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Modern Patronage and Development in Cambodia: Historical Foundations, Modern Re-Articulations, and the Contemporary Quest for Political Legitimacy

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Abstract

Cambodia´s complicated political landscape has created a development context that the international community long struggled to navigate. In this paper I – through a theoretical framework that conceptualises a political context as a historically located totality and defines the quest for political legitimacy as a constraint that can be used to make inferences about the behaviour and actions preferred by the ruling elite – explore how development endeavours can learn to work better within Cambodia´s political landscape. Through a qualitative exploration based on insights from previous research and 15 semi-structured interviews I conducted during my visit to the country, I argue that Cambodia´s contemporary political context has been shaped by how the ruling elite has been able to transform traditional patron-client relations into an elaborate modern mass patronage system. Within this system, legitimacy is maintained through a political theatre that builds on the constructed perception of "Khmerness" and projects notions of fear, protection and moral authority. While this articulation of political legitimacy is found to limit reforms and policies that are perceived to undermine the influence of the elite, it also provides a possible avenue of influence. Within the current circumstances, the elite is increasingly pressured to deliver tangible improvements at the local level, and strategies that utilise the developmental space this opens up could be more capable of navigating the murky waters constituted by Cambodia´s socio-political context.

Key Words: Cambodia, Patronage, Political Theatre, Legitimacy, Development

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Modern Patronage and Development in Cambodia: Historical Foundations, Modern Re-Articulations, and the Contemporary Quest for Political Legitimacy

1. Introduction

Cambodia´s complicated political landscape has created a development context that the international community long struggled to navigate (see for example Ear 2007; Cock 2010a). Today, an extensive modern patronage system, built on exploitation and corruption, drains resources away from the public and concentrates both financial and political power in the hands of a small elite (Un 2005: 224; Un 2006: 229; Cock 2010b 528-529; Global Witness 2016). Despite the potential difficulties associated with development work within this context (see for example Hughes & Conway 2003: 65), the international community remains positive about Cambodia´s future prospects and continue to allocate large amounts of aid to the country (Ledgerwood 2012: 197) Unfortunately, billions of dollars in official development assistance and years of attempted internal reforms have done relatively little to improve the situation for the poorer sections of the Khmer population (Bruce St John 2005: 406; Ear 2007: 68; Davies 2011: 313).

In this paper, I suggest that it is possible to get a better understanding of Cambodia's developmental difficulties by examining the political context and the articulation of political legitimacy it engenders. Through a qualitative exploration based on insights from previous studies and 15 semi-structured interviews I conducted during my visit to the country, I argue that the current political context has been shaped by how the country´s ruling elite has transformed traditional protective structures into a mass patronage system where personal alliances and state capacities are intertwined, and a combination of inducements, coercion,

and appeals to righteousness, are used to elicit votes from an exploited population. Within this context, political legitimacy is maintained through an elaborate political theatre that, by evoking notions corresponding to the ideals that underpin the public perception of "Khmerness" (i.e. characteristics and behaviour that are perceived to be important features of the Khmer identity), is used to construct a legitimising narrative that builds on fear, protection and moral authority. For development practitioners, this articulation of political legitimacy means that attempts at overarching governance reform and policies that are perceived to undermine elite influence are likely to be either circumvented or resisted. Nevertheless, there are strategies that could be more conductive to Cambodia´s political landscape. Due to the dynamics of the modern patronage system, and the perceptions of legitimacy that underpin it, the elite is pressured to deliver, or at least give the perception of, tangible improvements at the local level. This potential conflation of interests (between the elite and the development community) represents a promising avenue of influence. Working through channels that corresponds to the political legitimacy of the elite is, however, a precarious undertaking that requires delicate manoeuvring and tools that are specifically adapted to work within the lower levels of Cambodia´s modern patronage system.

1.1 Specific Aim and Research Question

The premise of this paper is that, due to the complex dynamic that shape Cambodia´s political system, even the smallest positive impact rely on understanding, and taking advantage of, the mechanisms that dominate the local context. The notion of context-adapted development strategies that acknowledge the "obstacles" engendered by local structures is, of course, not new to academia – or even mainstream development organisations (see for example Fritz et al 2014: 2-3, 11) – but it appears that such superficial rhetoric seldom translate into strategies that differ from the universalistic models that dominated the 1980s and 1990s (Hughes & Un 2011: 13). Instead of blindly focusing on how to change reigning power structures and local circumstances to correspond with our presumptions about proper societal ideals, the aim of this paper is to explore how we can learn to work better within the constraints and possibilities engendered by Cambodia´s political context. The basic assumption is that a better understanding of Cambodia's political context, and the foundations of political legitimacy it

engenders, can provide us with important insights about the possible conductivity of different forms of development efforts.

Based on this, the paper is structured around the question: *How does Cambodia´s contemporary political context, and the foundations of political legitimacy it engenders, affect the conditions for "pro-poor" development policies?*

Pro-poor development policies, in this case, simply refers to policies that are directed at both proximate and structural causes of poverty – i.e. at both the immediate factors that cause poverty (e.g. lack of resources), and the structural factors that underpin them (e.g. exploitative relationships) (see for example Hughes & Conway 2003: 13-15). The conceptualisations of political context and political legitimacy will be further elaborated in the theory section.

The disposition of the subsequent sections of the paper can be summarised as follows. I begin by clarifying why I have chosen to explore development through the prism of political legitimacy. Thereafter, I elaborate my theoretical foundations and methodological considerations. After the theoretical and methodological foundations have been laid, I turn to a brief historical review of the concept of development and the way it has been implemented in Cambodia. This review is followed by the main empirical section, where I – based on a combination of secondary and primary source data – present my analysis of Cambodia´s political context and the foundations of political legitimacy it engenders. The result of this analysis is then, ultimately, used to explore the conductivity of certain development efforts and to make some tentative suggestions about future prospects.

1.2 Political Legitimacy and Development

While the connection might not be immediately obvious, I would argue that there are good reasons to examine the potential conditions for development through the prism of political legitimacy. The concept of political legitimacy, and the factors that underpin it, can be a useful analytical tool due to the internal dynamics that it engenders. It is now generally accepted that most forms of successful and stable power-relationships – where power is defined as the ability to restrict someone's freedom (either by sanctions or inducements), and

subordinate their purposes to one´s own – need to be underpinned by some form of legitimacy (pure coercion is usually less stable than consent) (Beetham 1991: 43-45). It is also argued that the most common justification for a certain power-structure is that it will serve the collective interest of the population. However, due to the social organisation of power – i.e. that power, and power differences, arise from, and are maintained through, social arrangements that define the "rules of exclusion" (who have access to power and on what grounds) – these collective interests will most likely be met in ways that serve the interests of the powerful (i.e. in ways that also contribute to their continual privilege by preserving the current order). The quest for political legitimacy (a prerequisite for the maintenance of the current order) thus serves as a constraint on the scope of action for elite actors by encouraging a behaviour that conforms to the criteria that underpin the public perception of legitimate power. These constraints can, therefore, be used as a "point of inference" that allows us, at least tentatively, to theorise about the kind of actions that are preferred by elite actors within a specific context (Beetham 1991: 35-37, 43-45). Thus, a deconstruction and examination of the foundations of political legitimacy engendered within a specific political context, can be used to identify specific constraints on elite behaviour and, by extension, the most likely strategies that this elite will use to serve the collective interest (since these strategies are likely to be pursued in a manner that will improve/maintain their political legitimacy). Assuming, as I do, that poverty alleviation is a collective interest, this information can be used to make some tentative inferences about the kind of development strategies that best conform to the criteria set by the context-specific articulation of political legitimacy. Ultimately, such inferences can serve as the basis for an assessment of the potential conditions for "pro-poor" development policies. It could also tell us something about the utility, or futility, of current development strategies, and provide some guidance for future endeavours.
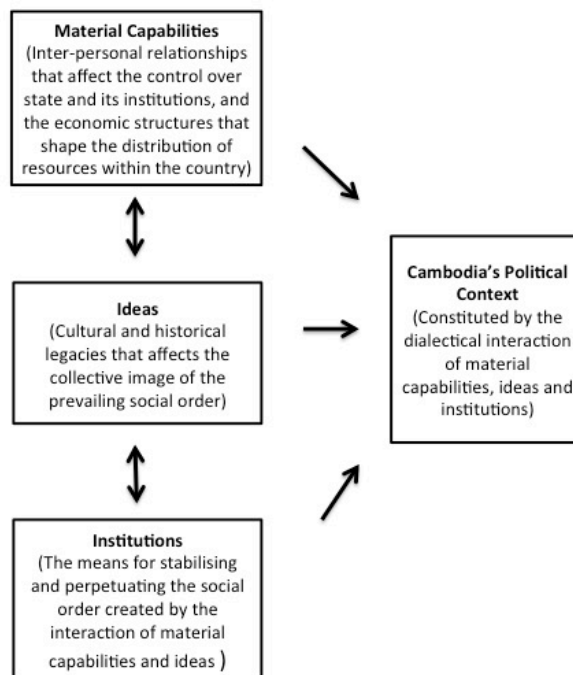
2. Theoretical Foundations

To get a better understanding of the foundations of political legitimacy in contemporary Cambodia, I am beginning my inquiries with an exploration of the political context that has engendered these foundations. The theoretical foundations behind my conceptualisation of a political context are influenced by how we can analyse the changing dynamics of the world system by exploring the formation, and transformation, of historical structures. In short, and very simplified, a historical structure, according to Robert Cox (1981), is constituted by three dialectically interacting forces – material capabilities, ideas, and institutions – that shape the structure within three different societal levels of analysis (called spheres of activity) – namely, the social relations of production, forms of states, and world orders. The main actors within a historical structure are engendered by the interaction of forces that constitute the realm of the social relations of production. These actors, defined as social forces, are the main beneficiaries of the social relations of production that have been engendered within a historically located totality (i.e. the specific articulation that characterises a temporally limited domain of history). Social forces work within and across all spheres of activity and, based on the assumption that they work to secure and proliferate the social order that is the basis of their existence, they have the agency to shape forms of states and world orders. Thus, by breaking down historical structures and analysing the interactions of forces within our historically limited totality, and the social forces it engenders, it is possible to get a better understanding of the dynamic that shape the current world system (Cox 1981: 136-138; Bieler and Morton 2004: 87-88; Moolakkattu 2009: 448).

This theorised model of the world system is obviously constructed to highlight the formation, and transformation, of macro-level dynamics, but the notions that underpin it got the potential to enhance our understanding of meso- and micro-level phenomena. If we conceptualise a context – a political context in this case – as the kind of historically located totality mentioned above, it is possible to construct a simplified framework that can be used to explore its specificity. Ontologically, any located totality is constituted by a specific interaction between

material capabilities, ideas and institutions. Material capabilities refer to material structures (like economic structures and distribution of resources); ideas are notions that shape the collective image of social order; and institutions represent the means for stabilising the social order engendered by the interaction of material capabilities and ideas. However, these forces are just broad categorisations, and to determine the specific articulation of interacting forces that defines a located totality, we have to explore relevant empirical material and trace the historical processes that have engendered it. Since it is assumed that social forces are autonomous actors with an ability to shape the circumstances around them, their influence plays an important role in this process (Cox 1981: 136-138). Based on these premises, it is by identifying the main social forces, and tracing the historical processes through which they have been able to constitute and transform their surrounding circumstances, that we can begin to understand the specific characteristics of a historically located totality (e.g. a political context). Within the confines of this paper, the role of social forces is ascribed to Cambodia´s ruling elite, and the specific characteristics of the political context will be analysed by exploring how they have been able to shape the political context.

Through a desk-based study (Petersson 2015), I have previously identified the main features of Cambodia´s political context. By reviewing some of the more prominent literature on the subject, this study concluded that the main categories of Cambodia´s political context could be conceptualised as follows:

In short, this study revealed that the material foundations of Cambodia´s political context appear to be shaped by a web of inter-personal relationships that affects the control of the state and its institutions, and an economic structure that tilts the distribution of the country´s resources in advantage of the political elite. It also indicated that cultural and historical legacies are, somehow, used to shape the collective image of the current social order, and that the combined force of the material and ideational domains has contributed to an institutionalised social order that makes it difficult for the Khmer population to question the current system (Petersson 2015). However, these were only tentative conclusions unfit to assess developmental constraints and possibilities. While the tentative conclusions from my earlier study have served as a guiding frame, this paper represents an attempt to expand and elaborate my previous findings and transform them into a tool that can be used to engender insights for future developmental endeavours. Here, by tracing the historical trajectory that has engendered the articulations of the current context, using both secondary and primary data, I have been able to expand and refine the analysis of Cambodia´s political system and, subsequently, use this enhanced understanding to explore the foundations of the contemporary elite´s political legitimacy.

