 4 (2017), 559–571; James Tyner, "Violence, Surplus Production, and the Transformation of Nature During the Cambodian Genocide," *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economic, Culture and Society* 26, no. 4 (2014), 490–506; Maureen S. Hiebert, "Genocide, Revolution, and Starvation under the Khmer Rouge," *Genocide Studies International* 11, no. 1 (2017), 68–86; Daniel Bultmann, "Irrigating a Socialist Utopia: Disciplinary Space and Population Control under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979," *Transcience* 3, no. 1 (2012), 40–52.

yield. Not only did the 2.7 million tons of bombs dropped on Cambodia result in lost lives and a refugee crisis, but the countryside was also devastated and rice production seriously compromised in acts some have referred to as ecocide.<sup>71</sup>

Peasant frustration grew because of land grabs, mounting debts, and other indignities, drawing them toward rebellion in the late 1960s. Then, on March 18, 1970, Lon Nol, with American backing, seized the government from the monarchy. For several cadre, it was this coup that overthrew Prince Sihanouk that brought them to the KR,<sup>72</sup> as Sihanouk rallied his supporters to join.<sup>73</sup> Between 1970 and 1973, the area of farmable rice land decreased by 77 percent, resulting in an 84 percent decrease to the rice yield, further exacerbating frustration.<sup>74</sup> As well, US cross-border forays into Cambodia resulted in antipersonnel mines being hidden across the countryside, presenting new risks to farmers and civilians in these regions.<sup>75</sup> Overall, the assault on Khmer, and on their primary source of subsistence, contributed to the growth of the KR.

Rice shortages were widely felt. Price increases in rice were noted in Phnom Penh in the early 1970s. The population of the city steadily increased as refugees from the KR advance fled to the city. With the KR victory, Phnom Penh was evacuated on April 17, 1975,<sup>76</sup> and both long-term and recent-arrival city dwellers came under suspicion. They were viewed as living an easy life on the backs of the peasant farmers. Their morality was in question because it was perceived that they did not engage in productive work. They were accused of being supporters of the Lon Nol regime. Strategically speaking, it was also the case that it did not serve the KR militarily to have population centers potentially vulnerable to attack, since they foresaw warfare with a weakened regime in Saigon, which would allow KR to claim contested territory from Vietnam before Vietnamese communists could do likewise.<sup>77</sup> The city dwellers thus became a new workforce to improve the economic base of the new society.

Part of what Alexander Hinton refers to as the “ontological resonance” of the KR message—the connection of socialist ideology to the lived experiences of Cambodians<sup>78</sup>—came from the rice paddy. One cadre saw the KR as a natural fit because of the allegiance he felt with the poor who had their land, rice, and animals exploited by the capitalists.<sup>79</sup> Another recounts the wisdom shared with him personally by Pol Pot while his wife served as a cook for the leader: “He told me to take root on soil near water. Do not fly around for family economies.”<sup>80</sup> The message was to rely on the soil rather than running from opportunity to opportunity like seed blown on the wind. For another cadre, Pol Pot’s lessons about land were most memorable: “What is most important is land. To have land to take roots. His [Pol Pot] guid[ance] was like this, if we don’t have anything, that is fine as long as we did not give up our land.”<sup>81</sup> These messages were provided despite the fact that Pol Pot never farmed rice. Though his father owned nine hectares of rice paddy, Pol Pot, whose birth name was Saloth Sar, was educated in

<sup>71</sup> Crook and Short, *Genocide-Ecocide Nexus*, 306.

<sup>72</sup> Carlsen and Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interviews 2, 9, 11, and 13, accessed July 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 7–8.

<sup>74</sup> Rice and Tyner, *The Rice Cities*, 562.

<sup>75</sup> Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 16–25.

