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Remember the Holocaust and the Killing Fields: A comparative Study

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Remembering the Holocaust and the Killing Fields:
A Comparative Study

By
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ABSTRACT

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Why is the Holocaust almost universally remembered as the most horrific event in the modern age while the Cambodian genocide is hardly remembered both in and outside of Cambodia? Do the two events share similar aspects despite their differences, and what implication does that have on a wider understanding of both genocides? This thesis explores these questions by examining how the Holocaust and Cambodian genocide (killing fields) have been remembered over time. Examining both shows the respective roads of memorialization that each have taken and reveals where the two catastrophes share major aspects: notably, the tactics used by the perpetrators, the world's failure to act, and the initial forced memorialization by third parties followed by a period of silence in the perpetrators and victims. This analysis focuses on three groups: the victims, the perpetrators, and third party countries – mainly America and Vietnam. The first two chapters focus on each genocide respectively by outlining how they have been remembered and what factors shaped, influenced, and hindered the process of memorialization. The third chapter compares and contrasts the two genocides, focusing on major similarities and differences between the two starkly different events.

Examining the first four decades of Holocaust remembrance shows how its memorialization has become established. Focusing mostly on Jewish and German commemoration and how third party memorialization has affected this remembrance can reveal this process of establishment. Doing this reveals a deep struggle of Holocaust memory and an initial ignorance of world powers in recognizing the Jewish calamity

within the context of the Second World War. Today, this can come as a surprise because the Holocaust is widely remembered and adapted into the narratives of many countries. Without studying the historiography of the Holocaust, one might assume that it was always openly and globally commemorated. However, this was not the case before the Israeli trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. It took Israel – the new Jewish state – to adapt the catastrophe into a suitable narrative, before the Holocaust became a publicly discussed topic anywhere else. This is the key reason why the Holocaust has been able to enter the realm of public commemoration while the Cambodian genocide has not – Cambodians do not have a separate state unlike world Jewry, which has Israel. Even so, the past struggles persist in Israeli and German narratives. Israel overemphasizes heroism in order to identify with the Holocaust; Germany has become torn between accepting past guilt and building a nation with a new image. Both of these elements have shaped how the Holocaust has been commemorated publicly in speeches, holidays, monuments, and museums.

On the other hand, scholars interpret the Cambodian genocide differently amongst themselves. Some do not even consider the killing fields to be genocide while others label it another holocaust. It all depends on whether the focus is put on the numbers of those who were killed or on the actual experiences of the victims. Either way, even Cambodians struggle to remember their past. There are two significant causes for this. First, conflicting messages of peace and justice have prevented many Cambodians from knowing how to deal with their past – a struggle similar to the one Germany has experienced. Additionally, while the Holocaust ended for Jews after liberation, the Khmer Rouge continued to be a real threat to Cambodians for another 19 years. The

effects of this can be seen in the topic's absence in schools and its constrained public commemoration within the Tuol Sleng museum and Choeung Ek Genocidal Center. This struggle has only recently seen some improvements with the beginning of an international tribunal that is bringing a sense of justice to Cambodians, while also promoting education and public discussion about the past.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	34
Chapter 3.....	61
Conclusion.....	85
Bibliography.....	90

Introduction

I grew up as an Americanized Jew with a private Jewish school education and first became interested in genocide studies several years ago when I participated in a program in 2010 that visited many of the death and concentration camps in Poland. The Holocaust was an underlying subject in my studies, and it was often used to reinforce the Zionist agenda that my schools preached to us students. I was raised with the understanding that my people had undergone the worst treatment by humanity and that it was imperative that I grow up remembering who I am and having a strong Jewish identity. This would ensure that something like the Holocaust would never happen again. This was the only genocide that I was taught about in school, and any other historical catastrophes were secondary to it. Then, in the spring of 2015, I was fortunate enough to study abroad in Cambodia with four other students. As we prepared for our departure, we read, watched, and discussed what had happened under the Khmer Rouge. For the first time in my life, I realized that Jews were not the only people who had such a deep connection to catastrophe. What the Holocaust was to me was what the Cambodian genocide was to young Cambodians of my same generation. During my 3-month stay in Cambodia, I was able to talk to survivors, teach the second and third generation of victims, visit the central places of death, and reflect on my own identity. What shocked me most was that the genocide seemed to be the cause of all of Cambodia's current socio-economic and political problems, but hardly any locals would openly talk about it. I was constantly surrounded by Cambodia's dark past, but could only confront it when I was inside places like the Tuol Sleng Museum or the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center. It was

only in these places that I did not get an uncomfortable vibe from Cambodians while discussing their past.

I left Cambodia with so many questions: Why did they deal with their past so much differently than Jews? Why does what happened continue to haunt Cambodians while the Holocaust seems to unify world Jewry? How could the world let genocide happen again after the Holocaust? I left with the impression that Cambodia represented what dealing with the Holocaust was like when it was still relatively recent history, but I knew it was not exactly the same. When I returned from Cambodia it was time for me to pick a topic for my thesis. It felt natural to study these two genocides in more depth, and I thought it would be productive to compare and contrast how they have been remembered and commemorated over time. This thesis argues that while the Holocaust and Cambodian genocide are starkly different events in history, striking similarities arise when comparing them. The victims and perpetrators of both genocides encountered initial difficulty with memorializing the catastrophes because both felt shame, which was matched with a desire to digest what had happened. At the same time, foreign powers influenced memory while occupying Germany and Cambodia, which affected the natural development of memorialization.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 is a historiographical narrative of the first four decades of Holocaust remembrance starting with the international Nuremberg War Crimes trial in 1945-1946 and ending in the late 80s. Four significant groups who remember the Holocaust are analyzed: Jewish victims, Jewish non-victims, Germans, and the Allied powers. However, there is a particular emphasis on the first three groups. Within the first four decades, the Holocaust went from being a neglected

topic in public life to being the prime example of genocide today. I argue, agreeing with many Holocaust scholars, that the turning point for this was Israel's capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Before this event, Israelis struggled to incorporate the destruction of six million Jews into their image of Jewish strength. It took the Eichmann trial to change this, and its global coverage prompted public commemoration – especially in West Germany. Yet, a struggle formed within Germany to incorporate the Holocaust into public life after the Eichmann trial. Events like the Historian's Debate, the 1985 celebration of the anniversary of the end of the Third Reich, and the construction of various monuments reveal the difficulty Germans had between remembering past perpetration and moving forward as a newborn nation.

Chapter 2 is a historiographical narrative of how the Cambodian genocide has been remembered and commemorated over time. This genocide took place much more recently compared to the Holocaust, and so the analysis covers from the time leading up to the genocide up until very recently. More of the actual genocide must be covered because more explanation of Cambodian culture and the Khmer Rouge period are necessary; the Killing Fields are much more foreign to the western reader than the Holocaust. For example, the overwhelming majority of westerners know that six million Jews died in the Holocaust, but it is not common knowledge that roughly 3 million Khmer were killed during the Khmer Rouge. It is also noteworthy to examine what scholars consider the killing fields to be; some argue that what happened in Cambodia was not technically genocide, while others consider it another holocaust. I highlight a few reasons why Cambodians struggle to remember the genocide: their culture promotes anti-memory, they are ashamed of their experience, and they are torn between two narratives

of extracting justice and moving forward as a unified nation. The recent introduction of the subject in schools and the slow progress of the international tribunals have brought memorialization to a new phase, but it is still unclear what effects these two events will have on the larger picture of remembrance.

The third and final chapter conducts an in-depth comparison of the two genocides by identifying major themes. It starts by comparing the two genocides as events and then examines them in the context of how they have been memorialized and commemorated. While logistically the two are so starkly different – mainly Nazi persecution was race-based while the Khmer Rouge fight was class-based – both groups of perpetrators used rhetoric, secrecy, and discipline to distort preexisting cultural beliefs and to create an environment that encouraged the persecution of a group of people. Also analogous was the ineffective way that the world reacted to both situations as they escalated into genocide. There are some major similarities and one key difference in how the genocides have been remembered. Both the Holocaust and the Cambodian genocide experienced a period of silence from the victims and perpetrators, and both also have been influenced by foreign powers to adopt a certain narrative. The key difference lies in the distinction between Jews and Khmer; the Jews are a global people while Khmer live in Cambodia. Once Israeli Jews adopted the Holocaust and brought justice on behalf of all Jews through the Eichmann trial, the event started to become heavily commemorated publicly. I argue that this is a significant reason why the Holocaust has become the icon of genocide whereas the killing fields are hardly remembered.

I began my research by reading about the how the Holocaust is dealt with in memory. The first book I picked up was Dominick LaCapra's *History & Memory after*

Auschwitz. LaCapra's central thesis argued that what made the Holocaust unique was that a line was crossed, but "whenever that threshold or limit is crossed, something 'unique' happens."¹ This meant that any genocide is considered unique as long as the threshold is set to incorporate all genocides. I kept that message in the back of my mind as I continued my research. The idea that the Holocaust is unique in the same sense that any awful catastrophe is unique was an exceptional challenge to the notion that the Holocaust is set at a level above all other genocides. LaCapra's thesis levels the two catastrophes while also affirming that they are both indeed unique. After I did some preliminary research on the Holocaust in memory, I switched over to studying the Cambodian genocide. I started with the chapter on Cambodia because the amount of accessible research on the Holocaust was enormous in comparison. This forced me to approach each chapter in a very different way. The biggest challenge in writing the Holocaust chapter was choosing what to include and what was not central enough to discuss. On the other hand, the biggest challenge with the Cambodian chapter was finding enough primary sources in order to make a meaningful comparison. Both obstacles forced me to think in different ways, which I believe has resulted in an instructive comparison of the two events.

¹ Dominick LaCapra, *History And Memory After Auschwitz* (London, Cornell University Press, 1998), 7.

The “First” Genocide: German and Jewish Holocaust Remembrance

Today, perhaps more attention is paid to the Holocaust than to any human catastrophe in the modern age. The Holocaust is remembered globally. There are over 250 museums and memorials, tens of thousands of books, and a massive genre in film dedicated to the death of six million European Jews.² It has become the sacred example of genocide – an unprecedented and unequalled crime against humanity. However, this was not always the case. For the first decade and a half after liberation, the near annihilation of European Jewry was a lost focus in the context of the aftermath of the Second World War. In addition to this global negligence, Jews and Germans struggled with confronting the past; Israelis and Germans were focused on building a positive future for their newborn states, which left survivors to privately digest their stories. A complete reversal to this silence occurred with the Eichmann trial in 1961 when Israelis finally found a way to incorporate the Holocaust into their national identity.

Two major themes are important in understanding this vast and complex topic. The first theme is the different narratives that each nation forms. The whole concept of a nation having to “fit” the Holocaust into memory shows how the event can be represented in a variety of ways depending on which angle is taken. The second theme is what James Young calls the “texture” to memory, which describes the diversity of opinions that are shared within a nation.³ It is important to recognize that nations form specific narratives on the Holocaust and that there are always other opinions and feelings that add depth to how it is understood. This is particularly evident in German memory in the 80s. The early

² Mark Weber, “Holocaust Remembrance: what’s behind the campaign?,” *Institute for Historical Review*, http://www.ihr.org/leaflets/holocaust_remembrance.shtml.

³ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), x.

foundation and formation of these different narratives took place over the first four decades of Holocaust memorialization, which is important to analyze because it was within this span of time that the Holocaust became the universal icon of hate and mass destruction that is today.

The beginning of Holocaust remembrance, between 1945 and 1960, is widely accepted by scholars of Holocaust studies as a time of neglect. There are many reasons for this belief. Immediately after the war the world was more focused on holding the Nazis accountable for the crimes that they committed against the Allies; the crimes against a bunch of nationless Jews took the back seat at the Nuremberg Trials. At the same time, Jewish victims seemed ashamed and embarrassed of what they went through while Jews who were not Holocaust victims were ashamed of their Jewish brethren for “allowing” themselves to be persecuted. Germans were ashamed of what they or their fellow Germans had done. This collective embarrassment was caused by two significant factors: the world’s inability to comprehend and truly understand what had happened, and the effect that trauma had on the victims and perpetrators. Most scholars of the Holocaust tell a narrative of neglect leading up to the Eichmann Trial of the 60’s. However, scholars have overgeneralized this neglect for silence. Neglect connotes a negative inaction while silence can be caused by multiple factors – positive and negative. Before analyzing this further, it is important to start at the beginning – the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials of 1945-1946.

There is a colloquial saying that the victors always write history; this is exactly what happened after Germany’s unconditional surrender. Immediately after the conclusion of the Second World War, the victorious Allies got together to discuss what

would be done with the German war criminals that were in their custody. The collective decision to hand these war criminals over to an international tribunal was, in itself, a historical first. The decision was reached due to a combination of factors, most of which played into the common sentiment to punish “an unprecedented crime” in an unprecedented manner.⁴ Furthermore, a trial would not simply be bringing the Nazi war criminals to justice, but it would also do so in a way that juxtaposed the crimes of the war criminals to their actions; these Nazis would get the trial that they never gave to the millions of people they murdered.

The Allies’ determination to rain down justice upon the leaders of the Third Reich had little to do with the Nazis’ attempted extinction of European Jewry. The trial was really centered on reprimanding the Nazis for instigating aggressive warfare on the Allies. The crimes against the Jewish people, which were most elaborated upon in the fourth count, “Crimes Against Humanity,” took a secondary role in the trial and were used mainly for the purpose of reinforcing Nazi guilt. Out of the first three counts brought against the war criminals, the first two were focused on the Nazis’ aggressive warfare and the third was focused on the mistreatment of civilians – the European Jews received very little special attention.⁵

The subject of Nazi massacre of Jews was pushed off the main stage of the trial for a combination of reasons that were political and anti-Semitic in nature, but was also due in large part to the general ignorance there was for what had actually happened. When French prosecutor, François De Menthon, devoted only one sentence to Jewish victimization in his “several hour” long speech charging the Nazis with crimes against

⁴ Michael R. Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-1946: A Documented History* (New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 1-2, 22-23.

⁵ Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-1946*, 57-70.

humanity, he did not do so simply because he forgot or because he did not know that there were large numbers of European Jews killed.⁶ Rather, Menthon neglected any real mention of Jewish massacre because, at the time, there was significant French unease over myths of Jews being Nazi collaborators, which was matched with a general anti-Semitic French attitude.⁷ When American chief prosecutor, Robert H. Jackson, proposed to bring Chiam Weizmann, then the President of the World Zionist Organization, to the trial as a witness, the British rejected Jackson's proposal on the grounds that doing so would garner too much "sympathy for the Jews."⁸ After all, too much sympathy was undesirable with the politically sensitive Palestine Mandate at stake. The Allied governments had their own agendas in bringing the Nazi prisoners to justice; there was no reason to dwell on the fate of the Jews, especially when politics and anti-Semitic attitudes obscured the truth.

Of course, politics and anti-Semitic fervor were only two reasons for not devoting an appropriate amount of attention to the Jewish victims. The trial was taking place in the immediate postwar period and much of what is known today about the Holocaust was not fully understood at the time. As one prosecutor confided in his memoir years after the trial: "like so many others, I remained ignorant of the mass extermination camps in Poland..."⁹ There was an enormous amount of evidence accumulated for the trial that would later be instrumental in understanding the scope of what the Nazis did to the Jews, but there was too much to digest in the short amount of time leading up to the trial. A great example of this knowledge gap was that at the time of the trial the prosecutors could

⁶ Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-1946*, 190-192.

⁷ Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-1946*, 192.

⁸ Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-1946*, 192.

⁹ Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-1946*, 192-193.

not distinguish between concentration camps and the death camps in Poland.¹⁰ In fact, the term “genocide” was not even adopted into international law until after the trial; a Polish-Jewish lawyer named Raphael Lemkin actually coined the word in 1944.¹¹ There was much to learn about the fate of the 6 million European Jews.

Dominick LaCapra, begins in the first chapter of his book, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, with a discussion on memory and the effects trauma has on repressing it. LaCapra explains that victims push traumatic events out of their memories and can only confront their experiences after “the passage of a period of latency.”¹² While this may be most prevalent for victims, LaCapra argues that it affects all who are connected to the traumatic event, even bystanders and later generations.¹³ Evidence of this can be seen in memoirs from Holocaust survivors, but also in the lack of public discussion about the fate of the European Jews. Scholar and survivor, Primo Levi, refers to an overwhelming sense of shame that he felt on the eve of liberation in his memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*. Levi tells the reader how he was “oppressed by shame,” when the SS hanged the last man with courage in the camp:

Alberto and I went back to the hut, and we could not look each other in the face... Because we also are broken, conquered: even if we know how to adapt ourselves, even if we have finally learnt how to find our food and to resist the fatigue and cold, even if we return home.¹⁴

¹⁰ Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-1946*, 193-194.

¹¹ William A. Schabas, introductory note, “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” in *Audiovisual Library of International Law*, <http://legal.un.org/avl/ha/cppeg/cppeg.html>.

¹² Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 8-9.

¹³ LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, 8-9.

¹⁴ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: the Nazi assault on humanity*, translated by Stuart Woolf (New York: The Orion Press, 1959), 135-136.

