Chapter 12

Klepto-Neoliberalism

Authoritarianism and Patronage in Cambodia

Simon Springer

In response to the financial crisis of the 1970s the Wall Street–Treasury nexus, in concert with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, sought to reconstruct the global power (im)balance by attempting to eliminate any inklings of collectivism in the global South through the imposition of brutal forms of economic discipline. For some this represents the heart of neoliberalism, which has been considered as a class reaction (Harvey 2005). Yet to focus our attention exclusively on the external forces at play in the constitution of neoliberal ideas risks contributing to an overgeneralized account of a universal and singular political economic idea, which insufficiently accounts for the abundance of local variegations that currently comprise the neoliberal project as a series of articulations with existing institutional contexts and cultural forms. The nascent language of 'neoliberalization' (England and Ward 2007) responds to this ubiquitous view by instead encouraging a geographical understanding that recognizes neoliberalism's hybridized forms as it shapeshifts along its travels around our world. This more nuanced interpretation was first advanced by Peck and Tickell (2002), who insisted that neoliberalism is not merely an end-state, but rather a varied series of processual, protean and promiscuous phenomena that occur both 'out there' and 'in here', with diverging and irregular effects, yet still recalling an overarching 'logic' owing to its spatial diffusion. With such an appreciation of neoliberalization in mind we can better understand the consequences of inherited historical contexts, institutional frameworks, geographical landscapes, policy regimes, regulatory practices and ongoing political struggles as repeatedly reconstituting neoliberalism through unfolding processes of articulation (Peck 2001; Smith 2007).

Cambodia offers a useful example of neoliberalization insofar as this transitional process to a free market economy was actually a predetermined outcome of the United Nations peace agreement of the early 1990s (UN 1991).

The country's transition was predated by three decades of war during the latter part of the twentieth century and a genocide that resulted in the deaths of 1.5 million people at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime (Kiernan 1996). Less well known is that another nightmare of comparable magnitude preceded the Pol Pot holocaust. In an effort to ostensibly flush out Viet Cong forces thought to be operating within Cambodian territory, between October 1965 and August 1973, the United States carpet-bombed Cambodia despite the country's proclaimed neutrality (Owen and Kiernan 2006). The protracted bombing campaign killed approximately 600,000 Cambodians (Kiljunen 1984), and in the hindsight of history, it served as the most effective recruiting tool of the Khmer Rouge, who promising to end the bombing and liberate the country from American imperialism seized power on 17 April 1975. When Pol Pot's troops finally fell to Vietnamese forces on 7 January 1979, 10 long years of silence followed at the international level (Chandler 2008). Throughout the 1980s Cambodia was effectively under the suzerain control of Hanoi, who ran the country as a client state. As Cold War geopolitics were central to the foreign policy objectives of global North governments at the time, Cambodia and its genocide were ignored. It was not until the Iron Curtain fell in 1989 and the global political climate shifted that the Cambodian question could finally be answered, as the Khmer Rouge continued to terrorize the population from their stronghold along the Thai border. The United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC) was tasked with presiding over a 'triple transition' from a brutal state of war to a tenuous peace, from overt authoritarianism to an unconsolidated 'democracy' and from a command economy to a particular version of free market neoliberal economics.

Elsewhere across the global South, neoliberal economics were initially promoted as a series of nostrums that, once implemented by unleashing market forces, would supposedly improve the lives of people from all walks of life. In spite of the obvious character of imposition in Cambodia's neoliberalization, this particular context also clearly reveals that powerful elites were all too happy to accommodate the entrance of markets. Neoliberalism frequently initiates opportunities for well-connected government officials to informally manipulate material and market rewards, thus enabling them to easily enrich themselves in the process. It is precisely with respect to this sense of the local appropriation of neoliberal ideas that we must move beyond conceptualizing a 'neoliberalism-in-general'. Neoliberalism never represents a singular or fully realized policy regime, regulatory framework or ideological form, and so we must necessarily work towards conceiving a multiplicity of 'actually existing neoliberalisms' with particular characteristics ascending from shifting geohistorical consequences that are entrenched within regional, national and local process of market-driven socio-spatial change (Brenner and Theo-

dore 2002). What constitutes 'neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics' as distinctly Cambodian are the ways in which patronage has enabled local elites to transform, co-opt and (re)articulate neoliberal reforms through a framework that has focused on 'asset stripping' public resources (Springer 2010). As a system of hierarchical relations that are woven through the political economy of Cambodia starting with the Prime Minister and extending down through every level of government to the village, the patronage system offers rewards for those who capitulate and punishments for those who refuse its logic. The result has been to increase Cambodians' exposure to corruption and violence, as neoliberalism works in concert with authoritarian means. While some scholars have insisted on focusing exclusively on an extraneously convened neoliberalism as a means of critique (Thavat 2010), they risk ignoring the local geographies of existing institutional frameworks and political economic circumstances, where internal constitution, individual agency, variability and societal influences all play a role in facilitating, circulating and (re)producing neoliberalism. Indeed, neoliberalization in Cambodia has been characterized by considerable contestation, inconsistency and concession. It is to such a notion of relationality and struggle that this chapter is attuned, where, in addition to offering empirical context to some of my more theoretical work on the violence of neoliberalism (Springer 2012, 2016), the local circumstances of individual neoliberalizations are understood as connected with global processes of neoliberalism.

