‘We do not march, we walk’: The Limits of Buddhist Peacemaking in Cambodia

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Discovering the problem

A few years ago in Phnom Penh, I arranged to meet a key organizer of the Dhammayietra Cambodia's peace walk. [1] He had suggested that we meet at the Dhammayietra Center at Wat Sampeou Meas. When I arrived at the wat that afternoon, the Center, usually a hive of activity, was eerily quiet and dusty with disuse. The elderly man drove up on his motorbike and we greeted awkwardly as he unlocked the front door. Only once did he refer to the chaos that had washed over the Center. This was when I asked to phone his wife who had been the primary trainer for the peace walks and who had been implicated in their decline. "Bopha is broken" [2] he said by way of warning. Laying his hand on his heart, he repeated, “Bopha is broken." After an interview abbreviated because my interpreter had fallen ill, he busied himself on the computer as I looked through some material. As I walked down the palm-lined lane that led from the wat compound to the busy street, I turned to notice that he was locking the door behind him.

What had happened to the thundering of steps that since 1992 had captured the imagination of an international network of Buddhist and interfaith peace workers? In search of an explanation, I interviewed many people that summer one of whom was former Jesuit brother Bob Maat, who was one of the main organizers of the early Dhammayietras and an admirer of Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda, the distinguished Cambodian Supreme Patriarch who was

[1] Dhammayietra is Pali and literally means, walk of the dhamma, but is more often rendered pilgrimage of peace.
[2] Given the controversy surrounding the Dhammayietra's demise, some names of the key figures have been altered.

the walk's inspirational leader.[3] During our conversation, he mentioned an encounter between Maha Ghosananda and a Tibetan monk at an interfaith gathering. The Tibetan had just responded to a question about how Tibetan Buddhists achieve political peace. He then turned to the Cambodian monk, "But you also lead peace marches across Cambodia. Sometimes people interpret these marching monks as showing anger. What do you think? Is marching good, or not? Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda replied, "We do not march, we walk--and walking is good. We walk peacefully every day in Cambodia. In this manner, we make peace in walking, in every step" (cited in Mitchell and Wiseman 1999, 230).

Matt had intended to communicate a fundamental constituent of Cambodia's Dhammayietra— the walk as skillful means—but Maha Ghosananda's response also signaled a political shift in the most visible means of the peacemaking in Cambodia at that point, the peace walk. While there have been many interpretations for decline of the Dhammayietra, it can also be argued that this distinction between marches and walks signaled the end of large-scale peace walks. This article focuses on the production of religious-based peacemaking in Cambodia from 1992 through 1998, when a crisis forced the sangha as Buddhist monks to reconsider their role in social action. The Dhammayietra organizers practiced a Buddhist philosophy of neutral nonviolence in response to the continued conflict between the Khmer Rouge and newly elected Cambodian government. This approach was legitimated by a generally conservative sangha and the state until monks joined a series of protests against the existing administration. Though non violent, the monks were no longer non-partisan. Then state authorities and sangha leadership challenged the monks' *religious* claim to peacemaking. The semantic and political battle about religious citizenship muddied the arguments for neutrality and brought peace walks to a tentative halt.

Socially engaged Buddhism

[3] Both of the Theravada orders elect a Supreme Patriarch. Maha Ghosananda was selected by exiled monks in the 1980's a decision that caused some controversy in Cambodia but was resolved by King Sihanouk.

The Dhammayietra has been characterized as "socially engaged" Buddhism, a new form of religious non-violent activism that has taken shape in Cambodia since its opening to the international community after the UN-moderated elections in 1993. This new "engaged" Buddhism has encouraged new forms of religious participation in the public sphere, particularly within the realm of peacebuilding and conflict mediation.

As a philosophy of liberation focusing on the mind, Buddhism is not known for its activism, and while there is a strong philosophy of nonviolence, the means towards this end have not classically taken a political route. "Socially engaged Buddhism" is a moniker coined by the South Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh to refer to his order's commitment to a Buddhist basis for social action during the Vietnam war.[4] In the 1980s Sulak Sivaraksa, an outspoken Thai lawyer, took up the term and employed it as a Buddhist critique of development strategies in Thailand.[5] By the mid-1990s an International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) had formed with members in over thirty countries, evincing the vitality of this contemporary activism.[6] Christopher Queen and Sallie King in *Engaged Buddhism* argue that its vitality in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and with exiled figures from Vietnam and Tibet marks a sea change in Asian Buddhism.[7] For Queen and King, Buddhist liberation movements as "voluntary groups and nongovernmental organizations committed to realizing a just and peaceful society by Buddhist means"[8] are unlike their predecessors, which were either small and countercultural reformists or sangha (Buddhist clergy) -mandated changes aligned with power elites.

