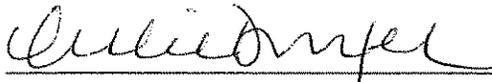


GHOST SOLDIERS: THE CHILD SOLDIERS OF POL POT

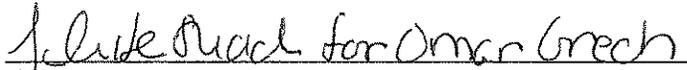
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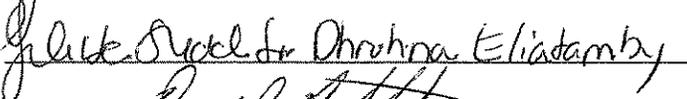
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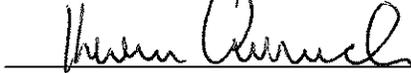
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Graduate Program Director



Dean, School for Conflict
Analysis and Resolution

Date:

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Fall Semester 2013
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
University of Malta
Valletta, Malta

Ghost Soldiers: The Child Soldiers of Pol Pot

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science at George Mason University, and the degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Malta

by

Emily Alexandra Burd
Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2012

Director: Leslie Dwyer, Professor
School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

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George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia
University of Malta
Valletta, Malta

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all who have inspired me throughout my life, and to all those who will continue to do so along the way.

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With the utmost gratitude, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Leslie Dwyer, for fueling my passion to pursue a study on Southeast Asia and for all of her patience and kindness throughout this endeavor. I would like to thank Phyllis Burd, my Aunt, who provided me with the trust I needed to complete my goals, Richard Rubenstein, who believed in me enough to provide me with the opportunity to pursue my dreams, my husband, Jonathon Thomas, who provided me with the love and support I needed to keep me motivated, and my incredible parents, Paul and Valerie Burd, who have always encouraged me to soar higher when the world attempts to push me down.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
KR	Khmer Rouge
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
YFP	Youth For Peace

ABSTRACT

GHOST SOLDIERS: THE CHILD SOLDIERS OF POL POT

Emily A. Burd, M.S., M.A.

George Mason University, 2013

Dissertation Director: Professor Leslie Dwyer

The former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge regime seem to have reintegrated back into Cambodian society on their own accord. Evidence as to how they were able to do so, a phenomenon rarely seen in post-war conflicts, has been difficult to acquire. Current research I have conducted and information I have received thus far via former colleagues in Cambodia has lead me to conclude that there could be a correlation between the reintegration of former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge and the dominant religion of Cambodia, Theravada Buddhism. This discourse aims to assess whether or not reintegration was a possibility and if so, whether religion was a contributing factor.

CHAPTER 1: THE PLEADING EYES THAT HAUNT ME

*“The place where people went in and never came out.”
-Factory worker of Tuol Sleng*

As I walked down the corridors, each new room I came upon had another gruesome story to tell of torture, of murder, and of childhood innocence lost. Row after row of aged black and white photos lined the rooms' walls. These were pictures of children, some seemingly as young as five years of age, their eyes so dark and lost and haunted. Some of their faces were so expressionless and cold that at times I felt like I was staring into a distant and hallowed out soul; others were confused and their eyes seemed to be pleading for someone to end their suffering. I suddenly had the desire to know more. The eyes of those children continued to haunt me as I made my way to my guide, with one question in mind, who were these children? The guide told me these were no normal children: they were child soldiers. They were killers and torturers. They were the ones who helped turn this old school first into a prison and now into the testament to genocide that it is today. I was in the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide, known as secret prison S-21 while the Khmer Rouge utilized it, was a former high school turned torture center. The Documentation Center of Cambodia estimates that between 14,000-20,000 people were held captive, tortured and executed in Tuol Sleng during the Pol Pot regime from 1975-

1979. DC-CAM also found that only seven people survived, out of the thousands of Cambodians, foreigners and whomever else the regime deemed “enemies” who were slaughtered inside those prison walls. In his book *Voices from S-21: Terror and History of the Pol Pot Secret Prison*, David Chandler describes what two Vietnamese photographers encountered when they uncovered the secret prison after the Vietnamese invasion of Phnom Penh on January 8, 1979. In the first chapter, called “Discovering S-21,” he wrote:

“In rooms on the on the ground floor of the southernmost building, the two Vietnamese came across the corpses of several recently murdered men. Some of the bodies were chained to iron beds. The prisoners’ throats had been cut. The blood on the floors was still wet. Altogether the bodies of fourteen people were discovered in the compound, apparently killed only a couple of days before. In large classrooms on the upper floors of the western buildings, the patrol found heaps of shackles, handcuffs, whips, and lengths of chain. Other rooms on the upper floors had been divided by clumsily bricked partitions into small cells where each prisoner’s foot had been manacled,” (Chandler, 1999, pp. 3).

Chandler’s account of what those two Vietnamese photographers came across that January day in 1979 doesn’t even begin to describe the terror and absolute evil that took place in Tuol Sleng. However, the picture he paints in his book resonates the darkness one can expect to endure during a visit to the Khmer Rouge’s secret torture and extermination center. Or does it? My experience there would prove otherwise.

Though so much death and suffering had taken place here during the genocide by the Khmer Rouge Regime under Pol Pot, there was a lightness swirling about each room. Even while staring into the hollowed eyes of the skulls of the murdered and tortured piled upon each other in the very last room of the prison, there was an overarching feeling of

peace. Maybe it was the incense burning on the altar in front of the glass cases containing the bones and skulls in remembrance, so sweetly swirling about my head, or maybe it was the incredible heat. One way or another, there was a light-hearted peace about the room, as if the ghosts of the past had been released. No darkness or heaviness, no residual pain. Only peace. How could this possibly be?

In contrast, I had felt the weight of the dead following me several months earlier, as I made my way around the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. Stories of those I had known who had visited Dakow and Auschwitz, sites of such unimaginable atrocities committed by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime on the Jews, had had similar experiences of darkness looming as they toured chambers of death. So how could it be that here, another site of genocide, of unspeakable horror, one would feel so peaceful, so much so that it was almost intoxicating?

I stepped out of the last memorial room on the second floor of the prison. I needed a break from the stifling heat and stuffiness of the room we were in. As I peered across the prison courtyard and slowly began to inhale, a blur of bright orange caught my eye, an orange so intense that, even against the backdrop of the tropical green of the palm trees surrounding the courtyard, it stood out starkly. As my eyes focused on this color, I saw an extraordinary sight, one that reaffirmed completely my experience in that prison up to that very point. Three Buddhist monks, garbed in their famous orange robes, were slowly making their way across the far end of the prison courtyard. Now, to most people this would be a completely normal sight. Buddhist monks are a constant encounter in the streets of Phnom Penh, but here, in the prison courtyard, their presence represented for

me the clash of two very opposite worldly spectrums: the best and the worst of what humanity has to offer the world. The monks to me represented peace amongst the horror, the most ultimate peace moving ever so silently amongst the walls that contained the utmost horror. That is when it hit me.

The children, the pictures of the child soldiers displayed in the prison rooms, embodied another clash of good versus bad: innocence versus corruption. Those children's eyes still haunted me. Not the prison, not the pictures of men and women being tortured, not the skulls and bones of the dead, but the eyes of all of those children. What happened to them? Those who survived, who were forced to commit such unspeakable atrocities, where did they go once the Vietnamese invasion liberated them of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge? Were they hunted down? Did they all become refugees? Or were they here, reintegrated back into a society that either forgave them or wanted to forget. If they were capable of reintegration, how so? Was it the principles of Buddhism, the religion practiced all around Cambodia, which gave this despicable place such a feeling of peace amidst the darkness, the peace I had been experiencing throughout my visit to Tuol Sleng?

All the past research I had conducted on the reintegration of child soldiers relayed how difficult and rare reintegration and reconciliation was for child soldiers in post-conflict regions. It had been evident in reports I had read that reintegration was an almost impossible feat to accomplish for NGO's and the United Nations in places suffering from the utilization of child soldiers in war and genocide. Could the contrast of peace and horror I was experiencing in a memorial to post-genocide represent a

community capable of detaching itself from the past? What role did these monks play in this feeling of peace? Was this a community capable of reintegration because of its religion? If so, what could I learn about reintegration from my experience in Cambodia? I was dead set on finding out.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION OF THESIS

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHILD SOLDIERS OF THE KHMER ROUGE

REGIME POST-CONFLICT IN CAMBODIA?

