TRANSFORMING OPPOSITIONS IN CAMBODIA

Caroline Hughes, PhD,
Lecturer, School of Politics,
University of Nottingham.
Email: caroline.hughes@nottingham.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of international democracy promotion as a means for peace-building in post-conflict societies has hinged upon the possibility of “habituating” contentious parties to exogenously promoted democratic procedures. The experience of one of the earliest democracy promotion experiments, that of Cambodia, suggests that such habituation is deeply problematic for local party organizations. Extensive and prolonged intervention, by powerful and resource-rich international actors, permits local parties to habituate themselves to a multi-layered politics that relies heavily on the mediating presence of intervenors, as a means to avoid habituation to a bipolar relationship with former enemies, mediated by local democratic processes. In this context, the portrayal of international democracy promotion as a limited and primarily technical form of intervention is problematic.
International democracy promotion in the aftermath of civil war has hinged upon the conception of a linear process of political transition that can prompt the substitution of “ballots for bullets”\(^2\) as decisive resources of legitimacy and authority in a post-conflict polity. Investigating the validity of this presumption, as it is experienced by parties attempting to negotiate this transformation in the context of international democracy promotion strategies, requires a detailed analysis of the ways in which two bodies of knowledge interact.

The first significant body of thought is that emerging from comparative theorists of democratization, such as O’Donnell and Schmitter, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan.\(^3\) The work of these theorists has engendered an understanding of trajectories of democratization primarily as it has emerged in states that undertook such a transformation in response to local pressures and decisions. Endogenously-produced democratic transitions have, arguably, been significant in the thinking of international democracy promoters attempting to engender similar processes, by strategies of exogenous prompting.

The second body of thought that has influenced international democracy promotion is the more general work of Western political theorists in formulating institutional models of democracy. These are viewed as offering a blueprint for democracy promotion abroad.\(^4\) The connection between these two bodies of knowledge as they are connected in the understandings and practices of international democracy promoters can be understood with reference to O’Donnell and Schmitter’s notion of “habituation.”

O’Donnell and Schmitter regard the early stages of democratization as a chaotic multi-dimensional chess game. This multi-dimensionality, in their view, represents stochastic noise surrounding an underlying uni-directional trend, in which political behaviour becomes regularised and sanitized over time, and players become “habituated” to their own game.\(^5\)
In the country that is the subject of this paper, Cambodia, signs of such “habituation” have been eagerly sought by international advisors, attempting to hold the leaders of Cambodia’s contentious political parties to the letter of laws and agreements, codified with significant international input, regarding democratic processes. The concept of “habituation” has been viewed by international democracy promoters as permitting the replacement of endogenous elite pacting for exogenous policies of democracy promotion. Emphasis on habituation implies that the initial motivation for the erection of democratic institutions and procedures is less important than the embedding, over time, of these procedures in the ideas and strategies of political actors. The concept of habituation also suggests the possibility that Western understandings of democratic procedures can be implanted in non-Western societies, since the form of the procedures constructed is less important than their accretion of legitimacy through use over time.  

The following discussion questions these presumptions on two grounds. Firstly, it is suggested that the difference between endogenous and exogenous motivations for transition does in fact have a crucial impact on the nature of transition. This is because the practice of international democracy promotion in itself introduces new political forces into the domestic polity. The close and sustained engagement of powerful and resource-rich international actors that is necessary to support exogenously promoted procedures prior to their institutionalization, and the habituation of local actors to them, creates a new set of resources and a new space of opposition for local politics.

While local actors may become habituated to implanted procedures, they also become habituated to using international resources for their political ends, rendering subsequent international disengagement more problematic. James Mayall comments that complex UN intervention has frequently resulted in “the manipulation of the UN by undemocratic forces in the countries where it operates.” Mayall attributes this tendency to the actions of
Transforming Oppositions in Cambodia

“unscrupulous politicians.” The contention here is that such manipulation may be explained, not as a function of individual (lack of) scruples, but as a function of the rational decisions of organizations that are burdened with the problems of change in a threatening environment.

Secondly, “habituation” to Western-style democratic procedures is likely to be significantly more difficult in some contexts than in others. International democracy promotion has frequently been prioritized as a solution for societies in conflict, where the replacement of military mobilization by political mobilization is viewed as offering an opportunity to end war. It is argued here that the conditions of post-conflict societies entail that the replacement of “bullets” with “ballots” is a dislocating experience for the warring parties charged with the primary responsibility for making democratic procedures work.

A particular aspect of this is the potential conflict between the nature of exogenously promoted procedures and pre-existing political parties. The habituation of local political parties, especially those which have developed from armies under conditions of civil war, to Western procedures entails a considerable organizational burden, since these parties developed in conjunction with markedly different political processes.

The following discussion outlines in detail the organizational burden entailed for parties undergoing such a process of “habituation” to exogenously imposed procedures. The central claim is that the parties operating in the context of the particular case studied, that of Cambodia, have dealt with the problems of habituation by greater reliance on international sources of support. Rather than removing their primary site of contest directly from the local battlefield to the local election campaign, the parties studied have displaced their struggles into international sites of encounter, manipulating international interventionary discourses to their advantage, ensuring continued international engagement in local politics, and manipulating proliferating ideas of “opposition” itself to finesse the conflicting demands of activists, opponents and international intervenors. Consequently, international democracy
promotion has inadvertently produced a situation in which political parties have habituated themselves to contestation in an interventionary context, as a means to avoid habituation to locally-operating democratic procedures.

The case of Cambodia is significant, as Cambodia was one of the first targets of post-Cold War international democracy promotion as a means for resolving conflict. Ten years ago, the warring Cambodian parties signed peace agreements that encapsulated a mandate for the United Nations to hold elections in Cambodia, to provide an alternative instrument to military conflict for erecting a legitimate and empowered government. International democracy promotion in Cambodia began with the activities of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in organising elections in 1993. It continued throughout the 1990s, comprising both the threat of international conditionality on aid, and the continuous engagement of experts from the United Nations, multilateral donor organizations and international NGOs to advise on and promote the construction of democratic procedures. The importance of the conception of habituation in this process was implicit in accounts of a democratic “legacy” and “culture” emerging from the implementation of even imperfect procedures. In this respect, Cambodia is unique in that it offers a decade of experience of concerted interventionary democracy promotion for analysis.

Yet practices of resistance to the channelling of political relationships into internationally promoted democratic procedures are discernible on the part of Cambodia’s major political parties, almost ten years after the democratization process began, suggesting that habituation has not so far been instrumental in consolidating change. The following discussion locates this finding within contingent factors of the political landscape – the social and political opacity of Cambodia’s post-war rural electoral heartland, on the one hand, and the highly penetrated and transnational polity resulting from decades of interventionary practice, on the other. The primary purpose of this discussion is to suggest that the multidimensional nature
of political party opposition in Cambodia may reflect, not so much the teething troubles of transition, as the difficulty of establishing democracy as “the only game in town”\textsuperscript{9} in the context of intervention. Intervention itself has produced a “town” with discontinuous and highly porous borders, while failing to reduce the political and practical problems of access to the hinterland. The evolution of Cambodia’s political regime reflects these realities more closely than it reflects the projected outcome of “habituation” to Western-style procedures.