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[4] Thich Nhat Hanh became well-known on both sides of the Pacific in the 1970s for his stance of nonviolence and radical neutrality which earned him a nomination for the Nobel Peace prize by Martin Luther King, Jr. For his work on interdependence, a significant contribution to contemporary philosophy of engaged Buddhism, see Thich Nhat Hanh. *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1997).

[5] Sulak Sivaraksa is very prolific. For an overview of his vision, see Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision of Renewing Society (*Berkeley, Calif: Parallax Press, 1993) and Donald Swearer, "Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society, " *Engaged Buddhists: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Southeast Asia,* pp. 195-235.

[6] There is a stimulating transnational interchange among engaged Buddhists. Recent books that attest to this are Christopher Queen ed. *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000); Christopher Queen, Prebisch, and Keown eds. *Action Dharma, New Studies in Engaged Buddhism,* (Richmond,VA: Curizon, 2001) and Sulak Sivaraksa et al, eds. *Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium* (Bangkok, Thailand: Sathirakoses—Nagappradipa Foundation and Foundation for Children, 1999).

[7] These include the Tibet's Dalai Lama, Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi, Sri Lanka's Sarvodaya organization, in Thailand, the now deceased Bhikku Buddhadhasa, and Sulak Sivaraksa, Thich Nhat Hanh and others. See Christopher Queen and Sallie King, eds. *Engaged Buddhists: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Southeast Asia.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

[8] Christopher Queen, "Introduction," *Engaged Buddhists: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Southeast Asia*, pp. 1-44.

This sea change in Buddhism is in fact much broader than Buddhism itself, comprising a range of religious movements worldwide.[9] There are at least three overlapping factors that have contributed to this popular engagement and its global spread. All have impact on peacebuilding in Cambodia. First, the re-emergence of religion in the public sphere – particularly in post-socialist societies – can be attributed to the end of the Cold War and opening of new civil societies.[10] Since its "transition to democracy" from fifteen years of communist isolationism, there has been a marked renewal -- and variety -- to religious life and the participation of religious groups in Cambodia's fledgling civil society.

Secondly, what follows from this is an the florescence of local NGOs in the Global South, traced in part to wealthy donor state's post-Cold War "New Policy Agenda" which supports liberal democratization by way of citizen action and a free market in the developing world. The voluntary sector has flourished with funding that was once channeled through the government because NGOS are perceived as less corrupt, more flexible, and better able to represent the needs of the populace. A plethora of Buddhist, Islamic, Christian and other religious groups allied to NGOs rather than to conventional political parties are re-inventing politics and norms of social justice. This contemporary religious activism ranges from Cambodian Buddhist monks organizing peace marches, Thai monks assisting with AIDs cures to Filipino nuns as human rights activists. Third, the emergence of what Keck and Sikkink call transnational advocacy networks, sophisticated horizontally connected clusters of these NGOs and other networks that promote specific forms of political issues such as human rights, environmental issues and peacemaking.[11] All of these arrangements are embedded in their own national histories. In Cambodia, the growth of Buddhist –based arrived in 1992 with (yet another) shift in its political culture, but its significance can only be understood by setting it within the last forty years of sangha-state relations.

[9] See Suzanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori, eds. *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997). Applby, Scott. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred. Religion, Violence and Reconciliation.* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).
[10] Jose Casanova. *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[11] Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

Cambodian Buddhism and Politics, 1960's-1990

Like Thailand's Theravada Buddhism which has forged a close alliance between the state, monarchy and sangha (Tambiah 1976). Khmer Buddhism has historically been employed to legitimate political authority. Sangha-state relations have often been likened to a chariot requiring two wheels, one representing Buddhism and the other the state. Both must turn harmoniously for the chariot to move smoothly. According to this philosophy, the roles of each are clearly assigned--Buddhism is responsible for moral and spiritual needs of the people, and the state maintains the political sphere. In truth, Cambodian Buddhism is saturated with state politics. The sangha has critiqued the monarchy and state at critical junctures in the 19th and 20th century (Harris 1999). Several significant nationalist uprisings in the early 1900s were instigated by monks and during the tumultuous period of the 1970s two well-known progressive monks, Khiev Chum and Pang Khat, advocated for democracy and participated in student protests against Lon Nol (Sam 1987).