Legitimate power is, according to David Beetham (1991: 3, 15), power that is acquired and exercised according to justifiable rules and with evidence of consent, and the public perception of legitimate power is shaped by its conformity to the "three dimensions of legitimacy". These three dimensions can be summarised as: 1) the ability to conform to established rules – which can include formal rules, like those governing an electoral democracy, or conventional rules, like informal rules based on traditions and customs; 2) that the established rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both the dominant and the subordinate parts of the power-structure; and, 3) that there is evidence of expressed consent by the subordinate part of the power-structure. Together, these three dimensions constitute the foundations of the public perception of legitimate power, and the legitimacy of the dominating echelons of society depends on their ability to conform to these criteria. This conformity is, of course, not an all or nothing affair, and the degree of legitimacy bestowed upon a particular power-structure depends on how well it is able to reflect the three dimensions (Beetham 1991: 15-19).

The criteria for legitimate power is, once again, a general framework, and the articulations that constitute the foundations of political legitimacy within a polity are context-specific and have to be determined by an empirical investigation (Beetham 1991: 27-30). Here, the historically variable content that form the basis of political legitimacy in contemporary Cambodia will be determined by an investigation of the forces that constitute the political context. When these two notions – the forces that constitute Cambodia´s political context and the foundations of political legitimacy it engenders – are combined we get the following schematic representation:
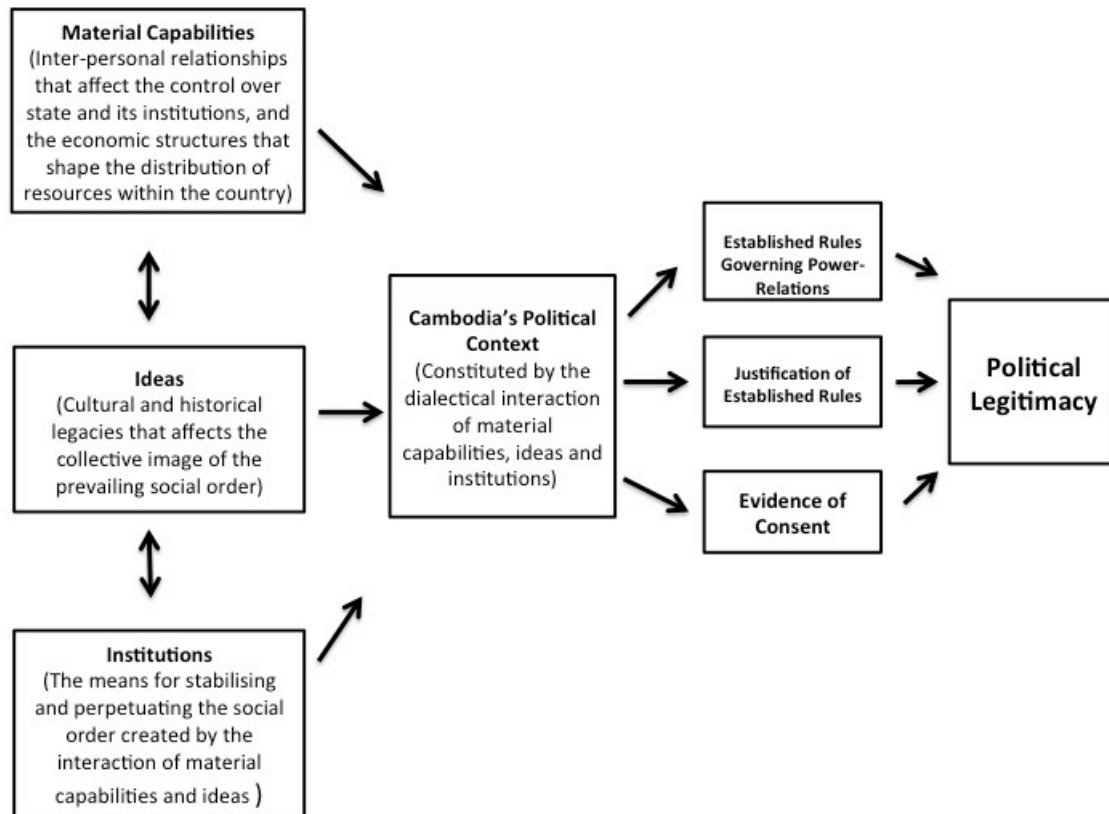
As the representation illustrates, the principles behind the simplified representation of reality that guides the inquiries in this paper is that an empirical investigation of the specific characteristics of the material, ideational and institutional dimensions can provide a better understanding of the specificities of Cambodia´s political context. The information from this study can then be used to get a better understanding of the established rules of power that underpin the current power-structure; the principles that justify these rules; and the expressions of consent that enforce them. This, in turn, can be used to uncover Cambodia´s context-specific articulation of political legitimacy. Ultimately, the articulation of political legitimacy provides insight into the constraints placed upon the strategies elite actors are using to pursue collective interests, which can be used to assess the conditions for pro-poor development policies.

Before I turn to the main empirical section, however, I will briefly explain and justify my methodological considerations, and explore some pre-existing explanations of the developmental problems that characterise contemporary Cambodia.

3. Methodological Considerations

To draw the conclusions that are presented throughout this paper I am relying on a qualitative research strategy that utilises information gained from both secondary and primary sources of data. While such a strategy is appropriate for the kind of exploration I am embarking upon here, it comes with some methodological challenges that require consideration. A qualitative study cannot, obviously, gain its validity from the kind of "measurement accuracy" that is used to assess works that fall within the positivist tradition of scientific research (see for example Muijs 2011: 56). However, that does not imply that qualitative inquiries do not have to adhere to some scientific principles. To ensure that the scientific standards of qualitative research are fulfilled, it is important to use an explicitly defined frame of reference (e.g. theoretical framework) that ensures an adequate fit between the collected data, the concepts engendered, and the inferences made (Bryman 2012: 389-392). Since the meta-theoretical assumptions behind my explicitly defined framework were elaborated above, the sections below will explain how I have tried to assure an appropriate fit between my data collection methods, my sampling, and the inferences I make in my analysis.

3.1 Data Collection

The main data for this paper has been gathered through an exploration of what can broadly be labelled "secondary sources". This somewhat abstract concept can encompass everything that is not gathered by those who actually witnessed or participated in the events they describe or refer to – i.e. primary sources (Halperin & Heath 2012: 229) – but the bulk of my information has been gathered through books and articles written by different scholars, and reports from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Using such sources of information is, of course, not unproblematic. Secondary sources, by its very nature, contain information that has already been interpreted by others, and sometimes packaged to support the arguments and opinions of

its writer. As a result, they may contain biases and potential misrepresentations of reality (Halperin & Heath 2012: 330). To mitigate the risk of a continued disbursement of potential biases and misrepresentations (both my own and others), I have tried to choose my sources carefully. The articles that I build my narrative around have been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, the books have been written by experienced scholars, and the NGO reports come from organisations with long-term experience of Cambodian issues. To counteract my own potential biases, I have incorporated sources written from different meta-theoretical standpoints, and emphasised regularities that reoccur from different perspectives. To further supplement and enhance the reliability of the information gathered from secondary sources, I have also collected some primary source data.

The main objective of the primary source data collection – gathered through 15 semi-structured interviews – was to enhance the validity of my inferences by expanding, gaining a secondary confirmation of, or simply rejecting, the information I gathered from the secondary sources. A semi-structured frame was chosen because it provided the kind of flexibility that allowed me to pursue the kind of topics that are relevant for my research question. The semi-structured interview facilitates for a conversation that is guided by the objectives of the researcher, at the same time as it allows the respondents to pursue and elaborate on the issues and areas they believe are of most importance (O´Reilly 2009: 126-127). Since these issues and areas are of most interest to me, the semi-structured frame was best suited for my investigation. By discussing my presumptions and potential inferences with people with local experience and knowledge, I gained valuable information that could be used to enhance the accuracy of the depictions presented throughout this paper.

The interviews included two different groups. The first set of interviews targeted representatives from international organisations and the NGO-sector. In total, I interviewed five members of this community. To get the best chance of acquiring some valuable information, I targeted established organisations with a local office in Cambodia and experience in working within the constraints of the political system. The second set of interviews targeted the Khmer public. Ten of these kinds of interviews were conducted, and the focus was to expand, confirm, or revise my understanding of public perceptions of religion and leadership. More specifically, I wanted to explore the interpretations and applications of the Buddhist cosmology, and how this worldview might affect the everyday perceptions of local people. The interviews were conducted on a small island located

somewhere along the vast Mekong river. Due to the recent increase in persecutions and violence against those associated with critique against the ruling regime (see for example Cheng & Dara 2016; Kijewski 2017; Touch & Kijewski 2017; Dara & Handley 2017), I have decided that it is best that the names of the respondents and the exact location of the island remain unnamed. The same logic applies to the names of the organisations and their representatives. A further elaboration of the rationale behind my sampling choices will be briefly presented below.

3.2 Sampling

The selection of interview respondents was based on a strategy designed to gain a better understanding of certain dimensions of my research problem. This strategy, sometimes referred to as "purposive sampling", is a non-probability form of sampling common within the qualitative research tradition (Bryman 2012: 416). However, using a sampling strategy designed to elicit information that pertains specifically to the delimited domain of a research question engender some analytical limitations. Foremost of the inherent limitations of a purposive sampling strategy is, quite obviously, the inability to use the data as a foundation for any universally applicable inferences (Bryman 2012: 418). For the sake of analytical clarity, it is therefore important to mention that these form of generalisations are not pursued here. Generalizable and comparative research strategies might have important roles to fill in future elaborations of the findings presented here, but that cannot be contained within the scope of this paper. Specificities are the main focus here. Therefore, I would argue that purposive sampling provides an adequate strategy. With that said, the borders that delimit the confines of purposive sampling are wide, and many different strategies can be placed within it. Below I will briefly describe the sampling choices made in conjunction with my two different sets of interviews.

In my first set of interviews, I targeted "established" international organisations and NGOs (i.e. some of the largest and most well-known organisations). The rationale for this selection is based on the unfortunate reality constituted by the murky waters of the Cambodian NGO-sector. Since 1993, there has been a massive proliferation of NGOs in Cambodia, and based on recent reports, many of these organisations are exhibiting various degrees of lacking

professionalism. It is even argued that large parts of the NGO sector are incorporated in the overarching patronage structures (Henke 2011: 292-294, 308-309). Since I was trying to tap into the knowledge of experienced development workers, not evaluate the work of the development sector, the more established (and hopefully more independent) organisations were the starting points best suited for my investigation.

The selection of the second set of interview respondents was mostly based on personal restrictions and the realities of the situation. These interviews were designed to explore the role of Buddhism and its impact on leadership perceptions. To achieve this, I had to choose a spatial domain that corresponded to my personal possibilities and constraints. By choosing to conduct this set of interviews on the unnamed island – which is a place I frequently visit and have stayed for extended periods of time – I chose a research site where my personal connections have made me a familiar presence and granted me access to gatekeepers, translators and informants. While this obviously limits the ability to make broad inferences about the general population, it allowed me to cut down on costs and travel times (which, due to financial limitations, were important factors).

Once I was on the island, the interviews were organised into two separate stages. The first stage consisted of a set of interviews conducted with a monk, and an initiated layperson (known in Cambodia as an *Achar*) that actively participates in the organisation and ceremonial functions of the local pagoda. These interviews provided information about how those most familiar with the Buddhist teachings perceive the intersection between religion and leadership. The second set of interviews was then used to explore how members of the public perceive these issues. To elicit this kind of information, I conducted interviews with eight different individuals living in the village surrounding the pagoda.

Since I do not speak the language, a translator was used during the interviews with the Khmer public. Using a translator can of course be problematic, and there is always a risk of misunderstandings and misrepresentations. During my interviews I tried to mitigate such risks by proceeding slowly and, when I felt that a possible misunderstanding might have occurred, asking the translator and respondent to repeat the statement. Within the current political climate, it also proved to be quite difficult to find respondents willing to discuss religion and politics with a stranger. As a result, many of the respondents were recruited from within the social circle of my gatekeeper/translator. This is of course limiting, but by including men and

women from different backgrounds and life stages, I at least tried to get the widest possible sample.

With that said, it should be reiterated that I do not suggest that my interview findings can be extrapolated into a depiction that corresponds to the overall Cambodian population. The sample size, the limited geographical domain, and the personal design of my interviews are but a few factors that limit the possibility to make such conclusions. However, as previously mentioned, the purpose of the interviews was not to stand on their own. It was never intended that a unilateral reliance on one mode of data collection would provide the foundations for the validity and reliability of my inferences. But that does not mean that the interviews did not have a role to fill. Building on the analytical advantages that could be gained by incorporating multiple data sources – sometimes referred to as "triangulation" (see for example Bryman 2012: 392) – the strength of my inferences is intended to arise from a process where the interview data is analysed in conjunction with the information gathered from secondary sources. Below, I will briefly describe the basic principles behind this process.

3.3 Analysis and Coding

The analytical coding process is a technique utilised to create some form of coherent account out of the messy complexity inherent in the collected material (Tilly 2006: 101-104). The exact procedure usually varies according to research strategy and personal preference (Bryman 2012: 575-577), but the basic technique I utilise here is based on an attempt to deconstruct collected data and reassemble it into an encompassing narrative that describes different aspects of the research problem. I will not go to far into the details here, but the basic principle is that an initial labelling process can be used to identify themes that recur in the data. These themes can then be fitted into larger categories that describe a cluster of themes with common characteristics. Different categories can, in turn, be connected to each other and placed within more overarching conceptualisations. Once the content of the conceptualisations has been identified, they can be used to construct an overarching narrative that describes the phenomena under scrutiny (Bryman 2012 575-577; O´Reilly 2009: 35-37).

