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Politics, Patronage and the Persistence of the Ruling Elite in post-UNTAC Cambodia

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Abstract

Cambodia's ruling elite has now remained in power for over 30 years. Today, many scholars believe that this could be attributed to a set of complex and context-specific patron-client relations that intertwines to form the patronage structures that underpin the political system. However, despite this, the specific dynamics of Cambodia's patronage structures are still considered underexplored. Here, I investigate the strength and persistence of the ruling elite by exploring the internal dynamics of Cambodia's political context. While internal dynamics is an abstract term, I suggest that it can be conceptualised as the dialectical interaction between material capabilities, ideas and institutions (i.e. forces). This "force-based framework" is based on Robert Cox's ontological and epistemological understanding of forces, but adds a constructivist understanding of socially constructed actors. Based on an investigation of empirical material gathered from secondary sources, I argue that the interaction between material domination, manipulation of ideas, and the systematic institutionalisation of patronage relations has constituted a political context that contribute towards the strength and persistence of the ruling elite by exerting strong pressure to conform and support prevailing power relations, at the same time as it limits the scope for rejection and constrains possibilities of resistance. **(Word Count: 9857)**

Key Words: Cambodia, Politics, Patronage, Forces, Ruling Elite

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1. Introduction

On the 7th of January 1979, a Khmer-Vietnamese military coalition recaptured Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, and ended a 4-year collectivisation experiment that had virtually destroyed all societal institutions and caused the death of up to 2 million Cambodians (Hughes and Un 2011: 1). The ousting of the Khmer Rouge – the regime responsible for the aforementioned genocide – certainly implies that the 7th of January is one of the most significant dates in Cambodia's modern history. While the end of genocide alone justifies such a statement, I would argue that there are further reasons to highlight this specific date. When the Khmer-Vietnamese coalition recaptured Phnom Penh they were joined by a number of former mid-level Khmer Rouge commanders. One of these commanders was Hun Sen (Cock 2010: 525a). With backing from the Vietnamese army, Hun Sen and his associates formed the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP) and established Cambodia's new government (Hughes & Un 2011: 1-2). Since then, Cambodia has undergone a number of changes and structural transitions (Hughes 2003: 1), eventually culminating in an internationally sanctioned intervention that introduced a democratic constitution based on liberal norms and values. United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was intended to end internal conflict and put Cambodia on the path towards democratic stability and prosperity (Hughes & Un 2011: 2). However, progress towards democratic consolidation has been scarce (Bruce St John 2005: 406, Un 2011: 546), and the tight knit group of former Khmer Rouge commanders that established the KPRP – and later reformed as Cambodian People's Party (CPP)- have kept their control over the state and established themselves as

Cambodia's ruling elite (Hughes & Un 2011:1-3, Un 2006: 229). Today, the ruling elite has remained in power for over 30 years (Cock 2010: 241b) and, despite a lower than expected victory margin in the 2013 election (Un 2015: 103), both academic studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that their control over the country continues to be strong (Sokheng & Sokhchea 2015a, Sokheng & Sokchea 2015b, Un 2012: 74-75, Craig & Kimchoeun 2011: 241, Thayer 2009: 97). While there is no real consensus around how the ruling elite has retained power throughout the transformation towards an electoral democracy, most scholars suggest that it can be connected to a set of complex and context-specific patron-client relations that intertwine to form the patronage structures that underpin the political system (see for example: Roberts 2002: 525, McCargo 2005: 100, Heder 2005: 114, Un 2011: 547). However, although studies have begun to reveal interesting insights into the specificity of modern patronage in Cambodia, the internal dynamics of the patronage structures could still be considered underexplored (Kimchoeun et al 2007: 58). In this paper I investigate the strength and persistence of Cambodia's ruling elite through an investigation of the internal dynamics of the patronage structured political system. Internal dynamics is an abstract term, and without further specification it has a very limited analytical value. Therefore, I propose that the internal dynamics can be represented by the interaction of material capabilities, ideas and institutions (i.e. forces). This type of ontology - using forces as the constituting factors of a context - is inspired by Robert Cox (1981) and his well-known theory of how historical structures affect the shape of the global economic system. However, here it will serve as the foundations of a framework with a far more modest aim - enhancing the understanding of Cambodia's political context. The "force-based framework" is based on Cox's ontological and epistemological understanding of forces, but adds a constructivist understanding of socially constructed actors. Adding this aspect is a very minor adjustment, but it does facilitate for inferences about how the pressures and constraints of a specific political context could affect local actors. The specific details of the framework will be further elaborated in the methods- section, but by connecting the assumptions of my framework with empirical material from secondary sources I have been able to draw some tentative conclusions. Throughout this paper I will argue that the interaction between material domination, manipulation of ideas, and the systematic institutionalisation of patronage relations has constituted a political context that contributes towards the strength and persistence of the ruling elite by exerting strong pressure to conform and support prevailing power relations, at the same time as it limits the scope for rejection and constrains possibilities of resistance.

1. 1 Specific aim and Research Question

As previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to contribute towards a better understanding of the strength and persistence of Cambodia's ruling elite. The rationale for such an inquiry stretches beyond this individual paper. While the study is an end in itself, I hope the conclusions can contribute to a larger context. Despite years of sustained economic growth and millions of dollars worth of aid, inequality and poverty have remained high (Davies 2011: 313, Un & So 2009: 131, Ear 2007: 77) and the ruling elite has displayed an apparent inability to use resources to the benefit of the Khmer population (Global Witness 2009: 11, McCargo 2005: 101). Today, Cambodia suffers from endemic corruption and resources – including both development aid and natural resources – are in constant risk of being diverted to sustain the patronage networks that keep the ruling elite in power (Cock 2010b: 245, Un & So 2009: 124, Global Witness 2007, 2009, Un 2006: 229, McCargo 2005: 100). Based on this, I would argue that a better understanding of the internal dynamics of Cambodia's political system could be useful for both development theory and practice. A better understanding of the interplay between material factors and ideas could enhance the theoretical understanding of patronage-based systems, at the same time as an increased understanding of the political system could be a useful tool for those who work with the developmental issues that continue to trouble Cambodia. However, I do not argue that this paper alone can achieve such an elaborate goal. I just hope that the conclusions reached here can make a small contribution towards the overarching understanding. To reach my conclusions I have conducted a case study where I have gathered empirical material through a desk-based study of previous research. Conclusions are drawn by comparing empirical material to a set of predetermined theoretical assumptions, and the main focus is on the internal dynamics (i.e. the interaction between material capabilities, ideas and institutions) of the patronage structures that underpin the political system. The study is structured around the question: *Based on the assumptions of a force-based framework, how could the internal dynamics of the political context affect the strength and persistence of the ruling elite in post-UNTAC Cambodia?*

It should be noted that the framework I propose represents a simplified version of reality, and this severely restricts the ability to draw any definitive conclusions. Therefore, it is also important to reflect over what this paper does not aim at. Cambodia's patronage structures is a

complex phenomena, and it would be both naïve and misleading to propose that this study should, or could, incorporate all of the aspects that affect the political system. Therefore, I do not aim at an all-encompassing study that pretends it can describe the full complexity of the modern world. The aspects chosen to represent the internal dynamics of Cambodia's political system have been selected because they are frequently highlighted in other studies, or because I believe that it is the factors that could contribute most towards an enhanced understanding of the political context. More aspects do undoubtedly exist, and while it is not possible to include these within the scope of this paper, the design of the framework means that more aspects can be added through further research. The components of the framework will be elaborated and discussed in the following methodological section. However, before I turn to my own methodological assumptions, I believe that it is important to consider the insights that can be gained from previous research.