The monarchy and state have both used Buddhism for neutral as well as violent ends. In the early 1960's Prince Sihanouk forged a peculiar brand of "Buddhist Socialism" that promoted the "middle path" of neutrality towards Vietnam's escalating war and meritorious acts of charity (Chandler 1991). His Buddhist socialism was short-lived. By the end of the 1960's Sihanouk decided, that it was not possible for Cambodia to remain neutral in the maelstrom engulfing the region and turned to anti-American policies (Sam 1987). When General Lon Nol deposed Sihanouk in a bloodless coup in 1970, he initiated a "Buddhist holy war" which construed Khmer Buddhism as the spiritual basis of the war that would ultimately revive the glories of Angkor, the vaunted ancient Khmer empire (Chandler 1991, 205). Five years later, the Khmer Rouge replaced Lon Nol's religious nationalism with a radical communist anti-modernist plan that perceived all class enemies-- sangha included -- as parasites that required extermination. An estimated two million Cambodians perished by execution, starvation and disease. In just four years under the Democratic Kampuchea, 3,000 wats were destroyed or converted to prisons and an estimated 60,000 monks were forced to disrobe.

The invasion of Vietnam in 1979 ended the Khmer Rouge experiment but maintained a socialist agenda, replacing one cadre of Khmer Rouge with others who had fled to Vietnam to

seek the assistance of the new Vietnamese Socialist Republic. In the ten years of Vietnamese socialist occupation from 1979-89, the sangha's rehabilitation was contingent on their compliance with the policies of the socialist state (Suksamran 1993). There were various amendments to the vinaya, such as the age of monks (over 50) and attendance at revolutionary training courses and reinterpret the teachings of Buddha to support communist ideology and government policies. Monks were urged to attend revolutionary training courses and reinterpret the teachings of Buddha to support communist ideology and government policies.

Buddhism in exile took its own course. In Cambodian communities in the US and elsewhere, wats were the vehicle for cultural preservation (Kalab 1994). In the refugee camps that served as the sites for the Cambodian resistance against Cambodia's socialist regime, Buddhism developed a more political agenda. By the mid-1980s, the camps became staging sites for anti-Vietnamese resistance forces of the FUNCINPEC and KPNLF. Propagation of Buddhism became fused to the nationalist anti-Communist of these factions (Suksamran 1993; French 1994). The sangha in Cambodia and in exile were thus following diverging political platforms when the country reunited under the Paris Peace Accords in 1992. One agenda of King Sihanouk when he returned to the royal palace in the 1990's was to unify and rebuild the sangha, increase its legitimacy with the populace, and bring it back into alignment with the monarchy.

Returning to Buddhism in post-socialist Cambodia

The weakened Buddhist sangha was a peripheral concern to the UN Transitional Authority (UNTAC), the architects of Cambodia's transition to democracy, who saw governance and infrastructure as the most pressing need for peacebuilding. While Buddhism was first incorporated in human rights curriculum in the border camps, it was also employed in the development of UNTAC's national dissemination of its human rights curriculum. Most of the fledgling local human rights NGOs that emerged in the early 1990's reflected this merger of rights language with Buddhist moral principles.

The fragile reunification of Cambodia's testy factionalism began to take place when the UN Transitional Authority (UNTAC) arrived in 1992 to monitor Cambodia's transition to

democracy, assure the repatriation of 300,000 Cambodians in Thai border camps, and oversee the national elections that would be held the following year. Its human rights component, one of the most extensive in its history, incorporated Buddhist tenets in the curriculum and sought to enlist monks for support.

The most dramatic expression of peacemaking, however, occurred outside of (and despite) the elaborate plans of UN advisors, state officials, and warring factions. In April, of 1992, over one hundred monks, nuns and international staff from Site II, the main refugee camp for Cambodians in Thailand, walked over the border and returned home on foot as a way to symbolize that peace was returning to Cambodia "step by step". Although permission had been begrudging, it was an astounding success, galvanizing both international and local support for a second walk that occurred the following year during the elections. The Dhammayietra (Pali, pilgrimage of truth) quickly became institutionalized as an annual event whose organizers were housed in the offices of the Dhammayietra Center for Peace and Reconciliation at wat Sampeou Meas, the pagoda of Maha Ghosananda, its charismatic leader internationally known as the "Gandhi of Cambodia."