Levi published his memoir in his native tongue, Italian, in 1947, but the memoir failed to gain much interest beyond his hometown until a reprint was made 10 years later; it took time for the book to become widely read, but by 1963 it has been translated into English, French, German, Finnish, and Dutch.¹⁵

Vera Schwarz, a descendent of Holocaust survivors and a historian, wrote a fantastic analysis of the role shame plays in trauma-inflicted memory. In her article, “The ‘Black Milk’ of Historical Consciousness,” Schwarz uses survivor Paul Celan’s Poem, “Deathsfugue,” to reveal the “limitations [that] historical consciousness” has in dealing with the ugly truth, which he poetically refers to as the “black milk” of history.¹⁶ Schwarz paints a clear picture of the Jewish resistance to Holocaust memory in the early years after the war. She explains that by the time the war was coming to an end, Jews in another part of the world – the Middle East – were fighting hard to establish their own homeland. With the creation of the State of Israel came a new beginning, the next chapter, in Jewish history. These Zionists saw themselves as a different breed of Jew, they were heroic fighters unlike the “unheroic ‘wretches’” of European Jews who “begged for mercy to no avail.”¹⁷ This led to many survivors changing their names in an effort to bury the past.¹⁸ They felt that the world did not care about their suffering.¹⁹

Holocaust scholar Tim Cole also explains this period of neglect eloquently in his book, *Selling the Holocaust*. Cole introduces his own ideas while incorporating the work

¹⁵ Primo Levi and Marco Belpoliti, *The Black Hole of Auschwitz* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 25.

¹⁶ Vera Schwarz, “The ‘Black Milk’ of Historical Consciousness: Thinking About the Nanking Massacre in Light of Jewish Memory,” in *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*, ed. by Fei Fei Li, Robert Sabella, and David Liu (M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 183-184.

¹⁷ Schwarz, “The ‘Black Milk,’ of Historical Consciousness,” 187-188.

¹⁸ Schwarz, “The ‘Black Milk,’ of Historical Consciousness,” 188.

¹⁹ Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 46.

of several previous historians such as Saul Friedlander, Lawrence Langer, and James Young – to name a few.²⁰ He coins the term “the myth of the Holocaust,” to describe the process of applying meaning and understanding to the murder of the 6 million Jews.²¹ Cole describes the period between the end of the war and leading up to the Eichmann Trial in 1961 as a “veil of silence” in Israel, and tells the story of survivor Dorothy Rabinowitz in America who was questioned about the numbers on her arm in the 50’s.²² The obvious Holocaust symbolisms of today, like the tattooed numbers on the forearm, were mysteries to most people in the 40s and 50s. Cole also points out the word “Holocaust” was not used in the *New York Times* as the term to describe the murder of 6 million Jewish until May 30, 1959.²³

What scholars like LaCapra, Schwarz, and Cole overlooked is that while the Holocaust may not have grabbed the public spotlight until the end of the 50’s, this does not mean that no one was remembering or dealing with what had happened. What they perceive as neglect may in fact be a necessary, and perhaps even a healthy, silence. People do not talk with their mouths full, and people are taught to think before speaking. In the same manner, it should come with no surprise that open discussion and memorialization should be preceded by quiet reflection – people need time to chew and digest. While the world looked past the death of 6 million Jews, survivors were deep in the throes of a more private memorialization, which took the form of a genre of memoirs called *Yizkor Bikor*.

²⁰ Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: from Auschwitz to Schindler how history is bought packaged, and sold* (New York: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1999), vii-viii.

²¹ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 3-4.

²² Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 3, 8.

²³ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 7.

Yizkor Bikor, Yiddish for “books of remembrance,” is a genre comprised of tens of thousands of memoirs that document the destruction of thousands of individual towns caused by the Holocaust. Their main purpose was for the author(s) to be able to record what had been lost: the culture, the religion, the architecture, the history, and most importantly the individuals who were killed. In order to do this justice, most of the books include lists of names, maps, and a variety of folk legends, but they also include the experiences and stories of lives during the Holocaust. These books were almost always published in limited print, usually fewer than 1,000 copies, because their audience was limited to “the community of survivors and émigrés from the town.”²⁴ In a larger sense, these books were a burial of sorts for all of the victims who never received a proper burial – the most sincere and honest way of commemorating and remembering what had happened under the Third Reich. These memoirs provided closure and reveal to the historian a period of inner reflection.

It is perhaps ironic that one of the most important forms of Jewish memorialization has been widely ignored in recent Holocaust literature.²⁵ This is most likely the case because these memoirs were not written for the world, but for the smaller, more specific audiences – the respective communities of the authors. Thus, Holocaust literature ignored them because they were not designed for public consumption. Furthermore, they were not available in other languages until recently and many have still not been translated to date. In 1983, Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, editors and translators of *From A Ruined Garden*, point out that these books had been widely

²⁴ Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, editors and translators of *From A Ruined Garden: the memorial books of Polish Jewry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 14.

²⁵ Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds. and trans., *From A Ruined Garden*, 1.

overlooked.²⁶ More work and attention has been put towards the genre, yet they still remain largely unincorporated with wider literature on the Holocaust.

For the study of Holocaust remembrance and commemoration, the *Yizkor* books reveals activity that contradicts the widely accepted narrative that survivors neglected their past before 1961. The New York Public Library has one of the largest *Yizkor* book collections in their online database with almost 700 available records. Looking at their collection of books that were published before 1961 shows 157 results, almost a quarter of their entire collection. This is evidence that the Holocaust was not an entirely neglected subject before the Eichmann trial. Rather, victims were hard at work to make sure that their experiences were recorded and not forgotten. This does not mean that the Holocaust was widely studied at this time; people other than the victims were not interested or ready to confront the topic. LaCapra, Schwarz, Cole, and others were right in arguing that there was a period of global neglect. Primo Levi's memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*, did not succeed until it was reprinted in the late 50's and early 60's. Raul Hilberg's monumental contribution to Holocaust literature, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, which he started writing in 1948, could not get a publisher until 1961.²⁷ However, this silence does not mean that everyone neglected the topic; Levi, Hilberg, and hundreds of others were quietly writing away. Instead, the silence is evidence that the Holocaust needed time to be digested before it could become a mainstream topic.

World powers like America, Britain, the Soviet Union, and Israel had their own interests in mind that led to a general avoidance of Holocaust commemoration. On the other hand, Germany was dealing with an internal struggle on how to confront the

²⁶ Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds. and trans., *From A Ruined Garden*, 1.

²⁷ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 2.

destruction that its previous government was responsible for. Saul Friedlander paints a bleak picture of this struggle in his book, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, where he describes a nation “unable to explore Nazi past in any significant way.”²⁸ Friedlander argues that the Holocaust remained an elephant in the room for the German public until the 60’s, when the second generation responded to the Eichmann trial by pressuring their parents into openly confronting the past.

Germany’s inability in the 40’s and 50’s to confront its past can be paralleled with the difficulty Israelis had facing the Holocaust in the early days of the State. Israelis disassociated themselves with survivors because they were perceived as “weak,” which contradicted the image of the strong, independent Zionist who built the new State from the ground up. Germans, too, were trying to build up a new state with a new government. They wanted to be motivated by the idea of starting anew with a clean slate, but memorializing the past seemed to tarnish that image. Germans wanted to look forward, not harp on topics that risked rocking an already unstable nation. James Young reveals this struggle in his book, *The Texture of Memory*:

...the ambiguity of German memory comes as no surprise. After all, while the victors of history have long erected monuments to their triumphs and victims have built memorials to their martyrdom, only rarely does a nation call upon itself to remember the victims of crimes it has perpetrated. Where are the national monuments to the genocide of American Indians, to the millions of Africans enslaved and murdered, to the Russian kulaks and peasants starved to death by the millions? They barely exist.²⁹

Young’s rhetorical question forces the outsider to see this from the German perspective. This deeper layer, the self-guilt of the perpetrator, distinguishes Germany’s struggle from Israel’s. It is hard for a nation to confront a dark past when it is trying to rebuild and look

²⁸ Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 3.

²⁹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 21.

to the future, but it is all the more difficult when that nation is perceived to be guilty of the worst crime in history.

By the time the Eichmann trial began on April 11, 1961, Holocaust remembrance was entering a new phase, which would last for Germany until 1985. In this span of two and a half decades Israel, America, and Germany took on the challenge of confronting the Holocaust. However, each country had to develop a narrative that it found comfortable: Israel put disproportionate emphasis on heroism and martyrdom, America put special attention on its role in liberating the camps and defeating the Germans, and Germany engaged in a serious national dialogue over its past and what that meant for its present.

The Israeli government had made rudimentary attempts at adopting the *Shoah*, the Hebrew name for the Holocaust, in the early 50's. Most notable was the installment in 1951 of *Yom Hashoah*, a day dedicated to remembering what had happened, and the establishment of the Yad Vashem organization two years after. However, both the national holiday and the new organization received scant attention from the public until after the Eichmann trial.³⁰ In the 50s, while the Israeli masses remained mostly unaffected by these new developments, the *Knesset* was involved in a secret project; the Israeli Secret Service installed a department in 1951 tasked with capturing prominent Nazi war criminals that had never been captured and brought to justice.³¹ It was this development that led to the capture, trial, and indictment of Adolf Eichmann nearly a decade later.

³⁰ Jillian Gould, "I lit the Candles with the Fire From My Heart,' Observing Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) at a Jewish Home for the Aged," in *Ethnologies* 34.1-2 (2012); and, Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 56.

³¹ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 53-54.

The Eichmann trial was monumental in bringing the *Shoah* out of the shadows and into mainstream public discourse. The key reason for this was that the trial signaled to the world that the Jewish people, under the Jewish state, were ready to adopt the catastrophe as part of their identity. However, this was only possible due to the media attention that the trial received. This was the first trial where selections of the proceedings were internationally broadcasted live by television. Furthermore, the courtroom itself had a larger international audience than domestic. 50 countries had representation comprising of journalists, diplomats, legal observers, and prominent leaders of anti-Nazi organizations.³² Since the trial reached a global audience, it was able to initiate a global dialogue over the fate of European Jews during the Second World War. *The Jerusalem Post* recognized this international attention in October of 1961, foreshadowing the lasting impact that the trial would have. The article, written by Geoffrey Wigoder and titled “Eichmann Trial Made Its Impact,” examined popular opinion in America, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, the Soviet Union, and even the Arab populations before and after the trial.³³ Wigoder noted that before the trial there was significantly more opposition to it, but as the proceedings developed criticism trailed off with few exceptions. This initial contestation arguably helped bolster the trial’s publicity and global interest. However, the world was able to take up such interest because of the technological advances since the Nuremberg War Crimes trials. Television and travel were much more widely accessible to the public by the early 60’s.

³² “Eichmann Trial ‘for History,’ Not a Show for the Public,” in *The Jerusalem Post*, January 30, 1961. And Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 67.

³³ Geoffrey Wigoder, "EICHMANN TRIAL MADE ITS IMPACT," in *The Jerusalem Post*, October 01, 1961.

Another significant difference between the Eichmann and Nuremberg Trials was the focus. As discussed above, the Allies sought justice to satisfy their own agendas overshadowing the distinct crimes against Jews. With Adolf Eichmann being captured by Israeli secret agents and being tried in an Israeli court this trial was to fulfill an Israeli agenda, one that entirely focused on the fate of European Jews. In fact, Cole explains the trial's wider purpose as being "about anti-Semitism in general, the 'Holocaust' in particular, and Eichmann himself only rather peripherally."³⁴ The Nuremberg Trials consisted of four counts, none of which focused explicitly on the Nazi crimes against the Jews. On the other hand, Eichmann was charged on fifteen counts, the first eight of which were solely concerned with his crimes against Jews.³⁵ Evidence for the trial was comprised of 1,600 documents, 108 survivor witnesses, and a selection of scholarly experts.³⁶ It was in this special circumstance, with complete Israeli control over the situation, that the young nation was able to talk openly about the Holocaust.

The Eichmann trial also stirred the German people, particularly in West Germany, to begin to confront past crimes. German youth in their late teens had grown up in an environment completely silent about what their parents had been part of. This new generation was either born after WWII or too young to remember it, and they were taught nothing about it in school. With the trial being globally broadcasted the grotesque facts of Germany's guilt prompted German youth to question their parents and that entire generation with "the questions asked of Eichmann in Jerusalem."³⁷ The outcome was a

³⁴ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 58.

³⁵ "The Trial of Adolf Eichmann," *Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team*, <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/trials/eichmanntrial.html>.

³⁶ "Eichmann's Trial in Jerusalem," *Yad Vashem*, http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/eichmann/eichmann_trial.asp

³⁷ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 9.

national conversation over past guilt while the trial in Jerusalem was in full motion. The *Jerusalem Post* reported in July of 1961 nation-wide “horror and sorrow” in West Germany from “recitals at the trial of train rides to death camps and what happened in those camps.”³⁸

Tim Cole argued that the trial was the event that opened up the door for the public to confront the Holocaust. Cole particularly focuses on how the trial enabled public discussions on the Holocaust in Israel and West Germany.³⁹ While Cole wrote a good analysis on the role that the trial played on prompting historical revisionism across the globe, he did not mention the importance that the timing for the trial had on its global impact. The timing of the trial was just as important for its success as the trial’s content was. If the same trial had taken place 10 years earlier, it would not have had the same impact because it would not have had such a global audience. Additionally, there would not have been enough time for the past to be digested by survivor, perpetrator, bystander, or Zionist.

In the aftermath of the Eichmann trial Israel was able to adapt the Holocaust into a suitable narrative. However, this narrative was not exactly representative of what had happened. Yes, Israel tried Adolf Eichmann and Israelis listened to hundreds of testimonies from survivors, but Israel’s narrative put a much larger emphasis on praising Jewish heroism and martyrdom than on mourning the dead and focusing on the actual atrocity, pain, and sorrow that Germany had caused. This disproportionate emphasis on heroism reveals itself when looking at Israel’s two biggest modes of Holocaust commemoration: *Yom Hashoah* and *Yad Vashem*.

³⁸ “Eichmann Trial Reaction Shows Greatest Impact on W. Germans” in *The Jerusalem Post*. July 12, 1961.

³⁹ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 8-9.

The Israeli parliament designated the 27th of the Hebrew month of *Nissan* as the day for *Yom Hashoah* in 1951, but the holiday was not widely celebrated until around the time Eichmann was put to trial. The holiday was originally implemented as a day for Jews to mourn those who were killed on an unknown date. This was inspired from a Jewish religious custom in which immediate family members of the deceased practice an extra level of mourning on the *Yarzeit*, or anniversary, of when that person passed away. The holiday enters its critical moment with a two-minute, nation-wide siren. For these two minutes time in Israel stops, cars come to a halt on the highway, radio stations pause their broadcasts, and the whole state mourns together. For Jews, this is an event that is unequaled in its impact to create a deep sense of unity, regardless – or even in spite of – their differences.

However, the date that the government picked for this “day of mourning” was also the Jewish date of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – the paramount example of Jewish heroism during the war. This overlap was no coincidence – it was designed with acute purpose. Israelis had to remember the Holocaust in a vein that matched the young nation’s image of Jewish strength and bravery. In order to do this, Israel had to create a way that commemorated the Holocaust without focusing too heavily on the slaughter of so many Jews. Israel accomplished this by making the official name for the holiday, as referred to on the Yad Vashem website, “Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day.” Furthermore, the holiday itself is followed by a day to remember those who had died fighting in Israeli wars, which is then followed by Israeli Independence Day – the happiest most celebratory day in the Israeli calendar.⁴⁰ Adding all of this to the picture exposes the nation’s difficulty to really commemorate the Holocaust. If anything, the

⁴⁰ Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 44.

Holocaust is more celebrated by Israelis than it is mourned. Is a two-minute silence enough to really mourn the death of six million Jews? Do not the holiday's name, date, and association to other holidays through proximity overshadow any sincere attempt to remember the dead? What it does do is convey an Israeli message: the Holocaust was able to happen because there was no Jewish state to prevent it and no Jewish army to fight for and defend European Jewry.

Tim Cole describes Yad Vashem's development over the years as one that has struggled to acknowledge the Holocaust without putting too much emphasis on heroism and bravery. Out of the nine original memorial objectives for the museum, 6 were dedicated to heroism and only 3 to destruction.⁴¹ The first two exhibits that Yad Vashem dedicated, *Memorial Hill* and the *Hall of Remembrance*, were focused on destruction.⁴² However, *Memorial Hill* was just a spot to privately remember the dead while overlooking the surrounding hills. The underlying message was clear: look at the beautiful Jewish homeland that did not exist when those who perished needed it. Other memorials dedicated to loss and death are the privately funded *Children's Memorial* in 1987, *The Valley of the Destroyed Communities* in 1992, and the *Hall of Names* in 2005. The *Children's Memorial* was actually designed by Moshe Safdie, a famous architect, under the request of Yad Vashem in 1976, but it took 11 years before anyone wanted to fund the project.⁴³ With the exception of *Memorial Hill*, these spaces are either enclosed indoors or are off to the side from the main complex.

While the few memorials commemorating death were built over a long period of time, memorials and monuments dedicated to heroism were erected consistently over the

⁴¹ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 122.

⁴² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 250.