1.2 Literature Review

Throughout the years, a number of different perspectives have been used to analyse Cambodia's political system. As I mentioned in the introduction, traditional patron-client relations, patronage networks and patronage structures are important factors in most of these perspectives. From a purely anthropological perspective, patron-client relations refer to a particular kind of interpersonal relationship that, despite its unequal nature, is tied through common interest and friendship (Verver & Dahles 2015: 53). Such relationships are a common feature throughout Southeast Asia and historically they represent a hierarchical relation where an individual of higher socio-economic status (patron) offers protection and benefits to an individual of lower status (client) in return for support and assistance (Hughes 2003: 18-19). Patronage networks could be seen as an extension of these traditional relationships, thus referring to the relationship between a patron and a larger group of followers (Erdman & Engel 2007: 107). Continuing this extension, a patronage structure, or system, builds on clusters of patronage networks. In a patronage structure, patrons of different networks are linked to higher-status patrons, creating a complex web of loyalty and obligation (Verver & Dahles 2015: 53-54, Kimchoeoun et al 2007: 40). In this study, I am using a political science perspective on patronage. In a political context, patronage structures often refer to a pyramid-shaped relationship where a number of influential political actors at the top

use different kinds of compensation to ensure the support of a wide base of followers (Roberts 2002: 525). While there are some subtle differences between an anthropological and a political science perspective on patronage (Verver & Dahles 2015: 53), the foundation for both strands is the patron-client relationship. Traditional patron-client relations have been the main organising structure in Cambodian villages for centuries and, as such, it is believed that they are deeply entrenched in Khmer culture (Kimcheoun 2007 et al: 49-51, Verver & Dahles 2015: 51). According to some scholars, Khmer culture is the most common explanation for the structure of the contemporary political system (Öjendal & Ou 2013: 367). Culturally based studies investigate how traditional values and beliefs are shaping contemporary politics, and a common understanding is that traditional patron-client relations, social hierarchies and religious beliefs can be used to explain contemporary power structures (Kimchoeun et al 2007: 49-51). There are a wide variety of culturally based explanations, stretching from crude cultural stereotypes (see for example: Mehmet: 1997) to more sophisticated studies based on different interpretative frameworks. To exemplify the latter, interesting insights have been gained by studies that investigate how cultural reinterpretations of the externally implemented democratic concepts create a political context where rightful leadership and power is connected to traditional patron-client dynamics (Lilja 2010: 305, Baaz & Lilja 2014: 15-17, 19); and by those who study how religious beliefs and social hierarchies constitute a complex conceptualisation of power that legitimises prevailing power relations (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox 2013: 10,11,14,20). These studies highlight how cultural and historical legacies continue to influence contemporary Cambodia, and their findings suggest that cultural factors need to be incorporated in studies of the political system. However, it is also important to consider that an overemphasis on cultural factors could misrepresent the complex dynamics of local contexts. Such analyses could get entangled in a static conceptualisation of culture that underestimates the dynamics of cultural transformation and portrays local actors as undifferentiated and passive creations of culture (Hughes & Öjendal 2006: 417-418). While the more nuanced cultural studies mentioned above incorporate this aspect (see for example: Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox 2013: 3), others investigate cultural transformation by putting less focus on endogenous culture and devoting more attention to exogenous influences. Simon Springer (2009, 2011), writing from a critical perspective, focuses on neoliberalisation, and by using the concept “actually existing neoliberalism” he has analysed how Khmer culture and neoliberal policies has interacted to create something that he labels “neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics”. According to Springer, “neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics” has been shaped by the elite’s ability to proliferate their patronage networks

through the re-articulation of neoliberal reforms. From his perspective, the strength and persistence of the ruling elite can be connected to their ability to use neoliberal reforms to amass personal wealth and turn the state into a mechanism for “legitimate” accumulation by dispossession (Springer 2009: 144, Springer 2011: 2555). It is also believed that the neoliberal world order, and its emphasis on stability, could have influenced the international community to accept the stability of the current regime, thus giving the elite a sense of legitimacy that could further contribute towards their power consolidation (Springer 2009: 139, 145-146, 155-156). Neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics is an interesting concept that highlights how a complex interaction between internal and external forces could have facilitated for the elite’s accumulation by dispossession. However, connecting everything to an overarching economic orthodoxy could exclude non-economic factors and limit the possible scope of understanding. To get a more comprehensive understanding of the political system, some perspectives are trying to incorporate both economic and non-economic factors in their analysis. The influence of cultural factors and neoliberalisation, or at least some neoliberal expressions (i.e. the affects of free market transformation), could still be important aspects from these perspectives, but the main reasons for the strength and persistence of the ruling elite are attributed to a deliberate strategy of domination. While it is difficult to isolate a cohesive perspective from this body of literature, these studies focus on the autonomous agency of the ruling elite and investigate the different ways that the elite have been able to manipulate the political and economic transformations that have occurred since the UNTAC-intervention (Slocumb 2006: 21-22, Un 2005: 211 Hughes 2007: 838, Cock 2010: 241-242).

In this study, I want to build on the insights gained from previous research. While I do not contribute with any new empirical material, I believe that the force-based framework could be used to weave together some of the knowledge accumulated by the different strands of inquiry discussed above. The force-based framework incorporates, what I have found to be, the most important lessons from previous research – to recognise the autonomous agency and transformative characteristics of local actors, and to conceptualise culture as dynamic force open for transformation, manipulation and co-optation – and combines these lessons with the insights that can be gained from a force-based ontology.

2. Theoretical Framework and Meta-Theoretical Considerations

Incorporating the aspects mentioned above requires a framework that moves beyond a positivistic ontology. However, making inferences in a world that consists of factors that cannot be observed or measured requires a well-defined methodology (Halperin & Heath 2012: 166). Below, I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a case-study design and the measures I have taken to increase the reliability and validity of my inferences. Thereafter, I will elaborate the theoretical foundations for the approach taken in this study. I will also describe the components of my theoretical framework and discuss some of the meta-theoretical aspects that I believe require consideration.

