

# **CAMBODIA'S TRIALS**

NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies  
NIAS Studies in Asian Topics

- 68 *Performing the Arts of Indonesia: Malay Identity and Politics in the Music, Dance and Theatre of the Riau Islands* • Margaret Kartomi (ed.)
- 69 *Hearing Southeast Asia: Sounds of Hierarchy and Power in Context* • Nathan Porath (ed.)
- 70 *Asia Through Nordic Eyes: Fifty Years of Nordic Scholarship on Asia* • Geir Helgesen & Gerald Jackson (eds)
- 71 *Everyday Justice in Myanmar: Informal Resolutions and State Evasion in a Time of Contested Transition* • Helene Maria Kyed (ed.)
- 73 *East–West Reflections on Demonization: North Korea Now, China Next?* • Geir Helgesen and Rachel Harrison (eds)
- 74 *Spirit Possession in Buddhist Southeast Asia: Worlds Ever More Enchanted* • Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière and Peter A. Jackson (eds)
- 75 *Fragrant Frontier: Global Spice Entanglements from the Sino-Vietnamese Uplands* • Sarah Turner, Annuska Derks & Jean-François Rousseau (eds)
- 76 *From Tribalism to Nationalism: The Anthropological Turn in Laos – A Tribute to Grant Evans* • Yves Goudineau and Vanina Bouté (eds)
- 77 *Community Still Matters: Uyghur Culture and Society in Central Asian Context* • Aysima Mirsultan, Eric Schluessel and Eset Sulaiman (eds)
- 78 *Jin Ping Mei – A Wild Horse in Chinese Literature: Essays on Texts, Illustrations and Translations of a Late Sixteenth-Century Masterpiece* • Vibeke Børdahl and Lintao Qi (eds)
- 79 *Electoral Reform and Democracy in Malaysia* • Helen Ting M. H. and Donald L. Horowitz (eds)
- 80 *Civil Society Elites: Field Studies from Cambodia and Indonesia* • Astrid Norén-Nilsson, Amalinda Savirani and Anders Uhlin (eds)
- 81 *Cambodia's Trials: Contrasting Visions of Truth, Transitional Justice and National Recovery* • Robin Biddulph and Alexandra Kent (eds)

NIAS Press is the autonomous publishing arm of NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, a research institute located at the University of Copenhagen. NIAS is partially funded by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden via the Nordic Council of Ministers, and works to encourage and support Asian studies in the Nordic countries. In so doing, NIAS has been publishing books since 1969, with more than two hundred titles produced in the past few years.



norden

Nordic Council of Ministers

# CAMBODIA'S TRIALS

Contrasting Visions of Truth, Transitional  
Justice and National Recovery

*Edited by*

Robin Biddulph and Alexandra Kent

*Cambodia's Trials*  
*Contrasting Visions of Truth, Transitional Justice and National Recovery*  
Edited by Robin Biddulph and Alexandra Kent

Nordic Institute of Asian Studies  
NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, 81

First published in December 2023 by NIAS Press  
NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies  
Øster Farimagsgade 5, 1353 Copenhagen K, Denmark  
Tel: +45 3532 9503 • Fax: +45 3532 9549  
E-mail: books@nias.ku.dk • Online: www.niaspress.dk

© the authors, 2023

Hardback: 978-87-7694-330-1  
Paperback: 978-87-7694-331-8

Typeset in Arno Pro by Don Wagner  
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Printforce

Cover design: NIAS Press  
Cover image: .....

# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Contributors</i>	ix
Introduction: Beyond Transitional Justice: Cambodians' Continuing Struggles for Truth in a Troubled World <i>Robin Biddulph and Alexandra Kent</i>	1

## Section 1: Context

1. 'Egregious Dysfunctions': Transitional Justice in Cambodia's Limited Access Order <i>Padraig McAuliffe</i>	21
2. Khmers Rouges and Khmer Rights <i>Grégory Mikaelian</i>	52
3. The Rhetoric and Language of Justice at the ECCC <i>Rebecca Gidley</i>	80
4. Narratives of Complex Political Victims: Constructing Victimhood and Negotiating 'Khmer Rouge' Identity in Post- Conflict Cambodia <i>Savina Sirik</i>	102

## Section 2: Interactions

5. Upholding the Right to Effective Legal Representation in Cambodia: Lessons Learned from the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia <i>Soy Kimsan and Hing Vandamet</i>	129
6. The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia: Failed Justice or Catalyst for Transformation? <i>Laura McGrew</i>	153
7. Outsourcing Outreach: "Counter-Translation" of Outreach Activities at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia <i>Alexandra Kent</i>	186
8. Violent Ruptures, Collective Memory and the Temporal Borders of the ECCC in a Cambodian Village <i>Sina Emde</i>	218

**Section 3: Beyond**

9. Ecocide in the Shadow of Transitional Justice: Genocidal Priming and the March of Modernity <i>Courtney Work</i>	245
10. Beyond Transition: Local Experiences of Change in the Forty Years Since the Fall of Democratic Kampuchea <i>Robin Biddulph</i>	279
11. The Dead, Haunting, and Reordering Cambodian Society After the Khmer Rouge <i>Caroline Bennett</i>	309
12. From Khmer Rouge Soldier to Guardian Spirit: Memorialization, Transformation, and Reunification <i>Eve Monique Zucker</i>	329
<i>Colour illustrations</i>	362
<i>Index</i>	367

**Figures**

0.1. Map of Cambodia	xiii
0.2. Phnom Penh landmarks	xiv
2.1. ECCC emblem	54, <b>362</b>
2.2. The 'Grandfather of the Iron Rod'	57, <b>362</b>
12.1. Ta Mok's School, Anlong Veng, July 1998	333, <b>363</b>
12.2. Ta Khmao statue, Anlong Veng, January 2017	337, <b>363</b>
12.3. Ta Mok's Khmer Rouge Monument/Yeay Mao shrine, Anlong Veng, January 2017	338, <b>364</b>
12.4. Khmer Rouge soldiers changing uniforms in Pailin in 1996.	342, <b>364</b>
12.5. Yeay Mao in Pich Nil, July 2019	347, <b>365</b>
12.6. Photo of Monument in Anlong Veng 2004	349, <b>365</b>
12.7. The Spiritualization of Ta Mok's Khmer Rouge Monument	349, <b>366</b>
12.8. Spikes on the statue of Yeay Mao, 2017	351, <b>366</b>

**Bold:** colour illustration.

**Tables**

1. Transition-related events highlighted during interviews	284
2. Assumptions that motivated the interview questions	285

# Ecocide in the Shadow of Transitional Justice

## Genocidal Priming and the March of Modernity

*Courtney Work*

*Pol Pot only killed the people; he didn't touch the forest. Now, everything's gone.* (Prey Lang resident, 2018)

*Genocide is the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular nation or ethnic group.* (OUP 2019)

*“(E)cocide” means unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.* (Stop Ecocide Foundation 2021)

**T**he first quote above was spoken by a fifty-five-year-old Kuy man named Van, born in the northeastern part of Prey Lang Forest in north central Cambodia. He wanted me to understand that Pol Pot was not that bad considering his present circumstances. It was a provocation, purposefully put forward in 2018 during a fieldwork trip researching collaborative forest management activities. He was well aware that this statement upends some truths that underscore the civilizing missions of development and progress to which he had been subjected, and in which ‘collaborative’ forest management is implicated. He was not referring explicitly to the Extraordinary Chambers of the Court of Cambodia (ECCC), but his sentiment included the idea of crimes against humanity, assuming himself to be a member of said humanity and a victim of crimes different from those prosecuted by the Extraordinary

Chambers. In an important twist on the idea of humanity, individual human lives are framed by this man to be of secondary value when compared to the multi-generational, multi-species, life-sustaining system of the forest. The forest constitutes *everything*, whereas the people are just people, fruiting bodies of the system. This man's narrative of destruction stands in stark contrast to the louder story of progress, justice and transition from a violent and impoverished past into a modern, prosperous present that permeates the discourses of the ECCC (Hinton 2018). This chapter uses history and ethnology to describe and contextualize elements of the transition to a market economy that occurred while the leaders of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime were being tried for their crimes against humanity (2006–2019).

Van lived through the American war (1954–1975), the Democratic Kampuchea regime (1975–1979), the Vietnamese-backed State of Cambodia (1979–1991), and the Kingdom of Cambodia reestablished with UN support in 1993. War gave way to peace and political change morphed into landscape transformation when the Royal Government of Cambodia issued multiple large-scale economic land concessions for industrial agriculture. Now, after 30 years of both planned and unplanned adventures in logging, industry and agriculture (1991–2014), Cambodia's forest cover has declined from over seventy per cent in 1973 to thirty-five per cent in 2020 (ODC 2016; Beauchamp, Clements and Milner-Gulland 2018; Hayward and Diepart 2021; Lohani et al. 2020; Mongabay 2020). Like many other members of forest-literate communities with generations of accumulated knowledge and technology, Van viewed these changes not in terms of progress and development, but as evidence of how 'life is so much worse now' (Steung Treng, 24 January 2018).

For many people of Southeast Asia, the accelerating destruction of the forest and river systems that support their livelihoods and culture is a threat not simply to the people, but to the ecological and cosmological totality of which they form a part (Allerton 2013; Baumann 2022; Johnson 2020). This chapter draws attention to the concept of ecocide and invites critical reflection upon the crime of genocide for which leaders of the Democratic Kampuchea regime were recently tried at the ECCC. There is wide consensus that the logic underlying genocide is embedded in civilization, which is especially recognizable during what we call the modern era (Bauman 1989; Hinton 2002b; Kiernan 2007). The logic of civilization presupposes the supremacy of humanity over so-called 'nature', and civilized society defines crimes against humanity that punish offences without consideration of the broader web of



life systems upon which humanity ultimately depends (Sands and Sow 2021; Palarczyk 2023; Branch and Minkova 2023).