Dhammayietra

The Dhammayietra was the only explicitly non-violent response to entrenched factionalism at work in Cambodia's transition to democracy. Unlike the UN's plans or other the government's official strategies for national reconstruction and reconciliation, the Dhammayietra Center's goals tended towards building a culture of peace through engaged Buddhist philosophy and practice. Its charismatic leader, Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda teaches "peacemaking as the dhamma" a way of life embodied in mindfulness meditation.[12]

The Dhammayietra conducted annual country-wide walks from 1993-2000 at which point Ghosananda in his mid'70s could no longer participate. [13] Each walk promoted a social message

[12] See Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda's collected dharma talks in Jane Mahoney and Philip Edmonds, eds. *Step by Step* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992).

[13] For more information on the Dhammayietra, read Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan, "One Million Kilometers for Peace, Reconciliation and Hope," in Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan and Thomas Weber, eds., *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders: A Recurrent Vision,* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 2000) pp.257-68; Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan "The Buddha in the Battlefield: Maha Ghosananda Bhikku and the Dhammayietra Army of Peace" in Simon Harak,

sanctioned by Buddhist clergy—peaceful elections, cessation of civil war, ecological balance, a ban on landmines. Each route was symbolically mapped so that walkers would encounter those most affected by Cambodia's conflict..

This allowed the walkers to "walk with" the suffering of local people and offer them "nonviolent solidarity." [14] For this reason, the walks often occurred in western Cambodia where fighting between the Khmer Rouge and government forces was fierce.[15] Up to seven hundred Cambodians and international supporters walked approximately 300 kilometers for two weeks, stopping at wats along the route. Thousands of villagers lined the roads, ready to receive the *tuk mon*, a blessing of water sprayed by the passing monks.

Maha Ghosananda is fond of saying that the Dhammayietra is a skillful means where "each step is a meditation" and "with every step we will build a bridge" (Ghosananda 1992). Thus, the Dhammayietra as a peace walk was understood as a meditative practice as well a social witness. Its non-violent neutrality was inculcated through the prerequisite of pre-walk workshops, a pledge to practice of non-violence that each walker signed, and organizers' demands that government officials and soldiers refrain from "accompanying" them along the route, as this would incite Khmer Rouge reprisal. The government's violation of this request was put to the test during the third walk through the war zones when government soldiers and Khmer Rouge exchanged fire. Walkers were caught in the crossfire, two were killed and six foreign participants were taken hostage by the Khmer Rouge. It is to the credit of the Dhammayietra's reputation as neutral and the walk's organizers that the hostages were released unharmed with the Khmer Rouge commander's instructions to take back the message that "we all want peace."[16]

Thus, as a socially active expression of Buddhism, the Dhammayietra and its iconic figure contributed to the post-socialist Cambodia three significant ways.

S.J, ed. *Nonviolence in the Third Millennium* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000) pp.121-36; Kathryn Poethig, "Movable Peace: Enagaging the Transnational in Cambodia's Dhammayietra" *Journal for the Social Scientific Study of Religion,* 41 (1) March 2002: 19-28 and Monique Skidmore, "In the Shade of the Bodhi Tree. Dhammayietra and the Re-awakening of Community in Cambodia," *Crossroads* 10(1):1032, 1997.

[14] Matt, personal communication, June 2001. See also Skidmore 1997.

[15] Six of the eight walks from 1992-1999 began or concluded in Cambodia's northwest.

[16] Bernstein, personal conversation, July 1994. See Moon 1995.

First, it introduced the concept that nonviolent intervention in political conflict was incontrovertibly Buddhist--thus encouraging the transnational expression of "engaged Buddhism" in Cambodia.

Second, it contributed to the renewed vitality of Cambodian Buddhism by disciplining and training of a new generation of young monks, inspiring lay participation (particularly through deep reverence for Maha Ghosananda) and reviving a pre-1970's balance between nation-religion-king through the royal patronage of King Sihanouk who often graced the Dhammayietra with a public audience whenever the walk ended in Phnom Penh.

Third, it developed a highly trained and dedicated peacemaking elite (both Buddhist and not) who took the theories of nonviolence, organizational skill development, and training in self-discipline learned from the Dhammayietras into new forms of conflict transformation and social action.

The Dhammayietra as a Buddhist Response to Violence

Despite the Cambodian sangha's turbulent relationship with the state, the sangha's participation in social action has been generally considered an exception rather than the rule. Because of this reticence, Maha Ghosananda became a leading proponent for the sangha's involvement in peacemaking as a form of social action. Responding to critics in the Cambodian Buddhist community who believe Buddhist monks should not engage in politics, Ghosananda has countered that the suffering of Cambodia and other Buddhist countries calls for a response. The political strife in India, Burma, Sri Lanka and elsewhere cause Buddhists much suffering. This suffering, like the suffering of Cambodia is “but a mirror of the suffering of the world” (66). Monks, he argues, must be challenged to leave their temples and enter the temples of human experience (“in the refugee camps, the prisons, the ghettos”), temples that are “filled with suffering” (63) Monks are therefore encouraged to engage in acts of compassion in the world, to work out liberation individually and concurrently for the world.