While conducting research for this discourse, I have found that there are very few contextual resources regarding the former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge regime and their reintegration into the society of post-conflict Cambodia. It seems that very little investigation into the whereabouts or physical state of former child soldiers has been conducted to date. According to a 2008 Child Soldiers Global Report on Cambodia by the UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency):

“Both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN bodies reported many cases of under-age recruitment by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces during Cambodia's civil war in the years following the end of the Khmer Rouge period in 1979. The second phase of the government's US \$42 million donor-assisted demobilization program, which had commenced in 1999 and was suspended indefinitely in 2003 after the World Bank identified irregularities in the use of funds, was not resumed. In total, 16,500 of a planned 31,500 soldiers, most of whom were old, sick or disabled, had been demobilized under the program before it was suspended. The program did not include a component for the demobilization or reintegration of those who were under 18 when recruited. In October 2006 the government announced its intention to reduce the size of the army by a further 40,000, to a total of 70,000 troops. There was reported to have been an attempt to identify former child soldiers for demobilization, but there was no follow-up action taken or further available information. The government's 2006 Defense White Paper stated that Category II

soldiers (the disabled, the elderly and the chronically ill) would again constitute the principal group for discharge over the next five years,” (UNHCR Global Report 2008-Cambodia, retrieved via refworld.com).

This has been the most recent UNHCR report to date and it is this report, along with the lack of evidence to suggest there have been issues with crime related to failed reintegration of child soldiers, that makes me believe that former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge have reintegrated. The efforts to demobilize and reintegrate former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge, as made evident by the UNHCR report above, were limited and directed towards soldiers recruited years after the Cambodian Civil War. Twenty years later there is evidence that child soldiers were still being recruited by The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces after the fall of Pol Pot, however, since that time former child soldiers of the regime have been liberated with little or no information to show or confirm what happened to them afterwards. Where did they go?

There are numerous reports that describe the mass of nearly dead Cambodian refugees residing in refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border after the end of the Cambodian Civil War. It is entirely possible, in fact most likely, that a large percentage of child soldiers of the Democratic Kampuchea defected and took refuge in refugee camps along the Cambodian borders. It is also very likely that many of the child soldiers continued to fight with the Khmer Rouge through guerilla warfare until Pol Pot’s death in 1997. Even so, there is more than enough evidence to support reintegration occurring, as you will see throughout the remainder of this case study.

2.1 Purpose of Case Study

The purpose of this discourse is to re-ignite conversation among conflict analysts regarding one of the worst genocides the world has beheld, and to evaluate the circumstances surrounding former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge in post-genocide Cambodia. It does not aim to analyze the recruitment of child soldiers by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces since the collapse of the Pol Pot regime or aim to theorize the circumstances under which child soldiers of the regime were recruited, though I make reference to the fact that it happened. I am only concerned with former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge and the circumstances surrounding them post-genocide. That being said, the aim of this discourse also is not to reopen old wounds or place unwanted attention on former child soldiers of Pol Pot, but to analyze whether reintegration was attainable in post-genocide Cambodia and if so, how, and what we can learn from it.

2.2 Assumptions of Case Study

It is my opinion that the majority of former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge regime have:

1. Reintegrated back into Cambodian society on their own accord in silence, and,
2. That there is indeed a correlation between this circumstance and the principles of Theravada Buddhism that the majority of Cambodians have espoused for thousands of years.

These assumptions do not conclude, however, that there are no other contributing factors, that I am discounting alternative theories or conclusions of Academia, or that my

theory would in any way explain or correlate with what happened during the Cambodian genocide under the Pol Pot regime. This discourse is solely a personal case study regarding the possibility that child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge may have reintegrated back into Cambodian society, and that the principles of the religion practiced by Cambodians throughout history could be a contributing factor to that reintegration.

2.3 Methodology

As I have previously stated, much investigation into how and why the Cambodian Genocide occurred has been undertaken, however, very little research and investigation has been done concerning the whereabouts of former Khmer Rouge child soldiers. After the penetration of Vietnam and the fall of Pol Pot, it was documented that many of the child soldiers were slaughtered, joined opposition groups or fled to find refuge in border towns near Thailand. The majority, however, disappeared from the international spotlight. What happened then? Was successful reintegration achieved and can it be attributed to the religion that created the roots of Cambodian culture?

Throughout the next few chapters, I lay out the resources and framework I have used as a means to present my hypothesis. I have chosen to do an entirely qualitative case study, as quantitative data regarding former child soldiers of the KR is scarce. I do, however, present what little quantitative data and statistics I have found throughout the course of my research.

I have conducted a content analysis of literature because it has been my experience that former child soldiers, especially those of the Khmer Rouge, more often than not are extremely reluctant to elaborate or participate in dialogue regarding their

experiences. Therefore, since I was not able to obtain interviews, I have fully relied on theoretical discourse and content analysis of academic resources I have obtained through online databases, such as The Documentation Center of Cambodia and information extracted from the United Nations Website, as well as numerous other academic resources. I use these resources as my technique to further explore what happened to the former child soldiers of Pol Pot.

During my visit to Cambodia in March of 2012, I personally encountered two former soldiers of the Khmer Rouge regime. They had been living in Phnom Penh since the invasion by Vietnam in 1979, working and caring for families of their own. I was unable to record an interview with them and time constraints have withheld the opportunity to travel back to Cambodia to do so. Subsequently, I have decided not to base my theory on interviews. However, I cannot deny that those encounters have helped me arrive at the conclusions I relay in this discourse.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Genocide in Cambodia

It has been thirty-four years since Cambodia endured one of the worst genocides of the 20th Century, and yet this beautiful country in Southeast Asia is still grappling with the remnants of what was left behind after the dust of civil war had settled. New details of carnage and devastation will continue to emerge long after the survivors have passed on. Landmines strewn across Cambodian jungles, roads and agricultural land throughout the civil war by various military factions, including those belonging to the United States and Vietnam, will continue to maim and murder civilians. All we can do as conflict analysts is take notice of the past, study it and learn how to prevent it from reoccurring in to harm future generations.

In order to find out what happened to former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge in post-genocide Cambodia, I first had to understand what happened during that dark time in Cambodia's history. I ploughed through biographies of Pol Pot, theoretical discourses belonging to the likes of Hannah Arendt and Alex Hinton, and read history book upon history book dedicated to explaining why and how the genocide occurred. After months of research, I still feel like I can barely grasp a basic comprehension of the circumstances surrounding such atrocity, horror and political corruption. Never will I completely understand, but at the very least my attempt at doing so has been aided by some

incredible authors and experts.

For the purpose of this discourse, I have employed the expertise of Elizabeth Becker and her thorough knowledge of Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge. Her book, *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution*, documents, in colorful detail, the years before, during and after the Khmer Rouge revolution. As one of the only journalists to interview Pol Pot before his death in 1998, as well as the only one to have reported from within Cambodia under every established government from Lon Nol's Khmer Republic in the early 1970's and concluding with Hun Sen's Kingdom of Cambodia. Becker is able to provide an outside perspective as a foreign journalist while also offering the perspective of her invaluable experience entombed within Cambodia throughout decades of civil war. She alone, in my opinion, possesses a unique understanding of the Cambodian genocide and the Khmer Rouge.