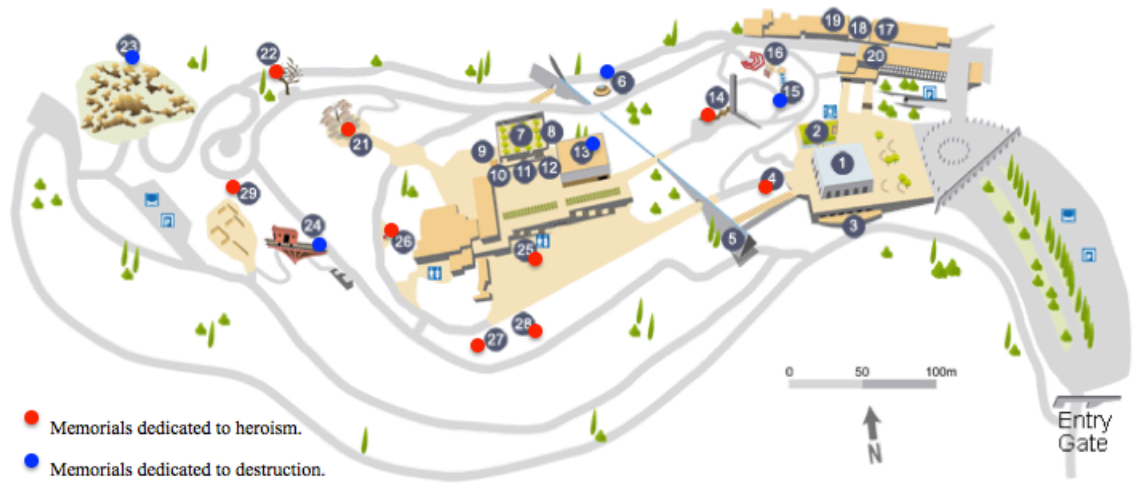
⁴³ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 257. It was eventually funded by an American survivor.

lifespan of the museum. This began with the *Avenue of the Righteous Gentiles*, a line of trees planted in 1962 to pay tribute to all of the non-Jews who risked their lives and the lives of their families to save Jews. It would become the entrance to the entire museum complex.⁴⁴ After visitors walk through the grove of gentile righteousness they enter the *Warsaw Ghetto Square*. Built in 1973, this space showcases Jewish heroism and bravery during WWII through the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and it continues to be the space used to commence *Yom Hashoah*.⁴⁵ Other notable dedications that highlight bravery are the *Pillar of Heroism*, which was erected in 1974 and remains the tallest object in the entire complex, the *Soldiers, Ghetto Fighters, and Partisans* monument (1985), the *Nieuwlande Monument* (1988), the *Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations* beginning in 1996 (and not to be confused with the *Avenue* established 34 years earlier), and the *Partisan's Panorama* (2003). Smaller monuments have also been added over time, but these remain the most significant. They stand proudly erect out in the open and counteract the sites of mourning. They are also spread out throughout the complex. Visitors cannot reach any sites of mourning without encountering a space dedicated to heroism and bravery.

⁴⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 250.

⁴⁵ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 250.

Map of Yad Vashem with Memorials Marked⁴⁶



While Israel was developing its own way to remember and commemorate the Holocaust that was not too sensitive, Germany was undergoing its own awakening to its crimes against the Jewish people. The Eichmann trial made a splash so big that it changed the current in German discourse. Before the trial took place, Germany was doing its best to avoid the subject of Jewish extermination, but after 1961 national dialogue and government action erupted. This new openness – almost eagerness – to remember the past can be seen by examining two types of action – one subtle and the other very public. The 60's brought a willingness to educate youth and a determination to hold ex-Nazis accountable for past crimes on German soil. Germany was able to separate the new from the old, the future from the past, by creating a curriculum on the Holocaust.

Education was perhaps the change that had the biggest impact in German society, but was also the least noticeable development because it was completely internal. Before

⁴⁶ Graphic taken from the Yad Vashem website. Red and blue markers have been added. See “Visiting,” *Yad Vashem: the world Holocaust remembrance center*, <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/visiting/map.asp>.

the 1960's schools did not deal with history past the 19th century.⁴⁷ This changed after the Eichmann trial when German schools began to confront the Holocaust. A prominent German historian named Hannah Vogt published "one of the most widely circulated histories of modern Germany" in 1961, a secondary school textbook called *The Burden of Guilt*.⁴⁸ In the 12-chapter book, Vogt goes to great lengths separating Germany from Hitler. She describes Germany as a united nation and Hitler as the antithesis and destroyer of that united German national pride.⁴⁹ No subject is left out and the longstanding presence of German anti-Semitism is acknowledged; the book covers everything from the 1096 pogrom in Worms leading up to the exterminations in Auschwitz.⁵⁰

The textbook goes beyond teaching facts and developing an appropriate German narrative. Vogt actually addresses the present day 1960's by connecting the past crimes to the ongoing anti-Semitism in Germany. In the conclusion, she rhetorically asks:

Should we listen to insinuations that the time has come to forget crimes and victims because nobody must incriminate himself? Is it not, rather, cowardly, mean, and miserable to deny even now the dead the honor they deserve, and forget them as quickly as possible?⁵¹

Vogt went on to argue that Germans had a choice. They could either regress by not confronting their nation's past, or they could learn from the past and work towards reunifying Germany once more. She puts it in clear terms: "The past cannot be erased,

⁴⁷ Hannah Vogt, "The Burden of Guilt," in *Sources of European History Since 1900*, 294-296, edited by Matthew Paul Berg and James H. Krukones et al (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 294.

⁴⁸ J.P. BAUKE, "This is what Happened," in *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 15, 1964.

⁴⁹ Vogt, "The Burden of Guilt," 295.

⁵⁰ BAUKE, "This is what Happened."

⁵¹ Vogt, "The Burden of Guilt," 296.

but the future is free.”⁵² By teaching the subject in secondary schools, the Holocaust was saved from being forgotten by an entire generation of Germans.

The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials from 1963-1965 marked the first public action by German officials to not only confront the Holocaust, but also hold ex-Nazis accountable for past crimes. The trial, which was expected to culminate within the year, convicted 22 former Nazis, consisted of more than 60,000 pages of material, and included the testimonies of 254 witnesses from across the globe.⁵³ The purpose of the trial was “to determine the guilt of each defendant as specifically as possible,” but it also brought the Holocaust into the German spotlight.⁵⁴

It was in this spotlight that the witnesses went into grotesque details of their persecution, touching on subjects that were previously too sensitive to discuss. For example one testimony accused defendant Stefan Baretzki of using prisoners to practice killing with “a blow from the side of his hand,” and one witness explained that conditions in his camp got so bad that rats began eating sick patients.⁵⁵ At some points the topic was too much for the spectators to handle. The *New York Times* reported an instance when a witness was describing how defendant Oswald Kaduk had chased a group of children into

⁵² Vogt, “The Burden of Guilt,” 296.

⁵³ Robert K. Woetzel, “Reflections on the Auschwitz Trial,” in *The World Today* 21 (11) (Royal Institute of International Affairs: 494–98, 1965), 496. And, Nehemiah Robinson, “Auschwitz Trial Begins Today,” in *The Jerusalem Post (1950-1988)*, Dec 20, 1963. Witnesses came from the following countries: Germany, Hungary, Poland, France, Israel, Czechoslovakia, Australia, Rumania, Greece, Norway, Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Holland, and America.

⁵⁴ Woetzel, “Reflections on the Auschwitz Trial,” 496.

⁵⁵ “Auschwitz Camp Cruelty Described at Trial of 22,” in *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, Dec 31, 1963; and, GERD WILCKE, Special to The New York Times, “AUSCHWITZ ‘HELL’ DEPICTED AT TRIAL,” in *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Feb 25, 1964.

the gas chambers with his pistol when someone from the audience screamed, “Why don’t you beat the pig to death?”⁵⁶

The trial was not spared from criticism. *The Jerusalem Post* published a critical article on the trial in December of 1964 entitled, “Auschwitz Trial Bored Germans.”⁵⁷ The article stated, “the public in Germany and abroad has apparently become bored by its catalogue of suffering.”⁵⁸ This could have been true for a combination of reasons. For one, the trial was at first expected to last a year at most. With no end in sight at the close of 1964, the public could have been overwhelmed with the whole ordeal. The trial also focused much more on the individual crimes of the defendants instead of dealing with larger topics, like discussing what led men to commit such crimes and the “deeper implications of the murders.”⁵⁹ However, the criticism could also be seen as unfair and a little unfounded. Media and news run at a fast pace. As new events take place the spotlight shifts. The trial being less reported on as time passed should not counteract the impact that the trial itself had, nor should it diminish from the fact that Germany put on such a trial with the support of its people. This event was a sign that Germany was trying to face its past and do exactly what Hannah Vogt challenged of her nation – to remember the past while looking to the future.

The eruption in Germany to incorporate the Holocaust eventually boiled over in 1985. To a certain degree Hannah Vogt’s message was too difficult to achieve. For some Germans, separating themselves from the Third Reich while accepting responsibility for

⁵⁶ Special to The New York Times, "OUTBURST STIRS AUSCHWITZ TRIAL," in *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Apr 07, 1964.

⁵⁷ "AUSCHWITZ TRIAL BORES GERMANS," in *The Jerusalem Post (1950-1988)*, Dec 21, 1964.

⁵⁸ "AUSCHWITZ TRIAL BORES GERMANS."

⁵⁹ Woetzel, “Reflections on the Auschwitz Trial,” 498.

its crimes was too contradictory. This conflict did not appear out of nowhere in 1985; it had built up over time. A telling example of this was the German public's split reaction in 1970 when their Chancellor Willy Brandt famously kneeled and wept at a wreath laying ceremony that he was attending in the old Warsaw Ghetto.⁶⁰ The Chancellor's memoir revealed the polarization of the nation. He wrote, recalling for some "there was no lack of questions, either malicious or foolish," while at the same time he was told by others, "that the gesture had in fact touched many people."⁶¹ Brandt quoted one reporter whom he felt identified the source of discomfort: "He who does not need to kneel knelt, on behalf of all who do need to kneel but do not – because they dare not, or cannot, or cannot dare to kneel."⁶² As time passed and the younger generation who were born after WWII grew older, some Germans became irritated with their responsibility for crimes they never committed.

May 8th, 1985 marked the 40th anniversary of Germany's defeat, an anniversary that was observed by Germany. This event sparked a national debate over whether or not Germany should observe this holiday, which led to larger questions over German guilt for what happened over 40 years ago. It started with President Richard von Weizsäcker's commemorative speech, which led to the famous historians' debate. These politicians and scholars reflected the national mood, which can be examined through Germany's monuments and memorials. The battle was taking place on all levels, top to bottom. It is important to note the context surrounding this German reaction in the late 80's. At the

⁶⁰ Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle, editors, *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: an anthology of texts* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 408.

⁶¹ Willy Brandt, "Kneeling in Warsaw," in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: an anthology of texts*, edited by Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle, 408-410 (New York: Routledge, 2005), 410.

⁶² Brandt, "Kneeling in Warsaw," 410.

time of these debates, nobody knew that the Berlin Wall would soon fall and nobody knew that the Soviet Union was going to collapse. The wall and Soviets greatly affected the way Germans perceived their situation after WWII, shaping the way many people thought.

When President Weizsäcker addressed his nation he spoke aggressively about German responsibility. He dispelled the older Germans' rhetoric, which claimed that they had been unaware of what was happening, and he scolded the youth for resisting their duty to remember.⁶³ Weizsäcker put it bluntly to the older generation:

Who could remain unsuspecting after the burning of the synagogues, the plundering, the stigmatization with the Star of David, the deprivation of rights, the ceaseless violation of human dignity? ...Whoever opened his eyes and ears and sought information could not fail to notice that Jews were being deported.⁶⁴

He made it painfully clear that ignorance was not only a lie, but it was a cover for guilt. The president concluded his remarks with a plea for the younger generation to embrace reconciliation, and he argued that this could only be done if Germany continued to remember: "The Jewish nation remembers and will always remember. We seek reconciliation. Precisely for this reason we must understand that there can be no reconciliation without remembrance."⁶⁵ Germany's president was admitting full responsibility on behalf of his people and proclaiming that the only path forward was by carrying the burden of the past into the future.

In response to the President's charged remarks, historian Golo Mann and editor-in-chief of the *Der Spiegel*, Rudolph Augstein, questioned the whole notion of the Nazi

⁶³ Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 9-10.

⁶⁴ Richard von Weizsäcker, "A German Plea for Remembrance and Reconciliation," in *Sources of European History Since 1900*, 399-400, edited by Matthew Paul Berg and James H. Krukones et al (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 399.

⁶⁵ Weizsäcker, "A German Plea for Remembrance and Reconciliation," 400.

era's unique status as having been an unprecedented time. By dismissing German singularity, they dismissed the notion that it was necessary to remember the past with such austerity. Mann brings up Napoléon's massacre at Waterloo, pointing out that nobody was paying close attention to it four decades later.⁶⁶ If the horrendous actions of the Nazis could be brought down to the level of other crimes in history, then surely the world can get past the Holocaust just as it had done with previous atrocities. Augstein goes further by bringing examples from the more recent past. He points out Stalin's terror in Russia and the extreme suggestions made by some American officials during the war that advocated for the "general sterilization of the German population."⁶⁷ Neither Mann nor Augstein were denying the mass murder committed by the Nazi regime, but they both saw a problem with putting Hitler and the Third Reich on an untouchable pedestal beyond all other crimes.

The historians' debate continued the struggle over questions of German responsibility and the uniqueness of the Nazi crimes at a more ideological level. The two key players in the dispute were historians Ernest Nolte and Jürgen Habermas. Despite its name, Saul Friedlander points out that the debate was much more about shaping the past "in terms of public memory and national identity" than it was an intellectual argument confined to the realm of academia.⁶⁸ Nolte called the German obsession to remember, "the past that will not pass," an unnecessary exception in world history; he argued that

⁶⁶ Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 12.

⁶⁷ Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 13.

⁶⁸ Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 22.

almost everything the Nazis did was adopted from the Bolsheviks' "White terror" of the previous century.⁶⁹ In compelling language, Nolte connects these two atrocities:

But just as a murder, especially a mass murder, cannot be 'justified' by another murder, so, too, we will be led thoroughly astray by an attitude that only takes note of *one* murder and of *one* mass murder, and that does not want to take note of the other one, even though there is probably a causal connection between them.⁷⁰

On the other side, Habermas went on the offense by accusing Nolte of nitpicking examples to support his own political agenda. He rebutted Nolte's oversimplification of Nazi crimes, writing: "Anyone who wants to drive away our shame about this fact through a slogan like 'obsession with guilt' ... is destroying the only reliable foundation for our ties to the West."⁷¹ Nolte and Habermas were key players who represent each side of the larger debate.

The national mood reflected the dispute at the political and scholarly levels. This struggle over guilt persisted at the ground level too. The public had mixed reactions to monuments and memorials that were being built to commemorate the Holocaust. There are five examples of this that James Young details in his book, *The Texture of Memory*: the first of Hrdlicka's four part Countermonument revealed in 1985, Gerzes' Countermonument revealed in 1986, "Skulptur Projekte 87" revealed in 1987, Hoheisel's "Negative-Form" Monument revealed in 1987, and Radermacher's Disruption of Public Space revealed in 1992.⁷² Young pays particular attention to the reactions that some of

⁶⁹ Ernest Nolte, "The past that will not pass: A speech that could be written but not delivered," in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: an anthology of texts*, edited by Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle, 414-418 (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁷⁰ Nolte, "The past that will not pass: A speech that could be written but not delivered," 417.

⁷¹ Jürgen Habermas, "A kind of damage control: Apologetic tendencies in contemporary German historiography," in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: an anthology of texts*, edited by Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle, 419-424 (New York: Routledge, 2005), 424.

⁷² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 17-48.

these monuments received upon being dedicated. Hrdlicka's four-part countermonument, which was commissioned by the city of Hamburg to counter a fascist memorial dedicated to the fallen soldiers of Germany in wartime, was only half completed because the initial interest for it waned.⁷³ Gerzes' Countermonument in Harburg was a self-destructive monument that people could graffiti their thoughts onto as it sank into the ground over time. It was compared to "a great black knife in the back of Germany."⁷⁴ "Skulptur Projekte 87," was designed to be a big black brick of an eyesore and placed smack in the middle of Munster's palace square. It was met with such hysteria from locals that it was demolished within the year of its dedication and eventually rebuilt in Hamburg in 1989.⁷⁵ All of these monuments were placed in public spaces. The reactions reveal a stark contrast of interests. On one hand, these monuments were being commissioned, money was being put toward them, and in some cases the public even demanded that they be built. However, at the same time they were met with severe criticism. Some of the monuments were even vandalized with Nazi symbolisms.⁷⁶

From President Weizsäcker to Ernest Nolte to the people of Hamburg, there was a severe reaction to the period of openness that the Eichmann trial had stirred in Germany. In many respects, Hannah Vogt accomplished her mission. Germans were certainly thinking of the future by confronting the conflicted past. Regardless whether people were for or against looking back on the Nazi era, everyone had an opinion and all sides were voiced. Young describes this division of opinions as the "texture" of memory – the idea

⁷³ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 37-38.

⁷⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 34.

⁷⁵ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 18-19.

⁷⁶ Young mentions two instances where swastikas were drawn on monuments. See Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 17, 35.

that one nation shares multiple opinions.⁷⁷ Even Ernest Nolte's argument against German responsibility and originality, as extreme as it is, fulfills the demand to remember in some respect.

