

The rules at Tuol Sleng

Activity 2

Historical examination of the Cambodian genocide



Here are the rules that the detainees of Tuol Sleng prison, also called torture centre S-21, had to follow:

1. *You must answer accordingly to my question. Don't turn them away.*
2. *Don't try to hide the facts by making pretexts this and that; you are strictly prohibited to contest me.*
3. *Don't be a fool for you are a chap who dares to thwart the revolution.*
4. *You must immediately answer my questions without wasting time to reflect.*
5. *Don't tell me either about your immoralities or the essence of the revolution.*
6. *While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all.*
7. *Do nothing, sit still and wait for my orders. If there is no order, keep quiet. When I ask you to do something, you must do it right away without protesting.*
8. *Don't make pretext about Kampuchea Krom in order to hide your secret or traitor.*
9. *If you don't follow all the above rules, you shall get many lashes of electric wire.*
10. *If you disobey any point of my regulations you shall get either ten lashes or five shocks of electric discharge.*



Torture victim at Tuol Sleng prison
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Note: These rules are posted today outside the Tuol Sleng Museum. The incorrect grammar is the result of faulty translation from the original Khmer. Source: "Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum". http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuol_Sleng_Genocide_Museum Web. 1 July 2012.



- These rules illustrate the state of mind of the Khmer Rouge as they exercised their authority. Based on these rules, what can you say about the Khmer Rouge view of authority?
- Were the people who were arrested and brought before Duch at S-21 treated humanely? Were their rights respected?

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Laws under the Khmer Rouge



Here are excerpts from the constitution of the State of Kampuchea, established after Brother number one Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge seized power in Cambodia on 17 April 1975:

The Khmer Rouge ideology is expressed in the constitution. Identify the main tenets of this ideology with regard to the individual, the State, justice, economy, labour.

Chapter One - The State

Article 1 The State of Kampuchea is an independent, unified, peaceful, neutral, non-aligned, sovereign, and democratic State enjoying territorial integrity.

The State of Kampuchea is a State of the people, workers, peasants, and all other Kampuchean labourers.

The official name of the State of Kampuchea is «Democratic Kampuchea».

Chapter Two - The Economy

Article 2: All important general means of production are the collective property of the people's State and the common property of the people's collectives.

Chapter Three - Culture

Article 3: The culture of Democratic Kampuchea has a national, popular, forward-looking, and healthful character such as will serve the tasks of defending and building Kampuchea into an ever more prosperous country.

This new culture is absolutely opposed to the corrupt, reactionary culture of the various oppressive classes and that of colonialism and imperialism in Kampuchea.

Chapter Four - The Principle of Leadership and Work

Article 4 Democratic Kampuchea applies the collective principle in leadership and work.



This photo shows Angkor Wat Temple, symbol of ancient Cambodian culture.

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Chapter Seven - Justice

Article 9 Justice is administered by people's courts, representing and defending the people's justice, defending the democratic rights and liberties of the people, and condemning any activities directed against the people's State or violating the laws of the people's State.

The judges at all levels will be chosen and appointed by the People's Representative Assembly.

Article 10 Actions violating the laws of the people's State are as follows:

Dangerous activities in opposition to the people's State must be condemned to the highest degree.

Other cases are subject to constructive re-education in the framework of the State's or people's organisations.



One way of making everyone equal was to impose the same dress code on all students.
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Chapter Nine - The Rights and Duties of the Individual

Article 12 Every citizen of Kampuchea enjoys full rights to a constantly improving material, spiritual, and cultural life.

Every citizen of Democratic Kampuchea is guaranteed a living.

All workers are the masters of their factories.

All peasants are the masters of the rice paddies and fields.

All other labourers have the right to work.

There is absolutely no unemployment in Democratic Kampuchea.

Article 13 There must be complete equality among all Kampuchean people in an equal, just, democratic, harmonious, and happy society within the great national solidarity for defending and building the country together.