In making this case, the following discussion begins by examining in more detail the presuppositions of international democracy promoters regarding the potential political force of democratic procedures. It then considers the features of Cambodia’s political party organizations, and the problems they raise for international attempts to “habituate” them to exogenously promoted, and Western-influenced, democratic procedures, in the context of the wider obstacles to habituation implicit in the Cambodian political landscape. It ends by addressing the ways in which these factors contribute to the enthusiastic embrace of international intervention by Cambodia’s opposition parties, and the problems that this poses for Western projections of the emergence of a locally embedded democracy in Cambodia.

Internationally-Promoted Democracy

Joel Barkan’s overview of democracy promotion strategies discovers three broad categories of democracy promoted: a conception of democracy as proceeding essentially from electoral choice, associated particularly with US interventionary programmes; a conception of democracy as proceeding from the growth of civil society, associated particularly with European programmes; and a third, multifaceted approach, which combines the two.\textsuperscript{10} Arguably, these categories reflect a distillation of western political thinking with regard to both democracy and democratization, which frames out of consideration the importance of
Transforming Oppositions in Cambodia

contingent historical experience in promoting a fit between democratic procedures and
democratic identities. International democracy promotion is viewed primarily as a process
which alters the terms of a dialogue between official and public, government and opposition,
state and civil society, in a mechanistic and universal way in order to achieve a “democratic”
outcome that is strongly influenced by Western understandings of this.

The dialogue envisaged reflects western liberal models of a territorially defined, dialectical
bipolarity in political relations. This is particularly evident in the Anglo-Saxon liberal
democratic tradition, with its two-party, first-past-the-post, winner-takes-all electoral model
and consequent emphasis upon the democratic mandate. The concept of the democratic
mandate, less pronounced in the coalition politics of multi-party, proportional representation
systems, has necessarily been at the centre of exported models of electoral democracy, even
in contexts where many parties compete in a system of proportional representation. This is
because, in the context of post-conflict peacebuilding, democracy promoters have viewed the
democratic mandate as encapsulating and idealising the sovereign “will of the people” in a
way that coalition deals, cut by politicians, cannot.\(^{11}\)

In the Anglo-Saxon model, the structure of both political party system and parliamentary
debate fixes an unbounded adversarial bipolarity into the core of the democratic system, in
the form of a binary government-opposition relationship. This is superimposed onto a
similarly unending balancing between citizen/civil society and state, in the context of a
national polity. Belief in the equivalency of warring armies facing off on the front lines, and
opposed politicians debating at the despatch box underlies the widespread belief in
democratization as a process by which bipolarity can be “tamed”\(^{12}\) through the replacement
of “bullets” with “ballots.” Yet the case of Cambodia suggests that, aside from a coincidence
of bipolarity, for political parties emerging from civil conflict, the difference between
engagement in civil war and engagement in parliamentary opposition is vast and dislocating.
Consequently, the belief that local parties in conflict can be habituated to exogenously promoted parliamentary procedures demands interrogation.

Resistance and Opposition

The process of habituation envisages a transformation from a relationship of “government-and-armed-resistance” to “government-and-opposition.” Resistance, in 1980s Cambodia, entailed a military contest pursued in order to oust opponents decisively from the national political arena. The stance of the resistance parties, grouped in enclaves and refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodia border, was based upon the allegedly inherent legitimacy of their claim to power as opposed to the allegedly inherent illegitimacy of the Phnom Penh regime, which had been installed by an invading Vietnamese army.

This denial of the adversary’s claim to power contrasts with the acceptance of the principle of “contingent consent” that is the hallmark, in Western conceptions of democracy, of an institutionalised “parliamentary opposition.” This principle entails that “those who lose in the present agree to respect the contingent authority of the winner to make binding decisions, in exchange for being allowed to take office and make decisions in the future.”

This is a stance that entails common subordination of party interest and identity to loyalty to the overarching constitutional context that sustains specifically multiparty competition.

Garry Rodan comments that “The tolerance or lack of tolerance towards a ‘loyal’ opposition is … a basic yardstick within [a liberal democratic] framework.” In the context of post-conflict societies, the tolerance both of government for opposition and of opposition for government is central to the promotion of democracy, given the power of these former armies, and their potential to undermine democratization efforts by mobilizing military force.

Stepan’s concept of “democratic opposition” describes an opposition stance in which the democratic opposition party opposes the legitimacy of an authoritarian power-holder on the
grounds that it is authoritarian. This form of opposition has significant force in the post-Cold War world, in an international regime in which international legitimacy is increasingly important to governments, and in which opposition activities practised in an international site of encounter are increasingly visible and powerful at home. Consequently, the “democratic opposition” identity is increasingly important in states in the South that are emerging from authoritarianism.¹⁵

Both “resistance” and “democratic opposition” may form important aspects of party identity that are not accommodated easily by the procedures of parliamentary opposition. Parties “resisting” foreign invasion or “opposing” authoritarian practices harness their identities to practices and discourses that are inimical with participation, alongside the enemies they seek to delegitimise, in a multiparty liberal democratic process.

This is problematic for the notion of “habituation,” as it implies that parties must radically alter both their internal rhetoric and their external relationships in order to engage with democratic processes. Achieving this double transformation successfully entails retaining internal cohesion while imposing discipline to ensure respect for the new constitutional order. This imposes great strains on party identity and structure.

The model offered here, and elaborated with detailed reference to the case of Cambodia, illuminates the ways in which efforts by opposition parties to address these internal, organizational stresses and strains conflict with habituation of parties as actors to a framework of bipolar relations, operating vertically between elites and masses, and horizontally, between governments and oppositions. It follows Vicky Randall’s analysis of political parties in the Third World in emphasizing the importance to party persistence of organizational structures.¹⁶ Thus, close attention is paid to the layer of party activists, presumed to have a stronger attachment to party identity than the broad mass of voters, and
presumed to be particularly important to the process of party-building, a pre-requisite for party persistence.

The model also posits a new dimension between government and opposition – namely, the dimension of international politics. International politics offers a series of sites for encounter to contending political parties in the context of a highly intervened polity. Garry Rodan views political opposition as involving “the existence of political space to contest the exercise of power through government or regime,” and adds that such space may be established within or outside of representative political institutions. The case of Cambodia suggests that the international dimension is used by political parties as a site for displacement of key issues of legitimacy. This permits engagement with opponents at home within a context of exogenously promoted procedures, without the need to re-orient the concerns and fears of party activists, squaring the incipient contradiction between procedural habituation and party identity-building.

Party Activists and Party Loyalties

Vicky Randall’s comparison of parties in the South suggest three major types of party loyalties: those based on promises to promote particular interests or ideologies; on partisan identification, that becomes “frozen” over time; and on the ability of the party to operate as a patronage machine, delivering material benefits. In a stable situation, different aspects of party loyalties are mutually sustaining, with individual supporters benefiting from a mesh of relations comprising representation of interest, award of identity, and material benefits.

Comparison with other party systems in Asia in the 1990s suggest the uniqueness of the exogenously-promoted Cambodian democratization project. Other democratizing South East Asian countries, such as the Philippines in 1986, Thailand in 1992, and Indonesia in 1998,
saw an authoritarian state challenged by new parties, comprising elite alliances with newly empowered economic classes and/or social movements. In this context, new identities and interests emerged, engendering a crisis of legitimacy within the state. By contrast, Cambodia’s resistance parties entered the multiparty arena disempowered by the dissolution of their administrative structures and the closure of refugee camps on the border. This reintegrated national space released a former captive population from resistance control, and subsumed resistance loyalists into the larger, CPP-controlled, area of the country. At the same time, the drying up of external aid flows to the “resistance” was not matched by significant new economic opportunities emerging independently of the state. The resistance parties struggled to retain coherence while few new voices were empowered.