Ghosananda was not naive about the quagmires of peace talks or the conditions under which negotiation can occur. He stressed that reconciliation is not a renunciation of political

will. The cessation of conflict must involve "compassion without concession and peace without appeasement" (52). It is rather a "skillful means" or detachment and a willingness to listen. He assures his critics that "conflict resolution" is intrinsically Buddhist. Even the Buddha embodied this conviction when he walked onto the battlefield between the Sakyas and Koliyas. For Ghosananda peacemaking *is* the dharma, the Buddhist way to liberation. As the dharma, it is a "middle path of equanimity, non-duality and non-attachment" (52).

He characterizes the practice of peacemaking as the "skillful means" to listen with compassion, to be mindful and selfless in the step-by-step journey. For Buddhists, the most dangerous enemy of peacemaking is within -- there are three defilements that must be "conquered" through mindful practice: greed, anger and delusion. The practice here is non-attachment, to "conquer the mind" through awareness of the projections of these three defilements.[17] In nonviolent work, anger is the greatest obstacle and for this equanimity is necessary-- nonactivity that releases one from the cycle of violence. Non-action is not inaction; if refers to non-reaction. If one is not "hooked" by anger or despair, one can act creatively instead of react mindlessly, producing more negativity that is karmic. Compassion is a result of "wisdom" -- the mastering of the mind through meditation, which ultimately produces equanimity. Moser-Puangsuwan, an expatriate who assisted with the early walks believes that this particular development of compassion is unique to mass movements in Asia. (2000a).

A march, a walk

While the Dhammayietra Center and the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation were the primary institutions in faith-based peace work, their scope was limited to the annual walk and nonviolence training. Because of this, other initiatives began to emerge in the mid-1990's. Most drew on the symbolic power of the peace walk and its non-violence training. A similar model was the Forum for Peace through Love and Compassion or *Mehta Thor*. *Mehta Thor* was organized as staff in NGOs grew increasingly concerned about a rising climate of violence. The organizers

[17] Buddha offered the "four abodes" of enlightened practice as antidote for these defilements of the mind. *Metta* (lovingkindness) subdues anger, *karuna* (compassion) turns those who are harmful harmless, *mudita* (sympathetic joy) is offered those whose greed does not welcome the success of others, and *upekkha* (equanimity) helps to neutralize the vindictiveness of those who are addicted to hatred and enmity.

were Thida Khus of SILAKA, Leang Meng Ho of the Cambodian Institute of Human Rights, and Oung Vuthy of the Dhammayietra Center. Their anxiety was heightened in March 1997 by a grenade attack on the rally of an opposition candidate, Sam Rainsy outside the National Assembly. Twenty were killed and one hundred left wounded. Individuals involved in *Mehta Thor* chose this as an organizing event, laying flowers on the site to call for restraint among political parties. On July 5-6, a brief, violent coup in Phnom Penh upset the fragile coalition government. Officials fled the country as tanks rumbled down the streets and shops were looted by military personnel. In early August, a short peace walk was organized by *Mehta Thor* and the Dhammayietra Center. Maha Ghosananda led monks, nuns, and laypersons from wat Sampeou Meas to the National Assembly. The walkers conducted a *soth mun* (traditional ceremony, meditation) to communicate a call for peace. The group also issued statements to political officials, the UN and media calling for calm. Both actions took tremendous courage on the part of participants as the political situation was highly charged. [18]

This new sense of partnership in peacemaking and the perceived lack of a cohesive, active peace network, drew together the 23 NGOs most active in *Mehta Thor* and the Dhammayietra to form the Campaign to Reduce Violence Through Peace (CRVP) on the Cambodian New Year in April. [19] The Campaign's main goal was to encourage peaceful conduct in the 1998 national elections. While not explicitly religious in philosophy, it modeled its nonviolence workshops and peace walks after the Dhammayietra. It held walks in sixteen provinces in 1998 and dwarfed the seventh Dhammayietra (Khus 1998).[20]

A year later, however, both the Dhammayietra Center and CRVP were virtually defunct. The peace walks attracted only the staunchest supporters and CRVP committee had been drawn

[18] This information is drawn from Linda McGrew, "Building Peace in Cambodia, Step by Step," The Cooperation to Reduce Violence for Peace, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 30 September 1998. Unpublished manuscript.