According to Becker, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge Communist Party took control of Cambodia after the Cambodian Civil War with Vietnam in 1975 and ruled until 1979. After overthrowing General Lon Nol, who had been in power since his own coup of Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge completely abolished the Royal Government of Kampuchea set up by the French and established the Communist Party of Kampuchea. For four years following the birth of Democratic Kampuchea, the name Pol Pot declared as his controlled state, brutality and blood rained down on Cambodia. Up to this point, Cambodians had endured years of hardship and warfare reaped down on them by the North Vietnamese Army and the United States during the Vietnam War (Second Indochina War). Nothing, however, prepared the Cambodian

people for the slaughter of their own by a government they placed faith in. As Becker recounts:

“Cambodia was now in the hands of the Khmer Rouge, who undertook nothing less than ultimate revolution. They pieced together a communist program for change and ordered that it be followed ‘totally and completely’ and ‘rapidly.’ All at once private property was abolished. Everyone was evacuated from the city and towns to the countryside. Everything produced in the country, whether from the fields or factories, was subject to seizure by the state. Everyone’s movements were controlled by the state. The country was cut off from the outside world. There were now only revolutionary classes of people-workers, peasants, soldiers, and political cadre. And there was only one source of power-The Communist Party of Kampuchea,” (Becker, 1998, pp. 162-163).

It was an era that alienated Cambodia from the world and made life in that region during the Pol Pot regime a mystery, a mystery that wouldn’t begin to unravel until the Vietnam invasion of 1979. It is Elizabeth Becker who has helped me begin to unravel the hidden history of Cambodia during the rule of the Khmer Rouge.

3.2 Theoretical Concept: *Internal Pluralism*

“In striving to adhere to traditional beliefs and moral codes, religious actors recognize that tradition is pluriform and cumulative, developed in and for concrete and changing situations. Decisions based on religious principles reflect the ways religious authorities interpret and apply the received tradition in specific circumstances,” (Appleby, 2000, pp. 31).

Internal pluralism, as embodied by Scott Appleby in *The Growing End of an Argument*, employs a two-part system that involves the duality of religion and the power of choice. The first part, the duality of religion, can be easily understood as “good vs. evil” or complexly by the contradictory meanings of “love vs. hate” incorporated by various religions and traditions worldwide. It is a concept that believes religion, or

religious action that stems from religion, is not only capable of promoting violence through the “sacred,” but also peace.

The second part, the power of choice, can only then refer to a religious actor’s choice of how to utilize religion for a cause, and therefore, whether to act morally or immorally in an effort to do so. Appleby perceived the idea of religious choice as “the internal pluralism of any religious traditions-the multiplicity of its teachings, images of the divine, moral injunctions, and so on-bestows on the religious leader the power of choice,” (Appleby, 2000, pp. 31).

Appleby supports this theory by dissecting the actions of religious organizations, like Catholicism and other Christian denominations, and how several have been the center of “moral arguments” by religious actors attempting to legitimize violence as a justifiable response to external violence against them. For example, he explores the case of Desmond Tutu and the role of the Christian church during apartheid in South Africa. It was a case study that aimed to identify the tradition of the “just-war” in Christianity and attempted to define how religious actors interpret and distinguish what is moral tradition and what is not, as well as which form of violence is acceptable and necessary as opposed to which is deplorable and wrong based on the circumstances of the situation at hand.

In contrast, Appleby further attempts to dissect and understand the actions of religious actors by evaluating those who chose to legitimize peace-building through religion. His example here, the Catholic Relief Services, was an

organization that, from its establishment in 1943 to 1995, was able to provide over 14 million people in need throughout the world with relief services. It was an example that shed a positive light on the Catholic Church after centuries of “just-war” tradition and displayed how these renewed efforts of promoting peace and relief through the CRS “suggests how a religious tradition’s social presences might evolve in the direction of active peace-building,” (Appleby, 2000, pp. 50).

The comparative analysis of case studies, such as the above, was Appleby’s way of showing both sides of the coin of religion. It was an effort to solidify his argument that religion can be used for both good and bad. The outcome depended on the decisions and choices of those in power, primarily religious actors, at the time an event or shift in the political, social or religious atmosphere takes place.

For the purpose of this discourse, I apply Appleby’s two-part concept of the internal pluralism of religion in order to explain how religion can be diverted from violent extremism after war and be utilized to promote peace-building and harmony instead, based on the actions of the religious leadership in power. It is the concept that constructs the base of my hypothesis, that in the circumstance of this particular case study, a religious actor chose to promote peace and reintegration in post-genocide Cambodia through the ancient traditions of his own religion, as well as the religions of others. I attest, also, that his efforts were successful.

3.3 Theoretical Concept: *Militant Peacemaker*

The concept of militant peacemakers was first touched on by Scott Appleby in *The Growing End of an Argument* as a means to evaluate the more physical moral “response to the sacred,” or a more pluralistic understanding of religion. Those who act violently and nonviolently for the sake of their religious beliefs are still considered to be acting in the name of their religion based on how they interpret the traditions of that religion, no matter whether others deem it to be “correct” or not. Even so, he evaluates how traditions of religions, including Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, embody specific elements of moral beliefs that can contribute to the transformation of a religion prone to promote violence to a religion promoting peace building. He affirms:

“Within each of these great traditions, notwithstanding their profound substantive differences, one can trace a moral trajectory challenging adherents to greater acts of compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. The competing voices of revenge and retaliation that continue to claim the status of authentic religious expression are gradually rendered “demonic.” It is this internal evolution of the great religious traditions that commands our attention, for these traditions spawn the most significant religiopolitical movements of our time, from the violent extremist cadres to the organizations of militant peacemakers,” (Appleby, 2000, pp. 31).

Therefore, through the study of religious traditions and how those traditions were utilized throughout history by religious actors in response to dynamic events of that time period, we can begin to understand how religion has transformed throughout history and into an era of globalization. By analyzing the ways in which the traditions in certain religions were interpreted and enacted during social shifts in the past, we can ascertain the nature by which they will be enacted in the modern era we inhabit. This could explain how religious actors can affect the circumstances of a conflict by employing violent

extremists in the name of religion and, in contrast, how, if they so choose, they can affect the outcome of a conflict by employing militant peacemakers, a method to establish peace, instead.

In further exploration of Scott Appleby's idea of a religious actor acting as a militant peacemaker, he confirms, as I do in my promotion of his theory that based on the understanding of the moral traditions of a religion it can be used as a method of healing for a community suffering from post-conflict situations. Cambodia, through the remainder of religious actors remnant in a post-conflict and post-genocide country, could very well have engaged its dominant religion, Theravada Buddhism, to heal and restructure after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. If this is true, then former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge could have reintegrated back into society at the encouragement of religious actors, or militant peacemakers, who prescribed the principles of Theravada Buddhism as a crutch or method of healing with the Cambodian society.

3.4 Theoretical Concept: *Engaged Buddhism*

Though Appleby was the first to explore the concept of a militant peacemaker, in Chapter 7 of "God's Century," called *Militants for Peace and Justice*, Monica Toft utilizes the idea of a militant peacemaker in order to further explore how religious actors can be used to promote peace-building. She does this by exploring the concept of Engaged Buddhism, or Buddhists engaging in principles of Buddhism to promote peace and reconciliation. It refers to a time period during the 1950s in which a "militant nationalist form of Buddhism arose in Sri Lanka," while Buddhists used missionary efforts to increase the reach of their activism into the global spectrum. Toft describes the

rise of Engaged Buddhism as “involving advocacy for peace, environmentalism, nonviolence, human rights, and social transformation,” (Toft, 2011, pp. 180).

Toft believes that the rise of Engaged Buddhism throughout history and into the modern era “strongly reflects” the power of religion as a force of global influence. Her entire assessment of religion in “God’s Century” surrounds the fact that religious organization and expression was able to withstand the revolution and advancement of scientific thought. The rise of Engaged Buddhism also encouraged the rise of religious militants working to promote peace in numerous countries across the world, a fact that Toft uses as evidence to support her theory that religion didn’t just survive centuries of scientific thought and secularization, but it has become even more prevalent in this century through the growing efforts for peace promoted by religious actors. Though those efforts for peace haven’t trumped religious warfare, she reaffirms Appleby’s position that “just as religious actors foment civil war and terrorism, so, too, they promote peace and reconciliation in the wake of civil war, genocide, and dictatorship” and “when they do, they draw from the motivations, doctrines, and communities that their religion entails. Sometimes they pursue peace with fervor equal to the religiously violent, acting as “militants for peace,” (Toft, 2011, pp. 176).

