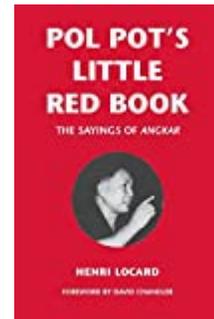




Henri Locard. *Pol Pot's Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar.* Chang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005. xvi +336 pp. \$18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-974-9575-56-7.



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The Constitutive Discourse of the Khmer Rouge

The Khmer Rouge governed Cambodia from April 1975 to January 1979 and can be truly called one of the most brutal regimes of the twentieth century. However, understanding Khmer Rouge ideology and its impact on Cambodian society is often difficult to discern because the regime's leaders did not create any major manifestos.[1] That is why Henri Locard's book, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar*, is such an important text for understanding the political thought of the Khmer Rouge.

Locard provides the reader with a group of sayings and slogans that he collected over four years, 1991-1995, from survivors of the Khmer Rouge's regime, as well as snippets from speeches by Khmer leadership. His text is an exemplar of what rhetoricians call "constitutive rhetoric" or a discourse that gives people a sense of identification.[2] All nation-states have narratives that serve as pillars of creation and reification which are told and retold within historical texts, monuments, and popular myths. Typically, this discourse is so well known to citizens that it becomes an unconscious part of daily political and cultural life. Constitutive rhetoric, there-

fore, is the discursive background of social life for a particular people. The slogans used by the Khmer Rouge provide a form of constitutive discourse. These slogans were rooted in Maoist ideology and Cambodian cultural mythology. However, until now they were never compiled into a specific text for the people to study en masse. Rather, since Cambodia is an oral culture, the Khmer leadership and their surrogates spoke them on a daily basis. The Khmer Rouge interpellated ordinary Cambodians through continuous rote instruction.

Locard's book is composed of an introduction, six chapters, and an epilogue. The introduction provides an understanding and a justification for why the author chose to use slogans and sayings from the memories of survivors. As Locard put it, "the entire doctrine of Pol Pot and his entourage ... is to be found in the slogans in this book—they immediately bring us into the center of the Khmer Rouge universe" (p. 5). The introduction also provides a brief history of the Cambodian civil war of 1970-1975, which led to the overthrow of the monarchy.

Each of the next six chapters deals with a particular theme found within the slogans, which are then further

broken into sub-themes. The substantive chapters give the reader a “‘macabre, bare-bones,’ ‘chemically pure’ ideology of the Angkar” (p. 1).[3] Chapter 1 is composed of sayings that were in praise of the regime. Chapter 2 recreates the considerable influence that Maoism had on Khmer Rouge ideology. Chapter 3 relays slogans about the regime and their tactics for keeping power. Chapter 4 discusses how the Khmer Rouge conveyed who were considered enemies of the people. According to the Khmer leadership, enemies were everywhere, even within one’s own immediate family. Chapter 5 discusses slogans relating to work, which was one of the primary directives from the Khmer Rouge to all Cambodians: you must work hard, the time of pleasure and vacation is over. Chapter 6 tells us how the Khmer Rouge attempted to convince Cambodians to think of themselves, not as individuals, but as part of the overall collective. The needs of the collective, not the individual, were of the utmost importance for society. Finally, the epilogue provides a short summary of the book, succinctly noting how these slogans were meant to dehumanize Cambodians to a point at which they were satisfied to be mere cogs in a revolution and give up their souls for the glory of the *Angkar*.

The advantages of this text are numerous, but I will only mention two here. First, it presents an excellent ideological window into a regime that has long been clouded in mystery. *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book* clarifies the motivations of the Khmer Rouge and the repressive revolution that resulted in the deaths of two million people during its forty-five month reign. This repression, as Locard highlights, should rightly be called “politicide” or “autogenocide” rather than genocide. Genocide is traditionally thought of as the slaughter of a particular ethnic, racial, or religious group, while politicide or autogenocide is the killing of enemies of the political system. The Khmer Rouge did not kill any particular ethnic group. Instead, their enemies were externally the KGB, CIA, and the Vietnamese and internally, intellectuals, government officials, city dwellers, and those that did not totally give themselves over to the revolution. Locard presents the reader with slogans that painted a discursive portrait of how the Khmer Rouge constructed their enemies and ordered their eradication.

I was asked to review this text because of my knowledge of rhetorical theory and criticism, which leads me to the second advantage of this book. For readers like me, who have little expertise on the Khmer Rouge, genocide, and Southeast Asia, Locard’s text provides an important introduction into the world of the Khmer Rouge, their ideology, and the culture of Cambodia.

That said, Locard’s analysis of the slogans seems a bit glossy at times. He often groups slogans together, offering a translation, but no analysis of the text itself, or its specific cultural or Maoist roots. Locard certainly does provide that analysis for a number of slogans and passages, but as a rhetorician, I wanted more discursive analysis than what he sometimes conveyed. In addition, if you want an in-depth analysis of the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian civil war, or the specifics of this period of politicide, this text does not provide it. What it does provide is an important understanding of both the roots and the constitutive appeals of the Khmer Rouge, which in turn reveal the true motivations of one of history’s most repressive regimes. I would recommend it to anyone who would like to begin or round out their understanding of the Khmer Rouge and the general power of discursive constructions.

Notes

[1]. Books such as Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and Mao Zedong’s *Little Red Book* can provide insight into the ideology of a particular regime.

[2]. Maurice Charland. “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of People Quebecois,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): pp. 133-150.

[3]. According to Locard, the word Angkar was an all-encompassing term for the Communist Party leadership of Kampuchea (CPK), which included Pol Pot and the other leaders of the CPK. Angkar simply meant organization, but the organization was depicted as being everywhere and nowhere at the same time. The slogans present a mental picture that the Angkar was ever-present in Cambodians’ lives. Thus, you must always be vigilant for the revolution and act with caution, for fear you may be declared an enemy of the Angkar.

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