**To what extent was Khmer Rouge ideology significant in causing the Cambodian genocide of 1975-1979?**

**CRITERION B: INVESTIGATION**

Khmer Rouge ideology was largely significant in causing the Cambodian genocide of 1975-1979, particularly the idealistic policies put in place in order to achieve a purist communist regime. However, there were also other factors that contributed to the mass killings in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge inferiority complex against ‘oppressor’ countries fueled the pursuit of an unrealistic rate of economic growth, taking many lives. Heightened paranoia against internal enemies also led to a purge of ‘traitors’. An alternate perspective of the genocide views the personal motivation of Khmer Rouge cadres to be primary cause of the mass killings.

The Khmer Rouge’s inferiority complex against countries that had previously ‘wronged’ Cambodia was one of the causes of the 1975-79 genocide.  Accumulated resentment against former “corrupt oppressors” (Hinton) led the Khmer Rouge to pursue an unrealistic rate of growth as a form of revenge to prove Cambodia’s worth. Pol Pot saw Vietnam as the source of all Cambodia’s problems (Chon) as she and Thailand had invaded multiple times (Wood), seized lower Cambodia, and was the cause of American bombing (Hinton). Chomsky states that the 500,000 tons of bombs America deployed on Cambodia between 1969 and 1973 not only accelerated the Khmer Rouge revolution, but also strengthened their extremist ideology (154). Cambodians had paid the highest taxes in French Indochina (Chea in Chon), and resentment caused anyone with ties to the old regime to be killed without trial (Mey). The Cambodian inferiority complex led the Khmer Rouge to “go [develop] faster so the enemy could not attack” (Chea in Chon). In order to outdo other communist countries to prove Cambodia’s superiority (Nhem), the Khmer Rouge made a “bizarre attempt at self-sufficiency” (Garraty). The Khmer Rouge copied Mao ZeDong’s Great Leap Forward (Hinton) and Yugoslavia’s labour camps (Chea in Chon). However, impractical demands to pursue an over-ambitious rate of modernisation (Nhem) caused the death of 1.7 million Cambodians (Mey) through overworking, malnutrition and disease (“One Spoon of Rice”). This inferiority complex helped give birth to the purist, nationalistic Khmer Rouge ideology, which was the main cause of the Cambodian genocide.

Khmer Rouge ideology was the most significant factor of the 1975-79 Cambodian genocide.  It was the impractical idealism of creating a perfect and pure Cambodian society (Hinton) that caused the deaths of many (Garraty). The Khmer Rouge wanted to establish the first truly communist society ("1966-1985 Historical Background") and “start over” (Chea in Chon) by eliminating the corruption they experienced as children in Cambodia. Pol Pot declared Year Zero and Cambodia was renamed Kampuchea ("1966-1985 Historical Background."), symbolising the annulment of 2,000 years of ‘wicked’ Cambodian history and the return to former Angkor Empire glory (Chon). A policy of “social cleansing” (Nhem) was put in place in order to eradicate “all urban and educated classes” (Mey). Those considered ethnically or politically impure were massacred (Wood), including those who complained, were ill or had unauthorised sex (Garraty). The Khmer Rouge set unrealistic goals to achieve a truly communist self-sufficient peasant community (Mey). Cities were forcibly evacuated and thousands died in the marches to the countryside ("1966-1985 Historical Background") due to exhaustion and lack of water (“One Spoon of Rice”). Districts were ordered to achieve an impossible 3-tons-per-hectare target, and the export quota was maintained no matter how much districts had fallen short of the target. This caused the death of tens of thousands through malnutrition and lack of healthcare (Nhem). Therefore it was the impractical Khmer Rouge ideology that was most significant cause of the Cambodian genocide.  The pursuit of a purist communist society caused the deaths of many, and sparked a paranoid purge of ‘enemies’ to the regime.