Men and women are fully equal in every respect.

Polygamy is prohibited.

Source: Jennar, Raoul. "DK Constitution"
<http://onwardoverland.com/angkorwat/polpot/cons.html>. Web. 1 July 2012.

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How to be a good Khmer - Khmer Rouge slogans and theories



Photo of a child arrested
by the Khmer Rouge
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- Strengthen and expand the absolute stance of proletarianism while absolutely sweeping out non-proletarian stances.
- Keeping you is no gain, losing you is no loss.
- Destroy communication networks!
- Hunger is the most influential disease.
- Must love Angkar with no limit!
- Be committed to sacrificing our lives in fulfilling Angkar's³ labour tasks!
- Revolution against imperialism is not an action of inviting guests to have meal, writing articles, braiding, education, softness or fear of enemy. But it is a class wrath seized to topple another class.
- Those who have never laboured must be made to do so in agricultural production.
- Loss of life is a simple thing for a man of war.

Source: Sayana, Ser. "Khmer Rouge Slogans and Theories."
www.dccam.org/Archives/Documents/.../Slogans_KR_Songs.htm.
Web. 1 July 2012.

³ *Angkar*, name given to the government



- From these slogans and theories, pick out the elements that define the Khmer Rouge social, economic, and political system.
- According to this information, which people were valued in the new society created by the Khmer Rouge?
- What qualities were essential to survive in this regime?

<p>Definition of Khmer Rouge social, economic, and political system</p>	
<p>Which individuals were valued in Khmer Rouge society?</p>	
<p>Values necessary for survival</p>	

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Resistance and Survival – Pin Yathay



Read the story of Pin Yathay that follows then complete the table below. Note the elements that describe:

- Cambodian life under the Khmer Rouge regime
- The Khmer Rouge ideology
- The means used by the Khmer Rouge to enforce submission

Elements of Cambodian daily life under the Khmer Rouge	Elements of the Khmer Rouge ideology	Means used to enforce submission

Pin Yathay and his family were categorized as “New” by the Khmer Rouge. Like thousands of other Cambodians, they were forcibly evacuated and re-educated so that the communist utopia of an egalitarian⁴ society could be achieved. Many died of starvation, exhaustion, and disease. Yathay’s story shows the stages and difficulties of resistance and rebellion, as well as daily life under the Khmer Rouge.

Pin Yathay published his first book *Murderous Utopia* in 1980. *Stay Alive, My Son* was his second book on his life and on the Khmer Rouge regime. The title of his life story was inspired by the words of his sick father who bid his son farewell on his deathbed.

⁴ The term “equality” has a positive connotation when it refers to equality between men and women or equality before the law, etc. The Khmer Rouge, however, sought absolute equality through forced collective labour, food rationing, and the abolition of all private property. Equality under the Khmer Rouge was characterized by the absence of freedom and democracy.

“I knew from the beginning that this regime would be bad, but I couldn’t convince you,” he said, with a ghost of a smile. [...] ‘Too much thinking obscures wisdom,’ he whispered, stroking my hand. ‘You must keep your feelings pure. Don’t worry about me’. My death is deliverance. But you, you must get out. Act ignorant, do not speak, do not grouse, do not argue. Stay alive, my son. Stay alive to escape. Escape, to stay alive.”

p. 122-123



Student life in Quebec and return to Cambodia

Pin Yathay was born in Phnom Penh in 1944. He immigrated to Quebec to study engineering at the École polytechnique of the Université de Montréal (U de M) between 1961 and 1965. After obtaining his degree, he returned to Phnom Penh where he became a director in the Ministry of Public Works. He had three sons; his wife's name was Any.

Forced evacuation

When the Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975, Yathay and his family - like all the “new” Khmer - were expelled from Phnom Penh. They were forced to embark on a voyage to an unknown destination. Once they arrived in the countryside, they had to build their own cabin in the jungle to have a roof over their head, and they – with the exception of the children – began forced labour in the rice fields.