[19] Central Committee included Cambodian NGOs such as SILAKA/Forum for Peace, Centre for Social Development, Cambodian Institute of Human Rights; SABORAS, YRDY, Dhammayietra Center/Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation, People's Association for Development, Star Kampuchea, Khmer Women's Voice Center, Project Against Domestic Violence, Khmer Students Association. The international NGOs included American Friends Service Committee, Mennonite Central Committee, CIDSE, Oxfam/Great Britain; NGO Forum; PACT, Australian Catholic Relief. One of its groundbreaking events was a strategic planning conference in May 28-29 called "Strategies for Peace and Non-Violent Actions in Cambodia." It attracted representatives from 70 organizations and staff from the Forum of the Poor in Thailand and the Peace Council in Sri Lanka.

[20] "Summary Report, The Campaign to Reduce Violence for Peace During the 1998 Election," SILAKA, Phnom Penh, unpublished report, 1998.

into a logjam. By 2000, both initiatives had lost momentum. What had happened, why this shift? It has something to do with the interchange between the Tibetan and Cambodian monks in that interfaith gathering who troubled over the means for achieving political peace. So we ask, when is a walk not a walk? When is it a march?

Let us return to 1998, the year of national elections and one year after the solidification of power of the CCP. Because Cambodia's new electoral law granted the sangha franchise, monks had voted in both the 1993 and 1998 elections.[21] While most international monitors claimed that the CPP had won the election legitimately, the primary opposition leader, Sam Rainsy, accused the CPP of fraud. Outraged that the outcome of the recent elections had not favored Rainsy, students and other supporters staged a Tiananmen-like sit-in and hunger strike at the park across from the National Assembly. A new generation of activist monks joined their numbers.

For several weeks, young monks joined the sit-in and marched while their abbots remonstrated but could not stop them. Concerned about international opinion, Prime Minister Hun Sen allowed the sit-in to continue for two weeks. Finally, after a grenade was set off near one of his residences, he instructed the military and police to break up the sit-in in the early morning of Monday, September 8. The following days were full of mayhem. A march from Wat Phnom, the city's shrine down main streets to Independence Monument was joined by over one hundred monks who carried signs saying, "Good leaders must not use violence" They claimed to be marching in honor of a monk who they believed was killed in Monday night's conflicts.[22]

The presence of monks at first mollified the police. Witnesses reported an incident where police had aimed their guns at the demonstrators until a group of monks gathered in front of the police and linked their arms. Students joined them, waving Buddhist and Cambodian flags, and the police withdrew. " They were using all our flags!" remarked Thida Khus, [During the Campaign to Reduce Violence for Peace] we campaigned for peace --and how

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[21] The privilege of franchise for the sangha is differently interpreted in the Theravada-dominated countries of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. In the two other countries that hold regular elections, the Thai sagha does not vote while Sri Lankan monks not only vote but can run for public office.
[22] "Sit-in crumbles after early-morning crackdown," *Cambodia Daily,* Sept 9, 1998

beautiful that is! --and we distributed 60,000 flags and bags." But then the police charged. In the mayhem, they chased monks, beat them and tore off their robes. A shop owner who had sheltered seven monks exclaimed, "They [the police} are worse than Pol Pot!" Phay Sophal an organizer of the CRVP who was witness to the police brutality was overcome with emotion when he spoke to me about it. 'We can't believe why the police can hit the monk—that hurt, it hurt. The whole country was very sad and hurt, they could not believe that the soldiers hurt the monk, kill the monk. So it seemed like water boiled."

Thida Khus called the several months after this event "hunting season for monks." The United Nations Rights envoy for Cambodia issued a public statement that "sixteen bodies including two of them in saffron robes" had been found floating in rivers, irrigation ditches, and in shallow graves around the capital and that many bore signs of torture or other violence. [23] Rumors of other assaults against monks multiplied.[24] The Phnom Penh wats and major wats throughout the country were in "lockdown" as military troops entered the wat grounds to arrest monks and warn the rest about participating in protests. Local human rights NGOs helped to hide targeted monks, some in homes of diplomats. One human rights organization reported helping as many as sixty-eight monks after the protest dissolved into violence on Tues afternoon. [25] The military targeted Wat Lanka and Wat Ounaloum, where the most visible monks in the marches -- and the Dhammayietra -- were residing. The latter was the primary Mohanikay wat, one of the two Theravada orders, sand was responsible for educating the largest number of new monks. Khus, like many NGO leaders active in peace walks was stunned by the fierce actions of the state against the sangha.

