

# THE 2003 PHNOM PENH RIOTS

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How Thailand Employed  
A 'Diplomacy of Anger'  
Toward Cambodia

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## How Thailand Employed A 'Diplomacy of Anger' Toward Cambodia

Fire, fury, and fervor engulfed Phnom Penh in January 2003. The Thai embassy and Thai establishments in the Cambodian capital were thrashed and burned. The incident is remembered as the 2003 Phnom Penh riots, which inflamed tensions between neighbouring Thailand and Cambodia. Nationalist sentiments were front and centre in this diplomatic stand-off. Thai and Cambodian state actors had pronounced that "the state" or "the people" felt certain emotions — even though states, being institutional actors, are unable to feel emotions. I argue that this seemingly strange phenomenon of states "feeling" emotions can be understood through a sociological lens — focusing on emotions and emotional labor — in the study of international relations. Such a new and innovative theory would advance our understanding of the international relations of Southeast Asia well beyond the traditional theories of realism, constructivism, and the balance of power that have dominated the scholarly study of the region. Through an empirical case study of how Thailand responded to the 2003 Phnom Penh riots, I demonstrate how emotions and emotional labor in the form of "emotional diplomacy" — specifically, the "diplomacy of anger" — has unfolded in the international relations of Southeast Asia, and served significant political ends.

### KEY CONCEPTS

To commence, it is important that I clarify the key terms that are used throughout this essay.

### EMOTIONS

Emotions are social and intersubjective; they have shared meanings, are mutually understandable, and can be named. Mercer, a political science professor who researches emotion's role in international politics, defines



"THE EMOTIONAL DISPLAYS ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE FRAME ISSUES AND MAINTAIN OR ALTER A STATE'S IMAGE; THEY ARE STRATEGIC AND SEEK TO SHAPE THE PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOURS OF OTHERS IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE PARTICULAR ENDS. "

*emotion* as the "subjective experience of some diffuse physiological change".<sup>1</sup> Turner and Stets, who both won scholarly acclaim for their work on the sociology of emotions, define *emotion* as physiological arousal *labeled* as a "specific feeling, mood or sentiment."<sup>2</sup> Hall and Ross, both leading experts in the role of emotion and affect in international politics, define emotions as "socially recognized, structured episodes of affectively valenced response, such as joy or fear . . . a subcategory of patterned affective reactions."<sup>3</sup>

Hutchinson and Bleiker, both noted academics whose research focuses on emotions in world politics, define *affect* as "non-reflective bodily sensations and moods,"<sup>4</sup> while Hall and Ross state *affective dynamics* indicate "the range of ways embodied mental processes and the felt dimensions of human experience influence thought and behavior."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, emotions and affect impact behavior — including interstate behavior in the realm of international relations, as this paper will demonstrate.

### EMOTIONAL LABOR

Eminent sociologist Arlie Hochschild theorized "emotional labor" as labor that involves managing *feeling* in oneself to produce "a proper state of mind in others"<sup>6</sup> — that is, the regulation of feelings to produce capable work. And according to Mercer, *feelings* are the "conscious awareness that one is experiencing an emotion".<sup>7</sup>

### EMOTIONAL DIPLOMACY

Emotional diplomacy is constituted by official emotion that is best understood as "*the team performance of emotional labor on a grand and collective scale.*"<sup>8</sup> Todd Hall, an international relations professor at Oxford, theorized emotional diplomacy as "coordinated state-level behaviour that explicitly and officially projects the image of a particular emotional

1 Jonathan Mercer. 2010. "Emotional Beliefs." *International Organization* 64(1): 3  
2 Jonathan H. Turner, and Jan E. Stets. 2005. *The Sociology of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
3 Todd Hall and Andrew Ross. 2015. "Affective Politics after 9/11." *International Organization* 69 (4): 848  
4 Emma Hutchinson and Roland Bleiker. 2014. "Theorizing Emotions in World Politics." *International Theory* 6(3): 496  
5 Todd Hall and Andrew Ross. 2015. "Affective Politics after 9/11." *International Organization* 69 (4): 848  
6 Arlie Hochschild. 1983. *The Managed Heart: The Commercialisation of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.7.  
7 Jonathan Mercer. 2010. "Emotional Beliefs." *International Organization* 64(1): 3  
8 Todd Hall. 2015. *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. p.21.