Both the transcripts from the interviews and the information from the secondary sources was ultimately analysed in this manner. By doing so, I was able to use empirical material to define the specific characteristics of the predetermined theoretical conceptualisations (i.e. material capabilities, ideas, institutions, established rules governing power relations, justification of established rules, and expression of consent), and eventually construct the basic narrative that I use to analyse Cambodia´s political context and the foundations of political legitimacy it engenders. By cross-referencing my interview data with suggestions from secondary sources, it was, for example, possible to identify how, within Cambodia´s contemporary political context, notions of fear and protection seem to have become intertwined with the perceptions that underpin political legitimacy. Before I turn to my own arguments, however, it might be useful to set the stage, and place this inquiry within a larger context. Since this paper is based on the assumption that any understanding of contemporary events should emerge in conjunction with an understanding of the historical processes that engendered them (i.e. that they are historically located), it would be irresponsible not to, at lest briefly, consider the historical underpinnings of development, and the impact this intellectual legacy has had on Cambodia.

4. Connecting Past and Present: The Historical Underpinnings of Development and the Contemporary Understanding of Cambodia´s Development Dilemmas

The will to improve, and the urge to intervene on behalf of those deemed to be in need of improvement, are tendencies with a relatively old intellectual legacy. While some might argue that the modern notions of development began to emerge in conjunction with the reconstruction efforts launched in the aftermath of the Second World War (Escobar 1995: 3-4), others have argued for a genealogy that stretches as far back as the mid-19th century (Cowen & Shenton 1996). According to proponents of the latter perspective, the intellectual foundations that have served as the basis for all subsequent development strategies can be traced back to the philosophical tradition that emerged from within the Saint Simonians – a collection of philosopher inspired by Henri de Saint-Simon. Before the Saint Simonians, development was envisioned as an inherent process of decline and progress equated with the dynamics of a "natural order". However, the Saint Simonians had different ideas, and argued that this process could be steered and managed through human intervention. Based on the belief in the emerging logics of secular science (the precursor of what we today might call positivism), they argued that, with the correct guidance and knowledge, natural fluctuations could be transformed into linear progress. When these ideas were embraced and elaborated by the French philosopher August Comte, they were transformed into the foundations of what would become a deeply rooted development doctrine. Through Comte`s influential reasoning, development was defined as a field of study dedicated to uncovering social laws that, through the trusteeship of those with the "correct knowledge" that these laws provide, could be used to achieve sustained improvement (Cowen and Shenton 1996: 19-29). Subsequently, a number of different classical thinkers have provided somewhat different interpretations of the circumstances that define trusteeship and the laws that define "correct knowledge", but none of these philosophers did ever manage, at least according to some chroniclers of the

development genealogy, to completely detach themselves from the idea that these principles are the key to managed improvement (Cowen & Shenton 1996: ix-x).

It was, therefore, perhaps, not a huge surprise that the same basic logic would guide the thinking that characterises what we today might call the "modern development era" (i.e. post-Second World War development). Examined in the light of the 19th century legacies, familiar themes re-emerged in the decades following the Second World War. Just to mention some influential strands of post-war development thinking, Walter Rostow, based on the dichotomy between the traditional and the modern (where modernity was identified as the democratic industrialised western countries), argued that he had discovered laws that, if followed correctly, would put traditional societies on the path towards modernity (Potter et al 2008: 89-91); Gunnar Myrdal and scholars inspired by the laws he discovered, whilst arguing against Rostow´s capitalist path, still contended that there were laws that dictated the path towards sustained improvement, and that this path should be followed by adhering to more protective state policies (Potter et al 2008: 96-99); and, in a more recent incarnation, it has been argued that the path towards successful development should be followed by adhering to the criteria inherent in the concept "good governance" (Kaufman et al 2000; Kaufman et al 2010). While they are based on different intellectual traditions and modern reinterpretations, the common denominator inherent in these approaches is that they still claimed to have identified social laws that, through the guidance of an appropriate trustee, could be used to achieve sustained improvement.

Today, it could be argued that these foundations have remained strong and become important aspects of the dominating development discourse. In a similar way as 19th century scholars envisioned a linear process of ordered progress through appropriate trusteeship, it is now believed that scientifically produced knowledge – and especially scientific knowledge derived from the economic orthodoxy – should be used to understand the "underdeveloped" and guide them towards improvement (Escobar 1995: 52-54). While there are contending development discourses that offer alternative visions – and some strands within the mainstream tradition have certainly provided a more inclusive and encompassing framework for the development process (see for example Sen 1999) – it could still be argued that the contemporary discourse now predominantly defines development as an economic problem that should be managed by creating the "correct" conditions for economic growth (Escobar 1995: 52-54; Cowen & Shenton 1996: 423; Rist 2008: 261-262). These foundational ideas, at least, appear to have

been the main rationale behind the intervention program designed and implemented by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

UNTAC, initiated in 1991, was an unprecedented international intervention that, based on what was then considered to be the pinnacle of development thinking, constructed a reconstruction strategy for a country brought to its nadir by decades of internal turmoil (Ear 2007 73-74). Reflecting the zeitgeist of the 1980s and early 1990s, this strategy emphasised democratic institutions, a free market economy, and rationalised governance practices, and it was believed that these reforms would trigger a developmental process that would lunge the country into a positive trajectory towards sustained progress (Hughes 2001: 296-298: Springer 2016: 42). While some early observers argued for the success of the endeavour (Finlay 1995: 103-104), the ensuing decades of failed governance reforms (Ear 2007, 2009; McCarthy & Un 2017), exploitation of the poor (Un & Hughes 2011: 19; Springer 2016: 2), endemic corruption (Transparency International 2014), violence against the public and its representatives (LICADHO 2008, 2011), and the elite´s continual appropriation of land and natural resources (Global Witness 2007, 2009), are just some factors that indicate that UNTAC might not have had all of the positive impacts envisioned by its instigators.

Subsequently, a new generation of scholars has begun to uncover some of the factors that contributed to the failure of Cambodia´s UNTAC-implemented "democratization-development". Approaching the problem from a variety of different meta-theoretical standpoints, this collection of scholarship has provided new insights into the different processes that hindered the evolutions anticipated by the UNTAC intervention. Since I am of the opinion that the construction of unnecessary dichotomies between insights gained through different ontological standpoints can be counterproductive for the understanding of the complexities inherent in socio-political phenomenon (realising, of course, that some standpoints are incommensurable), I prefer to focus less on their meta-theoretical accuracy and more on how these different accounts have contributed to the current understanding of Cambodian politics, society and culture. On the grander side of the analytical spectrum, scholars have, for example, produced books that explore the specific articulations of Cambodia´s hybridized form of democracy (Öjendal & Lilja 2009); highlight the elite´s ability to manipulate internal and external reforms (Hughes 2003); illustrate the distorting impacts engendered by an unreflective implementation of liberal economic policies (Springer 2016); and, enhance the understanding of the intersection between politics and Cambodia´s

religious and cultural foundations (Kent and Chandler 2008). In addition, this strand of scholarship has also produced a number of chapters and articles that provide new insights into more specific societal processes. Such studies have, for example, explored how the economic free market transformation has affected the relationship between the ruling elite and the business sector (Cock 2011; Verver & Dahles 2015), and what impact these economic reforms have had on the rubber- (Slocomb 2011), rice-, garment- (Ear 2011), and cashew nut-industries (Padwe 2011); how traditions (Hughes 2006) rituals (Ledgerwood 2008) and celebrations (Davies 2011) have been transformed in the encounter with external cultural influences; and, how the influx of different forms of aid have affected internal power relations (Ear 2009; Cock 2010a; Sullivan 2011).

Aggregated, current studies about Cambodia´s post-UNTAC phase paint a picture that deviates substantially from the outcomes anticipated by Cambodia´s early development architects. Working partly on premises set a century and a half ago, the notions of development that guided UNTAC´s efforts were based on a belief that the correct knowledge had been achieved – this was a time when the liberal democratic paradigm dominated the mainstream consciousness (see for example Fukuyama 1989) – and that, through the appropriate trusteeship of UNTAC, these features could be implemented with little concern about friction from local circumstances. Subsequent events have illustrated that these assumptions were incorrect. According to those who have studied Cambodia´s post-UNTAC development, external reforms are either being subsumed by indigenous structures (Baaz & Lilja 2014) or transformed through a process where they interact with local structures and engender new articulations. Over time, these articulations, sometimes referred to in terms of friction and hybridity (Lilja & Öjendal 2009; Hughes 2013, Öjendal & Ou 2013), have stabilized and formed the specific circumstances that define contemporary Cambodia. Despite some recent political upsets (Un 2015), those who study Cambodia´s democratization process contend that little real progress has been achieved (Lilja & Öjendal 2009: 298-299; Un 2011). For the foreseeable future, then, it appears as if Cambodia will continue to be characterised by the articulations engendered in the interaction between imposed external reforms and pre-existing endogenous structures.

For development practitioners, these findings are, or at least should be, an indication of the need to direct more attention towards how to work effectively within current circumstances.

With this in mind, it is time to turn to the main empirical section of the paper. Based on insights gained from previous scholarship and a small number of interviews I was able to conduct during my visit to the country, the following sections contain my analysis of the contemporary political context and the consequences its specificities might have for the strategies the ruling elite utilise to gain political legitimacy. The paper is then concluded with a brief incursion into the realm of future strategies and policies, where I discuss how these might benefit from an ability to use Cambodia´s specific articulation of political legitimacy to find new ways to work within, not only against, the factors that define the political context.

5. Cambodia´s Political Context: Ancient Foundations, Modern Re-articulations, and the Contemporary Quest for Legitimacy

It could certainly be argued that the features that define contemporary Cambodia have been shaped by a modern history characterised by internal conflicts and external interventions (see for example Ear 2007: 79). However, perhaps due to the spectacular and tragic features of Cambodia´s modern history, it is easy to overlook the totality of the historical trajectory that has engendered the contemporary articulations that define it. Here, I try to embrace this totality. In what follows, I explore the evolution of Cambodia´s political context, and the foundations of political legitimacy it engenders, as a long historical process characterised by both continuity and change.

5.1 Transforming Traditional Patron-Client Structures into Modern Patronage: Establishing the Material Foundations of Cambodia´s Contemporary Political Context

To understand contemporary Cambodia, it is important to understand the relationships, and the distribution of resources, that underpin the elite´s basis of power. In what follows, I, therefore, begin by highlighting the historical importance of the protective structures we today define as patron-client relations. This is then followed by an investigation of the historical trajectory that transformed Cambodia´s traditional patron-client structures into the exploitative mass patronage system that today underpin the political context. Throughout the following sections I try to illustrate how, within the confines of Cambodia´s economic and political transformation, forces within Cambodia´s dominating political party – today known as the Cambodian People´s Party (CPP) – managed to transform an existing foundation of patron-client relations into a mass-patronage system sustained through exploitation and

endemic corruption. During this process, a small group of individuals associated with the long-standing prime minister, Hun Sen, were able to consolidate control over the state apparatus and its adjacent institutions; gain a significant influence over the country´s natural resource industries and the larger economic sphere; and, eventually, establish, and institutionalise, the governing structures that today define the political context.

5.1.1 Patron-Client Protection and the Historical Underpinnings of State-Society Relations

After the fall of the prosperous Angkorean Empire (lasting between the 9th and 13th century), insistent conflicts and instability eventually eroded much of the region´s former glory. When Cambodia entered the 19th century, the country was poor and its approximately 750 000 strong population consisted overwhelmingly of rural households involved in subsistence farming. Rural villages had relatively little contact with the overarching state institutions and governed themselves through informal arrangements relying on guidance from elderly and respected individuals (Chandler 2008: 91-99, 120-121, 126-127). Mirroring codes of conduct and organisational patterns persisting since pre-Angkorean times (Kimchoeun et al 2009: 49), these informal relations were hierarchal in nature, and people with limited means sought protection from those occupying the higher positions within the societal strata. In return for protection, people at the lower end of the hierarchy offered homage and loyalty to their benefactors. As such, villages in 19th century Cambodia were relatively isolated domains organised around relationships where the higher and lower levels of the social strata were intertwined through reciprocal commitments (Chandler 2008: 126-130). These organisational structures, today referred to as patron-client relationships (Kimchoueun et al 2009: 49), were an important part of both village life and royal culture, and while it has not always been the case in practice, it is believed that a majority of the population perceived them as "natural" and generally mutually beneficial (Chandler 2008: 126-130).

During the French protectorate (1863-1953), French forces tried to implement a number of organisational reforms aimed at transforming Cambodia´s traditional power-basis into a rationalised bureaucratic governance structure. Despite the influx of values from the French metropolis, however, the trust for the patron-client system remained intact, and while the

French will to rationalise this ancient system was strong, they never succeeded in their attempts to remove its influence from the societal sphere (Chandler 2008:174-178).