2.1 Research Design

This paper is designed as a qualitative desk-based case study that builds on the insightful knowledge gained from scholars and international organisations. Such an approach has its strengths and weaknesses. A case study allows you to study a specific case in more detail, but unfortunately it limits the external validity of the findings. However, external validity can be increased if the investigated concepts can be generalised and applied to other contexts (Punch 2014: 123, Halperin & Heath 2012: 205). Patronage structures are a common element in many developing countries (Roberts 2002: 252), and you could argue that this makes it a generalisable phenomenon. This may have some merit, but it oversimplifies some of the context-specific factors that could define different systems. While this implies that it will be difficult to generalise the findings from this study, the framework itself would be applicable to other contexts. The ontology assumes that it is the interaction of a specific set of forces that constitutes a context. The specificity of the interaction has to be determined by an investigation of empirical material, but the basic principle could be applied to other contexts and cases. Such studies could be used to identify recurring elements, and ultimately a

comparative study could be used to create more generalisable knowledge. However, for the present study it is more important that my findings have internal validity and reliability. Since the study is based on secondary sources, internal validity and reliability can be increased by careful reflections over the choice of material. Secondary sources have by definition already been interpreted by others, and there is a risk that theory-laden assumptions could affect the reliability of the material (Halperin & Heath 2012: 330). To increase the reliability of my sources I have paid extra attention to the methodological underpinnings of the chosen material and tried to collect my main material from peer-reviewed articles published in well-known scientific journals. A somewhat related problem is selection bias. Selection bias occurs when researchers only choose material consistent with their main argument (Halperin & Heath 2012: 330), and failure to avoid this would imply that I am succumbing to my own theory-laden assumptions. To counteract selection bias and increase the internal validity of my study, I have tried to choose sources from different perspectives, reflect over alternative explanations and emphasise the regularities that appear in multiple studies.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

The ontological assumptions of the framework used in this paper are based on an adaptation of Cox's theory of historical structures. Cox's assumptions can be connected to the critical strand of scientific inquiry (Bieler & Morton 2004: 82). Critical theories highlight and challenge the way the world is organised (O'Brien & Williams 2013: 17) and, while there is not enough scope for complete reiteration of Cox's complex perception of reality, I believe that a rudimentary description is a necessary introduction to my framework. According to Cox, the changing dynamics of the world system are best analysed as a series of historical structures. The theoretical building blocks of an historical structure are defined as forces. Forces are conceptualised as material capabilities, ideas and institutions, and the method of historical structures (i.e. analysing the interaction of forces) can be applied on three separate levels of analysis. Cox considers these levels to be separate spheres of activity, and defines them as the social relations of production, forms of state, and world order (Cox 1981: 135-137, Bieler & Morton 2004: 87-88). The main actors are social forces engendered by the social relations of production. Social forces are groups of people that work within and across all spheres of activity (Cox 1981: 138, Bieler & Morton 2004: 88). However, social forces are

engendered within temporally limited domains, and a historical structure only represents a historically located totality, or limited totality (Cox 1981: 137, Moolakkattu 2009: 448). Limited totalities are specific historic patterns of interacting forces, and to understand the full complexity of an historical process it is necessary to analyse the dialectical interaction of forces and spheres of activity (Cox 1981: 138). When this historical perspective is applied on the global economic system, it can be used to break down historical structures and highlight how dominating social forces can shape forms of state and the world order.

As mentioned above, Cox's framework is much more complex than I can elaborate here, but it is the conceptualisation of forces that is most relevant for this study. In the next section I will explain how I intend to use forces to analyse the political context in Cambodia.

2.3 The Force-Based Framework

Forces are only abstract conceptualisations of reality (Cox 1981: 137), and to give them analytical value they will have to be connected to a more operational definition. Constructing an operational definition requires the ability to link specific data to a concept and to define what data that will determine the presence of variables (Halperin & Heath 2012: 153, Punch 2014: 75). While this positivistic discourse, referring to data and variables, might be more appropriate in a quantitative study, the general principle is still relevant for qualitative research (Punch 2014: 74). Therefore, concepts have to be defined in such a way that it becomes possible to use empirical indicators to determine its presence or absence, or its strength or weakness (Halperin & Heath 2012: 153). Achieving this kind of conceptual clarity requires me to decrease the abstraction levels in Cox's conceptualisations and adjust them to the context I am investigating. However, let's begin with the original meaning, and once that has been established, we can gradually narrow the scope, increase the clarity and, hopefully, highlight the contextual utility.

In its original manifestation, material capabilities refer to technological capabilities, organisational capabilities and accumulated resources; ideas are perceived as the inter-subjective understanding of social relations that shape behaviour, and the collective image of the prevailing social order; and institutions are regarded as the means for stabilisation and

perpetuation of the collective image of social order – most commonly reflecting the power relations at their point of origin (Cox 1981: 135-137, Bieler & Morton 2004: 88, Moolakkattu 2009: 447). The interaction between forces is reciprocal and the specific relationship between them has to be determined by a study of a particular case (Cox 1981: 136). According to Cox, analysing the interaction between forces gives a tentative understanding of the pressures and constraints that a specific context could exert on individuals and groups. Pressures and constraints do not determine action any direct way, actors can adhere or resist, but they cannot ignore them (Cox 1981: 135). Extrapolating from these insights, I believe that a force-based framework has the potential to reveal some interesting insights about the complexity of a patronage-based political system. However, since the object of study differs slightly from what was originally intended, a few conceptual modifications are necessary. Fortunately, Cox himself seems to suggest that concepts can be modified to the particular reality that a researcher tries to comprehend (Cox 1981: 128). While this statement concerns the fluidity of social reality, it still highlights the malleability of theories and, therefore, I hope my reinterpretations can be tolerated.

