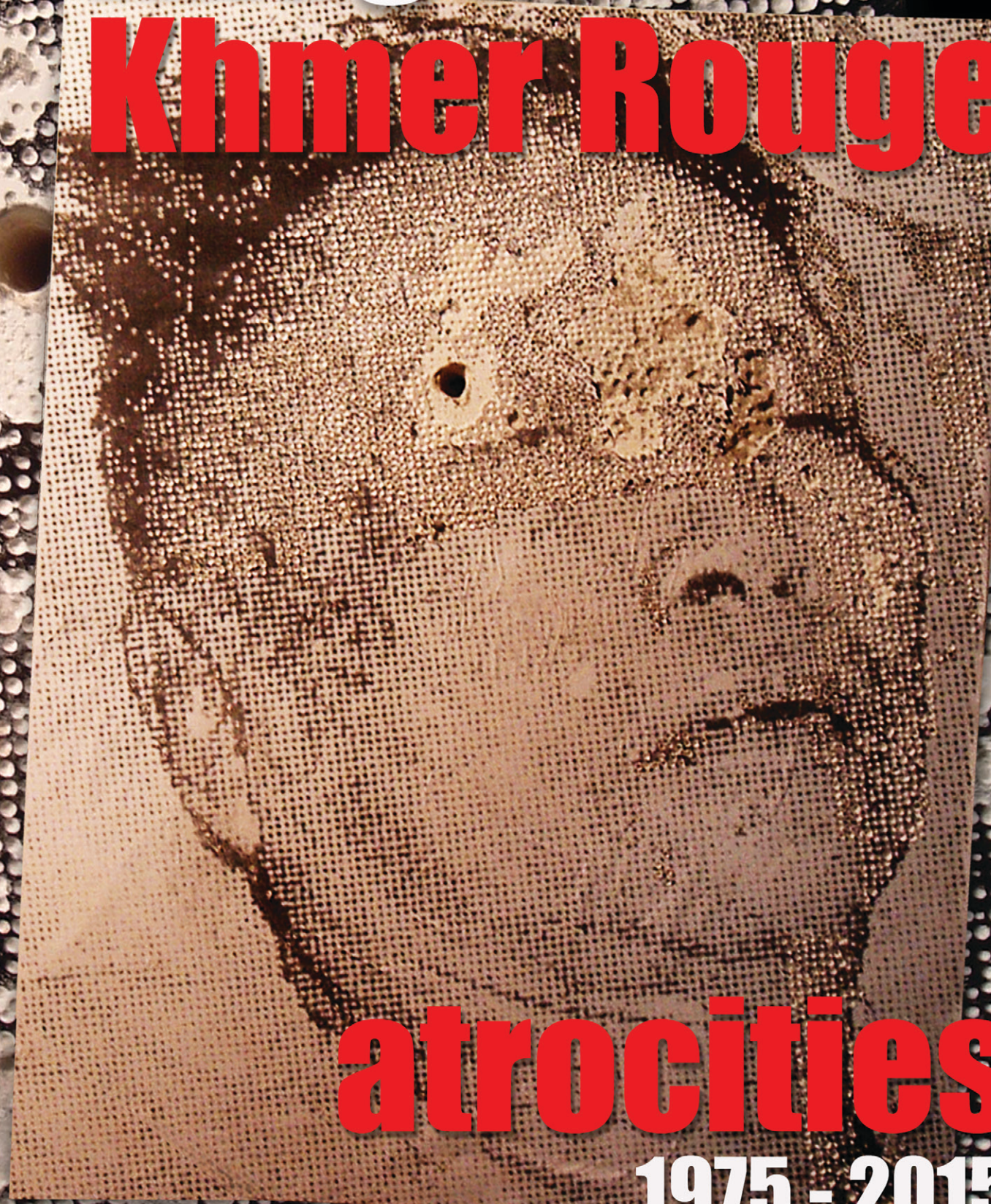


Images of

Khmer Rouge



atrocities

1975 - 2015

Stephanie Gautier

Images of Khmer Rouge atrocities, 1975-2015

Visualizing the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime
in transnational contexts of memory

Colophon

Cover design by: Tjebbe van Tijen

Based on the artwork *Pol Pot Series*, courtesy of Redas Diržys

Publisher: Imaginary Museum Projects, Amsterdam (www.imaginarymuseum.org)

ISBN/EAN: 978-90-810790-0-6

Printed by: Wöhrmann B.V. – Zutphen

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Images of Khmer Rouge atrocities, 1975-2015

Visualizing the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime in transnational contexts of memory

Thesis

to obtain the degree of Doctor from the
Erasmus University Rotterdam
by command of the
rector magnificus

Prof.dr. H.A.P. Pols

and in accordance with the decision of the Doctorate Board.
The public defence shall be held on

Thursday 22 December 2016 at 15.30 hrs

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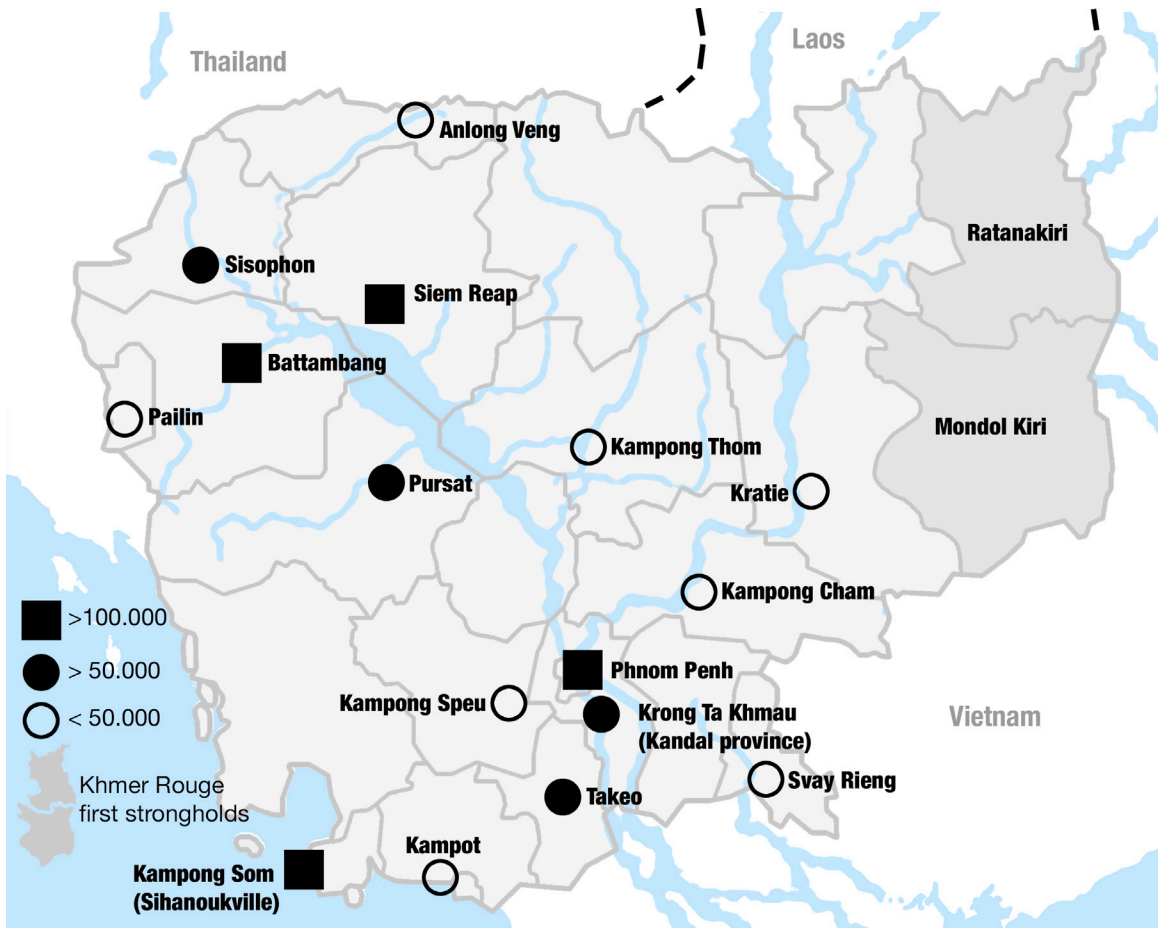
ACE: Association des Cambodgiens à l'Étranger (Association of Overseas Cambodians)
ADHOC: Association pour les Droits de l'Homme et le Développement au Cambodge (Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association)
AFP: Agence France-Presse
AKP: Arbeiternes Kommunistparti (Workers' Communist Party)
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BMZ: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)
CCAI: Clowns d'Ailleurs et d'Ici (Clowns from There and Here)
CGDK: Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CGP: Cambodian Genocide Program
CHRAC: Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee
CIMADE: Comité Inter-Mouvements Auprès des Evacués (Inter-Movements Committee for Refugees)
CJR: Center for Justice and Reconciliation
COERR: Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees
CORK: Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge
CPA-ML: Communist Party of Australia Marxist-Leninist
CP-ML of the United States: Communist Party Marxist-Leninist of the United States
CPK: Communist Party of Kampuchea
CPP: Cambodian People's Party
CRARDA: Comité Rhodanien d'Accueil des Réfugiés et de Défense du Droit d'Asile (Committee of the Rhône Region for the Reception of Refugees and Defense of Asylum)
CSD: Center for Social Development
DC-Cam: Documentation Center of Cambodia
DK: Democratic Kampuchea
ECCC: Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia
ERM: Enfants Réfugiés du Monde (Children Refugees of the World)
FUNCINPEC: Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia)
EVZ: Erinnerung Verantwortung Zukunft (Remembrance, Responsibility and Future)
FUNK: Front Uni National Khmer (National United Front of Kampuchea)
GiZ: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German civil service)
GRUNK: Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchéa (Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea)
ICC: Institute of Contemporary Culture
ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross
IFA: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations)
IISG: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute of Social History)

IMI: International Monitor Institute
INA: Institut National d'Audiovisuel (National Audiovisual Institute)
ISC: Indochina Support Committee
JIM: Jakarta Informal Meetings
JRS: Jesuit Refugee Service
KAP: Kommunistisk Arbejderparti (Communist Workers' Party of Denmark)
KBW: Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland (Communist League of West-Germany)
KFML: Kommunistiska Förbundet Marxist-Leninsterna (Communist Party Marxist-Leninist)
KID: Khmer Institute for Democracy
KPL: Khaosan Pathet Lao
KPNLF: Khmer People's National Liberation Front
KPRP: Khmer People's Revolutionary Party
KUFNS: Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation
LANGO: Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations
LCL: Leading Co-Lawyers
LICADHO: Ligue Cambodgienne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights)
MOCFA: Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
MoMA: Museum of Modern Art
MNATP: Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (National Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions)
MVGKR: Memorial for Victims of the Genocide Committed by the Khmer Rouge
NGO: Non-governmental organization
OXFAM: Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PAS: Public Affairs Section
PC-ML: Parti Communiste Marxiste-Léniniste (Communist Party Marxist-Leninist)
PCUI: Partito Comunista Unificato d'Italia (Unified Communist Party of Italy)
PDK: Party of Democratic Kampuchea
PHARE: Patrimoine Humain et Artistique des Réfugiés et des Enfants
PRK: People's Republic of Kampuchea
PPSA: Phare Ponleu Selpak Association
PPSE: Phare Performing Social Enterprise
ROM: Royal Museum of Ontario
SDC: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEAPAVAA: South East Asia Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association
SIPAR: Soutien à l'Initiative Privée pour l'Aide à la Reconstruction des Pays du Sud-Est Asiatique (Support to Private Initiative to Help the Reconstruction of Southeast Asian Countries)
SNC: Supreme National Council
SOC: State of Cambodia
SPK: Sarpodarmean Kampuchea
SRI: Sleuk Rith Institute
STV: Standard Total View
TPO: Transcultural Psychosocial Organization
UNAMIC: United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
UNTAC: United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
VFC: Victims Foundation of Cambodia
VGKR: Victims of the Khmer Rouge Genocide
VSS: Victims Support Section
WPK: Workers Party of Kampuchea
ZFD: Ziviler Friedendienst (German Civil Peace Service)

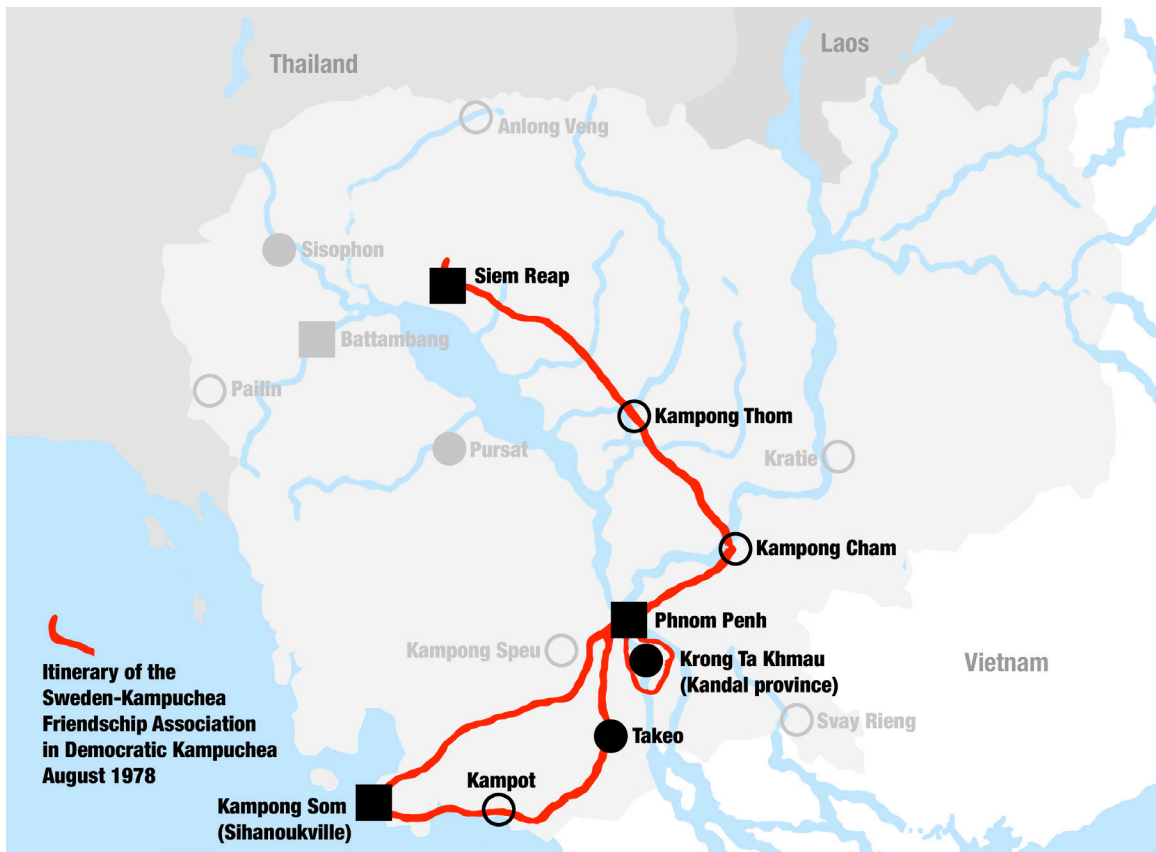
Map 1

Map of Cambodia, 2015



Map 2

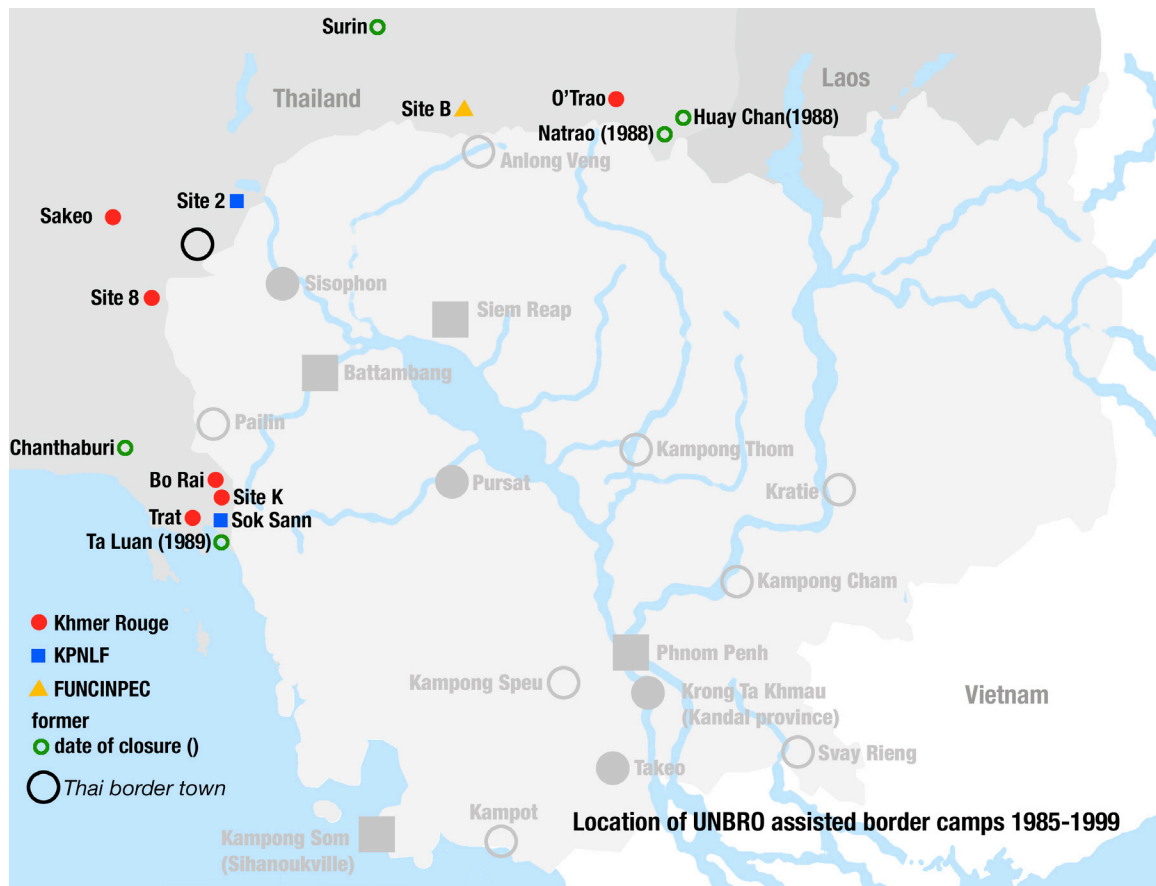
Itinerary of the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association in Democratic Kampuchea, August 1978



Design: Tjebbe van Tijen, based on the map included in *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2008).

Map 3

Map of refugee camps at the Thai-Cambodian border, 1985-1989



Design: Tjebbe van Tijen, based on the map provided on the website “Thai/Cambodian Border Refugee Camps: Information and Documentation).
(<http://www.websitesrcg.com/border/maps/UNBRO-camps-1985-1989.jpg>)

Chapter 1

Introduction

Angkar is generally represented in the emotive and dramatic images of skulls and black-clothed ant-like slaves building dykes. Our challenge is to move beyond these authentic yet essentially reductionist images to arrive at a deeper understanding of what took place in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979.¹

In 2004 I co-curated with Romanian artist Matei Bejenaru the group exhibition *The Way the World Is* at the Turkish Baths in Iași in eastern Romania. One of the participants was Lithuanian artist Redas Diržys. For the occasion he created a new version of his ongoing project *The Pol Pot Series* (figures 1-2). Right after the Khmer Rouge leader passed away (supposedly of a heart attack) on April 15, 1998, Diržys began to collect the photos of Pol Pot on his deathbed that were published in international media (figure 3).² Over the years he has used these pictures, and alternatively other photos of the Khmer Rouge leader, in installations in Germany, Italy, Lithuania, and Sweden among other countries. *We Remain Humans*, the title of Diržys's piece in Iași, resonated strongly in the Romanian context. President of the Socialist Republic of Romania Nicolae Ceaușescu was one of the state leaders with whom the masters of Democratic Kampuchea—as Khmer Rouge Cambodia was called—had kept a friendly relation. It materialized through the maintenance of a Romanian diplomatic representation in Phnom Penh and the reception with great pomp of the Ceaușescu couple in Cambodia on May 28-30, 1978 (figure 4).³ The stay of the “Genius of the Carpathians” and his wife Elena, greeted at each of their public appearances by a cheerful crowd waving flags and flowers, was punctuated with

¹ Helen Jarvis and Nereida Cross, “Documenting the Cambodian Genocide on Multimedia,” working paper GS04 (Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University, October 1, 1998), 1.

² When he died Pol Pot was in house arrest in Anlong Veng (the last Khmer Rouge stronghold). He was under the guard of a rival faction that had just agreed to hand him over to an international tribunal. The photos of the old leader on his deathbed came from American journalists Nate Thayer and David McKaige. Thanks to their contact within the Khmer Rouge, they were the only Western reporters allowed in Anlong Veng. Thayer writes: “The sickly–sweet stench of death fills the wooden hut. Fourteen hours have passed since Pol Pot’s demise, and his body is decomposing in the tropical heat. His face and fingers are covered with purple blotches (...) Pol Pot has a pained expression on his face, as if he did not die peacefully. One eye is shut and the other half open. Cotton balls are stuffed up his nostrils to prevent leakage of body fluids. By his body lie his rattan fan, blue-and-red peasant scarf, bamboo cane and white plastic sandals.” Nate Thayer, “Dying Breath: The Inside Story of Pol Pot’s Last Days and the Disintegration of the Movement He Created,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 30, 1998.

³ The other countries having embassies in Democratic Kampuchea were Albania, Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia.

speeches, banquets, a lightning visit at the Angkor Wat temples, and the signature of a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.⁴



Figure 1: "Pol Pot Series" by Redas Diržys, poster. Courtesy of the artist.

⁴ *Visite Officielle d'Amitié du Camarade Nicolae Ceausescu Secrétaire Général du Parti Communiste Roumain, Président de la République Socialiste de Roumanie & de la Délégation du Parti et de l'Etat Roumains au Kampuchéa Démocratique* (Gentilly, France: Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique en France, May 1978).

We Remain Humans included a portrait of Pol Pot drilled on the wall of the Turkish Baths and juxtaposed with an enlarged photo of Elena Ceaușescu taken just after she had been shot in December 1989. Both images came from Romanian newspapers Diržys had been searching in local archives. He added a print of the *Drilling Manifesto*, a text originally written in his home city Alytus in 2001 and in which he explains his work process. *The Pol Pot Series* installations usually combine photo, sculpture, painting, and performance. The picture of Pol Pot selected in the newspaper is enlarged and stuck on the wall of the exhibition space. The artist drills each pixel, the depth of which is being defined by the color of the printed dot (the blacker the dot, the deeper the drilling). Dust coming from the drilling is left on the floor. Diržys covers the engraved image with black painting. Then he washes it away with water he drinks from a bottle and spits on the wall. Once the installation has dried, the viewer distinguishes from afar the facial features of the portrait, but these are too vague to enable recognition. Getting closer—as the viewer is tempted to do to see the image “better”—does not help. The portrait remains blurred and identification impossible.



Figure 2: “Pol Pot series,” by Redas Diržys, making of the installation at the Turkish Baths in Iasi, Romania for the exhibition *The Way the World Is*, 2004. Courtesy of the artist.

The Pol Pot Series installations are site-specific. For each new version of the project Diržys selects in the local or national press the photo to be used, with additional visual materials from the same newspapers in some cases. The enlargement ratio is determined on the basis of the size of the picture and the surface to be drilled. The artist turns a mass-

mediated photo into a unique object and disrupts the viewer's immediate interpretation of the image. As a comment on the fast-paced consumption of images in mainstream media, his installations reflect on the role of visual archetypes in the depiction of mass violence. Out of the fascination with the figure of the dictator emerges only a cliché. The latter needs not even be identified since its only function is to conjure up other evil men (Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein) and deliver them to the public in the form of a harmless face, once alive and revered, now dead and desecrated. The gesture of disfiguration performed by Diržys does more than evoking the *damnatio memoriae* of reviled political characters as it exists in so many places and epochs—a belated revenge action on the portraits in the place of physical persons. The close-up on Pol Pot's face undermines the popular belief that one can unmask and comprehend the nature of genocidal violence by singling out the masterminds. The extreme pixelization of the picture makes Pol Pot unrecognizable. It is an excess of visibility that points, paradoxically, to an inaccessible side of the perpetrator. No matter how long the viewer scrutinizes his face, there is something that remains elusive. Furthermore, as Diržys suggests it with his installations, the focus on the leader keeps the events themselves in a blur, unknowable, because it denies the collective dimension of what happened. It fails to create a bigger and more complex picture of the past.