The case of Cambodia is unique, then, in that democratization entailed, not simply the need for governments to become habituated to the toleration of powerfully embedded emerging oppositions, but for two party coalitions to become habituated to tolerating one another under new rules, in an environment in which voices outside the party system remained largely silent. Adjusting to this process is most difficult, arguably, for the party organization required to form an opposition, as the party must be rebuilt without the benefits of incumbency, the fruits of patronage and control of the instruments of coercion. Furthermore, constitutive relationships of representation with followers, powerfully asserted but nevertheless untested prior to democratization, are strained by the need to subordinate sectional interests to a new constitutional order.

The impact on party identity is particularly problematic. The transformation of a “resistance party” into an “opposition party” is dislocating for core party activists who bear the brunt of suffering, at the hands of vilified “traitors” and “puppets” during civil war, and who are most at risk during the uncertain transition to democratic peace. Peaceful co-existence with former and, potentially, current enemies requires that leaders promote a tempering of rhetoric and
imagination within the party. Balancing this with the fear of alienating supporters and suffering party collapse is difficult.

The case of Cambodia suggests that such a transformation is equally problematic for “democratic oppositions” as for authoritarian parties. For such parties, the idea of democracy operates not only as a policy orientation but also as an identity. To the extent that party cohesion is reliant upon this identity, the party must continue to differentiate itself from, and vilify, its “non-democratic” opponents. For democratic oppositions, attempting to promote party loyalty in a fast-changing context, admittance of enemies into the legitimising “democratic” arena is fatal to their own distinctiveness and self-perception of their own legitimacy. Consequently, democratic oppositions have a strong interest in stridently protesting the inevitably flawed democratic processes to which they are being habituated. Habituation requires not just the construction of participatory procedures and the subjection of authoritarian parties to them, but a re-shaping “pro-democratic” party identities also.

In Cambodia, the emergence of a multi-party environment has not led to the smooth transformation of “resistance” parties into “parliamentary opposition” parties. The CPP, descendant of the authoritarian State of Cambodia regime of the 1980s, remains dominant under the leadership of present Prime Minister Hun Sen, thanks to its inherited control of key sections of the bureaucracy and military. The two other major parties have taken up different oppositional stances vis-à-vis the CPP, but both have repeatedly refused to admit the legitimacy of the CPP’s claim to participation in Cambodian democracy. A number of recent studies have put this refusal down to the impossibility of peaceful opposition in the context of Khmer culture. Some analysts have suggested that poor opposition leadership is also to blame.

However, this refusal can equally be explained in terms of the broader dynamics of party organization, in the context of international intervention, raising a question mark over the
interventionary project itself, rather than merely over the national response. Both the *Front Uni Nationale pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique et Cooperatif* (FUNCINPEC), led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, and the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) have combined more or less reluctant engagement with new democratic procedures with military “resistance” and democratic opposition activism. FUNCINPEC has moved in and out of coalition government with the CPP, in accordance with electoral achievements and military defeats, while the SRP has taken up a complex opposition stance which is located substantially in the international sphere.

These responses, arguably, emerge from a concern to defend the bottom line of the resistance/democratic opposition identity – denial of the legitimacy of a CPP government – while at the same time maintaining the ability to party-build in the difficult political landscape of the 1990s. A key contributory feature of this landscape is the interplay of international and local power that has resulted in the exclusion of the SRP and FUNCINPEC from rural electoral heartland. The opposition parties remain isolated from a “silenced majority” and are easily captured by their most radical activists as a result. The moderation of party identity and discourse, in an atmosphere where a pronounced sense of threat lingers, is consequently extremely difficult, and the lure of international activism is more pronounced.

THE FLAWED CONTEXT OF EARLY TRANSITION

The Silenced Majority

In contrast to the public outbursts that have accompanied democratization in other South East Asian countries, Cambodian democracy emerged in silence. International democracy promoters heavily promoted the idea of the secret ballot, in order to protect voters from the pressures of post-authoritarian politics, and explicitly encouraged voters to remain silent as to
their political preferences, and to pretend to support political parties for whom they in fact did not intend to vote.

From the perspective of international democracy promoters, such policies serve two purposes. Firstly, they greatly reduce security problems, permitting an emphasis on mass politics. While freedom to campaign is necessary, this may be minimal, reduced to the provision of time slots of equal duration at the central television and radio stations, or the personal monitoring of individual party leaders touring the country to make speeches to large, but silent, audiences. The public aspect of electioneering can thus be centralised, rationalised and secured.

Secondly, they obviate the need for international democracy promoters to become heavily involved with the development of political party structures to local level. This has two advantages. It obviates the need for close international engagement with political parties, which as Hamish Nixon points out, could lead to accusations of political bias and interference in Cambodian sovereignty. It also allows the preservation of distance from political parties that have continued, in the 1990s, to behave in ways that are foreign, and distasteful, to western liberal sensibilities. The style of electoral politics that has been imposed on Cambodia by international experts and advisors can be viewed as indicative of a concern to avoid over-mobilization by political parties, viewed as potential threats to the fragile peace.

After two national elections, very little is known about the demographics of Cambodian voter preferences in terms of class, gender or ethnicity, or the motivations for voting. In both 1993 and 1998, exit polling of voters was illegal. Scant information is available regarding the decisive concerns of this silenced majority, and political parties continue to operate blindly in this key site of democratic politics.
It is significant that the Cambodian political parties themselves are enthusiastic about this strategy. Party leaders assiduously promote silence and passivity among voters at their own rallies, even though this leaves them ignorant of voters’ views. This is explained by party leaders as a strategy for avoiding mass intimidation by the dominant CPP. Arguably, where party-building is still ongoing in a post-authoritarian society, ignorance of the views of the electorate as a whole simplifies the task of consolidating the power of the party leadership, and promoting activists’ allegiance. It permits the continued uncritical presumption that the party represents the whole nation, allowing focus on issues of concern to the party core, and obviates the need to balance the concerns of activists with the broader, perhaps more moderate, and almost certainly more diverse, concerns of the electorate as a whole. It encourages continued equation of party interests with national interests, and permits continued ascription of voting patterns to imperfections or manipulation of electoral machinery. Consequently, it inhibits the tempering of inter-party relations and delays the dislocating move away from the resistance identity.

