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A Reply to Nation, Modernisation and Civilisation: Development and the Emergence of a Transformed Cambodian State by Jolynna Sinanan

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Genocides do not have end-points. The Cambodian genocide did not *begin* on April 17, 1975 when Khmer Rouge forces entered the capital city of Phnom Penh. Rather, the genocide began in the many events leading up to that fateful day. Nor did the genocide *end* on January 7, 1979 when Vietnamese forces captured Phnom Penh. Instead, the legacy of the Cambodia genocide remains *to this day*. It is seen in the lengthy process of rebuilding and it is experienced daily by the survivors who attempt still to come to grips with the aftermath of one of the twentieth-centuries most horrific moments.

And yet too often the genocide is bookended by these dates. The on-going tribunal, the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia, for example, has explicitly, deliberately, artificially limited its purview to these three years, eight months, and twenty days, thereby restricting our understanding of the historical causes and consequences of the genocide. Jolynna Sinanan's paper attempts to move beyond such historical myopia, addressing as she does the trajectory of 'development' within contemporary Cambodia. Her paper is extremely salient, in that she considers explicitly how perceptions of development, modernity, and the legacy of genocide impinge on the meaning of being 'Khmer' in the twenty-first century.

Identity is always and already a relational process. The meaning of being Khmer was transformed by and during the period of French occupation; likewise, the meaning of being Khmer was transformed by the Khmer Rouge. As Sinanan articulates, Cambodia's relationship to its own understanding of both modernity and national identity is ambivalent, complex, and, arguably, *feared*. Why this is so is worth exploring further.

Within Democratic Kampuchea, as Cambodia was renamed by the Khmer Rouge, the *worth* of a person—despite the prevalence of Marxist rhetoric—was not equal. Rather, the Khmer Rouge constructed an assemblage of different classes, different forms, of people: base people, new people, and so on. Furthermore, these constructs could literally mean the difference between life and death, as the Khmer Rouge instituted policies that either allowed or disallowed life to the point of death, given one's 'standing' within society. Accordingly, the notion of Khmer identity was exceptionally complex—and fluid—throughout the genocide. Khmer identity, indeed, was ultimately differentiated by the perceived worth of the person.

One might argue that a similar process holds within contemporary governance. Sinanan argues that the Khmer Rouge attempted to construct Democratic Kampuchea predicated on a particular reading of Khmer history and culture; likewise, current attempts to promote development through modernization are based on the building of

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a functional, technocratic society that may participate competitively within the global market economy. In both cases, Sinanan argues, there exists an underlying anxiety of the meaning of being Khmer. I would suggest, however, we consider more closely the *worth* of a person and how this bio-arithmetic calculation impinges on life (and death) within Cambodia. As Sinanan writes, under the current trajectory of development there is little room to incorporate local identities, relations of power, social organization, and forms of knowledge into the development process. One must acknowledge the historical and geographical ambivalences of 'Khmer-ness'; the continuities and discontinuities of 'being Khmer'; and how these differentiated articulations matter, whether one is addressing the violence of genocide or the violence of development.