Monica Toft’s most notable example of a “militant for peace,” her version of Appleby’s militant peacemaker, was a man by the name of Maha Ghosananda. Ghosananda was a Buddhist monk who survived the Cambodian genocide by hiding away in the jungles of Thailand, only to return after the civil war had ended to work toward establishing peace in his devastated and dying country. He led a Buddhist

religious movement in 1992, called the Dhammayietra movement, which was hugely instrumental in promoting peace and reintegration of Khmer Rouge child soldiers, along with refugees, after liberation of the regime by the Vietnamese invasion in 1979. Toft's description of Ghosananda in "God's Century" was the breakthrough I needed in tracking down the whereabouts of former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge. I knew, through my research, that there were religious actors promoting peace in Cambodia post-genocide, but none were as successful as Ghosananda in promoting reconciliation among former child soldiers of DK.

3.5 Literature Review Conclusion

These concepts- internal pluralism, militant peacemakers and Engaged Buddhism- are the reigning glory, the bread and butter of this discourse. No closer have I been to supporting my hypothesis than through these three concepts. Theoretical concepts regarding reintegration, reconciliation, restorative justice, and demobilization have brought me very limited, if any, explanation as to what happened to former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge.

Reviewing and analyzing literature and theory by Scott Appleby and Monica Toft regarding religion has opened my eyes to the possibility of what is presented here. They have provided me with a door through the walled world that has secured child soldiers of the Cambodian Genocide for decades.

CHAPTER 4: GHOST SOLDIERS

During the course of my research, I have come to find that the term “ghost” soldier has been used to describe two types of soldiers in Cambodia. The less common usage of the term describes children conscripted during the Cambodian civil war who disappeared, a term I have found to be mostly used by survivors of the genocide. A well-known photographer by the name of Masaru Goto, who has followed and photographed former soldiers of the Khmer Rouge, refers to them as “Ghosts in the Temple.” The meanings for the word “ghost” are endless.

Joel Brinkley best describes the most common usage of the term in his book *Cambodia's Curse: The Modern History of a Troubled Land*, as soldiers placed on the government payroll by military commanders in an effort to “collect and pocket their salaries,” (Brinkley, 2011, pp. 122). According to Brinkley, during the guerilla war with the Khmer Rouge in the mid-1990's, Cambodia's Ministry of Defense discovered that over 10 percent of the 148,000 soldiers supposedly owned by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces were nonexistent. The use of ghost soldiers by RCAF commanders as a means to manipulate the government into feeding their pockets was not a new occurrence. It had been happening since the 1970's, when Lon Nol's soldiers figured out they could alter the number of government soldiers registered in order to obtain the extra pay. It was happening all throughout the Khmer Rouge period and beyond, and is still a

rampant problem in modern Cambodia.

For the purpose of this case study, however, I use the term in recognition of the former child soldiers who disappeared during the Khmer Rouge regime. I use the word “ghost” as a representation of both the spiritual and mysterious circumstances that surround the disappearance of these particular children.

4.1 What is a Child Soldier?

For the purpose of this case study, I employ UNICEF’s definition of child soldier. UNICEF defines a “child soldier” as “any child – boy or girl – under 18 years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than family members. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage. The definition, therefore, does not only refer to a child who is carrying, or has carried, weapons,” (Based on the ‘Cape Town Principles’, 1997, UNICEF).

4.2 Child Soldiers of Khmer Rouge

*You depend on your grandparents,
But they are far away.
You depend on your mother,
But your mother is at home.
You depend on your elder sister,
But she has married a [Lon Nol] soldier....
You depend on the rich people,
But the rich people oppress the poor people.*

*-Song taught to child soldiers by the Khmer Rouge
to sever their ties with family, (Kiernan, 1999, pp.
50).*

Thanks to the Documentation Center of Cambodia and The Cambodian Genocide Program, as well as written accounts by survivors and former child soldiers of the regime, evidence that the Khmer Rouge enlisted children as soldiers to administer their demands of brutality and death is ever mounting. The Khmer Rouge was apt at documenting the atrocities they committed and the victims those atrocities were inflicted upon. Child soldiers were no exception. The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, has hundreds of photographs of the child soldiers used as child guards, and this was only one of many secret prisons used by the regime to torture and slaughter prisoners.

The existence of child soldiers during the Cambodian Civil War also has been referred to and explored extensively throughout the works of Elizabeth Becker, David Chandler, Ben Kiernan, and more. In a report called *School Lessons in War: Children at Tuol Sleng & the Rise of International Protections for Children in War*, W. Warren H. Binford channels the work of these acclaimed authors and experts on the genocide in Cambodia, as well as many others, by assessing the process by which the Khmer Rouge first severed the family ties of the prospective child soldiers and then transformed them into killers. He describes how “Duch” or Kaing Guek Eav, the Khmer Rouge director in charge of torture and execution at Tuol Sleng, transferred children to the prison and trained them as “child guards.” He used techniques of brainwashing and displays of execution to force them into committing torture and murder on whomever he saw as an “enemy” of the Khmer Rouge, including other children. During his testimony before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia on April 29, 2009, Duch recounted

that children “were rounded up from poor families in the countryside to serve as ‘special and honest security guards’ at the prison” and that “because they were young, they were like clean pieces of paper that could be easily written or painted on. I myself educated them. I trained them,” (Binford, *School Lessons*, 2009, pp. 22).

Accounts and testimony by the handful of former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge who have come forward with their stories offer further evidence of abuse. Loung Ung, a former child soldier of Pol Pot and a survivor of the Cambodian genocide documented her experiences in a book she authored called *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*. In her book, she describes the takeover of the capitol of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, by the Khmer Rouge and her experiences as a child soldier and laborer throughout the occupation of the regime. At five years of age, she watched as her family was pulled apart and her father, mother and brother were murdered. She, as a female child soldier, endured attempted rape, starvation, and cruel physical and mental abuse, only to survive and share her story as a testament to the horror the Khmer Rouge reaped on Cambodia during their reign from 1975-1979. Loung Ung’s book is not only a story about her own experiences during genocide in Cambodia, it is also an eyewitness testament to what the hundreds of other young children endured after they were conscripted, whether voluntarily or by force, by the Khmer Rouge to work as soldiers.

That child soldiers existed and that they were used by the Pol Pot regime in the late 1970’s and beyond to commit atrocities is undeniable. The circumstances around how and why thousands of Cambodia’s children were forced into labor and conscription

during the Pol Pot regime has been assessed and dissected time and again post-genocide by researchers, authors and theorists alike. However, though I find theoretical discourse on how and why children were enlisted as child soldiers and what acts they committed as such, as well as how and why the genocide happened, to be extremely important, I am more concerned with what happened to those former child soldiers in the aftermath of the genocide. I have seen their faces. I have heard their stories and I have read the evidence, but very little research or information regarding the whereabouts of the majority of former child soldiers after the collapse of the Pol Pot regime exists. They seem to have disappeared, once documented by the regime in depth and bulk, fading into history as ghosts, ghosts that reappear from time to time to remind us of the horror once endured by the past generation of Cambodia.

4.3 Child Soldiers after the Khmer Rouge

When I manage to sleep, I only ever have one dream. In that dream, my parents are coming to visit me. I am dressed in new clothes – not an army uniform – and my parents' eyes glow with pride as they approach me. I miss my father and mother. I try to get home for visits as often as possible, but I rarely have enough money to do so. [Cambodia – joined when he was 13, now 18].

-(UNICEF, *Adult Wars*, 2002, pp. 65).

Though very little of this discourse focuses on the more recent recruitment and utilization of child soldiers by The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and the Khmer Rouge Guerillas, it is important to note the significance of their existence, specifically in regards to this case study. There is a good amount of information available on the continued conscription of child soldiers after the fracturing of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979. After the invasion of Vietnam, Pol Pot and factions of the Khmer Rouge

retreated into the eastern jungles of Cambodia and continued their cause through guerilla warfare until Pol Pot's death in 1997. Evidence gathered by NGO's and the United Nations post-genocide, beginning in the early 1990's, not only proves the continued recruitment and utilization of child soldiers by the Cambodian government and Khmer Rouge, but also relays how many of the post-conflict child soldiers in this region attempted to reintegrate.