response toward other states.”<sup>9</sup> It consists of state actors, spanning top leaders to low ranked officials, synchronizing their behaviors to project a specific emotion through their language, symbolic gestures, and substantive action. This diplomacy includes intentional and collaborative acts. Hall’s theory of “emotional diplomacy”<sup>10</sup> involves renowned sociologist Erving Goffman’s idea of “team performance” (a collection of individuals working in concert to project a particular image)<sup>11</sup> and entails eminent sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s notion of “emotional labor” (the display of mandated emotions as part of one’s professional role).<sup>12</sup>

The emotional displays on the international stage frame issues and maintain or alter a state’s image; they are strategic and seek to shape the perception and behaviours of others in order to achieve particular ends. Emotional diplomacy is a product of strategic choice and a form of foreign policy behaviour. It incorporates very substantive gestures with real and important consequences: how state actors use force, provide military aid, or respond to major strategic shifts. It is distinct: It intentionally injects displays of emotional behavior into interstate relations in order to shift such interactions outside of standardly understood political practices. Therefore, it shifts interstate relations from focusing on achieving interest through negotiating relations of relative power to harnessing the social meaning attributed to emotional displays to create alternative political possibilities.<sup>13</sup>

#### DIPLOMACY OF ANGER

A type of emotional diplomacy, as conceived by Hall, is the diplomacy of anger, which “consists of a vehement and overt state-level display in response to a perceived offense” that “can be ameliorated by reconciliatory gestures and will subside over time absent new provocations.”<sup>14</sup> The trajectory of anger “begins with an immediate, aggressive, and punitive reaction to a perceived wrong,” which may be abated by “conciliatory behavior on the part of the target” or “reversed into renewed escalation by subsequent violations.”<sup>15</sup> Anger serves the “social function of seeking to rectify a wrong,” such as through retribution or restitution, or an apology and “revalidation of the norms that were broken.”<sup>16</sup> The instrumental ability and strategic value of the diplomacy of anger draws from the social meanings of anger.<sup>17</sup> The diplomacy of anger enables a state to establish its redlines by projecting an image of anger that signals that a normative and emotive violation has occurred in which the absence of displaying anger

9 Todd Hall. 2015. *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. p.2.

10 Todd Hall. 2015. *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

11 Erving Goffman. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin.

12 Arlie Hochschild. 1983. *The Managed Heart: The Commercialisation of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

13 Todd Hall. 2015. *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

14 Hall. 2015. p. 40.

15 Hall. 2015. P. 47.

16 Hall. 2015. p 47 – 48.

17 Hall. 2015. p. 79.



## "THE INSTRUMENTAL ABILITY AND STRATEGIC VALUE OF THE DIPLOMACY OF ANGER DRAWS FROM THE SOCIAL MEANINGS OF ANGER."

would indicate consent to the violation.<sup>18</sup>

Hall explicates three behavioral indicators of a state projecting an image of anger: discursive, expressive, substantive. In the discursive behavioral indicator, the state issues angry statements denouncing the target and its alleged violation, and demands rectification.<sup>19</sup> In the expressive behavioral indicator, the actors of official anger may need to engage in emotional labor by displaying anger themselves such as in their body language and vocalics.<sup>20</sup> In the substantive behavioral indicator, state actors employ substantive gestures to back up their expressions and strike back at the target. These actions include suspending cooperation, shutting down channels of official communication, levying various sanctions, displaying military might, and even engaging in acts of warfare.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, the diplomacy of anger is a specific and recurrent pattern of emotional displays that state actors deploy on the international stage to serve political goals.<sup>22</sup>