Today, Holocaust remembrance has been stuck in a transitional phase for the last few decades. The Holocaust is gradually becoming historicized as the remaining first generation of survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders pass away. How it will be historicized will largely depend on how it has been remembered over time. The Holocaust has been confronted and memorialized by nations differently, but all treat it with paramount importance. In a sense, it is because it is so important that Israel and Germany have struggled to incorporate it into their national identities. This struggle has caused the subject to be construed by all that confront it. Immediately after Germany's unconditional surrender the victorious Allies conducted the Nuremberg Trials, thus dominating the subject. In doing so, the Allies downplayed the death of six million Jews by focusing more generally on the Second World War. This is one reason why remembering the six million murdered Jews was difficult, but shame and discomfort hushed public commemoration in Israel and Germany. However, contrary to mainstream scholarly opinion, survivors did internally memorialize and remember through modes such as writing *Yizkor Bikor* memoirs. It was not until Jews came together by collectively adopting the catastrophe that Holocaust remembrance experienced a 180-degree flip, dominating public discourse. The Eichmann trial was instrumental in this, influencing Germany to revisit its past. However, the "texture" of memory that James Young cautions not to ignore was particularly prevalent in Germany. While Germany fully accepted its status as the perpetrator of the Holocaust, the struggle to become a nation

⁷⁷ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, x.

reborn caused many Germans to question their level of guilt. Whether the Holocaust has been overshadowed by outsiders, been focused too much on heroism, or has inflicted guilt on an entire nation, one common denominator stands out. The Holocaust has become the icon of mass murder. In fact, out of it the world coined a new term – genocide. How this term, this word to describe the worst of crimes, is interpreted and applied will determine what lesson has been learned from the Holocaust.

Genocide Again: Cambodia's Struggle to Remember

There is very little research and scholarly work that deals with how the Cambodian Genocide has been memorialized. Plenty of books address the history, the politics, or the country's current situation. A plethora of research focuses on the Khmer Rouge period and the effects it has had on the nation today. However, few sources deal specifically with how the genocide has been remembered over time. When analyzing how an event is memorialized, it is important to note that a country's narrative and how the people of that country remember an event are not one and the same. A country's narrative is often heavily politicized. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between how the Cambodian people and the government have remembered and commemorated it. With this distinction in mind, the author examines how Cambodians and the government have dealt with their dark past.⁷⁸ The genocide has been largely neglected until recently. Three significant reasons have caused this neglect: they have been primed to forget, they struggle to understand, and they have been caught between desiring peace and justice. The Vietnamese and the subsequent Cambodian PRK regime started genocide memorialization, but public commemoration has been an area of debate amongst Cambodians to this day. In order to show how these struggles persist, one must examine the history leading up to, during, and after the Khmer Rouge regime while taking time to analyze how the genocide has been remembered in specific circumstances.

Before examining how Cambodians have been primed to forget, it is important to acknowledge that the crimes committed under the Khmer Rouge are not universally accepted as "genocide." Manus I. Midlarsky breaks the catastrophe down into numbers

⁷⁸ Cambodia has had government turnovers since the end of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979. This essay analyzes how these respective governments dealt with how the genocide should be remembered.

and facts by examining who was slaughtered, who did the killing, and what were the motives behind it in his book, *The Killing Trap*. He concludes that the term “genocide” could only be used to describe the fate of ethnic minorities in Cambodia, notably those who were ethnically Vietnamese, Chinese, Laotian, Thai, or Cham.⁷⁹ The percentage of those either killed or deported in each of those groups varies from 36% of the Cham to 100% of the Vietnamese.⁸⁰ These groups experienced higher levels of discrimination than the 25% of ethnic Khmer who died for non-racial reasons. Thus, Midlarsky defines the killings of ethnic Khmer as “politicide” rather than genocide; he borrows Kenneth Quinn’s description comparing Pol Pot’s actions to having “Mao’s plan with Stalin’s methods.”⁸¹ The intentions and results of the Khmer Rouge, according to some scholars like Midlarsky, was not strictly genocide. If the killing fields are not considered genocide, then what happened in Cambodia could be seen as a lesser evil to the Holocaust because of what the word “genocide” connotes.

On the opposite side, anthropologist and author of the book *Beyond the Killing Fields*, Usha Welaratna, refers to the Khmer Rouge period as “the holocaust.”⁸² She does not even entertain the argument that it was not genocide. Although Welaratna does not explain why she used “holocaust” to describe the period, it can be easily extrapolated. She does not focus on formal definitions, percentages, and numbers; instead, she studies Cambodians and examines how their lives were completely destroyed by the Khmer Rouge. For Welaratna, calling what happened anything less than a “holocaust” would be

⁷⁹ Manus I. Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap: genocide in the twentieth century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁸⁰ Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap*, 312-315.

⁸¹ Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap*, 309, 323.

⁸² Usha Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields: voices of nine Cambodian survivors in America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 5, 7.

offensive to those who lived through it and those who died. Scholars like Manus I. Midlarsky and Usha Welaratna represent extremes from either side. Most sources refer to the period as genocide, or attempted genocide. Although these scholars represent both extremes, it is important to recognize the big gap of what is acceptable when referring to this period. The fact that the years between 1975 and 1979 can be referred to as anything from a mass killing to a holocaust adds an element to the discussion of how it is remembered.

Cambodians have been primed to forget, or rather not to think or question things. This has made genocide remembrance especially difficult. Cambodian culture historically has had a big socio-economic gap between the corrupt elites and ordinary people, with the former running the nation. When the Khmer Rouge took control they distorted this culture to extreme proportions by making it their own. Dating back to Angkor times, kings treated their people as “pawns in service of their own agendas.”⁸³ Elites could take anything they wanted from ordinary people, even their lives. This culture survived long after the demise of the great Angkor period, and was only reinforced by the heavy taxes imposed on the Cambodian masses during and after the French Colonial period.⁸⁴ Additionally, only children of the elites benefited from the westernized education that the French brought.⁸⁵ This culture, which fostered a massive class gap between ordinary people and the more removed elite, primed the masses to put up with what was demanded of them. This has made the idea of remembrance especially foreign to most.

⁸³ Joel Brinkley, *Cambodia's Curse: the modern history of a troubled land* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 21.

⁸⁴ Brinkley, *Cambodia's Curse*, 24-30.

⁸⁵ Brinkley, *Cambodia's Curse*, 24-30.

Cambodians were actually overjoyed initially when the Khmer Rouge claimed victory, overtaking Phnom Penh on April 17, 1979. These communists were nationalist fighters and ethnic Khmer, “brothers of the same race” who stood for “a less corrupt social order.”⁸⁶ Cambodians welcomed the new regime; they believed it meant an end to the longtime social structures imposed on them by the ruling powers, and they hoped it also meant peace. The idea that each person should be equal to his/her neighbor was appealing.

The Central Party of the Khmer Rouge was highly insecure. They executed a radical plan to transform everyone into rural peasants, which forcefully and brutally flipped society upside down. This enforced an environment where thinking could get one, and one’s entire family, killed. The Khmer Rouge leadership was so secretive that they ended up only enhancing the old power system, making society even more radical and dangerous. On the same day that the Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh they immediately evacuated everyone into the countryside.⁸⁷ Chum Mey, one of the few survivors of the Tuol Sleng interrogation camp, recalled the rushed evacuation of the city in his autobiography, *Survivor*: “They said if we stayed, we would die because the Americans were planning to bomb the city. There was no need to take any belongings because it would only be three days.”⁸⁸ Another survivor nicknamed Mum, who was only eight when the Khmer Rouge took power, recalled clearly how the soldiers threatened to shoot them when her family did not immediately leave.⁸⁹ This rushed evacuation was

⁸⁶ Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields*, 94.

⁸⁷ Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields*, 94.

⁸⁸ Chum Mey, *Survivor: the triumph of an ordinary man in the Khmer Rouge genocide* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2012), 26.

⁸⁹ Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields*, 140-141.

caused by Pol Pot's insecurity. He believed that any delay could allow the educated elite enough time to form an opposition against his revolution.⁹⁰

Anyone that could possibly be perceived as anti-revolutionary could disappear. Even those who were associated with anti-revolutionary people were not safe. The people who were deemed anti-revolutionary were the educated. The Khmer Rouge soldiers made it brutally clear that education was useless under their superimposed society – survival depended on listening and not questioning. One soldier put it this way: “If Angka says to break rocks, break rocks. If Angka says to dig canals, you must dig canals... our school is the farm. The land is our paper, the plow is our pen.”⁹¹ A survivor named Heng Chi, who was a judge by profession, narrowly avoided his own execution by hiding his identity after he saw that “judges, teachers, bankers, soldiers, and politicians were subject to execution.”⁹² Mum's father was asked to answer some questions and then never returned home. They never found out what happened to him or why because the whole family was at risk of being abducted if they asked too many questions.⁹³ Disappearing relatives was a common theme during this period.

Nobody was safe, not even the Khmer Rouge soldiers themselves. One soldier was demoted when his superiors discovered that his father had driven an orange truck in Phnom Penh before the war.⁹⁴ Thousands of Khmer Rouge cadres whose ideology was put to question ended up imprisoned and interrogated in Tuol Sleng and then summarily

⁹⁰ Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap*, 318.

⁹¹ Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields*, 95.

⁹² Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge: inside the politics of nation building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 3-4.

⁹³ Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields*, 142.

⁹⁴ Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?: Cambodia in the shadow of genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 39.

executed.⁹⁵ As time went on, Pol Pot and the Party Central became so obsessively paranoid that there would have been little difference between his role and that of kings of ancient Angkor if there had not been such an emphasis put on secrecy.⁹⁶ Thus, the Khmer Rouge reinforced the belief in Cambodians that it was wrong to act or think independently. By not having the ability to digest what was happening to them under the Khmer Rouge, it has become very difficult for them to remember or commemorate it.

In addition to the cultural hindrances to remembering, Cambodians have struggled to comprehend the genocide. One of the most difficult aspects to date for Cambodians in understanding the catastrophe is: why did Khmer kill Khmer?⁹⁷ For any mass killing and attempted genocide, victims struggle with comprehending why so many were killed. However, Alexander Hinton explains that for Cambodians, this question is “particularly vexing” because majority of the perpetrators and victims were of the same ethnicity.⁹⁸ Furthermore, since the fall of the regime ex-Khmer Rouge and victims have been living side by side. Many Cambodians cannot distinguish who in their village was Khmer Rouge and who was a victim because when the regime collapsed, many fled to new villages – “their fellow villagers, and sometimes even their wives and children did not know about their background.”⁹⁹ This causes even more embarrassment and adds to the reason why many Cambodians prefer to bury their traumas deep within themselves instead of coming together as a nation to commemorate the past.

⁹⁵ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: terror and history in Pol Pot's secret prison* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1999), 36-37, 43-45.

⁹⁶ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 16. And Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 133.

⁹⁷ Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 15.

⁹⁸ Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 15.

⁹⁹ Burcu Munyas, “Genocide in the minds of Cambodian youth: transmitting (hi)stories of genocide to second and third generations in Cambodia,” in *Journal of Genocide Research* 10, no. 3 (September 2008): 413-439, 418.

A study published in 2008 on Cambodian youth found that many “families ‘try to forget’ [the genocide] by avoiding the subject” in conversation, books, movies, and everything else.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, “very few youth” have discussed “*why* the genocide happened” in their homes; an ignorance very similar to Germany before Hannah Vogt published her school textbook.¹⁰¹ This silence is bad for two significant reasons. First, if the majority of Cambodians continue to be silent about their past, the youth will grow up being left in the dark, which will lead to many personal stories being lost forever as the first generation dies off.¹⁰² Second, communication is a remedy for trauma and PTSD, which many Cambodians suffer from to date.¹⁰³ The fact that the genocide is excluded from the public school curricula because of its political sensitivity is not helpful.¹⁰⁴ As of 2004, Cambodians have constructed 78 memorials throughout the country. A map of Cambodia hung in Tuol Sleng marks the general vicinity of where all of these memorials are located. However, these memorials are small and not easily found. Many Cambodians do not know their whereabouts.¹⁰⁵

On January 7, 1979, less than four years after the Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh, heavily fortified Vietnamese troops launched a massive offensive, severely

¹⁰⁰ Munyas, “Genocide in the minds of Cambodian youth,” 421

¹⁰¹ Munyas, “Genocide in the minds of Cambodian youth,” 417.

¹⁰² Munyas, “Genocide in the minds of Cambodian youth,” 414.

¹⁰³ Nigel P. Field and Sotheara Chhim, “Desire for Revenge and Attitudes Toward the Khmer Rouge Tribunal Among Cambodians,” in *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 13, no.4 (July 2008): 352-372, 355; and, Hinton, D. E., A. L. Hinton, V. Pich, J. R. Loeum, and M. H. Pollack, “Nightmares among Cambodian Refugees: The Breaching of Concentric Ontological Security,” in *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 33, no. 2 (06, 2009): 219-65.

¹⁰⁴ Kheang Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal: A Politically Compromised Search for Justice,” in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 4 (11, 2013): 783-792, 790.

¹⁰⁵ During my three-month stay in Siem Reap, which included travel around the country, the only memorials encountered where the government sponsored Tuol Sleng Museum and Choeung Ek Genocidal Center. When asking locals about memorials in Siem Reap, no one was able to point out their whereabouts, and few had knowledge of their existence.

damaging Khmer Rouge power and taking over the capital.¹⁰⁶ The army brought with it a select group of Vietnamese-trained Cambodian politicians, most of who had previously defected from the Khmer Rouge.¹⁰⁷ This was the birth of a second revolution and a new regime – the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). Whether this Vietnamese military coup was viewed as ”liberation” or as an “invasion” has been widely contested by Cambodians, and remains so to this day. David Chandler, in his book *Voices from S-21*, wrote that the Vietnamese troops “were welcomed by nearly everyone” who was still in Phnom Penh when they took control.¹⁰⁸ While it would be nonsensical to argue that Cambodians were not happy to see their Khmer Rouge oppressors’ retreat, to claim that they “welcomed” the Vietnamese would be hyperbolic. Perhaps this was because Cambodians were now sobered and pessimistic from their mistakenly enthusiastic and hopeful response when the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh victorious. Or, perhaps they were tired from one regime replacing the last. Either way, Cambodians did not simply throw themselves into the arms of these troops. While fleeing from Tuol Sleng, Chum Mey was shot at by two Vietnamese trucks. He was only able to escape by finding refuge with Khmer Rouge soldiers.¹⁰⁹ He recalled in Thmat Pong that “people were not sleeping in their houses for fear of both Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge troops.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 7-9, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Mey, *Survivor*, 40-41. That night, the Khmer Rouge cadres shot and killed his wife and newborn child.

¹¹⁰ Mey, *Survivor*, 42.

An article translated from Khmer in the *New York Times* made it clear that independence was of “the highest priority” for Cambodians.¹¹¹ The author, Pheach Srey, was writing only 3 days after the Vietnamese takeover:

The replacement of the Pol Pot regime by the Vietnamese troops on Khmer soil is comparable to an epidemic of the bubonic plague being eliminated only to be replaced by the scourge of cholera.¹¹²

Srey continued, calling the PRK a “Communist puppet regime,” and declared that the only viable solution would be an internationally intervened democratic election. Srey was certainly not alone in condemning the Vietnamese. On January 8th of 1979, just one day after the Vietnamese took over Phnom Penh, Prince Sihanouk publicly pleaded to the world in a press conference in Peking, asking to expel the Vietnamese from Cambodia.¹¹³ Calling life under the Khmer Rouge “terrible,” the Prince adamantly condemned what he called the “Hitlerian Vietnamese aggressors,” declaring that an oppressive, nationalist government was better than a Vietnamese occupation.¹¹⁴ However, the Prince concluded his protest by acknowledging that the real fate of the Vietnamese in Cambodia rested in the opinion of the Cambodian masses.¹¹⁵ Of course, figures like Pheach Srey and Prince Sihanouk were writing and speaking from abroad, and their statements could easily be delegitimized as being highly politicized. However, there is not a source from this period that is not politicized. Either way, it remains clear that Cambodians – at best – skeptically received the Vietnamese, and the Cambodian Regime that they installed in power.

¹¹¹ Pheach Srey, "In Cambodia, 'Bubonic Plague' Out, 'Cholera' in," in *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 10, 1979.

¹¹² Srey, "In Cambodia, 'Bubonic Plague' Out, 'Cholera' in."

¹¹³ Fox Butterfield, "SIHANOUK REQUESTS AID OF U.S. AND U.N.," in *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 09, 1979.

¹¹⁴ Butterfield, "SIHANOUK REQUESTS AID OF U.S. AND U.N."

¹¹⁵ Butterfield, "SIHANOUK REQUESTS AID OF U.S. AND U.N."

With this contention between Cambodians and the Vietnamese in mind, the Vietnamese occupation created a unique and confusing beginning for genocide remembrance. On the one hand, the Vietnamese wanted to justify their invasion by exposing the Khmer Rouge, but on the other hand they had to incorporate the ex-Khmer Rouge Cadre into the new regime. This created a paradox similar to what Germany was beginning to experience. Cambodians were told that the Khmer Rouge had committed an awful crime, but they should forgive almost all of them.

Almost immediately after the Vietnamese took control, they began to force-feed their narrative to the Cambodian people in order to justify the invasion. The narrative was straightforward and simple: the Khmer Rouge committed crimes against Cambodians parallel to that of the crimes of Nazis against the Jews, and the Vietnamese saved Cambodians from death and liberated them from oppression.¹¹⁶ The day after the Vietnamese took Phnom Penh, two photojournalists found Tuol Sleng by chance. Also known today as S-21, the top-secret interrogation prison was a center where approximately 20,000 Cambodians were tortured, and shipped off like sheep for slaughter.¹¹⁷ Immediately recognizing the immense “propaganda value” that such a horrific site could bring, Vietnamese commanders closed off the area and began preparing it for visitors.¹¹⁸

For the first year, the discovered prison was actually only open to foreign guests who were invited by the Vietnamese to witness the atrocities committed by the Khmer

¹¹⁶ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 2.