In a case study released by UNICEF in 2002 on child soldiers called *Adult Wars, Child Soldiers: Voices of Children Involved in Armed Conflict in the East Asia and Pacific Region*, evidence is gathered on the use of child soldiers in the East Asia region through a series of interviews and dialogue with the subjects under analysis. The study estimates that “globally, at any one time, around 300,000 children under the age of 18 are currently serving as child soldiers,” and that “up to one fourth of these children can be found in the East Asia and Pacific region, and many more have served as soldiers in countries no longer facing armed conflict,” (UNICEF, *Adult Wars*, 2002, pp. 8).

Apparently, there is no longer a conscription of children by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces as the case study affirms that currently in Cambodia “the minimum age for voluntary recruitment is 18. There appears to be no new recruitment of children, although some soldiers, now over age 18 who were recruited as children during the Cambodian civil war, may still remain in the armed forces,” (UNICEF, *Adult Wars*, 2002, chart on pp. 15).

What I find interesting about this particular case study is that it also documents the method former child soldiers used as a means to find healing. Evaluating how former

child soldiers of the past decade attempted to reintegrate could provide further insight into how child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge were able to do the same. A passage in the study presents a more thorough explanation:

“Children who had been soldiers in one post-conflict situation reported that they had many more nightmares when they were first released and that after two or three years the nightmares subsided. Several sought traditional or ritual methods of healing and forgiveness, to help them reintegrate with their communities. Psycho-social counseling is not widely available to former child soldiers in the East Asia and Pacific region and was mentioned only by interviewees in one situation where counseling was available,” (UNICEF, *Adult Wars*, 2002, chart on pp. 65).

This case study, as well as the above statement, gives me more evidence to suggest that former KR child soldiers were able to use religion, or “traditional or ritual methods of healing of forgiveness,” which in Cambodia would be dominantly Buddhism, in order to help them reintegrate back into society on their own accord. It is reassurance that my hypothesis is not far-fetched or beyond realistic, but a legitimate theory.

CHAPTER 5: EVIDENCE OF REINTEGRATION

5.1 What is Reintegration?

According to the United Nations Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre, reintegration is “the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance,” (UN DDR Resource Center, Sec. General Note to Gen. Assembly, May 2005).

Reintegration is one part of a program established by the United Nations to work with post-conflict communities in achieving DDR, or “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.” The goal of the program is “to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin.” (UN, May 2005).

Reintegration is primarily the last step of the program instituted by the United Nations, meaning it can only take place once the majority of combatants have been relieved of their weapons and their units of armed forces are “discharged” or deconstructed. It is not to be confused with reinsertion, “assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilization but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration,”

which is a step added into the program by the United Nations to help transition post-conflict communities from demobilization into reintegration.

It is this definition of reintegration in which I rely in order to formulate exactly what I believe happened to former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge. For the purpose of this discourse, I do not focus on the prior steps of disarmament, demobilization or reinsertion, due to the fact that very little evidence exists to suggest any such program, whether implemented by the United Nations or an NGO, was successful in post-genocide Cambodia.

According to a briefing of guidelines and principles released by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations in 2000, called *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in a Peacekeeping Environment*, it is extremely critical that effective reintegration, as well as demobilization and disarmament, be attempted in post-conflict regions. Guidelines relay:

“In the short term, the failure to disarm and demobilize former combatants effectively may contribute to an immediate relapse into war. In the medium and long term, incomplete or ineffective reintegration of ex-combatants into civil society may lead to armed criminality by those former soldiers who have no other means of earning a living. In States where internal structures for civil order have already been weakened by an internecine conflict, this increase in armed criminality would be a further detriment to consolidating peace,” (UN DD&R Guidelines, 2000, pp. 16).

This statement within the UNPKO guidelines is important to this case study in the fact that it presents unanswered questions that point to the possibility that reintegration of former child soldiers of the KR may have indeed occurred. If this statement is internationally accepted as correct, then statistics, if obtainable, could relay whether or not a spike in criminality in post-genocide Cambodia occurred immediately after the war

concluded. If it did not, it is possible that former KR child soldiers were able to return to their communities and become a part of society again.

According to the UN, DDR programs have only partially, yet inefficiently, been attempted in Cambodia after the death of Pol Pot in 1998. Even then, according to a qualitative study released by UNICEF in 2002, called *Adult Wars, Child Soldiers: Voices of Children Involved in Armed Conflict in the East Asia and Pacific Region*, the former child soldiers uncovered were recruited a decade after the Cambodian Civil War by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and non-state entities, such as guerilla factions of the Khmer Rouge.

Almost twenty years had gone by, and yet, the extremely critical steps of DDR for former child soldiers of KR had failed to commence immediately post-genocide. No information, that I can find at least, regarding the implementation of DDR programs immediately after the fall of the Pol Pot regime is readily available. There was no extremely critical DDR program to aid Cambodia in demobilizing, disarming and reintegrating former child soldiers of the KR, and there are no records I can find that prove a direct link exists between criminality post-genocide and former KR child soldiers ineffectively reintegrating, though that does not mean one does not exist.

It is my opinion, based on the aforesaid, that many of these children were able to return home and become members of Cambodian society once again. It is also my opinion that they were able to do so on their own accord. The physical and psychological scars of war and genocide may still mark their spirits, but I believe that vast amounts were able to reintegrate, and that many were able to find healing through religion.

5.2 Study of Survivors

Though there is a limited amount of information available on former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge, some information does elude to the possibility of reintegration. In an article called *Cambodia's Twisted Path to Justice*, Ben Kiernan expresses just how horrible the loss of life was during the Khmer Rouge reign. He points out that out of 8 million Cambodians documented in the late 1970's, 1.7 million perished from disease, starvation and murder. The genocide left a devastated country and 6.3 million survivors behind to suffer the remnants of civil war and strife. No estimates currently exist as to just how many of those survivors were former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge.

According to Joel Brinkley, after Vietnam liberated Cambodia in 1979, thousands of survivors took refuge on the border with Thailand. He describes that:

“Millions of Cambodians quietly cheered as their historical enemy swept through the nation. Three years, eight months, and twenty days after they seized power, the Khmer Rouge slipped furtively into the night. For decades to come, Cambodians, with little prompting, would affirm that the Vietnamese saved their lives. Skeletal, sick, and traumatized, hundreds of thousands stumbled toward Thailand for sanctuary, eating leaves, roots, and bugs along the way. Many died of starvation en route, or stepped on land mines, for Khmer Rouge soldiers had laid mines almost everywhere along the western border, to prevent their victims from fleeing. Those who made it to Thailand brought malaria, typhoid, cholera, and a host of other illnesses into the camps. Human-rights groups estimated that about 650,000 more people died in the year following the fall of the Khmer Rouge,” (Brinkley, 2011, pp. 53).

Even though an estimate for how many of the refugees were former child soldiers or soldiers at all does not exist to date, another account in this book may suggest that

many were. Brinkley, a journalist who traveled to Cambodia to report on the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, further describes that he encountered a woman, named Cindy Coleman, who was searching Thai border refugee camps for former military officers she had cared for. She stated that she and an embassy aid had been following “Thai relief trucks around,” and that “the Cambodians were parked in open fields. They still wore their black uniforms and red scarves. All of them. They were undernourished, very thin. No expressions on their faces, just dead-eyed stares. Their clothes were soiled, (Brinkley, *Cambodian’s Curse*, 2011, pp. 54). Brinkley only mentions that most of Ms. Coleman’s clients were killed at Tuol Sleng and no further comments were made. However, her description of what she encountered at the refugee camps, in my opinion, suggests that a large amount of the refugees she saw were former soldiers of the regime-seeking asylum. If my conclusion is correct, that could also very well suggest that some of them were less than 18 years of age. Many of the refugee camps were emptied when Vietnamese soldiers entered Thailand in search of former Khmer Rouge soldiers.