In his forward to Alexander Hinton's edited volume on the anthropology of genocide (2002a), Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth notes how today's concept of rights promotes a particular, universal value system, sometimes referred to as humanism. His is not a critique of humanism, but his critique of how responses to genocide side-step humanitarian ideals provides a foundation for my critique of humanism. Roth describes how governments and policymakers often downplay the seriousness of emerging or active genocides, for example to preserve trade relations, as was the case with Iraqi extermination of the Kurds. These same actors may also abdicate their responsibility to intervene, as in Rwanda, defining those who suffered as 'victims of war' who required 'humanitarian aid', rather than as victims of a genocide that would have required military intervention.

In this chapter, I suggest that such cultivation of ignorance can also be observed in relation to the 'cultural genocide' and 'ecocide' that development and progress seem to require. Cultural genocide, in which a group of people's ways of life is eliminated, was proposed by the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944 as a component of genocide. The term 'ecocide' entered the United Nations lexicon in the 1970s in response to Agent Orange attacks on forests by the US military as it attempted to thwart communist enemies (Short 2016; Zierler 2011). This chapter follows others (Eichler 2020; Goyes et al. 2021; Lindgren 2018) using an Indigenous framework for personhood to attach ecocide to the processes of global development and, by extension, to genocide. This move enfolds Lemkin's concept of cultural genocide into the larger classifications of ecocide and genocide. Cold war geopolitics brought capitalist and communist forces to Southeast Asia with their bombs, guns and defoliants in a contest over which form of 'politically organized subjection' was best for the people (Abrams 1988: 63). This war forms the backdrop against which the Khmer Rouge genocide, the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), and the ecocidal form that development takes in Cambodia today may be viewed.

Scholars have argued that US interference in Cambodia's politics and its intense bombing of the country's eastern regions facilitated Pol Pot's rise to power (Kiernan 2004; Springer 2009; Vickery 1999). These events are consistent with Alexander Hinton's framing 'genocidal priming' (2005: 208), which often entails economic and social instabilities. Following the Vietnamese

ouster of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary were found guilty in absentia of genocide (Chandler 2008), even while their government of Democratic Kampuchea represented Cambodia at the UN and participated in ongoing cold war geopolitics until 1990 (Guan 2013; Thun 2010). By law, the Vietnam-recognized government could not hold a seat at the UN because of its status as an invader (UN 1942). The framing of Vietnam as an invader by the UN and ASEAN, rather than a humanitarian liberator, is a powerful political-economic choice (Kiernan 2004), reminiscent of the framing of Rwandans as victims of war rather than victims of genocide. This particular interpretation of Vietnamese 'invasion' invoked the law that gave Cambodia's UN seat to genocidal rather than communist leaders. All discussion of genocide in Cambodia was conveniently stifled (Vickery 1990).

The ECCC was established after much stalling in 2006, nearly 30 years after the fall of Democratic Kampuchea, and the first trials began in 2009 (ECCC n.d.). At the time of this writing, the trials have passed sentences on three frail old men whose utopian vision resulted in the death of millions (Hinton 2014; Kiernan 2008).<sup>1</sup> While the trials were taking place on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, the country's rain forests, which covered seventy-three per cent of its area before 1970 were disappearing in the service of a different utopian vision that also results in massive death. Cambodia's forest cover is now less than thirty-five per cent and numerous species of flora and fauna (including human families) that flourished in the pre-war years are now threatened (Magliocca et al. 2019; Theilade 2022).

The utopian framing of the juxtaposing impositions of social order, Khmer Rouge on one hand and global economic development on the other, is a device that helps to highlight the contradictions presented in the rest of the chapter. Generations-old market-independent forest communities are increasingly dependent on market relations for their basic subsistence (Davis et al. 2015; Work et al. 2022).<sup>2</sup> The forests that sustained them are the focus of global conservation efforts that further restrict these market-independent people from economic access to forest resources (Aun and Zsombor 2017; MoE

---

1 The numbers are disputed, from 1.5 to 3 million, so 'millions' is a perfectly reasonable and accepted claim. The large discrepancy in the numbers depends on how one chooses to count the dead. If those who died of neglect and starvation are counted, it's higher, if only the politically motivated are counted, it's lower.

2 To say that people were market-independent in the past is not to say that they had no interaction with the market; the point is that they were not dependent on the market for basic subsistence, as they are today.

2017). In this context, a statement such as ‘Pol Pot only killed the people; he didn’t touch the forest’ challenges us to consider the humanistic values underlying the concrete occurrences of genocide and ecocide.

This chapter examines the civilizing logic inherent in state-making ventures from the point of view of those civilized by it. It proposes that the processes of civilization and state making presuppose human supremacy over a thing called ‘nature’ and its ‘multiplicity of species’, which miraculously does not include human families. Humans are understood to be separate from and responsible for controlling ‘nature’. This belief is challenged by the effects of ecocide on the life-giving processes of the planet as well as by the disappearing cultures of the planet’s people that are being forced to assimilate. In presenting my argument, that ecocide and genocide are connected in intimate and insufficiently examined ways, I draw on insights gathered from the people with whom I have co-produced knowledge related to their political economy in the Prey Lang Forest since 2014. Their experience may help disrupt the everyday ethics of elite standpoints and privilege other kinds of ethics (Das 2015; Harding 2010). Many of those who are native to Prey Lang inhabit a world in which communication can run in multiple directions (Sprenger 2017). It can occur among species and most importantly, among lifeforms – including humans – and what is commonly considered non-life, particularly the elemental forces of water and land. Worldviews in which animation exists beyond the biological ‘level radically the distinction between all forms of existence’ (Povinelli 2016: 124). While many have asked, following Roth, cited above, ‘What prompts a society to seek to eradicate a category of people?’ (Hinton 2002b: ix–x), the data discussed in this chapter beg a broader question: What prompts a society to destroy not only people, but a life-support system upon which people depend?

The experiences of forest literate Kuy and Khmer people challenge us to critically examine how development may be experienced by its recipients as ecocide, which facilitates cultural genocide and, as such, is intimately connected to genocide (Eichler 2020; Goyes et al. 2021). The evidence put forward below shows how ecocidal processes are also laden with characteristics of ‘genocidal priming’ (Hinton 2005: 208). There is much work to do at this interface, the early stages of which are laid out below. I begin with an introduction of the research and the landscape, then present the concept of ecocide and contrast it with that of genocide. This is followed by ethnography from contemporary Prey Lang and a discussion of genocidal priming.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of what it might look like to engage with life-sustaining resources and all the species they support as if they were members of an extended kinship network. Self-organizing, competing and collaborating interests can be and have been engaged with care and respect *in the context of* economic production and consumption. Those kin relations must be severed, however, in order to succeed in a competitive market environment. Destroying forests does not automatically lead to genocide. The ways that forest inhabitants are ripped from webs of social connection with non-human neighbours, however, and the ways that non-humans are devalued and objectified through the civilizing process bear a striking resemblance to the processes embedded in acts of genocide (Bauman 1989; Hinton 2002b). In the following pages, I frame the strong connections and enduring patterns that connect genocide, ecocide, modernity and development. These connections are the beginning, but not the resolution, of an argument that illuminates a genocide-sustaining imaginary of modernity and an impossible utopia, both of which are tangled with the ideas and practices of civilization itself.

### Situating the Author

I began fieldwork in Cambodia in 2005. When the first trial at the ECCC started in 2009, I was doing research in an emerging village on the westernmost edge of Kampong Chhnang Province, examining the relationship between religion, development, and the environment. The area was home to a mixed community of soldiers, loggers and migrant rice farmers, creating a village out of the second-growth forest, amid industrial and smallholder land grabbing and prolific illegal logging (Beban 2021; Work 2020). These issues and their relationship to the political-economic practices referred to as religion formed the primary focus of my inquiries. But when the trials started, I asked people about it. They were not very interested. Most of them claimed ignorance, due to their lack of access to a radio or television to follow the events at the ECCC. Some were aware of the trials but were more concerned with the injustices they witnessed or were experiencing themselves in terms of access to land and economic opportunities. Most people simply claimed to have no opinion. Throughout my work in this region, the ECCC was hardly discussed among locals and seemed largely irrelevant to people's lives, despite its prominence in media and international circles.

In 2014, I began engaged research activities with Indigenous Kuy people living in and around the Prey Lang Forest, examining climate change policies and their effects on locally conceived projects directed toward forest conservation, forest crime documentation, and heritage conservation.<sup>3</sup> In addition to co-producing knowledge with local research collaborators, I conducted participant observation in the four provinces that occupy Prey Lang: Kampong Thom, Kratie, Preah Vihear and Steung Treng. Since 2014, for six to twenty-four weeks each year (except 2020), I have participated in forest patrols, local celebrations and development and conservation meetings, and have conducted interviews and group discussions with residents, local authorities, ministry rangers, Buddhist monks and the staff and directors of international conservation initiatives and government ministries. Data was collected from oral histories, GIS maps, photos, official documents and people's memories about earlier times, as well as conversations about and observations of the contemporary situation.

The Prey Lang Forest is situated in Cambodia's central lowlands between two major rivers, the Mekong and the Tonle Sap. Despite profound degradation and biodiversity loss since 2010, it remains the largest lowland forest in mainland Southeast Asia. Kuy people pre-date the Angkorian kings in this region, and archaeological evidence suggests they populated the region where the borders of present-day Cambodia, Laos and Thailand intersect for at least 2000 years (Évrard et al. 2015; Pryce et al. 2014; Seidenfaden 1952). Known for iron crafts in the pre-Angkorian and Angkorian eras, possessing skills as elephant trainers, and with deep knowledge of the forest, the Kuy retained their language and independence. Kuy were independent but never isolated from the big states and their trade networks, a political arrangement common throughout the region (Padwe 2020; Noseworthy 2013). This has remained the case until the present historical moment, and socioeconomic cross-fertilization between Kuy and Khmer subsistence livelihood practices is common (Swift 2013; Keating 2013). Up until 2015, the majority of Kuy in the research area made their livings through shifting cultivation, wet rice cultivation, hunting, fishing and foraging.