¹¹⁸ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 4, 8. The torturers had left behind the bodies of recently murdered prisoners in their hurried retreat.

Rouge.¹¹⁹ In fact, for months after the Vietnamese victory and the establishment of the PRK, Cambodians were blocked off from going into cities, like Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. These cities were transformed into military bases and also used by the new government while a hundred thousand Cambodians camped outside the cities with nowhere else to go.¹²⁰ A Vietnamese Colonel, named Mia Lam, was commissioned by the Vietnamese to transform S-21 into a museum, and subsequently Choeung Ek into a Genocidal Center.¹²¹ Lam “approached his work with enthusiasm and pride,” and worked hard to tie comparisons between the Nazi death camps and the atrocities committed in S-21.¹²² For example, the mass of exposed skulls and cases piled high of victims’ clothes at both Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek were techniques adopted from the death camps of Europe.¹²³ In order to legitimize the said atrocities under the Khmer Rouge, Lam left the museum and memorial spaces largely untouched from when they were used as torture and killing centers.¹²⁴ The focus was clearly on the massive killing of the Khmer Rouge and the horrendous methods they used to accomplish it.

When Tuol Sleng was finally opened to Cambodians in July of 1980, tens of thousands of Cambodians flooded the museum hoping to find news on lost relatives, but also hoping to understand what had happened and find meaning.¹²⁵ Instead of supplying an answer to the latter, the museum only reminded them of what they had suffered on a large scale. The Khmer Rouge had left behind thousands of headshots of prisoners along

¹¹⁹ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 8.

¹²⁰ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 4, 40.

¹²¹ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 4-5.

¹²² Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 5.

¹²³ Paul Williams, “Witnessing Genocide: vigilance and remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek,” in *Holocaust and Genocide studies*, 18, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 234-235, 248.

¹²⁴ Williams, “Witnessing Genocide,” 242.

¹²⁵ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 8.

with written “confessions,” of victims that “proved” their collaboration with organizations like the CIA, KGB, and Vietnamese government.¹²⁶ These confessions were compiled in designated rooms on the upper floors of the museum for special use and not on display for visitors to examine. However, after his visit to Tuol Sleng in August of 1981, David Chandler pointed out that it was impossible to corroborate the veracity of nearly all of the confessions.¹²⁷

Instead of using the space as a way for Cambodians to remember and search for meaning, Lam and the Vietnamese continued to propagandize by establishing a national Day of Hate – officially designated for May 20th.¹²⁸ On this day, Cambodians were required to gather at places where oppression had taken place, like Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, and listen to survivors recount the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge.¹²⁹ Paul Williams explains that the day was designed to “sustain an implacable hatred of the [Khmer Rouge].”¹³⁰ The annual Hate Days officially lasted until 1991, not long after the Vietnamese fully withdrew from Cambodia.¹³¹

Paul Williams writes that 1991 marked the moment when an “official reversal occurred,” and Cambodians were asked to forgive instead of hate.¹³² This was followed by a series of shifts in the stance taken by the government between forgiving the Khmer Rouge cadres and fighting them. Other scholars such as Evan Gottesman write that from the beginning, the PRK regime promoted forgiveness to all Khmer Rouge cadres except

¹²⁶ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, ix, 37.

¹²⁷ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, vii, ix.

¹²⁸ Williams, “Witnessing Genocide,” 249.

¹²⁹ Williams, “Witnessing Genocide,” 249. And Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 10.

¹³⁰ Williams, “Witnessing Genocide,” 249.

¹³¹ Williams, “Witnessing Genocide,” 249.

¹³² Williams, “Witnessing Genocide,” 249.

for Pol Pot and his immediate circle of top collaborators.¹³³ It was unknown exactly whom would be considered so bad that they had to be brought to justice. The regime argued that it was necessary to exempt everyone except a few of the top leaders because many “former Khmer Rouge cadres and soldiers... were appointed to positions in the Party, the state apparatus, and the security forces.”¹³⁴ It is irrelevant whether Williams or Gottesman was more accurate. Cambodians were receiving mixed messages from the new regime; they were told to hate the Khmer Rouge perpetrators and fight for justice while, at the same time, being told to forgive and move forward.

Cambodians are detached from Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek because these sites were discovered, established, and propagandized by the Vietnamese, but also because they have been a source of the mixed messages between hate and forgiveness. David Chandler acknowledges that this has caused problems with the “authenticity” of the sites for many Cambodians.¹³⁵ Furthermore, this Vietnamese force-fed narrative has left an impact of disbelief in second and third generation Cambodians.¹³⁶ Part of the problem lies in the fact that Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek have seen little transformation since their establishment under Vietnamese occupation, over 3 decades ago. However, Choeung Ek has recently made some good additions that help form a more complete narrative.

David Chandler’s account of Tuol Sleng when he visited in 1981 is remarkably similar to my own experience while visiting the museum in May of 2015. Chandler recalled his guided tour:

We were first taken to small classrooms on the ground floor. We saw metal beds, fetters, and photographs of murdered prisoners... In other

¹³³ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 9.

¹³⁴ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 78.

¹³⁵ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 9.

¹³⁶ Munyas, “Genocide in the minds of Cambodian youth,” 414.

ground floor rooms instruments of torture were displayed, alongside paintings by a survivor that depicted prisoners being interrogated, tortured, and killed. Hundreds of enlarged mug shots of prisoners were also posted on the walls. On the second floor we saw tiny cells assigned to prisoners being questioned and larger rooms where groups of less important captives were held.¹³⁷

Chandler also recalled having the history of the compound explained to him – it was once a high school – and also being shown the archival stacks left behind by the fleeing Khmer Rouge.¹³⁸

When I visited with my group in the spring of 2015, I remember the eerie quietness that surrounded the area around the museum in contrast to the rest of Phnom Penh, which was loud, overcrowded, and fast-paced. One could almost walk right past the museum without knowing what it was save for the simple sign over the entrance which read in both English and Khmer: “Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.” The place still held the eerie resemblance of the high school it once was, which was one of the first topics mentioned on our tour. Once inside, my group and I were lucky enough to have a walking tour with a man named Lundi. After Lundi gave us some context and explained his own story, he took us around into rooms that matched Chandler’s account exactly. Some rooms had beds and photographs. Other rooms were lined with torture equipment, paintings, and hundreds of enlarged mug shots. Lundi showed the same contrast between the larger rooms for less important prisoners and the smaller, individual cells for those who were deemed more of a “threat.” Over the course of three and half decades, the museum still had the message left behind by Mia Lam and the Vietnamese, which

¹³⁷ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, vii.

¹³⁸ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, vii.

focused on the scale and technique of the murder. There was very little on the display to help visitors understand the genocide.

My visit to Tuol Sleng did differ from Chandler's in three important aspects. Chandler and his team were able to dig through archives left behind by the Khmer Rouge soldiers. These archives have since been safely stored and microfilmed by Cornell University in the early 90's.¹³⁹ The second noteworthy difference was a fairly dominant stone memorial that had been erected in the back of the museum in the middle of a courtyard. It resembled the shape of a stupa, and on the side there was an inscription in gold letters on black polished stone that read: "Never will we forget the crimes committed during the Democratic Kampuchea regime." This is a clear tie to Holocaust remembrance. Nevertheless, in doing so it complimented the preexisting narrative curated by Mia Lam whose agenda was to draw parallels between the two genocides in order to legitimize it to a foreign audience.



Memorial stupa for victims of S-21 (photo taken by author on May 10, 2015).

¹³⁹ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, ix.

The last difference to note was the presence of survivor Chum Mey himself. He had a table on the side of the museum with a display of various books and films on the genocide, and he was an official stop on the tour. Here Lundi translated as Chum Mey explained his horrific experience as a prisoner. He talked about having had suicidal thoughts, being crammed into a tiny brick cell for days on end, and the routine interrogations where he was often tortured. He also explained his trauma, how for years he was unable to come back to the place without breaking down in tears. Ultimately, he realized his potential to teach others his experience so it would not be forgotten. Teaching the youth, he explained, made returning to S-21 bearable – even enjoyable. He now spends his days there talking to foreigners and locals alike. Chum Mey provides a level of meaning that the rest of the museum lacks. However, the museum exhibitions have undergone little adaptation from how they were established in 1980 by the Vietnamese. It has an overwhelming focus on the scale and methods of death, but fails to interpret or form any understanding of the atrocity.

On the other hand, Choeung Ek Genocidal Center has undergone a degree of development over time, and has tried to include an element of meaning to the atrocity. Discovered by the Vietnamese around the same time as Tuol Sleng, the first step was excavating a select number of mass graves and determining the extent of the death. Out of 129 mass graves discovered, 43 were left buried; 8,985 skeletons were found.¹⁴⁰ In 1988, a huge 36-meter high memorial “elongated stupa,” designed by Lim Ourk, was erected in the middle of the field, which holds many of the bones that were excavated in

¹⁴⁰ Williams, “Witnessing Genocide,” 241.



Memorial stupa at Choeung Ek (photo taken by author on May 11, 2015).



The remains of victims inside the memorial stupa (photo taken by author on May 11, 2015).



Bones protruding from the ground at Choeung Ek (photo taken by author on May 11, 2015).

1980.¹⁴¹ Once inside the stupa, the viewer is presented a tall glass case, totaling 17 levels, which contain over 8,000 skulls and other major human bones. On each individual skull, one can easily identify the crack where the victim was fatally hit over the head. The smell of death still permeates through the glass case. Although dominating, the memorial stupa is by no means the only thing to see. Visitors were, and still are, encouraged to walk around and see the excavated graves. Perhaps most shocking was the discovery of a particular tree where executioners would kill small children and babies by swinging them against its trunk. While walking around, visitors are asked to be careful, as it is quite easy to accidentally step on protruding bones that are constantly being exposed by weather and erosion. One could only imagine the effect Choeung Ek had on participants during the national Day of Hate, which was celebrated at the time.

Since Paul Williams wrote about Choeung Ek, two significant developments have taken place. First was the installation of a self-guided audio tour, which adds personal stories to the mass killing. Offered in 15 languages, the audio tour guide, Ros Kosal, begins by introducing himself as a survivor of the genocide. Kosal explains how much of his family was lost during the Khmer Rouge years. They are presumed dead but were never discovered. Kosal and his remaining family will never know what happened to those whom they lost. The tour continues to take the visitor around the area explaining the killing processes and how many were murdered there, while also dipping into personal stories and witnessed accounts of the time. By attaching stories to the bones, the genocide center makes a good faith attempt at providing meaning to the horrors.

¹⁴¹ Williams, "Witnessing Genocide," 240. And "Memoral," *Choeung Ek Genocidal Center*, <http://www.cekillingsfield.org/index.php/en/history/memoral.html>.

A second significant development was the creation of a new museum in 2008 set off to the side of the killing fields.¹⁴² The museum gives visitors context on the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime by showcasing some items used and playing a video about the period on loop. But the most remarkable aspect of the museum, which arguably makes it a better place of memory than Tuol Sleng, is that it incorporated the Khmer Rouge tribunal into the narrative and memory of the genocide.

The PRK regime actually conducted a People's Revolutionary tribunal – with Vietnamese supervision – in 1979, shortly after its establishment. Its purpose was to “convince the world of Pol Pot's crimes and promote the legitimacy of the PRK.”¹⁴³ However, the trial, which lasted for four days, ended up just being a show that amounted to no real results; the only individuals put on trial were Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.¹⁴⁴ Since they were not in the government's custody, neither showed up to the trial and their convictions were in absentia. The government went to lengths reassuring former Khmer Rouge cadres that they were not at risk of being put on trial.¹⁴⁵ Some Khmer Rouge cadres were handed short jail sentences, which were entirely based on their “attitude toward the new regime and on their value to the ongoing military campaign.”¹⁴⁶ The whole purpose of it was to legitimize the Vietnamese invasion and prove to the world that Pol Pot attempted genocide. It goes without saying that this did not help Cambodians achieve justice. The trial had little to do with them in the first place.

¹⁴² “Development,” *Choeung Ek Genocidal Center*, <http://www.cekillingsfield.org/index.php/en/about-us/development.html>.

¹⁴³ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 60-66. And And Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 276.

¹⁴⁴ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 61.

¹⁴⁵ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 61.

When the Vietnamese left in 1989, Cambodia underwent major national changes to distinguish the government as a truly new, independent power. Buddhism was reinstated as the state religion and the name of the state was changed to the State of Cambodia (SOC); even the flag and the national anthem were replaced with new, non-ideological expressions.¹⁴⁷ The government even rejected communism and adopted democracy. However, peace still had not been achieved. The world met in Paris in 1991 to discuss how the four major Cambodian factions would come to a peaceful agreement, one being the remaining forces of the Khmer Rouge.¹⁴⁸ This was received with meager hope, at best. An article written in the Phnom Penh Post a year after the peace agreement called out the Khmer Rouge for failing to “lay down their arms and cooperate with the peace process.”¹⁴⁹ The Khmer Rouge continued to be a player in Cambodian politics until 1998 when an inner faction destroyed the group. Pol Pot was abandoned by his own people, sentenced to a lifetime house arrest in a People’s Trial, and died soon afterwards. He died “without having taken responsibility or been held accountable for the death of more than 1.6 million Cambodians.”¹⁵⁰ The fact that Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge had remained in the political and international scene for over two decades, even after their crimes against the nation were exposed to the world, explains why Cambodians have struggled to develop an appropriate way to remember the genocide.

Under the new government, Prime Minister Hun Sen, who had defected from the Khmer Rouge in the ‘70s and had been a key player in the PRK regime during the

¹⁴⁷ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 303.

¹⁴⁸ Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 344.

¹⁴⁹ Sheila McNulty, “U.N. Celebrates Anniversary of Accords It Can’t Implement,” in the *Phnom Penh Post*, November 6, 1992, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/un-celebrates-anniversary-accords-it-cant-implement>.

¹⁵⁰ Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 14-15.

Vietnamese occupation, made a political alliance with the seasoned Prince Sihanouk – appointing him as head of state. Hun Sen and Prince Sihanouk began to entertain the idea of welcoming an international tribunal, which could bring justice to Cambodians.

However, the government had to be careful not to widen the scope of convictions too much. Many government officials had previously been aligned with the Khmer Rouge. In 2006, after years of hesitancy and second-guessing, this idea became a reality.

A quarter of a century after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia entered the current phase of remembrance: seeking justice for the genocide. This took form in the establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) – a hybrid court, co-adjudicated by Cambodia and the UN.¹⁵¹ However, the formation of this unique hybrid court was not easy. There was disagreement over everything from where the trials should take place to who can be put on trial. For the Cambodian government, the tribunal has run into an ongoing national tug of war between achieving justice and peace. This has resulted in very few convictions of former Khmer Rouge leaders, let alone indictments. No one has been convicted on charges of genocide; those found guilty have been charged with crimes against humanity. However, a second element could be at play here – the hesitancy to put the fate of Cambodians under the jurisdiction of an international court.

At best, Prime Minister Hun Sen has taken a wishy-washy stance on the tribunal. On one hand, Hun Sen has shown support for trying the Khmer Rouge. In response to claims that he had repeatedly changed his mind about seeking retribution, Hun Sen

¹⁵¹ Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 783-784.

retorted that he had “insisted again and again... to bring KR leaders to justice.”¹⁵² In February of 1999, he was quoted in *The Phnom Penh Post* clearly stating that justice is needed to keep peace:

There is a risk if [KR accountability] is not addressed in Cambodia, that this will sow the seeds of unrest in the future. Therefore there is no conflict [between justice and peace] in principle... One does not secure peace by ignoring crimes of this magnitude in the long run.¹⁵³

He had even reportedly made a list of “eight to ten” former Khmer Rouge leaders that he believed should be prosecuted in a trial.¹⁵⁴

On the other hand, Hun Sen had lunch with two top leaders from the former regime, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan, only a few months before his adamant declaration for justice. Upon their arrival, he publicly declared that the two men should be greeted “with bouquets of flowers.”¹⁵⁵ He has also stated that Cambodia “should dig a hole and bury the past and look ahead to the 21st century with a clean slate.”¹⁵⁶ This is a polar opposite view from his earlier stance. This side of Hun Sen separates peace from justice, describing the tribunal as poking at an old wound.¹⁵⁷ Hun Sen’s inconsistent statements reveal his hesitancy. He clearly has been worried about justice jeopardizing peace, and therefore harming his political stability.

The Cambodian government’s resistance to an international tribunal has caused the proceedings to hit a series of bumps in the road. Progress is being achieved, but at a

¹⁵² “Hun Sen draws his line in the shifting sands,” in *The Phnom Penh Post*, January 8, 1999, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/hun-sen-draws-his-line-shifting-sands>.

¹⁵³ “UN Rights Envoy Says KR Trial on Track,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, February 5, 1999, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/un-rights-envoy-says-kr-trial-track>.

¹⁵⁴ Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 786.

¹⁵⁵ Seth Mydans, “CAMBODIAN LEADER RESISTS PUNISHING TOP KHMER ROUGE,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Dec 29, 1998.

¹⁵⁶ Mydans, “Cambodian Leader Resists Punishing Top Khmer Rouge.”

¹⁵⁷ Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 787.

creeping pace. This is so because both the international and Cambodian professionals must approve any decisions made by the court.¹⁵⁸ The UN has pushed for more indictments while the Cambodian government has supported only a few; the consensus is that only “the most senior and most responsible” Khmer Rouge leaders would be indicted.¹⁵⁹ After much deliberation, which almost ended in the court disbanding, some agreements were made on who could be indicted. However, both sides still had their own interpretation of that phrase.