The Khmer Rouge army invades Phnom Penh.
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The Pin family, the “new people”

Yathay and his family were seen as “new people”, according to the Khmer Rouge ideology, because they lived in the city of Phnom Penh and because Yathay had a university degree. The Pin had no experience in agrarian work, unlike the villagers who were called the “old people.” After the forced evacuation, Yathay hid his true identity as an engineer because he was afraid of being considered an intellectual and being sent to prison. The “new” villagers were unaccustomed to the living conditions in the countryside and to the exhausting physical work. They

especially lacked the technical know-how of growing grain. As a result, the yields were poor and insufficient to feed everyone. There were deaths from the outset.

“It was not long before the dying started. Even in the first week, I saw several people carrying corpses down the trail. It was hardly surprising, given the amount of people in the forest near us, and their state of health.”

p. 84

First death in the family

After only a few weeks, Yathay and Any lost their youngest son who literally died of starvation.

To run away or not to run away

Beginning in September 1975, Pin Yathay and his immediate family considered escaping. The border with Thailand was 110 km from their village.

“I repeated the arguments for going. An escape now, in mid-October, was a risky enterprise at the best of times, but it was a risk we’d all accepted. Better to die in the forest than rot in the village.”

p. 95

Their first attempt to escape with other villagers failed because their leader stopped them.

Undernourishment and disease

Living conditions in the village of Veal Vong were very difficult: the inhabitants depended on communal meals which often consisted of a single bowl of rice soup or rice. The abusive work finally sapped people’s strength and diseases spread. Despite this, however, small acts of resistance were carried out in the village.

“A few hundred New People held a peaceful demonstration in the village with five teachers as their leaders to protest at the lack of food. I kept well clear, and I warned my brother, Theng, the teacher, to do the same. But I was told afterwards what happened. In a slow and dignified procession, the protesters moved towards the guardhouse, the wood-and-thatch place where rice was distributed every evening. There were three Khmer Rouge officers present at the time. In front of the guardhouse, the leaders came forward. One of them improvised a short speech, pouring out grievances to the village chief. [...] The food system had no sense. The rations were pathetic. The work was too hard. There was no medicine, and no hospital. [...] The rations came the next day. But a week later, the five teachers and some other villagers involved in the protest disappeared.”

p. 101

“Besides, we had no arms and no food. Even if we’d been able to procure arms and kill the fifty Khmer Rouge in the village, what would happen to us? We didn’t have enough food to build up any reserves to sustain a guerrilla army. In our state of weakness, after a few days of wandering in the jungle, death would have been inevitable.”

p. 102

The family is separated

Despite the poor conditions, Yathay remained optimistic and spoke of his hope for resistance, even when he was forced to leave his wife and children to work as a fisherman on Lake Tonlé Sap.



The Khmer Rouge army invades Phnom Penh.
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“Rebellion”, as defined by the Khmer Rouge Under the Khmer Rouge regime, trivialities could be considered acts of defiance.

Yathay gives a disturbing example of the Khmer Rouge definition of “rebellion” that carried heavy consequences.

At one point, Yathay became ill (most probably with paludism). For this reason, the Khmer Rouge allowed him to return to his family to be cared for. While on the road, he no longer had the strength to return to Don Ey, the village where his family was living. He stopped at the home of a family of “small capitalists”⁴ who gave

him food and tried to get him to his family’s village by car with an uncle who worked for the Khmer Rouge.