#### METHODOLOGY

Parsing through news reports on the Phnom Penh riots in 2003 retrieved through online databases, I analyze the discourses that the various parties involved in the conflict used and the actions they took. I adopt Hall’s three specific approaches to taking discourse as emotional: (1) discourse as *indicative of emotion*, or “offering evidence of and insight into the emotional state of its author or utterer”; (2) discourse as *provocative of emotion*, or “constructed to elicit emotional reactions from its audience” by using certain “symbols, themes, and narratives”; and (3) discourse as *invocative of emotion*, or “as capable of deploying emotions as socially — and even politically — consequential referents.”<sup>23</sup> To examine discourse as emotionally invocative is “to inquire into the purposes, implications, and consequences of emotions being made discourse’s object.”<sup>24</sup>

In my empirical exploration of the Phnom Penh riots, I will quote from my primary sources. Within these quotes, I will highlight words in bold. The bolded words serve to capture emotion-laden language, and emphasize the discursive acts that are *indicative*, *provocative* or *invocative* of emotion.

#### A CASE STUDY ON THE “DIPLOMACY OF ANGER”: THE 2003 PHNOM PENH RIOTS

On January 18, 2003, *Rasmei Angkor*, a small Cambodian newspaper, published a front-page article which (falsely) reported that a Thai soap opera star had claimed that Angkor Wat, Cambodia’s national symbol,

18 Hall. 2015. P. 48.

19 Hall. 2015. p. 49.

20 Ibid.

21 Hall. 2015. p. 50.

22 Hall. 2015. p. 185 – 186.

23 Koschut, Simon, Todd Hall, Reinhard Wolf, Ty Solomon, Emma Hutchinson, and Roland Bleiker. 2017. “Discourse and Emotions in International Relations.” *International Studies Review* 19(3): 487

24 Koschut, Simon, Todd Hall, Reinhard Wolf, Ty Solomon, Emma Hutchinson, and Roland Bleiker. 2017. “Discourse and Emotions in International Relations.” *International Studies Review* 19(3): 490



"THE PRIME MINISTER WAS ATTEMPTING TO SPEAK ON ITS BEHALF AND DEFEND NATIONALIST PRIDE, WHILE ALSO PRONOUNCING WHAT THE PROPER, PATRIOTIC EMOTIONAL RESPONSE SHOULD BE."

belonged to Thailand. The report further alleged that the Thai actress “**hated** Cambodians like dogs.”<sup>25</sup> Claiming that “Cambodians throughout the country **hate** Thais like leeches that suck other nations’ blood,” the story suggested the Thai actress “must lower her head to the ground and salute by placing palm to palm in order to apologize to Cambodians, who are a gentle and polite race and have never encroached on other countries’ land.”<sup>26</sup> The story continued, “It is **insulting** enough for Cambodians to hear Thais **wickedly** saying to their children, ‘You must not be born a Khmer in your next life’ and so on.”<sup>27</sup> The story struck a raw nerve among the Cambodian public given the tense history between Thailand and Cambodia. In the fifteenth century, Siam (now Thailand) overran the Khmer empire (now Cambodia). When France colonized Cambodia in 1867, it gave Thailand control of two provinces, including Siem Reap, which is home to Cambodia’s national icon, the Angkor Wat. France recovered these areas for Cambodia four decades later in a treaty with Bangkok. Moreover, Thailand and Cambodia barely had contact with each other during the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s. Relations were only normalised after Cambodia became democratic in 1993. Even so, there are still several border disputes between Thailand and Cambodia.

Against this backdrop, popular outrage in Cambodia ensued — and intensified when Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen amplified and legitimized the false claim. On January 27, Hun Sen said in a televised speech that the Thai actress was “**worth less than a blade of grass at Angkor Wat**” and Cambodian TV channels “must reduce or stop showing Thai movies.” His comments made front-page news in the Cambodian press.<sup>28</sup> By citing the putative emotions of the public, the prime minister was attempting to speak on its behalf and defend nationalist pride, while also pronouncing what the proper, patriotic emotional response should be. Indeed, student demonstrators cited Hun Sen’s remarks as justification to hand out anti-Thai leaflets to Cambodian students in an attempt to exploit enduring Cambodian suspicion of Thais.<sup>29</sup>