3 I acknowledge research funding from the following sources: 2022–2023 National Science and Technology Council, Taiwan: 111-2410-H-004-119; 2022 East-West Center, Research fellowship; 2021–2022 MOST, Taiwan MOST 110-2410-H-004-147; 2018–20 MOST, Taiwan MOST 108-2410-H-004-003-MY2; 2017– Council for American Overseas Research CAROC – RA-235021; 2014–2017 The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO): W-07.68.416; UK's Department for International Development: 07.68.416.

In 2018, I conducted a study of the relationships between Kuy traditional practices and new conservation initiatives in Prey Lang. During two months of visiting villages dotted throughout the forest, I noticed dramatic changes since my previous visits in 2016 and 2017. In Steung Treng, villages that in 2016 had been accessible only by cart trails through the forest were now connected to the provincial town via new laterite roads. Alongside these roads the forest was gone. As far as the eye could see, smallholder cashew plantations and their homesteads bore witness to intensive in-migration from other provinces. In the context of this rapid and extreme landscape transformation, I noticed people spontaneously drawing comparisons with the Pol Pot era. The comment quoted at the opening of this chapter came from that 2018 research trip. After nine years of research examining the impact of land-based development and climate change politics, particularly plantations, forest restoration projects, conservation, and REDD+ (see Franco and Borras 2019; Work and Thuon 2017; Work et al. 2022), the people living in these landscapes expressed preference for the Pol Pot era. This helped me articulate my understandings about the relationship between genocide and ecocide, which continue to deepen.

### Ecocide and State Making

States transform landscapes. They eat forests in different ways and for different reasons, industry, building, farming (Scott 2017; Tsing 2015; 2005; Goldstein 2019), but all forests fall before states. The state-inspired deforestation that first spurred interest in the notion of ecocide was a part of Cold-War attempts to protect capitalist values from communist threats. Humans were the targets in this struggle, but the forests of Vietnam and Cambodia were among the victims. In 1970, US scientists deployed the term ecocide to denounce the US military's herbicidal warfare strategy in Vietnam (Short 2016: 38). This call was soon picked up by legal scholars (Falk 1973) and so began the debate on the criminality of ecocide. Environmentalists also adopted the term to refer to the larger issue of environmental degradation (Wheeler 1973). This bifurcation of meaning – on the one hand, the destruction of nature as a side-effect of efforts to kill people in war, and on the other, the destruction of the biosphere as a side-effect of careless development – continues to inform discussions of ecocide (Lindgren 2018).

The first proposal to bring about an international agreement to ban ecocide was made by botanist and bioethicist Arthur Galston at the Conference on

War and National Responsibility in Washington, DC, in 1970. In 1972, at the UN Stockholm Conference, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme spoke of the Vietnam War as ecocide and, in the same year, Dai Dong, a branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, sponsored a Convention on Ecocidal War that took place in Stockholm. The Convention brought together many people, including Richard A. Falk, expert on the international law of war crimes. The Convention called for a UN Convention on Ecocidal Warfare to define and condemn ecocide as an international crime of war. In 1973, Falk drafted an Ecocide Convention stating that ‘man has consciously and unconsciously inflicted irreparable damage to the environment in times of war and peace’ (1973: 21).

From the 1970s onwards, support grew to amend the Rome Statute to include ecocide as the fifth international crime alongside genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression. This mirrors an earlier attempt by lawyer Raphael Lemkin, initiator of the United Nations Genocide Convention, to have ‘cultural genocide’ included as a punishable offense. Cultural genocide refers to the destruction of both tangible (such as places of worship) and intangible (such as language, kinship systems, rituals) cultural structures that erases a group of people’s way of life. Lemkin’s attempt in 1944 was unsuccessful, as has been each attempt to acknowledge ecocide as a crime. Cultural genocide and ecocide are complementary, in the land as well as the law.

The refusal to encode cultural genocide as a specific and punishable form of genocide is indeed echoed in the responses to efforts to encode ecocide as a crime. The destruction of nature, but not ‘ecocide’, was eventually included in Article 8 (bIV) of the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as a crime, but only in the context of war. Crucial to the objections against both cultural genocide and ecocide as punishable crimes is the issue of intent. The destruction of a people’s way of life and their extended elemental and multi-species kinship networks (sometimes called the natural environment) may both be considered simply incidental side-effects of the intention to bring about progress. This suggests a ‘genocide-sustaining imaginary of modernity’, an idea first put forward by Zygmunt Bauman (1989) and deepened through time (Hinton 2002b; Short 2016; Lindgren 2018).

Another factor that influenced the legal codification of the concepts of genocide and ecocide was the way that they were brought to the international court to be ratified as crimes against humanity. The Nazi extermination of Jews shaped the way the crime of genocide was worded (Short 2016: 23),

and the same is true of ecocide. The American herbicidal warfare in Vietnam shaped how the crime of environmental destruction was eventually defined in an International Criminal Court statute, ratified in 1998 and entered into force in 2002 (Greene 2019).

Intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated (ICC 2011, Article 8 (bIV); Mehta and Merz 2015).

Four things are noteworthy here. Firstly, the term ecocide itself is not included. Secondly, causing long-term and severe damage to the natural environment is defined as a crime only in the context of warfare. Thirdly, the wording is such that if the ‘destruction to the natural environment’ provides ‘concrete and direct overall military advantage’, it does not constitute a crime. Finally, it is only the ‘anticipation’ of such an advantage and not its realization that is required.

The restricted formulation of ecocide was finally decided after numerous delays, objections and draftings. In 2010, the Scottish barrister Polly Higgins submitted a proposal to amend the Rome Statute to include the crime of ecocide in the International Law Commission (ILC). Short (2016) describes how the ensuing debate pivoted on the notion of intent. Some argued that ecocide takes place continually during peacetime in association with industrial and other economic activity. In conjunction, it was asserted that when the intention is to earn profit, then concomitant ‘ecocide’ should not be considered a condition for liability (45).

The issue continues to be pursued (Higgins, Short and South 2013), and continues to be ignored, contested and postponed. A new definition of ecocide, quoted at the opening of this paper, was put forward in 2021 by an ‘independent expert panel’ convened by the late Higgins’ Stop Ecocide Foundation (SEF 2021). The objective of the expert panel was to extend the criminalization of environmental destruction beyond the context of war. Acknowledging peacetime ecocide as a crime would, of course, have far-reaching implications for the global economic system, and even for those advocating for ecological justice (Levene and Conversi 2014). The dominant argument for encoding ecocide as a crime in the international criminal courts focuses on the ways that ‘anti-ecological’ forms of capital accumulation will inevitably



result in genocide, not only of particular groups of people but ultimately, the entire human race (SEF 2023; Short 2016, 66; Lindgren 2017).

The wording of the new statute defines ecocide as ‘unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts’ (SEF 2021: 5). This definition attempts to omit the standard operating procedures of industrial production to focus on the most egregious violations. The expert panel draws on environmental law as well as criminal law, and some suggest that the inevitable controversies at their intersection and the profound complexities of ‘the environment’, of international law, of what constitutes damage, and how these things are defined could dilute the effectiveness of prosecutions (Branch and Minkova 2023; Palarczyk 2023). Ecocide as a concept and an object of concern is more visible at the time of this writing, but the debates about how and whether to criminalize it remain, along with a proliferation of its possible manifestations.

Ecocide can be understood in relation to humans, as the destruction of the environment toward the goal of destroying the humans in a particular area (either physically or culturally). This occurs in wartime when a water source may be poisoned to ‘remove the enemy’, for example. It also occurs in settler colonial contexts when groups of impoverished peasants receive incentives to migrate into indigenous lands and ‘settle’ them toward market-centred production, as is currently happening in Prey Lang.<sup>4</sup> Ecocide can also refer to the destruction of flora, fauna, rocks and waterways that are understood to be the primary victims of war or industry, regardless of its impact on humans (Kopnina 2018; Lindgren 2018). Some criticize this latter position as ‘antihuman’ (Washington et al. 2018; Sollund 2019), though anti-humanist might be a more appropriate term. Modern humanist, rights-based philosophies and political economies tend to be based upon the idea of human supremacy over nature, which frames ecocide as a side-effect of the pursuit of human progress (Sollund 2019).

The ongoing legal discussions on ecocide are productive, if not yet effective. As the intensity of floods, droughts and fires increases, the inadequacy of the law to address the coming challenges becomes evident, fueling calls to ‘rethink international law as a system’ (Branch and Minkova 2023: 74). The failure of

4 My paternal ancestors were Scottish ‘immigrants’ who were promised land title in Montana, provided they could develop the land with buildings and cash-producing endeavours and stay alive for five years.

international law to address the ongoing crimes of genocide are only amplified as ecosystem transformations disrupt even elite social systems.

### Forest Transformation and Genocidal Priming

Pol Pot only killed the people. Forest loss, and the attendant loss of animals, fruits and medicines, was the most reported complaint leveled by long-term residents in and around Prey Lang at that time. Still, they demanded educational and market infrastructure in order to securely enter the new economic paradigm in which people are severed from forest resources. Legal and illegal logging has been degrading the forest since the 1990s, and since 2011 legal agro-industrial plantations converted over two hundred thousand hectares of forest perimeter (Work et al. 2022; Hayward & Diepart 2021; Mongabay 2020). During my 2018 research trip to Steung Treng, the critique was particularly sharp due to the rapid and total transformation of the forest by recent migrant incursions. This was 25 years after Cambodia's transition to formal democracy and the holding of multi-party elections in 1993, but only 14 years after the first plantation development in Prey Lang. The speed of this transformation and the economic precarity it created are noted as contributing factors in what Alexander Hinton (2005: 208) calls 'genocidal priming.'