“Later, back at Don Ey, on the return of our fishing group, I was to learn from the others on the fishing team what happened to the family who had helped me. The young girl had found her uncle in the company of a Khmer Rouge soldier and asked him outright whether he would give me a lift. Of course, such friendliness towards a New Person, expressed by someone not in a position of authority, was entirely unacceptable to the Khmer Rouge. The uncle, frightened, reproached the girl. When the details came out, the young girl and her family were accused of counter-revolutionary attitudes – showing humanitarian feelings to a stranger. To the Khmer Rouge, it was bad enough to feel generosity towards a family member or a neighbour, let alone towards a stranger, and a New Person at that. It was an act that smacked of rebellion. The whole family had been arrested and deported to another province. I never knew what became of them.”

p. 119

⁴ According to the Khmer Rouge, these were people who had a secondary school education, or perhaps owned several rice fields or a small business.

Youth brigades

One day, the Khmer Rouge announced the forced departure of Pin's eldest son, Sudath, who was to join a youth brigade.⁵ When he was summoned, Sudath had a wounded knee; he died just five days later. His family never learned the circumstances of his death.

Death by starvation

Yathay, like many of the “new people” around him, was becoming more and more ill.

“Through the third quarter of 1976, nothing changed. People continued to die. The Ancients said that rice was not all that scarce, but that Angkar wanted to starve us to death. Indeed, the policy was made quite explicit. I remember an officer at one political meeting coming out with some particularly chilling words: ‘In the Kampuchea, one million is all we need to continue the revolution. We don’t need the rest. We prefer to kill ten friends rather than keep on enemy alive.’”

p.147-148



Child soldiers under the command of the Khmer Rouge
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Despair

The Khmer Rouge waited for people who were of no use to the revolution to die; Pin Yathay and others waited for foreign assistance, especially from the West. He explains why any resistance by the Cambodians seemed impossible:

“Without help, however, we were doomed. We could not help ourselves. Conspiracy was hard, an uprising unthinkable. Travel was banned, whispering was prohibited, and there were informers everywhere. Acts of heroism were suicidal. I heard of two young people in a neighbouring village who seized a rifle from a Khmer Rouge and fled into the jungle. One was shot, the other vanished. [...] If there were guerrillas, we knew nothing of them. How could you feed guerrillas in a country where all food was in the hands of Angkar? [...] I could see no way of organizing any resistance.”

p. 149

⁵ The youth brigades of Kampuchea were militarized and violent. Public officials used propaganda to indoctrinate the adolescents. The young were forced to work and to follow the rules of the Khmer Rouge so that they could transmit these “values” to the next generation. The *Angkar*, the Organization, took the place of their families. Values such as friendship and love for the family no longer counted. The *Angkar* taught them how to carry out orders and be good revolutionaries.



Child soldier under the command of the Khmer Rouge
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Denunciation

In November 1976, Yathay was recognized by a former worker of a site – as we have previously mentioned, Yathay was a director in the Ministry of Public Works in Phnom Penh. He would have to flee as soon as possible to escape death.

A son is left behind

When he spoke to Any of his plan to escape, she insisted on coming with him and leaving their younger son Nawath with another family.

“She knew what she was doing, knew that in any event she and Nawath would die, knew that we were in the process not of choosing life over death, but of choosing different ways of dying.”

p. 153

First stage of the flight

The escape of Yathay, Any, and another ten people was more spontaneous than well-planned. Passes were required to leave the village; Yathay forged the signature of the village leader. The false passes allowed them to “move” to another village in Leach where they remained for two months – November and December 1976.

Resistance

Beginning in 1977, there was more and more talk of guerilla warfare and rebellion. Yathay gives as examples the attack in Pursat where five Khmer Rouge soldiers were killed and the roneotyped (replicated MHMC) leaflets that called for insurrection and were dispersed along the roads.

People were called on to join clandestine networks. The big revolt of 17 April 1977, however, did not come to pass.

“Slowly, surreptitiously, we gathered in three separate groups of four at the edge of the village. Darkness fell, revealing a clear, starlit night. Two other conspirators had joined Any and me, and we walked on slowly into the forest, to the next meeting point, a huge tree we all knew. Then, when Yann, Lang, Eng and the others had joined us, we set off along a trail southwards, in single file, each person following the shadowy figure in front, keeping in touch with each other by whistling, imitating the sound of birds.