I begin this chapter by considering the Royal Government of Cambodia's (RGC) discursive positioning of populism vis-à-vis international 'enemies' inasmuch as it presents a convenient pretext for the tensions of neoliberal development. This discussion critiques the frequent suggestion that the RGC maintains a 'communist' outlook rather than recognizing the kleptocratic 'shadow state' practices that have been modified to accommodate a neoliberal modality. I then turn my attention more specifically to the mechanisms of Cambodia's patronage system via an analysis of privatization and primitive accumulation. I assess these developments through a critique of the purview that legal reform will somehow serve as cure-all for development, contrasting this idea with the realities of a judiciary firmly entrenched within patron relations. The degree of political patronage in Cambodia reflects a certain nepotism, or what I am calling '*nepoliberalism*' to reflect a particular application of neoliberalism that is never without the influence of patron politics. The enduring impunity of those with connections to power is the concentration of the final section before the conclusion, where I assess the continuing constraints of the poor with regard to patronage and the inequality and precarity it affords. It is here, in the question of (in)security, that Cambodia's neoliberalization alongside patronage demonstrates the depth of kleptocracy and violence in the country.

THE ENEMY INSIDE: NEOLIBERAL DISCOURSES IN THE SHADOW OF THE STATE

In positioning itself as a populist government, the RGC frequently uses the tightly controlled Khmer language media (LICADHO 2008) as a vehicle for criticisms of the international financial institutions (IFIs) and bilateral donors, which it often depicts as 'enemies' to Cambodian interests.[1] This discourse recalls the same general premise that existed in Cambodian politics under the Khmer Rouge, when paranoia for 'enemies of the revolution' was widespread and became one of the key ideas in the resultant genocide (Kiernan 1996). When employed against local opponents, the notion of 'enemy' (*khmaang*) has offered a rationale for much of the overt political violence that has marred elections and democratic process. In contrast, when this idea is used against the international community, the language of 'enemy' (*setrov*) is less accusatory, only ever voiced in Khmer, and does not suggest that this opponent will be stamped out.[2] Those reservations about the donor community that are conveyed in the local media are largely representative of the bravado of Prime Minister Hun Sen, where his intended audience is homegrown. This approach helps his government maintain a certain degree of popularity with its electorate, but also mobilizes a useful scapegoat when the strains of neoliberalization become particularly acute.

The rural population represents the primary power base of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), even though this is also the location that benefits least from neoliberalizing processes as uneven development proceeds. This geography is explained by the fact that those limited state provisions and benefits of development that do 'trickle down' to rural areas are not considered by many Cambodians to have been sourced from the state. Instead, such development is often confused as originating from the ruling party, and particularly as having come from Hun Sen. This conflation of the CPP and the state is not incidental as major infrastructure projects almost always bear the monogram of Hun Sen and a CPP party sign, even when the money originates from state coffers (Hughes 2003). The enmeshment of the CPP within the RGC has been so thorough that many Cambodians have difficulty identifying a difference between the two. This strategy of confusion works well with respect to the RGC's symbolic hand-washing from the negative effects of neoliberalization. The idea of neoliberal reform being an imposition spearheaded by foreign geopolitical interests and foreign corporate greed that works in concert with the mediations of Cambodian elites is avoided, as Hun Sen and the CPP instead present themselves as benevolent benefactors and the champions of Cambodia's development, even as they are able to misappropriate state revenues through the 'shadow state' (Reno 1995). Such an arrangement is obviously

advantageous for Cambodian elites because it obscures the way in which neoliberalism's ideological formation evolves through a variety of spatial settings, including its articulation with local political economic circumstances, in this case the patronage system. In my other work I have attempted to show how Cambodian donors, and indeed many scholars of Cambodia, use a reflection of the discourse mounted by Cambodian elites when they suggest that the tensions of neoliberalization are outcomes of explicitly 'local' political economic conditions, and in particular a 'culture of violence' (Springer 2015). Within this discourse there is little consideration afforded to 'global' political economic circumstances, giving us an incomplete picture that is reductionist with respect to the political economic complexity that comprises neoliberalization in 'actually existing' circumstances of articulation.

Adding to the discursive misperceptions, Cambodians often describe Cambodia's state form as communist, a claim repeated by some scholars who point to the country's historical legacy and swollen bureaucracy. For example, Craig Etcheson (2005: 143) has argued that although the CPP 'publicly abandoned socialism along with command-and-control economic policies [in 1989] … [it] did not … abandon its internal Leninist structures and procedures, which it retains to this day'. Yet Cambodia's bloated bureaucracy and internal party structures are not enough to suggest that they are 'Leninist', a problematic characterization that is assumed rather than actually explained by Etcheson. Instead, they are distinctly Cambodian and they should be considered as one of the key characteristics of neoliberalism in the country, contrasting with notions of 'small government' that are typically connected with neoliberalism in other contexts. These structures speak to Cambodia's patronage system, which offers the underpinning to the government's 'legitimacy'. While neoliberal ideology would have us believe that such patronage will be eroded as the mechanism of the market comes to dominate social relations, the Cambodian experience instead actually shows how patronage becomes strengthened and entrenched (Slocomb 2010). The adoption of a neoliberal configuration by high-ranking government officials in Cambodia is largely owing to its latent potential to provide them not only with enrichment, but also with the ability to influence the monetary channels of investment and privatization in ways that only those embedded within their systems of patronage can receive any direct benefit. This condition is essentially a question of how power is oriented in Cambodia, which rather than being an open and transparent system of exchange, neoliberalization in the country is caught up in the murkiness of shadow state politics, where kickbacks are a mandatory component of its substantive 'roll-out'.