The people whose experiences inform this study are from the northern regions of Prey Lang. Land transformations in this region started with the CRCK Rubber Development Company, Ltd. in 2011.<sup>5</sup> Since 2015, there was a substantial increase in the number of semi-legal medium-scale land grabs by land-poor Cham and Khmer migrant families. These migrant land acquisitions do not follow the national law, but they come with migration papers signed by district governors and commune chiefs and the promise of future infrastructure development. The settler conversion of forest into market-crop homesteads penetrates deep into the interior forest landscape, while at the same time Indigenous farmers convert swidden fallows to cashew and cassava. The fallow conversions are at once opportunistic responses to the shifting economic landscape and adjustments for new conservation policies curtailing shifting cultivation. This is happening in all four provinces, but the greatest impact is in Steung Treng and Preah Vihear, where new roads continue to be

5 This is the full name of the company. Michaud 2013 notes that the Tumring Rubber plantation cleared the southwestern forest in 2004, sparking a rush of rubber development by both industrial and smallholder land grabs in the state forest.

built. These land grabs are not isolated to the Prey Lang region and are in the process of becoming legally recognized, even as claims for Communal Land Title by recognized Indigenous groups languish (Sea 2023).

The Kuy language is almost eradicated. People cite the Khmer Rouge years as a key node in that process, which continues into the contemporary moment as both the need for and availability of formal education increases. Forest literacy gives way to reading and writing in the new economic environment based on market relations, which are not new to the Kuy, but could be engaged with or not as people desired. My colleagues in Prey Lang report many cash-generating strategies before market crops. Panning for gold is widely reported. Gold has been used as a form of currency since the French colonial era, but neither currency nor gold was considered essential to daily life. One man born in 1980 from Kampong Thom told me he did not know what money was until he was a young teenager. People's primary activities were fishing, hunting, gathering fruits and vegetables from the forest, cultivating paddy and swidden rice fields, making and repairing the tools they needed, and performing the ritual obligations associated with all these activities (sometimes called religion).

I was informed that the oldest continuous-use paddy fields in the Prey Lang forest are in Preah Vihear at the headwaters of the Chinit River, which swells to irrigate the rice fields during the rainy season. Up until the early 2000s, people report the regular trading of rice and fish between forest communities who lived in rice-growing areas and those who lived on the Mekong side of the forest. People described an environment of abundance where 70–80 per cent of their material needs were met from the forest until about 2007. Until then, there was plenty of fish in the streams and plenty of game, medicine, bamboo and rattan in the forest. People were reported by officials to be poor, but did not consider themselves poor. No one was hungry, and a strong ethos of sharing and community solidarity was reported in all villages. For example, in 2018, a man in his 70s near Preah Vihear told me, 'We used to go out and hunt a pig, and then come back and share it. Whatever meat we got we would share.' Recollections like this by older people were common, and were regularly accompanied by expressions of regret about the transformation to a monetary economy: 'It's not like today. Now, it's only money. Without money, you have nothing ...'

Most villagers reported resuming their familiar forest community life after the disruptions of the Khmer Rouge years 1975–1979. Some people moved to

new locations, two new villages were added close to the five pre-existing forest villages in Preah Vihear and some people who lived alongside the Mekong in Kratie Province moved to a river island and did not return until 1989. However, the majority returned to their previous villages and subsistence livelihoods in the still-abundant forests right after the fall of the Democratic Kampuchea regime in 1979. I was told that there were still plenty of elephants and tigers in the forest even after the decades of conflict. During the 1980s, some fighting continued in the northern villages and there was some commercial logging activity. Although deforestation had been taking place in Cambodia since the 1960s, the radical acceleration began in the early 1990s, just after the Paris Peace Accords.

One of the first policy decisions of the newly elected government in 1993 was to create Forest Concessions for national and international companies. Throughout the communities of Prey Lang, people consider this to be a landmark moment that heralded the beginning of the end of their livelihoods as subsistence farmers and of their increased absorption into the market economy. A woman in her 40s in Preah Vihear recalled, 'The big trucks came and started to take the big trees. There were so many trucks, they roared through every day. They were as dangerous as the soldiers.' A man in his 50s in Kratie said in 2016, 'It was hard work, but they paid money. At first maybe five people went to work for the companies. By 2013, most families were working in the timber trade.'

The more isolated villages continued with cash-light subsistence livelihoods and trade until the early 2000s, but as money entered their lives, many abandoned former practices of sharing. The cash did not just come from Forest Concession wages, but also from traders and merchants who travelled forest trails following the logging business. People still travelled the two days it took to get into town to buy clothes, pans and iron for tools, but with traders and merchants travelling the forest trails, people report being able to sell cattle and land in ways that were not previously available. I heard of how travelling traders told tales of high yields, fast cars and smooth roads. A man in his 40s in Kampong Thom told me in 2015, 'They say, "Oh, cows are so slow and they get sick. If you want to move fast, like others do, you should buy a tractor." Then, they came selling tractors. So, they caught us both ways – first they bought up our cows and then they sold us their tractors!' Nowadays, almost no one in the region owns cows or buffalo and the need for chemical fertilizers is ubiquitous.

Although the felling of ancient forest that started in earnest with the Forest Concessions of 1991 marked a significant change (LeBillon 2000, 2002), still more dramatic changes were unleashed by the transition from Forest Concessions to Economic Land Concessions (ELC). The first ELC granted by the government went to the Tumring Rubber Company deep in the Prey Lang Forest in southern Kampong Thom in 2004. A series of plantation concessions awarded to both Khmer and foreign investors followed between 2005 and 2007, which cleared the forest westward, opening that south-western quadrant to further in-migration. Significant local protests erupted as the economy and ecology of the region underwent irrevocable changes. Four years later, another period of so-called ‘development’ began in the region as ELCs were awarded to rubber, sugar and timber companies in three of the four Prey Lang provinces (Michaud 2013; PLCN 2014). A woman in her 30s in Preah Vihear told me in 2014, ‘The company just came one day, like an airplane falling from the sky. It hit the ground and scorched everything.’

Hinton describes such events as ‘genocidal priming’ (Hinton 2005: 280), pointing to the socioeconomic upheavals, the promises for new prosperity, the laws, and the institutional interventions that often precede, and make spaces where genocide might be ‘activated’. For Hinton, these conditions do not lead directly to genocide, but are rather common elements to those places where genocide erupts. Hinton’s analysis focused on the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime. I suggest that we can extend the analysis to consider the forests of Cambodia and their Indigenous communities in terms of the crimes of ecocide and cultural genocide. From that perspective, the Forest Concessions and the even more destructive ELC, and all of the alienating discourses and policies that accompanied them (Work et al. 2022; Neef & Touch 2012), can be seen as part of the continued priming for both the people living in the region and the people governing it. Genocide affects the children and grandchildren of victims and perpetrators alike (Cooke, Hodgkinson and Manning 2022; Hinton 2014; LaCapra 1996).

The land laws that emerged in the wake of Cambodia’s transition away from a command economy in 1991 attempted to rationalize an environment in which uncultivated land was suddenly contested, and the powerful and well-connected prevailed over the poor and marginal (Biddulph 2011). These laws instituted land titling, ensconcing in law the criteria for visible cultivation or habitation (Grimsditch et al. 2012). They also made possible the establishment of ELCs and made provisions for communal land title for Indigenous

communities (Diepart and Schoenberger 2017). While communal land titles are notoriously difficult for communities to obtain (Baird 2013), ELCs proliferated and, by 2012, over 2.2 million hectares had been awarded to both national and international companies for industrial plantations (LICADHO 2012). These plantations differed from the Forest Concessions because they permitted total clearance of thousands of hectares of forest at a time.

Often, these forests were in use by shifting cultivators as fallows when the companies' bulldozers appeared and cleared them. Occasionally, companies would also raze visible rice fields, homes, or entire villages, but the loss of swidden forest land alone was enough to break apart local communities and their economies. Resin trees, medicinal plants, fruits and other forest products that were once readily available close to home, were now only available far from the local people in surviving areas of forest. This impacted particularly heavily upon women, who no longer felt safe going to the distant forests. In addition to their economic losses, communities also lost their graveyards, the ancient archaeological sites of their Kuy ancestors, and forests that belonged to non-human Masters of the Water and the Land.

Locals frequently complained to me about the disrespectful way they were treated by these outsiders intervening into their lives. A woman in her 30s told me in 2016 that it was done 'as if we did not even matter, as if our suffering meant nothing.' A former village chief in Preah Vihear, a man in his 60s, told me in 2018 how he and other community representatives turned to local officials for help when the companies began destroying their swidden fallows. They were told that they had no land titles, and therefore no right to the land. Since the company received a concession from the government, it was legally entitled to claim the land. The village chief told me how he produced his village documents for the official, 'When we showed him the documents we had, he took them and said that they were old and not valid. Then he ripped them up.' A woman in her 60s in Preah Vihear in 2015 told me another method that authorities used to cheat people into giving up their claims:

We fought so hard, we did not rest day or night. When the company came again to clear our land, we stole their bulldozers and demanded compensation for our lost resin trees.<sup>6</sup> After that, they came with a paper they said would help us get land titles. We thought we had won,

6 The community received help from an NGO that informed them of their rights, the monetary value of their resin trees and about the significance of thumb prints on documents.

and we all put our thumbprints on the paper. We couldn't read it, but it said we agreed to give the company our land.