The Former One-Party State

The strategies of the CPP in the early post-UNTAC years also inhibited the possibility of a more public form of democracy. Following the establishment of the coalition government in 1993, the CPP and FUNCINPEC adopted similar strategies of reinforcing party links with the electorate. They did so using patronage politics based upon the revenues available to individual politicians as a consequence of increased international aid flows and inward investment in the post-UNTAC period. For the CPP, patronage politics allowed effective use of the highly politicised pro-CPP local government network to surveille, reward and exclude. This tactic led to the marginalisation and oppression of FUNCINPEC activists in the village, and the empowerment and privileging of CPP activists.
The SRP, too, has found itself consistently blocked by the policies of CPP local and central authorities from establishing an independent presence in rural Cambodia. From 1996, the party attempted to launch local offices, but was strenuously resisted by local authorities. Local police and militias attacked party offices, tearing down party signboards and firing shots at opening ceremonies. Similarly, the party was repeatedly denied permission by the Ministry of Information to launch its own radio station.²⁶

These policies significantly constrained the impact of the SRP in the rural arena prior to the start of the 1998 election campaign. Similarly, immediately after the 1998 elections, hundreds of rural party activists from both FUNCINPEC and the SRP arrived in Phnom Penh having fled their homes in fear of reprisals from victorious CPP officials. This represented a clawing back, by the CPP, of their monopoly on rural political activism following the internationally-scrutinized (relative) openness of the election campaign. Since 1998, a series of killings of rural SRP activists, who were being groomed by the party to contest local elections, has led the party to protest continued violent repression of its presence in the rural heartland.²⁷ Sam Rainsy commented in February 2000:

“In the countryside, there are very few signs [marking the location of SRP offices] still left because of intimidation. It is not safe to be known as a Sam Rainsy supporter.”²⁸

This exclusion of both parties from the rural electoral heartland has further distanced the party leaders from voters, and has significantly influenced the strategies of these parties for mobilizing support since 1993. To the extent that rural politics is central to electoral politics of the 1990s, failure by the SRP and FUNCINPEC to penetrate local government is problematic for the democratic meaning and function of these parties.
The silence of rural voters and the difficulty of access to the rural arena have encouraged the parties to promote the importance of other sites of political encounter in determining Cambodian political relations – in particular, international sites such as the UN, forums of donor governments, and Cambodian communities abroad. This has implications for both democratization and party-building. In these sites, complaints over their exclusion from the rural arena were used to shore up the opposition’s identity as a democratic opposition, problematizing the process of habituation to flawed democratic processes. The differing successes of these parties in creating meaningful sites of political activity in areas other than the rural heartland has dictated their evolution as organizations throughout the 1990s, and has confirmed their habituation to international intervention, as opposed to locally-embedded democracy.

HABITUATION VS. PARTY-BUILDING

Opposition Party Activists and the Meaning of Opposition Politics

The silence of the voters begs the question of how meaning is awarded to opposition politics. The representative function of opposition parties is limited, and their subjugation to extra-democratic powers of the dominant party prevents them from promoting a view of the opposition function itself as an important one. These factors permit continued circulation of, and reliance upon, tried and tested resistance and democratic opposition identities that are not challenged by new information regarding voter preferences or acceptance of new functions in the political system. These identities are particularly important in cementing the allegiances of core activists, at home and abroad, who are at the forefront of the party-building process, and who are asked to make personal and economic sacrifices to support this.
Within Cambodian opposition parties, the continued portrayal of the CPP, which first came to power with the backing of the hated invading Vietnamese army in the 1980s, as a tool of Vietnamese expansionism fulfils this function. The importance of nationalist resistance rhetoric in cementing the loyalties of threatened local activists is illustrated by the comments of two FUNCINPEC activists, in Kandal and Kompong Cham, during the election campaign of 1998. Both commented that their attachment to FUNCINPEC, in spite of the risk associated with this, was directly motivated by a desire to save the Khmer nation from sharing the fate of the Kingdom of Champa, absorbed into Vietnam by the early 19th century:

“Even if there is fighting, our activists will still conduct activities for the party. Because, otherwise Cambodia will become like Champa… The main point is to prevent the yuon from taking over Cambodia.”

“We must be careful because our country may become Champa. If the CPP win they are going to kill us.”

The extent to which this view of the threatening nature of Vietnam is shared beyond opposition party activists is unclear. David Roberts suggests that among the broader rural population, there is less animosity towards the Vietnamese. However, the importance of an alleged Vietnamese threat is central to the unity of FUNCINPEC in times of danger. Further, it promotes the active (and financial) engagement of sympathisers among Khmer communities abroad. Both FUNCINPEC and the SRP have built strong organizations among Khmer communities in Western countries, which are central to the organizational capacities of the parties. Rainsy, in particular, spends much time outside Cambodia, addressing Khmer communities in the US, Australia and France. The SRP in Cambodia frequently publicises the pro-opposition activities of these communities in sympathetic Phnom Penh newspapers.
The significance of attempts to link Khmers in the West with Khmers in Cambodia is associated both with the maintainance of resistance identities and the building of the party as an organization. The positing of the party as a link between Khmers at home and abroad contributes to the party’s self-identification as the expression of Khmer identity, in opposition to the CPP, who are identified as “the party of dictatorship, yuon puppets”. In campaign speeches in 1998, Rainsy criticised the failure to offer voting rights to Khmers abroad, unless they returned to Cambodia to cast a ballot. He related this explicitly to the 1994 law to outlaw the “Khmer Rouge” and to the broader war, characterising these policies as Vietnamese “tricks” to sow dissension within the “Khmer family”:

“They have made … plans for exploiting the country. They want to prompt Khmers to kill each other. The more Khmers are killed, the happier the yuon feel.”

By positing the SRP as the party that bridges the gap between Khmers, in different armies and in different countries, Rainsy portrays his party as the party of nationalist rebuilding and patriotic peace.

For both the SRP and FUNCINPEC, Khmer communities abroad also represent an important source of funding that is not available within impoverished Cambodia, following the cessation of the 1980s politicized international aid flows to the resistance. Diaspora funding is crucial for campaigning in Cambodia in the 1990s.

This organizational imperative feeds into the attachment of the parties to the resistance identity, and particularly to the notion of national distress. Mobilizing financial support among Khmers abroad, many of whom have few direct connections with the world of the Cambodian village, is facilitated more effectively by the language of crisis than by the language of policy adjustment. The allegiances of Khmers abroad both encourage and
facilitate emphasis on a conception of Cambodia as a nation whose very existence remains under threat – an emphasis which precludes the tempering of relations with former enemies, with whom the mortal threat is identified. For both FUNCINPEC and the SRP, the maintainance of these core resistance identities has powerful implications for behaviour, both in contention with other parties and in attempting to mobilize votes within Cambodia.

Royalism and the Sangkum Legacy

For FUNCINPEC, a further core identity is that of royalism. The party’s election victory in 1993 appeared to suggest that the silence of the voters could be translated into votes, thanks to mass support for FUNCINPEC’s identity as a party of monarchy and resistance. It was presumed that those votes awarded to the CPP in the 1993 elections were the result of intimidation and violence, and that as democracy developed in Cambodia, so FUNCINPEC’s lead over its rival would increase. Thus loyalty to the identity of FUNCINPEC as the party of the King has remained at the centre of FUNCINPEC’s political strategy and permits a continued presumption of representativeness on the part of FUNCINPEC’s leaders.

This portrayal of the situation served the interests of FUNCINPEC’s leader, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, in that it permitted him to use his royal descent to legitimate his leadership of the party. Dependence upon this identity is also viewed as a strategy that can trump the CPP’s attempts to isolate FUNCINPEC, as the identification of FUNCINPEC with Ranariddh’s father, King Norodom Sihanouk, is seen as a resource that requires little extra explanation or propagation to attract votes in Cambodia. A candidate for FUNCINPEC in 1998 commented:

“People aren’t interested in economic policy. The prince is the symbol of the nation, of peace. That’s what people are interested in… Actually we don’t need to do much campaigning. We just need to tell people that
FUNCINPEC is here. Because the people know us already…. People will vote for Ranariddh because it is the tradition for Cambodia to have a monarchy. And Cambodian people are very traditional.”