> I was surprised to find that NGOs are safer than the temple. It turns your belief upside down. We got telephones to four temples. They were harassed at night –trucks of military police arrived at the temples. We gave them a list of phone numbers including the number of the UN Human Rights Center, who showed up one half hour later. The military

[23] "Corpses in saffron? Death Toll climbs to 18," Beth Moorthy and Bou Saroeun, Phnom Penh Post, Sept 18-Oct 1 1998

[24] "The Manipulation of the 'People's Will," Chaumeau and Chea Sotheacheath, Phnom Penh Post, Sept 18-Oct 1 1998

[25] "Police target activist monks," Cambodia Daily, Sept 10, 1998

> harassed the monks for one and a half months. Monks hold a grudge towards the CPP now. This was not the usual military, this was Hun Sen's special troops.

High-ranking members of the sangha either offered no leadership or were intimidated into silence. Tep Vong, the Supreme Patriarch of the Mohanikay was not in the country when it happened. Two days later, he returned only to leave immediately. He later stated publicly that with the Khmer Rouge threat dissolved, the "time for peace marches are over." Maha Ghosananda was also out of the country and Nyeh Kim Teng the next ranking monk in the Dhammayietra, was in Phnom Penh teaching meditation classes at a center for peace and conflict. After leaving the class one evening, he noticed a military vehicle trailing him. Alarmed, he drove to a village outside Phnom Penh where he was well known. Cognizant of the state repression of monks, the villages immediately offered their assistance and he escaped reprisal. With so many of the leaders of the sangha out of the country, the burden fell upon the late Ven Oum Soum at the Wat Mohamontrei to placate the state. After days of intimidation by state authorities, he capitulated to their demands. Cobbled together from various sources, Thida Khus recounts another version.

> One day, they took him to a television station and gave him a statement to read. He said, 'can I change some of this?' They said, 'No you can't change. You just have to read [it]' In that statement, it denied that … monks were involved. He knew he committed big sin. Soon after that, he went on seclusion; maybe praying for forgiveness. He isolated himself. What can he do, "just say no?" He knew [that the statement was false] because his students, his people at his temple got hurt. Some think that is why he died, of a broken heart.

The campaign to discredit the young activist monks of sangha—and thus diminish any populist political capital of sangha itself—took many forms. State officials could only legitimate violence against the sangha by arguing that these were "fake monks." Thida Khus suggests that the state launched a media "smear campaign" to discredit all the monks after the demonstration. "They said they were "fake monks" because real monks don't wear underwear."

This was countered with various reports in the newspapers, witness reports and rumors, that several monks were stripped, beaten and then sent running naked through the streets. A second angle to discredit the monks was to stress particular interpretations of the vinaya, the Theravada text that proscribes a monk's behavior. Sar Kheng, co-minister of the Interior claimed, "monks have no right to serve any political party or get involved in politics. They must stay close with the precepts of Buddhist religion." He went on to argue, "[m]onks are a symbol…of the nation, for people to respect, but monks who join the demonstration are seen as improper. [26] It was also noted that the period of demonstrations occurred during the three-month observance of Buddhist "lent" when monks are required to remain in the temple grounds. Monks were also accused of violating of their precepts, by "shouting hateful words at police" and joining the rowdy demonstrators at Hotel Sofitel Monday night, which provoked the police reprisal.[27]

Their legitimacy challenged, the sangha attempted to reinterpret the role of monks in the public sphere and Thida Khus facilitated some of these meetings in her center.

> The monks were told, you should just "*atangau*" -- stay in the temple, learn the Tripatika. There was a discussion about monks and politics. The main question was: is it proper for a monk to get involved in a political situation? But some answered, "what is a political situation?"

Monks also defended their right to protest as Cambodian citizens. "If I have the right to vote, why do I not have the right to defend my vote if I think it is not used correctly? A 27 year old monk at Wat Ounaloum asked. "The people feed us. They give us food. If the people are angry, we must support them"[28]

At stake in the breakdown of 1998 was a premise upon which the Dhammayietra was founded—that monks had a responsibility to engage in nonviolent social action. But it also raised the question of the role of monks as religious citizens when they vote. It also foregrounded the difference between nonviolent dissent and a demonstration in Cambodia. The state crackdown on activist monks proved a leaven for religious-based peacemaking activities in subsequent years. While this point was not lost on Maha Ghosananda, it also served to

[26] "Police target activist monks," *Cambodia Daily* Sept 10, 1998
[27] Ibid
[28] "Police target activist monks," *Cambodia Daily* Sept 10, 1998

underscore a distinction he was fond of making that “step by step we walk for peace.” Peace and mindfulness come in small steps that ultimately lead to large transformations. In his response to the Tibetan monk he had added," We make peace for ourselves and the people follow us. So they also learn to make peace for themselves and others” (cited in Mitchell and Wiseman, 1999: 230).