Half a mile from Leach, deep in the forest, the trail gave out. On, then, away from Leach, through the virgin jungle. Two of our companions, a former adjutant and a former staff sergeant, knew the area, and led us on southwards. I felt exhilarated, keyed up. Liberty or death! My head was clear and I was confident in my companions.”

p. 189-190

Lost

Just after their departure, Yathay, Any, and a female friend lost sight of their group in the forest as they tried to hide from the Khmer Rouge.

A few days later, Yathay became separated from the two women because of a forest fire. Finding one’s way through the jungle seemed impossible.

Finding the strength to continue

With the disappearance of the two women, Yathay wavered between hope and despair but the wish to continue stayed with him.

“I headed west, a dead soul, pushed on by my voice. I felt strangely light, freed of hope, freed of fear. I, who had once been so ambitious and so confident, had lost everything. I had been unable to save two of my children, I had abandoned a third, and now I had lost my wife. I had nothing left to lose. What was there to fear? No longer fearing destruction. I was indestructible.”

p. 201

“Despite the physical exhaustion, despite my weakness, despite the loss of Any, I found that my morale was inexplicably high. I supposed it was because I had nothing more to lose. If I survived, I gained my life; if I died, I regained my family; either way, I won. I had passed the stage of physical fear. That was what kept me alive – the feeling of having overcome fear.”

p. 205

Surviving in the jungle

Because he had no food, Yathay ate jungle animals such as turtles, freshwater crab, and snakes, as well as fruit and mushrooms, which may have been poisonous.

« I had to survive not only for Nawath, but also for those who had died – for my parents, for Any, for the other children. Only through my survival would their lives have continued meaning. Stay alive, my son, my father had said. Now I knew why. In me, he lived on. Through me, even the dead would live.

And there was another reason to survive. Now that freedom was within my grasp, I wanted to tell the world what had happened, [...] I wanted to live to appeal to the world to help the survivors escape total extermination.»

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Prisoner of the Khmer Rouge

Believing he had arrived in Thailand, Yathay walked about freely. But he soon met three young Khmer Rouge soldiers who hauled him to a camp. Once again, he was a prisoner of the Khmer Rouge. His death then seemed imminent. Ironically, he was right next to the Thailand border, clearly demarcated by the Me Tuk river, the “mother of all waters”.

On the run

Taking advantage of a moment’s inattention on the part of the Khmer Rouge, Yathay succeeded in breaking away and escaping during a storm:

A refugee camp
© DCCAM



“All at once, I stepped out of trees on to the edge of the plateau. There ahead lay a beautiful sight, the sight I had so long dreamed of, and so long despaired of seeing. More than three thousand feet below, along the foot of a mountain range, beyond the forest, lay a highway, with traffic roaring by, and toy-like houses scattered beside fields, and, in the distance, the sea. Thailand.”

p. 234

“I rolled over, and lay flat on my back, too exhausted to move, my head turned to the road, watching the magical sight of traffic –

motorcycles, taxis, cars, trucks. I felt reborn, as happy as if I had arrived in paradise. It was June 22nd, 1977, and I was free, at last.”

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At the border, he reunited with his cousin Yann and two other acquaintances that had been lost en route. He was sent to the Maï Rut refugee camp.

Informing the world

In October 1977, Yathay left for Paris. In an attempt to convince the Western world that they must put an end to the Khmer Rouge crimes, he gave conferences on the events in Cambodia in Paris, Brussels, Geneva, Montreal, Ottawa, and Washington. Not one of the Western powers intervened.



Watch the video on Pin Yathay (5mins, in French ONLY), from Radio-Canada in November, 1978:

<http://archives.radio-canada.ca/politique/international/clips/2512/>

The search for his son goes on

Pin Yathay lost 17 members of his family during the Khmer Rouge regime and because of it. He is still looking for the son he left with another family before escaping with his wife in 1977.