When I interviewed the manager of one company in Phnom Penh in 2017, he scoffed when I used the term destruction in relation to the forest. He retorted, 'When we came, that place was not forest. It was more like brush. There was nothing of value there, and now we have a factory and plantation and jobs for the people. We will develop all of Preah Vihear.' By 2019, three-quarters of the company's 50-thousand-hectare concession, a healthy field forest landscape, was cleared for sugar production. A stream was captured and the downstream water soiled with chemicals, multiple ponds disappeared into the monocrop landscape, and the field forest is gone. At the time of this writing, the company is bankrupt and the factory is silent.

The wording of the Stop Ecocide Foundation's definition of ecocide is insufficient to address this company, even if the international court were to acknowledge the crime of ecocide. What the statute avoids is the accumulated impact of multiple small actors across nearly 200 thousand hectares of market-transformed forests in the flood plains between the Mekong River and the Tonle Sap. The statute addresses a singular ecocidal entity engaged in destruction that will not heal and will have lasting effects, but the only entity in Cambodia working at that scale is the government – or certain banks, both of which made the company's presence possible. The transformation of field forests, streams and ponds into a cash crop landscape is accomplished. At the time of this writing, local Kuy have reclaimed some land for rice and local officials rent some cash-crop fields to migrants, but swidden systems and habitats for large ungulates are impossible into the foreseeable future.

This episode in Preah Vihear involving one sugar plantation<sup>7</sup> invites critical reflection on the crime of ecocide. The violence and illegality of this land grab are poetic, and the hubris of the company's managers and local officials mocks humanist frameworks of rights, consent and indigenous lands. But the destruction is not enough to meet the standards of the statute. At the landscape level, it might be enough to warrant the charge of ecocide against the government, but to capture the whole impact, the upstream dams need to be considered, which are run by different companies, funded by different banks and facilitated by different governments. Who does one bring before which judge?

---

7 Guangdong Hengfu Group Sugar Industry Co. Ltd.

The stories of Prey Lang's development contain the promises of progress, the devaluing of existing systems and people, and the chaos of profound economic and social upheaval Hinton (2002b) describes as part of the grammar within which genocide emerges. The situation described here can be applied to numerous other colonial landscapes. I am not suggesting that ecocide and cultural genocide cause genocide. After critical consideration, I suggest that transforming the landscape toward market-industrial production lays a foundation from which genocidal priming might emerge.

### The Other-than-Human Collective: Development, Cultural Genocide and Ecocide

My observations and the experiences of local people in Prey Lang forest beg important questions about values and violations. Like other resource-rich areas of Cambodia, and the rest of the world, where self-organized systems of geological, hydrological, and biological abundance are transformed into market-dependent humans, and market-serving ecosystems, Cambodia's forests and the people who live there are understood as a subset of global market relations. This takes us well beyond the issue of how the agro, forestry and mining industries are impacting upon local economic and social systems. It invites us to consider how these economic forces also destroy cosmological systems constituted by hierarchal social relationships with members of the geo, hydro and biological universe. As members of the biological world, the humans are below water and land in terms of both power and importance. In the biological realm, humans are quite powerful, but human economies are a subset of the geo and the hydrological forces. The ancient people know this, and their economies manifest socially through anthropogenic kinship relationships (Eichler 2020; Goyes et al. 2021).

Using this alternate world systems theory, we can consider seriously the implications of the opening quotation. Is the neoliberal value system inherent in today's dominant notions of development bringing about not only cultural genocide but also an ecocide of such magnitude that it ultimately threatens the continued existence of all humanity? Is this kind of development, based upon human supremacy over nature, leading us towards auto-genocide? And if so, what lessons might we take from the values and knowledge of peoples like the inhabitants of Prey Lang, whose worldview traditionally required an inversion of the existing hierarchal order. This is not balance between human beings and



so-called ‘nature’. This is a hierarchically informed system in which human beings, and all other biological entities, are in the service of (as children and grandchildren) the geo and hydrological systems upon which they depend.

Hinton describes how the link between discourses of modernity and the conceptualization of human trauma, suffering, and cruelty presume a particular, rights-bearing human subject, and a sovereign state with rights within its own territory (Hinton 2002b: 25–6). The sovereign state in question rests upon a foundation long obscured by cosmological constructions currently recognized as religion (Masuzawa 1993; Sahlins 2017), which is particularly visible in the states of Southeast Asia (Ang 1995; Forest 1991; Work 2019). The abstract cosmologies these state systems brought with them were relevant only for elites, but, while elites practised their ‘religions’, the local people likely practised forms of respect for earth entities (understood to be ancestors), human ancestors, and water systems loosely and variously shared by non-state-assimilated people the world over (Descola 2013; Blaser 2013; Cadena 2015; Povinelli 2016). In Cambodia, the earth entities are known as *m’jas teuk m’jas day* (lit. Owner/Master of the Water and Land). This entity is also referred to as *neak ta* (the Ancient ones), or more intimately as *lok ta* (honoured grandparent). This ancestral entity of the elements governs access to resources and manages social relations between resource users in their territory (Ang 1995; Work 2019, 2020).

The system of governance by non-human arbiters of resource access and justice seems to have varied over time according to changes in social and economic practices. This is particularly related to the degree to which communities are absorbed into a state market system,<sup>8</sup> or into a state-centred cosmological system (Picard 2017; Tambiah 1970). In Cambodia, there is considerable overlap between lowland, settled rice-farming Khmer and forest-dwelling indigenous groups in terms of both economic strategies and the way these relationships with non-human entities function within them (Swift and Cock 2015; Work 2018). Many of the rural communities in Cambodia that have fallen victim to the structural violence and land grabbing associated with culture-annihilating ‘development’ have appealed to the power of the

8 For further inquiry along these lines in Southeast Asia: Monica Janowski has an interesting comparative study between hunter gatherers and wet-rice cultivators in Indonesia (2017). Kaj Århem shows how the Animal Master is present among those with and without domesticated animals, but domestication changes the nature of exchange with the Master (2016). Guido Sprenger (2018) documents transitions toward market crops among previously market-independent persons governed by the Rice Mother.

*neak ta* and highlighted cosmological relationships in their efforts to resist (Irvin-Erickson 2016; Beban and Work 2014; Aun 2015; Titthara 2011).

The overarching and omnipresent *m'jas teuk m'jas day* may manifest as *neak ta* anywhere. A woman in her 40s in Mondulkiri told me in 2019, 'We never know exactly where *lok ta* is. So, we have to call out ... we call them by the names of the places where we are. Call the name of the mountain, call the names of the rivers.' Villagers told me that the *m'jas teuk m'jas day* is especially powerful when manifest as the *neak ta* of mountains and islands, where they control the essentials for life, such as rainfall, flora and fauna, medicinal plants, and the social life of the community. It is therefore important to maintain good relations with *neak ta*, as well as with animals and plants. People consider themselves to be the descendants of the elemental ancestor and, as children and grandchildren, they claim that all animals and plants can be vectors for elemental energies. Old trees in particular, but also tigers, elephants, snakes, crocodiles and particular medicinal plants are often independent agents, and others may acquire this quality at any time.

The energy of *m'jas teuk m'jas day* animates everything. Water and land are, after all, essential for all life forms. People describe various invisible agents that are in charge of particular realms: the Animal Masters (*mering kon viel*), the Hearth Master (*jongkraing bie*), the House Master (*jamniang pthea*). These entities are entangled with everyday ethics and practices in their domains. People solicit consent or assistance from the non-human masters of the water and the land, or one of the above-mentioned proxies prior to acquiring or exploiting land to extract minerals, animals, or forest products. It is then expected that one take only as much as has been requested or as is needed. Other 'rules' also apply. For example, there is a strict code against getting angry, especially in the forest, and a code to never speak disrespectfully of the animals and insects who live there, or to family and friends who live in the village. Annual offerings of meat, wine, music and dance should be made by the community, food should be shared in general – especially meat – and promises made to *neak ta* should be honoured.

*Neak ta* grants consent for resource use sometimes through dream communication, but consent is typically known *post hoc*. If one requests permission to use the land, one watches for signs. In the early stages of a hunt or swidden clearing, one listens to the birds and watches signs in the landscape. If the animals give no sign and no one becomes sick or injured during the preparation for hunting or clearing, and then if the hunt is successful or

the land proves productive, people assume there is no objection. During my fieldwork in 2016, a man in his 70s in Pursat beseeched, ‘*Lok ta*, please send us an animal whose energy is weak. We will take it to make us strong.’ If after many days the request has not been met, this signals a possible breach in the relationship that must be mended. A medium or fortune teller is consulted to determine the infraction and what should be done to repair the breach. Typically, the community holds a party, a domestic animal provides meat for the feast, and is honoured along with the wine, rice and musical instruments, which all carry the elemental energy of *lok ta* and are participants in these celebrations honouring the *m’jas teuk m’jas day* (Work 2022).

A man in his 60s in Stung Treng told me in 2018 how important it is that people conduct themselves respectfully towards *lok ta*: ‘If we swear at *lok ta*, like if we trip or get stuck [on something], or don’t catch what we wanted and we curse *lok ta* for it – we will get sick.’ In Kampong Thom in 2015, a man in his 30s told me, ‘I made fun of a tiny wasp with a broken leg. My friend feared danger when we drew it from the lake in our bowl, and I said ‘just drink it, it is so tiny and we are so big. If they all gathered together then maybe, we would break a leg.’ Laughing we drank and went about our business. Returning to the lake to get water after our work, I slipped on a vine and broke my leg. That was *lok ta*.’ This arrangement of relations with *lok ta* integrates human beings and the forces that govern the environment into a single, embracing moral system in which people’s behaviour towards their environment may be rewarded with sustenance or punished by misfortune.

### Ethics and the New Everyday

The Master of the Water and the Land was *the* conduit through which rural Cambodians accessed resources in both the pre- and post-conflict eras. However, the recent acceleration of industrial exploitation and extraction from the land has deteriorated the relationship between the local people of Prey Lang and their environment. The effectiveness of *lok ta* seems to be waning in this era. In Preah Vihear in 2018, a man in his 40s suggested, ‘maybe the company can make better offerings than we can, and *lok ta* is protecting them now.’ In 2018, a man in his 60s in Steung Treng told me, ‘These days, no one worries about asking *lok ta* for anything anymore, and now we are out of food.’