The case of the homegrown company Sokimex is demonstrative of the shadow state in Cambodia. Founded in 1990 to coincide with the country's

transition towards a free market economy by close associate of Hun Sen and local tycoon, Sok Kong, Sokimex is Cambodia's largest business conglomerate, repeatedly receiving preferential treatment in obtaining lucrative government contacts under a veil of secrecy and non-disclosure on its accounts (Cain 2009). The company is notable in terms of its diversity, maintaining a broad portfolio that includes business ventures in petroleum importing, import-export services, construction, garment manufacturing, a service station chain, hotels, property development, transportation industries, a domestic airline, an exclusive contract to supply the Cambodian military with fuel and clothing, rubber plantations and the concession to manage ticket sales to Angkor Wat (Cain 2009). Sam Rainsy, official leader of the opposition, has publicly chastised the relationship between Sokimex and the ruling party, calling it the 'financial pillar for the ruling CPP', where 'you cannot make the distinction between Sokimex, the CPP, and the State. The CPP apparatchik is inextricably intertwined with the State. Sokimex was doing business not only for, but in the name of the State' (quoted in *The Phnom Penh Post* 2000). Such questions are longstanding, where for example in early 2000 four MPs aligned to Sam Rainsy sent a letter to Hun Sen requesting clarification about the government's relationship with Sokimex. In their response, the RGC indicated that the only reason it appears to favour Sokimex is the company's proven track record, praising them as being highly competent and always fulfilling contractual obligations. Yet this sanguine assessment is questionable given Sokimex's history of shoddy construction projects (*The Phnom Penh Post* 2000). While the transfer of ownership from the public to the private sector maintains the ostensible goal of making public holdings more efficient, capable and profit generating, the Cambodian characteristics of neoliberalization modify this idea through the country's patronage system. Instead, efficiency and competency are of little concern, and the primary motivation becomes profit for well-connected powerbrokers (Barton and Sokha 2007b; Un and So 2009).

The overarching contextualization of policy response in Cambodia is framed by ongoing poverty in a country having only recently emerged from decades of war and genocide. This violent geohistorical context is effectively the initial 'shock' (Klein 2007) that enabled neoliberalization to emerge as the supposed panacea for Cambodia's problems, while the Paris Peace Accords and UNTAC established the general legal framework in an attempt to ensure an 'idealized' state form through which later neoliberal reforms could be realized (UN 1991).[3] The institutions and agencies engaged in the evaluations of policy are multiple in Cambodia, including ministries, local and international NGOs, as well as multilateral and bilateral donors. While the relevant Cambodian ministries are usually responsible for oversight, the di-

rection of programme and policy orientation primarily flows from the wishes of the international donor community, only to be revaluated and reinterpreted by Cambodian elites as they invent ways to guarantee their privileged positions remain unobstructed. As neoliberalization is increasingly viewed as an opportunity to secure both political and monetary power, the motivating logic of any given reform policy must follow the general principle that it offers something of 'value' to established elites.

NEPOLIBERALISM: PRIVATIZATION, RULE OF LAW AND ACCUMULATION BY PATRONAGE

The ability of the Cambodian elite to cement their positions of privilege is demonstrated by the leasing of the rights to collect admission on national monuments such as Angkor Wat and Choeung Ek to private ventures (Kea 2006) and the abundant land swap deals involving central Phnom Penh and Siem Reap locations where institutional facilities, such as ministries and police headquarters, are exchanged for cash and privately held lands on the periphery of these cities (Wasson and Yun 2006). While the NGO community has criticized transfers of public holdings to private investors as examples of unpopular policies where corruption of the neoliberalization process has occurred (Lesley and Sam 2005; Ghai 2007), such practices continue unabated. Unsurprisingly, as these processes unfold, the bulk of financial remuneration mysteriously disappears from state ledgers and the value of public assets are purposefully underestimated, which is effectively theft from the commons. Land speculation in particular has been haunted by the spectre of primitive accumulation under Cambodia's neoliberalization, where over the past 20 years private investors have either purchased or leased an astonishing 45 per cent of the country's total land area (Global Witness 2009). Opposition leader Sam Rainsy is broadly in support of a pro-market orientation, yet he has also stated publicly that should he be elected as Prime Minister he will nationalize the millions of hectares of land that has been illegally acquired by businesspeople through land swaps and land grabs (Sokchea 2008). In contrast, Cambodia's donors have long advocated that a cadastral property system be put in place, which means a bounding and ordering of all of the country's available space into the structures of private ownership backed by legal rights and obligations. Rather than calls for redistribution of the land that has been acquired through questionable means, the emphasis in Cambodia is on further legal reform. The RGC has facilitated this focus inasmuch as it provides an enormous opportunity for enrichment through the networks of patronage, as this system's circuits have infiltrated the judiciary, guaranteeing that legal

processes are always understood in ways that advantage well-connected powerbrokers (Ghai 2007; LICADHO 2007a).

Conditions of patronage in Cambodia produce considerable violence, as those without its securities are often forcibly removed from their lands where and when speculation establishes a monetary value. Speculation alone triggered a major eviction in Mittapheap District, Sihanoukville, when 105 families were violently removed from their village on 20 April 2007. The land they had lived on uncontested for the previous two decades—thus granting them legal ownership rights under Cambodian law—was now an area demarcated as a 'development zone' (LICADHO 2007b). Tourism in the area had increased substantially around that time, and prior to the global financial crisis that began in 2008, offshore oil exploration had threatened to turn Sihanoukville into a boomtown economy, heightening speculative activities even further (McDermid and Sokha 2007). I interviewed evictees from this village in June 2007, and people complained of the complicity that local CPP officials had in their precarious situation, pointing to the patronage system as the root of the problem since the local village and commune chiefs were aligned to the CPP and blamed the villagers for their own evictions. They noted how there was support from local officials around election time when they needed something from the villagers, but outside of the campaign period officials were otherwise absent, unavailable and disinterested. Villagers also noted how they felt the village and commune chiefs were profiting off of their eviction. Given the significant media attention that has been placed on land grabbing, one would be inclined to think that investor ethics would slow the pace of violent evictions. Yet the reality is that evictions are taking place under the pretexts of 'beautification' and 'development' (Brickell and Springer 2016; Springer 2015), where local tycoons initially acquire the land in question and only subsequently offer it for lease or sale to private foreign companies (Amnesty International 2008). Nevertheless, the drive for profits outstrips concerns for human wellbeing as at least 10,000 families have been evicted from Phnom Penh over the last decade to make way for various development projects. As for the residents, they usually never receive any money in compensation for the loss of their homes and are only occasionally offered resettlement (*The Phnom Penh Post* 2008).