The connection with King Sihanouk has far-reaching implications for the nature of FUNCINPEC as an organization. Sihanouk dominated Cambodian politics throughout the 1950s and 60s, when he oversaw a period of peace that, in current memory, contrasts sharply with the horrors of war that succeeded it. Sihanouk’s Sangkum Reastr Niyum regime, constructed a powerful understanding of the cosmology of relations between monarch and people, that has dominated post-colonial politics in Cambodia, in the observance or in the breach, ever since.

In Sangkum ideology, the King in person was posited as the embodiment, interpreter and guarantor of popular aspiration, guardian of harmony, and repository of Khmer culture and memory. In the 1990s, FUNCINPEC has promoted a similar conception of its function as a party, while Ranariddh has emulated Sihanouk’s populist monarchism of the 1960s. He has styled himself “Euv Kmeing” – “Little Father” – in relation to Sihanouk’s “Samdech Euv” – “Lord Father”, and in the 1998 election campaign made reference to himself as the devaraja or “God King” of Angkorean tradition. FUNCINPEC in the 1990s, like the Sangkum in the 1960s, is portrayed as a vehicle through which a harmonious “union of people and prince” can be achieved.

This view of the function of FUNCINPEC and its relations with voters and opponents problematizes politics in the arena of parliament and government, in a number of ways. Firstly, the royalist identity has not facilitated the development of a specifically expressive function to lend meaning and power to the party’s relations with other parties in the context of institutions designed to foster debate. Rather, relations with voters have remained based on hierarchy, patronage and deference. A number of commentators have suggested that this
was to a great extent responsible for the increasing isolation of FUNCIPNEC in Phnom Penh during its period in government from 1993-7, while the CPP re-consolidated power via its more direct control of local government. Ranariddh commented before the election in 1998:

“I am very sorry that FUNCINPEC made its biggest mistake in 1993, because it forgot its rural structures. This was the biggest mistake of the FUNCINPEC leaders.”

FUNCINPEC’s “forgetfulness” was a consequence of the remoteness inherent in the hierarchical relations between the prince and the masses, implied by the centrality of royalism to the party’s organization, and emphasised by the interposed layer of hostile local CPP administration.

Secondly, this rendering of the relation between leader and supporters has been problematic for party-building itself. In particular it downplays the contribution of commoners at the top of the party, also expected to show deference to royalty. The senior levels of the party are staffed by a high proportion of returnees from the West, many of whom have a high level of technical or professional competence, and significant independent wealth. Many of these individuals returned to Cambodia inspired by a desire to contribute their skills and resources to Cambodia’s reconstruction, but found that a FUNCINPEC dominated by members of the royal family was ill-prepared to facilitate their contribution.

These problems contributed to a disastrous collapse of FUNCINPEC’s party unity in 1997, as Ranariddh attempted to curb internal dissent, at the same time as the party’s status in government, and vis-à-vis the electorate, became increasingly uncertain. The royalist identity has inhibited the ability of the party to foster debate over policy, to cultivate a sense of the value of individual contributions, and to subject Ranariddh’s leadership to internal
democratic controls. This has reduced the ability of the party to discipline members who remain unconvinced by the Prince’s strategies and policy pronouncements, and in 1998 forced FUNCINPEC back into coalition with the CPP, despite contrary promises to the electorate, in order to provide jobs and protection to supporters. Continued rumours of disaffection and disloyalty circulate within the parliamentary party in 2000.

The apparent attraction of the royalist identity to the rural electorate and to lower level activists has both precluded innovation within FUNCINPEC, and led to a complacency regarding the need to invigorate ties with voters. Within the government, this identity has been used by Ranariddh and his supporters to disempower and outmanoeuvre FUNCINPEC dissidents, with detrimental effect to intra-party democracy. FUNCINPEC has proved to be of limited effectiveness as a party of either government or opposition, beset by inner turmoil, which was exploited by the CPP that consolidated its power during the 1990s.

SRP and Urban Protest

Whereas FUNCINPEC has drawn upon its royalist identity to promote a presumed and cosmological representative function, the SRP has attempted to create a more pragmatic sphere of representative politics – namely, the sphere of urban protest that has emerged in Phnom Penh since late 1996. To this end, the SRP has organised demonstrations and sit-ins in support of striking factory workers, landless farmers, jobless students and motorbike taxi drivers protesting increased petrol prices. Indeed SRP members, including Sam Rainsy himself, have taken considerable personal risks in order to maintain a momentum behind their public political activities in Phnom Penh. A particular concern has been to maintain a public space for political protests and criticism of the government. This has been an extremely dangerous task. For example, a grenade attack on a demonstration led by Sam Rainsy in
front of the National Assembly Building in Phnom Penh in March 1997 caused the death of 16 protestors, and injuries to more than 100 others. Sam Rainsy himself was fortunate to escape alive.

Since 1997, the SRP has expended considerable effort maintaining the site of the attack – a place that the party has named “Democracy Square” - as a space for demonstrations. In 1998, a post-election “sit-in” protest was held there. Following the break-up of this demonstration, the party has repeatedly mobilised other demonstrators on the site. In March 2000, on the third anniversary of the grenade attack, the party raised a monument to those who died – a monument which for some days afterwards had to be replaced every morning after it was repeatedly removed and dumped in the nearby river at night.44

This attention to preservation of access to a site for political mobilization in the heart of the urban electoral base has greatly improved the opportunities for SRP cohesion even while in opposition. Close political relationships organized with key constituencies, such as factory workers and students, have provided a basis for combining parliamentary politics with opposition, and for developing and strengthening core party loyalties and links with the public. The politics of interest formulation, organization and promotion has served the party well in providing a concentrated, highly organised and dedicated support base, a rationale for criticism of the coalition government, and a distinct pro-worker identity. In the 1998 election, this translated into a dense core of voter support in urban areas. By contrast, FUNCINPEC since 1993 has consistently appeared either unconcerned or unable to defend its ability to mobilize key supporters, except in the context of the polling booth or the military, relying on its identity, rather than its representative function, to cement allegiance.

However, Rainsy’s engagement in these activities has usually involved the circulation of resistance, rather than policy oriented rhetoric – in particular, such demonstrations have been the venue for anti-Vietnamese rhetoric widely viewed as inflammatory by international
observers. This suggests that, at present, the mostly economic policy concerns of the protesters mobilized is viewed as inadequate in itself to sustain a broader allegiance to the party.

The position of the SRP across the broader political horizon is not dictated by the party’s relationship with urban workers, because of the limits to the (electoral) power of this constituency. Rather, the broad foundation of “resistance” has been used to support an opportunistic style of politics in which no one sphere or stance predominates. Thus, in party propaganda, Sam Rainsy is portrayed in a variety of different roles appropriate to different sites of political encounter. To the middle classes in Phnom Penh, he presents himself as an internationally supported technocrat. To radical students and workers, he is a fiery political activist and rebel. To farmers he appears as a Buddhist monk and man of morality and learning, who is protected from harm by magical forces. Yet in most of his speeches to Khmer audiences, the unifying theme is presentation of Rainsy as a patriot, struggling to free the homeland from the scourge of communism and Vietnamese hegemony. Only when speaking in English or French, to international intervenors, journalists and diplomats, is the anti-Vietnamese rhetoric replaced by the language of fiscally responsible liberal democracy.