On January 29, thousands of Cambodian students stormed, looted, and set fire to the Thai embassy in Phnom Penh.<sup>30</sup> A student explained to the *Bangkok Post* that “the protest is because we **hate** the Thais inside Cambodia and because the Thais encroach on Cambodian border territory.”<sup>31</sup> Several protestors told *The Phnom Penh Post* that Thais “**looked down**” on Cambodians, so they had to respond.<sup>32</sup> Much of the Thai

25 Quoted in Rachel S. Taylor, April 2003, “Cambodia/Thailand: Reacting to rumors”, *World Press Review*, 50, 4. <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/1010.cfm>

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Alexander Hinton. 2006. “Khmerness and the Thai ‘Other’: Violence, Discourse and Symbolism in the 2003 Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37(03):446

29 U.S. State Department, *Report to the Congress on the Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia on January 29, 2003* (Washington, DC: Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2003)

30 “Protest in Cambodia—Thai Embassy in Flames.” 30 January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

31 Ibid.

32 “Mobs go berserk in anti-Thai frenzy Thai embassy torched; businesses gutted”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mobs-go-berserk-anti-thai-frenzy-thai-embassy-torched-businesses-gutted>



embassy was in flames as “the mob ran amok in the embassy compound, setting bonfires and creating mayhem. They burned the Thai flag, about 20 embassy vehicles, motorcycles and furniture and showed disrespect for the Thai monarchy,” reported the *Bangkok Post*.<sup>33</sup> A painting of the Thai queen, a sacred item to Thais, was hauled out of the embassy and thrown on a bonfire on Norodom Boulevard.<sup>34</sup> *The Phnom Penh Post* reported that protesters “nearly destroyed the entire complex” as they “ran amok inside the embassy compound for more than two hours” with many screaming “*Chaiyo Kampuchea [Long Live Cambodia!]*” while police and firemen “stood by outside ... powerless to stop” the rampage.<sup>35</sup> Fire trucks made no attempt to extinguish the fire, with the deputy fire chief saying the mob threatened to burn the trucks if they tried to put out the flames.<sup>36</sup> *Udom Katté Khmer*, a Cambodian newspaper, reported that “**furious violence**” followed after the Cambodian demonstrators received (false) reports that twenty of their compatriots had been killed in Bangkok.<sup>37</sup> A student demonstrator told *The Phnom Penh Post*, “they poured gasoline on Cambodian bodies, so **we want to kill them back.**”<sup>38</sup> *The Cambodia Daily* reported another student as saying, “**We’re not crazy but this is payback.**”<sup>39</sup> Another youth said that all Thai businesses and nationals were legitimate targets and that he would sign up to fight should there be conflict with Thailand, declaring, “**We must kill them back. We will all volunteer to be soldiers.**”<sup>40</sup> *Reaksmei Kampuchea*, another Cambodian newspaper, reported that the Thai ambassador jumped over the fence of the embassy to escape from the “**really bad** situation.”<sup>41</sup> He was rescued by boat on the Bassac River; his residence behind the embassy was engulfed in flames.<sup>42</sup>

Several Thai-owned businesses were destroyed by the angry Cambodian mob.<sup>43</sup> *Bangkok Post* reported that the building that houses Shinawatra telecom — the company controlled by the then-Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra — was “nearly destroyed and youths were seen

33 “Protest in Cambodia—Thai Embassy in Flames.” 30 January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

34 “Mobs go berserk in anti-Thai frenzy Thai embassy torched; businesses gutted”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mobs-go-berserk-anti-thai-frenzy-thai-embassy-torched-businesses-gutted>

35 Ibid.

36 “Protest in Cambodia—Thai Embassy in Flames.” 30 January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

37 Rachel S. Taylor, April 2003, “Cambodia/Thailand: Reacting to rumors”, *World Press Review*, 50, 4. <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/1010.cfm>

38 “Mobs go berserk in anti-Thai frenzy Thai embassy torched; businesses gutted”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mobs-go-berserk-anti-thai-frenzy-thai-embassy-torched-businesses-gutted>

39 “Riots Erupt From Thai Embassy Protest”. 30 January 2003. *The Cambodia Daily*. <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/riots-erupt-from-thai-embassy-protest-21555/>