Conclusion

When is a peace movement useful to the state? From 1993-1998, the Dhammayietra never faced state repression. In fact, officials often sought to capitalize on the evocative power of its symbolic acts. Its stress on the Buddhist principle of neutrality protected it from assault from the Khmer Rouge and it was not a threat to government forces. While both the Dhammayietra and CRVP peace walks condemned the political violence of the elections, no parties were implicated in order to maintain neutrality. Peace walks, given the sangha and state's elision of political critique with partisan leanings, were thus not designed to comment on specific incidents of violence (either Khmer Rouge or the state) that might be considered examples of state impunity or human rights violations. Critiquing war, which is an authorized use of force, is quite different than acknowledging the violence of a coup, in which the new state must legitimate its violence. This is why the peace walk in Phnom Penh organized by *Mehta Thor* after the July 7 violence was considerably more *politically* threatening to its participants than walking into a war zone. Thus, monks who practiced nonviolence during the anti-government demonstrations of 1998 were sbeaten. As earlier events indicated, the monks and organizers of the peace walks (CRVP) needed human rights organizations to record military abuses in the wats. Very simply, the difference between a march and a walk is the difference protest and commentary. Those who join the Dhammayietra understood that they would walk through precarious peace of war zones. They walked through anger; they did not provoke it.

A leading socially concerned monk in Phnom Pen, the Ven Yos Hut Khemacaro indicates that the scope of religious citizenship for Cambodia's Buddhist community is still unclear (1998). He argues that it is possible to encourage monks to vote without creating a partisan sangha. Monks can assist citizens by offering valuable criteria and respect for the

Constitution in making their electoral choices. While many state officials and high ranking monks believe that monks should leave politics to those in authorized by the Constitution, Ven Yos Hut Khemacaro counters that Buddhist groups (and Maha Ghosananda in particular) participated in that 1993 Constitutional Assembly and reflected on the drafts of new laws. (Ironically, this was not the case with the National Electoral Law. The Assembly of Monks who had the authority to rule on the matter was not consulted.) Furthermore, politicians often seek a prominent monk's blessing to lend moral authority to their programs. Only recently, CPP officials have intimated villagers to vow before the monks that they will vote for them. The King was called upon to relieve any citizen of their "forced vows". [29] Thus, there is a need for the sangha to denounce injustice committed under its own aegis, but the political fractures have fragmented the sangha itself. Tep Vong, Supreme Patriarch of the Mahanikay order was appointed by the socialist party to his position in the 1980's. He has been quite vocal recently on the necessity for monks to remain nonpartisan in the coming elections.[30] More than a few question his motives.

Religious-based peacemaking in Cambodia has changed since the crisis in 1998. In 2003, the regime of peacebuilding is dominated by the strategies of "conflict transformation" at the community level and in high-level statecraft. It can be argued, however, that these changes not entirely driven by the tension between the state and sangha. This less sectarian approach to peacemaking has slowly gained dominance among most of the Cambodian and international NGOs interested in addressing conflict. As one peace practitioner put it, the "conflict training is more scientific than Buddhist training." This does not mean that religious-based peacemaking is absence from the political landscape. Cambodia's shift from religiously dominated peacemaking to non-sectarian conflict transformation has opened up a more variegated atmosphere for grassroots peace work and conflict transformation. Thus, while Phnom Penh-based peace walks stalled, smaller peace walks continued among the sangha in western Cambodia into the 2000's. Some NGOs promote Buddhism as the basis for their non-violence

[29] "Buddhist monks find collective cause," Amy Kazin, Financial Times, July 24, 2003
[30] Ibid.

training and the sangha is approached in local communities to assist with developing a "culture of peace."

The events of 1998 forced an inevitable confrontation between the "church" and state, a confrontation in which the state reasserted its dominance over the sangha at a time when monks were flexing their right to franchise. The philosophical arguments for monks to join and organize a peace walk that had developed into a social movement had opened a space for broader social engagement. If monks could participate in the peace walks, why not marches? If they could walk in war zones, why not the streets? If they could comment on landmines, why not political mines of the nation? With the right to vote, why not the right to nonviolent dissent? These questions are still unresolved in Cambodian politics and its Buddhist clergy.

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