<sup>76</sup> See testimonies of Meas Saran, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, November 22, 2012, Extraordinary Chamber of the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), accessed July 2020; Toeng Sokha, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, December 4, 2012, ECCC, accessed July 2020; Denise Affonco, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, December 13, 2012, ECCC, accessed August 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 62–63.

<sup>78</sup> Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 27.

<sup>79</sup> Carlsen and Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interview 10, accessed July 2019.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, interview 2.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, interview 26.

the royal monastery and in an elite Catholic school thanks to his family's palace connections.<sup>82</sup> Such messaging sought to strengthen connections between Khmer and the rice paddy, but CPK rice production policy significantly disrupted symbiogenetic relations, resulting in reverberations that upset patterns of work, family, and food consumption.

#### *Rice and Labor*

To break free from capitalist contradictions and the trappings of bourgeois society, money was initially banned and removed from circulation in Democratic Kampuchea. This did not mean that there existed no unit of exchange nor did it mean that the CPK did not seek to accumulate capital.<sup>83</sup> In this regard, the CPK viewed rice as the new Cambodia's most important export and a means of exchange and accumulation. Rice would not only feed the revolutionary nation; surplus rice would be shipped to markets in China, Africa, Singapore, and elsewhere in order to secure capital that would pay for the weapons and infrastructure required to secure the revolution.<sup>84</sup> This meant that three tons of rice had to be produced per hectare, according to the calculations of what was required for the CPK's "Super Great Leap Forward." This demanded mass mobilization of the workforce, with the so-called "new people" forced from the cities to engage in agricultural labor in the countryside alongside the "old" or "base" people. Immense irrigation projects were also initiated to meet rice production goals, allowing monsoon rainwater to circulate to feed second crops of rice in what would normally be dormant seasons. The plan was for a nationwide system to distribute water to one square kilometer rice paddies bordered by canals and dikes.<sup>85</sup> Through this plan, water was enlisted in the production of Democratic Kampuchea through the manufacture of a hydrosocial cycle of dams and canals used to organize rice production and perpetrate mass violence.<sup>86</sup>

Rather than a project designed in accordance with orthodox communism, James Tyner refers to the CPK vision of labor for purposes of creating exchange value as a variant of "state capitalism."<sup>87</sup> For Tyner, it was the desire of the CPK to accumulate capital quickly that compromised their Marxist values and magnified the devastation. By dispossessing people of their lands, engaging in forced removals, increasing agricultural production through intensive human labor, and providing starvation-level subsistence, the structural conditions were set to produce brutal results. Exploitation of labor and the commodification of rice to generate surplus value were integral to debilitating Khmer practices of rice production for family use, thereby reconfiguring the broader social relations sustaining Cambodian society and transforming human nature by inspiring a political consciousness formed through hard labor.<sup>88</sup> The Khmer Rouge sought to effect a new symbiosis of humans and nature—one through which a socialist society could be built, accompanied by new cultural and familial relations.

Ideological zeal rather than improved seed or machinery was the primary means by which the CPK sought to increase production. Cooperatives often lacked animals to assist in ploughing the fields and much work was done by hand and hoe. A romantic yet pragmatic

<sup>82</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 10.

<sup>83</sup> For more detailed analysis of the complexities of CPK monetary policy, see James A. Tyner, "'Currency is a Most Poisonous Tool': State Capitalism, Nonmarket Socialism, and the Elimination of Money during the Cambodian Genocide," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 14, no. 1 (2020), 143–158.

<sup>84</sup> For example, as noted by the CPK leadership, their objective was "[t]o produce rice for food to raise the standard of living of the people, and in order to export so as to obtain capital for the imports which we need." See Chanthou Boua, trans., "Document III: 'The Party's Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977–1980' (Party Centre, July–August 1976)," in *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976–1977*, ed. David P. Chandler et al. (New Haven: Monograph 33/Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), 51.

<sup>85</sup> Bultmann, *Irrigating a Socialist Utopia*.