The International Arena: the Politics of Democratic Identity

For both FUNCINPEC and the SRP, while the primary identity at home is that of nationalist resistance, the primary identity abroad is that of democratic opposition. Thus in 1997 the two parties formed an electoral alliance at home named the “National United Front,” and a lobbying alliance abroad named the “Union of Cambodian Democrats”. Assumption of a democratic identity has been a staple of these parties’ policies in attempting to engage their opponents in sites of encounter where international recognition and power are decisive. For
both FUNCINPEC and the SRP, memories of highly politicised international support for parties in the 1980s combine with the current far-reaching international intervention to promote belief in the continued significance of this site of political encounter. In the 1990s, as in the 1980s, international support offers potentially large rewards for political parties in Cambodia in terms of protection, prestige and bargaining power.

These have been used in different ways by the two parties. FUNCINPEC has attempted to rally international backing at times when its position as a party of government was under threat. At these times, FUNCINPEC has rejected local political action as a strategy altogether, in favour of departure from Cambodia and pursuit of international support. These strategies reflect the failure of the party to develop a meaningful function that is not based either upon power, or upon a belief in the party’s right to power.47

Although able to beckon international support in 1997, FUNCINPEC’s international strategy has not been particularly successful overall. The manifest failure of FUNCINPEC in office to act decisively to strengthen Cambodia’s new democratic system has caused a weakening of international sympathy for the party.48 Equally, the disastrous military defeat suffered at the hands of the CPP in 1997 has weakened FUNCINPEC’s ability to mount an armed resistance. Yet international support and military action remained, as late as August 1998 the two major alternatives to government power for FUNCINPEC, indicating the continued dependence of the party on the ability to allocate resources and deny the legitimacy of opponents, to secure loyalties.49

The SRP has developed a more sophisticated approach to international intervention, seeking not to return to the 1980s but to take advantage of the specific instrumentalities of interventionary practice in the 1990s. For the SRP, the international arena exists not as an alternative to local politics, but as a supplement to it. While FUNCINPEC views the arena of government as the vital arena, abandoning other arenas until moments of crisis, the SRP has
integrated its political practice in a variety of sites of encounter, rendering particular activities resonant in a range of spheres at the same time.

The attention paid by the party to publicizing domestic activities in the international arena, and international activities in the domestic arena, is significant. It permits the SRP to engage in parliamentary opposition politics at home, while acknowledging the “resistance” concerns of activists about the fate of Cambodia under a CPP government, by displacing them into the international sphere. The strategy is dependent upon a posited international observer, to whom political activities within Cambodia may be addressed. Thus, local participation in democratic processes is portrayed at home as a performance, designed to illustrate to international observers that Cambodian “democracy,” thanks to CPP participation, is merely a charade. By this means, the SRP takes advantage of the political opportunities offered by local political processes, while retaining, in a different arena, the denial of CPP legitimacy essential to the continuity of the resistance and democratic identities that sustain party loyalties. This strategy is the key to combining a resistance identity with practical, representative politics.

In the early years of the party’s formation, the SRP empowered this idea of local democratic politics as theatre played to interventionary international observers, by reference to the terms of the Paris Peace Agreements of 1991. The continued denunciation of the coalition government as dominated by “communists” and “puppets,” and demanding international intervention, represented the continuation of 1980s resistance and the promotion of a democratic identity, as opposed to habituation to (flawed) democratic processes.

In the post-Cold War world, this rhetoric is less effective, and the changing concerns of international intervenors are reflected in other forms of opposition politics pursued by the SRP. While the rationale for intervention continues to be represented domestically in terms of the threat posed by Vietnamese communist barbarians, internationally a rationale is offered
that is more appropriate to a liberal, issue-oriented interventionary regime. In the late 1990s, the policy orientation of interventionary practice in Cambodia has introduced new opportunities for the presentation by opposition parties of detailed statements and evidence on particular questions such as human rights, corruption, and “good governance,” to international forums.

The SRP has repeatedly submitted statements to the Consultative Group of donor governments on questions of forest preservation, corruption and economic policy. These statements are lent weight internationally by regard for Rainsy’s performance as Minister of Economics and Finance in 1993/4, and by the sophistication of the SRP’s use of international developmental discourses. For example, during the May 2000 Consultative Group meeting, Rainsy held a press conference in Paris in parallel with the plenary CG meeting to “give his point of view on solutions to make international assistance a more effective tool to reduce poverty in one of the world’s poorest countries, while at the same time promoting democracy and social justice.”

Further, Sam Rainsy testified before various international forums such as the “Friends of Cambodia” group, the ASEAN troika and the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee over the conduct of elections in 1998. The party makes extensive use of the internet and the French- and English-language press for the release of statements and open letters to various UN officials and foreign governments on detailed question of economic policy and institution building. The lack of legitimacy (in SRP eyes) of the CPP-dominated National Assembly is compensated by a displacement of policy debate into a dialogue with a presumed, powerful, international observer. This permits linking of pragmatic questions of jobs, prices, justice and corruption to questions of Vietnamese domination, in the urban protest arena and diaspora fund-raiser, and displacement of responsibility for resisting this domination to the
arena of international aid policy, where opposition concerns are translated into international discourses of “good governance,” aid conditionality, and democratic opposition.

The International and the Displacement of Politics

The (limited) success of the SRP has emerged from its ability to link, not so much voters with leaders, as multiple opposition sites of political debate on pragmatic questions of policy, while displacing questions of meaning and identity into different arenas. For example, following the fighting of July 1997, the SRP and FUNCINPEC both lobbied internationally for non-recognition of the new post-July coalition, dominated by Hun Sen, thus fulfilling the demands of both patriotic resistance, and democratic opposition identities. Yet at the same time, Sam Rainsy returned to Cambodia in early December 1997, and conducted negotiations with Hun Sen over possible paths forward, even while organising popular demonstrations and strikes during December and January in Phnom Penh and Kandal, designed to link international lobbying with local protest.

It is the linking of international, national-institutional and local urban layers of action that allows the party to engage with the new institutions of the Cambodian state, while denying their legitimacy. It allows the party to consult with the CPP while denying the CPP’s nationalist or democratic credentials; to call for international intervention while claiming to champion national self-determination; and, above all, to engage in continuous activity in a variety of arenas that confirms the continued relevance of the party to Cambodian and international politics, even in the absence of electoral support and executive power. These strategies combine the politics of parliamentary, democratic and resistance opposition in a layering of activities, reservations, and representations.
For example, Sam Rainsy commented on the strategy of taking cases of violations of workers' rights to court in Cambodia as a means of protest:

“All the time we lost. But never mind. Each time when I accompanied workers in front of the court, the press came and we expressed their case. I think with one stone we killed two birds. One was to make a political statement… Two, we gave evidence that the courts are not independent. In spite of the obvious case of violation of the law, they still ruled in favour of the factory owners who can afford to pay bribes. So we showed two things.”

The “two things” shown were the inherently democratic, pro-worker stance of the SRP, and the illegitimacy of the political activities of the CPP, which has sponsored and defended an antidemocratic judiciary in Cambodia. The implicitly posited observer was the “international community.”

Yet, equally, it is crucial to party strategy that the workers themselves should witness the SRP’s effectiveness in representing them thus before such a powerful audience. Local observation of the SRP-international encounter is crucial to defuse local calls for direct confrontation with the CPP. It is significant that, in the period of intense political tension, following the elections in 1998, both FUNCINPEC and the SRP called for military intervention by the US in Khmer-language speeches to supporters.