Companies frequently exploit the services of the military and police as private armies to carry out evictions. In response the donor community has made repeated calls for respect of legal norms, and a deepening of the rule of law so that less 'dubious' investors (meaning foreign) will want to become involved in the country. Unfortunately, the problem with this emphasis is that the protections offered by law primarily revolve around securing the stability of a property system, where human security is relegated to a secondary

concern. Elsewhere I have argued that the property system in Cambodia can be understood as a mechanism that affords legitimacy to processes of violent accumulation (Springer 2013). In effect, respect for the rule of law in accordance with donor standards would only function to entrench the violence of Cambodia's evictions by obscuring its underlying character of primitive accumulation through rendering this process legitimate. The fundamental difference with the current situation is that adherence to the rule of law, and the dissolution of the patronage system that neoliberals theorize such respect would engender, levels the playing field between Cambodian elites and their foreign counterparts with respect to access to the means of accumulation by dispossession. This is the crux of neoliberalization's desired objective from the standpoint of donors, while neoliberal reform is something Cambodian elites will accept only when it is clear that they alone stand to gain.

When the condition of financial reward is not met or somehow jeopardized, there is usually a prolonged stalling process on legislation in Cambodia. The adoption of Cambodian children by foreigners offers a case in point, where obstruction tactics by the RGC are very clear. In 2001, while investigating adoptions, Cambodian officials at the highest levels of government were accused by US immigration officials of complicity in scams that involved hundreds of babies and millions of US dollars (Cochrane and Sam 2005). The result was that a number of counties placed moratoriums on adoptions from Cambodia, while members of Cambodia's international donor community such as the United States, Canada and France had been pressuring the RGC to adopt legislation that will regulate adoptions in light of fears over human trafficking. Aside from concerns over children being bought and sold, another major goal of an adoption law on the part of the donor community was to build confidence in Cambodia's legal system and the rule of law, conditions that would work to enhance investment (Development Partner's Consensus Statement on Governance 2008). For years the RGC stalled on this issue based on the requirement by donors that a 'fixed price' on adoption processing be established. Depending on the connections of the individual facilitating the adoption processing fees range from being essentially free up to tens of thousands of US dollars. International agencies are charged higher rates than local facilitators, while prospective parents negotiating the process themselves are not required to pay, but must instead navigate much longer wait times and fend off repeated requests for bribes from officials to see that their paperwork makes its way through the Cambodian ministries.[4] With respect to neoliberalization in Cambodia, the broader implication is that policies that attempt to circumvent the patronage system's ability to accumulate capital are obstructed, while those that facilitate the accumulation of capital within the patronage system are pushed through.

Cambodia is a country that remains heavily dependent on aid, where international donors have provided over half of the government's annual budget for more than a decade now (Global Witness 2009). Accordingly, the intended audience for Cambodia's privatization, liberalization and deregulation policies is primarily the donor community that is requesting them. Yet there are nuances to this as it is not as simple as donor demands being fully implemented wherever and whenever they are requested. The donor community often criticizes the lack of transparency in the mechanisms through which policies are being implemented. In particular, bidding processes on government contracts and the sale of public holdings are routinely critiqued as being corrupt. Consequently, policy reform proceeds in a veiled way, whereby the substantive acts of neoliberalization that are occurring at centre stage are witnessed and applauded, while the role of patronage is still partially obscured and out of view. What this means is that 'neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics' is an extremely secretive affair, and the linkages within the patronage system that inform neoliberalization in Cambodia can only be speculated upon. Yet because the same small group of individuals always seems to receive the reward of a contract or newly privatized asset, the top of the patronage system is actually quite apparent and well documented (ADHOC 2008; Global Witness 2009). What occurs below the top rungs of patron power is unclear and not well mapped out, although evidence has begun to emerge that suggests that they operate along familial lines (Global Witness 2007; *The Phnom Penh Post* 2007). What this suggests is that neoliberalism in Cambodia proceeds as a form of nepotism, or what we might call '*nepoliberalism*'.

What can be determined from Cambodia's patronage system is that as a hierarchical, secretive and longstanding mode of power relations in the country, it provokes significant violence (Slocomb 2010), which carries over into the contemporary political economy of neoliberalization. This violence is operationalized through particular channels as it keeps important mediators of social relations (i.e. judges, high-ranking military and police officials, top monks, commune chiefs, and journalists and media outlets) on an unofficial 'payroll'. In the past this payroll was not simply orchestrated by the ruling CPP as a whole, but rather through two rival patronage systems within the party, where the two key players were Hun Sen and former Party Chairman, President of the Senate and Acting Head of State, Chea Sim (Global Witness 2009). These adversarial factions were never on equal footing, as Chea Sim was much less involved in corruption than the Prime Minister, and accordingly he had fewer supporters and a much smaller roll call than Hun Sen, who has control over both the military and the police. Conflicts between these two opponents have been numerous over the years, culminating in July 2004,

with Chea Sim fleeing Cambodia after apparently refusing to sign controversial legislation to allow a new government to be formed following the 2003 national elections (Rand and MacIssac 2004). He returned ten days later, citing that he required medical treatment in Thailand, but no explanation was ever offered as to why military forces surrounded his home on the day of his departure, suggesting Chea Sim and Hun Sen had come to an agreement concerning their differences and the conditions of his return to Cambodia (Yun 2004). More recently, following the death of Chea Sim in 2015, Hun Sen's consolidation of power within the CPP has been profound, as he now also serves as Party Chairman giving him even greater control over the two existing patronage networks, which are now surely being combined.