<sup>86</sup> Stian Rice et al., "The Hydro-Logic of Genocide: Remaking Land, Water, and Bodies in Democratic Kampuchea, 1975–1979," *Area* 52, no. 2 (2020), 389–390.

<sup>87</sup> Tyner, *Rice Fields to Killing Fields*, xiii; see also Tyner and Rice, *Cambodia's Political Economy of Violence*, 84–94; Tyner, *Violence*.

<sup>88</sup> Tyner, *Rice Fields to Killing Fields*, xxi.

vision of manual labor performed by the entire population was advanced in terms that connoted warfare: the farmers and army working together in the battlefield, crushing and winning their quotas.<sup>89</sup> Such collective effort was meant to overcome the lack of adequate livestock, farming tools, or rice seed. A 1976 quotation, likely authored by Pol Pot, found in the Khmer Rouge journal, *Tung Padevat*, captures the CPK's militaristic framing: "So we must launch offensives for more light rice, and for more corn, more vegetables. One hectare, ten hectares, a hundred hectares; we must go on planting. We strike continuously in all forms, we strike non-stop, we strike on a large scale and on a small scale. If we strike like this, we will be complete masters."<sup>90</sup> As Daniel Bultmann notes, the land was to be disciplined of all of its individualistic and specific qualities; nature was to be "mastered"<sup>91</sup> toward the establishment of a socialist society. Such a view was much different than the respect for the rice paddy that was symbolized through gifting to *neak ta* and practiced through daily family rituals of farming and eating rice. As a matter of fact, within the period of twelve months, the KR completely abolished religious belief of all kinds, including ritual practices.<sup>92</sup>

Rice farmers, too, were disciplined to try to make their work more efficient. Pech Srey Phal told of a hard rope that was used to time the transplanting of seedlings:

And when the militia men blew a whistle, then the rope would be raised and we had to quickly transplant the seedlings in a row. And if somebody transplanted and could not get up on time when the rope was lifted—and I mean the rope—the rope was a hard plastic rope or a kind of a metal rope. And if we could not get up on time then it would hit our eyes. One day, somebody who was transplanting nearby me got hit by the rope, and the eyes bled, and that person fell onto the ground damaging the seedlings. Then the militia men or the soldiers of the Khmer rouge who were monitoring us came down into the rice field and beat that person up, blaming the person of destroying the seedlings.<sup>93</sup>

Without the tools of modernization, rice farming was nonetheless mechanized through the martial discipline imposed by KR cadre. In this instance, the people themselves become mechanical in their interactions with seedlings and soil.

The destruction of seedlings mentioned above is also indicative of a larger process of KR-led devastation whereby the variety of rice seed suffered because of the genocide. At the fall of Democratic Kampuchea, many traditional rice seed varieties adapted to the harsh growing conditions of Cambodia were eaten by starving people or rats. As well, CPK policies resulted in farmers planting poorly adapted rice, with deep-water rice planting discouraged in some areas in favor of early duration varieties. Irrigation interventions imposed by the CPK also impacted deep-water rice varieties that were attuned to existing local conditions. All of these factors

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<sup>89</sup> DeFalco, *Justice and Starvation*, 57.

<sup>90</sup> For example, see Ben Kiernan, trans., "Document II: 'Excerpted Report on the Leading Views of the Comrade Representing the Party Organization at a Zone Assembly,' (*Tung Padevat*, June 1976)," in *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976–1977*, ed. David P. Chandler et al. (New Haven: Monograph 33/Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), 15.

<sup>91</sup> Bultmann, *Irrigating a Socialist Utopia*, 46–48.

<sup>92</sup> Hurst Hannum, "International Law and Cambodian Genocide: The Sounds of Silence," *Human Rights Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1989), 88.