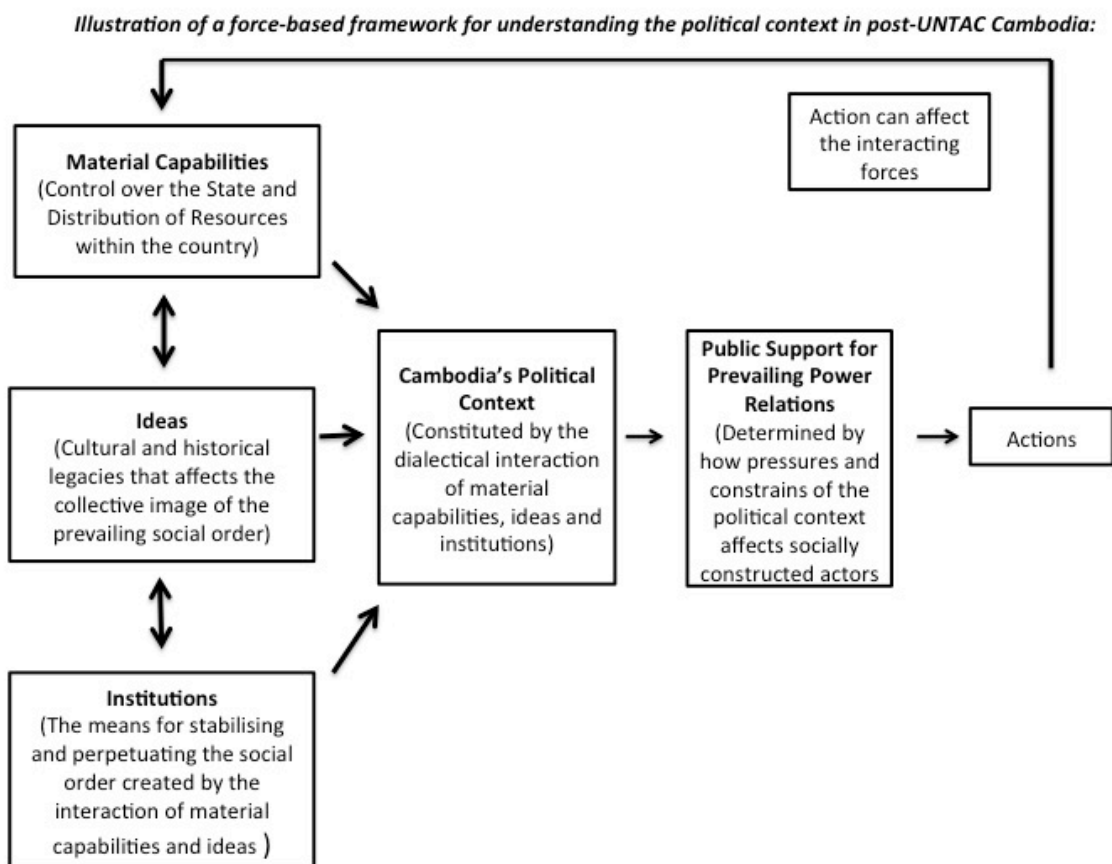
The main actors in my framework are the dominating social forces, i.e. Cambodia's ruling elite. In this paper, the ruling elite refers to a group of individuals connected to Cambodia's prime minister, Hun Sen, and a number of high-ranking officials within the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). This definition is borrowed from Andrew Robert Cock (2010a). According to him, the ruling elite is a relatively cohesive group of top level administrative, political, police, and military officials, high-ranking ministers, governors, and a number of Hun Sen's personal advisors. The group is mainly connected through interlocking patronage networks, alliances and family connections (Cock 2010: 528-529a). Conceptualising the ruling elite as the dominating social force in society means that I can acknowledge their autonomous agency, thus avoiding the cultural determinism discussed earlier. In this case, the ruling elite is assumed to be anything but passive creations of culture. Cox suggests that social forces are the foundation for state power and that their actions can be connected to the creation and demise of world orders (Cox 1981: 141-142) and, while I might not put quite as much emphasis on the social forces I am investigating here, I consider the ruling elite to be active agents pursuing their own agenda. The main goal of that agenda is to consolidate power, and their ability to do so is dependent on the political context. As discussed earlier, the political context is constituted by a dialectical interaction between material capabilities, ideas and institutions. In my framework, material capabilities refer to the control over the state

apparatus and the distribution of resources. The rationale for this definition is quite simplistic. While there are many different ways to conceptualise power (Halperin & Heath 2012: 150-151, Vimealea et al. 2009: 18), in patronage structures, power appears to have very close connection to control over the state and its resources (Vimealea et al. 2009: 20-21, Un 2005: 225). For example, it has proven to be very difficult to reform patronage structures when one group control the majority of state resources (Geddes 1991: 377). Therefore, I am assuming that a strong control over the state apparatus and the majority of resources equals a greater ability to consolidate power. However, distribution of resources only accounts for one part of the internal dynamics of patronage, and a fuller appreciation for the context requires an investigation of the dominating ideas. In this case, I define ideas as the forces that shape the collective image of social order. Ideas are not a quantifiable, but that does not mean that they cannot have a real influence on processes and outcomes (Balaam & Dillman 2011: 113). To investigate ideas I will focus on how cultural and historical legacies could affect contemporary politics. Culture can be defined as the beliefs and values shared by a defined group, and a political culture is defined by how cultural understandings guide the political process (Collier 2002: 7, Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox 2013: 18). While I have already stated my opposition towards static or deterministic conceptualisations of culture, I believe that a dynamic understanding of culture can be a useful theoretical tool. Culture, in its dynamic sense, is a force that can adapt, or be adapted, to prevailing circumstances. The main aim of this study is to investigate the strength and persistence of the ruling elite, and since the collective image of social order affects the perceived legitimacy of prevailing power-relations (Cox 1981: 136), I will focus on the elite's ability to pursue their power consolidating agenda by using cultural and historical legacies to shape the collective image of social order. The last force is institutions. Cox's ontology suggests that institutions can be means for stabilising and perpetuating the social order created by the interaction of material capabilities and ideas. As such, they could facilitate for the institutionalisation of prevailing power relations (Cox 1981: 136- 137), and here I want to use this conceptualisation to investigate how Cambodia's ruling elite are institutionalising their power position. More specifically, I will investigate how they could be using formal institutions to perpetuate the informal power relations inherent in their patronage networks. When rational-legal institutions succumb to the informal rule of patrimonialism, it is commonly referred to as neo-patrimonialism (Nyaluke 2014: 144-145). However, critics have argued that the pure abstraction of the neo-patrimonial concept makes it difficult to define, and that some of its incarnations implies a form of cultural determinism that assumes that neo-patrimonialism occurs when passive creations of culture simply

perpetuate the negative aspects of patrimonialism in a legal-rational setting. Such assumptions appear to be rooted in a “western” notion of modernisation that suggests that culturally based resistance against democratic values hinders the transition towards a “modern society” (Nyaluke 2014 147-149, Erdmann & Engel 2007: 96-97, 103-104). To avoid cultural determinism and universalistic assumptions about modernisation, I believe it is preferable to consider Cambodia’s institutionalisation of patronage as a context-specific process meant to stabilise and perpetuate a social order created by the interaction of material capabilities and ideas. To illustrate the institutionalisation of informal patronage relations I will investigate the autonomy of two specific institutions – the judicial system and the media. These institutions have been chosen because of their role as accountability mechanisms. Accountability mechanisms can function as a constraint on elite power. However, when society’s accountability mechanism becomes intertwined with patronage network, they lose their constraining function and prevailing power relations becomes very difficult to challenge (Un 2006: 230-231). My basic assumption is that this form of intertwining could institutionalise prevailing power relations and contribute towards the strength and persistence of the ruling elite.