TRADING (IN)SECURITIES: INVESTMENTS OVER HUMANS, PROFITS OVER PEOPLE

Cambodia's patronage system puts considerable pressure on individuals to conform, which as the case of Heng Pov revealed, often entails being an accomplice or agent in the killing of political adversaries, or at least a participant in an ongoing conspiracy of silence. Heng Pov is the former Undersecretary of State and assistant to the Minister of the Interior, as well as former police commissioner of Phnom Penh and a personal adviser to Hun Sen. He had amassed considerable wealth through his longstanding connection to the Prime Minister's patronage circuits. What has not been proven is Heng Pov's role in any violence. After a falling-out with the Prime Minister, a warrant for Heng Pov's arrest was issued by Cambodian authorities on 21 July 2006, accusing him of involvement in the 2003 assassination of Municipal Court judge Sok Sethamony and linking him to a number of other serious crimes (Barton 2006). Heng Pov fled Cambodia on 23 July 2006 and raids on his home apparently uncovered weapons and $1 million in cash. Heng Pov responded by accusing government officials of involvement in the 30 March 1997 grenade attack on a peaceful protest outside the National Assembly. He also claimed that a government official ordered the 7 July 1999 murder of actress Piseth Pilika, and the 7 July 1997 assassination of then Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior, Hor Sok, both of whom were vocal critics of corruption within the ruling party (Gillison and Phann Ana 2006). Which side is to be believed in this dispute on who murdered who is anyone's best guess, but what is clear is that the patronage system engenders violence and by providing the necessary framework of concealment to ensure that it proceeds with impunity. The violence of such political rivalry in Cambodia has to some extent transitioned alongside neoliberalization. This particular

form of violence now focuses its malignant powers on those who oppose the logic of neoliberalization in the country, where it is journalists like Youk Tharidh, union leaders like Chea Vichea, outspoken monks like Bun Thoeun, and deforestation activists like Chut Wutty who are now targeted, whereas in the past it was primarily opposition politicians who faced threats and intimidation. Since neoliberalism now forms the backbone of political economic power in Cambodia, this shift in who is being targeted is owing to the kinds of challenges that are being raised, which directly address the questionable accumulation practices of the country's elites.

Within Cambodia's NGO community there is a growing awareness of the rising tide of inequality in the country, which is viewed as an outcome of Cambodia's transitional political economy. Piled on top of increasing socio-economic disparity is the country's historical legacy of genocide and war, where people continue to operate with a survival mentality (Hayman 2007). Human security in Cambodia is fragile as people are often more concerned with what they are going to have for dinner than they are with the patterns of wealth disparity, except when it directly threatens their livelihoods through the threat of violent evictions. What Cambodia's historical context in concert with ongoing poverty and inequality means in terms of neoliberal governmentality is that most individuals in Cambodia are already adept at fending for themselves. They have never known state provisions of social welfare, and continually look to the patronage system as their only available security net. On the other hand, their subjectivation to neoliberalism in terms of its ability to foster an entrepreneurial spirit is mixed (Springer 2015). Individuals know how to make ends meet and often engage in the informal sector, but this does not always convert into sophisticated economic knowledge and Cambodians are increasingly struggling with the scourge of microfinancing and high debt loads that they can never escape from. This dire situation is exacerbating homelessness as property is routinely leveraged against the predatory loans that Cambodians take on. Neoliberal governmentality in Cambodia thus ensures that individuals are caught between a Scylla and Charybdis of violence. The poor must either look to the domination of the patronage system to ensure their livelihoods, or seek semi-official economic channels as an alternative, wherein they become easy prey to usury through private moneylenders or microfinance institutions. Cambodia's donor community and the IFIs are quick to make excuses for this particular form of accumulation by dispossession, pointing to the implementation of rule of law as the solution inasmuch as it can provide enforcement on the repayment of loans so that the formal banking sector is more willing to offer loans to everyday Cambodians. In other words, in order to repeal the violence of ongoing primitive accumulation in the form of predatory lending practices, Cambodia must replace it with a new form of

violence, a 'force' that will provide security on investments called 'law'. In effect, this is a call for a different form of concealed violence. Should one fail to make payments on a loan due to economic hardship or otherwise, the law will step in to dispossess the individual of whatever limited means he or she has left, or simply incarcerate them. Neoliberalization in this sense becomes a form of criminalizing the poor (Wacquant 2001), by 'legitimizing' the means of accumulation by dispossession through a legal framework.

'Neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics' is a ticking time bomb; one that may result in a repeat of the violent revolution of the 1970s should the discontent that boils just beneath the surface continue unaddressed. The ongoing epidemic of violent dispossessions may very well trigger an explosion (Sokha 2007; Lempert 2006), something Hun Sen well recognizes, as he has repeatedly addressed the Cambodian media with paranoid invocations of his firm grip on political and military power (Soenthrith and Yun 2004; *Koh Santepheap* 2008). Even more revealing was his proclamation in March 2007, when he publicly declared 'war on land-grabbing' to symbolically illustrate his concern, not for the people of Cambodia, but for his own position of power (Yun 2007). For now, what can be witnessed are the growing number of cracks in the structure of Cambodian neoliberalism as murders, rapes and assaults have become a common lived experience for the poor as marginalization and minor differences are magnified, resulting in a pattern of societal conflict (Uvin 2003).[5] In contrast, elites have worked hard to insulate themselves from potential reprisal through a ratcheting down of Cambodia's security regime, utilizing the apparatus of the state, such as authoritarian clampdowns on public space, as well as private measures visible in the landscape, such as fenced properties monitored by armed guards (Springer 2009, 2010). Similarly, there is growing evidence to suggest that domestic violence is also on the rise (Brickell 2015). Although the government eventually responded to this phenomenon by acknowledging it as a social problem, the push to see a law on domestic violence passed through the National Assembly represents yet another exercise in bureaucratic foot-dragging, not only because Cambodian elites had little to gain by passing the law but also that such a law would counteract the male dominated, masculine interests of the elite.