To date, three ex-Khmer Rouge leaders have been convicted, the maximum sentence being life imprisonment. Kaing Guek Eav, known as Duch, was the commandant of the S-21 interrogation prison; he was given a life sentence in February of 2012.¹⁶⁰ In case 002, which tried four senior leaders: Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, and Ieng Thirith, only Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan were given lifetime sentences. They were convicted in August of 2014.¹⁶¹ Ieng Sary died in March of 2013, and Ieng Thirith was released on grounds that she was “unfit to stand trial.”¹⁶² There are currently three more indicted persons awaiting trial; in total 8 individuals have been charged to date.¹⁶³ So far none of the defendants have been charged with genocide.¹⁶⁴

It is hard to say if the tribunal has given Cambodians their badly needed justice. If it has, it could lead to a new phase of commemoration – one that is not at odds with

¹⁵⁸ Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 784.

¹⁵⁹ Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 784.

¹⁶⁰ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 17. And Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 785.

¹⁶¹ “Key Events,” *Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia*, <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/keyevents>.

¹⁶² “Key Events.”

¹⁶³ “Indicted Person,” *Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia*, <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/all-cases/en>.

¹⁶⁴ Jorg Menzel, “Justice delayed or too late for justice?: the Khmer Rouge Tribunal and the Cambodian ‘genocide’ 1975-79,” in *Journal of Genocide Research* 9, no. 2 (June 2007): 215-233, 223.

peace. When Duch was put on trial, survivor Chum Mey testified against him. Duch was originally sentenced to 35 years in jail before the higher court extended it to a life sentence in 2012.¹⁶⁵ Duch's original sentence "wouldn't have been justice," according to Chum Mey.¹⁶⁶ Three years later, Chum Mey believes that the trials have fulfilled their job at achieving justice and should end. He explained that "the past is the past; [Cambodia] must focus on the children and educating them."¹⁶⁷ If the tribunal does not stop now, where would it end?

As mentioned above, Cambodian youth have not been receiving an in-depth education on the genocide.¹⁶⁸ The opening line of an article in *The Phnom Penh Post*, written in 2000, stated, "the Khmer Rouge rule of 1975-1979 practically doesn't exist" in textbooks.¹⁶⁹ There are brief sections mentioned about the period, particularly in high schools, but this is not enough. Youth are graduating with very little knowledge about the genocide. The article explores how youth cannot recall basic facts about the Khmer Rouge period when questioned, like how many people had died. The students who did have a decent level of understanding about the genocide learned from sources outside of their classrooms.¹⁷⁰ However, education on the Killing Fields has seen some recent changes. An article in *The Phnom Penh Post*, written in April of 2015, gives some insight

¹⁶⁵ Mey, *Survivor*, 48-49.

¹⁶⁶ Mey, *Survivor*, 49.

¹⁶⁷ Chum Mey explained this to me when I met him at Tuol Sleng in the spring of 2015.

¹⁶⁸ Un, "The Khmer Rouge Tribunal," 790.

¹⁶⁹ Anette Marcher and Bou Saroeun, "Khmer Rouge kept out of the schoolroom," in *The Phnom Penh Post*, April 14, 2000, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/khmer-rouge-kept-out-schoolroom>.

¹⁷⁰ Marcher and Saroeun, "Khmer Rouge kept out of the schoolroom."

on this transformation.¹⁷¹ The article states that the Ministry of Education has addressed the topic of genocide remembrance, but the educational system still lacks “critical genocide studies.”¹⁷² In other words, the educational system lacks a deep understanding of how genocide happens and why across the globe.

Kheang Un concludes that the Khmer Rouge tribunal has served as a tool for knowledge in Cambodia.¹⁷³ The trials have resurfaced history, uncovered new information, and forced the topic of genocide into public discourse. Yet, a majority of Cambodians today were born after the fall of the Khmer Rouge and only 6% of them have reported learning about the genocide in school.¹⁷⁴ The future looks optimistic, though, with an overwhelming majority of Cambodians supporting the tribunal and wanting to learn the truth.¹⁷⁵

Although compromised to a degree, places of memory such as Tuol Sleng, Choeung Ek, and the ongoing Khmer Rouge tribunal are indeed promoting remembrance in Cambodia. This paints a positive picture for the future. In addition to these sites there have been some successful organizations in Cambodia that focus on remembering the genocide. The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) has collected and archived hundreds of thousands of documents for the Khmer Rouge period and trained thousands of teachers how to educate youth on the genocide.¹⁷⁶ The Ksaem Ksan foundation, also called the Association of Victims of Democratic Kampuchea, was founded by a group of

¹⁷¹ Kamboly Dy, “Forty years on: A need for critical genocide studies,” in *The Phnom Penh Post*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/analysis-and-op-ed/forty-years-need-critical-genocide-studies>.

¹⁷² Dy, “Forty years on.”

¹⁷³ Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 791.

¹⁷⁴ Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 790.

¹⁷⁵ Un, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” 787, 790.

¹⁷⁶ “Work to Date,” *DC-CAM*, <http://www.dccam.org/#/theorganization/worktodate>.

survivors – Chum Mey among them – to help victims in any way possible. Founded in 2010, the foundation aims to create “reconciliation between victims and perpetrators,” and support the work being done in the tribunal.¹⁷⁷ These are just two examples of significant organizations making positive strides.

However, there is still need for improvement. Genocide remembrance is largely constrained to places like Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek. The two largest national museums in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh do not even mention the Khmer Rouge period. The museum in Siem Reap concludes with the fall of the ancient and mighty Angkor Empire; the museum in Phnom Penh addresses the French colonial phase but goes no further. The Killing Fields are separated from Cambodia’s history. Additionally, more tourists go to Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek than Cambodians. Inside the center, Choeung Ek posts the number of visitors and where they are from for each month. In January of 2015, out of the 28,000 visitors less than 2,000 were Cambodians. Tuol Sleng was receiving on average 50 visitors a day in 2003.¹⁷⁸ This shows that these sites are not encouraging the nation to remember. James Young would probably find this unsurprising. Young sees monuments as a way to “relieve viewers of their memory burden.”¹⁷⁹ Once they are built, they do the job of remembering and people can move on knowing that monuments are taking care of the responsibility. Of course, these places are not easy to visit for Cambodians. The bones of their friends, family, and people are on display there. It could be that many Cambodians do visit these sites, but they do so once, twice, or very rarely while the endless stream of tourist pour in day after day. This could overshadow the degree to which locals visit. Also, until the recent indictments from the tribunal, these

¹⁷⁷ Mey, *Survivor*, 49-50.

¹⁷⁸ Williams, “Witnessing Genocide,” 238.

¹⁷⁹ Young, *Texture of Memory*, 5.

spaces were reminders that justice had not been delivered, making it more painful for Cambodians to visit. The works of organizations listed above are trying to create a more public memory of the genocide, but their impacts are limited. Public commemoration and national memorialization will remain constrained as long as the government continues to separate Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, from the national history.

This chapter has examined how the genocide has been memorialized in Cambodia over time. It has explored how Cambodians have been primed against remembrance; the Cambodian masses have been expected to act as “pawns” to the small, removed elite class since the times of the Angkor Empire, which continued through the Khmer Rouge period. Cambodians also struggle to understand and comprehend the atrocities committed under the Khmer Rouge. The result is that many Cambodians hide from their past. This has translated down to second and third generation Cambodians, which puts memory at risk of being lost. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge came another problem: the Vietnamese occupation. It was the Vietnamese, and the subsequent “puppet” PRK regime, that forced a narrative on Cambodians that justified the invasion. This created the tensions between peace and justice that continue haunting the nation to this day. Genocide remembrance in Cambodia is improving. The juxtaposition between peace and justice is diminishing. This is largely to the credit of the tribunal and the hard work of non-government organizations. However, there is still a long road until the genocide is no longer at risk of being altogether forgotten.

Striking Similarities out of Stark Differences

This thesis has conducted an in-depth analysis of the history and memorialization of each genocide. Now it will thoroughly analyze the Holocaust and killing fields by examining the respective similarities and differences between them. This is looked at through the actual genocides and how each has been memorialized. While the genocides themselves are logistically very dissimilar, it is important to analyze some major themes that emerge despite such stark differences. These themes appear by examining how victims, perpetrators, and bystanders dealt with their genocides respectively. In both cases, the world was warned of the situation, but failed to act effectively. Also in both cases, the perpetrators were able to mobilize their followers to do their bidding by harnessing and distorting the cultures of their country. This has given rise to identical struggles with early memorialization of the genocides. However, over time the victims and perpetrators of Holocaust have proved more successful at commemoration than Cambodians. Comparing and contrasting these two very different genocides show that mass murders have eerily common themes and similarities despite that fact that one is remembered much more successfully than the other.

On the outset, the actual Cambodian and Jewish genocides seem to share few similarities. They took place on different continents, in different decades, and for different reasons. The Khmer Rouge forced Cambodians to spread out across Cambodia and work the land; the Nazis rounded up Jews into confined work camps. The Nazis gassed Jews; the Khmer Rouge cracked skulls and cut throats. The Holocaust was one event within the broader context of the Second World War while the Khmer Rouge was a byproduct of the Cold War. The Cambodian genocide took place all within Cambodia;

the Holocaust engulfed Europe and spread as far as Shanghai, China.¹⁸⁰ Hitler came to power in January of 1933 and remained until 1945, while Pol Pot's men took power in 1975 and only remained so until 1979. The differences between the two genocides are so stark that an argument could be made against comparing them in the first place.

Yet, while the two genocides were totally different in detail, they share two major themes that make comparison a productive exercise. The first common theme is the tactics used by the main leadership of the perpetrators. Both the Nazi and Khmer Rouge leadership used rhetoric and secrecy to promulgate hatred that led to murder. The second theme is how the rest of the world received and responded to the pleas for help. During both the Holocaust and the Killing Fields the world was at best ignorant of, and at worst ignored, the horrendous crimes against humanity. These themes must be analyzed to better understand how the genocides continue to be remembered, commemorated, and dealt with today. Understanding these repetitions also helps answer the question: how could this happen?

There is a stark difference in the relationship between the Nazis and Jews, and the Khmer Rouge and the Cambodian masses. In Cambodia, the killing was concentrated in Khmer murdering Khmer, whereas during the Holocaust Germans were focused mostly on targeting Jews. This comes down to the Killing Fields being class-based and the Holocaust race-based. However, analyzing the tactics and rhetoric that the Nazi and Khmer Rouge used to promote mass killing reveals a striking similarity between the two. This is important to analyze because it has heavily influenced how both genocides are understood – or not understood.

¹⁸⁰ David Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews: the Jewish refugee community of Shanghai, 1938-1945* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1978).

The rhetoric that the Nazi leadership used against the Jews can be found easily in the enormous amount of documentation that the Third Reich so meticulously kept. On the other hand, the rhetoric of the Khmer Rouge leadership is scarce in comparison. Yet, it is apparent that both Hitler and Pol Pot used anger and secrecy to promote their agendas to their followers. However, Hitler went much further with rhetoric than Pol Pot, who put a stronger emphasis on secrecy and discipline. A people are effectively dehumanized when it becomes okay for them to be killed for no reason other than that the opportunity presented itself – similar to squashing a bug on the sidewalk. When this happens they cease being “people” in the eyes of the perpetrators. Whether a stronger emphasis was put on rhetoric or blind obedience, both were used to foster genocide.

Hitler’s rhetoric was so successful because anti-Semitism was already prevalent within Germany long before he came to power. Anti-Semitism in Germany really dates back to the 14th century when Jews were blamed for spreading the Bubonic plague.¹⁸¹ They were consistently discriminated against and treated with suspicion for centuries – sometimes expelled from their homes, barred from public life, or heavily taxed. Even when a disproportionate number of Jews served in the German army during World War I, many Germans blamed them for sitting on the sidelines and avoiding active duty.¹⁸² This sort of racism was absent amongst the Khmer who were all the same ethnicity. Instead, Pol Pot harnessed Cambodia’s strict hierarchal culture of obedience to control his followers.¹⁸³ This culture was deeply rooted in Cambodian society well before Pol Pot. In

¹⁸¹ Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 4.

¹⁸² Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: volume 1: the years of persecution, 1933-1939* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 73-77.

¹⁸³ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: terror and history in Pol Pot’s secret prison*, (Berkeley: University California Press, 1999), 148-149.

fact, when Cambodia first fell to the Khmer Rouge 81 Lon Nol soldiers were studying in the United States. Cindy Coleman, who was in charge of these new refugees, recalled how the soldiers would not even decide on their lunch “without [first] asking their supervisors.”¹⁸⁴ Pol Pot exploited this submission, spreading maxims like: “When Angkar gives orders, carry them out to the letter.”¹⁸⁵ The Khmer Rouge event twisted traditional phrases like “know how to plant a Kapok tree,” which implied that one should know when to keep quiet.¹⁸⁶ While Germans were first and foremost primed to hate Jews, Cambodians were similarly primed to blindly follow orders and obey superiors.¹⁸⁷

Hitler’s rhetoric can be broken down into two aspects: one blaming the Jews for German problems, which casted them as outsiders, and the other portraying them as less than human and worthless. It was the former tactic that led to the latter, which justified the slaughter of millions of Jews in many German eyes. One of Hitler’s most remembered quotes, which he repeated in numerous speeches, blamed the Jews for bringing war to Europe and threatened “the annihilation of the Jewish race” if another war broke out.¹⁸⁸ This quote even made it into the anti-Semitic propaganda film, *The Eternal Jew*.¹⁸⁹ Hans Mommsen argues that when Hitler originally made this statement, it

¹⁸⁴ Joel Brinkley, *Cambodia’s Curse: the modern history of a troubled land* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 45.

¹⁸⁵ Henri Locard, *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book: the saying of Angkar* (Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004), 118.

¹⁸⁶ Locard, *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book*, 115.

¹⁸⁷ Holocaust Scholar, Christopher Browning, actually argues that the German Order Police followed orders first and foremost because of blind obedience and not because they were anti-Semitic or engrossed by the rhetoric. Either way, both rhetoric and obedience tactics were used by both the Nazi and Khmer Rouge leaderships. See Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Polica Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

¹⁸⁸ Hans Mommsen, “Hitler’s Reichstag Speech of 30 January 1939,” in *History and Memory* 9 (1/2), 147-161 (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997), 147. When Hitler first spoke these words in 1939, the Final Solution was still yet to be conceived and Jews were just beginning to experience German anti-Semitism at the level that the Holocaust is remembered by.

¹⁸⁹ Mommsen, “Hitler’s Reichstag Speech of 30 January 1939,” 157.

was more to pressure the rest of Europe and America to take in more Jews than it was a serious threat to their lives.¹⁹⁰ Even if Mommsen is correct in applying the political context of the time to understand Hitler's intentions, the fact that the majority of Germans received his words as no big deal reveals the anti-Semitic cultural normalization by 1939.

Blaming Jews enabled Germans to hate them as outsiders, but it was really the rhetoric that portrayed Jews as sub-human that enabled killing to take place on such a massive scale with such disregard. Art Spiegelman portrays this element best in his acclaimed Holocaust graphic novel, *Maus*, by depicting Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as Pigs, and so on. When characters hide their identities they wear masks, but they never actually transform into the species they are pretending to be – they are inherently different. The underlying message that the Nazi leadership gave to SS soldiers was that Jews should be persecuted for having Jewish blood. A striking example of this can be found in a report of a cycle battalion: “282 Jews were shot. During the action one Pole was shot for looting.”¹⁹¹ No reason was necessary for the death of hundreds of Jews, but one Polish death required explanation. However, what does demand explanation is when Jews are not killed, usually because their skills or labor were of immediate service.¹⁹² This report was of course classified, as were most reports that involved killing; it reveals that within the Nazi ranks, killing Jews was treated as routine. The Nazi leadership often masked murder in secrecy, but not always. While the German public was often kept in the dark, the indigenous people who were living abroad, where most of the killings took place, would occasionally be privy to executions. In countries like Ukraine and Poland

¹⁹⁰ Mommsen, “Hitler's Reichstag Speech of 30 January 1939.”

¹⁹¹ Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, editors of “*The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders*,” translated by Deborah Burnstone (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 11.

¹⁹² Klee, Dressen, and Riess “*The Good Old Days*,” 11.

public hangings and shootings did take place. One example of this was in Zhitomir, Ukraine, in the summer of 1941. A technical battalion truck driver recalled how the murder of about 50 Jews was broadcasted and turned into a spectacle. Soldiers sat on rooftops to get a good view because roughly 150 civilians had gathered around to watch.¹⁹³

Of course, not every soldier enjoyed killing Jews, and often these killings took place in secluded areas. The murders put an immense strain on many, which made secrecy and obedience necessary for the Nazi leadership to achieve killing on such a massive scale. The Milgram experiment in 1961 showed how prone many people are to following commanding orders without resisting much, even when they were morally against hurting another human. A war correspondent that witnessed shootings in Latvia noticed how some soldiers cried while others “kept a score-sheet” of their hits when ordered to kill Jews.¹⁹⁴ Often times soldiers who were sent to killing squads did not have a real choice; it was either shoot, be shot, or commit suicide.¹⁹⁵ These death pits were not easily accessible; special permits were required to enter these areas.¹⁹⁶ It is interesting to note that this polarization amongst soldiers is not an anomaly – similar reports were made in the American army during the Vietnamese War, most notably with the My Lai massacre.¹⁹⁷

The separation between victims and perpetrators becomes blurred in the context of the Cambodian genocide. Here, both the perpetrators and the overwhelming majority of victims were Khmer. Pol Pot and his top commanders did foster hatred against the

¹⁹³ Klee, Dressen, and Riess “*The Good Old Days*,” 108-111.