Together, material capabilities, ideas, and institutions - or institutionalisation - define the specificity of Cambodia’s political context. Once the specificity of the context has been explored, a constructivist understanding of socially constructed actors can be used to make some tentative inferences about how pressures and constraints exerted by the political context could affect the public support for prevailing power relations. Constructivism builds on an interpretive understanding of the world (Fierke 2010: 178-181), and one of the basic assumptions is that all actors are socially constructed. Socially constructed actors are affected by the social context they interact within, and ideas, norms, and values are all factors that can shape outcomes (Balaam & Dillman 2011: 108, 113). Building on such assumptions, the framework uses a holistic ontology and epistemology –which implies that individuals and their actions must be analysed as parts of a social whole (Halperin & Heath: 2012: 80) – and, while the emphasis is on trying to understand how the social whole and individuals affect each other, it is not an attempt to find causal mechanisms or create deterministic laws that can deliver objective truths about human behaviour. Attempts at finding such causal relations between contexts and actions tend to favour a rationalistic approach to human behaviour (see for example: Collier 2002: 12, Ostrom 2006: 31). Rationality implies a physical science approach to social science (Trigg 2001: 89), and that is something that is avoided in this

paper. This suggests that my conclusions might not be as rigorous as a positivist would prefer. However, the underlying assumptions will not be as simplistic. Through an analysis of Cambodia's political context, I hope to gain insights into how pressures and constraints could affect socially constructed actors, and how this could shape public support for prevailing power relations. Ultimately, such an understanding can be used to make some tentative inferences about how the internal dynamics of Cambodia's political system could affect the strength and persistence of the ruling elite. The basic components of the framework can be illustrated as follows:



3. Case Study: Politics, Patronage and the Persistence of the Ruling Elite in post-UNTAC Cambodia

This case study is structured as follows: I begin with a closer investigation of the landscape that materialised in the wake of the free market transition, arguing that this allowed the ruling elite to create a cohesive and loyal state apparatus, build an extensive network of mass-patronage, and significantly alter the distribution of resources to their advantage. Thereafter, I explore some aspects of Cambodia's cultural and historical legacy, arguing that Khmer traditions have been co-opted and reinvented to confirm a collective image of social order that fits with the rhetoric and propaganda of the ruling elite. Finally, an investigation of the judicial system and the media will be used to illustrate how the ruling elite's informal patronage relations have become intertwined with formal institutions.

3.1 Economic Transformation and Mass-Patronage: State Control and Distribution of Resources

After the 1979 coup d'état, internal conflicts continued in Cambodia and it has been argued that the period between 1975 and 1989 brought the country to its nadir (Ear 2007: 73). Throughout the 1980s, the Cambodian state remained weak and the process of state-building was severely hampered by a lack of educated officials, poor organisation, and continued conflicts with insurgency groups (Hughes 2003: 21,23,25,30). In 1991, after years of internal turmoil, UNTAC intervened (Ear 2007: 73). Proponents of UNTAC argued that it began a reconstruction of Cambodia's administration and economy, and that the country was left with a more open political process and a democratically elected government (Öjendal & Ou 2013: 370, Findlay 1995: 103-14). In many ways, UNTAC represented the paradigmatic assumptions that shaped development strategies during the 1980s and early 1990s (see for example: Potter et al 2008: 28-29), and it was assumed that the externally implemented

democratic institutions could replace endogenous power structures (Hughes 2001: 296). As we now know, this did not occur. Instead, it could be argued that Cambodia's free market transformation - initiated in 1989 and further implemented by UNTAC - strengthened endogenous power structures and contributed towards the creation of more cohesive and loyal state apparatus (Hughes 2003: 225). While the state was weak and unorganised during the 1980s, the privatisation process altered the economic dynamics in Cambodia. By protecting and facilitating for local power holders in their seizure of the newly privatised resources, CPP were able to cultivate an elaborate network of patron-client relations and build a cohesive state apparatus tied together by mutual interests of self-enrichment and political power (Hughes 2003: 39-40, 50, 215). However, in the post-UNTAC era, political survival had become dependent on winning elections. To achieve this, the CPP started to expand and transform its existing patron-client relations (Sullivan 2011: 52-53). These patron-client relations should not be confused with the traditional relations that were discussed in the literature review. The patron-client relations cultivated by CPP during the 1990s differed significantly in their mode of operation, and the transformed patronage networks built on a far more exploitative relationship between state and society (Hughes 2003: 60-62). While it took a while to build up the personal alliances that could assure electoral victory – in 1993, CPP lost the election and had to use their control over the state to force out a power sharing agreement; and, in 1997, they staged a military coup against its power sharing partner (Bruce ST John 2005: 411, Roberts 2002: 525) – the expansion and transformation of patronage laid the foundation for their subsequent consolidation of power (Hughes 2003: 64, Sullivan 2011: 53). Throughout the 1990s, CPP's use of patronage was refined and adapted to the specific needs of a mass-based, participatory political process (Hughes 2003: 70). In the early stages, the favoured strategy combined material inducements with mass recruitments, mass surveillance, intimidation, and violence (Hughes 2003: 64-67, Un 2005: 214, 220). Gradually, however, the ruling elite seemed to realise that long-term strength cannot be accomplished by coercion and intimidation alone, and once they had established sufficient control over the political and economic system, intimidation and violence was replaced by a more consent-based strategy (Un 2005: 220). To transform coercion into consensual rule, it is believed that CPP in general, and Hun Sen in particular, used their patronage networks to establish a "personal" relationship with rural communities and create an atmosphere in which the rural population felt like they were kept under the protection of the ruling elite (Un 2005: 220-223). The overarching sense of intimidation did not disappear at this stage; however, modern patronage politics in Cambodia have now become more reliant upon a strategy were

patronage lines within the state is used to deliver largess to the population with the aim of winning elections (Hughes & Un 2011: 6-7, Craig & Kimchoeun 2011: 219-220, Un & So 2009: 132, Un 2005: 220-223).

Maintaining an elaborate system of mass-patronage requires access to a significant amount of financial resources (Un 2005: 224). During the years since Cambodia's economic transformation, a number of strategies have been used to gather financial means (Hughes & Un 2011: 6-7). However, much of the necessary wealth is allegedly accumulated through a tight control over Cambodia's natural resources. An investigation of the logging sector, for example, found that Hun Sen and a number of other senior CPP officials are taking a personal interest in the timber business. By allocating valuable forest areas and logging concessions to family members and close friends, it is believed that they have established a tight control over the logging sector (Global Witness 2007: 6-8, 10, 19, 89). Other studies reveal that similar strategies have been used within Cambodia's extractive industries. Cambodia's mining industry is currently controlled by individuals with a close connection to the ruling elite, and the Cambodian National Petroleum Authority (CNPA) - the organisation responsible for coordinating all of Cambodia's petroleum activities - has been specifically designed to be under the direct control of Hun Sen and the deputy prime minister (Global Witness 2009: 21-43, 37-38). The ruling elites extensive patronage connections, combined with Cambodia's weak oversight institutions, have allowed them to treat natural resources as their personal domain, and it is believed that profits from this illicit business have been used to garner political support and maintain and strengthen existing patronage networks (Un & So 2009: 128).