In stark contrast to the slow pace of progress on the domestic violence law, the establishment of a pseudo-legal framework for oil and gas exploration was rapid (Un and So 2009). In the 1990s oil exploration was only speculatively on the country's radar, yet petroleum legislation was quickly passed in 1991 (Council of Ministries 1991), coinciding with the structural changes that would ensue as Cambodia transitioned to a free market economy under the Paris Peace Accords signed that same year. Throughout the 1990s discreet amendments were made to the existing petroleum legislation, clearing the

way for the questionable founding of the Cambodian National Petroleum Authority (CNPA) in 1999, without primary legislation passed by the National Assembly. This placed direct control of the institution into the hands of Hun Sen and his deputy, Sok An, making the institution highly politicized from the outset as exercise of this power sidelined those who were supportive of Chea Sim prior to his death (Carmichael 2003). The CNPA's establishment by royal decree means that, to this day, it operates without oversight from the Cambodian parliament or other relevant ministries. By 2006, the Council for the Development of Cambodia, the body in charge of foreign investment, had approved $403 million worth of investment initiatives to facilitate the exploitation of mineral resources. Global Witness (2009) has charged that concession allocations have occurred under a blanket of secrecy, where financial bonuses, totalling millions of dollars, paid to secure concessions do not show up in the 2006 or 2007 revenue reports from the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Once again and unsurprisingly, Sokimex is the company that stands to profit the most from these developments, having entered the petroleum business in May 1996 through its purchase of state-owned oil company, Compagnie Kampuchea des Carburants, as part of the RGC's market-oriented privatization programme. As part of the deal, Soximex was tasked with the storage, distribution and import of petroleum in Cambodia, giving the company a stranglehold on the industry with a market share of approximately forty per cent. The deal obviously led to further speculation of Sok Kong's close ties to Hun Sen and the CPP (Cain 2009), and lead many observers to anticipate a 'resource curse' scenario (Barton and Sokha 2007a). These patterns of patronage and corruption within Cambodia's extractive industries are repetitions of what happened in the 1990s, when the country's political elite focused their energies on resource exploitation in Cambodia's forest sector (Global Witness 2007; Le Billon and Springer 2007). In short, 'neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics' is shaped by a kleptocratic system of nepotism, where 'legitimacy' is conferred through partisan control of the military, a quasi-legal framework with a thoroughly corrupt judiciary (Sam and Poynton 2007), and a labyrinthine system of patronage that extends down to the lowest levels of government in the village.

CONCLUSION

Understanding neoliberalism requires that we appreciate its nuances with respect to the complexity of exchanges between local and extra-local forces operating within the global political economy. Crucially, we must acknowledge and account for the traction of neoliberalization as it moves around the globe into different contexts by attending to how neoliberalism is always

necessarily co-constituted with existing political circumstances and economic frameworks. Likewise, it is imperative to recognize that an excessive focus on either external or internal phenomena to the exclusion of relational connections across space is inadequate in addressing the relevant features and significant articulations of neoliberalism as a series of 'glocal' processes. Dismissing neoliberalism as a mere 'bogeyman' figure (Thavat 2010) demonstrates a lack of understanding for the processes of articulation, whereby existing institutional frameworks and economic conditions are altered as variable societal influences circulate and thereby transform neoliberalism into its 'actually existing circumstances' of neoliberalization. Even more problematic is that such disregard actively ignores or serves to retrograde the theoretical gains that critical scholars have made over the past decade by returning neoliberalism to an ill-conceived and ageographical 'bulldozer effect' through an insistence that it is a monolithic and static phenomenon. Yet most harmful of all is that accounts that do not adopt a relational perspective of neoliberalism make no consideration for how retaining the abstraction of neoliberalism as a 'global' project—even as we recognize that its connections to particular contexts come with a high degree of specificity—enables geographically diffuse phenomena like inequality and poverty to find a point of similarity (Springer 2008). In other words, it allows us to identify how the structural violence of capitalism operates in diverse settings. Such disarticulation of the scope of neoliberalism effectively paralyzes attempts at constructing and supporting solidarity beyond the micro-politics of the 'local', thereby weakening a potentially liberatory basis among the world's poorest and most vulnerable peoples.

In theorizing neoliberalization as a processual, hybridized, variegated and protean phenomenon—as is the cutting edge in the critical literature today (Brenner et al. 2010)—the particularity of the Cambodian context suggests that the four-way relationship between neoliberalism, violence, kleptocracy and patronage is necessarily infused with characteristics that are unique to this location. My argument is thus not to construct a metanarrative that suggests that the practical effects of neoliberalism are everywhere and always the same. Instead, I only want to draw attention to some of the relations that neoliberalism has produced or facilitated—in this case violence, kleptocracy and patronage—by locating these intersections within the specificity of a particular context. As the Cambodian state is increasingly neoliberalized in its decision making, economic orientation, planning agencies and developmental agenda, as each of these becomes more intensively embedded within transnational circuits of capital and expertise (Sneddon 2007), violence becomes gradually more woven into the fabric of Cambodian life through the existing patronage system. While patron politics undoubtedly predate Cambodia's adoption of neoliberal ideas, it is clear that patronage has since become intimately tied to neoliberalization. While 'neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics' points to a distinctive