I noticed how many locals expressed themselves with a similar matter-of-fact tone of resignation. It was as though they had become indifferent to the regular

violations of their environment and way of life, which they were powerless to prevent. This recalled Anna Tsing's (2005) observations in Indonesia, where trees that had been in families for generations were suddenly transformed into commodities. The transition into a new economy brought so many new difficulties for locals to contend with that the loss of their ancient forests seemed to pale into relative insignificance and slide into the realities of the everyday.

The transformation of complex human-ecological systems into profit-yielding elements of state-driven market economies renders the extensive knowledge and experience passed down through generations in indigenous communities worthless. Further, these rural people often lack the skills necessary to survive in the new economy. Those who are forest-literate but lack the skills to read and write are poorly equipped to contest what is happening and demand their rights to 'their' land. The government's agenda is also to intensify the market, and local authorities perpetuate this by denigrating those who try to resist the change. For example, at a forest governance meeting in Phnom Penh in 2017, a local official said disparagingly to an indigenous participant, 'Do you want to be a forest person forever, or what? Indigenous people don't know anything about the world. Things are changing. You need to change, too '

People do need to change, but how and what to change is a contested matter and the attitudes among members of local communities are complex and varied. Some adopt the new values and try to live accordingly. A 40-year-old male farmer in Kratie said in 2016:

Before, we just did small regular farming. We would cut one small plantation to feed the family. Ever since the company came, we started doing big plantations, like the company... The NGO came to teach us about cash-crop agriculture so we could grow crops for the market... They did not promote fertilizers or herbicides, this came with the advertising and with neighbours using them for higher yields, but everyone uses them now. We don't have money to rent a tractor and doing it [weeding] by hand takes a month. So, we use poison. It's cheaper and easier.

In Kampong Thom in 2017, a man told me that he had to use herbicide. 'If I don't, the "communist grass" will take over and I won't have any harvest.' People are becoming aware of the precariousness of their lives as they are absorbed into the lower end of the new market. A man in his 60s in Kratie said in 2016, 'Before the company came, we never borrowed money. Now, we

borrow money to buy a moped to go to work for the company, and we use our salary to repay the bank. Then we get fired or laid off ... then where are we?’

During my last field trip in August 2023, every village reported debt as the biggest challenge to their lives. Debt now joins illness as an acute village problem. In 2014 in Preah Vihear, a woman in her 40s told me, ‘We are sick all the time, we just go to the doctor and take the medicine. Then we’re sick again. There is no cure, no wellness.’ With the first incursion of Forest Concessions, every village had reported a rise in malaria cases. A man in his 40s in Steung Treng said in 2017, ‘We used to get something kind of like malaria before, but only sometimes. And between ritual and forest medicine, we could always cure it. We learned about malaria after the companies came when we had to travel to the doctor because the illness would not be cured.’

Once large plantations were established in the area, reports of illness increased, and all of the local communities say illness is one of the worst effects of the recent changes. Significantly, people were also losing their confidence in the power of *m’jas teuk m’jas day* and *lok ta* to help them. As one man reminisced, ‘It is not like before. We hardly ever got sick back then, and when we did, we would just *sien lok ta* (perform a communal celebration in honour of the *m’jas teuk m’jas day*) and we would become well again...’

These rose-tinted recollections perhaps reflect, above all, the feelings of powerlessness that local inhabitants experience. A lost way of life is perhaps idealized in response to the fact that it has been destroyed by forces far beyond the control of local people, ‘We never used to take water from this stream. This was *lok ta*’s forest here. Now, since the company came, it’s not the same’, said a man in his 50s in Kratie in 2016. Many speak nostalgically of a past in which they shared with one another and enjoyed good health and abundant forests. Importantly, they do not blame the Khmer Rouge regime for the ‘cultural genocide’, or the deliberate dismantling of their way of life. Nor do they blame them for the current ‘ecocide’ – an atrocity in which ‘nature’ is deliberately destroyed and the victims include the water, the land and other non-human members of their community. All too often, these victims are replaced by more highly respected community members, like cashews and cassava. The destruction of their culture and their neighbourhood is associated with ‘development’, with the companies, money, greed and the government – not with the Khmer Rouge.

Although villagers lament the world they have lost, they are simultaneously drawn into the cash economy. Many are now involved in planting cashews in

their former swiddens, transforming a rotational system of forest regeneration and high biodiversity into extended monocrop landscapes valuable only for cash (Dressler et al. 2018; Padwe 2011). In the new market economy, survival depends upon speed and productivity. So, nowadays, instead of weeding by hand, locals are using herbicides to poison the very earth that they know they depend on for survival. The forest is gone, but the promised benefits of development are still desired in the now hot and dusty villages. For many, there is a palpable ambivalence.

Representatives of the companies express no such ambivalence. To protesting Preah Vihear villagers in 2016, one shouted, 'This place was nothing before we came, nothing but forest. Now you have jobs and we are developing. You should be grateful.' Living with the altered ethics and practices of development is fraught with contradictions. For example, one man in his 40s in Kratie told me in 2014, 'We did not object to having jobs, but they never said they would take the whole forest.' A man in Steung Treng in 2017 loves the new roads, 'We can get to town in two hours by motorbike. That used to take two days of walking!' Yet, a woman in her 40s, also in Steung Treng, complained in 2019, 'It's the roads. Since they built the roads, the people just come and clear the forest for their cash crops. It's nothing but cashews now, and all we have to eat are moto fish and chemical vegetables.'

Environmental activists and local community members tried to resist the changes and ravages to the forest and the ways of life it supported for so long. The best known is perhaps Chut Wutty, who was attacked by armed soldiers at a rubber plantation concession and deforestation site in Prey Lang and then protected by members of the local community. He was later murdered, in 2012, while escorting two journalists from the Cambodia Daily newspaper to a protected forest area in Koh Kong Province (Milne 2012).<sup>9</sup>

In 2011, Cambodian activists and local indigenous people staged an 'Avatar' protest against the forest destruction (Carmichael 2011). In July 2015, the Monks' Network for Social Justice delivered five confiscated chainsaws to the National Assembly in protest (Oudom 2012). In July 2015, monks again gathered on the streets of the capital to demand stronger government action against continuing deforestation (Palatino 2015). Voicing dissent is becoming ever more dangerous. Following the 2013 National Elections, in which the rul-

9 See also Fran Lambrick's 2015 documentary 'I am Chut Wutty', which portrays the story of Wutty's environmental activism, his murder, and the impunity that his murderers continue to enjoy.

ing Cambodian People's Party was taken by surprise by the growth in support for the opposition party, government toleration for dissenting voices ended. Advocacy NGOs and media outlets were closed and opposition politicians arrested. In 2016, political commentator and activist Kem Ley was shot dead while drinking coffee at a petrol station in Phnom Penh. In 2017, the major opposition party was outlawed at the Supreme Court in the city centre, even as the ECCC continued to operate in the suburbs. The opposition leader was also sentenced for treason and espionage. Various media outlets and civil society organizations found themselves similarly criminalized.

These developments have effectively crushed any remaining hopes that there may be legal avenues through which indigenous people or rural villagers may demand that their rights to land be honoured and their forests protected. Today, in Prey Lang, security and prosperity can no longer realistically be sought through the 'ecological ethics' inherent in maintaining good relations with the non-human agents of the water, land and forest. Instead, security is the reward some enjoy for adopting the new, profit-driven value system and an individualistic selfhood. Some former environmental activists are now accepting payoffs and benefiting materially from the illegal activities of legitimate companies. One man I have known for many years as a strong community and forest advocate now drives a car, wears jewellery and associates with all the important people who come through the village. Ministers and businessmen call him by name, and he lives in a large house. Collaborators cultivate new *ksae* (protective networks) and have powerful new *khnanng* (backers); this man demonstrated his loyalty to them by intimidating his neighbors into selling their family trees.

The history locals recall describes how interactions within socio-natural-political environments may be based upon mutuality, care and affirmation, but also how they can quickly and too easily shift into the 'lethal possibility of the denial of each other' (Das 2015: 27). This is where genocide and ecocide dovetail. While genocide is predicated upon people's denial of one another, ecocide is predicated upon human denial of their life-giving ancestors. Ultimately, this becomes mutual. People say that the 'river has grown tired of us' (Johnson 2020).

## Conclusions

In less than one decade, many of my colleagues in Prey Lang have gone from being respected community leaders to selling out their neighbours. I argue that the profound socioeconomic upheaval, coupled with the devaluation,

disrespect and disenfranchisement expressed in the stories above are part of the way people and communities are primed into a place where genocide can be activated. The scenario I describe is not at all unique, as Kiernan's (2007) excursions into genocide's deeper history show us. The experiences of non-state peoples who have recently become absorbed into the modern global economy give us some insights that enhance our understanding of the violence associated with state making in other places and at other times.

Locals say that the forests are coming down so fast today because the *neakta* are powerless against machines that cannot be punished with illness or hunger. This echoes Kiernan's (2007: 24) observation of the associations among genocidal acts, material power and technological prowess. The processes I describe above reproduce elements of the logic of genocide. There is a utopian state to be achieved – one that is fully developed and modern, in which there is no poverty, illness or violence. Policies are enacted towards achieving this end, and those who refuse to acquiesce are crushed by the churning wheel of history. They are deprived of sustenance and protection, or swiftly eliminated.

The imaginary of modernization, upon which development interventions are based, permits no alternative worlds as it renders all non-human life expendable. In Prey Lang, this imaginary was palpably manifest in the Forest Concessions that permitted the transformation of ancient trees and protected places into consumer products, and later by the bulldozing of the land for industrial plantations. Such large scale forest clearance swept away entire ways of life and systems of values – a form of 'cultural genocide' based in 'ecocide'.