Internal enemy paranoia was another factor of the mass killings in Cambodia. ‘Traitors’ within the party were seen as “the worst” (Chea in Chon) form of enemy to the country. Anyone labelled a traitor would be killed without question, as “they would spread” (Chea in Chon) and “rot society” (Hinton) if allowed to live. Criticism sessions were often held to root out ‘traitors’, but trivial offenses such as eating fruit in secret would be blown out of proportion into “economic crimes” (Chea in Chon). This caused many to starve and overwork in order to avoid being labelled a ‘traitor’ and be subject to punishment (“One Spoon of Rice”). Paranoia grew and “everyone became a suspect” (Hinton), so in fear for their own lives, no one defended the innocent (“One Spoon of Rice”). Cambodians fought to outdo each other in proving their loyalty to the party (Hinton) in order to withstand the purge of supposed ‘traitors’. Khmer Rouge zone leaders exaggerated values of agricultural output to three times the target output (Chon), causing ‘surplus’ food to be sent to China while peasants starved and died of sickness. People were forced to confess to crimes and name accomplices (Hinton) despite their innocence, by beatings and electrocution (Mey). For every ‘traitor’ killed, more would be named (Chea in Chon) as torture caused the innocent to agree to crimes in a state of psychosis. Mey states the soldiers at S-21 had no choice but to make him confess despite his innocence, as “they [too] would be killed if I didn’t” (35). Internal enemy paranoia caused the Khmer Rouge to encourage the execution of traitors, and nearly everyone was seen as a suspect (Hinton).  This led to the frenzied massacre of Cambodians who were labelled traitors, in order to achieve the purist society the Khmer Rouge detailed in their ideology. Despite the significance of ideology in causing the Cambodian genocide, it is possible that many were killed not due to explicit Khmer Rouge policies, but rather due to the personal movitation of individual Khmer Rouge cadres.

An alternative perspective to that proposed by simplified secondary sources suggests personal motivation to kill was the primary cause the Cambodian genocide. An excerpt from the trial of Khmer Rouge S-21 jailer and executioner Duch suggests the possiblity that often the ground-level cadres were “acting without knowledge” (Chief Judge Nil Non in Mey 48) of higher tiers of the party when inflicting punishment. Duch insisted only hand dynamos were used on ‘traitors’ to extract information, whereas Mey, a S-21 execution centre survivor, states his interrogators used electricity from the socket. Hinton argues in his genocidal study *Why Did They Kill?* that local Khmer Rouge cadres had their own motivations to kill; primarily for revenge on the soldiers of the preceding Lol Nol regime. This hatred was transferred onto ‘city people’, whom they killed “even though Pol Pot didn’t tell them to kill” (Hinton). Hinton goes on to suggest many cadres used ‘following orders’ as an excuse to kill, psychologically displacing blame onto authority figures. Therefore perhaps the Khmer Rouge killed not due to explicitly outlined ideological commands, but due to personal motivations such as revenge or to gain face (Hinton). Nuon Chea supports this view, claiming leaders of the Khmer Rouge were nationalistic and ruled for the good of the people (Chon). Chea states the party had no policies to kill innocent people, nor overwork and starve them (Chon). Chea knew Cambodians had to work hard under the new regime, but believes ‘enemies’ disguised as zone leaders “went too far” and “did not listen” to advice given by top leadership (Chon). Chea insists that although leadership were aware of food shortages, they were unaware of the extremity of starvation and punishments alike (Chon). Therefore the Khmer Rouge cadres personal motivations to kill may have been a crucial cause of the 1975-79 genocide. However, such motives were only actualised with the aid of Khmer Rouge ideology, which encouraged the killing of those considered ‘enemies’.

In conclusion, Khmer Rouge ideology is the major cause of the Cambodian genocide of 1975-79. Although the Khmer Rouge inferiority complex against oppressors and paranoia against internal enemies were also causes of the genocide, these elements were embodied in their ideology. The role ideology played in the Cambodian genocide is heavily emphasised in all relavant sources. Another possible factor of the killings is the personal motivations of Khmer Rouge cadres. This is a less determinist view as it takes into account human individuality, and is supported by more detailed but subjective primary sources, as well as scholarly human behavioural analyses of the genocide. Despite this, individual motives to kill could only be sanctioned through Khmer Rouge ideology, making ideology the most significant cause of the 1975-79 Cambodian genocide.

who deliberately tried to massacre their own race, whereas primary sources were much more objective and considered a range of factors that sparked the genocide. More academic Western secondary sources written recently also suggested that ideology was not the only basis for the genocide, but pointed to factors such as timing and personal desire for revenge. Despite this, I felt that every cause of the genocide could be tied into ideology, as they were either precursors or results of Khmer Rouge philosophy. Deliberately or not, it is inevitable that historians are selective in their portrayal of historical knowledge. In an attempt to counteract this fact I attempted to use a wide range of sources to present a more objective perspective about several causes of the Cambodian genocide.

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