Subsequently, the logics of patron-client protection remained an important influence during both the country´s independence process and its aftermath. For a new emerging political force – King Sihanouk, ordained under French tutelage in 1941 – Cambodia´s patron-client foundations became an important power-consolidating tool. During the 1950s, Sihanouk consolidated control over the Cambodian state apparatus and, strengthened by his growing influence, he was able to put more pressure on the French administration and, eventually, convince them to grant Cambodia its independence (Chandler 2008: 187, 191, 201, 204). The success of his independence-endeavour assured Sihanouk that he was the rightful leader of the country, and in 1955 he abdicated to pursue a political career. By portraying himself as the nation´s father and overarching patron, at the same time as he coerced opponents to defect to his side, he won an overwhelming victory in the 1955 election. Throughout the early years of his political rule, Sihanouk consolidated power to such an extent that, in 1958, Cambodia´s first period of pluralistic electoral politics effectively ended (and would not be resumed until the UNTAC implemented elections in the 1990s) (Chandler 2008: 211-218, 224- 234). By conveying an image of himself as the benevolent father and patron of, what he called, his family (i.e. the Cambodian population), whilst backing up this image by the coercive power of the state, Sihanouk appealed to the persistent trust for the patron-client dynamics, and illustrated how appeals to the logics of the traditional patron-client relationship could be utilised as a political tool in, at least, a semi-modern context (Kent & Chandler 2008: 6). Building on such perceptions, Sihanouk remained in power until 1970 (Chandler 2008: 244-250).

The years that followed Sihanouk´s demise is a relatively a well-documented era of Cambodian history (Hughes 2003: 20). In the early part of the 1970s, a number of different processes – including the incompetence of the Lon Nol lead republic regime that took over from Sihanouk, continual internal conflicts, and extensive bombing campaigns conducted by the Untied State´s army – converged to create a space where a communist faction could overthrow the government and seize control over the country (Chandler 2008: 251-254; Öjendal & Lilja 2009: 1). The communist regime, known as Democratic Kampuchea (DK), or the Khmer Rouge, implemented an unprecedented revolutionary reform program that intended to erase 2000 years of history and take the country back to, what they referred to as,

year zero. In this process, money, property, markets, education, religion, and freedom of movement were banned. Cities were emptied of inhabitants, dissidents or anyone believed to be a threat toward the regime were executed, and those who remained were forced into an existence characterised by strict surveillance and diminishing food supplies. The DK regime only lasted for 3 years, eight months, and twenty days, but when the dust of the revolution settled, an estimated 2 million people had perished and almost all of the pre-existing social institutions had been destroyed (Ear 2007: 73; Chandler 2008: 255-258).

The DK regime ended in April 1979 when a Vietnamese-Khmer coalition army overtook Phnom Penh and forced the DK leadership to retreat back to the kind of peripheral guerrilla-existence that had characterised their pre-revolutionary years. Disbursed throughout a number of key strongholds, they continued their insurgency towards the Vietnamese controlled government that came to power in the wake of their ousting. They were, however, never able to regain direct control over the Cambodian state (Chandler 2008: 272-276). Instead, as will be explored below, a small group of people once given the mandate to rule by the occupying Vietnamese forces, would, over the years, create a cohesive state apparatus, gain independence from Vietnam and, ultimately, by building on a revised version of Sihanouk´s political tactics, consolidate power and begin to build the structures that define the contemporary political context.

5.1.2 Post-DK State-building and the Emergence of the Modern Patronage System

Cambodia´s first post-DK government, assembled by the occupying Vietnamese forces, called itself the People´s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). The leaders of the only legal political party that existed during the PRK period – the Kampuchean People´s Revolutionary Party (KPRP) – consisted to a large extent of former Communist Party officials that had defected to Vietnam in 1977-78. Under Vietnamese tutelage, this group was commissioned to rebuild the shattered Cambodian state (Hughes 2003: 21-22; Chandler 2008: 276).

The upper echelons of the KPRP regime began to build the foundations of their subsequent power consolidation in the midst of the chaos and uncertainties that defined the early stages of the 1980s (see for example Chandler 2008: 278-284). However, despite the complicated

circumstances set by Cambodia´s post-conflict context, or perhaps due to the structural vacuum it provided, members of the ruling regime were able to underpin their power position by cultivating an intricate network of personal relationships (Hughes 2003: 38-44).

While, in the early stages of the KPRP regime, state cohesion was low and the central authorities struggled to gain administrative control over local authorities (Hughes 2003: 23, 30), the regime´s ability to create a cohesive state apparatus changed dramatically during Cambodia´s burgeoning economic transformation. The liberalisation of the economy, sometimes wrongly attributed solely to UNTAC policies, was initiated in 1989 by the Cambodian government and used as a tool to strengthen the cohesion of the state and limit the scope for oppositional forces (Hughes 2003: 19-20). By liberalising the economy, the people at the top of the political hierarchy gave themselves the opportunity to guide and control the privatisation of land and state owned enterprises. In this process, access to land and resources became dependent on power (including political, economic, and military power), and those controlling the state and its institutions were provided with a new set of tools that could be used to strengthen the attachment of individuals in control of local authorities (Hughes 2003: 38-39). Once again, the patron-client logic appears to have reappeared as an organisational framework for Cambodia´s political relations, and the central government was transformed into a protective umbrella used to secure alliances with important stakeholders by providing them with opportunities and support in their endeavours to capitalise on the privatisation process (Hughes 2003: 40). For members of the ruling regime, these changes allowed them to build on an existing foundation of patron-client relations and, supported by the benefits granted to them by their high positions within the state, expand their personal networks and recruit the loyalty of important new allies (Hughes 2003: 40-44).

The relationships created in the midst of Cambodia´s economic transformation were, however, far from traditional. They were engendered within a modern context that differs significantly from the one that characterised the existence in pre-modern Cambodia. The early 1990s was dominated by UNTAC and their quest to transform the country into a liberal democracy, and this had a number of impacts on Cambodia´s societal context. Most importantly, it deepened the economic liberalisation, created new institutions for controlling the state, and implemented a system where political power became dependent on electoral success (Hughes 2003: 59-60). Faced with these structural opportunities and constraints, the ruling regime fundamentally transformed the dynamics of Cambodian patronage. Instead of

being localised protective expressions building on personal contact and reciprocal respect, patron-client logics were now intertwined with the capacities and modern bureaucracy of the new state. In this process, reciprocity between two parts was transformed into a one-way exploitation of a third part. Patrons, within the transformed relationship, now had the ability to reward the loyalty and support of their followers by offering them societal positions and protection that facilitated for rent-seeking and self-enrichment (Hughes 2003: 59-63; Kent 2007: 335-336). Since this self-enrichment came at the expense of a third party (mostly the less fortunate segments of the population), this transformation resulted in a purely extractive modern patronage system (Hughes 2003: 62; Springer 2008: 144).

Throughout the 1990s and the early years of the second millennia, the ruling regime – now operating under the name of the CPP – perfected the art of modern patronage politics, and by proliferating their personal networks, and combining it with an unbridled use of violence and intimidation, direct at both the political opposition and the voting populace, they secured a number of electoral victories – and when elections failed to provide the "right" outcomes, intimidation or brute force was used to convince oppositional parties that it was best they either shared power (as in the 1993 election) or conceded power (as in the *coup d'état* that followed the 1997 election) (Roberts 2002: 523-525, 530; Bruce St John 2005: 411; Un 2005: 206-209). Eventually, relying on their ability to expand and proliferate their strings of mutually beneficial "friendships" – that could be used to intimidate nonconformists and materially reward compliance – the CPP created a cohesive state apparatus tied together by mutual goals of self-enrichment, monopolized material resources in the countryside, and amassed enough support to cement their position on the top of the socio-political hierarchy (Hughes 2003: 215-221; Un 2005: 209-222; Un 2006: 228-229).

Throughout the 1990s, competing networks of patronage within the CPP struggled to become the dominating force in Cambodian politics (Un 2005: 217-218). However, as Cambodia entered the 21st century, material and political power began to consolidate within a small group of individuals closely associated with Hun Sen (Un 2005: 218-222; Morgenbesser 2017: 11-12).

5.1.3 Manipulating Modern Patronage: The Rise of Hun Sen and the Contemporary Ruling Elite

Hun Sen was part of the original group of former DK cadres commissioned, by the Vietnamese, with the responsibility to rebuild Cambodia. While he began as the PRK´s foreign minister, he would soon advance through the rankings (Chandler 2008: 272, 277; Human Rights Watch 2015: 22). Some newly published reports have documented Hun Sen´s rise to power, and since it can be argued that his rise has had the most influential impact on the contemporary political system (Osborne 2007: 117), this process provides some important insights into the structures that shape the current situation.

Hun Sen was born in 1952 and, as such, his formative years were influenced by the tumultuous circumstances that defined the late 1960s and early 1970s (i.e. Sihanouk´s fading power, Lon Nol ´s *coup d'état*, and the growing Communist influence). After having witnessed the devastation caused by the American bombing campaigns and Lon Nol´s crusade against the communists, the 18 years old Hun Sen decided to join the armed insurgency against the regime. While he claimed to be unaware of it at the time, this insurgency was lead by Pol Pot (the subsequent leader of the DK regime). Due to Hun Sen´s relatively high educational status (most soldiers were not even able to read), he soon advanced through the Khmer Rouge hierarchy. During his years in the Khmer Rouge, Hun Sen was involved in a number of military campaigns, and while he denies any involvement in some of the more atrocious episodes of the murderous regime, he remained a cadre until he defected to Vietnam in 1977. Whilst in exile, Hun Sen gained the trust of the Vietnamese and was given control of an exile force that eventually participated in the invasion that lead to the ousting of the Khmer Rouge (Human Rights Watch 2015: 6-22; Morgenbesser 2017: 5). After Khmer Rouge had been ousted, Hun Sen was appointed foreign minister of the newly established PRK regime (Morgenbesser 2017: 5).

Due to his political prowess, Hun Sen, once again, quickly advanced through the hierarchy of the party, and when the current leader passed away (in 1985), he was appointed Prime Minister (Morgenbesser 2017: 5). From his place at the apex of the political hierarchy, Hun Sen was in the best possible position to control and manipulate the modern patronage system that emerged during Cambodia´s economic transformation. His political privileges gave him the ability to amass personal wealth for himself and his family by appropriating the country´s

natural resources (Global Witness 2007, 2009, 2016); act as a gatekeeper for high office and appoint loyal followers to strategic positions within the state and its institutions; and, manipulate and control the societal institutions meant to hold leaders accountable (Un 2006: 231-233; Morgenbesser 2017:6-7). Building on such abilities, Hun Sen secured the loyalty of a number of key individuals – creating the group today loosely defined as "the ruling elite" (see for example Cock 2010b: 528-529) – and constructed a vast network of personal patronage connections that stretches throughout Cambodia´s entire societal foundation (Morgenbesser 2017: 11-12; Un 2006: 228-229). To understand Cambodia´s contemporary political context, it is, therefore, paramount to understand how the ruling elite is able to control the economy, the state, and the country´s accountability institutions.

5.1.3.1. Accumulating Personal Wealth and Cultivating Business Connections: Consolidating Influence Over the Economic Sphere

To amass the necessary wealth and loyalty needed to proliferate and sustain a vast modern patronage network, Hun Sen has secured a personal influence of Cambodia´s natural resources and its accompanying industries (Un & So 2009: 128). According to some reports, Hun Sen has used his position to allocate lucrative land concessions and timber plots to friends and family members (Global Witness 2007); grant close friends control over the country´s mining industry (Global Witness 2009: 17); and, made sure that he has a direct personal influence over the organisation that is responsible for all of Cambodia´s emerging petroleum activities (Global Witness 2009 36-38; Cock 2010b: 534-536). However, perhaps due to the diversified nature of the modern economy, a sole reliance on natural resources has not been enough to secure financial dominance and, during the years, the ruling elite has expanded the portfolio that assures that the country´s distribution of resources is heavily weighted in their advantage.

The expansion of the ruling elite´s business connections has, arguably, been based on a two-pronged approach. The first prong of the strategy has been aimed at proliferating the ruling elite´s, and in particular Hun Sen´s, personal business portfolio. While it has been difficult to survey the extent of his expanding family holdings, a recent report compiled by Global Witness (2016) has now given a first glimpse into the intricate web of connections and alliances that underpin Hun Sen´s personal business empire. Based on newly released data

from the Cambodian Ministry of Commerce´s corporate registry, the report suggests that Hun Sen´s family is in possession of a business portfolio worth, at least, around US$ 200 million, and that their realm of influence includes both well-known international brands and key national industries. Having found links to 114 registered companies, the report contends that Hun Sen and his family are personally involved in the country´s most profitable industries and that their influence spans over 20 different economic sectors (Global Witness 2016: 3-4, 10).

The influence from this personal business empire has then been further supplemented by strengthening the connections to the larger business community. This second prong of the strategy has been aimed at co-opting influential financial actors and convincing them to direct their loyalty towards the ruling elite. The main tool in this recruitment campaign has, arguably, been the reinvention of the *Oknha* title. By reinventing the *Oknha* title – an old Khmer title re-introduced in 1994 and awarded, by the leadership of the CPP, to individuals that contribute more than US$ 100 000 to "national development projects" – the ruling elite has created an "elite pact" where prominent business leaders and entrepreneurs, in return for economic support to the CPP, receive protection and business-related privileges (Un & So 2009: 127; Verver & Dahles 2015: 60-63, 65).