40 Ibid.

41 Quoted in Rachel S. Taylor, April 2003, “Cambodia/Thailand: Reacting to rumors”, *World Press Review*, 50, 4. <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/1010.cfm>

42 “Mobs go berserk in anti-Thai frenzy Thai embassy torched; businesses gutted”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mobs-go-berserk-anti-thai-frenzy-thai-embassy-torched-businesses-gutted>

43 Rachel S. Taylor, April 2003, “Cambodia/Thailand: Reacting to rumors”, *World Press Review*, 50, 4. <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/1010.cfm>



## "A PROTESTER WAS QUOTED PROCLAIMING 'WE HAVE TO BURN THIS THAI COMPANY. WE WANT TO WARN THEM.'"

tossing computers out of windows.”<sup>44</sup> *The Phnom Penh Post* reported that the Shinawatra office “had been trashed. Burned equipment, files, phones and computers littered the street. On upper floors filing cabinets had been toppled over, windows broken and chairs destroyed.”<sup>45</sup> *The Cambodia Daily* reported that people trapped inside the Shinawatra building were forced to jump to the next building.<sup>46</sup> A protester was quoted proclaiming, “**We**

**have to burn this Thai company. We want to warn them.**”<sup>47</sup> The offices of both Thai Airways and Bangkok Airways were also damaged in the riots.<sup>48</sup> The Royal Phnom Penh Hotel was “gutted by fire and looted.”<sup>49</sup> A Cambodian hotel employee told *The Cambodia Daily*, “I’m not sorry about anything. I’m at my job. I don’t care. **This is for Khmer culture. I’ve been angry for a long time already. Not just today.**”<sup>50</sup>

Thai state actors promptly responded with a *team performance of emotional labour on a grand and collective scale* — the hallmark of engaging in emotional diplomacy.<sup>51</sup> The Thai prime minister said the burning of the Thai embassy would seriously damage bilateral relations, calling it “the **worst** incident” ever between Thailand and Cambodia.<sup>52</sup> He called the violence “**barbaric.**”<sup>53</sup> *CNN* quoted Thaksin as saying, “This is the **most terrible** thing that can happen in a friendly country if Thai people have to escape from the backdoor of an embassy.”<sup>54</sup> The Thai foreign minister said in a telephone interview that he ordered the foreign ministry to summon the Cambodian ambassador to receive “the **strongest official protest**” from the government.<sup>55</sup> The Thai Army commander’s chief of staff was on the

44 “Protest in Cambodia—Thai Embassy in Flames.” 30 January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

45 “Mobs go berserk in anti-Thai frenzy Thai embassy torched; businesses gutted”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mobs-go-berserk-anti-thai-frenzy-thai-embassy-torched-businesses-gutted>

46 “Riots Erupt From Thai Embassy Protest”. 30 January 2003. *The Cambodia Daily*. <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/riots-erupt-from-thai-embassy-protest-21555/>

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 “Mobs go berserk in anti-Thai frenzy Thai embassy torched; businesses gutted”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mobs-go-berserk-anti-thai-frenzy-thai-embassy-torched-businesses-gutted>

50 “Riots Erupt From Thai Embassy Protest”. 30 January 2003. *The Cambodia Daily*. <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/riots-erupt-from-thai-embassy-protest-21555/>

51 Todd Hall. 2015. *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

52 “Protest in Cambodia—A Serious Blow to Bilateral Ties, Says Shocked PM.” 30 January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

53 “Riots Erupt From Thai Embassy Protest”. 30 January 2003. *The Cambodia Daily*. <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/riots-erupt-from-thai-embassy-protest-21555/>

54 “Thais flee Phnom Penh after night of riots.” 30 January 2003. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/01/29/cambodia.siege/index.html>

55 “Protest in Cambodia—A Serious Blow to Bilateral Ties, Says Shocked PM.” 30

phone with the Cambodian prime minister and defense minister.<sup>56</sup> The Thai ambassador in Phnom Penh said in a phone interview with a Thai television station that the help from the Cambodian authorities came “**too late.**”<sup>57</sup> “They **should not have any excuse.** ... I called everyone I know in the Cambodian foreign ministry, the police, the defence ministry, but **they did not turn up soon enough,**” he said.<sup>58</sup> The Cambodian minister of defense confirmed the Thai ambassador had called for help.<sup>59</sup> Following the interview by the Thai ambassador, the Thai foreign ministry issued a statement protesting the “**deplorable incidents**” that had endangered its diplomatic staff, and condemned the Cambodian government “in the **strongest terms**” for its failure to protect the embassy and its staff.<sup>60</sup> The Thai statement read:

“**Most objectionable** was the fact that these life-threatening acts and **wanton destruction** were allowed to occur and continue **despite repeated and persistent direct requests for protection** from the Thai Ambassador to the highest levels of the Royal Cambodian Government, who either **professed helplessness** or **merely indicated seeming indifference** at the **acute plight** of our diplomatic mission.”<sup>61</sup>

A foreign embassy official based in Bangkok told *The Phnom Penh Post* that the Thai government was “**very, very angry**” and that insults to the Thai Royal Family caused great resentment as the Thais are “**very, very nationalistic and proud.**”<sup>62</sup>

This was a diplomacy of anger. Thailand backed up its rhetoric with substantive actions — including the show of military force. By 7:30 p.m. on the night of the riots, the Thai prime minister informed reporters in Bangkok that he had readied a force of Thai commandos to dispatch to Cambodia to protect Thai nationals, and he had ordered four C-130 military transport planes to be ready to fly to Phnom Penh to evacuate Thai nationals.<sup>63</sup> The Thai prime minister threatened to send in the Thai commandos if the Cambodian government failed to bring the situation under control within ninety minutes.<sup>64</sup> The next day, Thai military planes evacuated Thai embassy staff and several hundreds Thai civilians from Cambodia.<sup>65</sup> Thailand also reportedly put its border forces on alert and

January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 “Mobs go berserk in anti-Thai frenzy Thai embassy torched; businesses gutted”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mobs-go-berserk-anti-thai-frenzy-thai-embassy-torched-businesses-gutted>

60 Robert Carmichael and Michael Coren. “‘Deplorable incident’ ruins Thai-Khmer relations”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/deplorable-incident-ruins-thai-khmer-relations>

61 Ibid.

62 Robert Carmichael and Michael Coren. “‘Deplorable incident’ ruins Thai-Khmer relations”. 31 January 2003. *The Phnom Penh Post*. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/deplorable-incident-ruins-thai-khmer-relations>

63 “Riots Erupt From Thai Embassy Protest”. 30 January 2003. *The Cambodia Daily*. <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/riots-erupt-from-thai-embassy-protest-21555/>

64 Rachel S. Taylor, April 2003, “Cambodia/Thailand: Reacting to rumors”, *World Press Review*, 50, 4. <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/1010.cfm>

65 Ibid.

deployed naval vessels.<sup>66</sup> Citing the Thai prime minister, *BBC News* reported that “troops were on full alert in case of further violence.”<sup>67</sup> *The Guardian* reported that “the navy was ordered to patrol the sea nearby.”<sup>68</sup> A U.S. State Department report stated the Thai government “**reacted swiftly and angrily.**”<sup>69</sup> Even as they had arrived at Phnom Penh, a Thai delegation led by the Thai Commerce Minister canceled planned trade talks with Cambodian officials.<sup>70</sup> Thailand downgraded diplomatic ties with Cambodia to the chargé d’affaires level, recalled its ambassador to Phnom Penh, expelled the Cambodian ambassador, closed all border checkpoints to Cambodian nationals, and barred Thais from entering Cambodia.<sup>71</sup> The Thai prime minister promised to gather and deport



## "THAILAND BACKED UP ITS RHETORIC WITH SUBSTANTIVE ACTIONS – INCLUDING THE SHOW OF MILITARY FORCE."

hundreds of thousands of Cambodian illegal immigrants and beggars, and the Thai defense minister said the police had begun to do so, reported *The Guardian*.<sup>72</sup> “We can **no longer be merciful** to these people. They are a **threat to our national security.** This will show them that **Cambodians will have a much more difficult time if they mess with us,**” the Thai defense minister told local television.<sup>73</sup> Within a day, sixty-seven undocumented Cambodian workers had been rounded up for expulsion, reported the Associated Press.<sup>74</sup> All flights to Cambodia by Thai Airways International were canceled.<sup>75</sup> Pronouncing Cambodia’s “**informal apology**” as “**not enough,**” Thailand suspended all joint projects on technical and economic cooperation.<sup>76</sup> Bangkok stopped business with Cambodia until Phnom