Figure 4: Cover of *Visite Officielle d'Amitié* (1978)

1. Research questions

The Pol Pot Series of Redas Diržys provides me with a metaphor for my own research. The dissertation digs into decades of visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities, drilling through successive layers of representations of terror in Democratic Kampuchea. It examines how the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime have been made visible or invisible through images. It proposes to historicize "ways of seeing" the Khmer Rouge's violence in a changing memory landscape engaging the socialist, non-socialist, and post-socialist worlds and different interpretations of the notion of "postcolonial." I situate the study in a transnational realm that emphasizes the interaction of Cambodians and non-Cambodians in the production and circulation of visual materials.

Considering images of Khmer Rouge atrocities beyond local and national frameworks might be a sensitive issue as it resonates with a long history of colonial and postcolonial tensions in the Cambodian context. Many today assess critically the application of Western models of justice, therapy, culture, and social relations to Cambodian society (Guillou 2009, Hinton 2008, Ledgerwood and Un 2003, LeVine 2010, Poluda et al. 2012, Prenowitz and Thompson 2010). This is the latest manifestation of an old and ongoing debate. Since the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, when the French colonial power created and imposed a "national identity" for the Khmer, the interaction of Khmer culture and foreign cultures has been the matter of uninterrupted discussion, often carried out through frameworks opposing destruction to reconstruction, tradition to experimentation or modernity, and authenticity to copy (Ebihara et al. 1994, Edwards 2007, Muan 2001). As a result of the violence to which Cambodians were exposed, the social and cultural fabric of Khmer society has become even more fragile, and its preservation and relation to identity and nation the object of increasingly polarized views. In the eighties these took the form of strident denunciations of the "Vietnamization" of Cambodia as ethnocide (Martin 1994[1989]) and the acculturation of Khmer refugees in border camps and resettlement countries. In the nineties it was the impact of NGO culture that came under fire, as an extremely high number of foreign organizations settled in Cambodia. Nowadays these are the homogenizing effect of worldwide trade, mass culture and communication technologies, the influence of the ever-present aid community, and the interplay of memory industry and mass tourism that form the new background for this discussion.

I use "transnational" as a mediating concept that helps work out, even transcend the tensions between global and local, West and non-West, center and periphery. The term, defined across a wide range of academic disciplines, is sometimes elusive and not so distinguishable at first sight from other notions used to depict the condition of today's mobile and interconnected world. In the dissertation I refer to the definition given by social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz:

The term "transnational" is (...) often a more adequate label for phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distribution, even when they do share the characteristic of not being contained within a state. It also makes the point that many of the linkages in question are not "international" in the strict sense of involving nations—actually states—as corporate actors. In the transnational arena, the actors may now be individuals, groups,

movements, business enterprises, and in no small part it is this diversity of organization that we need to consider.⁵

The situations examined in the dissertation show that dichotomies do not easily capture the diversity of actors involved over time and of their relations. If Democratic Kampuchea lasted “only” three years, eight months, and twenty days, the history of the Khmer Rouge movement itself spans over more than half a century from the Second World War to the present day as the trial of Khmer Rouge leaders Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan continues to stir up controversies within Cambodian society and beyond. This history involves a variety of actors—colonizers and insurgents, capitalists and communists, civilians and military—from the Asia-Pacific area, Euro-America, the former Soviet bloc, and China. These are the “different groups [which] have re-written the Democratic Kampuchea past to meet the needs of the present, asserting their legitimacy and moral authority.”⁶

The dissertation explores how images have been used by these multiple actors over the past forty years for the construction of Khmer Rouge memory in Cambodia and abroad. Its primary question is: How are the crimes of the Pol Pot’s regime visualized in transnational contexts of memorialization from 1975 to the present day? To answer this question, I examine the following three sub-questions:

1. To what extent do images clarify continuity and shifts in the group identities of those involved in memorializing Khmer Rouge atrocities?
2. How does the medium affect both the modalities of circulation of images and the formats of perception?
3. What changes do images articulate with regard to the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War context?

The dissertation looks at a selected set of images: photographs, documentary movies, drawings, paintings, exhibitions, memorial sculptures, graphic novels, and digital media. It analyzes the original context of production and public reception of the artifacts. When possible, it examines the afterlife of these images as they are presented in new institutional, geographical, and cultural environments. The study follows a chronological order, exploring the successive political environments in Cambodian recent history, from the Democratic Kampuchea period (1975-1979) to the present-day Kingdom of Cambodia (1993-).

The introduction includes six sections. The first one gives a historical background based on the synthesis of a range of studies covering Cambodian history from the post-Second World War period onward.⁷ The second section of the chapter discusses the

⁵ Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 6.

⁶ Alexander Laban Hinton, “Truth, Representation, and the Politics of Memory after Genocide,” in *People of Virtue: Reconfiguring Religion, Power, and Moral Order in Cambodia Today*, eds. Alexandra Kent and David Chandler (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), 66.

⁷ The historical background is based on the following studies: David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution since 1945* (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books, 1993 [1991]); Justin Corfield, *Khmer Stand Up! A History of the Cambodian Government 1970-1975* (Australia: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1994); François Ponchaud, *Cambodge Année Zéro* (Paris: Julliard, 1977); Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua,

notion of “genocide” as applied to Khmer Rouge crimes in the arenas of justice, politics, and academic inquiry, and how this transposes into the visual realm. The next two sections examine whether and how the idea of visual culture might be associated productively with the study of images of Khmer Rouge atrocities, first in relation to the visual production of the Pol Pot’s regime itself, second in relation to the more recent formation of cultural memory of the DK period. The fifth section introduces the theoretical frameworks of the dissertation. The study builds on the notion of “sedimentation” elaborated by anthropologist Didier Fassin and psychiatrist Richard Rechtman, and the concept of “trauma aesthetic” coined by cultural anthropologist Allen Feldman. The last section of the chapter explains the sources, methods, and organization of the dissertation.

2. Historical background

When it came to power in April 1975, the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), or Khmer Rouge, was not a newcomer on the Southeast Asian political scene. From the forties onward Cambodian communists had been active in the region, first as an anti-imperialist resistance force (*Khmer Issarak* or “emancipated Khmers”) progressively coming under Viet Minh command, then as independent formation (Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party or KPRP) after the split of the Indochinese Communist Party into Vietnam, Lao, and Cambodia’s national movements in 1951. When Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, the communists carried on their activities through both the legal socialist movement *Krom Pracheachon* (“People’s Group”) and the KPRP’s clandestine networks. In the early sixties the “Paris Group” (a group who had radicalized while studying in France in the fifties) took command of the Party, which

Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942–1981 (London: Zed Books, 1981); Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975–1982* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Karl D. Jackson, ed. *Cambodia 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930–1975* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Roel Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple: Revolutionary Intellectuals and terror in Democratic Kampuchea* (Saarbrücken and Fort Lauderdale: Verlag Breitenbach Publishers, 1990); Henri Locard, *Pourquoi les Khmers Rouges?* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2013); Meng-Try Ea, *The Chain of Terror: The Khmer Rouge Southwestern Zone Security System* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2005); Ben Kiernan, “The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian Peace Process: Causes and Consequences,” in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: The Khmer Rouge, the United Nations and the International Community*, Ben Kiernan, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1993); Serge Thion, *Watching Cambodia: Ten Paths to Enter the Cambodian Tangle* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993); Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge. Inside the Politics of Nation Building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Christophe Peschoux, *Les “Nouveaux” Khmers Rouges: Enquête (1979-1990). Reconstruction du Mouvement et Reconquête des Villages. Essai de Débroussaillage* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992); Steven Heder and Judy Ledgerwood, eds. *Violence in Cambodia: Democratic Transition under United Nations Peacekeeping* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996); Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields*.

was then renamed Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK). In the following years the new leadership tried unsuccessfully to emancipate from North Vietnamese patronage.

Cambodia's leader prince Norodom Sihanouk, whom the French had put on the throne in 1941, abdicated in 1955 in order to exert more power with his party the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* ("People's Socialist Community"). He managed at first to absorb the Left by posing as a democrat and appointing socialists to his government. By the mid-sixties the escalation of the Second Indochina War signed the end of the neutrality Sihanouk had maintained all those years. The presence of Vietnamese communist troops in Cambodia and the retaliation by the U.S. Army destabilized the country. Social unrest grew on the domestic front, and divisions appeared between Sihanouk and his progressive allies. In this troubled context the repression of the peasant rebellion in Samlaut (western Cambodia) in 1967 was a turning point. Although there was no evidence of their involvement in the uprising, communists were suspected of having masterminded the revolt. Sihanouk, infuriated, ordered the crushing of the Party, thereby driving its leaders into hiding. In spite of Hanoi's reluctance, the Khmer Rouge (as Sihanouk had christened them) began to launch from their jungle bases guerrilla operations against the Sangkum regime—without much success.

The politics of Sihanouk had antagonized many people in Cambodia, on the Left and the Right alike. Amidst growing political instability and popular unrest, the rightists in the government, led by Lon Nol and Prime Minister Sirik Matak, deposed Sihanouk in March 1970, using the prince's annual travel to France for medical treatment. In October 1970 they proclaimed the Khmer Republic with the backing of the United States. The new regime, plagued by infighting, corruption, and rabid nationalism, did not garner much support from the population. On the other hand, the ousting of Sihanouk was a stroke of luck for the Khmer Rouge. On the advice of his friend Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, the prince agreed to ally with his former enemies and form a resistance movement, the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK). It included alongside the Khmer Rouge Cambodian communist returnees from Hanoi and pro-Sihanouk members. A government-in-exile, the Royal United National Government of Kampuchea (GRUNK), was established in Beijing. On March 23, 1970, in a radio broadcast message to the nation, Sihanouk urged Cambodian peasants to join the guerrillas and fight against Lon Nol.

The country plunged into civil war. The massive aerial bombing campaign of the U.S. Army (1970-1973), killing tens of thousands, and the depredations committed by troops sweeping across Cambodia chased villagers either to Khmer Rouge bases in the "liberated" zones or to cities, which proved unable to cope with the flux of refugees. In January 1973 the United States, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Accords. This came too late for Cambodia that kept spiraling down. After the Vietnamese communists withdrew from the country, the "Paris Group" found itself free to conduct the revolution as it saw fit. Cambodian veterans from Hanoi were purged and life in the "liberated" zones was radicalized. The FUNK gained ground on the military front. Following the resignation of President Nixon in 1974 (Watergate), American support to Lon Nol dried up. The days of the Khmer Republic were numbered. On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge troops entered Phnom Penh. Year Zero had begun.

The first measure taken by the new masters of Democratic Kampuchea (DK)—as the country was renamed—was the forced evacuation of cities and relocation of townspeople

in the countryside. Behind the shadowy façade of Angkar (“Organization”), the CPK leaders proceeded to a radical transformation of society: collectivization; elimination of Western and urban influences; separation of families; closing of schools and cultural institutions; dismantling of religion; abolishment of currency.⁸ The population was divided into two main categories: “old people” (farmers who had lived in liberated zones prior to 1975) and “new people” (city dwellers deprived of rights). The Khmer Rouge first eliminated military, police, civil servants, and intellectuals who had been associated with the Lon Nol regime, indeed anyone who had a Western-oriented past. They also persecuted ethnic minorities such as the Muslim Cham and the Vietnamese. Eventually, Angkar turned its attention to its own ranks and launched a series of internal purges. To achieve a “super great leap forward,” the Khmer Rouge transformed Cambodia into a countrywide labor camp where people slaved to fulfill the masters’ vision of a self-reliant nation. But the absence of professional guidance, the rejection of modern equipment, and the lack of agricultural know-how of most workers condemned these grandiose plans to failure. As a result, penury settled over the country and took catastrophic proportions in some regions. Up to 1.7 million Cambodians—over one quarter of the population—lost their life in DK due to starvation, exhaustion, disease, and killing.⁹

Since 1975 the relation between DK and Vietnam had become increasingly tense. Supported by China, which was eager to counter Vietnamese and Soviet designs in the region, the CPK leaders grew emboldened. Border skirmishes turned into full-scale war. In December 1978 the Vietnamese army crossed into Cambodia and reached Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979. Among the troops were members of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS), or “the Front,” a mix of Hanoi-trained Cambodian communists and Khmer Rouge defectors from the Eastern Zone. The People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was officially established on January 10, 1979, with the backing of Vietnam. Former Khmer Rouge military commander Heng Samrin, one of the Front’s founding members, was made head of state. From the start the new government of Cambodia faced legitimacy issues at home and abroad. Cambodians, who had welcomed the Vietnamese soldiers, became more and more resentful of the occupation—a feeling mitigated only by their fear of a Khmer Rouge comeback. The international community had first tolerated Vietnam’s intervention in Cambodia, but soon condemned it as an invasion, seeing it as a proxy maneuver for the Soviet Union’s advance in Southeast Asia.

⁸ See Appendix A for a description of the Party and State apparatuses in DK.

⁹ This is the commonly cited death toll. Variations range from 740,000 to three million depending on the methods used for counting the dead. According to document no. 37 A/C.3/34, released in August 1979 by the People's Revolutionary Tribunal held in Phnom Penh for the “Trial of the Genocide Crime of the Pol Pot – Ieng Sary clique,” the figure of three million was established on the basis of a sample survey of the population living in Phnom Penh and at a commune in Siem Reap province, plus data collected on the spot by journalist Wilfred Burchett in three provinces (Prey Veng, Kompong Speu, and Svay Rieng). See: Craig Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005); Patrick Heuveline, “‘Between One and Three Million in Cambodia’: Toward the Demographic Reconstruction of a Decade of Cambodian History (1970-1980),” *Population Studies* 52, no.1 (1998); Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*; Marek Sliwinski, *Le Génocide Khmer Rouge: Une Analyse Démographique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995); Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*.

The United States, Western governments, and the ASEAN shifted their support to the Khmer Rouge, alongside China. Financial and military assistance to the guerrillas transited via Thailand to Khmer Rouge-controlled refugee camps, and from the camps to rear bases in Cambodia.

The eighties were a difficult decade for the PRK. Isolated, recognized only by socialist countries, it had to re-build the country from scratch in the midst of a refugee crisis and a protracted civil war against the Khmer Rouge and other anti-Vietnamese and anti-communist groups in the border region. The American embargo on Vietnam and the PRK made the situation only worse. Trying to escape both the new socialist state and economic hardship, Cambodians fled en masse to the Thai border. The situation of the Khmer Rouge, renamed Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK) in 1981, was better. They retained Cambodia's seat at the UN General Assembly, which made them the legitimate representative of the Cambodian people. However, the movement was still in dire need of a veneer of respectability, especially in public opinion. As an answer to this problem, the United States and China forced the Khmer Rouge, Sihanouk, and nationalist politician Son Sann into forming an alliance, christened Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) and officially launched in 1982.

The end of the Cold War brought dramatic changes. Deprived from Soviet economic assistance, Vietnam could not afford anymore to support Phnom Penh. Left with little choice, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen (himself a Khmer Rouge who had defected to Hanoi in 1977) began to negotiate with the international community. At stake were the departure of Vietnamese troops and advisors from Cambodia and the guarantee the Khmer Rouge would not return to power. As a sign of good willingness, the PRK—renamed State of Cambodia (SOC) in 1989—renounced Communism and engaged in economic liberalization. After negotiations in the frame of the Jakarta Informal Meetings (JIM) in 1988-1990, Hun Sen, Sihanouk, Son Sann, and the Khmer Rouge finally signed the Paris Agreements in October 1991. It marked the beginning of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), a two billion-dollar operation designed to turn Cambodia into multiparty democracy. The mission started in March 1992. However, the Khmer Rouge withdrew from the agreements and resumed warfare later that year. In spite of violent attacks from their side and a general climate of intimidation, the UNTAC kept proceeding. The UN-monitored elections in May 1993 produced mixed results. Cambodians voted en masse. A new constitution restored monarchy, and the Royal Government of Cambodia was established. But Hun Sen refused the polls verdict. He forced Sihanouk and his son prince Ranariddh to share power with him. He finally got rid of his political opponents in a bloody coup in July 1997, which saw some of Ranariddh's supporters being killed. Since then, Hun Sen has been ruling Cambodia with an iron fist, leaving King Sihanouk (and after 2004 King Sihamoni) only honorific functions.

3. Khmer Rouge atrocities, “Cambodian Genocide,” and the problem of (visual) representation

3.1 Prosecuting and defining the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime as “genocide”

The new masters of Phnom Penh have invented something original, auto-genocide. After Auschwitz and the Gulag, we might have thought this century had produced the ultimate in

horror, but we are now seeing the suicide of a people in the name of revolution, worse: in the name of socialism.¹⁰

It is beyond the scope of the dissertation to discuss whether the crimes perpetrated by the Pol Pot's regime qualify legally as "genocide." Yet, given how much the notion informs the public perception of Khmer Rouge terror, it is essential to provide an overview of the debates on the subject in the political, judicial, and academic arenas. Calling the atrocities committed in DK "genocide" links them to a specific understanding of what happened in Cambodia. In that respect, genocide is not only a legal concept but also a political, historical, and cultural category whose mobilizing power resides in the connotations it conjures up in the collective mind.¹¹

French journalist Jean Lacouture was not the only one who used the contested "auto-genocide." As Richard Rechtman convincingly argues, the expression allowed those supporting the struggle of Indochinese people against U.S. imperialism to denounce atrocities in DK without sounding anti-communists.¹² Special Rapporteur Abdelwahab Bouhdiba too resorted to "auto-genocide" in a meeting session of the UN Division of Human Rights, but he preferred the expression "barbaric genocide" in a later report (1978). This was more in line with the politics of that period. American president Jimmy Carter spoke of the "genocidal policies" of the Khmer Rouge regime (April 21, 1978). Mainstream media—at least in the United States—tried "to produce in the public mind the firm impression of 'genocide' in the Kampuchea of Pol Pot." Refugee testimonies were widely reported, and journalists did not hesitate to resort to "inflated rhetoric and highly speculative games of numbers."¹³ In this context one might easily concur with French historian's Serge Thion analysis that:

Genocide is nothing else but a political label aiming at the exclusion of a political leader or party beyond the bonds of humanity. It leads us to believe we are good, that we have nothing to do with these monsters. This is entirely misleading. Pol Pot has been produced by our political world, is part of it, is using it and is getting strong from it.¹⁴

¹⁰ Jean Lacouture, "The Bloodiest Revolution," *The New York Review of Books*, March 31, 1977.

¹¹ The Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (adopted at the UN General Assembly in December 1948) defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (1) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

¹² Richard Rechtman, "Altérité Suspecte et Identité Coupable dans la Diaspora Cambodgienne," in *La Haine de Soi: Identités Difficiles*, Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, eds. (Paris: Editions Complexes, 2000). 174.

¹³ Louis and Eryl Kubicka, *Kampuchea under Pol Pot: A Critical Analysis. A Report to the Board of Directors of the American Friends Service Committee* (AFSC Indochina Program, April 1979), 12-13.

¹⁴ Serge Thion, *Watching Cambodia: Ten Paths to Enter the Cambodian Tangle* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993), 185. Caution is needed when it comes to Serge Thion. His stance as

The situation changed dramatically after January 1979 and the turnabout of the international community in favor of the Khmer Rouge. Cold War politics ensured that the word “genocide” disappeared from political and diplomatic discourses, and with it the possibility to prosecute senior Khmer Rouge for their crimes. This created a lasting “monumental case of amnesia” that culminated in the Paris Agreements as the term itself was ditched from official talks and replaced with the neutral “human rights abuses of a recent past.”¹⁵

Of course, on the other side, the communication of the PRK and Vietnam revolved around the idea of “genocide,” and the comparison between Khmer Rouge and Nazi atrocities became a staple in articles, books, and movies of the new regime and its allies.¹⁶ Early 1979 the Khmer Rouge prison S-21 in Phnom Penh was refurbished as the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes and opened to Cambodians and international visitors. In August 1979 a People’s Revolutionary Tribunal was established in the capital city with the mission to prosecute the “Pol Pot – Ieng Sary clique” for the crime of genocide. The trial took place in the presence of foreign lawyers and journalists.¹⁷ The analogy with the Third Reich was not lost on the activists and Cambodian communities forming anti-Khmer Rouge lobbies in the United States. As if to underline further the genocidal nature of the Pol Pot’s regime, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel lent his moral weight to the Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge (CORK), which gathered over one hundred NGOs under the umbrella of the Asia Resource Center (former Indochina Resource Center) in Washington DC.

Following the relative stabilization of Cambodia after the 1993 elections, the idea to prosecute the Khmer Rouge leaders began to gain ground again, in part as the result of intense lobbying of anti-Khmer Rouge groups and supportive politicians. In April 1994 the U.S. Congress passed the bill of the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act, signed by President Bill Clinton in May that same year. It set the judicial machine into motion, even if it took a decade more before the Cambodian government and the international community reached an agreement—a decade that saw King Sihanouk grant Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan with royal pardon while Prime Minister Hun Sen proposed to “dig a hole and bury the past and look at the twenty-first century with a clean slate.”¹⁸ Finally,

Holocaust denier (which cost him his job at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in France in 2000) colors much of what he has been writing in the past decades.

¹⁵ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with Genocide? Elusive Justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 37.

¹⁶ As might be read in the monthly newsletter *Nouvelles du Kampuchéa Démocratique* of the Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique en France throughout 1979, the Khmer Rouge conducted a similar campaign, accusing Hanoi of exterminating Cambodians to replace them with Vietnamese peasants.

¹⁷ The Permanent Secretariat of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), *Kampuchea: A Blood Debt is Paid* (Afro-Asian Publications 102, October 1979); *Kampuchea Dossier III: The Dark Years* (Hanoi: Vietnam Courier, 1979); Howard J. De Nike, John Quigley, and Kenneth J. Robinson. *Genocide in Cambodia: Documents for the Trial of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Hun Sen added that senior Khmer Rouge should be welcomed “with bouquet of flowers, not with prisons and handcuffs.” Seth Mydans, “Cambodian Leader Resists Punishing Top Khmer Rouge,” *The New York Times*, December 29, 1998.

the decision to prosecute Khmer Rouge leaders came into fruition. After a lengthy and rocky process of negotiations coming up against issues of the legal system to be used for the trial and the identity of the candidates for prosecution, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) were established in 2003. Ta Mok, captured in 1999, should have been the first senior Khmer Rouge to sit in the dock but he died in prison in 2006, as his trial was about to begin. The first case to be prosecuted was Duch, the former commander of the prison S-21 (Case 001, 2009-2010). The trial of senior Khmer Rouge Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, and his wife Ieng Thirith began in November 2011. Due to the old age and poor health of the accused, Case 002 was segmented into “mini-trials.”¹⁹ The ECCC delivered the first verdict in August 2014, life imprisonment for Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan. The second and final trial, covering charges of forced marriage, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes related to genocide, began in October 2014 (and is still going on as this is written).²⁰

“Was it genocide?” human rights activist David Hawk wondered in 1984.²¹ Over the years his question received a variety of academic answers in terms of identity of the target groups; relation of Communism, nationalism, and racism; applicability of the concepts of “politicide” or “democide” in the place of “genocide” (De Swaan 2015, Levene 2005, Weitz 2009).²² As Craig Etcheson aptly puts it, “the scholarly debate how the mass killing in Cambodia unfolded became the central issue in the historiography of modern Cambodia.”²³ Early discussions revolved around the Standard Total View (STV), a term coined by Michael Vickery. A simplified, black-and-white perspective on the DK period (defended by Ponchaud 1976, Barron and Paul 1977), the STV posited that Khmer Rouge extermination policies had been systematic and invariant in time and space for the entire duration of the Pol Pot’s regime (Barnett 1983, Quinn 1989, Vickery 1983). Questions about the existence of a centralized apparatus of terror in DK, the privileging of race over social origin and political belief in victim groups, and the definition of Khmer Rouge ideology as communist or not contributed to a later revision of the STV. An early proponent of “genocide” in the strict sense of the Convention, Cambodia expert Ben Kiernan has been contesting the views of other specialists for years. He criticizes the emphasis on local initiatives of academic Stephen Heder. The latter questions the notion

¹⁹ Ieng Thirith, suffering from dementia, was ruled unfit to stand trial in 2012 and died in 2015. Ieng Sary died in 2013.