geohistorical set of power relations operating in combination with a broader hegemonic ideological project, this does not mean that this argument can only be considered as relevant to the Cambodian context. The 'in here' implications of Cambodia's particular imbrications between patronage, kleptocracy, violence and neoliberalism have wider 'out there' relevance owing to the similarities of experience that countries on the losing end of colonialism have weathered and continue to endure under global capitalism. Establishing how far such theorizations can be extended requires comparative analysis and detailed empirical research in other countries where klepto-neoliberalism, or *nepoliberalism*, is unfolding. While I can speculate that patterns characterizing the relationship between neoliberalism, kleptocracy, patronage, and violence would emerge in (post)colonial locales like many African states and particularly other Southeast Asian nations with analogous political legacies and cultural histories, this would always be marked with contradictions and contingencies that are dependent on the context in question. The stark brutality of neoliberalism may ultimately prove to be less or perhaps even more intense than is currently found within the Cambodian context.

NOTES

1. I refer particularly to 'Western' donors, as the RGC has been largely uncritical of money arriving from Asia and China and particular, which has risen considerably in recent years.
2. The first sense of 'enemy' (*khmaang*) is used to refer to adversaries in a battle or war, while the second sense (*setrov*) is used in a more general sense of opposition.
3. Cambodian elites were not oblivious to this 'shock'. De facto privatization spread across the country throughout the 1980s. Prior to UNTAC, the RGC had shown itself to be committed to economic reform including through revisions to marketing, land tenure, investment and taxation legislation designed to attract foreign capital, as well as the privatization of state holdings and reductions on subsidies (Slocomb 2010).
4. These observations are based on my family's own experience of adopting a Cambodian child in early 2007.
5. A reading of the 'police blotter' section in any issue of the *Phnom Penh Post* will confirm this claim.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ADHOC (2008) Human Rights Situation 2007 Report. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (February). Available at: http://www.adhoc-cambodia.org/?p=367

Amnesty International (2008) Rights Razed: Forced Evictions in Cambodia (11 February). Available at: http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA23/002/2008/en

Barton C (2006) Crooked cop or whistle-blower? *The Phnom Penh Post* (11 August). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/crooked-cop-or-whistle-blower

Barton C and Sokha C (2007a) Donors put spotlight on petro cash. *The Phnom Penh Post* (20 April). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/donors-put-spotlight-petro-cash

Barton C and Sokha C (2007b) Private profit versus public gain. *The Phnom Penh Post* (18 May). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/private-profit-versus-public-gain

Brenner N, Peck J and Theodore N (2010) Variegated neoliberalism: Geographies, modalities, pathways. *Global Networks* 10(2): 182–222.

Brenner N and Theodore N (2002) Cities and the geographies of 'actually existing neoliberalism'. *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 34(3): 349–379.

Brickell K (2015) Towards intimate geographies of peace? Local reconciliation of domestic violence in Cambodia. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 40(3): 321–333.

Brickell K and Springer S (2016) An introduction to contemporary Cambodia. In: Brickell K and Springer S (eds) *The Handbook of Contemporary Cambodia*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Cain G (2009) Sokimex in line for black rewards. *Asia Times* (6 February). Available at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/KB06Ae01.html

Carmichael R (2003) A volatile, high-octane blend. *The Phnom Penh Post* (15 August). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/volatile-high-octane-blend

Chandler D (2008) *A History of Cambodia*, fourth edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Cochrane K and Sam R (2005) Adoption gumshoe gives detailed report on baby-scam payoffs. *The Phnom Penh Post* (20 May). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/adoption-gumshoe-gives-detailed-report-baby-scam-payoffs

Council of Ministries (1991) Petroleum Regulations (28 September). Archived by Asia Pacific Centre for Environmental Law, Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore. Available at: http://sunsite.nus.edu.sg/apcel/dbase/cambodia/regs/carpet.html

Development Partner's Consensus Statement on Governance (2008) Official statement prepared for the Cambodian Development Cooperation Forum, 19–20 June 2007. Available at: http://www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/cdc/first_cdcf/session1/sonsensus_statement.htm

England K and Ward K (eds) (2007) *Neoliberalization: States, Networks, Peoples*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Etcheson C (2005) *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Ghai Y (2007) Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for human rights in Cambodia (A/HRC/4/36). Available at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/KHIndex.aspx

Gillison D and Ana P (2006) Statement in Heng Pov's name details allegations. *The Cambodia Daily* (16 August): 1–2.

Global Witness (2007) *Cambodia's Family Trees: Illegal Logging and the Stripping of Public Assets by Cambodia's Elite*. London: Global Witness. Available at: https://www.globalwitness.org/en/reports/cambodias-family-trees/

Global Witness (2009) *Country For Sale: How Cambodia's Elite Have Captured the Country's Extractive Industries*. London: Global Witness. Available at: https://www.globalwitness.org/en/reports/country-sale/

Harvey D (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hayman A (2007) The rich, the poor and the income gap. *The Phnom Penh Post* (1 June). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/rich-poor-and-income-gap

Hughes C (2003) *The Political Economy of Cambodia's Transition, 1991–2001*. London: Routledge Curzon.

Kea P (2006) 'Privatized' Killing Fields site tries to quiet critics. *The Japan Times* (13 January). Available at: http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20060113f2.html

Kiernan B (1996) *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Kiljunen K (ed) (1984) *Kampuchea: Decade of the Genocide*. London: Zed.