<sup>93</sup> Testimony of Pech Srey Phal, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, December 5, 2012, ECCC, accessed August 2020.

combined to compromise the availability of several well-established deep-water rice varieties, leaving Cambodians bereft of the diversity of rice seed that had previously sustained them.<sup>94</sup>

Though rice production had previously experienced shifts, such as the attempt to modernize the industry under French Colonialism, never before had such dramatic change been implemented. This impacted the way Cambodians and rice were shaped to each other. Land, water, and fields were re-engineered alongside a brutally enforced division of labor intended to achieve the desired yields. And new cultural meanings of rice appeared—primarily as a unit of exchange and object of conquest—disrupting its centrality to community, village, and family.

### *Rice and Family*

To maximize rice production, the CPK undertook a massive reorganization of the family. In 1976, Angkar began to view the individual's commitment to family as a potential barrier to collectivism. So-called "family-ism" needed to be disciplined out of the population.<sup>95</sup> This notion was likely influenced by the Marxist critique of the patriarchal capitalist family, but it also took unique and pragmatic form with respect to the CPK's goals for rice production.<sup>96</sup> Without the technological means to modernize farming and increase yields, they sought instead to deploy human labor in a manner that would ensure the majority of Cambodians, from the very young to the old, would contribute to the goal of three tons per hectare. Many family units, especially those of the new people, were reconfigured, and a new division of labor was imposed on the countryside. Arduous physical labor building dams, digging irrigation canals, and clearing land was largely performed by mobile teams of unmarried youth and adults. Married adults worked in their villages to produce on behalf of their cooperative. They were often separated from each other, as well as from their children and aging parents, who also had roles to play in ensuring their cooperative achieved its quotas.<sup>97</sup> Children were typically permitted to visit their parents once every two or three months,<sup>98</sup> and women who were up to nine months pregnant were often assigned to grind and husk the rice.<sup>99</sup>

To remove "family-ism" from this new labor force also entailed a transformation of the family meal. As of 1976, many families could no longer eat together, sitting on the floor around their shared plates. Meals were now collective. Cooperatives of approximately 100 people had three to four kitchens where meals were prepared.<sup>100</sup> The rice pot was a large metal cauldron. For one survivor, the collective meal was the worst part of CPK rule: "Anyone can lead us as long as they don't make us eat in collective kitchens."<sup>101</sup> The families of the new people were frequently stripped of their possessions by the CPK, which saw the holding of such possessions

<sup>94</sup> E. L. Javier, "Rice Ecosystems and Varieties," in *Rice Production in Cambodia*, ed. Harry J. Nesbitt (Phnom Penh: Cambodia-IRRI-Australia Project, 1997), 40; Glen Denning, "Revisiting Cambodia's 'Killing Fields,' 30 Years Later: The IRRI Pioneer Interviews conducted by Gene Hette," *Rice Today*, December 20, 2015, accessed April 27, 2020, <http://ricetoday.irri.org/glenn-denning-on-irris-cambodia-experience-revisiting-the-killing-fields-30-years-later/>; see also Don Puckridge, *The Burning of the Rice: A Cambodian Success Story* (East York: Hushion House, 2004); Reena Shah, "Rice Crop Sprouts in Killing Field," *Tampa Bay Times*, October 17, 2005, accessed September 12, 2020, <https://www.tampabay.com/archive/1990/05/18/rice-crop-sprouts-in-killing-field/>.

<sup>95</sup> Ben Kiernan, trans., "Document V: 'Summary of the Results of the 1976 Study Session,' (Party Center, undated)," in *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976–1977*, ed. David P. Chandler et al. (New Haven: Monograph 33/Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988).

<sup>96</sup> James A. Tyner and Hanieh Haji Molana, "Ideologies of Khmer Rouge Family Policy: Contextualizing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence during the Cambodian Genocide," *Genocide Studies International* 13, no. 2 (2020), 177.

<sup>97</sup> Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 10.

<sup>98</sup> Testimony of Mom Vun, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, September 16, 2016, ECCC, accessed August 2020.