²⁰ There is still a question mark regarding the organization of further trials, Cases 003 and 004, which involve military and regional mid-level commanders. The issue has been poisoning the relations of the Cambodian government and the international community for several years. Open Society Justice Initiative, “The future of Cases 003/004 at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia,” October 2012; Randle C. DeFalco, “Cases 003 and 004 at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal: The Definition of ‘Most Responsible’ Individuals According to International Criminal Law,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 8, no.2 (2014).

²¹ David Hawk, “Pol Pot’s Cambodia: Was it Genocide?” in *Toward the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide*, Israel Charny, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984).

²² For a discussion on “politicide” vs. “genocide,” see: Barbara Harff, and Ted Robert Gurr. “Towards Empirical Theory of Genocides and Politicides,” *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (1988): 359-371.

²³ Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 77.

of intention and gives local and regional commanders far more autonomy in the conduct of violence—a thorny issue in the context of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.²⁴ Kiernan also disagrees with what he calls “technical denial of genocide” in the analyses of historians Michael Vickery and David Chandler, who refer to a peasant revolution gone awry and Marxism-Leninism respectively to explain violence in DK.²⁵ All these scholars are active in the field of Cambodian history for years and many were already writing, from different political perspectives, about the Khmer Rouge regime during the events. It is clear that their previous ideological positions keep informing their current interventions in the debate.²⁶ Lately, British journalist and writer Philip Short too objected to the use of “genocide” in the Cambodian case on the grounds that the treatment of ethnic minorities in DK cannot be equated with the Holocaust and Rwanda.²⁷ For French historian Henri Locard, the term comes with too loaded a past since it “has been used since January 1979 as political expediency.”²⁸ Locard refers mostly to domestic politics in Cambodia. Still, his comment is a good reminder that the “genocide debate” has much to do with the role of foreign powers in the events and their desire to be exonerated from responsibility in the tragic history of Cambodia.

The latest perspective on the issue of “genocide” is anthropological with the seminal work of American scholar Alexander Laban Hinton. The latter takes a broad definition of genocide, and proposes a change of scale from macro- to micro-level analysis in which individual motivation and agency are to be conceived of in interaction with ideology and policy (in this case Marxism-Leninism and Maoism). Far from essentializing violence, Hinton looks for the interaction of localized and global understanding, old and new frameworks in producing the cultural dimension of genocidal violence.²⁹ For Richard Rechtman, as both psychiatrist and anthropologist, the qualification of genocide makes

²⁴ Stephen Heder, “Racism, Marxism, Labeling and Genocide in Ben Kiernan’s ‘The Pol Pot Regime,’” *South East Asia Research* 5, no. 2 (1997) and “Reassessing the Role of Senior Leaders and Local Officials in Democratic Kampuchea Crimes: Cambodian Accountability in Comparative Perspective,” in *Bringing the Khmer Rouge to Justice: Prosecuting Mass Violence Before the Cambodian Courts*, Jaya Ramji and Beth van Schaack, eds. (London: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

²⁵ In his early articles about the Khmer Rouge regime Kiernan did not use the term “genocide.” He changed his mind after he met with lawyer Gregory Stanton (founder of the CORK) in Cambodia in 1980. Ben Kiernan, *Genocide and Resistance in Southeast Asia: Documentation, Denial, and Justice in Cambodia and East Timor* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 225-228, 203-204.

²⁶ See: Donald W. Beachler, “Arguing about Cambodia: Genocide and Political Interest,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2009).

²⁷ Nayan Chanda, “The Man Who Made Cambodia Hell,” *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2005; “Former BBC Correspondent Philip Short Speaks on his New Biography of Pol Pot,” UCLA Asia Institute, March 10, 2005; “Philip Short Testifying as Expert Witness,” Testimony of Philip Short, ECCC, May 6, 2013.

²⁸ Henri Locard, “Scope of KRT Case 002/2 Contains Fundamental Shortcomings,” *The Cambodia Daily*, April 15, 2014.

²⁹ Alexander Hinton Laban, *Why Did They Kill?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). The broad definition Hinton refers to is the following: “intention to kill because of who they are.” “Macro-Level Factors and Localization: Expert Gives Evidence,” Testimony of Alexander Laban Hinton, ECCC, March 14, 2016.

no doubt. Khmer Rouge slogans clearly translate the criminal intentions of the CPK leaders—reconstructing the Cambodian people with only one third of the population. They invented a radical otherness (which they expressed through the idea of “new people”) and destroyed any form of descent or genealogy. If the Cambodian Genocide does not get recognition as such, Rechtman argues, it will be the first genocide of the twentieth century that is not acknowledged.³⁰

3.2 Images of the “Cambodian Genocide”: a question of visual culture?

The use of the term “genocide” raises a number of issues in the visual realm too, especially due to its long-term association in both academic and popular milieus with the idea of invisibility. Genocide is considered traceless—perpetrators usually leave little evidence of their crimes—and non-representable. The latter notion emerged in the post-Holocaust discourse about trauma and representation. It is based on the assumption that victim experiences are too overwhelming to be described and demand extraordinary, radically new forms of representation if they are to be expressed. Substituting “Khmer Rouge atrocities” for “Cambodian Genocide,” as the dissertation proposes to do it, is in no way a judgment on the events that took place in DK or an attempt to qualify or disqualify them. Rather, it shifts the question of images away from the aporia of visual representation in the context of genocide to the analysis of the conditions in which such events are made visible. The dissertation does not strictly oppose visibility and invisibility. Instead, it considers invisibility as one of the modalities of visibility, albeit the most extreme and challenging one. In that respect, it relates to the idea of “missing picture” [l’image manquante], to draw on the recent movie of Cambodian-born film director Rithy Panh about the DK period and its long-term effects.³¹ *The Missing Picture* revolves around a manifold definition of images, which are in turn destroyed, absent, recovered, reconstructed, or simply created. This might introduce the preliminary question: When one speaks about images of Khmer Rouge atrocities, what images does one actually mean?

In the introduction to his book *The Eyes of the Pineapple* (1990) Dutch researcher Roel Burgler mentions photos of killings by Khmer Rouge guards that were published between April 1976 and January 1978 in Western mainstream media such as the *Washington Post*, *Paris-Match*, *London Observer*, *Newsweek*, and *Der Spiegel*. Different stories circulated about the origin of the pictures. Some said they had been smuggled out of Cambodia by a relative of the photographer, who himself had died while trying to escape, or by a Cambodian refugee in Paris who refused to reveal his identity. According to Sygma Photo News (the agency which had distributed the pictures), the images came from Khmer Rouge defectors. In fact the photos had first appeared in a Thai newspaper in April 1976 and were reprinted in the *Bangkok Post* under the headline “True or false?” a

³⁰ Anne-Laure Porée, “L’Intention Génocidaire n’est Pas Ecrite. Entretien avec Richard Rechtman,” Procès des Khmers Rouges: Carnets d’un Tribunal au Jour le Jour, March 7, 2009.

³¹ Using a wide range of visual media, including Khmer Rouge archive images, contemporary video footage, and dioramas with painted clay figurines, Rithy Panh weaves his personal story in the DK years (he was deported with his family) with Cambodia’s collective history. The film won the top prize in the section Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival (2013) and was shortlisted in the category Best Foreign Language Film at the 86th Academy Awards (2014).

few days later. The daily explained they had first refused to buy them from the Thai trader who tried to sell them because they doubted their authenticity. Even American intelligence services thought the pictures were fakes. The photos, it turned out, were an operation of Thai intelligence services. They had been staged and taken in Thailand. Once the real story came to light, though, none of the newspapers that had released the photos acknowledged the mistake, with the exception of the *Washington Post*.³² Interestingly, as soon as the split between DK and Vietnam became official, media in pro-Hanoi socialist countries published these photos in turn as proof of the cruelty of the Khmer Rouge, now the designated enemy. So did the Soviet *Liternaturnaja Gazeta* in September 1978, as revealed the Kampuchea Komitee Nederland—a Dutch pro-Khmer Rouge group formed by Maoists after the collapse of the Pol Pot’s regime—in the Spring 1979 issue of its bulletin *Kampuchea*. The Komitee montaged one of the pictures (a man on his knees beaten by four Khmer Rouge armed with hoes and guns) next to the cropped version *Newsweek* had used for its cover at the end of 1977 (figure 5).³³

The story may serve as cautionary tale, especially in the present-day context where all kinds of archive images—decontextualized, tinkered with, captioned in inaccurate or biased ways—become accessible in just one click of the mouse. More than this, it prompts the question whether only documentary evidence of the crimes perpetrated in DK might be considered atrocity images. What does visualizing the event mean, scholar Barbie Zelizer asks with respect to the Holocaust. Does it mean “to capture all that [the event] entailed? To capture part of what it entailed? To capture the core of what it entailed?”³⁴ In the case of DK, there is only a limited body of images that might be defined as direct proof of the extermination of Cambodian people. The better known are the photos of S-21 prisoners. S-21 was a school in Phnom Penh used by the Khmer Rouge political police (*santebal*) to jail, torture, and kill alleged opponents of the regime (these were mostly Khmer Rouge cadre and military purged with their families for a host of reasons). The inmates were photographed upon arrival, and the picture attached to their “confession” file. But then what about “the emotive and dramatic images of skulls and black-clothed ant-like slaves building dykes” mentioned by Jarvis? What about the propaganda images of the Pol Pot’s regime showing the glorious achievements of the Angkar? What about “liberator images” such as the footage depicting the “discovery” of S-21 and the excavation of mass graves?³⁵ What about the photos of skeleton-like Cambodians and Phnom Penh as ghost city that circulated in media and human rights

³² Burgler, *The Eyes of the Pineapple*, 1-2. Supporters of DK claimed that the Thais had not worked alone. According to the American Maoist newspaper *The Call*, the photos were part of a wider operation of disinformation mounted by a CIA-headed network employing former officials of the Lon Nol regime. *The Call*, *Kampuchea Today: An Eyewitness Report from Cambodia* (Chicago: The Call, December 1978), 63.

³³ Kampuchea Komitee Nederland, *Kampuchea* 1, no.1 (March-April 1979), 9.

³⁴ Barbie Zelizer, “Introduction: On Visualizing the Holocaust?” in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, Barbie Zelizer, ed. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 2.

³⁵ I borrow the term “liberator images” from a recent study of Vicente Sánchez-Biosca. He defines them as “metonymic by nature in relation to the events they bring to light; in other terms, having missed the fatal instant, they are condemned to allude to them only by representing their effects.” Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, “Non-author Footage, Fertile Reappropriations: On Atrocity Images from Cambodia’s Genocide,” in *A History of Cinema Without Names: A Research Project* (Italy: Università degli Studi di Udine, 2016), 139

reports throughout 1979? What about images of cultural revival in Cambodia and refugee camps in the eighties? What about the documentation created in the recent contexts of transitional justice and dark tourism? What about the fast-growing production of artworks and documentary movies about the Khmer Rouge era and its long-lasting effects?



Figure 5: Fake photo of Khmer Rouge atrocities, Kampuchea Komitee Nederland, *Kampuchea* 1, no. 1 (1979)

As soon as the scope of selection for images of Khmer Rouge atrocities is enlarged, the discussion about visualization becomes a discussion about visual culture. Like “transnational,” the term “visual culture” has been defined a great many times in a variety of disciplines, up to having its own “visual culture studies,” and at the same time remains elusive. In the frame of the dissertation I understand it in the sense given by American art historian W.J.T. Mitchell: “Visual culture is the visual construction of the social, not just the social construction of the visual.”³⁶ How does visual culture then relate to the Cambodian case? I propose a twofold interpretation of the relation: on the one hand, the visual practices and images through which the Khmer Rouge looked at the world and themselves; on the other hand the broader and heterogenous set of visual representations mediating the history of DK into collective consciousness. Obviously, these two groups overlap to some extent. As the earlier paragraph made it clear, it is not easy to discriminate archive images from afterimages in such a context. The distinction is simply not accurate. Nor does it do justice to the fluidity of categories such as perpetrator, liberator, and survivor images, or the “post-memory” visual production (after Marianne Hirsch 2001, 2012) of second-generation Cambodians and even non-Cambodians. The concept of visual culture, thus, might open up a wider understanding of images of Khmer Rouge atrocities, not only as bearing witness to destruction and extermination, but also as being active agents in processes of coming to terms and reconstruction. It emphasizes the role of visual artifacts in building or rebuilding communities—real or “imagined” to refer to Benedict Anderson’s well known study—and promoting new national and transnational stories of the past.

4. The Khmer Rouge’s visual culture: an organized visibility

At first sight “Khmer Rouge” and “visual culture” seem to be antithetical terms. It is often assumed that the Khmer Rouge had an anti-visual bias. Angkar is described as all seeing but invisible—a view that both the taste for secrecy the CPK leaders had inherited from the years spent in clandestine struggle and the limited printed legacy they left seem to confirm. Publications were reserved for the elite. For mass communication the Khmer Rouge preferably used radio speeches, songs, and performances.³⁷ Yet, while the CPK leaders never produced as much material as their counterparts in Vietnam or China, they were not afraid of images. Indeed, they engaged in visual production at an early stage. The first publishing structure they established was the Bureau of Information in Beijing in 1970. Its mission was to produce brochures and photos for the international

³⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2002), 170.

³⁷ Henri Locard, *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar* (Chiang-Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), 1-2. For a description and analysis of songs and performances, see: Toni Samantha Phim, “Anthropologies of the Khmer Rouge, Part I: Terror and Aesthetic,” working paper GS06 (Genocide Studies Program Seminar, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, September 16, 1998).

communication of the FUNK during the civil war.³⁸ The Bureau's materials featured in bulletins published by support groups abroad and were also displayed in exhibitions and public talks. Photos had an economic function too. Recycled as stickers, postcard sets, and posters for sale, they were a source of money for the Khmer Rouge.³⁹ Obviously, Vietnam and China were involved in this visual production. Isolated in remote bases, the Cambodian resistance forces could hardly afford to maintain propaganda teams. Nor could they store, develop, or edit films due to conditions in the jungle and the constant harassment by enemy troops and American bombardments. Therefore, the help of China, Vietnam, and possibly Laos in organizing shooting sessions and smuggling films and equipment in and out of the country was vital to the Khmer Rouge movement.⁴⁰

The Chinese were particularly active in the creation of Khmer Rouge propaganda. The journey of prince Sihanouk and his wife princess Monique in the liberated areas in February-March 1973 is a good example. The purpose of this major media operation was to deny rumors about cracks between the prince and his allies. Officially, the material came from the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces (CPNLAF). In reality Chinese cameramen covered the trip of the royal couple (figure 6).⁴¹ "Voir Angkor et mourir!" ("To see Angkor and die"), Sihanouk and Monique had said on the way to Cambodia.⁴² According to Henri Locard, they did not even reach the temples and the photos supposedly taken at Angkor Wat were probably retouched in Beijing.⁴³ American officials in Phnom Penh and Washington DC even doubted the royal couple had ever left China.⁴⁴ The Chinese shot several movies during the civil war. Y Phandara, a partisan of the FUNK-Khmer Rouge living in France at the time, recalls a screening organized for Cambodian students in August 1975 near Paris. The film showed the liberated zones before the victory of April 1975. "After seeing this movie, that spoke Khmer but had been made by the Chinese, many [students] thought about coming back home," he writes in his memoir.⁴⁵

³⁸ The Bureau, which had received the approval of Sun Hao, ambassador of China to Cambodia (and later on DK), was placed under the supervision of Thiounn Prasith. Suong Sikoeun acted as director and his wife Laurence Picq (a Frenchwoman) as secretary. Suong Sikoeun, *Itinéraire d'un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2013), 144-145.

³⁹ On the subject, see the letter of Poc Mona (GRUNK in Paris) to the Vriendschapsvereniging Nederland-Cambodja ("Netherlands-Cambodia Friendship Association") dated December 12, 1975. She thanks the association members for sending the money collected through the sale of visual materials (1,000 florins).

⁴⁰ Martin Haldane Rathie, personal communication to author, March 2015.

⁴¹ Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 97. See also: Éditions du FUNK, *Images du Retour Historique de Samdech Norodom Sihanouk au Cambodge*, 1973.

⁴² Norodom Sihanouk, *Prisonnier des Khmers Rouges* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), 71.

⁴³ Locard, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book*, 28.

⁴⁴ William Shawcross, *Sideshow. Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London: André Deutsch, 1979), 282. On the other side, the Indochina Support Committee (ISC) in London, which had organized a screening of the movie in June 1973, found preposterous the idea that the Chinese or North Vietnamese could have built "a mock movie set of the entire temple at Angkor Wat (...) complete with recent damage from B52s." "Cambodian Film," in *Indochina* 26 (July-August 1973), np.

⁴⁵ Y Phandara, *Retour à Phnom Penh: Le Cambodge du Génocide à la Colonisation* (Paris: Editions A.-M. Métailié, 1982), 35-36.

CAMBODGE :



MEETING
GRANDE SALLE DE LA
MUTUALITE
VENDREDI 1^{er} juin 20h30

avec la participation d'un
représentant du GRUNC
projection du film sur la visite de
SIHANOUK au CAMBODGE



A l'initiative de :
Centre d'Information sur la
Lutte Antiimpérialiste
(C.I.L.A.)

Avec le soutien de :
Mouvement National
de Soutien aux Peuples
d'Indochine (M.N.S.P.I.)

et de : Cause du Peuple
Humanité Rouge
Parti Socialiste Unifié
Prolétaire Ligne Rouge

LA LUTTE DE TOUT UN PEUPLE

Figure 6: Photos of Prince Sihanouk and Princess Monique's visit in the liberated zones. Poster advertising the screening of the movie in Paris (1973).

After the Khmer Rouge came to power, it was mostly Office B-1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) that dealt with this aspect of DK's public relations.⁴⁶ It maintained printing structures in Phnom Penh for the production of newspapers and pictorial magazines in foreign language.⁴⁷ Besides, the Ministry of Propaganda and Information released a number of publications and established a Photography and Cinematography section in the former Khmer-Soviet Technological School in Phnom Penh.⁴⁸ Of course the Chinese kept helping the Khmer Rouge run their propaganda machine. Possibly movies were edited in China since there were no facilities in Phnom Penh.⁴⁹ Young Cambodians were sent to Shanghai to learn photography and filmmaking. The CPK leaders also resorted at several occasions to the services of Westerners. These guests produced additional records about life in DK. Indeed the Khmer Rouge had grown so accustomed to outsiders giving a hand in propaganda making that throughout the eighties they continued bringing foreigners to jungle bases, refugee camps under their control, and combat zones.⁵⁰ The visitors were meant to document for the whole world the courageous struggle of the guerrillas against Vietnam and the "puppet regime" in Phnom Penh. In their publications for supporters abroad, the Khmer Rouge included the materials of these guests alongside their own pictures of battlefields and "liberated" areas.⁵¹ Until the last moment the Khmer Rouge used non-Cambodians for their visual communication with the international community. In July 1997 military commander Ta Mok invited Nate Thayer and David McKaige to videotape the mock trial of Pol Pot in Anlong Veng. The spectacle the two journalists were offered then proved that the Khmer Rouge were still able to put up a good performance for Westerners.⁵²

⁴⁶ The office was responsible among other things for translating in Khmer of foreign documents and press articles, and editing news and articles for the radio Voice of Kampuchea and the political journal *Tung Padevat*. Suong, *Itinéraire d'un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge*, 223; Laurence Picq, *Au-delà du Ciel. Cinq Ans chez les Khmers Rouges* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Barrault, 1984).

⁴⁷ Several printing houses were located near the Olympic Stadium. James Tyner, Samuel Henkin, Savina Sirik, and Sokvisal Kimsroy, "Phnom Penh during the Cambodian Genocide: A Case of Selective Urbicide," *Environment and Planning A* 46 (2014), 1884. Office K-27, an old printing house in Phnom Penh that contained an offset printer, was used for the printing of glossy magazines in French and English. Andrew Mertha, *Brothers in Arms. Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 44-45.

⁴⁸ Tyner et al., "Phnom Penh during the Cambodian Genocide," 1884.

⁴⁹ "'I Am Proud', Says Former S-21 Photographer about his Work," Testimony of Nhem En, ECCC, April 20, 2016.

⁵⁰ The bulletin of the Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique between 1979 and 1982 provides lists of guests of the Khmer Rouge every month (see Appendix D).

⁵¹ For example the brochure *The Growing Success of the Struggle against the Vietnamese War of Genocide* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the CGDK, 1983) includes pictures of Japanese photographer Tadao Mitome and writer Naoki Mabuchi. The latter toured with Khmer Rouge troops for ten weeks and collected about fifteen hours of videotape and several hundreds photos (*Bangkok Post*, June 26, 1983).

⁵² Thayer describes an open-air meeting hall where the crowd shouted slogans on cue, "their fists striking down toward the ground," in front of a diminished Pol Pot on the verge of tears. It evoked the "grainy film clips of China's Cultural Revolution," the journalist writes. Nate Thayer, "Pol Pot, I Presume," *Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 1997.

The issue of the Khmer Rouge's visual culture is often either evaded or assessed on a negative mode. Recently, geographer James Tyner and two colleague researchers of Kent University, United States, proposed an analysis of Khmer Rouge songs, and called for a further study of the cultural and aesthetic practices of the Pol Pot's regime.⁵³ Director of the DC-Cam Youk Chhang reacted, referring to his own experience in Takeo in 1975: "Rather than 'healing', as art often does (...), performing arts under the Khmer Rouge were used more as 'a torture device'."⁵⁴ This addresses the field of performing arts, an otherwise "recognized" cultural practice of the Khmer Rouge. But it is clear that the field of "visual arts" or simply the image is even more problematic, considering DK's systematic wipeout of cultural forms deemed feudal or westernized. Quoting the infamous slogan "Angkar has the eyes of the pineapple," art historian Ly Boreth argues that the "scopic regime" of the Khmer Rouge aimed to "blind" people, to "plunge them literally in the dark" so they would have no idea of the leadership's political agenda. In DK vision was "a mode of social control," he writes.⁵⁵ This translated among other things into the absence of personality cult at least for several years, the secrecy surrounding S-21, the killing of people out of sight (taken to "study" in Khmer Rouge newspeak), or the presence of spies hiding below houses during the night to listen to people's conversations.⁵⁶ The blackout was undeniably an integral part of Khmer Rouge's visual culture. Yet is it not possible to look at the "scopic regime" of DK in terms of creation rather than destruction?

The third chapter of the Four Year Plan (1976) provides some elements to answer this question. The section *Instruction of the People, Propaganda and Information* lists four principal means of mass education. Three of them involve images. The Plan underlines the importance of pictorial magazines, and orders more printing in foreign languages, especially English. In contrast, art is ascribed only a limited function: "Step-by-step (a little is enough) in order not to disturb the productive forces raising production."⁵⁷ The artists kept alive were spared for practical reasons. They were used to create portraits of Pol Pot in paintings and statues, made at a special art unit in S-21, or to paint signs, as happened to female artist Duong Saree, a former student at the Royal Academy of Fine

⁵³ James Tyner, Mark Rhodes, and Sokvisal Kimsroy. "Music, Nature, Power, and Place: An Ecomusicology of Khmer Rouge Songs," *GeoHumanities* (June 2016).

⁵⁴ Jack Davis, "Paper Calls for a Closer Study of Culture under Khmer Rouge Regime," *The Phnom Penh Post*, July 5, 2016.

⁵⁵ Ly Boreth, "Devastated Vision(s): The Khmer Rouge Scopic Regime in Cambodia," *Art Journal* 62, no. 1 (2003), 72. He borrows the notion from art historian Martin Jay's seminal text "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" (1988).

⁵⁶ Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua argue that the absence of cult of personality was not the outcome of collective decision-making but the result of disunity and internal conflict. As soon as the group of Pol Pot controlled the country in 1978, busts and statues began to be produced. Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea*, 234-235.

⁵⁷ The meeting for the Four Year Plan was held between July 21 and August 2, 1976. "The fields of culture, literature, art, technology, science, education of the people, propaganda, and information," in *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977*, David P. Chandler, Ben Kiernan, and Chanthou Boua, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), 113-115.