The non-human Owner of the Water and Land, the ancestral grandparent of local residents, manager of resources and arbiter of justice, is no longer understood to be the primary source of life and livelihood. This force has been devalued in favour of the products of human endeavour – the state and the market, which claim sovereign law and the ability for independent action respectively. I suggest that this severance of humanity from the life-sustaining, life-creating systems of the planet lies at the root of the genocidal tendencies inherent in the 'gardening state' of modernity, to borrow Zygmunt Bauman's time-honoured phrase (1989). This cannot be addressed through the application of international law. But the wording of international law can begin to change the conversation. Ironically, the death and destruction of the Khmer Rouge and the landmines and economic sanctions that followed seems to have protected the forests and kept some of the kinship economies with the *m'jas teuk m'jas day* alive in the context of a weak state-market



system. While leaders of the genocidal regime were on trial for their crimes in international court, the life-supporting ancestors were being violently consumed by an insatiable market. Indeed, the law may not be focused on the most important thing. There is a high probability it will change, with or without human intervention.

## References

- Abrams, Philip (1988) Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977). *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1(1): 58–89.
- Allerton, Catherine (2013) *Potent Landscapes: Place and Mobility in Eastern Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ang, Chouléan (1995) Le Sol et l'ancêtre l'amorphe et l'anthropomorphe. *Journal Asiatique* 283(1): 213–35.
- Århem, Kai. (2016) Animism and the Hunter's Dilemma: Hunting, Sacrifice and Asymmetric Exchange among the Katu of Vietnam. In K. Århem and G. Sprenger (eds), *Animism in Southeast Asia*, pp. 91–113. Routledge.
- Aun, Pheap (2015) Villagers Call on Spirit to Curse Officials, Company Behind Dam. *Cambodia Daily*, 2 March.
- Aun, Pheap and Peter Zsombor (2017) Wildlife Sanctuaries Issued First Zoning Plans. *Cambodia Daily*, 10 January. [english.cambodiadaily.com/news/wildlife-sanctuaries-issued-first-zoning-plans-123189/](http://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/wildlife-sanctuaries-issued-first-zoning-plans-123189/)
- Baird, Ian G. (2013) 'Indigenous Peoples' and Land: Comparing Communal Land Titling and Its Implications in Cambodia and Laos. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54(3): 269–81. [doi.org/10.1111/apv.12034](https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12034)
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1989) *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Polity Press.
- Beauchamp, Emilie, Tom Clements and E. J. Milner-Gulland (2018) Exploring Trade-Offs between Development and Conservation Outcomes in Northern Cambodia. *Land Use Policy* 71: 431–44. [doi: 10.1016/j.landusepol.2017.11.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2017.11.021)
- Beban, Alice (2021) *Unwritten Rule: State-making through Land Reform in Cambodia*. Cornell University Press.
- Beban, Alice and Courtney Work (2014) The Spirits Are Crying: Dispossessing Land and Possessing Bodies in Rural Cambodia. *Antipode* 46(3): 593–610.
- Biddulph, Robin (2011) Tenure Security Interventions in Cambodia: Testing Bebbington's Approach to Development Geography. *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography* 93(3): 223–36. [doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0467.2011.00374.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0467.2011.00374.x)

- Blaser, Mario (2013) Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in Spite of Europe. *Current Anthropology* 54(5): 547–68.
- Branch, Adam and Liana Minkova (2023) Ecocide, the Anthropocene, and the International Criminal Court. *Ethics & International Affairs* 37(1): 51–79.
- Cadena, Marisol de la (2015) *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Carmichael, Michael (2011) Cambodia Villagers Stage ‘Avatar’ Themed Protest about Land Loss. *VOA News*, 17 August. [www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-villagers-stage-avatar-themed-protest-about-land-loss-128017108/167893.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-villagers-stage-avatar-themed-protest-about-land-loss-128017108/167893.html)
- Chandler, David (2008) Cambodia Deals with its Past: Collective Memory, Demonisation and Induced Amnesia. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9(2–3): 355–69.
- Cooke, Paul, Katie Hodgkinson and Peter Manning (2022) Changing the Story: Intergenerational Dialogue, Participatory Video and Perpetrator Memories in Cambodia. *Memory Studies*. [doi.org/10.1177/17506980221108474](https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980221108474)
- Das, Veena (2015) What Does Ordinary Ethics Look Like? In Michael Lambek, Veena Das, Didier Fassin and Web Keane (eds), *Four Lectures on Ethics Anthropological Perspectives*, pp. 53–126. Hau Books.
- Davis, Kyle Frankel, Kailiang Yu, Maria Cristina Rulli, Lonn Pichdara and Paolo D’Odorico (2015) Accelerated Deforestation Driven by Large-Scale Land Acquisitions in Cambodia. *Nature Geoscience* 8(10): 772–75.
- Descola, Philippe (2013) *Beyond Nature and Culture*. University of Chicago Press.
- Diepart, Jean Christophe and Laura Schoenberger (2017) Concessions in Cambodia: Governing Profits, Extending State Power and Enclosing Resources from the Colonial Era to the Present. *The Handbook of Contemporary Cambodia*, 157–168. [doi.org/10.4324/9781315736709](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315736709)
- Dressler, Wolfram H., Smith, Will, and Montefrío, Marvin J.F. (2018) Ungovernable? The Vital Natures of Swidden Assemblages in an Upland Frontier. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 61 (July), 343–354. [doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.12.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.12.007)
- ECCC. No Date. Key Events. Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. [www.eccc.gov.kh/en/keyevents](http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/keyevents)
- Eichler, Lauren J. (2020) Ecocide is Genocide: Decolonizing the Definition of Genocide. *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 14(2): 104–21. [doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.14.2.1720](https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.14.2.1720)
- Évrard, Olivier, Thomas O. Pryce, Guido Sprenger and Chanthaphilith Chiem-souraj (2015). Of Myths and Metallurgy: Archaeological and Ethnological Approaches to Upland Iron Production in 9th Century CE Northwest

- Laos. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 47(1), 109–140. [doi.org/10.1017/S0022463415000491](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463415000491)
- Falk, Richard (1973) Environmental Warfare and Ecocide – Facts, Appraisal, and Proposals. *Belgian Review of International Law* 9(1): 1–27.
- Forest, Alain (1991) Cambodge: Pouvoir de roi et puissance de génie. In A. Forest, Y. Ishizawa and L. Vandermeersch (eds), *Cultes populaires et sociétés asiatiques: Appareils culturels et appareils de pouvoir*, pp. 185–222. Editions L’Harmattan.
- Franco, Jennifer C. and Saturnino M. Borrás (2019) Grey Areas in Green Grabbing: Subtle and Indirect Interconnections between Climate Change Politics and Land Grabs and Their Implications for Research. *Land Use Policy* 84(October): 192–99.
- Goldstein, Jenny Elaine (2019) The Volumetric Political Forest: Territory, Satellite Fire Mapping, and Indonesia’s Burning Peatland. *Antipode* online. [doi.org/10.1111/anti.12576](https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12576)
- Goyes, David R., et al. (2021) Genocide and Ecocide in Four Colombian Indigenous Communities: The Erosion of a Way of Life and Memory. *British Journal of Criminology* 61(4): 965–84. [doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaa109](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaa109)
- Greene, Anastacia (2019). The Campaign to Make Ecocide an International Crime: QuiXotic Quest or Moral Imperative? *Fordham Environmental Law Review* 30(3): 1–48.
- Grimsditch, Mark, Leakhana Kol and Depika Sherchan (2012) *Access to Land Title in Cambodia: A Study of Systematic Land Registration in Three Cambodian Provinces and the Capital*. Phnom Penh: Mekong Land Research Forum. <http://www.mekonglandforum.org/node/2447>
- Guan, Ang Cheng (2013) *Singapore, ASEAN and the Cambodian Conflict 1978–1991*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Harding, Sandra (2010) Standpoint Methodologies and Epistemologies: A Logic of Scientific Inquiry for People. *World Social Science Report: Knowledge Divides*. Paris 173–75.
- Hayward, Daniel and Jean Christophe Diepart (2021) Deforestation in Cambodia: A Story of Land Concessions, Migration and Resource Exploitation. *Land Portal*, 24 September. [landportal.org/data-story/2021/09/deforestation-cambodia-story-land-concessions-migration-and-resource-exploitation](https://landportal.org/data-story/2021/09/deforestation-cambodia-story-land-concessions-migration-and-resource-exploitation)
- Higgins, Polly, Damien Short and Nigel South (2013) Protecting the Planet: A Proposal for a Law of Ecocide. *Crime, Law and Social Change* 59(3): 251–66.
- Hinton, Alexander Laban (2002a) *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*. University of California Press.

- (2002b) *The Dark Side of Modernity: Toward an Anthropology of Genocide*. In A. L. Hinton (ed.), *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*, pp. 1–40. University of California Press.
- (2005) *Why Did They Kill? : Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide*. University of California Press.
- (2014) *Genocide and the Politics of Memory in Cambodia*. In A. Hinton et al. (eds), *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*, pp. 149–69. Rutgers University Press.
- (2018) *The Justice Facade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia*. Oxford University Press.
- ICC (2011) *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*. The Hague: International Criminal Court.
- Irvin-Erickson, Douglas (2016) *Spirit Cults, Religion, and Performative Peace in Cambodia*. In Douglas Irvin-Erickson and Peter C. Phan (eds), *Violence, Religion, Peacemaking*, pp. 61–80. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Janowski, M. (2017) *The Dynamics of the Cosmic Conversation: Beliefs about Spirits among the Kelabit and Penan of the Upper Baram River, Sarawak*. In K. Århem and G. Sprenger (eds), *Animism in Southeast Asia*, pp. 181–204. Routledge.
- Johnson, Andrew Alan (2020) *Mekong Dreaming: Life and Death along a Changing River*. Duke University Press.
- Keating, Neal B (2013) *Kuy Alterities: The Struggle to Conceptualise and Claim Indigenous Land Rights in Neoliberal Cambodia*. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54(3): 309–22.
- Kiernan, Ben (2004) *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930–1975*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- (2008) *Genocide and Resistance in Southeast Asia: Documentation, Denial & Justice in Cambodia and East Timor*. Transaction Publishers.
- (2007) *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*. Yale University Press.
- Kopnina, Helen (2018) *Just Conservation: In Defense of Environmentalism*. In S. Dhiman and J. Marques (eds), *Handbook of Engaged Sustainability*, pp. 1–20. Springer International Publishing.
- LaCapra, Dominick (1996) *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. Cornell University Press.
- LeBillon, Philippe (2000) *The Political Ecology of Transition in Cambodia 1989–1999: War, Peace and Forest Exploitation*. *Development and Change* 31: 785–805.