<sup>99</sup> Jeffery Himel, *Khmer Rouge Irrigation Development in Cambodia*, Documentation Center of Cambodia, April 11, 2007, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://fliphtml5.com/wqov/xcsk/basic>; Carlsen and Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interview 23, accessed July 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 58; Carlsen and Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interview 4, 24, accessed July 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Carlsen and Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interview 9, accessed July 2019.

as acts of “privatism” or “individualism.” This included taking from these families the implements of rice production, such as oxen, and rice consumption, such as bowls.<sup>102</sup>

In a process Michel Foucault terms “refamilization,”<sup>103</sup> individuals were not simply cut adrift; instead, they were blended into new communal units, an emergent revolutionary family, with Angkar as the ultimate parent. As one cadre put it, “We cooperatively built a true family here. What a revolutionary family!”<sup>104</sup> To not accept this refamilization was to take a “strong private stand,”<sup>105</sup> one that could be criminalized. One cadre recalled being told, “favoring the family means breaking the law.”<sup>106</sup> Another remembered, “Kinship relationships between human beings did not exist at this time. They were prohibited. Family members did not even know where their relatives were living. So we did not have any means to communicate to tell our family members about our health or our situation.”<sup>107</sup> This refamilization failed, in part because it sought to overwrite familial, community, and spiritual relations that had long served to foster local solidarity and harmony.<sup>108</sup> In the face of familial recalcitrance, or even because of the perceived crimes of one family member, the KR sometimes sought to eliminate the entire family line. Hinton connects such violence against the family to an extreme form of the principle of disproportionate revenge, whereby a powerful person might seek to “destroy” the “seed” of his enemy, meaning their family or clan.<sup>109</sup> The connection drawn between destroying the family line and destroying the seed is not insignificant.

Marriages were also often redesigned to fit the revolutionary vision of Angkar. Though arranged marriages were a common practice in Cambodia prior to the Democratic Kampuchea period, these marriages were arranged through a set of rituals designed to build relationships between the two families, in particular establishing trust between marriage partners, as well as between them and their new in-laws. KR weddings were different. Cadres, who might have only known one another in passing, if at all, would be married in group ceremonies.<sup>110</sup> These could be as small as two couples, but could include as many as ten or even twelve couples.<sup>111</sup> Some of the grooms were injured in battle and no longer able to engage in combat, making them eligible for marriage.<sup>112</sup> There were no parents or relatives in these ceremonies. The couples were united under the symbols of Angkar—the sickle and rice—where they promised to love one another and work hard for their country.<sup>113</sup> Most importantly, they were tasked with procreating, as the CPK estimated it needed to grow the population to maximize rice production.<sup>114</sup>

For many families, their daily lives had been entangled with the production and consumption of rice. Fractured according to the new division of labor, underfed, and deprived of group-sustaining rituals such as the family meal, or tending to the family plot, the “revolutionary family” was weakened by denial of its patterned relations with rice.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Michel Foucault, “Alternatives to the Prison: Dissemination or Decline of Social Control,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (2009), 15–16; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1979).

<sup>104</sup> “Diary of a Cambodian Student in France,” Document Centre of Cambodia, accessed September 10, 2020, [http://d.dccam.org/Archives/Documents/Diaries/Diary\\_Cambodia\\_Student\\_in\\_France.htm](http://d.dccam.org/Archives/Documents/Diaries/Diary_Cambodia_Student_in_France.htm).

<sup>105</sup> Hiebert, *Genocide, Revolution, and Starvation*, 81.

<sup>106</sup> Carlsen and Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interview 3, accessed July 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Testimony of Nhip Horl, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, August 25, 2015, ECCC, accessed July 2020.

<sup>108</sup> Hinton, *Agents of Death*, 821.

<sup>109</sup> Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 71.

<sup>110</sup> Testimony of Chea Dieb, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, August 30, 2016, ECCC, accessed July 2020.