Arts in Phnom Penh who spent the DK years in the Preah Vihear province.⁵⁸ The Khmer Rouge had no wish to engage in any aesthetic experiment. Painting was not meant to create a new style, but produce recognizable images. Prisoner at S-21 Bou Meng recounts that once Comrade Duch gave him a photo of Pol Pot with the order to make a lifelike portrait. It took Bou Meng three months to complete the task:

After that, Duch ordered a photographer to take picture of the portrait. It was developed as small as the original photo of Pol Pot. Duch asked his bodyguards to identify which one was the real photo of Pol Pot and which was the picture I painted. They could not identify them and said the two pictures looked very similar. Duch was satisfied. He encouraged me to keep working.⁵⁹

The fourth means of mass instruction considered in the Plan is films. They must depict “the movement’s present and past, especially the present.”⁶⁰ The Khmer Rouge film footage that has been recovered shows agricultural and industrial achievements of the Angkar, meetings of the Party Center, and reenactments of battles of the civil war period. Recent testimonies at the ECCC bring more information about film production in DK. Testifying about movies shot at waterworks sites, a former Khmer Rouge cameraman explained to the Court that he was always careful about the background when he filmed. “We only shot good frames in order to attract the viewer,” he said. Would they have done otherwise, “it would have an impact on the nation.”⁶¹ And the cameramen would have been punished, as shows the example of Ang Saroeun. After filming exhausted children laboring in terrible conditions, he was arrested and killed at S-21.⁶² In the Plan the CPK leaders urge for the organization of “many groups to produce many films to show to the people in general.”⁶³ Film director Rithy Panh, a child at the time, remembers such

⁵⁸ Philip Smith, *The Spirit of Cambodia... A Tribute*, exhibition catalogue Providence College Hunt-Cavanaugh Gallery and Rhode Island Foundation (Providence, Rhode island: Providence College, 2002), 8. Quoted by Tara Tran, “The Art of Memory: Visions of Restoration in Khmer Art and Visual Culture Since the Genocide, 1979-2009” (master’s diss., Westmont College, United States, 2010), 46. See also: Ou Mom, “Women Artists to the Foreground,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, June 20, 2011.

⁵⁹ Bou Meng and Huy Vannak, *Bou Meng, a Survivor from Khmer Rouge Prison S-21: Justice for the Future Not Just for the Victims* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, Searching for the Truth, 2010), 44.

⁶⁰ Chandler, Kiernan, and Boua, *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 114.

⁶¹ Testimony of Nhem En, ECCC, April 20, 2016. Nhem En refers to movies shot at the January 1st dam, the January 6 dam, and the dam at Trapeang Thma. See also: The documentary movie *L’Oeil du Khmer Rouge* by journalist Carole Vann, Maria Nicollier, and Philippe Calame (2008) about former Khmer Rouge cameraman Thorn.

⁶² Ang Saroeun was accused of trying to give the footage to the CIA. The real reason behind his arrest was possibly a technical mistake he had made when recording a speech of Pol Pot. The footage came up with a kind of veil. He was arrested on July 16, 1976 (CBIO record ID B15255, Cambodian Genocide Program). Film director Rithy Panh likes to think that Ang Saroeun wanted to make workers in Phnom Penh aware of the ordeal in villages. Over the years he interviewed several former Khmer Rouge cameramen. One told him that he too had photographed people suffering from hunger but destroyed the negatives out of fear. Nicolas Bauche and Dominique Martinez, “Entretien avec Rithy Panh,” *Positif*, no. 632 (2013), 34.

⁶³ Chandler, Kiernan, and Boua, *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 114.

screenings: “Sometimes leaders gathered several villages and showed us a movie telling the struggle of the people with bare hands against the powerful colonizers” (figure 7).⁶⁴ As other returnees from abroad “re-educated” at the Boeng Trabek camp, Y Phandara too attended screenings. The films that were presented, he writes, “had never been shown in the countryside because they were so fake and untrue they would have aroused the anger of workers there.”⁶⁵ The emphasis of the CPK leaders on movies is typically a question of visual culture. Did it stem from their belief in the revolutionary efficacy of the filmic medium? Did it reflect in some twisted way their relation to Cambodian film production in the Golden Age (the sixties), including the romantic oeuvre of leader-cum-director Sihanouk? Was it a means for them to enact a form of revenge on the newsreels showing executions of “leftists” at the peak of the Sangkum government’s repression?⁶⁶

This situates the issue of the Khmer Rouge’s visual culture within the wider frame of interactions of local and external influences. Clearly, the participation of outsiders, especially the Chinese, in the making of Khmer Rouge propaganda left visual traces. Photos and films of DK are hybrid creations. Publications, for instance, combine pictures of Angkor Wat—a major national symbol of Cambodian modern political iconography until the present day—with images of industry, agriculture, and the army modeled after China, North Korea, and Vietnam’s iconography of war and revolution (themselves partly Soviet and socialist realism-inspired). The film of the CPK meeting at the Olympic Stadium in Phnom Penh (1977) conjures up images of First of May meetings in Moscow—a reference that the portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin hanging behind the CPK leaders at the podium make all the more obvious. At the same time, the movie also evokes the mass event organized by Sihanouk at the same spot in 1966 for the visit of French president Charles De Gaulle. Paradoxically, it is its very hybridity that places the Khmer Rouge’s visual culture in the continuity of Cambodian culture. As was the case in pre-colonial and colonial formations, culture reflects the interplay of internal and external influences. It links tradition and novelty, or for the Pol Pot’s regime tradition and a certain conception of revolution. In that respect, Khmer Rouge imagery expresses the complex position of the CPK leaders between modernity and attraction to the past. It also shows the connections of DK (not as isolated as it is often described) with multiple worlds, among which Third World solidarity, socialist brotherhood, and the Indochinese sphere. How this syncretic Asian Marxism-Leninism would have evolved visually and whether it would have emancipated as state or national aesthetic from the early “copycat” style that defines it in 1975-1978 are questions that cannot be answered. The return of the Khmer Rouge to jungle warfare signed the premature end of their attempt to build a new visual culture for Cambodia.

This overview shows that the Khmer Rouge, far from rejecting images, understood the power of the visual not only to “blind” but also to convince and remould people, and developed their practices accordingly. There is an enlightening story from the civil war period on that matter. In a bulletin published in February 1971 the Khmer Rouge claimed that tens of thousands of enlarged photos of resistance leaders had been distributed in Phnom Penh. The photos, which did not feature in the bulletin itself, were said to have

⁶⁴ *The Missing Picture*, sequence: 1:17:15-1:18:32.

⁶⁵ Y Phandara, *Retour à Phnom Penh*, 136.

⁶⁶ I thank Martin Haldane Rathie for drawing my attention on this point.

the power “to frighten the traitors in Phnom Penh.”⁶⁷ The leaders represented in the alleged pictures were FUNK’s Interior Minister Hou Yuon, deputy Prime Minister Khieu Samphan, and Minister of Information and Propaganda Hu Nim. The men were known as the “three ghosts.” For years they had been thought dead, executed by Sihanouk’s police. Their orchestrated re-appearance suggests that the Khmer Rouge knew well how to play with popular beliefs and a magical conception of photography (making ghosts visible) in parts of Cambodian society, while using it as a practical tool of political communication with supporters of the movement. More than this, the “outing” of the three ghosts through photography reveals a controlled approach to the visual. The “real” CPK leaders (Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, Son Sen) usually stayed in the margin, literally speaking. In group pictures they systematically stand on the side, leaving the front stage to figureheads (the three ghosts). Against this backdrop, it might be more productive to talk about the organized visibility of the Khmer Rouge rather than invisibility of the regime grounded in the supposed anti-visual bias of the leadership. This shift becomes decisive when defining the Khmer Rouge’s visual culture and understanding how the latter keeps structuring (or not) our perception of the Pol Pot’s regime and its crimes.

5. “Khmer Rouge visual culture” and the formation of cultural memory

I propose to take the notion of organized visibility a step further and see how it materializes in the formation of the cultural memory of Khmer Rouge atrocities. There are many conceptualizations of “cultural memory” in the academic field. In the frame of the dissertation I draw on the definition given by Jan Assmann, with a specific interest in the idea of “floating gap” between what he calls “communicative memory” and “cultural memory.”⁶⁸ In contrast to communicative memory that “lives in everyday interaction and communication and (...) has only a limited time depth of eighty years,” cultural memory comes in the form of “monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions.”⁶⁹ The floating gap defines quite accurately the current condition of Khmer Rouge memory. Although the DK era is by no means a distant past and still forms part of everyday communication for Cambodians, the process by which it is “exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms” and related to identity-building is underway. The shift to cultural memory implies a “different structure of participation” as

⁶⁷ Mission du Front Uni National du Kampuchéa, “Les Traîtres ont Peur Même des Photos,” *Bulletin d'Information* 58, 28 February 1971, 4-5. The photos also represented Hu Nim’s deputy Tiv Ol and deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Poc (Pok) Doeuskomar. In 1972 Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, and Hu Nim appeared in the chapter “The life and activities of the Khmer people in the liberated areas,” in *The armed struggle and life of the Khmer people in the liberated areas in pictures* (NUFC Press, 1972). They were photographed in modest offices as illustration of the ideal leader, effective, hardworking, leading a monastic life in the service of the people.

⁶⁸ Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds. (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2008). Assmann builds on Jan Vansina’s work *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) defining the “floating gap” as the gap between an informal generational memory referring to the recent past and the formal cultural memory that refers to the remote past, 112.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 111.

the past becomes the preserve of specialists who control the access to knowledge.⁷⁰ In a context of mass production and reproduction of images facilitated among other factors by digital media and tourism, these “specialized carriers of memory” have to struggle if they want to maintain their hold on artifacts and narratives. Jan Assmann does not see the dynamics of cultural memory only in terms of transition out of communicative memory. He also stresses the movement within cultural memory itself as forms transit from rear to front, periphery to center, and vice versa—or, as he says in reference to Aleida Assmann’s analysis of the phenomenon, from the “canon” to the “archive.”⁷¹ The canon, in the definition of Aleida Assmann, is “the past as present” and “actively circulated memory,” while the archive is “the past as past” and “passively stored memory.”⁷² I situate visual culture between these two poles. The idea of organized visibility, which emphasizes agency, shifts the discussion about the dynamics of cultural memory into the conditions in which images are selected, deselected, or reintroduced, and new hierarchies of uses and users established.

A striking feature in the formation of Khmer Rouge cultural memory is the centrality of the justice paradigm. The previous section discussed the impact of “genocide” on the public perception of terror in DK. Justice has also practical effects in terms of images in the sense it spawns archives. In the mid-nineties the prospect of international prosecution of Khmer Rouge leaders triggered a process of recovery and production of evidence linking the CPK leadership to acts of genocide. Those wanting to try the Khmer Rouge faced a “data vacuum” (in spite of the materials produced by the PRK).⁷³ The Cambodian Genocide Program (CGP) was founded by Ben Kiernan and Craig Etcheson at Yale University to collect documentation for the trial.⁷⁴ Within a few years of activity, the CGP and its field office in Phnom Penh the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) gathered an impressive amount of materials: “official Khmer Rouge correspondence, biographies of Party members and arrested persons, prisoner confessions, notebooks of Khmer Rouge cadres, photo of Party cadres, films, tape recordings, Party magazines, other publications, and maps of Democratic Kampuchea.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 114, 116.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 117-118.

⁷² Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds. (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2008), 98.

⁷³ Craig Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005), 54.

⁷⁴ The CGP was sponsored by the Yale Center for International and Area Studies, the Council on Southeast Asia Studies and the Orville H. Schell, Jr. Center for International Human Rights at the Yale Law School. The records collected in that frame were organized into bibliographic, biographic, photographic, and geographic databases (Cambodian Genocide Data Bases, CGDB). Copies of the documents were stored in several places in Cambodia and the United States. Ben Kiernan, “The Cambodian Genocide Program 1994-1997” (Yale University, 1997) and “The Cambodian Genocide Program 1997-1999” (Yale University, 1999); Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields*, 53-76; Helen Jarvis, “Mapping Cambodia’s ‘Killing Fields’,” in *Matériel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth Century Conflict*, John Schofield et al., eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Kenton J. Clymer, “Cambodia and the Cold War,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6-7 (Winter 1995-1996).

⁷⁵ Khmer Rouge History Database of the DC-Cam.

The collected records were organized into bibliographic, biographic, photographic, and geographic databases (Cambodian Genocide Data Bases, CGDB). Copies of the documents were stored in several places in Cambodia and the United States. The databases were made available first on CD-ROM, then via a website launched in January 1997. The CGP ended its activities in 2005 but the DC-Cam (independent since 1997) continued the mission, becoming in the process a prominent archive and research institution. Today it hosts over one million documents, photos, tapes, and movies. Around the same time, film directors Rithy Panh and Ieu Pannakar established the Bophana Center for Audiovisual Resources (thereafter Bophana Center) with the mission to collect and preserve Cambodia's cinematographic heritage, including DK footage as well as television news and documentary movies addressing the topic of the Khmer Rouge.

The historical archive, Aleida Assmann writes, is the “receptacle for documents that have fallen out of their framing institutions and can be reframed and interpreted in a new context.”⁷⁶ Unsurprisingly, specialists are concerned with the use of archive images in non-archival contexts. The artistic appropriation of the paintings of S-21 survivor Vann Nath is a good example of the problems arising in such a situation. In 1980 the Tuol Sleng museum authorities commissioned Vann Nath for a series of paintings depicting the suffering of S-21 prisoners to be displayed onsite (figure 8). These paintings achieved over time a status of central visual testimony of the DK period, presented at the Tribunal, photographed by museum visitors, posted on social media, and featuring in Rithy Panh's movies *Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy* and *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*. They recently acquired a new kind of public when American curator Carolyn Christov-Bagarkiev included one of them in the major international art event Documenta 13 in Kassel, Germany (2012). She had selected two Cambodian artists, Vandy Rattana and Pich Sopheap, and as her email correspondence with the latter demonstrates, she had difficulty conceiving how she could include too a work by Vann Nath in spite of her wish to do so. It is “not really ‘high art’,” she writes to Pich. Eventually, a compromise was reached, as Pich agreed to have in his own space of representation Vann Nath's painting *Interrogation at the Kandal Pagoda*.⁷⁷ In fact the picture was from his personal collection. He usually kept it tucked away in a house closet because it was too painful to watch it.⁷⁸ The display of the painting in such a context is disturbing in many ways. The work of Vann Nath, judged too “folkloric” for the highbrow Documenta environment, was instrumentalized as a bridge between Cambodian history and contemporary art practices. But even this role was not fully acknowledged as *Interrogation at the Kandal Pagoda* was presented only with a small explanation label that did certainly not reflect the magnitude of Khmer Rouge crimes. As a result, Cambodian history became a footnote in the context of a big art event that made human rights violations an exhibition theme.

⁷⁶ Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” 103.

⁷⁷ E-mail correspondence between Carolyn Christov-Bagarkiev and Pich Sopheap, reproduced in the Log Book of Documenta 13, quoted in Ashley Thompson, “Forgetting to Remember, Again: On Curatorial Practice and ‘Cambodian Art’ in the Wake of Genocide,” *diacritics* 41, no.2 (2013), 83.

⁷⁸ Gregory Galligan, “Woven into History,” *Art in America*, May 2013.



Figure 8: Painting of Vann Nath displayed at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Source: Flickr (CC)

The paintings of Vann Nath are among the representations of Khmer Rouge terror made during the PRK period that are still included in today's canon, unlike many others discarded for being too ideological or graphic. The transmission of the past to younger generations, however, is not only a question of what and how archive images should be preserved and used. It also implies afterimages created in the present. This implies defining appropriate themes, genres, and styles against the mass production of images from non-specialists. Justice, again, offers some frameworks for it. The establishment of the ECCC and the trials of Duch and senior Khmer Rouge opened up a new phase of visualization. The Tribunal itself generates a whole new range of materials, including recordings of hearings, tribunal monitor blogs, and television programs. It is also at the origin of documentary movies, memoirs, books, memorials, exhibitions, performances, some of which are directly connected to the ECCC as outreach activities. Transitional justice in Cambodia shows the complexity of interactions between state- and institution-sanctioned projects and initiatives coming from the civil society, communities, and individuals far beyond the opposition between Khmer and foreign. Obviously, some projects developed as outreach activities of the Tribunal are seen as top-down Westernized formats imposed on an unwilling and unconvinced audience. At the same time, as debatable as these transnational processes might be, they contribute to the diffusion of large-scale paradigm shifts promoting new subject positions and approaches to the past. Long-ignored stories of specific victim groups such as women or homosexuals, and the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in DK (an attention motivated in part by the genocide indictment at the Tribunal) are finally given

attention.⁷⁹ Perpetrators feature in several documentary films and photo projects that give the floor to the “small fish” and depict grey zones of perpetratorship and victimhood.⁸⁰ As well, a small but rising number of Western figures appear in this new configuration of cultural memory, some as supporters of DK, but others as victims of the Khmer Rouge. This was, for instance, the case of New Zealander Kerry Hamill, one of the eight Westerners killed at S-21, whose brother Rob participated in the trial of Duch as civil party.⁸¹ This strong symbol of shared fate might create a new perception of the role of Westerners in the events.

Justice provides an ethical framework for visual production, focused on accountability, reconciliation, and healing. Materials are created and disseminated with clear objectives. Things are different when these materials are produced in environments more loosely related to justice. Art, once again, is a good example. Ly Daravuth and Ingrid Muan—founders of Reyum, the first art center opened in post-UNTAC Cambodia—experienced it in 1999, when the American non-profit organization Legacy Project contacted them with the idea to organize an art exhibition about the Khmer Rouge period.⁸² Ly and Muan were reluctant to engage in such a project. They had to commission artworks since there was nothing available in Cambodia at the time with the exception of the paintings of Vann Nath.⁸³ The “painting on demand” dimension of the

⁷⁹ In 2004 the DC-Cam initiated a five-year oral history program for collecting testimonies of Cham survivors (Muslim Cambodians) and published books on the subject: *Cham Rebellion* by Ysa Osman in 2007, and *The Hijab of Cambodia* by Farina So in 2011. Osman had previously authored *Justice for the Cham Muslims under the Democratic Kampuchea Regime* (2002).

⁸⁰ Among which: Rithy Panh’s *S-21 The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003) and *Duch, the Master of the Forges of Hell* (2011); Thet Sambath and Rob Lemkin’s *Enemies of the People* (2009); Jan van den Berg’s *Deacon of Death: Looking for Justice in Today’s Cambodia* (2004); Jan Krogsgaard and Thomas Weber Carlsen’s *Voices of Khmer Rouge* (2010); David Aronowitsch and Staffan Lindberg’s *Facing Genocide: Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan* (2010); Daniel Welschenbach and Timothy Williams’s *Entering the Tiger Zone: How Normal People Became Khmer Rouge* (photo exhibition presented at the University of Marburg, Germany in May 2015).

⁸¹ The other Westerners jailed at S-21 were from Australia, England, France, and the United States. Two books deal with the subject: David Kattenburg’s *Foxy Lady: Truth, Memory and the Death of Western Yachtsmen in Democratic Kampuchea* (2011) and Peter Maguire and Mike Ritter’s *Thai Stick: Surfers, Scammers and the Untold Story of the Marijuana Trade* (2013). The participation of Rob Hamill in the trial of Duch is documented in Anne Goldson’s movie *Brother Number One* (2011). See also: Mark Orton, “Story of Salvation,” *Otago Daily Times*, March 1, 2012.

⁸² The goal of the Legacy Project was to “channel for mutual recognition across generations and geography,” and to create “new and shared frameworks for cultural expressions of loss.” Website “Legacy Project.” The idea came to the organization’s founder Clifford Chanin during his ten-year tenure as associate director of Arts and Humanities at the Rockefeller Foundation. “The recurrence of historical memory” in the works he had seen had raised for him “a number of questions about how various expressions of remembrance might be brought into dialogue.” Clifford Chanin, e-mail sent to the H-Holocaust mailing list, August 24, 2001.

⁸³ Thompson, “Forgetting to Remember, Again,” 83. Ly and Muan managed to gather a group of artists, all survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime: Vann Nath, Nghet Sim, Svay Ken, Saren Tum, Phy Chan Than, Soeung Vannara, Lim Muy Theam, and Ly Daravuth himself. The curators added Jan Montyn, a Dutch artist who had a long shared history with Cambodia. The outcome

project unsettled Ly and Muan. It left no space to reflect about the absence of representation of Khmer Rouge crimes in Cambodia, to find a way to deal with this “heritage.”⁸⁴ Indeed, as Ly and Muan had feared it, *The Legacy of Absence* opened “the floodgates to representation of the Khmer Rouge period by Cambodian artists in Cambodia.”⁸⁵ It seems logical that Cambodian artists, survivors and second generation alike, finally tackled the lack of representation of Khmer Rouge atrocities in Cambodian art. Yet, the country’s particular situation—as both post-colony and a state in the clutches of neo-colonialism—explains why some artworks and projects were viewed as an opportunistic take on Cambodia’s tragic past tailored for different categories of foreign consumption rather than thoughtful attempts to visualize the DK period and its long-term impact.

As she elaborates further on the “massive importation of politico-cultural constructs associating memory-building, mourning, healing, justice, democracy and freedom” in Cambodia in the 2000s, Thompson questions the interaction of these constructs and local or grassroots models.⁸⁶ In the post-UNTAC context the debate about what it means to be “Khmer” in terms of identity, nationality, and citizenship gained a new significance. Following the dramatic transition experienced by the country in a short period of time the dependence of Cambodia on exterior financial aids and the installation of a high number of international NGOs created a volatile environment for this discussion. The return of refugees and exiles was an even more determining factor. In that sense, the debate was perhaps not so much about what is being “Khmer” as what is being “foreign.”⁸⁷ The repatriation of refugees from the Thai-Cambodian border camps generated strong tensions in regions of resettlement. But it was perhaps the “coming home” of bi-cultural Cambodians from the United States, France, Canada, and Australia that proved more difficult to absorb for the local population. They understood the events and the aftermath differently, and this was reflected in their visual production. Anxiety over the DK period becoming less of a “Cambodian story” might have abated over the years but it can be reactivated any time. In that respect, it will be interesting to see what happens with the adaptation of Cambodian-American human rights activist Loung Ung’s memoir *First They Killed my Father* (2000) by American movie superstar Angelina Jolie to be released in 2016 (figure 9).⁸⁸ “It [the movie] will be made for and with Cambodians,” Jolie said

was the exhibition *The Legacy of Absence: A Cambodian Story*, which opened in January 2000 at Reyum.

⁸⁴ Ly Daravuth, quoted in Sara Stephens, “The Legacy of Absence: Cambodian artists confront the past,” *Persimmon*, Summer 2000, *Persimmon*, Summer 2000.

⁸⁵ Thompson, “Forgetting to Remember, Again,” 86.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 87.

⁸⁷ As Kathryn Poethig explains it, the debate was clearly, and perhaps first and foremost, a political one, with Prime Minister Hun Sen retaliating on members of the National Assembly and key ministries (Funcinpec) who were dual citizens. They were depicted as forming a fifth column in Cambodia in the pay of diaspora and foreign interests. Kathryn Poethig, “Sitting Between Two Chairs: Cambodia’s Dual Citizenship Debate” in *Expressions of Cambodia: The Politics of Tradition, Identity, and Change*, eds. Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier and Tim Winter (New York: Routledge, 2006), 73-78.

⁸⁸ The film was commissioned by the provider of on-demand Internet streaming Netflix in 2015 and will be released in the course of 2016. Amar Toor, “Angelina Jolie is Directing a Netflix Movie about the Khmer Rouge,” *The Verge*, July 24, 2015; “Angelina Jolie to Direct Film for

(she works indeed with Bophana Center as co-producer, local artists, and thousand extras).⁸⁹ How controversies about the book itself will add to aspects of the shooting in Cambodia coming under fire will say whether Jolie's claim is more than rhetoric precaution.⁹⁰ Of course, "specialists" are not always Cambodians. Conflicts arise in the same way if the "structure of participation" is defined in professional or political terms rather than ethnic, communal, or national ones. In the case of Cambodia, the difficulties inherent in the floating gap are exacerbated by the transitional period the country has been going through. Against this backdrop it might be tempting to call the "Khmer Rouge cultural memory" in the making "transitional cultural memory," not only because of its obvious relation to the ECCC and the judicial context but also because it is shaped by the transformation of Cambodian society, political life, and economy. The question, thus, is what kind of theoretical framework makes it possible to approach this formation, link it to the visual culture of the Pol Pot's regime itself, and trace the organized visibility of Khmer Rouge atrocities across the different phases.