During the period surrounding the 1998 elections, generally, the SRP’s activities resonated in a variety of arenas. Simultaneously, the party engaged in campaigning for votes, in a bid to defeat its opponents electorally, while calling for an opposition boycott of the elections. It rejected the composition of the major state bodies administering election, while at the same time submitting complaints to them, and using non-response to these complaints to illustrate,
internationally and locally, the bias inherent in the process. It enjoyed the benefits of international monitoring of campaign activities, while denouncing the international effort as inadequate and politically motivated.

This form of politics has been useful in achieving three ends. It preserves the resistance identity of the SRP that cements loyalties among activists and rejects the legitimacy of CPP claims to political participation. It permits continuous party activism and party building on a range of other policy issues, taking advantage of, and defending, opportunities for action within the multiparty arena. Simultaneously, it permits cultivation of a democratic identity internationally and of international support in the context of international insistence that the parties remain within the multiparty order. In reconciling a variety of conflicting demands in this way, the SRP has managed to maintain a continuity between the resistance identity that motivates its core activists, the democratic identity that motivates international sympathisers, and international pressures to engage in constitutional processes, while simultaneously finding opportunities for activity that are rendered meaningful within the context of the representative function.

This policy continued following the 1998 elections, when the party’s elected representatives were sworn in to the National Assembly while denying the integrity of the elections that engendered it. SRP Assembly members have since used National Assembly procedures, such as the rules for tabling questions to ministers, not only to fulfil their constitutional role of rendering government accountable according to international expectations, but also as a demonstration to the world of the non-functioning of Cambodian democratic processes and the lack of accountability of the (Vietnamese puppet) coalition government. This demonstration itself reassures party activists of their own continued denial of the legitimacy of parliament led by Hun Sen, while devolving responsibility for action onto the international community that “pressured” the party into participation in the Assembly.\(^{57}\)
For example, throughout 1999, the SRP released a series of press statements detailing questions posed to the government by the opposition in parliament, and ending with the comment:

“According to article 96 of the Constitution, the Government must respond to any question from any National Assembly member within seven days. But so far the Hun Sen government… has failed to adequately answer any question from the Parliament… Donor countries and institutions should pay more attention to the lack of transparency and accountability on the part of the current Phnom Penh government.”

Such statements both permit and justify participation in a parliament viewed by activists as a “fraud against the Cambodian people and democracy.” Equally, they indicate the continued failure of government and opposition parties to enter into a bipolar relationship of contingent consent. The consent of the opposition is withheld, on the grounds that access to power is denied them, and the party operates in parliament under protest.

These responses have been deeply subversive to the interventionary project of promoting stability and democratization, as defined above, in Cambodia. The party rejects what Huntington calls the procedural definition of democracy, and adopts a normative definition – democracy as a “hurrah word” – as the party’s own identity. Further, the party insists upon holding this identity up to a posited “international community” as a means to vociferously beckon their intervention. This tactic undermines the international notion of democracy promotion as a subjectless intervention comprising non-controversial technical assistance, and brings international power back into the centre of Cambodian political equations. Continued insistence that international intervenors acknowledge their power, and use it to support a normative view of democracy as the popular overthrow of those identified as authoritarian – and the acting out of this insistence in front of local supporters – harnesses
democracy as an identity to the cause of resistance, rather than subordinating the resistance identity to the processes of democracy.

CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Forms of international democracy promotion and manipulation of them by the various political parties have contributed to a continuing fluidity to Cambodian politics. As yet there has been little impetus towards the stabilization of bipolar norms of contention between parties, the localization of politics, or the prioritization of the vote as a key resource of power. Structural obstacles, either primarily internal to the party, as in the case of FUNCINPEC, or external to it, as in the case of the SRP, have limited the embedding of the parties in a local representative function in rural Cambodia. In the narrow constituencies where such embedding has been able to occur, for example, in the form of the urban activism of the SRP, it has not translated into a secure base for winning administrative power, because of the weight of the still-inaccessible rural vote. Consequently, participation in democratic processes has not provided sufficient momentum to serve as a rationale for imposing discipline and constraint on the core of the party. Instead, anxious to maintain core loyalties in the context of continued danger, the parties have allowed such limited representation as they are able to mobilize to be subsumed under a resistance identity which explicitly rejects the notion of “habituation” to multi-party co-existence.

The result is a finely-balanced impasse, in which the engagement of parties that remain essentially oriented towards resistance in parliamentary relationships with the CPP can be justified only as a means to an end. The goals of the SRP, in particular, continue to be portrayed as liberation of the oppressed nation from external hegemony, and are pursued by a
vigorous, and increasingly habitual, lobbying for international support. Thus, international democracy promoters in Cambodia, rather than acting as inert catalysts of democratization have become active agents in sustaining government-opposition relations. The goal of spatially localised, temporally unbounded bipolarity has proved elusive; instead government, opposition and intervenors exist in an uncomfortable _menage-à-trois_. The international observer performs a key role in preventing a return to warfare, but has also permitted continue attachment to resistance rhetoric and indefinite delay of the dislocating transformation of intra-party relations that would be necessitated on all sides by political commitment to multi-party co-existence.

In this context, two key issues remain unresolved. Firstly, while parties focus on the trilateral relationship between government, opposition and “international community,” the importance of the rural voter becomes a secondary issue. The silence and marginalization of the rural voter is used as a justification for the continued circulation of the resistance identity, and thus serves to perpetuate the status quo, rather than impelling a transition to a democracy that is more deeply consolidated across the country. Second, the continued rhetoric of resistance and democratic opposition, projected into international arenas, promotes an atmosphere of crisis, instability and illegitimacy, which militates against “habitation.” For Cambodia’s parliamentary opposition, participation in democratic processes remains tactical rather than necessary, contingent upon a balance of considerations which are highly dependent upon the continuing ability of party leaders to present international intervention as imminent and powerful. Under these circumstances the localization and deepening of democracy, and the institutionalization of political processes, is inhibited.

The broader question that arises is whether the Cambodia experience suggests an important limitation to international democracy promotion. While international intervenors may view their own task as temporally and politically limited to providing technical expertise and
material resources to support change, the Cambodian experience suggests that these resources quickly become a part of the landscape, as it is perceived locally. Party leaders become habituated to using these resources specifically as a means to avoid the dislocating and threatening changes implied by local democratic engagement. The forgetting of the local politics of international intervention by international democracy promoters has permitted the representation of intervention as surgical, limited and oriented towards precise outcomes. The Cambodian experience suggests that this conception of intervention has been subverted in the context of a political landscape peopled by rational and imaginative political actors with interests and fears of their own.

NOTES

1 This study is based on fieldwork conducted in 1999 and 2000, generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust. I would like to thank Annamari Antikainen-Kokko, Edward Friedman, Kristina Jönssen, Donna Lee, and the reviewers of Global Society for their comments and advice.


4 Particularly influential have been civil society theorists, and theorists of democracy such as Robert A. Dahl, whose Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition, (New Haven: Yale UP,
1971) offers an account of democracy as predominantly a question of participation and choice, that closely resembles that promoted internationally.