5.1.3.2 Building Alliances: Consolidating Influence over the State

Economic control does not, however, necessarily translate into political control, and to consolidate political influence, Hun Sen has assured that important societal positions are awarded to family members and loyal followers (Morgenbasser 2017: 6).

Family members, both those bounded by blood and those acquired through marriages, seem to be Hun Sen´s favoured alliance partners. When it comes to the immediate family, he has, for example, appointed his brother, Hun Neang, to be the Governor of Kampong Cham, member of CPP´s Central Executive Committee, and the Chairman of the Commission of Interior, National Defence, Investigation, Anti-Corruption, and Public Function of the National Assembly. Hun Sen´s oldest son, Hun Manet, commands the National Counter-Terrorism Special Force and holds three other notable positions within the army; his middle son, Hun Manith, is the Commander of the Defence Ministry´s Intelligence Department; and, his

youngest son, Hun Many, is the leader of CPP´s youth organisation and a member of the National Assembly. If we go beyond the immediate family, strategic alliances have also been secured by the aforementioned marriages. Hun Sen´s oldest daughter, Hun Many, is married to the director of the Central Security Department; his youngest daughter, Hun Mali, is married to the son of the, recently deceased, Chairman of Council Ministers; his niece is married to the Commissioner of the National Police; and, his nephew is married to the daughter of the Deputy Commissioner of the National Police (Global Witness 2016: 26-27; Morgenbesser 2017: 6-7).

In addition to family members, old friends and loyal followers have been used to further personalise the control over the state apparatus. Today, some of Hun Sen´s oldest friends are in charge of different military factions and paramilitary groups, and a number of people that proved their loyalty to him – including former bodyguards and soldiers – have either been promoted (Dara & Turton 2016) or given political positions within the CPP (Morgenbesser 2017: 6).

When these different alliances are put together, they begin to reveal the extent of the personal influence contained within the ruling elite´s modern patronage networks. Just this short overview of Hun Sen´s personal alliances indicates a direct influence over the upper echelons of the political sphere, the military, and the police – thus intertwining political domination with the coercive capabilities inherent in the military and police. In addition, his brother has, as we saw above, been put in control of the organisation responsible for stemming Cambodia´s endemic corruption. Such a placement could, according to some observers, be used to protect members of the ruling elite from corruption allegations (Morgenbesser 2017: 7) and, instead, transform the anti-corruption legislation into a political weapon that can be aimed at oppositional forces and people unwilling to conform to the current hierarchy (LICADHO 2011: 30-34; Informant D, 6th of April 2017). As one informant told me:

"Of course, that was the intention of setting up this institution [the new Anti-Corruption Unit]. We know that. They protect corrupt people… If it is a person from the ruling party he can be protected, and he if from the opposition, let´s take him on. It is a tool. Obviously, it is a tool." (Informant D, 6th of April 2017)

As will be discussed in more detail below, such selective impunity and legislative attacks are a common occurrence in Cambodia.

5.1.3.3 Keeping the Judiciary Weak: Consolidating Influence over Cambodia´s Accountability Institutions

Cambodia´s justice system has long been weak and tied to the ruling political regime (Un 2009: 74-75; McCarthy & Un 2017: 104-105). During the post-UNTAC era, a number of reforms have tried to steer the judicial system towards a more independent existence. However, due to what some would describe as a lack of political will (Un 2006: 229-231; Un & Hughes 2011: 202-204), these reforms have failed to make a significant impact. Instead, the judiciary has remained weak and open for manipulation, and the political elite has utilised these persisting features to subvert the judiciary to the logics of modern patronage. By keeping judges salaries low; allowing corruption to prosper and determine the allocation of lucrative positions; placing high ranking CPP members in charge of reform initiatives; and, ensuring that institutions meant to oversee the appointment of judges and ensure the independence of the court are controlled by people with connections to the elite – the ruling elite has co-opted the judiciary and embedded it within their patronage network (Un 2006: 231-233; Un 2009: 81-84; Un & Hughes 2011: 204; LICADHO 2011). Such control has turned the legal system into a political weapon that can be used to protect the elite and pursue those deemed to threaten their position (Un 2006: 231-233; McCarthy & Un 2017: 105-109).

In addition to the impunity it provides for members of the ruling elite (LICADHO 2007: 9-16), Cambodia´s legal system has been used to limit the scope of action for institutions and organisations that attempt to hold them accountable for their actions. In the past, journalist, opposition politicians, and other critical societal forces have been pursued, threatened, and killed without anyone being prosecuted for the crimes (Un 2011: 549-550, 552, 556-558; LICADHO 2007: 9-16). Politically targeted prosecutions have been used to further silence critics (LICADHO 2011: 21, 27, 34), and a combination of coercion and legal attacks have convinced many segments of the media, not already controlled by the elite – large parts of Cambodia´s media outlets are directly controlled by members of the ruling elite – that it is best to invoke some form of self-censorship (Un 2005: 552; LICADHO 2008: i-iii 24-25, 56). While there are some islands of independence and media outlets still able to criticise, many of Cambodia´s accountability institutions have either been subverted to the inducement of patronage or coerced into self-censorship.

Unfortunately, Cambodia´s recent trajectory suggests that legislative attacks on the freedom of expression will continue to be an influential part of the political landscape (McCarthy & Un 2017: 105). The *Law on Association and Non-Governmental Organisations*, for example, was passed in 2015 and has been widely criticised for restricting the freedom of expression of NGOs and hindering their ability to report on human rights abuses and other sensitive issues. In addition, new provisions for defamation and insult, passed in 2010, have resulted in an increased ability to arrest and prosecute government critics (McCarthy & Un 2017: 105-109). As the country now prepares for the upcoming elections – a commune election will be held in 2017 and the national election in 2018 – these provisions have been put into good use, and at the same time as violence has remained a present force (Dara et al 2016; Handley & Baliga 2017), a wave of lawsuits and legal attacks has been directed at oppositional parties (Chheng 2017; Sokchea et al 2017; Sockchea & Turton 2017; Turton 2017), human rights workers (Chheng & Turton 2016), and political analysts (Sokha & Kijewski 2017; Dara & Handley 2017). Thus, for the foreseeable future, at least, it seems as if the space for critical voices will remain severely restricted.

When the strategic use of legal impediments and impunity is added to the dynamics that characterise Cambodia´s modern patronage, the material foundations of the contemporary political context begin to emerge. By building on an existing foundation of traditional patron-client relations, Cambodia´s emerging elite transformed traditional protective structures into a mass patronage system where personal alliances and state capacities are intertwined, and a combination of inducements and coercion are used to elicit votes from an exploited population.

Coercion and inducements alone cannot, however, produce a stable order. The ability to construct some form of justificatory narrative is a vital ingredient. To really understand Cambodia´s political context it is, therefore, important to understand the historical and cultural imaginings that shape the collective consciousness and affect public perceptions of the contemporary order. In the following sections, such perceptions are explored by focusing on the evolution of Cambodia´s cultural underpinnings, and how these have been politically manipulated to construct a legitimising narrative for the dynamics of the modern patronage system.

5.2 Religion, Tradition, and the Political Re-articulation of Cambodian Culture

While religion and tradition have an important influence on Cambodia´s societal relations (Kimchoeun et al 2007: 53-55), the ideas that underpin the contemporary articulation of Cambodian culture have been engendered through a long historical process shaped by displacement, interference, and interactions (Ollier & Winter 2006: 1-2). It is, therefore, important to emphasize that the historical perspective I take does not imply an assumption of cultural path dependence. Here, I do not in any way suggest that the ideational domain of the Khmer consciousness is shaped by some kind of static cultural tradition that forms an unbroken chain with ancient ideologies. Such depictions miss important aspects of the dynamic process that shape Cambodian culture (Hughes & Öjendal 2006). Thus, to understand how cultural legacies shape the current consciousness, and how this might influence perceptions within the current political system, both traditional foundations and more recent transformations have to be included in the analysis.

Based on these premises, the following sections explore the origins, evolution, and manipulation of the cultural imagery that underpin current perceptions of what Penny Edwards (2007: 10-12) has called "original Khmerness", or simply "Khmerness" (i.e. characteristics and behaviour that are perceived to be important features of the Khmer identity). By tracing Cambodia´s cultural and religious evolution, I illustrate how the current perception of Khmerness has been shaped by ancient foundations, colonial encounters, and modern re-articulations. In this process, Khmerness has become associated with the ancestral brilliance of the Angkorean culture and a religious moral order that focuses on merit and individual acts and behaviour grounded in the Buddhist scriptures. Ultimately, these perceptions have been co-opted and turned into a political tool used to construct a legitimising narrative for a number of Cambodia´s post-DK regimes.

5.2.1 Constructing Khmerness: Ancient Roots

Many historical accounts might prefer to linger in the cultural grandeur of the Angkorean Empire, but the ideas that shape Cambodia´s contemporary culture have far more distant

origins. Around 2000 years ago, a cultural revolution, sometimes referred to as "Indianization", brought a slow but steady flow of religious beliefs and values from India to the Cambodian shores. Throughout this process, Hindu notions, beliefs, and perspectives on kingship and politics were embedded within the higher and lower levels of the societal strata (Chandler 2008: 13-18). At this point in history, Buddhist ideas coexisted with its Hindu counterparts (Harris 2005: 24-25), but within the small city states that were scattered around present-day Cambodia, kings used Siva and other Hindu notions to legitimise the reigning social order and their right to rule (Chandler 2008: 22-23).

As King Jayavarman II consolidated control over the northern areas of the country and laid the first foundations of the Angkorean empire (around the 9th century), Hindu notions continued to serve as the guiding principles, and this logic was subsequently adopted by a number of Angkorean kings. For large parts of the Angkorean era, kings were perceived to be patrons whose connection to the spiritual domain ensured enough rain for successful harvests; god-like entities that represented an ideal version of virtuosity and power; and, a central administrative figure in the reciprocal relationships that underpinned society (Chandler 2008: 39-54). Adhering to these perceptions provided most of the Angkorean kings with a protective legitimacy, and it was not until the 12th and 13th century that Buddhism began to establish itself in the consciousness of the upper echelons of society (Edwards 2007: 97).

The exact process that cemented the Buddhist influence is not known, but after having gained a more prominent role after 950 CE (Harris 2005: 4, 15), the religion began to prosper under the tutelage of King Jayavarman VII (r. 1181-1220) (Chandler 2008: 66). Under his rule, new legitimising principles, based on Buddhist notions, were introduced to the Khmer public and a new form of kingship emerged. Instead of claiming a special connection to Hindu deities, Jayavarman VII proposed that his right to rule was attributed to his extraordinary devotion to the Buddhist precepts and the meritorious behaviour he displayed (Chandler 2008: 66-73). After Jayavarman VII and the demise of Angkor, Buddhism remained an influential force in royal circles, and its popularity continued to grow. In time, Theravada Buddhism (the strand practiced in Cambodia today) overtook the earlier preferred Mahayana Buddhism, and the foundational principles of the Buddhist cosmology established itself within courts and villages (Harris 2005: 30-48).

The Buddhist cosmology that took root in 15th century Cambodia – and, as far as it is possible to discern from the scarce available evidence, remained relatively unchanged until the 19th century – was, however, shaped by the country´s religious history. Within 19th century Buddhism, new and old notions had been intertwined to form a number of syncretic articulations (Edwards 2007: 97; Forrest 2008: 16, 19-22). Perhaps building on the foundations laid by Jayavarman VII (see for example Chandler 2008: 66-73), Hindu notions of a divine monarchy with spiritual connections were intertwined with a karmic perspective that emphasised the societal force of *bon* (merit) (Harris 2005: 79-80). Merit, according to karmic theory, is a force – collected by benevolent and righteous acts during the continual process of birth and rebirth that define human existence – that determines roles within the social hierarchy (Hansen 2007: 20). Power, within this moral order, is connected to those with an abundance of merit, and since merit is accumulated through morally commendable acts, those with power are perceived to be entitled to the societal position they occupy (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox 2013: 10,11,14). As a result, kings were perceived to be sacred characters that gained strength from their superior merit (Harris 2005: 79-80), and the force of merit acted as an important organisational principle throughout the societal structure.

According to 19th century Buddhism, the history of the world was characterised by a process of decline and regeneration where its destruction and rebirth were connected to merit. Merit was thus a force that connected the interests of the upper and lower levels of society by constructing a moral order where righteous behaviour became connected to societal prosperity (Hansen 2007: 20-23). The king had a central role in this order, and was perceived as the protector of the realm and the guardian of morality. The righteous leader, underpinned by his superior merit, was meant to guide the population and lead society towards prosperity and moral development (Hansen 2007: 20-22, 33, 42). However, at the end of the 19th century, a new cultural force was introduced to the Cambodian public, and it was within the confines of this encounter that the foundations for the modern perception of Khmerness began to emerge (Edwards 2007: 7-8).