6. Theoretical frameworks of the dissertation

6.1 A field under construction

The analysis of the Khmer Rouge movement and the DK period was for a long time the preserve of Khmer/Cambodian studies with a focus on political science, history, and anthropology. However, the past years brought concurrently with the formation of cultural memory a cross-fertilization of disciplines, engaging fields as diverse as law and transitional justice, migration and diaspora studies, Holocaust and Genocide studies, film and media studies, and of course memory studies. What is the place of the visual in this process? Are images of Khmer Rouge atrocities looked at differently in this broadened context of analysis? Does images studies manage to carve out its own space in this new configuration—and if yes in what ways? Of course, "image studies" is a catchall term, as vague or over-defined as "visual culture." It suggests a wide range of concepts and perspectives, considering in turn the image itself, its creator, the public, techniques, content, aesthetics, discourses, and practices. Within this extended field, the more restricted area of atrocity images presents the same diversity of approaches. How we regard the pain of others, as Susan Sontag famously wrote, has been explored in post-Holocaust culture (Didi-Hubermann 2003, Baer 2004, Crane 2008, Guerin 2012, Hirsch 2012, Milton 1986, Struk 2005, Zelizer 2000), art history and visual culture (Apel 2012,

Netflix," *CNN Money*, July 24, 2015; "Angelina Jolie to Direct Cambodia Film for Netflix," *BBC News*, July 24, 2015.

⁸⁹ Will Jackson, "Jolie Pitt Prepares for Film Adaptation of KR-Era Memoir," *The Phnom Penh Post*, July 29, 2015.

⁹⁰ On Loung Ung's book, see: Tuong Bunkong, "Inaccuracy and Testimonial Literature: The Case of Loung Ung's *First They Killed my Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*," *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 38, no. 3 (2013). On Jolie's movie, see the (rather spiteful) posts exchanged on the thread "Fake Humanitarian Angelina Jolie Is so Cheap, She Is Only Paying Cambodian Extras \$25 a Day for her Netflix Vanity Piece" on Female First Forum, February 16-20, 2016.

Di Pia and Elkins 2013, Bennett 2005, Eisenman 2007, Guerin and Hallas 2007), photojournalism and humanitarian imagery (Zelizer 2010, Taylor 1998, Torchin 2012, Linfield 2010, Sliwinski 2011), cultural anthropology and postcolonial studies (Edwards and Morton 2009, Hight and Sampson 2002, Peterson and Pinney 2003). All these discussions point to a common set of issues: the shattering effect of trauma on the very idea of representation; the function of the image as informing and calling for ethical responsibility through mobilization and critical knowledge; the re-victimization and exploitation of those depicted in the images; the fascination exerted by perpetrator aesthetics and its potential appeal to violence and sadism; pornography and voyeurism; empathy and identification; the vicarious traumatization or alternatively the desensitization of spectators; appropriateness of the representation (in terms of beauty, pleasure, taste, and narrative closure); the materiality of the image and the embodied experience it produces; the emergence of hierarchies and dichotomies within the visual itself (such as figurative versus abstract, documentary versus imaginary).

How did these debates penetrate academic inquiries into images of Khmer Rouge atrocities? For years, the discussion about the subject was part of a broader investigation of forms of memory in Cambodia. Originating in the field of anthropology, the discussion focused primarily on the relation of memorialization and Buddhist, traditional representations of death (Ledgerwood, Mortland and Ebihara 1994, Thompson 2004 and 2005), the impact of the French colonial period on local perceptions of culture and history (Edwards 2007, Muan 2000), the postcolonial and/or neocolonial dimension of memory making in contemporary performing and visual arts (Chau-Pech Ollier and Winter 2006, Thompson 2010 and 2013). The “popularization” of Khmer Rouge memory in widening geographic, cultural, and academic circles contributed to a double movement of internationalization and diversification of approaches. The role of art historians and cultural theorists from the Khmer Diaspora in the process must be underlined (Ly 2003 and 2008, Phay-Vakalis 2010, Schlund-Vials 2012, Um 2015). The transformation was remarkably quick, as the comparison with previous attempts to tackle the issue might demonstrate. In 2005 French historians Ariane Mathieu and Jean-Louis Margolin tried, separately, to reflect on the images of Khmer Rouge atrocities available to researchers.⁹¹ Their respective corpuses, overlapping partially, give a good indication of the canon and the archive at the time. They include DC-Cam archive materials with a focus on photos of S-21 prisoners, international press photos from the civil war to the post-UNTAC period, movies such as Roland Joffé’s *The Killing Fields* (1984) and Rithy Panh’s *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003). Both Mathieu and Margolin emphasize what is *not* available in such a way that it makes “visible” or “present” the absent documentation of terror in DK. In that sense, what they document is less the visualization of Khmer Rouge crimes themselves than the difficulty they both experienced collecting visual materials.

Ten years later collecting sources remains an uneasy task due to the dispersion and disappearance of materials. Yet, it is evident that the conditions of research changed dramatically since Mathieu and Margolin published their work. The massive amount of

⁹¹ Ariane Mathieu, “Images, Représentations, Histoire: La Tragédie Cambodgienne des Années Soixante-Dix” (Université de Paris X-Nanterre, France, 2005); Jean-Louis Margolin, “Révéler/Cacher: Images et non-Images du Génocide Cambodgien,” in *Le Temps des Médias* 2, no.5 (2005).

images circulated on the Internet and the remediation of visual materials in all kinds of contexts transformed the landscape considerably. New topics of research appeared in the process. Tuol Sleng, this landmark of Khmer Rouge memory, is at the heart of many new studies, among which archive scholar Michelle Caswell's exploration of the museum's archival records, the analysis of the representation of the site in social media (Benzaquen 2014), and the current research projects of anthropologist Anne-Laure Porée on daily life in S-21 and cultural theorist Vicente Sánchez Biosca on the migration of films and photos of Tuol Sleng across media, borders, and political systems. Other themes of research, some more "established," some only emerging include: the cinema of Rithy Panh (Hamilton 2013a and 2013b, Lim 2013, Norindr 2010, Rachlin 2011, Torchin 2014, Tsang 2013); the depiction of transitional justice in Cambodia and "China's exportation of propaganda techniques to Cambodia via Norodom Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge" (Michael Mascuch, 2011-ongoing), the complex relation of contemporary visual arts with the representation of Cambodia's traumatic past (Roger Nelson 2012 and 2014, Linda Saphan's ongoing exhibition projects).⁹² This is only a short list, but it makes it clear that the very idea of "Khmer Rouge visual culture" is gaining ground. While this genealogy briefly described here shapes my understanding of images of Khmer Rouge atrocities to a great extent and will often be referred to in the course of the dissertation, the field it sketches is still too much under construction to provide unifying frameworks of analysis. As a consequence, the dissertation goes back and forth between on the one hand the specific demands posed by the Cambodian context, on the other hand a generalist approach to the visual with a focus on the constructedness and performative dimension of the image. The theoretical frameworks I use for this purpose come neither from visual culture (or image studies) nor from Cambodian/Khmer studies. They are derived from cultural anthropology and function as mediating concepts that allow me to navigate between these two poles or disciplinary areas.

6.2 "Sedimentation" and "trauma aesthetic"

At first sight nothing seems more opposed than Cambodia's current neoliberal regime and the socialist dictatorship of the PRK in the eighties, or than the human rights-oriented agenda of the international community today and the Realpolitik of the Cold War period. But is the divide between these periods so clear-cut? Has ideology been left behind now that we see the world as multipolar? Does it resurface in a new guise? Are those involved different actors or the same actors with different roles? Do they tell different stories or the same stories with new focal points? The visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities is an ongoing process from the mid-seventies onward. But how should it be seen when the question of the "visual construction of the social" is so deeply entangled with that of the politics of representation? Is it a continuum or a series of political, epistemological, and moral ruptures? The theoretical framework to which I resort in the dissertation is based on two notions that make it possible to conceive of these opposite interpretations as a dynamic. The first notion, "sedimentation," comes from the book *The Empire of Trauma* (2009) in which French anthropologists Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman discuss the

⁹² On the research of Michael Mascuch, see: David Holmberg, "Getting the Picture," *California* (Summer 2012), and Mascuch's webpage on the website of the University of California, Berkeley.

history of trauma as social and psychological formation. The second notion, “trauma aesthetic,” was coined by American cultural anthropologist Allen Feldman in “Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing and the Trauma-Aesthetic” (2004). Strictly speaking, these are not visual concepts in that they do not deal with images in a direct or exclusive way but with representations in general. Nevertheless, they allow me to bring out a structure in which the visualization of Khmer Rouge crimes might be addressed in time and space.

The Empire of Trauma proposes a “constructionist” rather than “essentialist” approach to trauma as a “system of knowledge and values” in contemporary societies. Against the naturalized conception of trauma as “a psychic given inscribed in the unconscious,” Fassin and Rechtman examine the notion at the interplay of psychology/psychiatry and social movements.⁹³ They see the emergence of politics of reparation, proof, testimony, and confession as constitutive of the redefinition of trauma as a universalizing category for thinking stories of violence and suffering. Rechtman was already mentioned several times in the course of the introduction. As psychiatrist and anthropologist, he has a long-term involvement in Cambodia. In 1990 he opened psychiatric counselling sessions for Cambodian refugees at the mental health center Philippe Paumelle in Paris. He travels regularly to Cambodia, participates in local memory projects (such as the series of workshops *Cambodge L’Atelier de la Mémoire* organized by French-Cambodian art historian Soko Phay-Vakalis at Bophana Center in 2009), writes about the DK period and its long-lasting effects, and supervises doctoral researches on these topics.

Although Cambodia is not a case study included in *The Empire of Trauma*, the time frame chosen by Fassin and Rechtman is directly linked to the history of the country. The two researchers connect the emergence of trauma (as a redefined category) to the Second Indochina War (or Vietnam War) and the inclusion of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. This, in their view, opens up a new era, when trauma is no longer considered as a neurosis and potentially a fraud, but as “a normal response to an abnormal situation.”⁹⁴ Fassin and Rechtman underline the social history in which this transformation took place, emphasizing the role of Vietnam veterans in the process. What they point out is a change in the discourse used to denounce the horrors of the war, and the new distribution of roles that it spawns.⁹⁵ A few decades ago, people focused on violence rather than trauma when they spoke about conflicts, especially those taking place in a postcolonial and anti-imperialist context:

The talk was of the resistance of fighters rather than the resilience of patients. Those who were being defended were always oppressed, often heroes, never victims. The focus was on understanding not the experience of people suffering, but the nature of social movements. No one thought in terms of psychological care, they campaigned for national liberation movements.⁹⁶

⁹³ Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 77, 86.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 92.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 160.

Now that left-wing militants active in the sixties and seventies are no longer involved, or at least not in the same way, terms such as “national liberation” and “freedom fighters” disappear. The realities themselves do not change, but the words and concepts used to represent them do. Fassin and Rechtman describe this process as “a phenomenon of ideological sedimentation, where one layer is deposited on top of the preceding one, without completely obliterating it. The old language may re-emerge, or fusions may occur.”⁹⁷ The “Mystic Writing Pad” of Freud (1925) and the analogy the psychoanalyst draws between this marketized device and memory processes come to mind:

The permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights. Thus the Pad provides not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also permanent traces of what has been written, like an ordinary paper pad.⁹⁸

As the words expressing realities change, so do the ways we depict and look at these realities. Yet, seen within the framework of “sedimentation,” the visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities becomes a palimpsest-like process, the same images being re-written over and over again, and new ones being superimposed on them without fully erasing their predecessors. Addressing “Khmer Rouge visual culture” as a layering of old and new strata of images makes it possible to go out of the strict opposition of the Cold War and the post-Cold War period since it reinscribes visualization into continuity. There is no brutal rupture (although things might sometimes take this form) but shifts and alterations through which earlier formations keep manifesting themselves in the present. As a historicizing tool, the notion of sedimentation offers a different perspective on the relation between the canon and the archive, and the structures of participation characterizing each phase of memorialization. The history of trauma is “above all a history of hierarchy and inequality,” Fassin and Rechtman argue, since “the way in which one’s suffering is viewed will depend on their status of their social usefulness.”⁹⁹ Visual practices, with their built-in discrimination in terms of access to images and self-representation, claims over ownership and interpretation, appropriateness of genres and mediums, reflect and even participate in the creation and perpetuation of hierarchies and inequalities. Therefore, their history is a good way to understand how the “social usefulness” of Cambodians is viewed internationally over decades. Conceived of within the framework of sedimentation, transnational dynamics are no longer seen as a condition emerging out of today’s global, interconnected, and mobile world, but as a set of relations grounded in older networks of communication, and as such having a history.

The second notion used in the dissertation is “trauma aesthetic.” It was coined by American cultural anthropologist Allen Feldman in the paper “Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing and the Trauma-Aesthetic,” which examines the transnational circulation of

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Sigmund Freud, “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’,” in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 215. I thank Tjebbe van Tijen for pointing to this connection.

⁹⁹ Fassin and Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma*, 30.

the proceedings of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2004).¹⁰⁰ Feldman's inquiry into the representation of violence began with his research in Northern Ireland.¹⁰¹ His latest book *Archives of the Insensible* (2015) reformulates his ongoing analysis of the phenomenon in terms of "photopolitics," the practices by which powers manifest themselves globally in the context of war and terror.¹⁰² "Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing and the Trauma-Aesthetic" is central to Feldman's research because it articulates the transition from a situated analysis to a transnational perspective. It explores the transformation of a local event into a universalized one, and the consequences of such a scale-change in terms of representation and historiography.

The first thing Feldman emphasizes is "emplotment," a notion he draws from the work of historian Hayden White and philosopher Paul Ricoeur. To be consumed universally, the local event must follow the "prescriptive plotting in human rights," which turn experiences of terror and suffering into "episodes scheduled for an eventual overcoming through redemptive survival, recovery, and restorative justice."¹⁰³ Feldman calls this emplotment "trauma aesthetic," and defines it as focusing on the individual, pain, the body, witnessing and testimony, and the figures of the victim and the perpetrator.¹⁰⁴ It produces "popularized and generic" cultural forms that are legible across borders as commodity-memory. As such, it transforms the original event by extracting it "from the particular and from the opaque materiality of state, ethnicized, gendered or racialized terror" that explains it.¹⁰⁵ Like Fassin and Rechtman, Feldman is concerned with the hierarchies generated in the process. While he stresses the positive effects of the new subject positions and social categories born out of trauma aesthetic, he also warns about the distorting impact of such an emplotment on historiography. In tune with the critiques expressed at the time (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003, Kansteiner 2004, Klein 2000), he voices his skepticism vis-à-vis the use of a "medicalized, psychoanalytic, therapeutic or aesthetic concept" as a tool of historical inquiry.¹⁰⁶

Trauma aesthetic is often advanced from the outside, Feldman argues, and based on linearity, which usually leads, narratively speaking, to a "cathartic break" with the past.¹⁰⁷ In that respect, it implements a "normative and moralizing periodization built into the post-violent depiction of violence," which has little to do with history.¹⁰⁸ Against it, the cultural anthropologist proposes to search for the "residual historical fragments" that are not easily integrated into these new master narratives and to reconstruct on their basis a

¹⁰⁰ Allen Feldman, "Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing and the Trauma-Aesthetic," *Biography* 27, no. 1(2004), 184.

¹⁰¹ Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narratives of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

¹⁰² Allen Feldman, *Archives of the Insensible: Of War, Photopolitics, and Dead Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015). He defines the photo-political as "a neologism of the Greek *phos* and *politea* that implies a political economy of *phos* and *aphos*, apparition and dis-apparition, for within this economy non-light (*aphos*) is as much a constitutive practice of power and privation as is light," 7.

¹⁰³ Feldman, "Memory Theaters," 165.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 191-192.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 191, 165.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 185.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 170.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 164.

more critical picture of the event.¹⁰⁹ What is at stake is the recovery of the “effaced ground.” The last term refers to the “historicized and transnational complicities” involved in the local episode of violence, and which remain concealed thanks to the use of trauma aesthetic. The effaced ground prevents people from fully understanding “the political and cultural logic” of the violence unleashed.¹¹⁰ In this context Feldman raises the issue of structural violence (beyond the isolated event of terror), and links the effaced ground to a colonial/postcolonial setting, with a special responsibility of the West. Through “performance and iconography,” trauma aesthetic makes it possible for transnational actors to create a polarizing view of the world, where “disorderly political matter and spaces of death” are clearly separated from “supposedly civil terrains of order, discourse, and rationality” in time and space.¹¹¹

“Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing and the Trauma-Aesthetic” provides a set of ideas for the analysis of the visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities. The human rights-related emplotment described by Feldman totally applies to the situation of transitional justice in Cambodia, and the narratives the Tribunal tries to convey through different platforms. At the same time, the “cathartic break” with the past is a model promoted by all successive political regimes in Cambodia, starting with DK. This might be an indication to look at the past of trauma aesthetic in Cambodia as a plot running across layers of memorialization and to use it as a thread organizing the inquiry into the sedimentation of images of Khmer Rouge crimes. The colonial/postcolonial dimension underlined by Feldman is of course essential when it comes to Cambodia. However, the fact that China and Vietnam were deeply involved in the events, and colonization and postcolonial have more than one interpretation in this context should not be overlooked. Altogether, “sedimentation” and “trauma aesthetic” make it possible to take the visualization of the DK terror (as traumatic historical event) out of the deadlock of invisibility and non-representability, and instead to focus on the way Khmer Rouge atrocities have been rendered visible over a period of forty years. By favoring over rupture an idea of continuity through shifts, fusions, and transformations, the two notions help rethink the effect of the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War on such imagery. Transnational networks, structures of participation, and identities of specialists might be understood then as historical formations in which the “old” survives and can be traced back. This turns the “effaced ground” into something that might be excavated and exposed as a reflection of the violence of memory politics. Although they are not visual concepts, “sedimentation” and “trauma aesthetic” create a framework by which the dissertation might provide not only a history of Khmer Rouge memory through images, but also a history of visualization itself.

7. Sources, methods, and organization of the dissertation

7.1 Multi-sited fieldwork

The dissertation looks at visual materials produced between 1970 and 2015: photos, paintings, drawings, documentary movies, exhibitions, memorial sculptures, graphic

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 165.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 197, 169.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 197.

novels, and social media. This array of artifacts was collected and analyzed through “multi-sited fieldwork.” American anthropologist George E. Marcus defines it as “tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity” that may be territorial, social, or cultural entities.¹¹² The transnational dimension of the study implies, literally speaking, several physical locations of research beyond Cambodia. Khmer Rouge-related materials are scattered across countries. Documents disappeared over the years, destroyed by the Khmer Rouge and during the post-1979 civil war, confiscated by governments, stolen by individuals, or victim of neglect during transitional periods.¹¹³ The same goes for records made by foreigners in Cambodia. Some documents are consultable as public sources at archive centers in different countries but part of the material is not even referenced. The people involved at the time often keep their documentation private either because they do not wish to reveal their past political sympathies (especially for former friends of the Pol Pot’s regime) or they never had the opportunity to show their pictures, and somehow forgot about them.¹¹⁴ Records happen to resurface when private archives are donated to institutions after the owner’s death, or in the course of a conversation with eyewitnesses. Still, what is available today is only a fraction of the existing documentation.

The body of images examined in the empirical chapters was elaborated through archive research and documentation process in the Netherlands (International Institute of Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam) and in Cambodia at the occasion of two fieldwork periods (2011 and 2014). The archives institutions consulted in Cambodia are Bophana Center, the DC-Cam, and the National Archives of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, and the Center for Khmer Studies in Siem Reap. The art center Phare Ponleu Selpak in Battambang provided further material for the dissertation. I have to underline obvious limitations due to the extended scope of the study and the impossibility to conduct onsite research in all the institutions concerned. While the Internet facilitates communication across borders, it does not make access to state, party, or museum archives easier. “Following the thing,” as multi-sited ethnography suggests it, proves at times difficult. Projects organized twenty years ago are not always well documented. When there is documentation, it might be shelved in storage rooms, not scanned, then unavailable from afar. Interruptions in recording and lack of continuity are major problems for the researcher. This becomes a structural issue in Cambodia due to the tragic history of the country and the extent of destruction it suffered. Understandably in these conditions reconstruction overrides preservation. For years—as things were being rebuilt from scratch—local institutions received financial and technical help from the international

¹¹² George E. Marcus, “Ethnography in/of the World-System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 96, 108. See: James Clifford and George E. Marcus. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Simon Coleman and Pauline von Hellermann, *Multi-sited Ethnography: Problems and Possibilities in the Translocation of Research Methods* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Marc-Anthony Falzon, *Multi-sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis, and Locality in Contemporary Research* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

¹¹³ Etchenson, *After the Killing Fields*, 65.

¹¹⁴ It was the case of cameraman Charlet Recors, sound recordist Olivier Schwob, and journalist Willy van Damme who have never showed their personal documentation of travels in the PRK in the period 1979-1983. Personal communications to author.

community. However, in the present context of generalized economic crisis and shifts in diplomatic interest, foreign donors progressively withdraw from Cambodia, thereby forcing these institutions into an autonomy they can hardly afford. This has direct consequences. Outdated systems and equipment, absence of experts (often replaced with voluntary workers, interns, and fellowship students) explain much of the disruption in the preservation and classification of documents. The high turnover of staff may become a hindrance when one researches projects that were not documented in a consistent way. The people who were associated with these projects do no longer work for the institution and in spite of the help of the local staff they cannot be located easily.

In this particular context of research, multi-sited fieldwork opens up new possibilities for collecting and even interpreting data. American anthropologist Hugh Gusterson calls it “polymorphous engagements,” a response to increasingly challenged conventional field models. Researchers interact “with informants across a number of dispersed sites, not just in local communities, and sometimes in virtual form.”¹¹⁵ Digital media become thus a valuable source of information. Online discussions and forums, websites and blogs, databases, newspapers articles that are no longer available in the “real” world, Facebook accounts, LinkedIn pages, postings on YouTube and Flickr, tweets, crowd-funding webpages help counterbalance gaps in physical documentation. They reveal unknown connections, forgotten stories, interactions between different actors, persistence of debates in old and new forms, public and private statements. As well, interviews provide a substantial part of my documentation. I interviewed twenty-five people living in Cambodia, Europe, United States, and Australia (see list of interviewed people in the bibliography). Some interviews took place during face-to-face encounters and were audio-recorded. Others were conducted through Skype, phone conversations, and email correspondence. I did not have a strictly fixed model of interview since questions usually covered a variety of topics. When several interviews concerned a similar subject (as was the case with visits in DK in 1978 or the founding of the art school Phare), I asked the protagonists the same set of basic questions. I let them elaborate freely, considering that the process of recollecting thirty years or so after the events cannot be guided in any productive way. In some cases, when the information was of controversial or delicate nature, the interviewees (or informers) did not want to be named and demanded that I retain information about their location and/or professional status. Interviews with curators were more defined as my questions dealt with the origin and development of the project, the interaction with the people involved in the project, the display of images and information, the organization of associated activities, and the reaction of the public.

7.2 Chapters and sources

The dissertation includes five empirical chapters.

Chapter 2 looks at the photographic records made by Western visitors in DK. The first section introduces the international friendship network of the Khmer Rouge in the seventies and the travels of delegations in Cambodia throughout 1978 as a result of the “open-up” policy of the CPK leadership. Building on the literature about fellow travelers in communist countries and reports of the visitors in Cambodia, the second section

¹¹⁵ Hugh Gusterson, “Studying Up Revisited,” *PoLAR* 20, no.1 (1997), 116.

reconstructs and analyzes the structure of the Khmer Rouge guided tour. The third section examines the visual records of the visitors, the relation of these documents to Khmer Rouge propaganda materials, and the way images materialize the co-creation of an ideal Kampuchea for outsider consumption. The last section of the chapter discusses two recent public presentations in Cambodia of these visual records: the photos of the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association in the book and exhibition *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (2008) and the photos of American journalist Elizabeth Becker in the exhibition *A Reporter's Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* (2012).