¹⁹⁴ Klee, Dressen, and Riess “*The Good Old Days*,” 129.

¹⁹⁵ Klee, Dressen, and Riess “*The Good Old Days*,” 129.

¹⁹⁶ Klee, Dressen, and Riess “*The Good Old Days*,” 129.

¹⁹⁷ *Return to My Lai* (Toronto: Southam Inc., 1998).

urban, wealthy, and educated class, but these victims were still perceived as Cambodians. Dehumanization was used to a much lesser degree than the Nazis, and it was concentrated in the prisons, which shrouded it in secrecy. A commonly used tactic was to speak towards the victims using pronouns that one would use for slaves, animals, and objects.¹⁹⁸ A more severe dehumanizing method, which was actually considered to be a type of interrogation act, would be to force victims to pay homage to pictures of dogs and inanimate objects.¹⁹⁹

There were also hundreds of common sayings that the Khmer Rouge cadre repeated to enforce their dominance and eagerness to kill. For example, one widespread quote equated the importance to farm with the importance to kill: “One hand grasps a hoe, the other, a rifle.”²⁰⁰ Perhaps the most repeated phrase that Cambodian victims heard was: “No gain in keeping, no loss in weeding out.”²⁰¹ This reinforced their worthlessness to the new order of society. Even the sick were looked upon with contempt and suspicion as “victims of their own imagination.”²⁰² While this rhetoric certainly widened the hierarchal gap between the Khmer Rouge and their victims they did not go as far as the Nazis had with their dehumanization of Jews.

The leadership recruited Cambodians who were angry for reasons like their economic status, but they also targeted those who were angry for a multitude of reasons: mainly the ongoing civil war, American B-52 bombings, and foreign invasion.²⁰³ It is important to consider how uneducated the Khmer Rouge soldiers were to understand how

¹⁹⁸ Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?: Cambodia in the shadow of genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 183.

¹⁹⁹ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 130, 133-134.

²⁰⁰ Locard, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book*, 163.

²⁰¹ Locard, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book*, 210.

²⁰² Locard, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book*, 188.

²⁰³ Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, 58-59.

Pol Pot was able to mobilize them against city dwellers. Reports from April 17, when the soldiers marched into Phnom Penh, described how the soldiers were perplexed by the items they encountered in Phnom Penh:

The young peasant soldiers appeared puzzled and surprised by what they found in the city. One could not find a way to open a can of beer; another inspected an aerosol deodorant spray can a long time before giving it a wallop and throwing it aside. Some made fires on the hoods of automobiles to cook their rice.²⁰⁴

These soldiers saw “good” Cambodians as people who could work and live off of the land, not those who emulated a western lifestyle of luxury.

The most important tactic that Pol Pot used to promote genocide was secrecy, more so than fostering anger or dehumanizing his victims. Secrecy was always the priority.²⁰⁵ Places like Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek were so secret that they were not even referred to by name in documentation.²⁰⁶ The Khmer Rouge had their own secret police called the *Santebal*, who spared no one who was suspect of anti-revolutionary activity.²⁰⁷

Pol Pot created this intense level of secrecy by using Cambodia’s cultural social hierarchy and taking advantage of his uneducated soldiers. His cadre had to follow orders blindly – they were not allowed to participate in the politics of the regime. One Frenchman who remained in Phnom Penh as it was being evacuated in 1975 observed: “I felt their fighting spirit and ability came more from the rough discipline... they seemed

²⁰⁴ Jean Jacques Cazaux and Claude Juvenal, "Khmer Rouge Acts to 'Purify' Nation," in *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, May 09, 1975.

²⁰⁵ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 16.

²⁰⁶ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 3, 17.

²⁰⁷ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 3.

like animals being led into the field by the master.”²⁰⁸ There were no questioning or understanding orders, only obedience.

At a general level the Holocaust can be understood as one nation killing a people out of racial hatred. While it is hard for the typical reader to understand why race could justify persecution and extermination, the concept is far from foreign. On the other hand, the Cambodian genocide is much harder to understand within Khmer culture because it was a single ethnicity systematically killing their brethren. A civil war is a delicate subject for a nation, which requires a lot of effort to recover from. Imagine how much more sensitive and difficult it becomes when one group commits a civil genocide. For the same reasons, German Jews who had fully assimilated into German society and had fought in the Great War took longest to understand what was happening to them. Analyzing the tactics that Hitler and Pol Pot used to convince one group to systematically slaughter the other reveals how banal genocide really is. It forces the reader to not see these atrocities as anomalies or special circumstances, but instead exposes genocide as an act attainable by merely exploiting a culture in the right way.

The second major theme that the Holocaust and the Killing Fields shared was the ignorance that foreign powers displayed while the situation began to escalate into genocide. This topic is important to analyze because of the larger implications that this repeated failure to act adds to genocide studies. The world’s failure to act, not once but twice, can be seen through the present lens as abominable. It is important not to make the mistake of holding people responsible for having the historian’s knowledge. However, the Allies’ sheer unwillingness to act, matched with their alarming knowledge about the

²⁰⁸ Denis Gray, "Red Khmer: Farm Boys Who are Confused by Modernity," in *The Jerusalem Post (1950-1988)*, May 12, 1975.

magnitude of the problem before it was too late, diminishes the aforementioned precaution. It is important to analyze such apathy because it shows just how difficult it is for a nation to set aside its own interests for the interests of another. Two clear examples of this failure to help can be seen in the ineffectiveness of the Evian Conference in July of 1938 and the prolonged support that the Khmer Rouge received in the UN. In both cases, America actually enabled more killings to take place because of the government's failure to act.

The Evian Conference was an international initiative by President Roosevelt to solve the growing refugee problem of Jews trying to leave Germany with nowhere to go. Despite the goodwill effort put forth by the representation of 32 nations, nothing concrete materialized beyond the formation of an intergovernmental committee that continued dialogue with few results. Representatives expressed sorrow and alarm, but were unwilling to take on large numbers of Jewish refugees.²⁰⁹ Around the same time that the committee was failing to pass any soluble legislation, Germany was still willing to release Jews from concentration camps permitted that they had a visa to enter another country.²¹⁰ This policy was no secret – the *New York Times* reported on the subject.²¹¹ Furthermore, the potential impact of the conference and subsequent committee were compromised before either ever took place. The American and British governments made

²⁰⁹ Clarence K. Streit, "HUGE REFUGEE PROBLEM IS REVEALED AT EVIAN," in the *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jul 10, 1938.

²¹⁰ Otto D. Tolischus, "Reich Orders Out Jews it Released: they must emigrate within next two months of race return to the camps," in the *New York Times*, April 26, 1939.

²¹¹ Tolischus, "Reich Orders Out Jews it Released."

an agreement prior to the Evian gathering that neither party would pressure the other to revise existing policies in order to accept more refugees.²¹²

In America this was enforced by upholding the Johnson-Reed immigration act of 1924-1929. This law not only privileged people emigrating from certain areas more than others, but also required these people to be financially stable and in good standing with their respective governments.²¹³ For Britain, the Palestine Mandate was politically sensitive. The adoption of the White Papers a year later imposed even more stringent emigration laws for Jews trying to enter.²¹⁴ Thus, the British representative at the Evian Conference and for the subsequent committee, Lord Winterton, made no mention of Palestine as a part of the solution when he remarked that Britain would “with utmost sympathy and desire to collaborate, examine any suggestions... promoting a lasting settlement” for the Jewish refugees.²¹⁵ In these respects, the conference was already severely limited in what it could accomplish before it even began.

Unlike the Nazis, who tried to push Jews out before resorting to killing them, the Khmer Rouge closed the doors to Cambodia shortly after taking power in April of 1975 leaving the world uninformed about what was happening.²¹⁶ There was essentially a communications “blackout,” as a front page *New York Times* article put it.²¹⁷ However, at the same time the world was not left totally in the dark as to what the situation was like

²¹² Naomi S. Stern, “Evian's Legacy: The holocaust, the United Nations refugee convention, and post-war refugee legislation in the United States,” in *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal* 19: 313-585 (2004).

²¹³ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews*, 30-31.

²¹⁴ “The Evian Conference,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, <http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007698>.

²¹⁵ “Texts of Talks by President Roosevelt, Hull and Lord Winterton,” in the *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 18, 1939.

²¹⁶ Brinkley, “Cambodia’s Curse,” 40-41.

²¹⁷ “Communications Blackout Limits News of Cambodia,” in the *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Apr 20, 1975.

under the new communist regime. Both the US government and the public were receiving grave reports from escaped refugees, which only grew worse as time passed.

Perhaps most important were the reports that the US government was receiving from Charles Twining – the political officer deployed to Cambodia, but stuck in Thailand since the Khmer Rouge was not letting in any foreigners.²¹⁸ Twining gathered his information from the few refugees who managed to escape over the border, and his reports became grimmer as time went on. After learning about rampant disease, frequent public executions, exceptionally high death rates amongst children, and the dead being thrown into mass graves, Twining wrote back to Washington in dismay: “This can’t be possible in this day and age. This is not 1942. This is 1975.”²¹⁹ He was not the only one to be reminded of the Nazis’ treatment of Jews. A first-term New York congressman named Stephen Solarz visited Twining on an official trip in the fall of 1976. He was also struck by what seemed like “another Holocaust.”²²⁰ Solarz was able to initiate a congressional hearing in 1977 where Twining amongst others gave horrific testimonies on the situation in Cambodia, but the topic died on the House floor – no resolutions were passed to address these human rights violations.²²¹

While the press had little access to what was happening in Cambodia while the Khmer Rouge were in power, the public was not totally ignorant of the killings and political turmoil. There was significantly less reporting between the spring of 1975 and the end of 1978, but there were reports. For example, when around 300 Cambodians were shot down for trying to escape into Thailand in July of 1975 the story was reported in 5

²¹⁸ Brinkley, “Cambodia’s Curse,” 41.

²¹⁹ Brinkley, “Cambodia’s Curse,” 44.

²²⁰ Brinkley, “Cambodia’s Curse,” 46-47.

²²¹ Brinkley, “Cambodia’s Curse,” 47, 50.

major newspapers.²²² Even more striking was the decision of the United Nations, heavily influenced by America, to continue to allow the Khmer Rouge to represent Cambodia for 15 years after the Vietnamese threw them from power.²²³ It was a gigantic slap in the face to Holocaust memory and Cambodia when United States President, Jimmy Carter, famously said in September of 1979, “out of our memory... of the Holocaust we must forge an unshakable oath... that never again will the world stand silent, never again will the world... fail to act in time to prevent this terrible crime of genocide.”²²⁴ By this time, the world knew the full extent of what the Khmer Rouge had done; yet the perpetrators were allowed to represent their victims on the world stage for a decade and a half after the Vietnamese pushed them out of power. Furthermore, hundreds of millions of American dollars was secretly financing the Khmer Rouge.²²⁵ This happened after the mass killings were confirmed; there was no more guessing or mystery as to what happened in Cambodia while they had been in power. America was too worried about the Vietnamese invasion to care about dying refugees. The Vietnamese War was still a fresh scar in American memory, and the invasion was also viewed as an aggressive move in the context of the Cold War.

While the differences in detail vastly outnumber the similarities between the two genocides, the Holocaust and the Killing Fields share many more glaring similarities than

²²² Lay Chhay, "Fleeing Cambodians Tell of Khmer Rouge Killings," in *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, Jul 21, 1975; and, "Reds Kill Hundreds Fleeing Cambodia," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File)*, Jul 21, 1975; and, "Cambodian Escapees Tell of 300 Massacred by Reds," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jul 21, 1975; and, Lay Chhay, "Fleeing Refugees Attacked," *Boston Globe (1960-1984)*, Jul 21, 1975; and, "300 Cambodians Slain in Khmer Rouge Ambush," *The Jerusalem Post (1950-1988)*, Jul 21, 1975.

²²³ Brinkley, "Cambodia's Curse," 56.

²²⁴ "Frequently Asked Questions," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, <http://www.ushmm.org/research/ask-a-research-question/frequently-asked-questions#1>.

²²⁵ Brinkley, "Cambodia's Curse," 59.

differences in how they are remembered and commemorated. Remarkably, they both follow a very similar historiographical timeline in how they are memorialized immediately after the war. However, as time progressed, the world began to confront the Holocaust better than it has done with the killing fields. For both genocides, immediately after liberation third party occupiers began to develop a narrative that victims and perpetrators were expected to adopt. In both cases those involved struggled to publicly remember and commemorate. The past was too painful and too recent for the victims and perpetrators to simply start commemorating. This was not so for the rest of the world, which was shocked by the death and destruction that had taken place.

The German and Cambodian people were force-fed a narrative by their occupiers immediately after the war. For Germany this was accomplished through the transformation of concentration camps like Dachau and Buchenwald, and for Cambodia the Vietnamese used S-21 and Choeung Ek. Concentration camps like Dachau and Buchenwald were inside Germany, and places where tens of thousands of Jews were forced to as the losing Germans retreated from Poland.²²⁶ The fact that so much persecution and death had taken place at these sites makes them extremely sensitive and traumatic to both the perpetrators and victims respectively. The major difference between them is that while S-21 and Choeung Ek are in the heart of Cambodia – in the capital itself, most of the extermination committed by the Nazis was done abroad in Poland. This makes the mass killings more foreign to Germans, especially as the Nazi generation dies out, whereas in Cambodia the sunken earth of mass graves and physical protrusion of bones stand out like a hideous garden in the heart of the nation. While these people were

²²⁶ James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 60-61, 74.

struggling to confront these sensitive sites, those who were neither the perpetrators nor victims seized these places for their own narrative and forced it upon them.

When the Americans liberated concentration camps like Dachau and Buchenwald they set up makeshift memorials and actually marched Germans through to witness them.²²⁷ Buchenwald was then handed over to Soviet control a few years later as part of the division between East and West Germany and the two camps developed different narratives. In Dachau, the American troops set up memorials, fenced off the crematoria, and displayed pictures of German aggression and dying victims.²²⁸ This narrative – that American troops put a stop to German evil crimes – led to local German protests that claimed the exhibits were insensitive and detrimental to developing future relations with the world.²²⁹ In Buchenwald, the Soviets presented a narrative of self-liberation by German communists.²³⁰ By turning the camp into a type of German victimization rather than German perpetration, the Soviets encouraged camps to be left as they had looked at liberation. It symbolized a new German birth out from the ashes of the old. While both Dachau and Buchenwald were under American and Soviet occupation, the American narrative focused on German defeat by U.S. troops whereas the Soviet narrative fostered German self-liberation.

When the Vietnamese discovered S-21 and, subsequently, Choeung Ek they immediately saw potential to justify their invasion. Mia Lam, the Vietnamese colonel designated to oversee the museum's development, had the example of the Holocaust at his disposal when he set out to memorialize the prison and killing fields. He modeled his

²²⁷ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 75.

²²⁸ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 62-63.

²²⁹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 62-64.

²³⁰ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 75.

exhibits of death off of those that commemorated the Holocaust. Like the Americans, Lam projected his nation as the liberators of Cambodian oppression, but like the Soviets, he and the rest of the Vietnamese command encouraged Cambodians to take control – or at least make it appear that way. This can be seen by Lam’s decision to appoint a Cambodian survivor, Ung Pech, as the Museum’s curator, and the Vietnamese installment of the PRK regime that was comprised of Cambodians that they trusted.²³¹ However, this created a conflicting narrative in Cambodia when the puppet PRK regime, supported by the Vietnamese, encouraged Cambodian victims to forgive the ex-Khmer Rouge so that the nation could move on.²³²

Regardless of their roles as perpetrators or victims, Germans, Jews, and Cambodians all struggled to confront their pasts for an extended period after liberation. For the Holocaust this initial silence lasted for around 16 years in both Israel and in Germany. It is more difficult to pinpoint the exact moment in Cambodia, but it took the nation 27 years from the time that the Vietnamese overthrew the Khmer Rouge, 17 years from when the Vietnamese withdrew their troops, and only 8 years after the death of Pol Pot and the final collapse of the Khmer Rouge for the government to initiate the international tribunals. The Americans, Soviets, and Vietnamese certainly did not help victims and perpetrators deal with their past when they created their own narratives, which focused more on themselves as liberators than on anything else. However, while one could argue that this alone, inhibited commemoration, there were other reasons for these silences.

²³¹ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 5-6.

²³² Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge: inside the politics of nation building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 9.

The causes of silence after the Holocaust in Israel, Germany, and amongst Jewish victims were already analyzed above. Israelis initially struggled with the Holocaust because it went against the narrative of the newborn state. Germans struggled with how to remember their past while moving forward as a new nation. For the Jewish victims, I argued that silence should not be mistaken for neglect – for them, this was actually a period of digestion. Most Cambodians did not have the luxury to record what they had suffered through. The Khmer Rouge left them with nothing, and very few were given international help. Not to mention many were illiterate. There is no equivalent to the *Yizkor Bikor* books that survivors wrote – many stories were lost to the recess of memory. Holocaust silence was broken by the Eichmann trial, initiated by Israel, which opened up Holocaust commemoration to the public, even reaching Germany. Without Israel, Holocaust remembrance could still be stuck in the shadows as it was before the Eichmann trial. Cambodians do not have an equivalent to the Jewish homeland, nor do they have the same type of community in America.