In a presumed attempt to make sure that the majority of the aforementioned wealth stays within a closed elite sphere, the ruling elite has also established close reciprocal relationships with the *Oknha*. *Oknha* is an old Khmer title - once equivalent to the English title "lord" - that was re-introduced in 1994 and given to individuals that contribute more than US\$100,000 to national development projects. Formally, the title is awarded by the King, but in practice, candidates are selected and granted by the leadership of the CPP. The *oknha* partnerships originated during the early stages of privatisation, and throughout the years they have grown into an "elite pact" where selected business leaders receive protection and privileges in return for loyalty and financial contributions to the CPP (Verver & Dahles 2015: 48, 56, Ear 2011: 71-73). Hun Sen has been particularly skilful in acquiring these forms of relations. From his

place at the apex of the pyramidal patronage system, Hun Sen has the means to offer both protection and possibilities. Throughout the years, he has formed a close working relationship with Cambodia's most prominent business tycoons, and it is believed that the *oknha* title has been an important tool used to co-opt these business leaders and institutionalise the relationship between the business elite and the ruling elite (Verver & Dahles 2015: 60, 65). While some *oknha* are involved in the aforementioned resource exploitation, the extent of the "elite pact" have been stretched far beyond natural resources. Today, *oknha* are present within a wide variety of business fields, and through a complex party-financing structure built on hierarchy and loyalty (Craig & Kimchoeun 2011: 222- 226), they have cemented their alliance with the CPP leadership and become the most important backers for the mass-patronage system that keeps the ruling elite in power (Verver & Dahles 2015: 61-63, 65).

Cambodia's free market transformation gave the ruling elite material capabilities to expand and strengthen their patronage-based social order. The cohesiveness of the emerging state rested on a foundation of patron-client relations, but to adopt this system to an electoral process, the elite transformed and extended these relations into a vast network of mass-patronage. Access to resources is paramount in Cambodia's modern mass-patronage system, and a strict control over valuable industries, combined with the "elite pact", has allowed prominent political actors and selected business leaders to enrich themselves at the same time as it has made sure that the majority of resources remains concentrated within the ruling elite. However, ruling by mass-patronage does, as specified above, require the ability to use material inducements and gifts to secure the support of voters. This system serves as means for inclusion and exclusion through a dynamic that breed corruption and exacerbate inequalities (Un & So 2009: 125, Un 2006: 229), and in the next section I will argue that references to traditional Khmer culture has been used to shape a collective image of social order that enhances the acceptance of the patronage system.

3.2 Ideas: Culture, Power, and Gift Giving – The Co-optation of a Historical Legacy

Khmer culture is constituted by a complex interaction of religious values and social hierarchies (Kimchoeun et al 2007: 53-55), and while it is not possible to capture all its

complexity within the scope of this paper, there are a few aspects that I find particularly relevant. One such example is the previously mentioned longevity of patron-client relations. Early Khmer societies, dating as far back as the pre-Angkorian period, were structured around strong individual leaders accompanied by a closed sphere of power formed through personal loyalty (Kimchoeun et al 2007: 49). While these relations often occurred within the higher levels of the social strata, they have left a significant legacy on the village-level. In Khmer villages, *Khsae* - meaning network, string, rope or cords that link people together - has been the main structure and source of protection for well over a thousand years (Baaz & Lilja 2014: 13, Kimchoeun et al 2007: 49, Jacobsen & Stuart Fox 2013: 17). Patrons in a traditional *Khsae* extracted resources from villagers, but in return they guaranteed the social and spiritual fabric of the village (Hughes 2003: 61). Due to its important role throughout history, patron-client dynamics have become deeply intertwined with Khmer culture. Today, social hierarchies are strongly supported, and both behavioural norms and language appear to perpetuate hierarchical relations (Kimchoeun et al 2007: 55-56). Another significant influence is religion. While Hinduism introduced a belief in strong, all-powerful and god-like leaders, Buddhism has long been the dominating religious force. Buddhist beliefs are closely interwoven in society, and religious values affect everything from interpersonal relationships to state practices (Kimchoeun et al 2007: 53). Buddhism has also had a strong influence on the conceptualisation of power (Jacobsen & Stuart Fox 2013: 10). Power is an abstract term, but many Cambodians believe that power originates from *bunn*. *Bunn* can be translated as “merit”, and the connection between merit and power derive from the Buddhist belief in karma and reincarnation. Merit is collected in past, current and future lifetimes, and it is gained by performing morally commendable activities. Intertwining these cultural beliefs in the conceptualisation of power could affect the perception of political leaders. Since power is connected to those with a lot of merit - something that is earned by performing morally commendable activities - it becomes more likely that powerful people are considered to have the moral right to their wealth and power. Such beliefs could undermine equality, reinforce the acceptance for social hierarchies, and make it difficult to question reigning power structures (Jacobsen & Stuart- Fox 2013: 10-14, Kimchoeun et al 2007: 53-54).

A brief overview of Cambodia’s cultural context indicates that the historical and cultural legacy could support trust for patronage structures. A long history of patron-client relationships has created a tendency to favour personalised power, religious values support the existence of natural power holders, and behavioural norms and language reinforces strong

social hierarchies. However, while cultural factors do support the existence and importance of traditional patron-client relations - based on benevolent leaders and reciprocity - that is not the kind of relations that characterise contemporary Cambodia. The transformed patronage relations that have become the basis of power in post-UNTAC Cambodia are based on violence, exploitation, and the provision of material inducements sustained through endemic corruption (Hughes 2003: 60, Un 2006: 229). Arguing, as some do (Mehmet 1997: 676,683), that Cambodia's cultural heritage is responsible for this system, implies a form of cultural determinism that underestimates both cultural transformation and the agency of local actors. Khmer culture is of course relevant for the political process, but perhaps it should not be treated as a deterministic factor. Instead of assuming that culture and traditions are perpetuating a centuries old governance system, it might be more appropriate to focus on how cultural traditions and references have been used to support and proliferate a new and transformed system of patronage. From this perspective, it could be argued that CPPs co-optation of Cambodia's cultural legacy began in the 1990s, when the party started to associate itself with the re-emergence of Khmer culture. This new rhetorical strategy emphasised the benevolence of patronage and highlighted its importance throughout history (Hughes 2003: 59-60). As previously mentioned, CPPs main strategy at this time was to gain electoral support through the provision of material inducements. To legitimise this practice, CPP made explicit references to traditional *tveu bon*- gift-giving (Hughes 2006: 469). Gift-giving is a well-established Khmer tradition that draws inspiration from cultural beliefs and values. The giving of a gift is often connected to karma, and gifts to monks, elderly and the poor are considered a good way to earn merit (Nissen 2005: 51). However, traditional gift-giving is constituted on a complex web of social norms, reciprocity, and moral evaluations (Nissen 2005: 51-55), and the kind of gift-giving strategy utilised by the CPP, and specifically by Hun Sen himself, has been stretch far beyond its traditional origins and turned into a tool of intimidation and surveillance validated by traditional values and beliefs (Hughes 2006: 472). In its modern reinvention, gift-giving draws upon two specific strands of Khmer culture - the *saboraschon* and the *bong thom*. A *saboraschon* is a meritorious benefactor that earns personal merit by making donations to communal projects and by performing selfless acts of public generosity. A *bong thom*, meaning big brother, sits at the apex of the traditional *Khsae* pyramid, and refers to a strong and fair leader that protects his loyal followers and is ruthless towards his enemies (Jacobsen & Stuart Fox 2013: 18, Hughes 2006: 470, 479). To cultivate the image of a *saboraschon*, Hun Sen has pursued an elaborate gift-giving program where he donates buildings with his name written in big gold letters; presents gifts from foreign donors