66 Ibid.

67 “Cambodia apologizes to Thais”. 30 January 2003. *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2708499.stm>

68 John Aglionby. “Thais cut links with Cambodia after riots.” 31 January 2003. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/31/cambodia>

69 U.S. State Department, *Report to the Congress on the Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia on January 29, 2003* (Washington, DC: Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2003)

70 “Riots Erupt From Thai Embassy Protest”. 30 January 2003. *The Cambodia Daily*. <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/riots-erupt-from-thai-embassy-protest-21555/>

71 “Cambodia Crisis – Envoy Recalled, Apology Rejected.” 31 January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

72 John Aglionby. “Thais cut links with Cambodia after riots.” 31 January 2003. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/31/cambodia>

73 Ibid.

74 The Associated Press. “Cambodia Apologizes To Thailand Over Riot.” 31 January 2003. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/31/world/cambodia-apologizes-to-thailand-over-riot.html>

75 “Cambodia Crisis – Envoy Recalled, Apology Rejected.” 31 January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

76 Ibid.

Penh would “satisfy” Thailand’s need for repairs to Thai businesses damaged in the riots.<sup>77</sup> The Thai finance ministry withheld a 567.8-million-baht soft loan for a key road project, and Thai military engineers were ordered to stop building a 190-km road in the Koh Kong province of Cambodia that was partly funded by Thailand.<sup>78</sup> Thaksin said Thailand would continue to stop all contacts with Cambodia “completely” until Cambodia “comes up with a good explanation for the violence and offers to remedy the damage.”<sup>79</sup> Saying that the Cambodian prime minister and defense minister “underestimated the situation,” Thaksin said “they were indifferent about sending in their military to protect our embassy.”<sup>80</sup> Remarking that this was the strongest retaliation Thailand had ever made in its international relations, Thaksin said bilateral relations would not return to “normal” if Cambodia “continues doing nothing.”<sup>81</sup> Punitive action, threats of further escalation, and demands for compensation—all these correspond with the logic of displaying anger.

Thailand’s response was a clear demonstration of emotional diplomacy at work for there was a coordinated official display of state emotion involving a multiplicity of actors and institutions. Thailand’s expressive and substantive gestures conform to the logic of the diplomacy of anger: Recurrent emotionally charged assertions and condemnation were backed up with retributive and forceful substantive actions. The Thai government set three basic conditions for restoration of normal relations in its January 30th Aide Memoire to the Cambodian Ambassador:

- (1) Full explanation by the Royal Cambodian Government for its failure to respond to Thai requests for protection;
- (2) Full compensation for all losses incurred by the Royal Thai Government, its diplomatic personnel, and Thai nationals;
- (3) Justice for the perpetrators of the violence and those instigators responsible for it.<sup>82</sup>

With a sustained team performance of emotional labour on a grand collective scale, including not only rhetoric but show of military force, Thailand’s emotional diplomacy shaped the strategic responses of Cambodia. This is a product of injecting anger into international relations.

Cambodia responded to Thailand’s anger by apologizing and offering compensation. In a statement, carried by national TV and radio, the Cambodian government expressed “most profound regret for the events which took place and considers that they were an immense loss for Cambodia and the Cambodian people itself.”<sup>83</sup> It blamed the riots on “the unfortunate instigation of a number of extremists.”<sup>84</sup> The Cambodian government promised to promptly create a committee for compensating

77 “Cambodia Crisis – Envoy Recalled, Apology Rejected.” 31 January 2003. *Bangkok Post*. Accessed via Factiva.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 U.S. State Department, *Report to the Congress on the Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia on January 29, 2003* (Washington, DC: Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2003)

83 “Cambodia apologises to Thais”. 30 January 2003. *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2708499.stm>