6 While the “habituation” thesis has been prominent in the thinking of international democracy promoters, it is challenged by adherents to the political culture approach. Larry Diamond, for example, writes that “the development of a democratic culture cannot be taken for granted as a natural by-product of democratic practice or institutional design.” Larry Diamond, “Introduction: Political Culture and Democracy,” in Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries, Larry Diamond, ed., textbook edition, (London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p. 7. Similarly, Atul Kohli comments that, “cultural conditions in the developing world do not readily mesh with … imported political models.” Atul Kohli, “On Sources of Social and Political Conflicts in Follower Democracies,” in Democracy’s Victory and Crisis, Hadenius ed. op. cit. p. 72. This discussion proposes that structural and organizational factors may be equally problematic for habituation.


8 Discussions regarding UNTAC’s “legacy” was prevalent in the early 1990s literature, including in Boutros-Ghali’s own account of UNTAC, in the introduction to The United Nations and Cambodia 1991-5, United Nations Blue Books Series Vol. 2, (New York: UN Dept. of Public Information, 1996), p. 55. Habituation, arguably, is also implicit in human rights strategies undertaken by UN peacekeepers in Cambodia, which included education campaigns, institution-building, promotion of civil society and attempts to use exemplary
Transforming Oppositions in Cambodia


11 In the case of Cambodia, international commentators from countries in the Anglo-Saxon tradition have frequently criticised the “power-sharing” agreement that was the outcome of the 1993 UN-organised founding election. For example, US-based scholar Khatarya Um uses a common formulation when she refers to the 1993-7 coalition as a “forced partnership result[ing] not from popular electoral expression but from the hijacking of nascent democracy by prevailing politico-military realities in Cambodia,” [Um, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Cambodia and the Elusive Quest for Peace,” *South East Asian Affairs 1998* (Singapore: ISEAS,1999), p. 72]. She ignores the fact that patterns of voting as they emerged within a system of proportional representation made some form of coalition inevitable, as no party achieved a governing majority.


21 FUNCINPEC won the 1993 UN-sponsored election, and in a UN-brokered deal, entered a coalition with the CPP. Subsequently, FUNCINPEC failed to consolidate operational power within the coalition, and was eventually ousted militarily by the CPP in 1997. A year later, FUNCINPEC ran a close second to the CPP in new, internationally-sponsored elections, and
after months of demonstrations and negotiations re-entered coalition with the CPP as the junior partner.


23 International observers criticised, in particular, the SRP for its anti-Vietnamese rhetoric, which, according to one international democracy promotion practitioner, “poisoned Rainsy’s image internationally,” [Brad Adams, personal communication, Oxford, June 1999].

24 Personal interviews with party leaders, Phnom Penh, May-June 1998.

25 Newspapers in 1996 frequently carried accounts of activities by politicians who competed to rebuild schools, hospitals, roads and temples throughout Cambodia during this period. The ouster of that section of FUNCINPEC that remained loyal to Ranariddh, in 1997, allowed the CPP to excel at these activities. The impact of this can be seen across Cambodia, where civic amenities prominently bear the logo of the CPP, or the personal monogram of Hun Sen, often inscribed in the roof of the building.


Transforming Oppositions in Cambodia

29 Funcinpec provincial activist, personal interview, Kompong Cham, 6 July 1998. “Yuon” is a Khmer word for “Vietnamese,” generally viewed as derogatory.

30 Funcinpec commune activist, conversation with Funcinpec candidate, Lvea Aem District, Kandal, 11 June 1998.


32 See for example, pro-SRP newspaper Udam Kate Khmer’s coverage of demonstrations by Cambodian communities in Paris and the Cambodian government’s response to this, “Does Hun Sen Really Want to Violate the Constitution?” Udam Kate Khmer (Khmer Ideal), 19 June 1996, pp. 1-4.

33 Sam Rainsy, campaign speech, Kien Svay District, Kandal, July 1998, recorded and transl. by Caroline Hughes and Sok Ty.

34 Sam Rainsy, campaign speech, Kompong Tralach District, Prey Veng, July 1998, recorded and transl. by Caroline Hughes and Sok Ty.

35 Kate Frieson, “The Politics of Getting the Vote in Cambodia,” in Heder and Ledgerwood, eds. op. cit., p. 201.


39 Quotation from Girling, op. cit., p. 4.
Transforming Oppositions in Cambodia

40 Ashley, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

41 Prince Norodom Ranariddh, speech to party supporters, Ta Khmau, Kandal, May 1998, recorded and trans. by Caroline Hughes and Sok Ty.

42 Interviews with FUNCINPEC candidates, Phnom Penh, July 1998.


45 Rainsy was threatened with a withdrawal of UN monitors deployed to monitor the safety of party members after an anti-Vietnamese speech made to striking workers at a garment factory in Ta Khmau in January 1998. Further criticism followed the beating to death of four ethnic
Vietnamese during the period of post-election demonstrations in September 1998. At the demonstrations, Rainsy repeatedly attacked the CPP as “yuon” and “tmil [barbarians]”. Pro-SRP newspapers were also criticised at this time for carrying stories which blamed ethnic Vietnamese for an outbreak of food poisoning in Phnom Penh, under headlines such as, ‘Vietnamese Poison Cambodians in Revenge for their Attack on Vietnamese Statue in Phnom Penh,’ *Samleng Samapheap* (Voice of Equality) *News*, 3-4 Sept 1998, p. 1; ‘People Say Next Time They Arrest Vietnamese Who Are Poisoning Food, They Will Kill Them,’ and “Vietnamese are Poisoning Cambodians,” *Neak Prayuth* (The Struggler) *News*, 4-5 Sept 1998, p.1.

46 These different personas were identified from a comparison of recordings and translations of 17 campaign speeches made by Rainsy during the 1998 election campaign, 6 speeches made to demonstrators after the election, 3 press conferences for international and local journalists, and party press releases and statements released during the election period.

47 For example, FUNCINPEC lobbied internationally for support following the party’s ouster in 1997, and considered the same option after its defeat in allegedly fraudulent elections in 1998.

48 Major Western donors, including France and Australia, hesitated over providing support to Ranariddh after his ouster in 1997, taking the view that Ranariddh had failed to articulate a policy for stability in Cambodia after 1993. Arguments for this approach are put forward by Grant Curtis, *Cambodia Reborn? The Transition to Democracy and Development* (Washington DC: Brookings/UNRISD, 1998), pp. 52-57.

49 According to one National Assembly candidate, the option of returning to military resistance was considered by the party following the 1998 elections. Personal communication, Phnom Penh, 7 Aug. 1998.
Article 29 of the *Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict* states that the members of the Conference may be consulted at the request of the Secretary-General of the United Nations “in the event of a violation or the threat of a violation of these Agreements” with the aim of “taking appropriate steps to ensure respect for these commitments.” This provision has been construed by the SRP as entailing an open ended duty on the part of other nations to intervene in Cambodia in support of the peace settlement.


Sam Rainsy, interview with Dominic Faulder, op. cit.

Prince Norodom Ranariddh, speech to supporters, FUNCINPEC headquarters, Phnom Penh, 8 Aug. 1998, recorded and trans. by Caroline Hughes and Sok Ty; Sam Rainsy, speech to protestors, “Democracy Square,” Phnom Penh, 26 Aug. 1998, recorded and trans. by Caroline Hughes and Sok Ty. Sam Rainsy later told foreign journalists that his call to the US to bomb Hun Sen’s house had been a “joke,” although the recording and unofficial translation of this speech gives no such indication.

Sam Rainsy, speech to protestors, Olympic Stadium, Phnom Penh, 23 Aug. 1998, recorded and trans. by Caroline Hughes and Sok Ty.