The study of DK imagery is based on primary sources, mostly Khmer Rouge movies and illustrated publications in French and English (see bibliography). I integrated pre-1975 materials in order to create a genealogy of the regime's visual propaganda. The IISG supplied a substantial amount of documentation since it began collecting Khmer Rouge materials in the early seventies. The archives of Maarten van Dullemen and Tom Küsters at the IISG provided further materials, such as books, brochures, and in the case of the former correspondence with the GRUNK. I accessed Khmer rouge film footage at Bophana (see filmography) and press releases of DK and TANJUG at the DC-Cam (see bibliography). The analysis of the visit of Western fellow travelers in DK is based on the articles and reports they published upon their return in North America and Europe, mostly available at the IISG. I also used materials published at a later stage such as memoirs, ECCC testimonies, and secondary sources (Appendix E). Of the protagonists interviewed, only Gunnar Bergström agreed to be nominally cited. The study of the visual records of Western visitors is based on a body of five hundred photos featuring in different publications and books (Appendix F). I accessed the the movie *Kampučija 1978* (Nikola Vitorović) and the digital copies of the photos of Elizabeth Becker at Bophana Center, and the untitled movie of Jan Myrdal at the DC-Cam. It is important to state that the research concerns publicly available records, which form only a fraction of the documentation made by Western visitors in DK. There are listed records I could not access, for practical reasons, such as the Danish Communist Workers' Party's newspaper *Arbejder Avisen* or the 1979 report of the Swedes *Kampuchea mellan två krig* ("Kampuchea between two wars"). Some records mentioned by delegates in their reports are not catalogued anywhere. In that respect, the study developed in the chapter may be considered as in-progress and open to changes if materials resurface. The documentation about the exhibitions *Gunnar in the Living Hell* and *A Reporter's Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* was collected primarily via the Internet. The Living History Forum in Stockholm, Sweden, supplied additional materials about the exhibition *Middag met Pol Pot*, which is related to the project *Gunnar in the Living Hell*. Interviews with the staff in charge of the organization of the exhibitions provided further information.

Chapter 3 focuses on the documentary movie *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* made by London-based journalist John Pilger in the PRK in 1979. The first section situates the film in the context of reporting from Cambodia in the immediate aftermath of the Pol Pot's regime. It compares *Year Zero* with accounts of other eyewitnesses that were released at the same time (films, press articles, books, reports). The comparison provides some insight into what a visit in the PRK might have looked like and what it entailed for the foreign guests of the new authorities. The second section of the chapter examines how Pilger articulates cinematically the issue of starvation in Cambodia across a set of political and cultural themes. It draws on the literature about

media and humanitarianism, especially the notion of “emergency news” coined by media scholar Lilie Chouliaraki in *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006). The last section of the chapter looks at the remediation of *Year Zero* on YouTube and studies the present-day reception of the movie through the analysis of users’ comments.

The central material of the chapter, *Year Zero* itself, is available on YouTube in several formats (Appendix H). The reports analyzed for comparison come from: French journalist Alain Ruscio (first Westerner to enter Phnom Penh in January 1979); French anthropologist Françoise Corrèze who visited in the PRK in December 1979; Maarten van Dullemen and Antoon Claassen from the Medisch Comité Nederland-Vietnam who visited in Cambodia in December 1979; the Women’s International Democratic Federation and the Australian Women’s Association which toured the PRK in April 1979 and December 1979 respectively. The reports are available at the IISG, in addition to books and leaflets published by Vietnam, Hungary, Czech Republic, and the Soviet Union. The movies analyzed in the chapter are: *Cambodge, un Pays à Refaire* (1979) and *Un An après les Khmers Rouges* (One Year after the Khmer Rouge) (1980) by French journalist Roger Pic; *Cambodge: Années Néant* (1979) and *Le Dilemme Cambodgien* (“The Cambodian Dilemma”) (1980) by French film director Jérôme Kanapa; *Kampuchea: Sterben and Auferstehen* (“Kampuchea: Death and Rebirth”) (1980) by East German film directors Gerhard Scheumann and Walter Heynowski (Studio H&S); an untitled movie made by journalist Mil Speum and director Keo Pech from Cambodia at the occasion of the first anniversary of the liberation of the country.¹¹⁶ All these movies are consultable at Bophana Center. At the DC-Cam I found early reports of the PRK on the reconstruction of the country and the establishment of the People’s Tribunal. It was not possible to have an interview with John Pilger and other members of the ITV crew. However, I spoke with people who had the same experience, namely Charlet Recors and Olivier Schwob, cameraman and sound recordist for the movie *Cambodge Années Néant* respectively. The interviews made it possible to correct some elements and shed another light on Pilger’s narration of the trip in Cambodia. Willy van Damme, a Belgian journalist who traveled to the PRK in 1983, provided further information.

Chapter 4 focuses on the story of the art center Phare in Battambang, Cambodia. It explores the relation of testimony, individual healing, and social reconstruction through artistic practices. Phare was originally a drawing school for children founded in 1986 in the border refugee camp Site Two by French artist Véronique Decrop. Following the repatriation of refugees in 1993, Decrop joined some of her former students in Cambodia and convinced them to open an art center in Battambang for the community. Phare, which has been renamed Phare Ponleu Selpak (“brightness of the arts”), is now a major artistic institution in Cambodia. After introducing the context of the refugee camps, the first section of the chapter retraces the establishment of the drawing school and the founding of the association PHARE at Site Two. The second section looks at the relation of drawing and resilience as a narrative conveyed in the promotional materials of PHARE. The third section provides background information about the repatriation process and

¹¹⁶ Jérôme Kanapa made a third movie in the PRK, *Les Enfants d’Angkor* (“The Children of Angkor”) in 1982. Scheumann and Heynowski dedicated to Cambodia between 1979 and 1981: *Kampuchea: Sterben and Auferstehen*, *Die Angkar* [The Angkar], and *Der Dschungelkrieg* (“The Jungle War”). I did not access as yet the movie filmed by East-German journalist Lutz Herden in August 1979 and broadcast on GDR television on January 24 and 25, 1980.

retraces the establishment of the art center in Battambang. The fourth section investigates the role of the founding myths of Phare as public discourse mediated to different audiences. The last section of the chapter examines the influence of Phare in the development of artistic scenes in Cambodia, particularly the local one.

The drawings of the children themselves were not accessible for study. The founding members of Phare I met in Battambang did not take the works with them when they returned to Cambodia (needless to say, the context of repatriation was not conducive to transporting such artifacts). The drawings are currently stored by Decrop in Marseille. Therefore the analysis is based on those available in the book *Voyages dans les Rêves des Enfants de la Frontière* (1988), itself consultable at PPS; the documentary movie *Ombre et Lumière: La Supplique des Enfants de la Frontière* (1992); the website of the association PHARE. The testimonies of Decrop and founding members Tor Vutha, Khuon Det, and Svay Sareth (still involved in Phare and/or the arts) were a central source of information for the chapter. The basic set of questions covered the story of Phare from the period of the drawing school in Site Two to the present day. After such a long time, memories are of course not always accurate—and forgetting is sometimes a convenient argument for not getting into issues the interlocutors do not want to address. The other problem encountered in the process is that some of the founding members of Phare are interviewed so often (by journalists) that their recollection comes in a fixed form, as a well-rehearsed discourse. In that respect, I found it interesting to compare my notes with the interviews conducted by scholars Pamela Corey and Ashley Thompson for their paper “Histories and Stories of Phare Ponleu Selpak” (2014). I noticed that parts in my transcripts were almost word for word what they had recorded. The chapter is also based on my personal observations in Phare Ponleu Selpak and Battambang (October 2014), interviews and discussions with local artists and gallery owners, and informal conversations with people who do not wish to be identified. Oral testimonies are crossed with other documents such as press articles, promotional materials (leaflets, websites), and online discussions.

Chapter 5 looks at the formation of iconic images of Khmer Rouge atrocities on the basis of DK archives through the case of the Photo Archive Group. In the mid-nineties this non-profit organization founded by American photographers Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley cleaned and indexed the negatives of photos of S-21 prisoners. In return for their services, the members of the Photo Archive Group were granted the right to print one hundred negatives and exhibit the photos abroad. Even today the Photo Archive Group initiative keeps crystallizing issues about the presentation ex-locus of the S-21 photos and the dislocation of Tuol Sleng’s photographic archive. The chapter proposes to clarify how this happened and was discursively constructed over the years. The first section discusses the notion of copyright in transnational contexts of memory. The second section retraces the history of the Photo Archive Group in Cambodia (1993-1995) and the first series of exhibitions in North America, Europe, and Australia (1996-2001). It elaborates further on two critical moments of that period: the publication of the book *The Killing Fields* and the show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1997). The third section of the chapter looks back at Cambodia and the effect of the project on Nhem En, one of the photographers at S-21. Finally, through the analysis of recent displays of the Photo Archive Group’s collection in the UK, South Korea, and Canada

(2009-2013), the last section examines the relation of current debates to earlier controversies about the work of the Photo Archive Group.

The chapter is based on the literature dedicated to the Photo Archive Group (papers, book chapters, press articles, and dissertations). The voices of Doug Niven and Chris Riley are hardly heard in the literature about their project, with the exception of Lindsay French's study.¹¹⁷ The founders of the Photo Archive Group did not express themselves much in the past years, out of personal choice. To say the truth, they do not make access to them particularly easy. Negative reactions to the project possibly made them more cautious vis-à-vis potential interlocutors. At the same time, it seems they have not been much sought after either, as if their side of the story did not matter so much. Chris Riley declined the interview for reasons he detailed in a long email but did not wish to make public. Doug Niven proved very helpful, and answered the questions as much as his recollection of the work he conducted in Cambodia in the mid-nineties allowed him to do. The firsthand accounts of participants in the project Peter Maguire (with the book *Facing Death in Cambodia*, 2005) and Mark Norris (blog entry "Cambodia 1994") provided further information. The material about the exhibitions of the Photo Archive Group was collected from different sources included the files provided by museums (Australian Center for Photography in Sydney, Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto), interviews with curators (when possible), museum magazines, exhibition catalogues and guides, press releases, reviews in newspapers and professional art press, and websites.

Chapter 6 focuses looks at the memorial project *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* by French-Cambodian artist Séra, which is one of the proposals selected in the framework of the "moral and collective reparations" scheme introduced by the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (ECCC) in 2010. The sculpture, which was supposed to be erected in Phnom Penh in April 2015 for the forty-year anniversary of the fall of the city, refers to the forced evacuation of the population in April 1975. After providing a historical background about the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, the first section of the chapter details the system of collective and moral reparations established by the ECCC and how it works with respect to Case 002/01. The second section describes the development of Séra's memorial project as public art, with a focus on partnership and fundraising strategies through social media. The third section discusses through a set of selected examples some features of Khmer Rouge-related memorial culture in Cambodia. The fourth section analyzes the proposal of Séra against this backdrop. Building on the notion of "social aesthetics" coined by Holocaust scholar James E. Young, it looks at the aesthetics of the memorial, the relation with local public taste, and the historical referentiality of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*. Elaborating on the exhibition *Unfinished*, the latest project of the artist in Cambodia (April 2015), the last section of the chapter examines the relation between public space and collective memory in the context of Phnom Penh's urban development.

The case studied in the chapter is particular in that it still exists in a state of project. So far (summer 2016), there is still no sign of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* being erected in Phnom Penh. Consequently, this limits the material available for study. There are no photos and videos of the built memorial. There are no press articles or television

¹¹⁷ Lindsay French, "Exhibiting Terror," in *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, Mark Bradley and Patrice Pero, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002). She interviewed Chris Riley.

reportages on the reactions of the local public. There is no survey to be conducted onsite as yet. Furthermore, as any project in the making, *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* is still dependent on the decision of public authorities and funding. Tensions around practical and financial issues explain the current “silence” around the memorial—so different from earlier manifestations of enthusiasm—and the reluctance of some actors, including Séra, to talk about the project. In this context, the documentation used for the chapter consists of the promotional material released by Séra and partner organizations Anvaya and Anou’savry Thom (especially the brochure *A Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là*, which provides correspondence, sketches, maps, and photos); the graphic novels and artworks of Séra; ECCC documents related to collective reparations; the Kickstarter campaign webpage of the memorial and associated websites; social media updates on the memorial’s Facebook page and Wikipedia; online discussions; articles in the local press. The sources used for situating the project of Séra within Cambodian memory culture include personal material collected in Phnom Penh and Battambang during the fieldwork, studies of the memorial policies of the PRK and the Kingdom of Cambodia, exhibition catalogues and illustrated books published by the DC-Cam, and press articles.

Chapter 2

The Khmer Rouge guided tour: Visual records of Western visitors in Democratic Kampuchea

1. Introduction

“Upon return, our comrades who had seen the film *Democratic Kampuchea* asked us: ‘Is Kampuchea as beautiful as in the movie?’ Yes, it is. The movie does not lie,” French Maoist Camille Granot writes in the newspaper *L’Humanité Rouge* in October 1978 upon returning from Democratic Kampuchea (DK).¹ Granot was not the only Westerner to travel in Cambodia that year. The Khmer Rouge had launched a number of invitations. Since 1975, a regular albeit limited stream of visitors had been allowed in the country, including Swedish ambassadors Kaj Björk in February-March 1976 and Jean-Christophe Oberg in December 1977.² Yet, what happened in 1978 was of a different order. The United Nations (UN) began to speak officially of genocide in Cambodia, and mainstream media published more and more stories of Khmer Rouge atrocities. Faced with mounting accusations of human rights violations, the CPK leaders had no choice but to improve their public image and open the doors of the country to more foreigners.³ Furthermore, in the context of escalating conflict with Vietnam (DK had severed diplomatic relations with its neighbor on December 31, 1977), it was essential for the Pol Pot’s regime and its ally China to get support from the international community. Therefore sympathizers were invited for one or two-week-long tours in Cambodia. Back home they produced enthusiastic reports about their trip.

Fellow travelers are not a new phenomenon. As noted by historian Michael David-Fox, they already existed in pre-modern and modern times (Tsarist Russia, Revolutionary France).⁴ Nevertheless, it is rather the experience of twentieth-century fellow travelers in the Soviet Union and Third World revolutionary countries that has been studied extensively. Many intellectuals and artists were attracted to the new societies in Russia, Cuba, and Vietnam—Theodore Dreiser, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Sontag, Harry Mulisch, and Jane Fonda among others. The list of admirers also included communist party members, journalists, scholars and students, trade unionists, businessmen, and so on. These visitors were received like royalties. During a carefully constructed tour they were presented with the greatest achievements of the new regime. Sometimes, the VIP treatment did not bring the expected results and even antagonized the guests (as was the case with writers André Gide and Panaït Istrati). Visitors usually went back home full of praise for their hosts. Fellow travelers in DK were no exception to the

¹ Camille Granot, “Mille Kilomètres à travers le Kampuchéa Démocratique,” *L’Humanité Rouge* 952, October 17, 1978.

² For a list of visitors in DK in the period 1975-1978, see Appendix B.

³ David P. Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books, revised edition 2000 [1999]), 144.

⁴ Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

rule. While they were traveling across Cambodia, the purge of Eastern Zone was in full swing, the victims filling up the prison S-21 to the brim. Yet, the invited delegates did not mention any episode of violence in their reports. Instead they gave accounts that glorified the Cambodian society in the making. The pictures they took during the trip showed happy farmers devoted to the reconstruction of the country, impressive water works, rich rice fields, abundant cultures of fruits and vegetables, thriving factories, studious children in schools. In short, this was socialist paradise on earth.

What were the Western visitors shown in Cambodia? What did they see? What did they fail to see? What did they avoid seeing? Their visual records (photos and films) provide a good entry point into the Khmer Rouge scopic regime. Not only do they shed light on the strategies of control used by the CPK leaders to “blind” their guests and make the regime’s crimes invisible to the outside world. They also give an insight into the Khmer Rouge’s self-representation. It is important to understand these materials as the result of an interaction. Rather than an opposition between passive delegates and cunning Khmer Rouge, one should look at the congruence between the attitude of the foreign visitors and the attitude of the Cambodian hosts: “the former wished for the experiential confirmation of the favorable beliefs entertained about the social systems of the countries visited, and the latter were ready to offer just that.”⁵ In that sense, these visual records are better conceived of as a form of co-creation materializing the interplay of national imaginaries.⁶ In many ways the guided tour in DK was a colonial exhibition in reverse. The cardboard splendors of Angkor Wat temples displayed in international fairs in France in the first decades of the twentieth century gave way to real-life enactments of revolutionary representations. The CPK leaders combined orientalist clichés—which they knew well since they had themselves grown up in the colonial environment—with their interpretation of Western expectations about Third World revolutions as well as a projection of their own utopia.⁷ The documentation created collaboratively during the journey of the visitors across DK was thus less about the “real” place than about a place fantasized by both sides.

A similar observation applies to the present-day situation and the way these images are used in new arenas. As Cambodia progressively vanished from the news, the photos of Western delegations in DK were forgotten, packed into boxes, and shelved out of sight. Some reemerged lately in the form of books and exhibitions. Once an interface between the Khmer Rouge and the outside world, they are now an interface between the past and present. These images are enmeshed in thick historical and political contexts that people might find difficult to understand nowadays. How are these photos “plotted” anew? What frameworks do the institutions bringing these visual records back into the public sphere devise in order to facilitate the interpretation of such materials? How we re-see these images is an essential question, as it implies that such records of fake or staged situations can become documentary and be construed as the credible rendering of some fantasized Kampuchea. Books and exhibitions propose a reconstruction of DK, in which

⁵ Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in the Search of Good Society* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009 [1981]), 351.

⁶ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 24.

⁷ About Orientalism and the Khmer Rouge, see for instance the analysis by Kevin McIntyre of Khieu Samphan’s doctoral dissertation (1959): “Geography as Destiny: Cities, Villages, and Khmer Rouge Orientalism,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no.4 (1996).

the photos of Western delegations function less as “witnesses” of the past than as support to new narratives. These revolve around the figure of the Western bystander (as symbol of Western responsibility in the tragedy that befell Cambodia in the seventies) and the transformation it undergoes in the post-Cold War context. In that respect, the curatorial and editorial decisions about the meanings assigned to these photos reflect broader dynamics of history writing and geopolitical interactions, in which Cambodian and Western partners are equally involved.

My analysis of the visual records of Western visitors in DK tries to avoid “a moralizing attitude that fixes on the character of a single individual.” As German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger says, “this explains nothing and nothing is won by it.”⁸ I am not interested in pointing the finger at specific people but in understanding a particular system of image production on the basis of the materials it generated, and how it is transformed in the post-Cold War era. After a brief introduction of the international friendship network of the Khmer Rouge in the seventies the chapter focuses on the different delegations that traveled in Cambodia throughout 1978. Then, it builds on the literature about fellow travelers in communist countries to analyze the visit in Cambodia. This general framework combined with the reports of visitors in DK helps clarify the structure of the Khmer Rouge guided tour. After that the chapter examines the “photo-album,” metaphorically speaking, of the Western delegates, the relation between their visual records with Khmer Rouge propaganda materials, the way their images materialize the co-creation of an ideal Kampuchea for outsider consumption. The last part of the chapter discusses two recent public presentations in Cambodia of the photos of Western visitors in the form of book and/or exhibition. The first project examined is *Gunnar in Living Hell* (2008), based on the material of the Swedish delegation. The second project is *A Reporter’s Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* (2012), based on the material of American journalist Elizabeth Becker.

2. Western visitors in DK in 1978

2.1 The Khmer Rouge network

The period from mid-1975 to mid-1977 was a “golden age” for the Khmer Rouge. The new masters of Cambodia received the support of progressive circles worldwide. During the civil war the Khmer Rouge had built under the cover of the FUNK (the alliance of communist, pro-Sihanouk, and nationalist forces against Lon Nol’s Republic) a transnational network of friends, which kept supporting them after the victory in April 1975. This was in part the outcome of the long-term relations the Khmer Rouge who had studied in Paris had developed from the fifties onward via the Union of Khmer Students (UEK) and the Marxist Circle of Cambodian Students. Through these organizations, they had come in contact with anti-colonialist movements, communist parties, and leftist intellectuals. They also had traveled to Eastern Europe (Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, Yugoslavia) and participated in big events convened by leftist student associations and democratic youth organizations. By 1975 the network of friends of DK included socialist

⁸ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Tourists of the Revolution,” in *Hans Magnus Enzensberger: Critical Essays*, eds. Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982), 164.

regimes, communist parties in different countries, and a variety of pro-Kampuchea committees formed by activists, journalists, and academics mostly coming from anti-Vietnam War movements. It had authoritative figures such as famous American linguist Noam Chomsky, Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett, and Scottish lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London Malcolm Caldwell. They gave talks, released books, and fought nail and tooth for DK in mainstream media. This was the period when books such as *Phnom Penh Libérée* by French communists Jérôme and Jocelyne Steinbach (1976) and *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution* (1976) by George Hildebrand and Gareth Porter from the Indochina Resource Center in Washington DC were published. On the local and national level pro-Khmer Rouge support groups campaigned for DK via newsletters, publications, demonstrations, exhibitions, and public meetings. They received materials from the Khmer Rouge themselves. During the civil war, it was the GRUNK that handled the distribution in the West through its offices in Paris (Thiounn Prasith, Ok Sakun, In Sokan, Poc Mona, Khuon David) and London (Lek Hor Tan). The embassies of DK in Beijing and East Berlin (closed for the latter in 1977), and the Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique in Gentilly (France) directed first by Hing Un then by Nghet Chhopininto, took over when the GRUNK progressively ceased its activities between December 1975 and July 1976, its members being called back in Cambodia.

The situation of united front against the bourgeois and imperialist media and powers changed dramatically as the specter of a conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia arose. The relations between Phnom Penh and Hanoi began to deteriorate in spring 1977, following the Khmer Rouge attack on the Vietnamese provinces of An Giang and Chau Doc. The diplomatic ties between the two countries were cut off after Vietnam retaliated in December 1977. The Vietnamese army quickly reached Svay Rieng province, fifty kilometers from Phnom Penh. Hoping this would be sufficient to deter the Khmer Rouge from attacking Vietnam again, the government in Hanoi withdrew its troops in January 1978 and even proposed to resolve the dispute through negotiation—to no avail. The conflict kept escalating throughout the year and turned into full-scale war. These events deeply affected leftists worldwide, who split into pro-Vietnam and pro-Cambodia factions (that is, into pro-Soviet Union and pro-China factions by proxy). Consequently, the Khmer Rouge lost many important supporters, starting with the USSR and pro-Moscow regimes and parties. The battle for communist leadership in Southeast Asia, or at least a new phase of it, had begun. To fight it, the Pol Pot's regime could only rely on a limited number of sympathizers, this in a context of increasing pressure on governments in the West for intervention in Cambodian affairs.

At that point the Maoists formed the backbone of the Khmer Rouge's international friendship network.⁹ The latter simply replicated the network China had developed in the previous decades when trying to build a new Communist International. This had a strong impact on pro-Kampuchea committees. Formed in the name of solidarity with the three Indochinese peoples, these groups could not resist the divisions generated by the conflict

⁹ The CPK leaders had relations with Maoist parties in Argentina, Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, United States, and Uruguay. The list is based on the friendship messages and telegrams reported in the monthly bulletin *Nouvelles du Kampuchéa Démocratique* published by the Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique de Gentilly between August 1978 and January 1979.

between Vietnam and Cambodia. Some disappeared in the process, inactive, dissolved, or reformed with new partners. The progressive infiltration of their ranks by Maoists was another problem these groups had to face. By 1978 it had become increasingly difficult to answer the question “who’s who” in pro-Kampuchea committees. In some cases, things were clear. For example, the Kampuchea-Italy Friendship Association was the brainchild of the Unified Communist Party of Italy (Maoist party). In other cases, though, relations were intricate. The Belgium-Kampuchea Friendship Association, for instance, shared a same postal address in Brussels with the association *Fraternité Vietnam SOS Section Belge*, the *Centre de Diffusion et de Documentation pour le Vietnam*, and with the *Parti Communiste Marxiste-Léniniste of Belgium* (Maoist Party) chaired by Fernand Lefèbvre. In Sweden the originally mixed workgroup Kampuchea (*Arbetsgruppen Kampuchea*) was officially replaced in April 1977 with the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association (*Vänskapsföreningen Sverige-Kampuchea*).¹⁰ Most members in the new formation came from the Swedish Clarté League (*Svenska Clartéförbundet*), an old socialist student association that had radicalized in the seventies and affiliated with the Communist League Marxist-Leninist (*Kommunistiska Förbundet Marxist-Leninisterna*, KFML). One of the major figures in the new group was writer Jan Myrdal, a good friend of China since the early fifties.¹¹ The Khmer Rouge had started their reign in 1975 with an important “capital of sympathy” abroad. Yet they soon proved unable to cultivate it. Within a couple of years they ended up with a network of friends drastically reduced in terms of number and composition. In 1978, as they were ready to launch their communication campaign, they found they had only limited options. With the exception of the first guests, a team of Yugoslav journalists, and a late opening to non-communist visitors, the Westerners who traveled to Cambodia that year were all affiliated with pro-China organizations. This might have felt safer for the Khmer Rouge, who reluctantly opened the country to outsiders, yet it certainly affected the result of the communication operation in terms of public reception.