Klein N (2007) *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Koh Santepheap (2008) Hun Sen: Nobody can topple Hun Sen. Translated from Khmer by Vong Socheata. Available at: http://ki-media.blogspot.com/2008/03/hun-sens-speech-points-to-internal.html

Le Billon P and Springer S (2007) Between war and peace: Violence and accommodation in the Cambodian logging sector. In: de Jong W, Donovan D and Abe K (eds) *Extreme Conflict and Tropical Forests*. New York: Springer, 17–36.

Lempert D (2006) Foreign aid: Creating conditions for the next civil war. *The Phnom Penh Post* (29 December). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/foreign-aid-creating-conditions-next-civil-war

Lesley E and Sam R (2005) Public land deals flaunt intentions of law. *The Phnom Penh Post* (28 January). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/public-land-deals-flaunt-intentions-law

LICADHO (2007a) *Human Rights in Cambodia: The Charade of Justice* (December). Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights. Available at: http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports.php?perm=113

LICADHO (2007b) *Illegal Forced Eviction of 105 Families in Sihanoukville Fact Sheet* (July). Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights. Available at: http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports.php?perm=108

LICADHO (2008) *Reading Between the Lines: How Politics, Money & Fear Control Cambodia's Media 2008* (May). Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights. Available at: http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports.php?perm=119

McDermid C and Sokha C (2007) Islands in the stream of cash. *The Phnom Penh Post* (9 August). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/islands-stream-cash

Owen T and Kiernan B (2006) Bombs over Cambodia. *The Walrus* (October): 62–69.

Peck J (2001) *Workfare States*. New York: Guilford Press.

Peck J and Tickell A (2002) Neoliberalizing space. *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 34(2): 380–404.

Rand N and MacIssac V (2004) In Cambodia, Hun Sen is in the driver's seat. *Asia Times* (20 July). Available at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/FG20Ae01.html

Reno W (1995) *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sam R and Poynton D (2007) Judicial reform 2007: an iron fist gone limp. The Phnom Penh Post (26 January). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/judicial-reform-2007-iron-fist-gone-limp

Slocomb M (2010) *An Economic History of Cambodia in the Twentieth Century*. Singapore: NUS Press.

Smith A (2007) Articulating neoliberalism: Diverse economies and everyday life in postcolonial cities. In: Leitner H, Peck J and Sheppard ES (eds) *Contesting Neoliberalism: Urban Frontiers*. New York: Guilford Press, 204–222.

Sneddon C (2007) Nature's materiality and the circuitous paths of accumulation: Dispossession of freshwater fisheries in Cambodia. *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 39(1): 167–193.

Soenthrith S and Samean Y (2004) Hun Sen says opposition plans revolt. *The Cambodia Daily* (19 July). Available at: https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/hun-sen-says-opposition-plans-revolt-41951/

Sokha C (2007) Rights groups echo PM's fear of farmer revolution. *The Phnom Penh Post* (9 February). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/rights-groups-echo-pms-fear-farmer-revolution

Springer S (2008) The nonillusory effects of neoliberalisation: Linking geographies of poverty, inequality, and violence. *Geoforum* 39(4): 1520–1525.

Springer S (2009) The neoliberalization of security and violence in Cambodia's transition. In Peou S (ed) *Human Security in East Asia: Challenges for Collaborative Action*. New York, Routledge, 125–141.

Springer S (2010) *Cambodia's Neoliberal Order: Violence, Authoritarianism and the Contestation of Public Space*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Springer S (2012) Neoliberalising violence: Of the exceptional and the exemplary in coalescing moments. Area 44(2): 136–143.

Springer S (2013) Violent accumulation: A postanarchist critique of property, dispossession, and the state of exception in neoliberalizing Cambodia. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103(3): 608–626.

Springer S (2015) Postneoliberalism? *Review of Radical Political Economics* 47(1): 5–17.

Springer S (2016) The violence of neoliberalism. In: Springer S, Birch K, and MacLeavy J (eds) *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Sokchea M (2008) Sam Rainsy vows to confiscate lands from Tycoon if he wins in election. *The Phnom Penh Post* (2 June). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/sam-rainsy-vows-confiscate-lands-tycoon-if-he-wins-election

Thavat M (2010) The neoliberal bogeyman of Cambodia. *New Mandela* (27 July). Available at: http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2010/07/27/the-neoliberal-bogeyman-of-cambodia/

The Phnom Penh Post (2000) All that glitters seems to be... Sokimex. *The Phnom Penh Post* (28 April). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/all-glitters-seems-be-sokimex

The Phnom Penh Post (2007) It's a family affair. *The Phnom Penh Post* (23 February–8 March): 8–9.

The Phnom Penh Post (2008) Phnom Penh's decade of land evictions. *The Phnom Penh Post* (3 October). Available at: http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/timeline-phnom-penhs-decade-land-evictions

UN (1991) Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict. Available at: http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/agree_comppol_10231991.pdf

Un K and So S (2009) Politics of natural resource use in Cambodia. *Asian Affairs* 36(3): 123–138.

Uvin P (2003) Global dreams and local anger: From structural to acute violence in a globalizing world. In: Tetreault MA, Denemark RA, Thomas KP and Burch K (eds) *Rethinking Global Political Economy: Emerging Issues, Unfolding Odysseys*. London, Routledge, 147–161.

Wacquant L (2001) The penalisation of poverty and the rise of neo-liberalism. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 9(4): 401–412.

Wasson E and Yun S (2006) Council of Ministers approves sub-decree to manage state land. *The Cambodia Daily* (13 December): 16.

Yun S (2004) Chea Sim, CPP healthy, party claims. *The Cambodia Daily* (30 July): 1–2.

Yun S (2007) This is war, Hun Sen tells land-grabbers. *The Cambodia Daily* (6 March): 1–2.