<sup>111</sup> Carlsen and Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interview 7, accessed July 2019.

<sup>112</sup> Dieb, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid; Carlsen and Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interview 23, accessed July 2019.

<sup>114</sup> Theresa De Langis, Judith Strasser, Thida Kim, and Sopheap Taing, *Like Ghost Changes Body: A Study on the Impact of Forced Marriage Under the Khmer Rouge Regime* (Phnom Penh: Transcultural Psychosocial Organization of Cambodia, 2014), 105.

### *Rice and Hunger*

Labor under the CPK regime was often undertaken in conditions of severe hunger. Whether building dams, digging irrigation ditches, or cultivating rice and other produce, most workers were underfed. Long Tong notes, “every day we had to build dikes for rice cultivation all day and night. We did not get enough food and work was very laborious.”<sup>115</sup> He recalls him and his colleagues preparing a murky, waterlily soup in order to fill their bellies and allow them to continue work. Rice, when available, was diluted and portioned to share among his compatriots.<sup>116</sup>

In the famine that took hold under CPK rule, rice was a measure to assess levels of subsistence. It was measured in units of condensed milk cans. The Angkar leadership proposed the people should receive three cans per day. But many remember their allotment was only one can each day.<sup>117</sup> Much depended on whether one was considered a “base” or “old” person or a “new” or “April 17” person evacuated from an urban center. The latter were fed less and worked harder.<sup>118</sup> In either case, there was not enough food provided for the back-breaking work demanded of members of cooperatives. Rice farmers often began work at four a.m., received a break between eleven a.m. and one p.m., and then worked from then until seven p.m.<sup>119</sup> To sustain themselves, they found edible items that were not part of their normal diets. Chruy Chreun, who hailed from Kampong Cham province and was a soldier under the Khmer Rouge, recalls, “I have eaten everything. I had never eaten ripe toddy palm fruit before, but then whenever there’s a ripe toddy palm fruit [which] fell down, I would fight for it... despite I had never even eaten ripe toddy palm, boiled bael fruit, papaya stump, morning glory, rice mixed with Billygoat Weed. They fed us Billygoat Weed mixed with rice.”<sup>120</sup>

Ultimately, denial of food under the CPK regime was a denial of humanity. Denise Affonco echoes Agamben’s analysis of the bare life of the Nazi concentration camps,<sup>121</sup> seeing famine as an orchestrated technique to reduce the human being to a state in which it can simply be allowed to die:

Do you think we were human beings at all? We weren’t. We were totally dehumanized. We became animals. We were utterly dehumanized. That’s all I have to say today. And let me tell you again and again, if you want to listen to me, that famine was organized and programmed. It was a way for the system to eliminate us while feeling they had washed their hands of the problem, but they could say, ‘We didn’t kill those people; they died because they’ve been eating rubbish.’ Is that not a technique to assassinate somebody without getting your hands dirty?<sup>122</sup>

As Randle DeFalco notes, survivors often use the word *bong-ot* (to starve) rather than *tutaphik* (the Khmer word for famine, usually connoting hunger caused by unfavorable weather

<sup>115</sup> Long Tong-Testimony, KCI381, Document Centre of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, accessed October 2020. Testimony was unofficially translated by Um Sereyvothny.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Carlsen and Jan Krogsgaard, *Voices of the Khmer Rouge*, interview 29, accessed July 2019.

<sup>118</sup> Testimony of Seng Sivutha, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, June 4, 2013, ECCC, accessed August 2020.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Chruy Chreun-Testimony, KCI0636, Document Center of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, accessed August 2019. Testimony was unofficially translated by Um Sereyvothny.