In a report called *Genocide Prevention and Cambodian Civil Society*, by Socheata Poouv, the fact that Cambodian survivors left their stories of genocide and experiences behind in refugee camps in Thailand is addressed. She theorizes that due to poverty, mass illiteracy and little desire by authorities to “push” for stories of Khmer Rouge survivors, very little in the way of narratives regarding the atrocities of the genocide exists.

According to Poouv’s research, 70% of Cambodia is currently made up of those born after 1979. She believes the remainder of the population does not talk about the Khmer Rouge period due to a “lack of education about the genocide and the fact that the

history is not shared within families. Cambodian youth deny that the genocide happened at all,” (Poeuv, *Genocide Prevention*, 2009, pp. 49). Throughout the remainder of the report, she places the responsibility to prevent further genocide in Cambodia on civil society and the survivors of the Pol Pot regime. To call on the survivors to tell their stories would suggest that she believes many have reintegrated back into society, which I believe could include former child soldiers.

A great example of a former child soldier of the Khmer Rouge during the genocide would be a gentleman by the name of Aki Ra. He was a former child soldier for the Khmer Rouge. He returned to the villages in which he planted land mines while conscripted by the regime, and began to remove them. He established The Cambodian Landmine Museum and School in 1997. He began removing the land mines with homemade tools and by hand, only to create his own demining NGO years later, called Cambodian Self Help Demining. His NGO continues to demine villages all over Cambodia and provides financing for at risk children. His story is indeed an incredible example of reintegration back into Cambodian society, albeit he does not cite his religious beliefs as the reason he was motivated to act. Even so, he is evidence that reintegration of former Khmer Rouge soldiers was possible in post-genocide Cambodia.

CHAPTER 6: THE POWER OF RELIGION

As previously mentioned, Monica Toft's book "God's Century" focuses on the power of religion and how its strength can be evaluated based on the prevalence of religious expression on both the domestic and global levels of modern time. The fact that religion has proven to be powerful enough to withstand scientific thought, as aforementioned, has led me to conclude that it is an extremely important tool in the conflict resolution field and in the process of implementing reintegration to former child soldiers. However, it is important to note that religion is only a positive tool when it is first analyzed in relation to the culture and history of the post-conflict environment, as well as utilized as an avenue to promote peace.

As Appleby's concept of internal pluralism constructs the base for religion to be seen as flexible and ever-changing, his concept of a militant for peace constructs the core of the possibility that it can be directed away from violent extremism and wielded by religious actors for good. In the next chapter, I present an example of how religion is already being used by religious actors to promote peace and stability through the reintegration of former child soldiers in conflict prone Africa. I also present, however, how the dark side of religion can present itself for decades after a conflict has ended if its principles are not properly invoked or used to promote violence instead of peace.

6.1 Case Study of the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Uganda

In the first section of a working series called *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda*, a gentleman by the name of Bård Mæland analyzes the complexities of helping former female child soldiers of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda reintegrate back into their communities. What is fascinating about his assessment is that he factors in religion, in this case Christianity, and discusses how it could be a key factor in helping these ex-combatants reintegrate.

According to Mæland, a Professor of Systematic Theology at The School of Mission and Theology, "the reintegration of thousands of young persons and young adults back into the society of northern Uganda, from which they were abducted in order to serve as soldiers for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in various capacities, represents tremendous practical, social and cultural challenges," (Mæland, 2010, pp. 1 Intro). These challenges, he attests, could be more easily combated if the "social, cultural, and religious complexities" that plague former female child soldiers of the LRA in the region were evaluated and addressed.

What is interesting about this case study is that Mæland emphasizes that understanding the "culturally, religiously, and ritually rich environment" of Uganda may "strengthen the ongoing reintegration process," (Mæland, pp. 1 Intro). He believes that understanding first the context of the environment itself is critical, but includes religion as one of the key components affecting these particular ex-combatants.

Mæland's University, The School of Mission and Theology, is currently in the midst of doing just what was mentioned above through projects established for purposes of researching the context of former female child soldiers in Uganda. However, these projects are also implementing religion as a tool for reintegration.

According to a project description on the School of Mission and Theology's website:

“The research group will provide new knowledge about (a) the background of the phenomenon of child soldiers (with an emphasis on female soldiers), with particular reference to how religion is used for legitimizing purposes, (b) the potential of religious communities to provide religious rituals and narratives as means for the reintegration of the former soldiers, and (c) the reintegration of these young persons as an ethical challenge to religious communities,” (School of Mission and Theology Website, Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, 2013).

I believe that the goals relayed in the above statement are a portrayal of the importance religion can play in post-conflict society. I also believe it shows the importance the effort to gain more knowledge and understanding about this particular subject is for the conflict resolution field, especially for practitioners.

6.2 Concluding Statement

The idea that religion can be used to help reintegrate former child soldiers and ex-combatants is in the midst of development, though it is not a new concept. However, projects, such as this one, are crucial to my hypothesis because it shows the capacity religion has in affecting the lives of former child soldiers. Even though this project is ongoing, a fact that makes it difficult to rely on any concluding results, it presents that there are conflict resolution specialists and academics that believe reintegration through religion is possible, as I aim to discuss in this discourse. If they believe that future

reintegration for former child soldiers if achievable through the application of religious principles that promote healing, than there is a higher possibility that religion has already done so. In my opinion, if former child soldiers of the KR were able to rely on principles of Buddhism to reintegrate back into their families and society in a post-genocide environment, it is more than likely that we can learn valuable information that will allow us to further ease the challenges confronting conflict resolution practitioners implementing religion in case studies similar to the one described above. There is power in religion and if conflict resolution practitioners can learn to influence religious authorities in using it to promote peace and reintegration, then efficiently restructuring communities post-conflict may be attainable.

CHAPTER 7: BUDDHISM IN CAMBODIA

Buddhism in Cambodia has faced a vast array of hardships, including the invasion of Cambodia by foreign nations and the transitioning of empires and regimes, as well as efforts to influence it by other major religions. Even so, it has overcome even the most significant period of destruction, the Khmer Rouge regime and Pol Pot's attempt to destroy all aspects of the faith, and it has prevailed to become the dominant religion in Cambodia again today. Buddhism has even been used in peace building efforts throughout the region. It is my belief that the most prominent religious peace- building initiatives and the principles of Theravada Buddhism practiced by the majority of the Cambodian people could have contributed greatly to the reintegration of former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge post-genocide.

Indian Buddhist King Ashoka, who sent Indian missionaries, as well as merchants, all over Southeast Asia, first introduced Buddhism as an influence to Cambodia and the region in the 3rd Century BC. Hinduism was the dominant faith during this time period, but interestingly enough, it proved to be somewhat compatible with the emerging influence of Buddhism. During ancient times, Buddhism not only continued to influence Hindu beliefs, but it flourished throughout the first established kingdom of Cambodia, the Funan Kingdom, as well as through the Chenla Kingdom, covering from 100BC to 700AD, until it emerged as the second established religion of the country. However, it

wasn't until the Angkor Kingdom of the 13th century that the country saw a complete transition from Hinduism to Buddhism, which became apparent as the empires of Hindu Kings transferred to the empires of Buddhist Kings. The transitions were solidified through the transition of the Hindu God-King, specifically God- King Jayavarman II, to Buddha-King, which was a peaceful transition for the people between the two religions and kingdoms. In fact, there were several peaceful transitions back and forth from Hindu-King to Buddhist- King during the Angkor period, and the research that I have encountered has revealed that Buddhism became the dominant religion with little resistance by the end of the 13th century.

Though there were several peaceful transitions from Hinduism to Buddhism in the Angkor period, there were resistance movements during the Medieval and Colonial periods of Cambodia's history. These resistance movements were intra-state conflicts due to invasions by Thailand and Vietnam, in which both countries attempted to force their own branches of Buddhism and Christianity on the Cambodian people. There were also violent religious resistance movements during the French colonization of Cambodia beginning in 1867, in which the French and missionaries from other Christian-based countries worked to implement Christianity into Cambodian society. Some of these efforts succeeded in creating a small number of Christian colonies, but for the most part Buddhism continued to flourish until it became the state religion, with all but 5% of the population practicing Theravada Buddhism.