as his own; funds numerous infrastructural projects; and hands out large amounts of cash (Hughes 2006: 472, 477). By associating himself with the image of a *saboraschon*, it is believed that Hun Sen is trying to emerge as a leader that, due to his superior merit, could be perceived as a natural power holder and a disinterested guardian of the national good (Hughes 2006: 475, Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox 2013: 18). The image of natural power holder has then been reinforced by a rhetoric that refers to him as the strong, but fair, leader of the *Khsae* embodied by the *bong thom*. The *bong thom* image is backed by the coercive powers of the modern state, and by combining the spiritual power of the *saboraschon* with the menacing power of the *bong thom*, people are encouraged to believe that the stability and prosperity of the country are dependent on the current leadership (Hughes 2006: 470, 479). Gift-giving has also been used as a regimentation tool. The “membership drive” pursued in the run up to the 1998 elections illustrate the pressures exerted by this form of gift-giving strategy. During this campaign, Khmer villagers were given personal gifts by the CPP elite. In return for the gifts they were, among other things, required to surrender their thumbprint; acknowledge the importance of their gift in public; participate in ceremonies where they swore Buddhist oaths; and told that support for any other party would breach the customary norm of the gift (Hughes 2006: 479- 481). These kinds of campaigns were mostly targeted at the rural population (Un 2005: 213), and by connecting gifts to a pledge of alliance backed by the collection of thumbprints, gift-giving practices were transformed into a tool for oppression, surveillance and intimidation (Hughes 2006: 472, 488, Hughes 2003: 74, Un 2005: 217).

Based on the deliberate cultural references continuously utilised by Hun Sen and the CPP, it could be argued that the co-optation and re-invention of Khmer culture has been used to shape a collective image that enhances acceptance for the current patronage-based social order. By co-opting cultural references and re-inventing traditions, the ruling elite tries to portray an exploitative and oppressive mass-patronage system as a protective *Khsae* ruled by natural power holders and disinterested guardians of the national good. This image is of course not universally accepted, attempts of resistance and rejection exist (Hughes 2006: 482), but the interaction between material domination and manipulation of cultural legacies creates a social order where it becomes difficult, and sometimes dangerous (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox 2013: 14, Hughes 2006:472), to question prevailing power relations. Today, it is believed that patronage dynamics affects most of Cambodia’s societal institutions (Un 2006: 244), and in the following section I will use the judicial system and the media to illustrate how this

intertwining could stabilise and perpetuate the informal power relations inherent in the current social order.

3.3 The Institutionalisation of Informal Power Structures: Intertwining Informal Relations with Formal Institutions – The Judicial System and The Media

Cambodia's judicial system bears the scars of the country's turbulent modern history. Before 1970, Cambodia had a very rudimentary legal structure and through decades of internal conflicts and disasters, the judicial system were disassembled and left in disarray (Daleke 2014, Öjendal & Ou 2013: 375). In 1993, UNTAC initiated a series of reforms aimed at rebuilding and reinstating an independent judicial system that could enforce and ensure the statues of the newly introduced democratic constitution (Un & Hughes 2011: 202). However, the reform process has been slow and progress scarce. According to some commentators, the failed reforms can be attributed to a politically motivated strategy aimed at keeping the judicial system weak, corrupt and open to political manipulation (Un & Hughes 2011: 202-204, Un 2006: 229- 231). This strategy took advantage of the low salaries - kept well below the minimum cost of living - to make court officials dependent on corruption, thus embedding the need for protective patron-client relations throughout the entire judicial system. While salaries have subsequently been raised, the systemic corruption has continued. Corruption has now become the norm, and by using personal connections and bribes to appoint, promote and transfer court officials, the judicial system has been co-opted into the heart of the ruling elite's patronage networks. Today, supposed reforms are implemented by institutions placed under the control of high-ranking CPP officials; bribes and personal connections have become the determinants of selection for new law school students, thus ensuring that new judges become incorporated into the patronage system; and the Supreme Council of Magistracy (SMC) – the institution mandated to oversee and review the judiciary, appoint and replace judges, and ensure the independence of the courts – is itself embedded in the overarching system of patronage (Un & Hughes 2011: 204, LICADHO 2011: 3, Un 2006: 231-233). By embedding the judicial system within its patronage network, the ruling elite gets a direct influence over the decisions and behaviour of judges, which leaves the judicial system wide open for their political manipulation. Indeed, interventions by high-ranking government officials in court

affairs are a common occurrence in contemporary Cambodia. Due to the dynamics of the patron-client relationship, such interventions are often met with compliance and the judicial system has been turned into a tool used to protect powerful individuals and their interests (Un 2006: 231-233). Politically targeted prosecutions, for example, have been a recurring feature in Cambodia's modern history, and the judicial system has repeatedly been used to pressure oppositional forces (LICADHO 2007: 2-6, Heder 2012: 104). For members of the CPP-network on the other hand, impunity is common and clients under the protection of a powerful political patron have been known to commit serious crimes without repercussions (LICADHO 2007: 9). The political control over the judicial system has also given the elite control over the legislative process, and a series of new laws appears to be designed to protect the judiciary and give the state more legal authority against its critics (LICADHO 2011: 5, 17).