Today, Israelis fully identify with the Holocaust, but this was not always the case. Saul Friedlander describes how Israel initially confronted the subject in his book, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*. He explains that Israel promoted a “catastrophe and redemption” narrative – the Holocaust was destructive and awful, but in the end the Jewish people persevered and from Europe’s ashes emerged a Jewish homeland.²³³ Friedlander argues that the Eichmann trial changed this perception, opening eyes up to the terrible, vile, and horrendous truth that so many Jews were murdered under the auspices of a nation. He asserts that the Holocaust “has not been incorporated into any compelling framework of meaning in public consciousness”

²³³ Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 43.

since.²³⁴ While Friedlander's depressing picture of Holocaust remembrance is persuasive, he does not specifically address the role Israel itself played in promoting remembrance and commemoration. Israel's very existence has affected the ability for Jews to confront the Holocaust. After the 1948 war for Independence, Israel's existence was no longer being threatened so imminently, which allowed the state over time to "no longer [need] heroes larger than life."²³⁵ In this way, Israel became a symbol of strength and continued life to world Jewry. As discussed in Chapter 1, Israelis originally saw themselves as a new breed of Jew, distinguished from the wretched survivors and their state as the antithesis of the Holocaust. Eichmann's capture and trial in 1961 completely changed this perception causing Israel to take ownership and authority over Holocaust remembrance and commemoration and incorporating the catastrophe into its narrative. Israelis no longer disassociated from the Holocaust – they owned it.

This Holocaust paradigm shift reached American Jews as well, although it did not culminate until sometime later. By 1993, the Holocaust dominated American Jewry by taking over America itself. The United States Holocaust Museum was opened in the nation's capital, with 2 million visitors in its first year, while at the same time the new Simon Wiesenthal Centre's Museum of Tolerance was being visited by hundreds of thousands of people as well.²³⁶ The Holocaust dominated Hollywood as well: "65 million Americans [watched Schindler's List] when it was first shown on TV."²³⁷ The Holocaust even infiltrated American literature. Elie Wiesel's book, *Night*, Primo Levi's book,

²³⁴ Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 43.

²³⁵ Vera Schwarz, "The 'Black Milk' of Historical Consciousness: Thinking About the Nanking Massacre in Light of Jewish Memory," in *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*, ed. by Fei Fei Li, Robert Sabella, and David Liu (M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 187.

²³⁶ Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: from Auschwitz to Schindler how history is bought packaged, and sold* (New York: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1999), 147.

²³⁷ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 74.

Survival in Auschwitz, and Art Spiegelman's iconic comic, *Maus*, were being consumed on a massive scale by the American public by this time. Just as Israelis had, American Jewry became strongly associated with the Holocaust.

Cambodians lived in Cambodia. There were no large, well-established populations of Khmer living abroad before the genocide. Yes, many educated Cambodians fled to France before the Khmer Rouge closed Cambodia's doors, and 6,000 Cambodians resettled in the United States, but this paled in comparison to the deeply rooted Jewish community in America.²³⁸ Furthermore, Cambodians had no state – like Israel was to the Jews, which was separated from the catastrophe enough to launch a memorialization on behalf of its survivors. Fleeing Cambodians ended up in refugee camps on the Thai border where most were either shipped back into Cambodia, given a visa for France, or somehow made it past America's strict immigration laws.²³⁹ While European Jews had other Jews who eventually adopted their victimization and promoted memorialization, Cambodians were on their own. All they had were the hated Vietnamese that promoted their own narrative for the first 10 years of memorialization.

Furthermore, Cambodians had to spend the first 19 years remembering the Khmer Rouge while they were still around and a perceived threat. How could Cambodians commemorate their losses when fighting was still taking place within their nation? The drawn out fighting and slow defeat of the Khmer Rouge left Cambodians in a state of perpetual warfare that stretched back from before the Khmer Rouge took power, not to mention that those doing the fighting against the Khmer Rouge were the Vietnamese.

²³⁸ Usha Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields: voices of nine Cambodian survivors in America* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993), 166.

²³⁹ Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields*, 166-167.

Two enemies were fighting over who would control the country. It was not until 1998 that Cambodians could breathe a sigh of relief.

The allure of dark tourism is a perplexing phenomenon of human nature. Sites of the Holocaust and Cambodian genocides have attracted millions of tourists who visit to witness firsthand these places of mass murder. Tim Cole estimates that approximately six million tourists visit the six major Holocaust museums in the world every year; 700,000 of these sightseers are going to Auschwitz.²⁴⁰ Since 1999, when Cole published his book *Selling the Holocaust*, visiting numbers have only increased. The *Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum* reports that since 2007, over a million people began to visit annually; in 2015 there was a record breaking 1.7 million visitors.²⁴¹ Cole recalls visiting Amsterdam where he waited in line at the Anne Frank house for hours as thousands of tourists waited patiently to climb the secret staircase into a largely empty room with no original décor.²⁴² The museum's website boasts that the house is visited by around 1,000,000 people annually.²⁴³ The Cambodian sites are much less visited than those of the Holocaust, but those who visit perceive them as no less of a tourist destination.

There are two main types of visitors: the tourist and the pilgrim. The tourist visits as an outsider whereas the pilgrim has some sort of emotional attachment to the place; the pilgrim is an insider. The overwhelming majority of visitors to the Cambodian sites are foreigners seeking to learn more about the genocide. As mentioned above, less than 10%

²⁴⁰ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 113.

²⁴¹ "Basic Information on Auschwitz," *Auschwitz-birkenau Memorial and Museum*, <http://auschwitz.org/en/press/basic-information-on-auschwitz/#Visitors> to the Auschwitz Site.

²⁴² Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 17. All the original furniture was confiscated by the police that discovered the hidden complex.

²⁴³ "Frequently Asked Questions," *Anne Frank House*, <http://www.annefrank.org/en/Museum/Practical-information/Frequently-asked-questions/Museum/#16>.

of the visits to the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center were by Cambodians in January of 2015. When the Vietnamese first opened S-21 as a museum, only foreigners were allowed for the first 16 months.²⁴⁴ These figures contrast with the ratio in Auschwitz of foreigners to nationals. In 2015, Poles were the highest represented nationality at 425,000. Germans ranked fourth at 93,000 and Israel came in seventh with 61,000.²⁴⁵ This contrast speaks to how important it is to visit for the nations who were directly victimized or who perpetrated at Auschwitz compared to the lack of importance for Cambodians. It also speaks to the interest of those who are not predominantly Poles, Germans, or Jews. The second and third most represented nationalities were the British and Americans respectively.

Why are people so obsessed with death, mass destruction, and genocide? This question is perhaps larger than the scope of this thesis, but it is still worth some reflection. There is something about mass death that fascinates society. The sheer incompressibility of the atrocity captivates people. As one gets closer to the heart of the event – the killing – it becomes increasingly dark, distorted, and harder to understand. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi draws a compelling metaphor to understanding the Holocaust, comparing it to a black hole that “consists of concentric circles, of which the gas chamber was the center.” No person can truly know what it was like to die in the gas chambers because everyone who was subjected to it was killed. The same metaphor can be drawn for the Cambodian genocide. It is much easier to discuss themes like how the second and third generations are affected – their proximity to the black hole is much further in time and space, whereas topics like Dr. Mengele’s experimentation on victims and prisoners’

²⁴⁴ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 8.

²⁴⁵ “Basic Information on Auschwitz.”

arrivals to Choeung Ek in the middle of the night are much closer to the center, and therefore more incomprehensible and fascinating to the outsider.

Another reason for the popularity of dark tourism is the irresistible desire to witness it – to be able to say, “I Was Here.”²⁴⁶ When one is able to claim personal testimony to an event they also claim a degree of ownership and authority over it. This has given rise to the truly dark side of dark tourism – what Cole refers to as “selling” the genocide. For example, many of these sites have gift shops where visitors can take part of their experience home with them. For example, you can purchase a set of 10 color postcards that feature different parts of Auschwitz for a bargain 10 PLN, or \$2.52.²⁴⁷ At Choeung Ek, visitors can choose from a variety of “small souvenir[s]” to purchase or buy a can of pop, ice cream, or a coconut to take with you as you weave between the excavated mass graves and step over bones.²⁴⁸ Outside of these spaces, and in the markets, it is impossible to not encounter merchandise like t-shirts joking about landmines while also running into several landmine victims in the same vicinity. When I was at the edge of the Choeung Ek Center, beggars would try to get pity money from myself and other visitors. Tourists flock to these places, and they become tourist spots in the eyes of the locals as well.

Perhaps most shocking is the impact that social media has had on these sacred sites. The rise of the smartphone has prompted some to ask, “Should Auschwitz be a Site

²⁴⁶ “I Was Here” is a series put together by French photographer, Ambroise Tézenas, who traveled to places of death and destruction between 2008 and 2014 to document how tourists view these places. He has compiled these photographs into two books. Ambroise Tézenas, “I Was Here,” <http://www.ambroisetezenas.com/serie/i-was-here>.

²⁴⁷ “Bookstore,” *Auschwitz-birkenau Memorial and Museum*, <http://auschwitz.org/en/bookstoreproducts/product/postcards-auschwitz-ii-birkenau,177.html#2>.

²⁴⁸ “Shopping,” *Choeung Ek Genocidal Center*, <http://www.cekillingsfield.org/index.php/en/about-us/shopping.html>.

for Selfies?”²⁴⁹ The same can be asked for other places of mass murder like Tuol Sleng or Choeung Ek. These selfies are posted to social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more where they are taken out of the sacred context and consumed by the internet-realm of praising beauty and cracking jokes.²⁵⁰ The Hashtag is another perfect example of this. “#Auschwitz” gets over 126,000 posts where one can find the iconic picture pose on the train tracks leading into Birkenau, or on occasion the classic “kissy face.” “#tuolsleng” brings up smiling tourists standing next to survivors inside the museum and locals using their fingers to make the peace sign. Gift shops make money off of the tragedy and hashtags desensitize the sacredness of these places, but both of these aspects are created out of the demand from tourists to be able to take ownership and lay claim to their personal witness.

Many aspects have been outlined to show how these genocides have impacted the world, which was done by examining the similarities and differences of the actual events and how they have been memorialized. Logistically speaking, the Holocaust and Killing Fields are starkly different. Yet, examining them together revealed major themes connecting them despite the disparity. In both cases leadership took advantage of culture in order to promulgate the killings, and the world failed to intervene until it was too late. These themes gave rise to identical struggles with early commemoration and confronting the genocide. However, a major difference in remembrance lies in the advantage that Jews have as being a global people. Once Israeli and American Jewry was able to adopt the Holocaust, after a period of struggle and digestion, it became much easier for the genocide to be commemorated. Israel’s Eichmann trial sparked this reversal. Cambodians

²⁴⁹ Ruth Margalit, “Should Auschwitz be a Site for Selfies?” in *The New Yorker*, June 26, 2014.

²⁵⁰ Margalit, “Should Auschwitz be a Site for Selfies?”

do not have the same type of strong identities outside of Cambodia. Furthermore, it took nearly two decades after the genocide before the perpetrators were decisively defeated. Comparing and contrasting these two genocides have shown why the Holocaust has been remembered so much more globally than the killing fields, but it has also revealed a major failure in Holocaust remembrance. The Cambodian genocide has eerily common themes with the Holocaust. Despite the calls to “never forget” and of “never again,” the overwhelming majority of the world let a second holocaust happen. By seeing the significant and larger similarities underneath all the differences, one can hope that this mistake stops being repeated.

Conclusion

The Holocaust and Cambodian genocide are two very distinct events in history. Yet, this thesis compared the two on the premise that similarities would arise from the differences. This comparison creates a wider understanding of each one because it forces the author to think of them in the context of each other. This thesis covered a lot of history and two very complex topics, but it was unable to cover everything. Events as big and emotional as genocide are remembered in many ways. This thesis focused on public remembrance, and in particular, the struggle of remembering, while including some discussion on private memorialization. However, there are many subjects and specific categories that this thesis did not focus on in depth that are important aspects of how these genocides are remembered. Some examples are: film, art, music, literature, and religion. Film is a huge subject for genocide remembrance with different subcategories within it. There are documentaries, historical fiction, and fiction. Perhaps the most well known documentary on the Holocaust is Claude Lanzmann's 10 hour film, *Shoah*, released in 1985. On the other hand, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, released in 1993, is the most successful example of historical fiction film on the Holocaust. For the Cambodian Genocide, *The Killing Fields* (1984), directed by Roland Joffe, is possibly the most important film to watch, but there are many out there. Perhaps most unique is *The Missing Picture* (2013), directed by Rithy Panh. The film recreates the genocide using clay figures. This thesis also did not focus on Vann Nath's painting of the Khmer Rouge period, the Holocaust art museum inside of Yad Vashem, or Him Sophy's musical piece, "Memory from Darkness," that visitors listen to at the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center.

These subtopics go beyond the scope of this thesis. An entire book could be written about these two genocides in film, art, music, literature, or religion.

The first two chapters focused on giving a historiographical account of how the genocides have been remembered and commemorated over time; the first chapter analyzed the memorialization of the Holocaust while the second chapter did this with the Cambodian genocide. After examining the major themes and developments of each one, the third chapter conducted an in depth comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between the two. I found that the memorialization of these two genocides have encountered two overarching, remarkably similar struggles despite the fact that from the outset they are so starkly different. The people involved in both the Holocaust and the Cambodian genocide encountered shame, and the world acted in a remarkably similar fashion. There is also one striking difference: the Holocaust has become the icon of genocide, unlike the killing fields, which is hardly remembered or commemorated at all.

For victims and perpetrators of genocide, shame is a shared emotion. It took 16 years before the Holocaust began to be heavily memorialized in public spaces. In some ways, the Cambodian genocide is still struggling to do this. Most Jewish victims of the Holocaust only began speaking out after they had allowed time to process and digest their experiences. Before that, many turned to writing as a way to memorialize and remember what they had lost, but these memoirs were not widely circulated or printed. Likewise, victims of the Khmer Rouge avoided discussing their past. The subject was neglected in schools until recently, and the curriculum still lacks a critical study of genocide.

The shame of the perpetrators is more obvious, and their struggles are more apparent. The Nazis and Khmer Rouge committed massive crimes against humanity. It

makes sense that afterwards those involved did not want to draw attention to what they did. This explains why Germany did not publicly talk about the past or teach the Holocaust in schools for the first 16 years. For this same reason, it also makes sense that Cambodians often do not know if their neighbors were perpetrators in the aftermath of the war – killers kept quiet. This also explains the mixed reaction, or “texture” to memory, that Germany so prevalently dealt with in the 80s. The Historian’s Debate in 1985 and domestic struggle over Holocaust monuments reveals the struggle that Germany had between remembering the past and creating a bright future. Cambodia is experiencing that same struggle. Many government officials, including Prime Minister Hun Sen, were once part of the Khmer Rouge. Hun Sen has had a wishy-washy stance on public memorialization of the Killing Fields. Just like Germany struggled to incorporate the past with its image as a newborn nation, Cambodians are hesitant to poke at an old wound.

It is eerie how the world has repeated itself in responding to and dealing with both genocides. In both cases, the world did not know at first that the situation would escalate to genocide. However, the world was not completely in the dark as to the threat that both the Nazis and the Khmer Rouge posed. Rather, the world powers did not care enough to set aside their own agenda for the welfare of others. A significant example of this leading up to the Holocaust was in the failure of the Evian Conference before it even began. For Cambodia, escaped refugees shared stories with government officials and news sources. Then, when Jews and Cambodians were finally liberated the Soviet Union, America, and Vietnamese force-fed narratives that satisfied their own agendas. Examples of this can be

seen in the Nuremberg trials, and the transformation of S-21 into a museum by the Vietnamese.

The world's obsession with witnessing sites of mass destruction is yet another element to this second theme. Dark Tourism, or the desire for people to be able to claim a degree of ownership and connection to the atrocities, transforms these sacred sites into tourist attractions. With the rise of a more globally connected world snapshots of these places strip them of all sacredness and context and turn them into a unique selfie background or the perfect hashtag opportunity.

Why has the Holocaust become the icon of genocide whereas the Killing Fields are hardly commemorated in comparison? This thesis identified a striking difference between the Jewish and Khmer victims: the former are a global people while the latter are not. It is important to remember that it took the Eichmann trial, conducted by Israel, to pull Holocaust remembrance out of the shadows and into public discourse. Before the Eichmann trial the Israelis resisted the Holocaust and viewed victims of it as weak; in the eyes of Israelis, European Jewry was the antithesis of the Zionist. Israeli Jews had to figure out how to fit the Holocaust into their narrative of strength before they could identify with it. In fact, Israel itself was the symbol of strength for Jews. No such symbol has presented itself to the Cambodian victims. These victims had two choices: they could stay or try to emigrate. The latter was very difficult, and often resulted in a long-term hiatus in refugee border camps with awful conditions. Furthermore, the continued threat that the Khmer Rouge posed for 19 years after the Killing Fields added a dimension to the struggle of genocide commemoration. How could Cambodians stop to remember the death under the Khmer Rouge when they were not only still a threat, but also the

Vietnamese were still occupying their nation? This is another key difference between how and why the Holocaust and Cambodian genocides are remembered.

A central aim of this thesis is to expand readers' horizons on genocide studies to see the benefits in comparing them. Whether the reader has an emotional attachment to the Holocaust or the Cambodian genocide, or if the reader is an outsider to both, it is my hope that this comparison sheds light on the connection between two very different catastrophes. No single genocide is too awful for comparison. Such thinking will lead to a shallow understanding of how genocides impact the people who are involved and the greater world.

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