5.2.2 Constructing Khmerness: Modern Re-articulations

During the French protectorate, the Khmer social elite was suddenly faced with an occidental perspective of their own history and culture. The French brought their own perspectives and

interpretations, and when these imageries were projected to the Khmer, a new space for cultural transformation opened up (Edwards 2007: 8-12). Two particular articulations engendered in the encounter between French cultural imaginings and Cambodia´s pre-existing traditional foundations seem to have had a lasting impact on perceived Khmerness – the reinvention of Angkor and the modernisation of Buddhism.

As the French ravelled in their self-proclaimed discovery of the Angkor Vat temple complex, they proudly presented it as a symbol of national pride and heritage. While historical records suggest that this interpretation was a bit misinformed, and that Angkor was an important, and not forgotten, spiritual centre (Edwards 2007: 19-26, 125-129), this depiction did not match the narrative promoted by the French. According to them, Angkor Vat was the pinnacle of a lost civilisation that, under their tutelage, could be reinstated to its former glory (Edwards 2007: 2). The Khmer, within the French narrative, were distant descendants of a once grand civilisation that, through centuries of decline, now were in desperate need of protection (Chandler 1997: 35, 37-39). Based on these premises, an imagery portraying the bravery and glory of the lost ancient Khmer civilisation was disbursed throughout the architectural and cultural landscape. Over time, the spiritual roots of Angkor began to fade, and the temples were reinvented as a national symbol, and the greatness, skill, and bravery of those who built it were portrayed as the epitome of the proud Khmer population (Edwards 2007: 10-12, 51-53, 61-63, 150, 164-165).

The modernisation of Buddhism was not guided by the same direct colonial influence – religious influences from Siam and a growing internal will to adapt Buddhism to a modern context were more important factors (Harris 2005: 130; Edwards 2007: 95-96; Hansen 2007: 77) – but since it became intertwined with the emerging nationalist movement and the quest for independence (Edwards 2007: 220), it had an important impact on perceived Khmerness. The Buddhist modernisation movement wanted a more "rational" religion. Instead of "old superstitions", proponents of modernisation wanted a religion that followed the "true" words of the Buddha. In their eyes, the traditional manuscript culture that formed the basis of 19th century Buddhism – where merit was gained by reciting old scriptures (without understanding its content) – needed to be replaced by an order that placed a greater emphasis on individual acts and behaviour, and where everybody should be able to understand and live according to the true words of the Buddha (Edwards 2007: 104-106: Hansen 2007: 101, 178-181). Within this order, merit remained a vital organisational principle, and individual morality and

meritorious acts were seen as the true path towards a prosperous society. Such meritorious acts could, for example, include feeding monks, donating to the *Sangha* (the monastic community), building schools, participating in religious ceremonies, and providing for the poor (Jacobseb & Stuart-Fox 2013: 11). In the 1930s, modernist Buddhism became the dominating perspective (Hansen 2007: 178-181), and within the emerging nationalist movement, a new generation of intellectuals saw its fundamental principles as an important part of the Khmer identity (Edwards 2007: 95-97).

Within the nationalist movement, Khmer Buddhist modernist principles were intertwined with the reinvented myths and traditions that defined the ancestral brilliance of the Angkorean civilisation, and promoted as the fundamental traits of the Khmer identity. Through a variety of disbursement methods, including the newly established newspaper media, this imagery was eventually spread beyond elite circles and incorporated into the consciousness of the wider population (Edwards 2007: 7-8, 10-12, 210- 213, 218-221).

The perception of Khmerness would, however, not only serve as a unifying tool in the colonial independence movement. Its legacy has remained an important feature of the political landscape, and the imaginations associated with Khmerness have become an important political tool for all of Cambodia´s post-independence regimes (Edwards 2007: 249- 253). As will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections, the current regime is not an exception to this tradition, and the perception of Khmerness has played an important role in the legitimising narrative constructed to justify Cambodia´s modern patronage system.

5.3 Modern Patronage and Culturally Manipulated Justifications: Political Legitimacy in Contemporary Cambodia

Political legitimacy is a multi-faceted concept with both external and internal dimensions. External legitimacy is often connected to how the international community perceives a regime´s ability to comply with the rules and regulations that define a free and fair electoral process (Hughes 2009: 31-32) and, within the Cambodian context, this dimension has been pursued by superficially adhering to international stipulates, and by either implementing strategic reforms within areas that do not directly affect their power position, or ensuring that

reformed organisations remain within their control (Ear 2009: 163-165; Öjendal & Lilja 2009: 7-9; Un 2011: 551; Un & Hughes 2011: 199-202, 204-205, 208). Through this delicate manoeuvring, the political elite has been able to maintain the fundamental functioning of the modern patronage system that underpins their power, whilst still gaining enough external legitimacy to secure continued support from the international community (Ear 2009: 162-163; Cock 2010a: 242). However, while the elite´s exploits on the international stage are worthy of further scrutiny, my main focus here is on the dynamics of internal legitimacy.

In contemporary Cambodia, the underpinnings of internal legitimacy are not automatically associated with democracy. Instead, a number of studies have indicated that informal rules and conventions have subverted or re-invented many of the formal rules and regulations that are meant to guide political actions within a democratic system (Gyallay-Pap 2007: 75-81; Lilja 2008: 289-291; Lilja & Öjendal 2009: 300; Springer 2011: 2544-2545; Hughes 2013: 144- 146; Öjendal & Ou 2013: 374; Baaz & Lilja 2014: 5-8). As such, informal, or conventional, rules have remained a significant influence on the rules that govern power relations, and while electoral legitimacy appears to be relatively well established (Hughes 2009: 33) – i.e. that politicians accept that the basis of their power depends on an ability to get votes from the public – the ideas and behaviour that guide the pursuit of these votes do not conform to a democratic logic (Öjendal & Lilja 2009: 2-3). Understanding political legitimacy in contemporary Cambodia, therefore, requires a better grasp of the informal/conventional rules that underpin public perceptions. Such perceptions are, of course, hard to capture, but I contend that important insights can be gained by exploring a phenomenon that can be referred to as "Cambodia´s political theatre" (see for example Ledgerwood 2008).

5.3.1 Cambodia´s Political Theatre: Constructing the Foundations of Regime Legitimacy

A political theatre, as I define it here, is an umbrella term for the rhetoric and behaviour used to construct a legitimising narrative for the current political establishment. The values and traits attached to Khmerness have an important part in this process, and as will be discussed below, within Cambodia´s political theatre, Angkorean symbolism and Buddhist cosmological foundations have been manipulated, re-invented, and transformed into a

legitimising narrative that portrays the elite as capable protectors, guardians of morality, and righteous leaders that will guide the nation towards prosperity.

The first dimension of Cambodia´s political theatre is constituted by the projection of protection and menace. In a similar manner as Sihanouk once proclaimed to be the father of the nation, the contemporary elite is using a rhetoric that highlights the beneficial features of the traditional patron-client relationship and portrays themselves as the country´s protectors (Hughes 2006: 469-471, 479). As we saw above, trust in the protective character of the patron-client structure, or *Khsae* as it is referred to in Khmer, is still prevalent among the population. To elicit a sense of protection, backed up by menace, the elite, and Hun Sen in particular, has used an imagery connected to the perception of the traditional leader of the *Khsae*, the *Bong Thom* (big brother). The Bong Thom is the fair, but ruthless, leader of the traditional *Khsae* that offers protection and benefits to his loyal followers, but ensures that any acts of disloyalty or resistance will be met with harsh punishments (Hughes 2006: 470-471). Such ideas of morally condoned violence is a recurring theme in traditional Khmer tales, and the notion of justifiable violence still appears to be somewhat accepted by contemporary Cambodians (Edwards 2008: 216-218). Due to his personal influence over the military and police, Hun Sen certainly got the institutional means to back up the menace-related aspect of his image, and the consistent stream of public violence and intimidations that have been connected to his rule could have helped to cement this image in the public consciousness. For some, the current regime is associated with stability and peace, and their removal could result in a new wave of war and insecurity.

"Without Hun Sen we would have war. Because Hun Sen is a strong leader, others have no experience. Hun Sen is a hero. He can die for the people. He does not run away. He fights for the people" [my translation] (Informant H, 7th of May 2017).

Hun Sen himself promotes this perception, and has repeatedly suggested that a victory for the opposition could result in a new civil war (Sokchea & Dara 2017; Informant G, 7th of May 2017). Violence and fear thus, in quite a contradictory manner, seem to have become an aspect of legitimacy. By evoking the imagery connected to the *Bong Thom* – an imagery reminiscent of the leadership that is believed to have underpinned the greatness of ancient kings and the prosperous Angkorean civilisation – the elite is constructing a narrative that portrays them as the only leaders capable of retaining stability and order (Hughes 2006: 471, 479).

To further promote the protective aspect of their legitimacy, however, the elite has to show that they are capable of providing the population with material security and societal improvements (Edwards 2008: 221- 225). Studies of leadership and voting preferences have implied that the Khmer public is relatively uninterested in the ideological foundations of a political party (Hughes 2006: 479). Instead, the preferred leaders are those supported by the traditional perceptions of "righteous leadership" – an aspect explored in further detail below – and those who can prove that they are capable of delivering local improvements and material benefits (Vimalea et al 2009: 87-89; Baaz & Lilja 2014: 16). Many of the villagers I talked to expressed similar views.

"A good leader builds schools for the children, fix the roads and bridges, and help people when they need help" (Informant N, 9th of May). "Hun Sen is a good leader because he rebuilt the country after the Khmer Rouge. Before we had nothing, now we have hospitals, bridges, cars and motorbikes" (Informant I, 8th of May 2017). "If some place needs help, he [Hun Sen] will be there. If someone is poor, if the pagoda is poor, he will help them too" (Informant J, 8th of May 2017) [my translations].

Hun Sen seems to be well aware of such perceptions and, through what can be considered an elaborate self-promotion attempt (Hughes 2006: 472; Edwards 2008: 224), he has orchestrated a number of "personal" development initiatives. These initiatives range from small-scale ceremonial handouts of money and supplies to large-scale infrastructural projects that, among other things, have covered the geographical landscape with buildings bearing his personal monogram. Through closely directed ceremonies broadcasted to the public by the elite-controlled media apparatus, Hun Sen and other members of the political elite, are shown interacting with a grateful public overwhelmed by the personal generosity they display (Hughes 2006: 472-478; Edwards 2008: 220-221). In a style reminiscent of both Jayavarman VII´s and Sihanouk´s early use of the patron-client system, Hun Sen´s "personal" projects (often founded by foreign donors or wealthy allies) have been used to portray him as the benevolent benefactor that works tirelessly to protect his loyal followers (Hughes 2006: 472-478). This imagery has traditional roots, and the meritorious acts that the elite displays are meant to invoke a sense of righteous leadership promoted by the merit-based Buddhist cosmology (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox 2013: 18). The "gifts" bestowed upon the public gain a certain amount of moral authority from Cambodia´s cultural legacy – a legacy that emphasises the role of merit and the socially binding force of reciprocal gift-giving (Nissen 2005: 50-55; 2008: 275-276) – but under the tutelage of the current political regime, this

tradition has been reinvented and turned into a large-scale secular operation meant the project a sense of merit-based legitimacy (Hughes 2006 472-478: Edwards 2008: 220-225). By continuously projecting expressions of their personal generosity and selfless commitment to the public, the elite is promoting a narrative that portrays them as the personal patrons of Cambodia´s development, and illustrates how they, through the superior merit they possess, have the capacity to guide the country towards prosperity (Heder 2012: 104; Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox 2013: 18-20).

Such appeals to the traditional perception of "righteous leadership" are recurring themes in Cambodia´s political theatre. In addition to the reinvented gift-giving tradition, Hun Sen has, for example, tried to enhance his personal "moral legitimacy" by inventing a narrative that connects him to the revered 16th century King, Sdech Kan (Heder 2012: 104; Norén-Nilsson 2013: 4). Sdech Kan, the quintessential *neak mean bon* (man of merit), was a king that rose from humble beginnings and, through his personal prowess, earned his place at the throne by overthrowing a cruel and unjust ruler. Guided by his fairness and superior merit, he quickly gained the trust and admiration of the population and helped to usher in a sustained period of national prosperity (Norén-Nilsson 2013: 6-8, 11-12). In a presumed attempt to benefit from the perception and collective memory of Sdech Kan´s righteous leadership, Hun Sen has repeatedly emphasised the similarities with his own life story and rise to power. Building on, and in some cases inventing, such similarities, Hun Sen has tried to portray himself as the modern *neak mean bon* and the righteous leader of contemporary Cambodia (Norén-Nilsson 2013: 4-8, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20-21).

On a somewhat larger scale, the righteous leadership of the elite has been promoted by incorporating the *Sangha* (the monastic community) into the political theatre. The Buddhist community has, historically, been a force capable of placing some restraints on the political elite´s use of power (Kent 2003: 3). However, even though the Buddhist discourse can still be used to challenge the current social order (Marston 2009: 247-248), within the modern political context, the social role of Buddhism has increasingly been subverted to the interests of the political elite. Instead of aligning elite behaviour to the Buddhist precepts (as has been the traditional role of the *Sangha*), representatives of the Buddhist community are now used to construct a religious legitimacy for the modern behaviour that underpins the elite´s power position (Kent 2003: 2-3; 2006: 354-355; O`Lemmon 2014: 38). In this process, prominent monastic figures have been co-opted into the overarching patronage networks of the elite and,

through a combination of intimidation and inducements, convinced to convene the elite´s political messages (Kent 2006: 354-355; Marston 2009: 246).