2.2 The Yugoslav experiment

The charm offensive of the Khmer Rouge began in March 1978 when the CPK leaders invited a Yugoslav press delegation to tour Cambodia for two weeks. The delegation included a team from Belgrade Television (*Televizija Beograd*) led by film director Nikola Vitorović, journalist Dragoslav Rančić from the daily *Politika*, and correspondent Slavko Stanić for the news agency Tanjug. They had for interpreter Suong Sikoeun and for guide Ni Kân, chief of the Protocol Department of the Minister of

¹⁰ Peter Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot : Over en Zweedse Reis door het Kambodja van de Rode Khmer* (Amsterdam: Nieuwe Amsterdam, 2009), 65-66; Per-Olof Eriksson, “När vibildade Vänskapsforening,” *Kampuchea 2*, 1977.

¹¹ He had authored the well-known *Report from a Chinese Village* after his stay in the veteran revolutionary village Liu Lin in 1962, and chaired the Sweden-China Association for years. Perry Johansson, “Mao and the Swedish United Front against USA,” in *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, Yangwen Zheng, Hing Liu, and Michael Szonyi, eds. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 223-226.

Foreign Affairs.¹² The major outcome of the visit was a documentary film, *Kampučija 1978*, which was broadcast in many countries throughout the spring of 1978. These were not the first images of DK to appear in Western mainstream media. Around the same time the Khmer Rouge regime had released its own film entitled *Democratic Kampuchea*. At first sight *Kampučija 1978* did not differ much from DK propaganda images. It showed the same rice fields, water works, model cooperatives, newly built houses, collective ways of life, and popular performances. The big scoop of *Kampučija 1978* was the interview of Pol Pot (figure 1). It was the first one the Prime Minister of DK had ever granted to an international television team. Brother Number One, it was said, had a “soft spot” for Tito’s Republic. He still cherished the memory of the summer he had spent there as a student volunteering on the Belgrade-Zagreb highway (1951):

This month stay at the highway-building site in Yugoslavia was probably one of the reasons why the prime minister and party secretary revealed to a Yugoslav newsman a number of unknown details about his tempestuous past. “You are the first representatives of the world public to whom I will reveal some of the details of my life,” the Cambodian Communist Party secretary told us while we were in Phnom Penh. This surprised even the officials of the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Education who later told us they had been totally unaware of these details.¹³

Pol Pot’s undying love for Yugoslavia was certainly not the only explanation. The credibility of Yugoslavian journalists in the West (compared to that of reporters from other socialist countries) was another possible reason. But it was certainly the status of DK in the non-aligned movement that had motivated the invitation. Sihanouk had been a founding member of the movement in 1955 at the Bandung Conference. The Khmer Rouge regime was ready to fight for keeping Cambodia’s precious position among the non-aligned as the movement itself was increasingly torn between China and the USSR. Inviting Vitorović and the other journalists in DK was part of the strategy of the CPK leaders for winning the support of Yugoslavia, a historical and determining member of the non-aligned movement.

The operation did not have the expected result in terms of communication. The movie was presented with great caution in Western mainstream media and often followed by critical debates. After *Kampučija 1978* aired on TV Rete Uno (April 27, 1978) the Italy-Kampuchea Friendship Association published a review in the Maoist newspaper *Linea Proletaria*. It praised the work of Vitorović. The director had broken the wall of silence surrounding DK and shown “a proud, dignified, and serene people engaged in the great work of pacifist reconstruction.” The problem was the unfair discussion after the film. Not only had the guests no expertise on the Kampuchean subject. They were also patently opposed to the Pol Pot’s regime.¹⁴ In France, *Kampučija 1978* was broadcast on April 15,

¹² Ni Kân (Son Nhan) was the younger brother of Deputy Prime Minister Son Sen. Suong Sikoeun, *Itinéraire d’un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2013), 217.

¹³ Slavko Stanić, “Pol Pot Meets with Yugoslav Journalists, Tells Life Story,” LD181031Y Belgrade TANJUG Domestic Service in Serbo-Croatian 0822 GMT 18 Mar 78 LD, [“Pot Pot Worked on Belgrade-Zagreb Highway” TANJUG headline], March 20, 1978 FE/5768/B/2.

¹⁴ A.C. “Aperto Appoggio del PCI all’Aggressione al Kampuchea,” *Linea Proletaria* no.18, May 13, 1978.

1978 in the popular program “Question de Temps” on public channel A2.¹⁵ Presenter Jean-Pierre Elkabbach warned the spectators: “The document we will show you now does not reflect real life conditions in Cambodia.” As in Italy those who took part in the post-screening debate were no friends of the Khmer Rouge. The participants were Cambodian refugees Soun Kaset and Thonn Ouk (who had been twice a minister of Sihanouk), Father François Ponchaud, and A2 journalists Patrick Clément and Paul Nahon. Nicola Vitorović also attended the discussion. Interestingly, even his participation did not shake the rather negative impression left by the movie. Did *Kampučija 1978* paint a beautiful picture of life in DK as the Italian Maoists claimed? Indeed some sequences had the opposite effect, especially those showing Phnom Penh’s eerily empty streets, the traffic boards and street signs covered in white paint, the city’s iconic spots deserted, the universities and schools abandoned, the cinemas and pagodas closed. In the same way, images of children working in factories although they were too small to even reach the machines they had to operate shocked the spectators. To Western public opinion the educational system in DK looked very much like a disguised form of slavery.

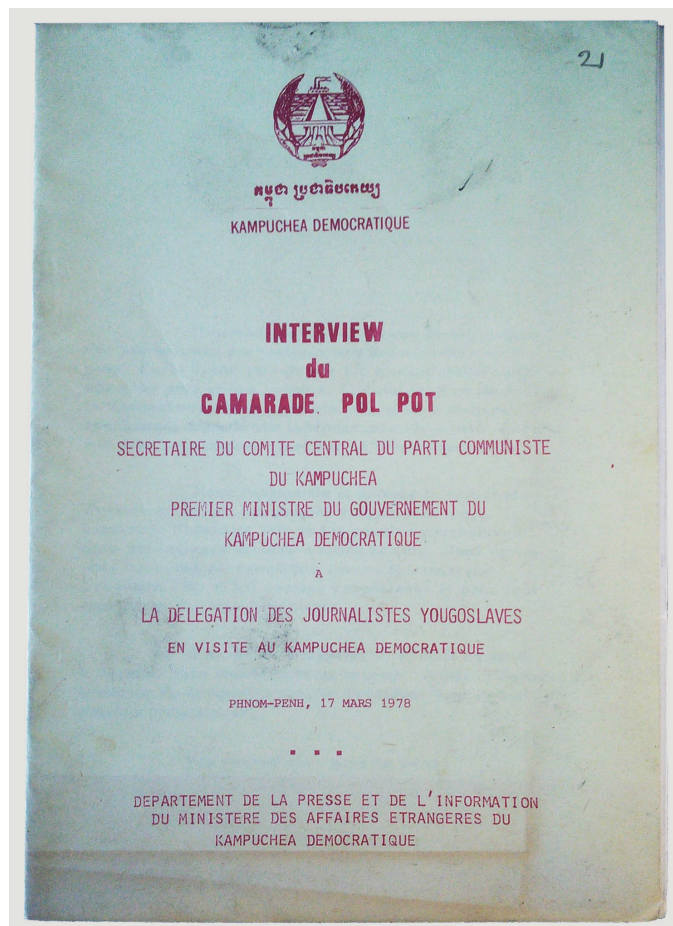


Figure 1: Cover of *Interview of the Comrade Pol Pot* (1978)

¹⁵ “Question de Temps,” Antenne 2, April 15, 1978. The movie was shown with the original comment in Serbo-Croatian, translated in French.

The Khmer participants in “Question de Temps” watched the movie, aghast. They were especially upset with the situation in Phnom Penh. Thonn Ouk hardly recognized the city. Asked what had been the most powerful image for him in DK, Vitorović answered it had been Phnom Penh. Familiar with the place, he had the feeling while walking around the city that it was siesta-time. He confessed he had been somewhat surprised (“un peu étonné”) at the sight of empty towns. Obviously, the film director did not speak up his mind. He remained on the defensive throughout the debate and did not do much to defend the Khmer Rouge vision of society.

Presenter: Spectators in Yugoslavia were shocked by the movie. Is it because what it shows is not the kind of socialism they know?

Vitorović: Socialism is not the model. It’s up to each state to find its own model!

Soun Kaset: So if the state chooses to kill millions of citizens, no one has a word to say?

Vitorović: I am sitting in the dock here!

The lackluster performance of Vitorović in the television debate reflected the mixed feelings of the Yugoslav journalists in Cambodia. These showed through “Kampuchea, three years old,” the article of Rančić for *Politika*. While not openly critical of the Khmer Rouge regime, it revealed the puzzlement of the team at some aspects of life in DK. Some things were impressive, for instance the huge water works. Others, however, were highly disturbing, starting with the desolation in Phnom Penh. The Yugoslavs did not believe the official figure they had been given of 200,000 inhabitants. There were traces of activity, such as workers who trimmed grass on the avenues or young women who whitewashed the walls of reopened factories. Still, these could not hide the fact the city was mostly deserted. The team was not convinced by the Khmer Rouge educational system either. The journalists visited a primary school and attended classes for boys and girls. Yet, they found that too many children were at work. The absence of civil government and professional, military, and cultural organizations further astonished them. The Yugoslavs struggled to come up with a definition of the political system in DK. All this appeared in *Kampučija 1978*, as the CPK leaders themselves discovered to their dismay during the celebration of the third anniversary of the “liberation” of Phnom Penh. Laurence Picq recounts that Ieng Sary had invited foreign ambassadors and their staff to the projection of a new movie about life in DK. The personnel of the Foreign Minister had been requisitioned for the claue. As everyone was about to leave after the screening, the projectionists announced they had just received the film of the Yugoslavian delegation. Guests sat back and watched. The movie was a shock. Picq says that everyone could feel the terror pervading the sequences filmed in the countryside. It spread to the spectators themselves as they imagined the consequences of a diplomatic incident between DK and Yugoslavia. The projectionists were immediately arrested, accused of being CIA, and sent to S-21.¹⁶

After the failure of the “Yugoslav operation,” the Khmer Rouge turned to more reliable sympathizers. The next batches of visitors were mostly representatives of Maoist friendship associations, parties, and journalists from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, the United States, and West Germany. Toward the end of the year the CPK leaders initiated a change of strategy and extended their

¹⁶ Picq, *Au-delà du Ciel*, 121.

hospitality to non-communist reporters. They invited Elizabeth Becker of the *Washington Post* and Richard Dudman of the *St Louis Post Dispatch*. Both were familiar with the region. Becker had covered the civil war in Cambodia for two years. Vietnamese communists inside Cambodia had held Dudman prisoner for a few weeks in 1970. The two reporters travelled with scholar Malcolm Caldwell. The journey of the trio ended up in a tragic way. The last night of their stay in Cambodia, Caldwell was killed in the guesthouse in Phnom Penh, shot by a guard.¹⁷ His death came as a shock in leftist circles, but of course we cannot know what impact it would have had on the Khmer Rouge's public relations campaign on a longer term. Two weeks after the incident, the Vietnamese army was in Phnom Penh and the CPK leaders on the run.

3. The visit in Democratic Kampuchea

3.1 Analysis of the tour

3.1.1 General description of the system

As said in the introduction of the chapter, pulling the wool on the eyes of visitors is not a new phenomenon in totalitarian states (communist or not). It has been extensively studied in the context of the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, and Cuba (Artaraz 2009, Bruckner 1983, Cauter 1988[1973], David-Fox 2012, Enzensberger 1982, Hollander 2009[1981], Margulies 1968). I build on this literature to clarify the experience of visitors in DK. These studies require some caution due to their possible ideological bias. American political sociologist Paul Hollander defends conservative positions concerning social movements in the United States in the sixties and seventies. As for Pascal Bruckner, his present-day leaning to the right side of the French political spectrum sheds retrospective light on his work as “new philosopher” thirty years ago. Other authors, such as German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger, come from the left side. This obviously shapes their understanding of fellow traveling in a completely different way. Yet, despite ideological differences, these analyses point to a common platform of techniques applied in guided tours.

Most authors concur on the elaboration and crystallization of the conducted tour in the Soviet Union in the twenties, and its further development from the fifties onward in the People's Republic of China first, and then in Third World countries such as Vietnam, Albania, and Cuba. Enzensberger (who had firsthand experience in Cuba) calls it the *delegacija* system. He describes it as a means to make the guest dependent on the host in

¹⁷ Elizabeth Becker, *When the War was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1998 [1986]), 427-431; Richard Dudman, “Report reprinted from the Congressional Record-Senate, 18 January 1979,” in *New War in Southeast Asia: Documents on Democratic Kampuchea and the Current Struggle for National Independence* (New York: Kampuchea Support Committee, 1979). 7-8. Chandler formulates three hypotheses concerning the death of Caldwell. It happened either on the order of Pol Pot or his opponents, or as a mistake, Caldwell being “a casualty in a personal feud among low-ranking cadre.” *Brother Number One*, 155. Former Khmer Rouge officer Phi Phuon, in charge of the security of visitors, confirmed the last version during the interview he gave to historian Henri Locard in 2001. Suong, *Itinéraire d'un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge*, 260.

any respect to the point it creates “infantile” situations in which the visitor is both being pampered and made impotent.¹⁸ Hollander speaks of “techniques of hospitality,” which basically involve “ego-massage” and screening of reality.¹⁹ The ego-massage consists of material and non-material privileges granted to the visitor. The delegate is always a guest of the State that takes care of everything the guest may need, from visa to accommodation to “pocket money.” There is a constant supply of good and abundant food, superior means of transportations, luxurious lodgings, gifts, and flattery. This VIP treatment aims to dull the critical senses of the visitor.²⁰ It is a kind of bribe that makes it difficult for the ingratiated guest to criticize those who prove so generous and considerate.

The screening of reality combines different methods. Obviously, there is no travel in the country without a firmly established schedule. The program offers the same patterns everywhere: “construction projects (...) new or reconstructed institutions (...) sights of high aesthetic appeal (...) and finally certain groups or individuals symbolizing various aspects of the new social system and conveying specific messages.”²¹ It includes the same villages and factories, standard reception procedures, and speeches.²² Guests are kept apart, isolated from the population. They meet only selected people. Contacts with the locals are mediated through guides and interpreters who act as “shock-absorber.”²³ Since visitors may reject this monitoring, it is important to give them the “illusion of freedom.” According to Sylvia Margulies, there are two main techniques ensuring that visitors believe they can go wherever they want. The first is to allow them to travel to areas that were previously closed. The second is to show them squalid zones that are then passed off as the legacy of the former regime.²⁴

Margulies also speaks, literally, of Potemkin villages. The key principle of the guided tour is simple. The more preposterous the setup, the more effective it is, because visitors will refuse to believe that a war-torn country struggling for survival goes to such lengths just to fool them.²⁵ This, indeed, was exactly what the members of *The Call* (as many other guests of Pol Pot) argued in their report. They thought it was impossible to fake popular enthusiasm and support to the revolution along one thousand kilometers, especially when the visitors could stop whenever they wanted and speak with whomever they wished.²⁶ Of course, the “illusion of freedom” was not the only method used by the Pol Pot’s regime. Most of the techniques of hospitality described above were applied. Since their first visitor, French historian Serge Thion in February 1972, the Khmer Rouge

¹⁸ Enzensberger, “Tourists of the Revolution,” 164-165.

¹⁹ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 357.

²⁰ Sylvia R. Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia. The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 115.

²¹ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 372.

²² David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988 [1973]), 352.

²³ Enzensberger, “Tourists of the Revolution,” 164-165; Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 377.

²⁴ Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia*, 115.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 151-153, 155.

²⁶ Daniel Burstein, *Kampuchea Today: An Eyewitness Report from Cambodia* (Chicago: The Call, December 1978), 6-7.

had improved the system.²⁷ Yet, compared to guided tours in the Soviet Union, China, and even Cuba, the visit in DK appeared not so sophisticate.

3.1.2 The Kampuchean version of the tour

My study of the Khmer Rouge guided tour is based on the reports, articles, and books Western visitors published upon return or in the following months. Furthermore, Gunnar Bergström and a delegate who wants to stay anonymous (informer 1) agreed to be interviewed in the frame of this research. Our conversations allowed me to assess the gap between their reports at the time and the way they had actually experienced the visit in DK. Officially, Khmer Rouge Cambodia was a wonderland. In private discussions or party meetings, however, some delegates expressed serious doubts vis-à-vis the CPK leaders. For instance, the Danes Bisschop and Madsen from the Kommunistisk Arbejderparti (KAP) published enthusiastic articles in the party's newspaper about the Pol Pot's regime, but inside the party they circulated a far more critical account of their trip. This "secret" report even mentioned the possible existence of a state security police in DK.²⁸ Informer 1, who had experience as fellow traveler in China, found the contrast between the situation in China and the situation in Cambodia disturbing. For instance, he found alarming the physical aspect and behavior of Khmer Rouge interlocutors, whom he described as gaunt, silent, and stiff. These interviews enabled me to correct earlier assumptions about the gullibility or "blindness" of the visitors and read anew their writings with a more skeptical eye. In such a light, the reports appeared to me less an enthusiastic account of Pol Pot's revolution than the strict application of the party line and China's orders, and as such a language to be deciphered rather than taken for granted.

The invitation to visit in DK generally came from the Committee of Relations with Foreigners of the Central Committee of the CPK and from Office B-1 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (they might have been the same structure with a different name, as Ieng Sary figured in both). It was usually while they were visiting in China that delegates were proposed to travel for a few days to Cambodia. Informer 1 says that the invitation was made at the end of an impromptu visit at the embassy of DK to Beijing and the group was rushed to the next available flight to Phnom Penh. Brunel remembers evoking with Ok Sakun (from the GRUNK) a project of visit in Cambodia before he returned to the country in December 1975, but the proper invitation came from Beijing.²⁹ China was thus

²⁷ Informed that the FUNK wished to invite someone of international media in the liberated zones, Serge Thion struck a deal with the daily *Le Monde* and proposed his name. The newspaper published his report on April 26, 27, and 28, 1972. Guided by Ros Chet Thor, a former journalist who had joined the resistance movement in 1971, Thion visited over fifty villages in two weeks. He enjoyed the Robin Hood-like atmosphere he found there and praised the living conditions in FUNK-controlled areas. The trip is recounted in: Serge Thion and Ben Kiernan, *Khmers Rouges! Matériaux pour l'Histoire du Communisme au Cambodge* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981); Serge Thion, "Cambodia 1972: Within the Khmers Rouges," in *Watching Cambodia: Ten Paths to Enter the Cambodian Tangle* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993).

²⁸ Some statements of Nuon Chea (who acted, quite unusually, as their guide for two days) had aroused their suspicions. Peter Frederiksen, *Kindkys af Pol Pot. Kampuchea og den Danske Forbindelse* ("Kiss on the Cheek of Pol Pot. Kampuchea and the Danish Connection") (Denmark: Lindhart og Ringhof, 2004).

²⁹ Marie Aberdam "Visites Guidées au Kampuchéa Démocratique," *Relations Internationales* 3,

actively involved in screening even selecting visitors for the Khmer Rouge. The Swedish delegation was an exception to the rule certainly due to the particular status of Sweden in China's international network. The members were invited by the Committee of Relationship with Friends of Democratic Kampuchea and received their invitation in spring 1978, several months before the trip.³⁰ The situation of American journalists Becker and Dudman was different. Both were invited following the annual visit of Foreign Minister Ieng Sary at the UN as Kampuchea's representative at the General Assembly. In 1978, the Pol Pot's regime proposed UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim to come to DK but the latter declined on the advice of Russia. Then, the Khmer Rouge diplomats turned to reporters. Becker, who had applied unsuccessfully several times for a visa, jumped at the opportunity. She presumes that "the government wanted foreign witnesses who were not just delegations and perhaps to postpone an imminent invasion [by Vietnam]."³¹

Several people at Office B-1 were in charge of the regime's guests. Suong Sikoeun, who worked for Ni Kân's Protocol Department as chief of section for Southeast Asia and director of the European department, welcomed diplomats from Yugoslavia, Romania, Switzerland, Sweden and Albania.³² The Italians mention So Hong.³³ Thiounn Prasith and Ok Sakun, from the General Political Department, took care of English-speaking visitors. As former representatives of the GRUNK in Paris, they had developed long-term relations with many Western sympathizers, and were thus ideal guides. Ieng Sary sometimes joined in the organization of the tour. In study sessions at Office B-1, he taught the staff in contact with foreigners how to behave. No detail was left unattended. For example, he ordered the personnel to stop "wearing black clothes and car tire sandals to greet the delegations. He told us to go to O'Russey [state sewing house]. He asked us to get different clothes. We had a blue pair of pants and a white shirt."³⁴

Visitors transited either from or via Beijing in the weekly flight (Boeing 707) that was then the only connection between Phnom Penh and the outside world. The VIP treatment began as soon as they landed at Pochentong airport. A reception committee, including the guide responsible for the delegates, welcomed them with cold beverages and spray of flowers.³⁵ Visitors drove from the airport to Phnom Penh in comfortable cars—Mercedes-

no.162 (2015): np.

³⁰ Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea, *Bulletin* 69, August 28, 1978; Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 275.

³¹ Becker was afraid of a possible military intervention of Hanoi but an American diplomat allayed her fears. He called the trip a "piece of cake" and told her to "enjoy" herself. "Testimony of Veteran Foreign Correspondent Captivates Hearing," Testimony of Elizabeth Becker, ECCC, February 10, 2015.

³² Suong, *Itinéraire d'un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge*, 206.

³³ "Pol Pot: Una Visita Storica per la Causa della Lotta Rivoluzionare dei Popoli Cambogiano e Italiano," *Linea Proletaria*, no. 30, August 5, 1978.

³⁴ "Fearful civil party refuses to continue testimony without 'lifelong' police protection," Testimony of Sar Sarin, April 29, 2013.

³⁵ Jacques Jurquet, *A Contre-courant, 1963-1986* (Paris: Le Temps des Cerises, 2001), 276; Mehmet Ataberk and Nuri Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np (Turkey: Aydinlik, 1979). Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea, *Bulletin* 68, August 27, 1978. The reception of delegations, however, had little to do with that of important visitors such as Burma's head of state U Ne Win or China's deputy Prime

Benzes, Peugeots, and even the Dodge of the American embassy.³⁶ In the city, the delegates stayed in villas converted into guesthouses. One of them was located on the shore of the Bassac River.³⁷ Becker and her companions were accommodated at a villa situated 22 Monivong Boulevard not far from the back entrance of the Chamcar Mon Presidential Palace, the area that served as the foreign embassy compound during the DK period. The guesthouses were well-equipped and high standard. The Turkish journalists describe a luxurious boarding, which included a room with en suite bathroom (“like a hotel”), air conditioning, and a king size bed equipped with a mosquito net.³⁸ The Khmer Rouge showed great attention to details:

I was put in a bedroom on the first floor. The vanity was stocked with two bottles of French nail polish, five tubes of lipstick, and a box of face powder, but no soap. The men were given separate bedrooms on the second floor, near the liquor cabinet, which contained ample quantities of whiskey, gin, and cognac. Boxes of Cambodian cigarettes were stashed throughout the residence. We were the first Western journalists allowed in the country and our welcome displayed the Khmer Rouge interpretation of our daily habits.³⁹

In Siem Reap, the visitors stayed at the residence of Sihanouk.⁴⁰ Jurquet was even given the bed of the Prince for the night.⁴¹ In the model cooperative of Leay Bo, the American journalists and Caldwell, as certainly other delegates before them, were hosted in separate houses on stilts, which were “furnished with fresh straw mats, cotton pillows and solid pieces of furniture.”⁴² A retinue of drivers, stewards, and cooks accompanied the guests everywhere they went (figure 2). Food played an important role in the guided tour. Becker speaks of the “sumptuous meals” they were served during the journey.⁴³ In this case, the well-known technique of hospitality was also meant as the proof that no one was starving in Cambodia. Fish, poultry, meat, rice, and exotic fruits were provided at every occasion—snacks before or after a visit, organized meals at cooperatives, and so on.⁴⁴

Minister Cheng Younggui, who were cheered by thousand of people. Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique, *Visite d'amitié du Camarade Tchen Yong-Kouei*, (France: Gentilly, December 1977); Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Democratic Kampuchea* (Democratic Kampuchea, March 1978).