As I stated above, Theravada Buddhism, with the exception of the Khmer Rouge reign, has been the state religion of Cambodia since the 13th Century. Theravada Buddhism, in order to provide a more well rounded understanding of this particular sect of Buddhism, is the branch of Buddhism that practices the "Teachings of the Elders," (Ron Epstein, *Vajra Bodhi Sea: A Monthly Journal of Orthodox Buddhism*, Feb., 1999, pp. 41-43.). This means that this sect claims that it is the branch that follows the original beliefs and practices of the Buddha and the Elders of ancient times, who initiated the religion of Buddhism. The whole of this branch bases its practices off of the writings of the Buddha and the Elders in a language called Pali, while other branches use different forms of languages to interpret and read their practices. Theravada Buddhism is considered the less conservative and more simplistic form of Buddhism, and it is the branch that focuses more strictly on the idea that one must renounce the world and worldly possessions in order to achieve salvation. It is considered the Buddhism of the South and the lesser vehicle of the religion throughout the region. Its stricter focus on renouncing the world in order to move forward or achieve enlightenment could be one reason why reintegration through this particular religion is possible. For those Cambodian families who survived genocide and continued to embody principles of Theravada Buddhism such as this one, reintegration could be seen as much less of a challenge for ex-combatants than in other conflicts of similar circumstances.

What I have found to be most interesting in my research about Cambodia's form of Buddhism is that there was a nonviolent revolution and mass conversion of the Khmer society to Theravada Buddhism from Hinduism in the 13th century. In my opinion, this

was an incredible religious paradigm shift that occurred as a peaceful transition. Ever since this great shift, Theravada Buddhism has greatly influenced the Khmer language and culture. Because of this great influence, it is noteworthy that one of the basic tenets of a form of this religion encourages those who practice it to release the past in this life, an idea that could be beneficial in the reintegration back into society of former child soldiers who once committed atrocities during the Cambodian genocide.

The fact that there was this great and somewhat nonviolent shift from Hinduism to Theravada Buddhism in Cambodia's history is one of the reasons why I believe religion could be an overarching contributing factor to what appears to be a peaceful reintegration of former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge after the genocide. I find it intriguing that kings during the Angkor period were able to somewhat peacefully transition their kingdoms from one religion to the other and vice versa. This could be seen as somewhat of an anomaly, although there were periods of war with invading foreign forces. Even so, this is a fact that has been somewhat challenged by Elizabeth Becker, who in her book *When The War Was Over* expressed her belief that there are roots of violence in the Cambodian culture, her examples being dark tales passed onto younger generations by the elder and the violent actions of former Cambodian kings.

Nevertheless, the lack of inter-state religious conflict during such an integral transition period of Cambodian history and the role I believe Theravada Buddhism played in maintaining peace during that period has led me to conclude that the possibility of former child soldiers of the Pol Pot regime reintegrating back into society after committing mass atrocities, if reintegration is indeed what happened, is a reality. The

somewhat peaceful co-existence of two major religions in this specific region over thousands of years is especially fascinating when it is analyzed and applied to present day aspects of religion and conflict in Cambodia.

Pushing forward, one cannot focus on religion in Cambodia without relaying the destruction of religion reaped on Cambodians during the Khmer Rouge Regime and mass genocide. Elizabeth Becker, in *When the War Was Over*, describes the experiences of an American Foreign Service Officer named Kenneth M. Quinn, who had bestowed upon him the unfortunate task of interviewing Khmer refugees during the Khmer Rouge takeover. He relays that “perhaps the most significant socio-cultural reformation the [Khmer Rouge] have attempted is an attack on religion in general and the Theravada Buddhist Church and clergy in particular,” (Becker, 1998, pp. 146).

The constitution set up by the KR, called the Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea, was a document that portrayed a government focused on the good will of the people of Cambodia, which unfortunately proved to be a document created as a veil for the regime’s real intentions of mass degradation and destruction. For instance, the constitution has an article declaring "religious freedom" for all Cambodians; ironic in the sense that the regime did everything it could to destroy not only Buddhism, but also any kind of religion present in the country at that time. According to Becker:

“Religion was suppressed in the name of conservation. All religious and social celebrations were prohibited, and Buddhism was derided as backward and feudal. Marriage was more or less outlawed, so the party could induct young men and women into the army more easily. Gaiety was suspect. Flirting was banned and punished as severely as gambling. Bright clothes, jewelry, and any “extravagance” of dress were forbidden: Black or drab-colored pajamas and sarongs were the uniform. As Quinn wrote, these rules hit the Muslim minority, the Chams,

especially hard. Their dress and the women's jewelry and hairstyles were part of their religion and identity. Events would prove this not a coincidence. Minorities-Chinese, Cham, or Vietnamese-would be greatly endangered as the Khmer Rouge expressed their nationalism more urgently," (Becker, 1998, pp. 149).

Pol Pot came into power with the goal of glorifying anti-colonialism and implementing the communist social structure. He spoke of watching China expand while Cambodia, his country, remained a third world country, deprived of development and wealth. He wanted to change the old ways of the Khmer Rouge society and attempted consistently to abolish all religion and connections to traditional Khmer society in Cambodia during his regime. He saw religion as a parasite and tried to destroy and devastate all religious orders of Buddhism, as well as most of the minority groups, including the small orders of Muslims and Christians. He destroyed Buddhist Wats and defaced statues, and slaughtered and enslaved millions of Cambodians. Out of the estimated 65,000 Buddhist monks, only 5,000 survived execution or enslavement in the labor force. An estimated 2 million died in the genocide. Pol Pot almost completely eliminated Buddhism during his rule, but it has since rebuilt itself in many ways, including through peace-building initiatives in the post-genocide era.

7.1 Case Study of Maha Ghosananda

Peace-building initiatives through Theravada Buddhism had an incredible role in helping to restructure post-genocide Cambodia. Monica Toft recounted in Chapter Seven of her book, *God's Century*, called "Militants for Peace and Justice," that there was a Buddhist religious movement led by a man named Maha Ghosananda in 1992. He led the first, and possibly only, movement of religiously based peace building in Cambodia's

post-genocide period. From 1992 to 1998, he led incredibly successful peace walks annually and worked with Buddhist monks to promote negotiation and the drafting of peace accords with other factions of religious orders. He was nominated four times for the Nobel Peace Prize and worked tirelessly to promote Buddhist principles and peace, and even helped refugees, victims and child soldiers of the Pol Pot regime. His spiritual movement led to the establishment of other great institutions for peace, albeit non-religious movements, like the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation, which is an organization that provides training in conflict resolution on the grassroots level and teaches nonviolence for many Buddhist monks, nuns and others wishing to promote conflict resolution. Ghosananda's movement was greatly inspired by the teachings of Gandhi and was called the Dhammayietra movement, a movement aimed at teaching and promoting nonviolence, as well as Buddhist theology, as a way to peace and reconciliation.

In applying another religious framework to my research of Buddhism in Cambodia, I used Scott Appleby's idea of a religious actor acting as a "militant peacemaker" and that religion can actually be used as a method of healing for a community suffering from post- conflict situations. It is my opinion that Maha Ghosananda could be considered a non-violent religious militant inspired by this "sacred rage" Appleby mentions, or rage "against racial, ethnic and religious discrimination; unjust economic policies; unnecessary shortages of food, clean water and basic education for the poor; corruption and hypocrisy in government; state or corporate policies that cause environmental pollution and deforestation; the presence of millions of landmines in

the soil of developing nations; and the systematic or collateral violations of human rights, whether by state security forces or by religious or secular combatants,” (Appleby, 2000, pp. 6).