To further emphasise their moral authority, the elite has also co-opted the religious space of the pagoda. In recent years, the elite presence within the pagoda sphere has increased, and by becoming major sponsors and leading figures in merit-making activities, many pagodas have been transformed from spaces of religious devotion to spaces of political manifestation and spiritual propaganda (Kent 2003: 18-21; 2007: 342-352; O´Lemmon 2014: 38-40).

When these tactics are put together, it illustrates the kind of moral legitimacy that the elite is trying to evoke through their political theatre. To construct their invented morally legitimising narrative, people and spaces imbued with moral superiority have increasingly been co-opted, and the authority of these institutions has been used to portray the elite as patrons of religion and guardians of the morality that upholds the Buddhist cosmology.

Cambodia´s political theatre, then, can be conceived as an elaborate attempt to construct a legitimising narrative for the dynamics that define the modern patronage system. As we have seen, the re-invented traditional myths and modernised religious foundations that underpin the historically constructed perception of Khmerness have become a recurring theme in the elite´s attempts to justify the contemporary order. Through these elaborate cultural manipulations, the ruling elite has been able to construct a veil of traditional legitimacy for the exploitative patronage system that underpins their power. By drawing on the notions inherent in the historically constructed perception of Khmerness, they have tried to portray modern patronage as a mutually reciprocal protective relationship, elevate themselves to a position of national patrons, and co-opt features of the Buddhist belief system that defines them as righteous power holders.

To what extent this political theatre is believed by the Khmer public is, however, questionable (Hughes 2006: 482; Kent 2006: 350-351; O´Lemmon 2014: 40-49; Norén-Nilsson 2016: 795, 814). Khmer people are not just impressionable spectators easily fooled by the loud and bright distractions showed towards them by the elite and their political theatre. The aftermath of the 2013 election, for example, indicates that the population is becoming more aware of the injustices and inequalities emanating from the current social order (Informant B, 4th April 2017; Informant D, 6th April 2017). Gift-giving as a form of large scale vote-buying is now

largely dismissed by the public (Informant B, 4th of April 2017; Informant C, 5th of April 2017; Informant D, 6th of April 2017) and, while every villager I were able to talk to still believe that Hun Sen is a man with a lot of merit (because he would not have reached his position without it) (Informants F-O), the negative aspects of his rule have now begun to influence perceptions. Some, including a local monk, even suggested that, if he did not change his behaviour, his supply of merit would soon be emptied (Informant G 7th of May 2017; Informant M, 9th of May 2017; Informant O, 9th of May 2017).

However, while Khmer people are becoming more aware of the political underpinnings of the elite´s culturally manipulated tropes and tactics (Norén-Nilsson 2016: 795, 814), this heightened awareness might not become the transformative catalyst that is hoped for. As could be said about so many social phenomena, the strength of its impact does not emanate from a singular force; it is engendered through the combined effects of many different forces acting in conjunction with each other. For Cambodia, the culturally manipulated political theatre gains its strength from its entanglement with the very real forces that constitute the modern patronage system. When the ruling elite's cultural manipulations are added to the material foundations of the political system, it creates an institutionalised social order that combines threats of violence with promises of protection and an invented, but still very much present, appeal to a higher moral order. Such a context, even if its premises are not internalised and completely accepted by everybody, provides the population with very few available means of rejection and spaces of contestation (Hughes 2006: 488-489).

Political legitimacy, therefore, needs to be understood and analysed in the light of the fear, hopes of protection, and belief in the Buddhist moral cosmology that underpin public perceptions of the current system. Based on the information presented throughout this paper, it could be argued that it is these three pillars – fear, protection, and moral authority – that intertwine to form the foundations of political legitimacy in contemporary Cambodia. The logics inherent in Cambodia´s modern patronage system have engendered a set of established governing rules that combine a superficial, but accepted, electoral process with an underlying dynamic where access and maintenance of power are reliant on an ability to build and cultivate extensive networks of exploitative patronage. Through a combination of violence-induced intimidation and promises of protection, the elite has constructed a legitimising narrative that connects political stability and prosperity to the preservation of their political rule. Many Cambodians might be aware of the invented character of this logic, but as long as

the elite is capable to finance the cohesion of their patronage networks and provide enough evidence to the public of how their righteous rule is guiding the country towards prosperity, the legitimacy of the reigning social order can be maintained. Appeals to righteous leadership are an important part of the elite´s political theatre, and by reinventing the country´s cultural and traditional heritage, they have constructed a culturally manipulated belief system that supports the actions and behaviour that underpin their power. Finally, through carefully directed ceremonies and widely broadcasted gift-giving rituals, the public is presented with a consistent flow of people expressing their consent for the contemporary political establishment.

Thus, to remain a legitimate political force, the contemporary elite needs to: 1) project a sense of state cohesion and protective capability – a sense maintained through the modern patronage system; 2) maintain an, at least superficial, support for their political theatre; and, 3) through the state controlled media outlets, convince the public that there is a widespread consent for their rule. In the end, this articulation of political legitimacy can give us some important insights into the conductivity of different forms of development initiatives.

6. Political Legitimacy and Development in Contemporary Cambodia

While many development initiatives, worldwide, fail to produce pro-poor outcomes, the ruling elite´s quest for political legitimacy can be used to get a better understanding of the factors that hinder this process in Cambodia. Seen through the prism of political legitimacy, it is, for example, not very surprising that externally promoted strategies that emphasise the virtues of "good governance" have produced such meagre results (see for example Ear 2007: 68; 2009: 151-153; Un & Hughes 2011: 208; Hughes 2013: 144-146). Successful implementation of these policies – i.e. achievement of pro-poor development outcomes – relies on a fundamental change in Cambodia´s modern patronage system (since it could be argued that it, due to its inherent tendency to exploit the poor and drain resources away from the public domain, is an important structural cause of the country´s poverty). However, since the protection and maintenance of the modern patronage dynamics is an integral part of the elite´s legitimacy, any overarching attempts at reforming the foundations of this system will most likely be met with severe political resistance.

Previous experiences support this inference. Attempted reform within areas that affect the foundations of Cambodia´s modern patronage system have had very limited impacts, and, in some cases, regression has been a more prominent result than improvement (Ear 2009: 173-175). After almost two decades of internationally sponsored good governance reforms, Sophal Ear (2007, 2009), for example, has concluded that, despite having spent billions of dollars, these strategies have failed to make a significant contribution to both Cambodia´s governance situation (with the exception of political stability) and the state of poverty within the country (2007: 68, 76-78; 2009: 157-159). He even suggests that the continued flow of international aid, even with the accompanying requirements of good governance, has made a more significant contribution towards preserving the current order than it has done to change the exploitative structures that underpin it (Ear 2009: 159-165).

Others have drawn similar conclusions (Cock 2010a), and years of attempted institutional reforms within the upper levels of the Cambodian state apparatus have produced few encouraging tendencies (Un & Hughes 2011: 200-201). As was discussed earlier, reforms of the judiciary have been skilfully managed, manipulated and subverted to the overarching patronage system, and it could be argued that this process has been reproduced within other areas of the state. Reforms within the land and natural resource management sector have, for example, produced few tangible improvements. Due to its central role in the maintenance of elite legitimacy, powerful political actors have a strong interest in keeping this sector from becoming an independently operating unit. To counteract reforms that would undermine their influence, new institutions and regulatory frameworks have been created in accordance to the demands of reformers and the international community, but the people placed in charge of these mechanisms are directly connected to, and controlled through, the *Khsae* of the ruling elite. Such superficial changes allow the elite to project a sense of compliance and progress, whilst still remaining firmly in control (Un & So 2009: 128-129; Un & Hughes 2011: 206-208, 218; Un & So 2011: 289, 306-308).

As these examples illustrate, Cambodia´s political context, and the foundations of political legitimacy it engenders, can have a significant impact on the conditions for certain forms of pro-poor development policies. In contemporary Cambodia, development policies that aim to achieve pro-poor developmental outcomes cannot, or at least, should not, be solely focused on overarching governance reforms. Such efforts can easily be manipulated and reoriented to conform to the existing governance structures that define the modern patronage system. Since collective interests, according to the dynamics inherent in the social organisation of power, most likely will be met in ways that contribute to the preserved legitimacy of the ruling regime, top down governance reforms only work against, not with, the forces that characterise Cambodia´s political context. Political legitimacy in contemporary Cambodia is persevered by promoting a sense of fear, protection, and moral authority; not by striving for some abstract democratic ideal. Within this context, convincing the public that the stability and prosperity of the country rely on the elite´s protection and righteousness is more important than living up to the societal ideals promoted by the international community.

Cambodia´s articulation of political legitimacy does not, however, necessarily only engender developmental obstacles. Turning its limitations into possibilities, though, would require strategies that are adapted to work within, not only against, the modern patronage system.

Such strategies are of course difficult to envision, especially from an outside perspective, but some initial insights can be gained by examining areas where important progress has actually been achieved. The reform of Phnom Penh´s water management system provides one such potential example (Hughes 2013: 146). The leader of that particular project, Ek Sonn Chann, was a high ranking member of the CPP, and through his involvement in, and knowledge of, the logics of the political system, the dynamics of modern patronage could be turned into an organisational advantage. By rearticulating donor rhetoric and aligning it with a more familiar local imagery, at the same time as he used his personal connections to isolate the project from further political interference, Ek was able to frame the project in a manner that both complied with donor requirements and that was perceived to be unthreatening to other members of the indigenous elite. Ek´s reforms also happened to correspond to the elite´s legitimacy building strategy. At that time, CPP were in the midst of orchestrating an extensive "beautification" of Phnom Penh – meant to invoke a sense of emerging prosperity and progress – and an improved water supply fitted neatly into the imagery they tried to project. Combined, an intricate knowledge of the political system, an ability to avoid undermining the influence of other elite actors, and the alignment with the pursuit of political legitimacy, allowed Ek to establish a functioning organisation and improve water access throughout the capital (Hughes 2013: 146-148).

Other influential development schemes have followed a similar pattern (Un & Hughes 2011: 208, 215-218), and while it is not possible to reproduce the exact conditions that made these reforms successful, they provide some important insights into Cambodia´s developmental realities. Within this reality, development efforts that adapt to work within the modern patronage system, avoid obvious attempts at undermining established patterns of influence and power, and are framed in ways that, at least perceptually, contribute toward the legitimacy of the ruling elite, are more conductive and able to make a substantial impact. This is perhaps not the most compelling development alternative – especially due to the exploitation and atrocities attributed to the ruling elite – but, based on the dynamics of the current political context, it might be the most pragmatic.

While it will be difficult to design development efforts that correspond to these criteria, the ruling elite´s quest for political legitimacy provides a potential opening. Since political legitimacy is built on notions of fear, protection, and moral authority, the elite continuously needs to convince the public that they have the capability to preserve stability and moral

order, and guide the country towards increased material prosperity. At the very top of the social hierarchy, such notions are reinforced through ceremonies, rituals and rhetoric that promote their inherent Khmerness, but this theatre cannot be sustained without tangible improvements at the local/village level. This has been especially prevalent in the post-2013 electoral landscape. After the 2013 election (where CPP suffered some surprising losses), the elite has been forced to change their political approach, and this has meant that they have, at least to a higher extent, tried to align their strategies with the needs and priorities of the electorate (Informant B, 4th April 2017; Informant C, 5th of April 2017). To fulfil the contemporary ideals of righteous leadership, the benevolent benefactors now have to prove their ability to improve the conditions for their supporters – a sense echoed in the perception of the villagers I was able to talk to. For both the young (Informant M, 9th of May 2017; Informant N, 9th of May 2017) and the old (Informant L, 8th of May 2017; Informant J, 8th of May 2017), good leadership was associated with improvement of their immediate material environment. In short, the elite´s legitimacy is, despite the exploitative dynamic of their rule, intrinsically intertwined with the ability to project a sense of material improvement at the local level. Thus, to evoke notions of stability, protection and progress, the elite needs to produce, or at least evoke a perception of, improved local conditions. Since this change usually falls outside of their own personal domain, this pressure is diverted to lower level public servants. These local authorities are the ones that manage a majority of the contact with the population (Craig & Kimchoeun 2011: 224-226), and to retain and strengthen the legitimacy of their superiors (and by extension their own positions), local officials are pressured to deliver more effective local governance and material improvements (Sedara & Öjendal 2009: 114; Un & Hughes 2011: 199-200).

Within Cambodia´s modern patronage system, local representatives are thus given a development mandate (Hughes et al 2011: 248), and their proximity to the villagers, their local knowledge, and their personal connection to the spatial domain, are all factors that could contribute to the hypothetical developmental potential of these agents. Unfortunately, reality does not always corresponds to hypothetical ideals, and local authorities have, for a number of reasons explored in more detail below, not been able to live up to their development potential. However, unfulfilled potential aside, development strategies that utilise the role, expectations, and capacity of local authorities could represent an avenue of improvement that is both aligned with the elite´s quest for political legitimacy, and capable of providing pro-poor developmental outcomes.