84 Ibid.

the Thai embassy and its staff, and also promised to safeguard all the property of companies and Thai nationals who have left Cambodia.<sup>85</sup> The Cambodian government said it would compensate “quickly and unconditionally,” reported the Associated Press, which quoted a government spokesman as saying, “we did not expect this to go this far. It was a mistake. We apologize and regret what happened to Thailand and her people.”<sup>86</sup>

Thereafter, tensions between Thailand and Cambodia cooled by mid-February that year in 2003.<sup>87</sup> However, it was not until April for Thailand to restore full diplomatic relations.<sup>88</sup> By the end of March, the Thai government recognised Cambodia’s willingness to atone, including accepting and beginning to meet the conditions in the Thai Aide Memoire.<sup>89</sup> The Cambodian government also launched public relations campaigns to repudiate the false reports about Thailand claiming Angkor Wat.<sup>90</sup> In doing so, the Cambodian state actively refuted the rumor that angered the Cambodian mob and led to the riots, an about-turn from the prime minister’s speech on January 27 that added fuel to the fire. This development corresponds with the logic of the diplomacy of anger: Thai displays of anger subsided in the face of reconciliatory gestures. Overall, the Thai government’s response fit the trajectory of the “diplomacy of anger”<sup>91</sup>: it combined outraged rhetoric with immediate punitive substantive actions, which only subsided when the Cambodian side repeatedly apologized and agreed to Thailand’s conditions. Significantly, the crux of this diplomatic incident was not the interchange of threats and counterthreats vis-à-vis warfare but an attempt to reaffirm norms (such as the protection of embassies) and penalize a violation of redlines. This is the political quintessence of the diplomacy of anger. This case study demonstrates the strategic import of adopting a sociological approach to international relations beyond pure realists manoeuvres.

## CONCLUSION

Emotional diplomacy presents a theoretical framework for understanding the nature, significance, and consequences of state-level emotional behaviour on the international stage. I have demonstrated how this can be applied in Southeast Asia. Although states are institutional actors and do not feel emotions, actors in international relations routinely pronounce that “the state” or “the people” feel a certain emotion. Assertions of collective emotions serve significant political ends, such as bolstering legitimacy or impacting the actions of others.

85 Ibid.

86 The Associated Press. “Cambodia Apologizes To Thailand Over Riot.” 31 January 2003. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/31/world/cambodia-apologizes-to-thailand-over-riot.html>

87 Rachel S. Taylor, April 2003, “Cambodia/Thailand: Reacting to rumors”, *World Press Review*, 50, 4. <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/1010.cfm>

88 U.S. State Department, *Report to the Congress on the Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia on January 29, 2003* (Washington, DC: Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2003)

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Todd Hall. 2015. *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.



In fact, Thai newspapers opined that emotions were the cause of the 2003 Phnom Penh riots. *Kom Chad Leuk*, a mass-circulation Thai-language daily newspaper, postulated “the deep **resentment** of young Cambodians, who were born after the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge in 1978” was to blame as “they are **very bitter** with the lack of governance and corruption problems in their country” and so “any news, especially that related to neighbouring countries, can trigger **outrage**.”<sup>92</sup> *Mathichon Daily*, a major Thai-language daily newspaper with a focus on politics that was founded by a group of progressive writers, posited “the biggest mistake of the Thai-Cambodian misunderstanding is the **fanning of nationalism** on both sides,” and suggested “Thailand should learn from this incident and urge both the government and private sectors to find ways to **ameliorate the feelings** of Cambodians.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, in my empirical exploration of this case, I find that the 2003 Phnom Penh riots were caused by popular emotion in Cambodia, to which Thailand responded with official emotion.

Emotional behaviour is an essential part of how states communicate what matters to them and their identity, and it has important consequences for the strategies state actors adopt and the manner in which they interact with each other. Thus, a sociological lens focusing on emotions in international relations advances our understanding of Southeast Asia and global events.

92 Quoted in Rachel S. Taylor, April 2003, “Cambodia/Thailand: Reacting to rumors”, *World Press Review*, 50, 4. <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/1010.cfm>

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