- (2002) Logging in Muddy Waters: The Politics of Forest Exploitation in Cambodia. *Critical Asian Studies* 34(4): 563–86.
- Levene, Mark and Daniele Conversi (2014) Subsistence Societies, Globalisation, Climate Change and Genocide: Discourses of Vulnerability and Resilience. *International Journal of Human Rights* 18(3): 281–97.
- LICADHO (2012) Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (Vol. 6329276254).
- Lindgren, Tim (2018) Ecocide, Genocide and the Disregard of Alternative Life-Systems. *The International Journal of Human Rights* 22(4): 525–49.
- Lohani, Sapana, Thomas E. Dilts, Peter J. Weisberg, Sarah E. Null and Zeb S. Hogan (2020) Rapidly Accelerating Deforestation in Cambodia’s Mekong River Basin: A Comparative Analysis of Spatial Patterns and Drivers. *Water* 12(8). [doi.org/10.3390/w12082191](https://doi.org/10.3390/w12082191)
- Magliocca, Nicholas R, Khuc, Quy Van, Ellicott, Evan A., and de Bremond, Ariane (2019) Archetypical Pathways of Direct and Indirect Land-Use Change caused by Cambodia’s Economic Land Concessions. *Ecology and Society* 24(2). [doi.org/10.5751/ES-10954-240225](https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-10954-240225)
- Masuzawa, Tomoko (1993) *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mehta, Sailesh and Prisca Merz (2015) Ecocide – A New Crime against Peace? *Environmental Law Review* 17(1): 3–7.
- Michaud, Alan (2013) Prey Lang Development Case: Do People Benefit from its Development? Phnom Penh: NGO Forum on Cambodia Land and Livelihoods Program, Forestry Rights Project, October. [preylang.net/wp-content/uploads/Other%20reports/Prey-Lang-Development-Case.pdf](http://preylang.net/wp-content/uploads/Other%20reports/Prey-Lang-Development-Case.pdf)
- Milne, Sarah (2012) Chut Wutty: Tragic Casualty of Cambodia’s Dirty War to Save Forests. *New Mandala*. 30 April. [www.newmandala.org/chut-wutty-tragic-casualty-of-cambodia%e2%80%99s-dirty-war-to-save-forests/](http://www.newmandala.org/chut-wutty-tragic-casualty-of-cambodia%e2%80%99s-dirty-war-to-save-forests/)
- MoE (2017) Zoning Guideline for the Protected Areas in Cambodia. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Environment.
- Mongabay (2020). *Deforestation Statistics for Cambodia*. Rainforests Mongabay. [rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/archive/Cambodia.htm](http://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/archive/Cambodia.htm)
- Neef, Andreas, Touch, Siphath, and Chiengthong, Jamaree. (2013). The Politics and Ethics of Land Concessions in Rural Cambodia. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 26, 1085–1103. [doi.org/10.1007/s10806-013-9446-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-013-9446-y)
- Noseworthy, William (2013) The Cham’s First Highland Sovereign: Po Rome (r. 1627–1651). *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 28: 155–203.
- ODC (2016) Forest Cover. *OpenDevelopment Cambodia*, 7 March. [opendevelopmentcambodia.net/profiles/forest-cover/](http://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/profiles/forest-cover/)

- Oudom, Tat (2012) Prey Lang Petition Goes Unanswered. *Phnom Penh Post*, 7 July. [www.phnompenhpost.com/national/prey-lang-petition-goes-unanswered](http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/prey-lang-petition-goes-unanswered)
- OUP (2019) Ecocide' and 'Genocide'. *Lexico Online Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. [www.lexico.com/](http://www.lexico.com/)
- Padwe, Jonathan (2011) Cashews, Cash, and Capitalism in Northeast Cambodia. In Caroline Hughes and Kheang Un (eds), *Cambodia's Economic Transformation*, pp. 123–53. NIAS Press.
- (2020) *Disturbed Forests, Fragmented Memories: Jarai and Other Lives in the Cambodian Highlands*. University of Washington Press.
- Palarczyk, Danuta (2023) Ecocide Before the International Criminal Court: Simplicity is Better than an Elaborate Embellishment. *Criminal Law Forum*. 34: 147–107.
- Palatino, Mong (2015) Cambodia: Monks Protest against Destruction of the Prey Lang Forest. *Cultural Survival*, 1 October. [www.culturalsurvival.org/news/cambodia-monks-protest-against-destruction-prey-lang-forest](http://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/cambodia-monks-protest-against-destruction-prey-lang-forest)
- Picard, M. (2017) *The Appropriation of Religion in Southeast Asia and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- PLCN (2014). Our Forest Remains Under Destruction. Phnom Penh: Prey Lang Community Network.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth A (2016) *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. Duke University Press.
- Pryce, Thomas Oliver, et al. (2014) The Iron Kuay of Cambodia: Tracing the Role of Peripheral Populations in Angkorian to Colonial Cambodia via a 1200-Year-Old Industrial Landscape. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 47(1), 142–63. [doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2014.04.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2014.04.009)
- Sahlins, Marshall (2017) The Original Political Society. In D. Graeber and M. Sahlins (eds), *On Kings*, pp. 23–6. Hau Books.
- Scott, James (2017) *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Early States*. Yale University Press.
- Sea, Eung (2023) Indigenous Peoples Fear Loss of Lands after Passage of New Law. *Camboja News*, 2 June. [cambojanews.com/indigenous-peoples-fear-loss-of-lands-after-passage-of-new-law/](http://cambojanews.com/indigenous-peoples-fear-loss-of-lands-after-passage-of-new-law/)
- Seidenfaden, Erik (1952) The Kui People of Cambodia and Siam. *Journal of the Siam Society*, 39(2), 144–80
- Short, Damien (2016) *Redefining Genocide: Settler Colonialism, Social Death and Ecocide*. Zed Books.

- Sollund, Ragnhild (2019) Wildlife Management, Species Injustice and Ecocide in the Anthropocene. *Critical Criminology* (1).
- Sprenger, Guido (2017) Communicated into Being: Systems Theory and the Shifting of Ontological Status. *Anthropological Theory* 17(1): 108–32.
- (2018) Buddhism and Coffee: The Transformation of Locality and Non-Human Personhood in Southern Laos. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 33(2), 265–90. [doi.org/10.1355/sj33-2b](https://doi.org/10.1355/sj33-2b)
- Springer, Simon (2009) Culture of Violence or Violent Orientalism? Neoliberalisation and Imagining the ‘Savage Other’ in Post-transitional Cambodia. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34(3): 305–19.
- Swift, Peter (2013) Changing Ethnic Identities among the Kuy in Cambodia: Assimilation, Reassertion and the Making of Indigenous Identity. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54(3): 296–308.
- Swift, Peter and Andrew Cock (2015) Traditional Khmer Systems of Forest Management. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25(1): 153–73.
- Tambiah, Stanley J. (1970) *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*. Cambridge University Press.
- Theilade, Ida, et al. (2022) Evergreen Forest Types of the Central Plains in Cambodia: Floristic Composition and Ecological Characteristics. *Nordic Journal of Botany*. [doi.org/10.1111/njb.03494](https://doi.org/10.1111/njb.03494)
- Thun, Theara (2010) International Responses to the Khmer Rouge’s Diplomacy 1979–1991. Chulalongkorn University.
- Titthara, May (2011) *Villagers under Surveillance*. Phnom Penh.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt (2005) *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press.
- United Nations (1942). *United Nations Charter*. [www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text](http://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text)
- Vickery, Michael (1990) Notes on the Political Economy of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 20(4): 435–65.
- (1999) *Cambodia 1975–1982*. Silkworm.
- Washington, Haydn, Guillaume Chapron, Helen Kopnina, Patrick Curry, Joe Gray and John J. Piccolo (2018) Foregrounding Ejustice in Conservation. *Biological Conservation* (September): 367–74.
- Wheeler, Harvey (1973) The Politics of Ecology. *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 4(1–4): 183–87.
- Work, Courtney (2018) ‘There Was So Much’. *Journal of Religion and Violence* 6(1): 52–72.

- (2019) Chthonic Sovereigns? 'Neak Ta' in a Cambodian Village. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 20(1): 74–95.
- (2020) *Tides of Empire: Religion, Development, and Environment in Cambodia*. Berghahan Books.
- (2022) The Dance of Life and Death: Social Relationships with Elemental Power. In Holly High (ed.), *Stone Masters: Power Encounters in Mainland South-East Asia*, chapter 4. NUS press.
- Work, Courtney, Ida Theilade and Try Thuon (2022) Under the Canopy of Development Aid: Illegal Logging and the Shadow State. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 0(0): 1–23. [doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2103794](https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2103794)
- Work, Courtney and Ratha Thuon (2017) Inside and Outside the Maps: Mutual Accommodation and Forest Destruction in Cambodia. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne d'Études Du Développement* 38(3): 360–77.