6.1 Strengthening Local Development Capabilities in a Modern Patronage System: Possible Problems and Potential Possibilities

Before I venture into the potentials and problems with local authorities, it should be reiterated that the premise of this paper has only been to explore Cambodia´s political context and the foundations of political legitimacy it engenders, and use this information to explore the conditions for pro-poor development policies. Based on the information that I have been able to gather, Cambodia´s political context creates a situation where overarching good governance reforms will, most likely, continue to have a very limited impact on the structural causes of poverty, whilst development strategies that attempt to strengthen, and work through, local authorities, represent a promising avenue of improvement more capable of producing pro-poor developmental outcomes. Such initiatives conform to Cambodia´s articulation of political legitimacy – since they represents development efforts that correspond to the ideals and imageries that underpin the perceptions the elite want to project to the public – and could, therefore, be more conductive to Cambodia socio-political reality. Whit that said, to pretend that I, at this point, have enough information to speculate about a specific strategy that could be used to strengthen local development capabilities, without only contributing to the perpetuation of an exploitative and corrupt elite, would be both naïve and potentially misleading. More research is needed before it will be possible to make such conclusions. What can be done at this stage, however, is to, at least briefly, try to weave together insights from existing research on the subject and explore the most prevalent obstacles and promising tendencies.

Local authorities – i.e. the commune and village levels of the government (Hasselskog 2009: 192) – are, as most other areas of Cambodia, affected by the country´s turbulent history. Originally established in the 1920s as a part of the French administrative reforms, the local government has long been perceived to be a coercive instrument of the ruling regimes. Subsequently, local authorities have suffered from a lack of public trust, and despite some recent perceptual transformations, a lingering sense of suspicion continues to surround these organisations (Hasselskog 2009: 199-200; Sedara & Öjendal 2009: 114-119; Hughes et al 2011: 246-249). However, despite the local government´s complicated history, the idea of

decentralisation reforms is not new, and since it was first introduced in 2002, the commune election has reshaped the local governmental landscape. Today, the local government is comprised of a commune and village level. The former level is governed by a multi-party council, headed by a commune chief appointed by the political party that gets the most seats in the commune election. The multi-party council appoints the village chief, and together, this group is in charge of the administration and development of the commune (Hughes et al 2011: 246-249). An important part of this mandate is to produce the commune´s development budget (Craig & Kimchoeun 2009: 220-221; Hughes et al 2011: 248). Unfortunately, a number of different factors intertwine to limit the developmental capability of commune councils.

Chronic underfunding, low organisational capability, unclear assignment of duties, corruption, and an inherent lack of trust, have all been mentioned as prominent reasons for the inefficiencies of local authorities (Hasselskog 2009: 194-200; Sedara & Öjendal 2009: 118-119; Informant A, 4th of April 2017; Informant B, 4th of April 2017; Informant E, 21st of April 2017), but the problems do, arguably, go deeper than this. Despite being spatially distant from the epicentre of political power, local representatives are not detached from its influence (Sedara & Öjendal 2009:121; Craig & Kimchoeun 2011: 219-226). Breaking this attachment has proved to be quite difficult. The strings that connect local actors to their national patrons are long and durable, and this has made the decentralisation process slow and sporadic. Even at the local level, powerful individuals have an interest in preserving the current order, and due to their connections, they have the capacity to co-opt and circumvent decentralisation reforms (Hughes 2013: 149-153).

In some ways, the repercussions of the Seila program illustrate this inherent problem. The Seila programme, introduced in 1996, was an internationally sponsored decentralisation effort. The programme wanted to improve the relationship between the local government and the population, and believed that by strengthening the capability of local authorities, these units could be transformed into accountable development agents. Working on these premises, Seila introduced a number of mechanisms designed to encourage a more participatory development model and make rural villagers an integral part of the planning process (Hasselskog 2009: 192-193: Sedara & Öjendal 2009: 108). Unfortunately, politically vested interests complicated the implementation process and many of the reforms were co-opted and manipulated by influential local actors (Hasselskog 2009: 206; Hughes 2013: 153), and the

resulting improvements were used to support the elite´s legitimising narrative (Hughes 2013: 149-151).

In contrast to reforms of national level governance, however, the political co-optation of local reforms has evoked a more tangible sense of dissatisfaction within villages. When local leaders abuse their power, the local community has both better reasons to react – because it affects their immediate existence and livelihood – and better means to protest (Hasselskog 2009: 207, 210-211; Sedara & Öjendal 2009: 117). Increased scope for dissatisfaction and the relative proximity of local leaders open up a possible zone of contestation (Hasselskog 2009: 210-213), and it is here that potential possibilities begin to emerge. While the Seila program had some problems – organisational difficulties and trust deficiency being the most prevalent issues – it illustrates how local authorities have, at least, potential to become development agents that, in contrast to national leaders, could be held accountable for their actions (Hasselskog 2009: 194-206, 210-213). The programme also showed that some factions of the local government embraced their new developmental role. While this faction did not represent the majority, such attitudes could, in the long run, have an important impact on the expectations and demands the public places upon their local authorities. If one local authority is able to provide services and improvements for their community, others should be able to do the same (Hasselskog 2009: 215). Such perceptions are indeed becoming more prevalent (Informant E, 21st of April 2017), and studies have suggested that local villagers now, for example, see the commune election as an important tool that can be used to remove unpopular leaders and, in the end, increase their influence over how local resources are spent (Sedara & Öjendal 2009: 109, 117).

"The commune elections have done a lot. Today, these elections can be used to remove unpopular leaders and party candidates, and we have done research that show that the decentralisation reforms have improved the relationship between the local population and the local government. And now, after a few elections, I think that commune councils are more starting to side with the population. The local level politics are now more positive." (Informant B, 4th of April 2017)

Changing local expectations and attitudes, increased ability to question local leaders, and a greater influence over how resources are spent are all promising tendencies. As Seila illustrated, through decentralisation and more development oriented local authorities, it is possible to create a new space for local contestation and resistance, and within this space, ideas and attitudes that challenge inequalities and injustices can be allowed to prosper and,

eventually, spread throughout the collective consciousness of the village (Hasselskog 2009: 214). So, while development efforts that aim to strengthen and utilise the development potential of local authorities will contribute to the ruling elite´s legitimacy, they also have the potential to engender attitudes and expectations that can become catalysts for long-term transformative change (Hasselskog 2009: 217; Sedara & Öjendal 2009: 122-129). This potential is important. In a country where public space for contestation and resistance are increasingly limited (Hughes 2006: 488; Informant A, 4th April 2017), a better ability to challenge local inequalities and injustices is a promising tendency.

Turning this promising tendency into substantial progress, however, will depend on a delicate negotiation between the self-interests of the elite and the ability to slowly, and over time, introduce mechanisms that can protect and nurture local expressions and influence. Stronger and more development oriented local authorities will, based on the political legitimacy pursued by the elite, most likely be a policy supported by the upper echelons of power. For the people at the top of the political hierarchy, the local government represents an integral part of the legitimising narrative, and an enhanced ability to deliver local improvements will contribute to the imagery they want to promote. For those who work toward less politically self-centred goals, this somewhat contradictory conflation of interests (in the sense that both parts have a genuine interest in improved local conditions), represents a promising avenue of influence. To utilise the developmental space this opens up, however, requires tools that are adapted to work within the lower levels of Cambodia´s modern patronage system. Based on the findings presented here, the construction of such tools would be a path worth pursuing further.

7. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have explored Cambodia´s political context as historically located totality engendered by a long historical process characterised by both continuity and change. Using this meta-theoretical point of view facilitates for an investigation that focuses on how material and ideational forces have interacted throughout history and, eventually, slowly stabilised to construct the institutionalised characteristics of the contemporary political system. By analysing Cambodia´s political context in this manner, it is possible to discern how historical legacies have evolved into the modern setting. This evolution does not represent a continuation of ancient governance or a simple transfer of traditional values into a modern bureaucracy. There has been a genuine transformation; a fundamental change in how societal relations operate. While an existing foundation of patron-client relations, and a trust for the protection this provided, were important organisational principles in pre-DK Cambodia, the emergence of the current ruling elite and their manipulation of the country´s economic transformation reconfigured the logics of patronage. Old patron-client structures were transformed into a mass-patronage system where the political elite survived by protecting each other, not the people. As the democratic transformation introduced an electoral basis of power, the logics of modern patronage were adapted to continue its existence within the new system. The new institutions gave the political elite an opportunity to expand their influence and – by placing friends, family and loyal followers in crucial positions within the institutional structure – consolidate power over the state and its adjacent institutions. Under these circumstances, an elaborate network of mutually beneficial relations was allowed to prosper and embed itself throughout Cambodia´s societal structure. Today, Cambodia´s elite continues their rule through a mass-patronage system that builds on corruption and exploitation, but that has been adapted to use a combination of violence, intimidation, and material inducements to gain enough votes to secure electoral victories.

The ability to justify methods by reference to tradition and religion have become an important aspect of Cambodia´s political context, and it is, arguably, in this intersection between

modern patronage and cultural manipulation that the perceptions that underpin political legitimacy have been engendered. Within Cambodia´s political theatre, traditional values and religious beliefs have been manipulated and re-articulated in a deliberate attempt to construct a legitimising narrative for the contemporary elite. Building on the Buddhist notions and traditional symbolism that have shaped the public perception of Khmerness, the elite has engendered an articulation of political legitimacy that is constructed around notions of fear, protection and moral authority.

The political system, and the political theatre that supports it, has now become an institutionalised feature of contemporary Cambodia. Through a long and complex historical trajectory, the material and ideational domains have been formed and transformed, and through the intervention and manipulation of the dominating social force – the ruling elite – eventually stabilised in the current articulation. Unfortunately for the Khmer population, this articulation is not a beneficial one. However, that does not mean that it is possible to simply ignore it or think that shallow reforms will suddenly change the fundamental features that underpin the ruling elite´s position. Based on the findings presented in this paper, it is ineffective, and perhaps even counterproductive, to continue to assume that overarching, national-level, governance reform will be the panacea for Cambodian development. Due to the internal dynamics of Cambodia´s modern patronage system, such organisational reforms are open for political co-optation and manipulation. The implementation of overarching good governance reforms might produce a superficial change in the organisational structure, but the underlying power relations will remain unchanged. Organisational reforms can even be turned into a political weapon used to perpetuate the rule of the elite.

Substantial change, therefore, must come from below and work through pre-existing societal frames. Conducting development work within Cambodia´s modern patronage system will probably always be a precarious undertaking, but the ability to progress could, at least, be improved by acknowledging its specific features, and trying to understand the constraints and possibilities it provides. Here, I have suggested that development initiatives that work through local authorities represent a path that both corresponds to Cambodia´s articulation of political legitimacy, and that, in a longer perspective, could be able to produce pro-poor development outcomes. This path is, however, fraught with difficulties, and to be able to utilise the possibilities it provides, more research is undoubtedly needed. Future studies need to delve deeper into the dynamics of local governance. The bonds between the local and national level

need to be more accurately mapped, the local impact of the political theatre needs to be further understood, and the everyday work of local authorities needs to be further explored. By doing so, future studies can hopefully reveal new insights and tools that can be used to work within, not only against, Cambodia´s modern patronage system.

With that, I am not suggesting that we should simply accept the exploitation, corruption, and cultural manipulations that characterise contemporary Cambodia, but if the leadership wants to play a theatrical political game, learn the rules – learn to play along. Do not introduce your own rulebook and expect that everybody will begin to play by your rules. Subverting to the logics of localised dynamics does not mean a complete abandonment of what is considered right and fair (whatever that now might be), it represents an attempt to adapt to the reigning circumstances and work better within the conditions that actually exist. If this paper has been able to make a small contribution to this kind of thinking, it has served its purpose.

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Informants

Informant A, Country Manager at an International NGO, Interviewed 4th of April 2017
Informant B, Cambodian Researcher, Interviewed 4th of April 2017
Informant C, Employee at a Foreign Mission, Interviewed 5th of April 2017
Informant D, Executive Director at an International NGO, Interviewed 6th of April 2017
Informant E, Employee at a Foreign Mission, Interviewed 21st of April
Informant F, Woman, 17 Years Old, Student, Interviewed 4th of May 2017
Informant G, Male, 35 Years Old, Monk, Interviewed 7th of May 2017
Informant H, Male, 60 Years Old, Deputy Village Chief, Interviewed 7th of May 2017
Informant I, Male, 45 Years Old, Teacher, Interviewed 8th of May 2017
Informant J, Woman, 69 Years Old, Retired Farmer, Interviewed 8th of May 2017
Informant K, Woman, 69 Years Old, Retired Farmer, Interviewed 8th of May 2017
Informant L, Male, 66 Years Old, *Achar*, Interviewed 8th of May 2017
Informant M, Male, 25 Years Old, Forest Manager, Interviewed 9th of May 2017
Informant N, Woman, 25 Years Old, Cashier, Interviewed 9th of May 2017
Informant O, Male, 29 Years Old, Working in South Korea, Interviewed on 9th of May 2017