Legislative attacks have been aimed at NGOs, demonstrators and trade unions (LICADHO 2011: 21,27,34), but it has also been used to further limit the freedom of an already constrained media. While there are no official censorship, CPP has been able to use patronage and the judiciary to keep a close control over Cambodia's media outlets (Un 2011: 552, LICADHO 2008: 30, Un 2005: 215). Cambodian newspaper press (excluding the international newspapers) is known for being used as political propaganda machines for both the opposition and the CPP. However, journalists from pro-CPP newspapers are usually able to spread propaganda and lies with impunity, while journalist from papers outside the political establishment could face severe consequences for their actions (LICADHO 2008: 13, 43). These consequences could range from fines and imprisonment all the way to physical assaults and murder. Here, the legal system is an important tool, and laws about defamation, disinformation and incitement are regularly used to intimidate newspaper journalists and control the way they report the news. These laws are very vaguely formulated, and arbitrary interpretations of them have been used to prosecute and sentence numerous newspaper journalist (LICADHO 2008: 24-25, Osborne 2007: 118). In 2009 alone, ten legal cases were filed against oppositional newspapers and independent journalists (Un 2011: 552). When the legal system fails to provide sufficient deterrent for critical voices, threats of violence and murder evoke a sense of fear that further motivate compliance and self-censorship (LICADHO 2008: 56). Since 1993, nine journalists have been murdered. In all of these cases, the alleged murderer had a connection to the government or the military and, in all cases, the alleged murderers enjoyed complete impunity (UN 2011: 552, LICADHO 2008: 51). In addition to the killings, countless acts of physical assault and attempted murder have been

directed at journalists (LICADHO 2008: 54). Today, Cambodian newspaper journalists state personal security and intimidation, combined with a fear of legal actions, as their main concern and the biggest threat to their profession (UN 2011: 552, LICADHO 2008: 51, 54, 56 - 57). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the vast majority of legal and physical attacks have been aimed at a medium enjoyed by a mere 2 % of the population (Un 2011: 552). Most likely, this can be attributed to the fact that most other media outlets are already entrenched in the ruling elite's patronage networks. All of Cambodia's television stations, and a majority of radio stations, are owned by the government or by people closely associated with the CPP (Un 2005: 552, LICADHO 2008: 15, 28, 33). Due to its highly politicised ownership, television news has been transformed into a propaganda machine. Controversial or sensitive news stories are censored, and news sections regularly feature high-ranking CPP officials traveling to the countryside to inspect infrastructure or hand out money and food to the poor (LICADHO 2008: 15-16, 31-32).

This brief overview of the judicial system and the media suggests that informal power structures have been incorporated into the hearts of Cambodia's formal institutions. Through careful manipulation of the judicial system, the ruling elite has circumvented reform efforts and created a judiciary organised around hierarchical patronage relations sustained by endemic corruption. It is now believed that the outcome of a judicial case depends more on the operation of patronage than it does on the formal provision of law (Hughes 2006: 487). The media exhibits similar propensities towards patronage influences. A majority of the electronic media is fully incorporated in the ruling elite's patronage networks, and television stations have been transformed into well-controlled propaganda machines that proliferates an image of a grateful population ruled by leaders that embody the best aspects of Khmer tradition (Hughes 2006: 486). While newspapers enjoy a somewhat less centralised patronage control, legal actions and physical intimidation work as effective deterrents against critical voices. Today, it is believed that a majority of Cambodia's formal institutions are ruled by the same dynamics as the judicial system (Un 2006: 244). A lack of independent institutions, especially those who are supposed to work as accountability mechanisms, have left Cambodia with few constraints on elite power and rendered it very difficult to challenge the basis of the ruling elite's power (Un 2006: 230).

4. Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

On the 7th of January 2009, the CPP leadership gathered for a spectacular ceremony. This date marked the thirtieth anniversary of the ousting of the Khmer Rouge, and the CPP decided to use the opportunity to celebrate Cambodia's progress and economic development. However, the CPP leadership had further reasons to celebrate. By 2009, they had been able to overcome a decade of civil war and instability, create a cohesive state apparatus, manoeuvre several democratic elections, and consolidate their control over post-UNTAC Cambodia (Hughes & Un 2011: 1-3). In this paper I have suggested that a better understanding of the ruling elite's power-consolidation process can be gained by analysing how the interaction between material domination, manipulation of ideas, and the systematic institutionalisation of patronage relation have constituted a political context that exerts strong pressure to conform and support prevailing power relations, at the same time as it limits the scope for rejection and constrains possibilities of resistance. From this perspective, it becomes possible to argue that the pressures and constraints of Cambodia's political context could be affecting socially constructed actors in a way that enhances the public support for prevailing power relations and proliferates the modern patronage-based social order that underpins the strength and persistence of the ruling elite. Through the economic privatisation, the ruling elite consolidated control over the state and altered the distribution of resources to their advantage. During this process, traditional patron-client dynamics were transformed into an exploitative mass-patronage system where intimidation, violence, and the provision of material inducements sustained through endemic corruption exerts a strong pressure on Cambodia's, mostly rural, population to conform to prevailing power relations. Further pressure to conform has been added by incorporating traditions, culture and religious values. By co-opting and re-inventing historical legacies and Khmer culture, the elite has tried to shape the collective image of social order and portray it as a protective *Khsae* ruled by strong leaders that, due to their superior merit, could be perceived as natural power holders and disinterested guardians of the national good. Finally, the intertwining between informal patronage relations and

formal institutions have perpetuated and stabilised the patronage-based social order; left Cambodia with few constraints on elite power; and constrained the possibilities of resistance by limiting the space where ordinary citizens could challenge prevailing power relations.

For further research on patronage-based political systems, I hope that this investigation has highlighted the utility of analysing how three separate forces, interacting within a historically located totality, could constitute the internal dynamics of a political context. Mainly, such assumption facilitates for an understanding that transcends arguments about how culture and historical legacies makes local actors culturally determined to perpetuate traditional patron-client relations into a modern setting. While it is not necessary to use the exact same theoretical foundations, I believe that it would be beneficial for future research to devote more attention to the pressures and constraints that arise out of the intrinsically modern articulation of patronage that characterises specific political contexts. For further research on the political context in post-UNTAC Cambodia, this investigation has only provided a very rudimentary understanding of the complexities of the modern patronage system. More research is needed, and such research would most likely benefit from field studies and information from primary sources. Unfortunately, the empirical section in this paper has been based exclusively on material from secondary sources, and while this has its advantages, my conclusions would certainly benefit from additional information, confirmation, or perhaps even rejection, from primary sources. However, by elaborating and adding to the aspect investigated here, I believe that it would be possible to gain an even better understanding of the internal dynamics of Cambodia's political context. This understanding could be utilised for a variety of purposes, but for my next project I believe it would be interesting to investigate some of the development initiatives that are being pursued throughout the country. As this paper has tried to illustrate, patronage penetrates all levels of the Cambodian society, and by investigating how this modern patronage dynamic could affect development initiatives, I believe that it would be possible to gain some interesting insights into the utility, or futility, of current strategies. Hopefully, the conclusions from such studies could make a real contribution towards a better understanding of the Cambodian context, and the developmental problems that arise out of it.

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