

Human Sciences Encounters in Phnom-Penh: Past Presentations: Teaching Democratic Kampuchea: "Genocide" versus "politicide"

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Since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, a controversy has developed among Cambodian politicians, together with international historians and lawyers, about how to brand the criminal policies of *Angkar Padevoat* - the Revolutionary Organization.

The dominant approach among Cambodian officials has been to associate "the Pol Pot regime" with the "genocides" of the XXth Century - the one perpetrated by the Nazis in particular. This in fact is not an issue for the Khmer speakers themselves, as the 1948 new word "genocide" of Raphael Lemkin has been translated into the Khmer language by *kaprolay puchsah*, "the extermination of a nation" or simply *okretekam*, "the crime".

The use of such a word in English is no answer to the controversial issue of why did the Khmer Rouge kill. Thus the Khmer students are never informed about the great controversy touching the differences between the Communist and the Nazi forms of totalitarian regimes and societies. The former killed people perceived as their political enemies "politi-cide" (as the Americans political scientists Barbara Harff et Ted Robert Gurr have proposed), while the Nazis have eliminated the "racially inferior races" that they claimed "polluted" the purity of the Germanic race (geno-cide)

It matters to be frank with the Cambodian public and its vast student population in particular, to describe the lethal regime accurately and with suitable historical analogies and comparisons. Democratic Kampuchea needs to be compared with its models: Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, Kim Il-sung's North Korea and Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam - and not with Nazi Germany, Iraq, Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as is done in Cambodian schools today.