<sup>121</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>122</sup> Testimony of Denise Affonco, Case File No. 002/19-09-2007-ECCC/TC, December 13, 2012, ECCC, accessed August 2020.

patterns) to capture the human agency that created and perpetuated the famine.<sup>123</sup> This language is important, since the CPK government, if they acknowledged food shortages at all, claimed natural conditions and traitorous sabotage were the cause of famine in Democratic Kampuchea rather than leadership policies.<sup>124</sup> But, as DeFalco reports, previous periods of poor growing conditions had never resulted in as sustained or widespread a famine as occurred during the Democratic Kampuchea era. The CPK leadership was aware that starvation and under-nourishment were rife, yet persisted with policies, such as forbidding people from gleaning food from other sources, that exacerbated the famine.<sup>125</sup>

Famine is often considered solely as a form of physical destruction, but it is also a culturally destructive event. Through food preparation and consumption our social worlds are made and remade on a day-to-day basis.<sup>126</sup> Genocide interrupted these relations for Khmer and even changed Cambodian cuisine. It is sometimes considered a simpler cuisine than that on offer in Vietnam and Thailand, but this is in part because the CPK regime inflicted a very basic cuisine on the communal kitchens, and this was further exacerbated by famine. Other traditions of eating, including royal court, elite, and even some forms of peasant cuisine were forgotten.<sup>127</sup> Famine thus also instigated cultural loss by transforming Khmer relations with rice.

### **Conclusion: Rice Relations and Genocide**

The reorganization of rice production had wide ranging consequences for Khmer people. In the rapid and forced transition toward massively increased rice exports, a complex of relations that had historically sustained Khmer was threatened. Rice was imbricated with family life, spirituality, language, cuisine, art, and so many other aspects of cultural life, that its disruption had long standing consequences. At stake, however, were not just cultural practices attuned to symbiogenesis with the rice paddy. Khmer were compelled to reframe their relationship to their natural world. Farming lost its familial and spiritual dimensions and became an act of war or an obligation to the new family signified by Angkar. Symbiogenesis was thus transformed into human versus nature. The “super great leap forward” entailed a mastery of the natural world. The CPK exhibited a “high modernist” tendency toward social engineering, particularly in the belief that nature could be shaped to fit their ideology.<sup>128</sup>

Our relations with the natural world are always in flux, but when subject to forced and rapid change, as was implemented by the KR, one can see how the very way that a human group shapes itself alongside a more-than-human counterpart causes disruptions that rob the group of the very relationships through which it forms itself as a group. These relationships represent the possibility of associational vitality. But when they are subject to the social/natural death of symbiogenetic destruction, the building blocks of collective meaning-making are thrown into disarray. To this extent, understanding the genocide in Cambodia comes not solely by tabulating the number of dead or identifying specific groups within the larger population who were targeted for elimination, but also by looking at how a complex symbiogenetic web of social and natural interactions was destroyed in a manner that interrupted vitalizing processes

<sup>123</sup> DeFalco, *Justice and Starvation*, 48.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 82–84.

<sup>126</sup> See the literature on the anthropology of food and eating for a more in-depth exploration of this point. For example, Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, “The Anthropology of Food and Eating,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002), 99–119.

<sup>127</sup> Such as Na Tang, a dish of deep-fried sticky rice dipped in a sauce of pork, chili, and coconut milk. See Rinith Taing, “How Kraya Angkor is Reviving Cambodia’s Forgotten Recipes,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, March 24, 2017, accessed September 12, 2020, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/post-weekend/how-kraya-angkor-reviving-cambodias-forgotten-recipes>; Georgia McCafferty and Dan Tham, “Food for the Soul: Resurrecting Cambodia’s Forgotten Cuisine,” *CNN*, May 3, 2017, accessed September 12, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/cambodias-forgotten-cuisine/index.html>.

<sup>128</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.

of group formation among human and more-than-human beings. By drawing on an ontology informed by North American Indigenous studies and the new materialism, it is possible to open genocide study to consideration of heretofore muted and understudied aspects of genocide's social/natural death that impact not only the group's modes of subsistence, but also its formative relations with the more-than-human entities that inhabit the natural world.

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