He didn't use guns, death or destruction to promote his ideals and beliefs, which comes to mind when one thinks of a “militant,” but he used nonviolence and the promotion of peace to create a force against what he opposed in society. Monica Toft, as well, discussed the idea of a “militant for peace” and stated that “just as religious actors foment civil war and terrorism, so too, they promote peace and reconciliation in the wake of civil war, genocide and dictatorship,”(Toft, *God's Century*, 2011, pp. 176). She explored the 1950's rise of “Engaged Buddhism,” which she describes as “involving advocacy for peace, environmentalism, nonviolence, human rights, and social transformation” reflecting “the global rise of religion as a transnational global force,” (Toft, *God's Century*, 2011, pp. 180). In this case, “Engaged Buddhism” reflects the missionary efforts globally for peace advocacy and non-violence through promoting the implementation of Buddhist principles in conflict. Her personal identification of Maha Ghosananda as an incredible and perfect example of an “Engaged Buddhist” gave me further reason to explore the use of Buddhism as a method of peace- building and a reason to believe that these efforts allowed former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge regime to peacefully reintegrate back into society.

Also, I found Toft's evaluation of “Engaged Buddhism” really interesting, particularly because I was able to personally see how aspects of the concept can be used to achieve peace. While I was working with the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in

Phnom Penh over a year ago, we implemented principles of Buddhism to help eliminate inner conflict as a means to pursue helping others in societal conflict. We practiced meditation as a method of healing oneself before healing another, because it is so important to find peace in oneself before attempting to help others find peace. In a sense, some of the methods I worked with, including the idea of looking at a perpetrator of atrocities during genocide as a victim, were very difficult to accept. I personally struggled, even after my own experience working with the idea that perpetrators are capable of reintegration into societies in Cambodia still suffering from the remnants of the Khmer Rouge regime and its brutality. However, this was the first time I had engaged in meditation and methods of Buddhism. Most Cambodians, on the other hand, live and breathe what I was learning of these particular principles. Therefore, I have come to comprehend more thoroughly just how reintegration of former child soldiers of the Pol Pot regime, through the practice of Theravada Buddhism, could have been possible after the regime fell.

In further research of Maha Ghosananda, I discovered another reason why his Buddhist movement for peace in Cambodia could be one of the reasons why peaceful reintegration of child soldiers may have happened. I found research relaying that Ghosananda helped former child soldiers find ways to give back to their communities and engage in peace building and healing through principles of Buddhism. This was further evidence that Ghosananda and his peace movement through the principles of Theravada Buddhism could be a contributing factor to how former Khmer Rouge child soldiers were able to find acceptance back into their communities after committing such horrible

atrocities. I have found that religion in general has shaped the identity and culture of Cambodians, and the daily rituals of meditation and other aspects of Theravada Buddhism could very well have helped the society cope with the genocide on a personal level. The more I research, the more religion seems to play a larger role, proving my theory.

7.2 Monks in Effect

Maha Ghosananda is not the only one who hoped to implement Buddhist theology into the Cambodian infrastructure after the Pol Pot regime crumbled. Many Buddhists, including monks, in present day Cambodia wish to restructure societal governance by using Buddhist principles of transformation and by establishing and injecting more education at the village-level of Buddhist theories regarding conflict resolution and neutrality.

The best example of monks working to provide healing and peace through Buddhism is Youth for Peace. Youth for Peace is a Cambodian NGO, one of the most active local level NGO's with a goal of educating and training the next generations of Cambodia in conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace building. According to the YFP website, they are currently working on two new projects, called the Healing Through Buddhism project (HTB) and the Voice of Former Khmer Rouge (VFKR) project. These two projects are unique in that they work together to train Buddhist Monks in skills that will help them use Buddhism to help former child soldiers and victims of the Khmer Rouge, as well as the youth of the current generation, to heal, build peace and promote awareness of the history of the Khmer Rouge.

Their promotion of peace and reintegration, as well as their call for former soldiers of the Khmer Rouge to come forward and share their stories, depicts and also reaffirms how religion can be used by religious actors to promote peace building. These are modern day religious actors acting as militant peacemakers. Their actions have directly and positively affected the lives of those still suffering from a society that endured the horrors of genocide. If they are able to touch the lives of former Khmer Rouge soldiers and help them obtain healing through principles of Buddhism, then it is likely that former child soldiers of the KR were able to do so on their own accord. It is not unreasonable to suggest that children and survivors of the genocide were able to find their way back to practicing principles of Theravada Buddhism, a possibility that would attribute to the massive reemergence of Buddhism after the fall of the Pol Pot regime.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

8.1 Plan of Action for Reintegration

"Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius -- and a lot of courage -- to move in the opposite direction,"

-Quote by Albert Einstein

As I previously stated, it is important to note that religion is only a positive tool when it is first analyzed in relation to the culture and history of the post-conflict environment, as well as utilized as an avenue to promote peace. Understanding first the complexity, content, and history of religion, as well as establishing how each community perceives what is “good” and what is “bad” (or what is “evil” vs. “good”) is vital before employing it as a tool for reintegration in post-conflict communities.

With that being said, I absolutely believe that religion is key in promoting peace and obtaining sustainable reintegration for former child soldiers. I also believe it is key in administering aspects of reconciliation, transitional justice and restorative justice in post-conflict communities, whether they are religious or not. Therefore, in my opinion, I believe religion should be evaluated and incorporated into the framework of conflict resolution practitioners and any international entities dealing with the restructuring of post-conflict communities. UNICEF indirectly alludes to this idea in the 2002 *Adult Wars, Child Soldiers* study in phrasing:

“Psycho-social services –culturally adapted to the specific needs of

the child – must be provided. Children should be involved in the process of demobilization, including forgiveness rituals, as appropriate, and peer counselling. A specific plan to promote education and vocational training is essential to their successful reintegration into community life,” (UNICEF, 2002, pp. 75).

“Forgiveness rituals,” like those practiced in Theravada Buddhism, are very likely attributable to the healing achieved by former child soldiers of the KR that may have made it possible for them to reintegrate, if that is what actually happened. It is also very likely that the same type of principles could be implemented through religious and spiritual education to those currently dealing with psychological issues and failed reintegration stemming from post-conflict situations.

Children and adults alike could benefit from programs that incorporate methods of healing through religion, based on the context of the culture and conflict. Should I be granted the incredible opportunity to work with former child soldiers in post-conflict and conflict communities, my plan will be to construct a framework that will encompass the careful and cautionary assessment and evaluation, as well as incorporation, of religious practices compatible with the context of the conflict in an effort to promote healing and sustainable long-term reintegration.

8.2 Conclusion

It is my sincere hope that my research could one day bring to light new methods and processes of reintegration that could prove to be more deserving of funding and more reliable in sustaining peace for regions conflicted by issues arising from the use of child soldiers. However, the religious framework I have provided in this discourse in regards to Buddhism as a method of peace building in Cambodia and in other conflict ravaged

countries could also shed light on new methods and processes of reintegration through the use of religion.

As I stated above, I believe that the religious framework I have presented in this discourse has helped me unveil a correlation between religion and reintegration in post-genocide Cambodia. Though I have not conducted the proper fieldwork to provide further evidence to support my theory, I take comfort in the fact that for some former child soldiers of the Pol Pot regime, the correlation is all too apparent.

In conclusion, Buddhism in Cambodia has proven to be a force in itself, with the ability to survive great periods of change and the restructuring of its entire religious infrastructure several times over. The Pol Pot regime worked to ethnically cleanse Buddhist Cambodians in order to completely eliminate the entire religion, as well as reaped destruction on many of Cambodia's famous Buddhist and Hindu temples, and yet, Theravada Buddhism remains the dominant religion in the region. This faith and its ability to survive and promote peaceful societal transition could very well be the reason why child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge regime could have peacefully reintegrated back into society during the post-conflict genocide. It could also be the reason why movements like the Dhammayietra movement in Cambodia as a method of religious peace building was so successful in becoming a global force for conflict resolution in other conflict ravaged regions throughout Southeast Asia.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Emily A. Burd grew up in a small town near Chicago, Illinois. She attended George Mason University, where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Government and International Affairs in 2012. She spent time working with Sudanese refugees in Egypt in 2010 and completed a course on “trauma and healing” through the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 2012. It was her work in Cambodia that intrigued her enough to pursue a study on former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge. She currently lives in Northern Italy with her husband and is hoping to further her investigation of child soldiers of the Democratic Kampuchea.