³⁶ The Khmer Rouge had constituted a car park for transporting foreign guests. Testimony of Sar Sarin, ECCC, April 29, 2013. Mercedes-Benz sedans are mentioned in the accounts of Dudman, and the journalists of members of *The Call* and *Aydinlik*, and Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 399. The Dodge is mentioned in Granot, “Mille Kilomètres.”

³⁷ Dudman, “Report,” 8.

³⁸ Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np.

³⁹ Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 400.

⁴⁰ Diary of Ekerwald, August 16, 1978, quoted in Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 270.

⁴¹ Jurquet, *A Contre-courant*, 277.

⁴² Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 422.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 416.

⁴⁴ Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np; Burstein, *Kampuchea Today*, 11; Canadian Communist League and The Forge, *Kampuchea will win! Glimpses of Kampuchea (Cambodia)* (Canada, 1979), 25; *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2008), 14.

Food even appeared in unexpected conditions. As Becker, Caldwell, and Dudman were visiting the temples at Angkor Wat, the Khmer Rouge set out “a picnic table with chrome and plastic chairs and served orange soda pops and cookies under the trees.”⁴⁵

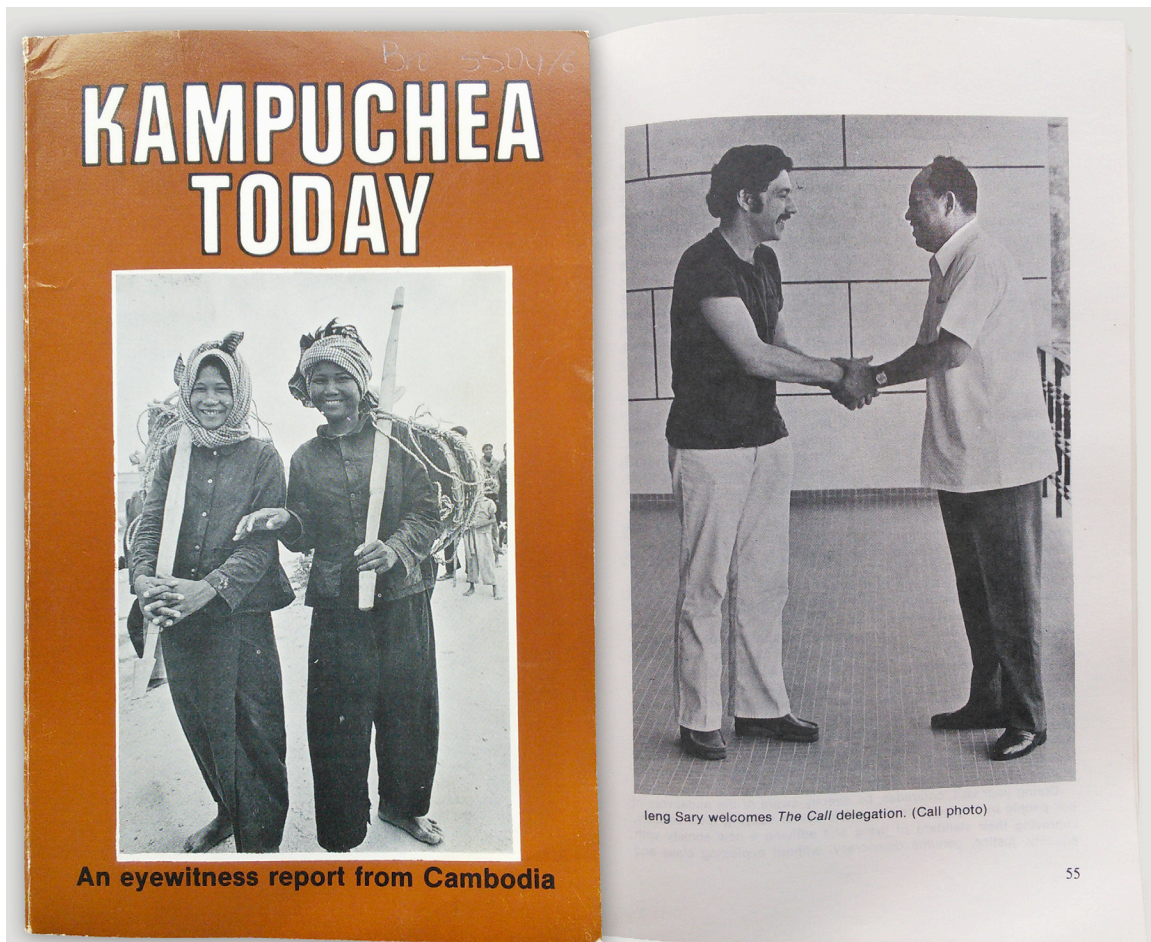


Figure 4: “Ieng Sary welcomes The Call delegation [Daniel Burstein].” Source: *Kampuchea Today* (The Call: December 1978).

Gifts of course were not forgotten. Brunel kept bamboo peaks for jungle traps. The Italian delegation received a huge banner of DK, a stone statuette and a silver cigarette case with symbols of Angkor Wat, two movies, and a basket of exotic fruits.⁴⁶ The pleasures of the mind were not neglected either. Although DK had not much to offer in terms of cultural activities besides visits at the Silver Pagoda and Angkor Wat, the Khmer Rouge did their best. They programmed screenings of movies about life in DK and old footage of the Khmer Republic period, and concerts in villages.⁴⁷ However, performances

⁴⁵ Dudman, “Report,” 3.

⁴⁶ Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique, *Nouvelles du Kampuchéa Démocratique* (France: Gentilly, October 1978), 12 ; interview of Annie Brunel, Aberdam, “Visites Guidées”; one of the movies mentioned by the Italians was about the construction of the country, the other about the war with Vietnam, “Pol Pot: Una Visita Storica.”

⁴⁷ Screenings are mentioned in Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np, and Becker,

at the Suramarit theater hall in Phnom Penh were seldom, reserved for big occasions since public attendance had to be organized at a larger scale. An artistic evening with artists of the Democratic Kampuchea Radio, such as the one attended by the Swedes, ambassador Daouda Kourouma (Republic of Guinea), and the Romanian folkloric group “Crown of the Carpathians,” was a rare occurrence (figure 3). In his memoirs former Khmer Rouge Y Phandara tells that his group of (reeducated) returnee students from France was ordered at this occasion to dress in colorful clothes. They were picked up by bus, and found upon arrival at the theater girls in shiny silk *sampot* (traditional dress) waiting for the performance. Even workers in blue uniform had been summoned to play the claque.⁴⁸ Last but not least, meetings and banquets with the CPK leaders and high-ranking officials gave a final touch to the “ego-massage.” Delegates basked in the glow of friendship, especially with Ieng Sary who was a cheerful host, informal and always ready to hug the visitors (figure 4).⁴⁹ The Foreign Minister usually held a banquet at the Hotel des Hôtes on the day of the guests’ arrival in Phnom Penh. The meeting-interview with Pol Pot, generally scheduled on the day before departure and followed by a dinner, marked the end of the visit, amidst enthusiastic declarations of fraternal bond and mutual admiration (figure 5).

3.2 Grey areas

We could circulate freely anywhere and walk alone in Phnom Penh with a photo camera in hand (the Cambodian comrades were even disappointed that we had not brought a video camera with us). We made unplanned stops and were able to talk with any farmers and carpenters.⁵⁰

This claim features in other reports.⁵¹ How did the Khmer Rouge deal with the “illusion of freedom”? Visitors were under the close watch of the team that traveled with them. Under the pretext of their safety, they were kept in guarded villas and followed in every displacement by guides and guards with pistols.⁵² Some delegates say they could walk unsupervised around Phnom Penh. On the first evening of their stay Ekerwald and Wikander from the Swedish delegation went out for a stroll in the city. They came back a few minutes later escorted by guards. The delegates filed a complaint, surprisingly with some result. Later on they were authorized to walk around as they wished, and the drivers

When the War Was Over, 406. Ekerwald writes in her diary about a concert of traditional music organized for the Swedes at the Baray cooperative, quoted in Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 123.

⁴⁸ Y Phandara, *Retour à Phnom Penh: Le Cambodge du Génocide à la Colonisation* (Paris: Editions A.-M. Métailié, 1982), 131-135.

⁴⁹ Burstein, *Kampuchea Today*, 39; The Forge, *Kampuchea will win!* 7.

⁵⁰ For instance: Annie Brunel, “Mille Kilomètres à travers le Kampuchéa Démocratique,” *L’Humanité Rouge* 956, October 21-22, 1978.

⁵¹ Burstein, *Kampuchea Today*, 6-7; The Forge, *Kampuchea will win!* 28; Hedvig Ekerwald, “Kampuchea Does All to Rebuild after War,” in *Kampuchea August 1978: Records from a Journey made by a Delegation from the Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association* (Stockholm: Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association, October 1978), 13; Ekerwald’s diary quoted in Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 106.

⁵² Jurquet, *A Contre-courant*, 277; Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 409; Dudman, “Report,” 3.

accompanying them were not armed.⁵³ Becker and Dudman had a different experience. The American journalists tried unsuccessfully to escape the vigilance of their handlers on several occasions. Each time, they were stopped and brought back to the villa.⁵⁴ How freely a visitor was able to move in Phnom Penh appears thus a matter of perception, circumstances, and organization. Unlike the other delegates, Becker and Dudman were “nosy” journalists who did not have much sympathy for the Pol Pot’s revolution. Even Caldwell had to cope with it: “They’re keeping us close together now. If one drops back or sidesteps, a ‘guide’ or one of the girls is at one’s shoulder politely to recall you.”⁵⁵



Figure 5: Meeting with Pol Pot. Source: newspaper *Aydinlik*, October 17, 1978.

The VIP treatment lasted as long as the visitors complied with the Khmer Rouge rules. The *delegacija* system ensured that the guests refrained from asking their hosts embarrassing questions for fear of making them uncomfortable. Inquiries about the fate of Cambodians met in Europe and disappeared since their return in DK ranked high on the list of not-to-be-raised issues. Before traveling the Swedes had agreed they would not inquire about their Cambodian friends. This however did not apply to Wikander, who

⁵³ Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 166. Bergström confirms that guards followed them but did not restrict their movements in the cities (personal communication to author, April 20, 2015).

⁵⁴ Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 402; Dudman, “Report,” 7.

⁵⁵ Caldwell’s diary, quoted in Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 446.

asked about the whereabouts of her husband, Someth Huor, a former representative of DK in East Berlin who had not been heard of since his return to Cambodia in 1977.⁵⁶ If the guests persisted, as Caldwell and the American journalists did, they did not receive any answer from their guides or only blunt lies. Other unwelcome questions concerned accounts of Khmer Rouge brutality. As Becker discovered it, the atmosphere became far less congenial when one departed from the script. When she interviewed Ieng Sary over dinner, he dismissed her questions about human rights and called her “either bourgeois or a CIA agent” for asking these questions. Becker had also many disagreements with Thiounn Prasith, who found her too concerned with city dwellers and not enough with peasants.⁵⁷ Prasith indeed deplored the bad influence of Becker and Dudman on Caldwell. “The English Professor is a man with a lot of sympathy for us (...) But he does not have a strong standpoint. And when he is with the American journalists, he is influenced a lot by them too,” he wrote in his report.⁵⁸

The guests mostly stayed in “a bubble that glided by people and places.”⁵⁹ They were offered now and then the opportunity to interact with locals. To what extent were such encounters scripted and staged? There is no clear answer to this question. Every report includes so-called typical scenes. Ataberk and Çolakoğlu describe their chance meeting with farmers on the road. The Turkish journalists told them about accusations of forced labor in Western media. The peasants smiled and answered:

We heard this news too. But now you can see how we work. In the past, we were forced to work. Now, we are masters in our country. Why would we be forced to labor when we try to achieve a better life? Look around. Do you see any guard?⁶⁰

Since neither Ataberk nor Çolakoğlu spoke Khmer, the interpreter could freely translate the conversation. The farmers, thus, could be “real” farmers. There was nothing to fear since communication between them and the foreigners was carefully mediated. Guides confined the visitors to the highway, thereby preventing them from discovering what was happening in the Zone’s interior.⁶¹ Therefore, unplanned stops were not a problem at all. Bergström is certainly correct when he assesses that the scenes he witnessed along the highway were not staged. Those that were staged took place on side roads when the delegates were taken to cooperatives and other specific locations.⁶² Meetings there were not spontaneous but thoroughly prepared. A witness told Kiernan that the night before the visit of some Europeans, the workers in his cooperative were informed that they would stop working at 10 A.M. the day after, bathe, get new clothes, and go to the communal eating hall. “Anyone who fought over the food would be withdrawn [killed] because the

⁵⁶ Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 160, 273-274; Bergström, personal communication to author, April 20, 2015). On Someth Huor : Kim Salomon, “Gripande berättelse om sökandet efter en far,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, October 17, 2006.

⁵⁷ Testimony of Elizabeth Becker, ECCC, February 10, 2015.

⁵⁸ “Report on the Tour of the English Professor and the American Journalists” [*Sekkedei reaykar ompi toussenakecc sastrachar angkleh neah kasaet amerik*], December 18, 1978, quoted in Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 447.

⁵⁹ Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 399.

⁶⁰ Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np.

⁶¹ Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 444.

⁶² Bergström, personal communication to author, April 20, 2015.

foreigners were coming to photograph.”⁶³ The people with whom the delegates talked were either “real” people who had rehearsed their speech or cadres brought in for the occasion and passing off as farmers or workers.

We often asked to drop in unexpectedly at a mess hall at mealtime, but the only communal meals we saw had been carefully staged. At lunchtime at a pharmaceutical plant in Phnom Penh, the workers were sitting at a lavish meal, including huge bowls of rice and four side dishes, plus dessert. They were stiffly picking at the rice, obviously waiting for another tour group of “foreign friends.” Side tables were loaded with bunches of bananas and orange soda pop.

“How often do they get the orange drink?” I asked.

“On holidays,” said a government escort, referring to the national days off on the 10th, 20th, and 30th of each month.

But it was Dec. 22 and I asked why they were getting it that day.

“We had some leftover from the 20th,” was the reply.⁶⁴

In many cases, the atmosphere was not pleasant. Becker felt there was “nothing relaxed, casual or interesting within the narrow band they had to ask questions.”⁶⁵ Guides, guards, and local Khmer Rouge staff kept a close watch on those in direct contact with visitors. Caldwell reports in his diary that on the first day in Phnom Penh, “one girl started chatting to me in English but desisted when our guards caught up.”⁶⁶ Becker had asked repeatedly to meet with former city dwellers. She was finally granted access to one man and one other family who had lived in Phnom Penh. She and Dudman met the man (Leng Kry) at the cooperative of Preuh Meas. Although he named shops and restaurants where he had worked in Phnom Penh, Becker thought he was just a trusted cadre. The family (Neth Yan, a former soldier in an engineering unit, his wife Ken and two teenage daughters) was presented to them in the cooperative of Leay Bo in Takeo province (figure 6). Yan gave the American journalists the feeling of having been coached.⁶⁷ What the visitors suspected or not at the time did not matter. With the exception of Becker and Dudman’s, the accounts of delegates did not express doubts about these encounters. On the contrary, the guests reported fantastic stories, such as this chance encounter of *The Call* members with a farmer on the road:

“We know about the students who died at Kent and Jackson universities in America,” the peasant explained. “They died for helping our struggle. You must thank the American people for us and tell them we will never forget their aid.” Incredible? We found

⁶³ Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 191-192.

⁶⁴ Dudman, “Report,” 5.

⁶⁵ Testimony of Elizabeth Becker, ECCC, February 10, 2015.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 443.

⁶⁷ Dudman, “Report,” 4. It could be the same family that appears in the book *Gunnar in the Living Hell*. The photo shows a man in his forties or early fifties wearing glasses, his wife, and their daughters. Bergström explains in the caption that one of the delegates (Myrdal) had previously met this man in Phnom Penh in 1967. That year, Myrdal had traveled to Cambodia with his wife Gun Kessle on the invitation of Sihanouk for a study of the temples of Angkor Wat. Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, *Angkor: An Essay on Art and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971).

Kampuchean eager to make friends with the American people, whom they regard as victims of the U.S. policy makers' war on Cambodia, just like themselves.⁶⁸

Whether Burstein and his comrades of the Maoist party actually believed such a story is irrelevant. In that respect, some of Becker's anecdotes are enlightening. She recounts that once she and her companions came across "a group of peasants working a field and singing revolutionary songs under a flapping red flag" on the highway past Kompong Thom. While she and Dudman dutifully took pictures of the scene, Caldwell, although a staunch supporter of DK, chose "to stay in the car and [laughed] at the clumsy photo opportunity prepared for us."⁶⁹ Yet, the fact that some situations were obviously staged did not alter the Scottish scholar's positive perception of the Khmer Rouge. This was just part of the game, a situation embellished for the good cause. It did not say anything negative about the regime itself. In any case, good friends of the Pol Pot's revolution—and of any Third World revolution in general—were able to disregard such details and look only at the bigger picture. Still, doubts crept sometimes in the mind of the visitors, especially as conversations some had had with Chinese officials while transiting in Beijing had revealed China's concerns over the situation in DK.⁷⁰ But the delegates chose the path of least resistance as there was too much to go against (such as the party line or the interest of China) to let suspicions take root durably.

4. The "photo-album" of the guided tour

4.1 A genealogy of Khmer Rouge imagery

Delegates altogether produced hundreds of pictures during their visit in DK. It is this overall production that I call, metaphorically, the "photo-album" of the guided tour in Cambodia. Before analyzing the public image of the Pol Pot's regime that emerges from the juxtaposition and comparison of these visual records, it might be useful to situate these photos in relation to Khmer Rouge imagery, within a visual genealogy of war, revolution, and reconstruction. As said in the introduction chapter, Pol Pot and his comrades began early on to circulate visual propaganda materials outside Cambodia, first as resistance forces, then as national leaders. Over the years these pictures shaped the way supporters viewed the regime. They possibly influenced how Western visitors looked at DK. Did the delegates reproduce in their photos, more or less consciously, what they had seen so many times in publications? Did such imagery prevent them from looking behind the façade the Pol Pot's regime had erected? To answer these questions, I look at the documentation produced by the Khmer Rouge at different phases. My analysis is based on a selected set of publications from the period 1972-1978. The visual communication of the Pol Pot's regime after the victory in April 1975 owed much to the

⁶⁸ David Kline, *Kampuchea: A Photo-record of the first American Visit to Cambodia since 1975* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1979), 12.

⁶⁹ Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 416.

⁷⁰ Aberdam, "Visites Guidées" np. According to Suong Sikoeun, Pol Pot made a secret visit in Beijing in September 1978. Deng Xiaoping scolded him for the excesses of the regime and the lack of discipline in the army, but still renewed China's support to DK. Suong, *Itinéraire d'un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge*, 293-294.

imagery the FUNK had developed throughout the civil war with China and possibly Vietnam's assistance. From the early seventies to the demise of DK, the Khmer Rouge offered the public image of a movement/state that was autonomous, self-reliant, and sovereign. It was articulated around several grand themes. The first one was the militarization of life expressed in the representation of war and soldiers. The second theme was the parallel transformation of nature and man through the building of water works, the restructuring of rice fields, and the collectivization of life. The last one was the tension between tradition and modernity in social life, culture, science, and economy.



Figure 7: Young Khmer Rouge soldiers carrying ammunition boxes (1973).
Source: *Les Réalités des FAPLNC* (Éditions du FUNK, 1973)

The years spent fighting against the Lon Nol regime left their imprint on the Khmer Rouge. Cambodia remained a mobilized country even in the short peacetime the country enjoyed. Militarization was perceptible in any aspect of life in DK, where people were

organized into units, platoons, and brigades ready to open new fronts and launch attacks in rice production and water works construction. This explains the predominance of war and army-related motifs in visual materials. The Khmer Rouge sought to give an impression of power, discipline, and preparedness. Military iconography was elaborated at an early stage and included basic elements repeated over and over again such as images of heavily equipped units ready for battle, soldiers at training, watchful troops guarding buildings, enemy weapons, and tanks seized on the battlefield (figures 7-9).

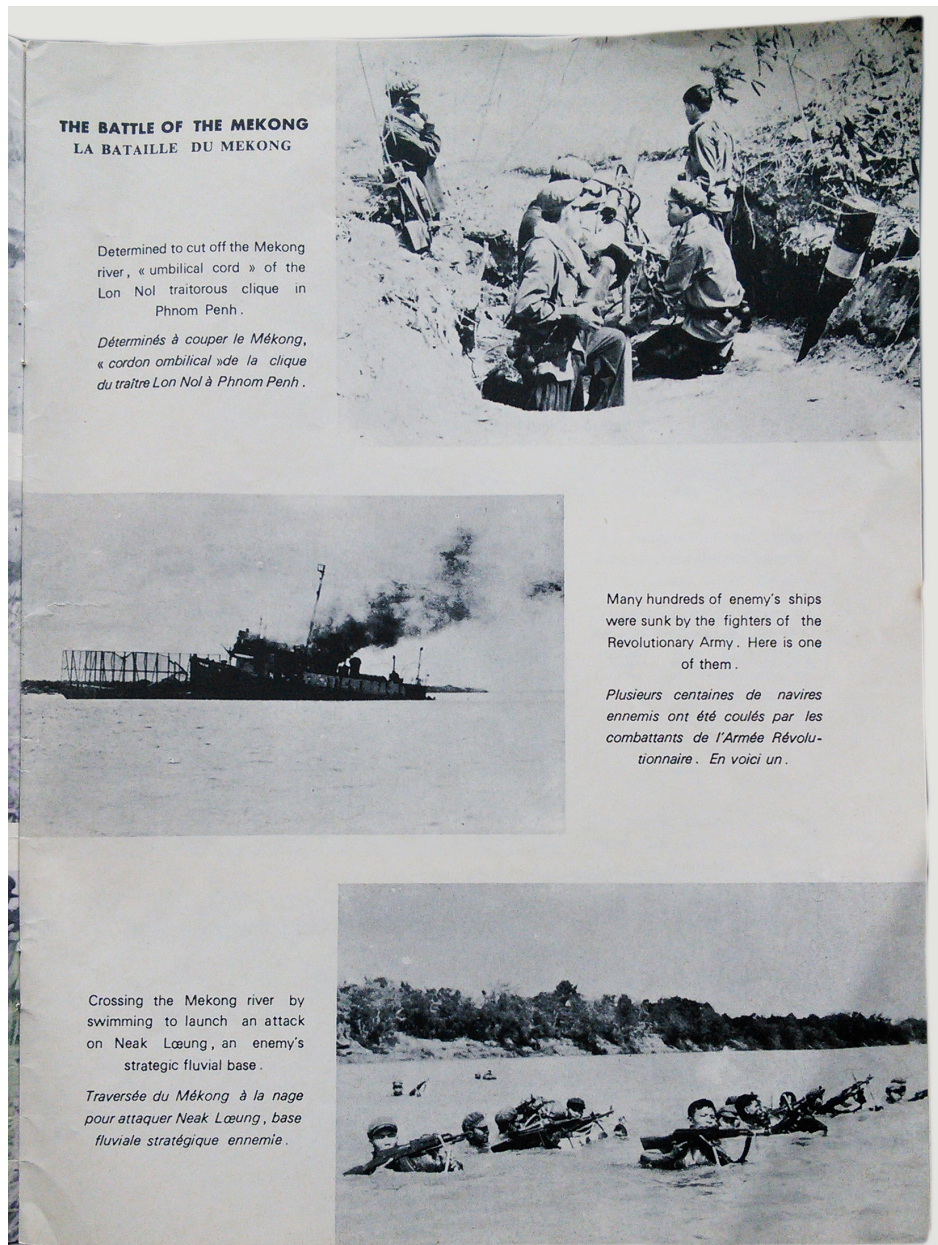


Figure 8: Battle of the Mekong. Source: *Pictures of Democratic Kampuchea* (DK, 1976).

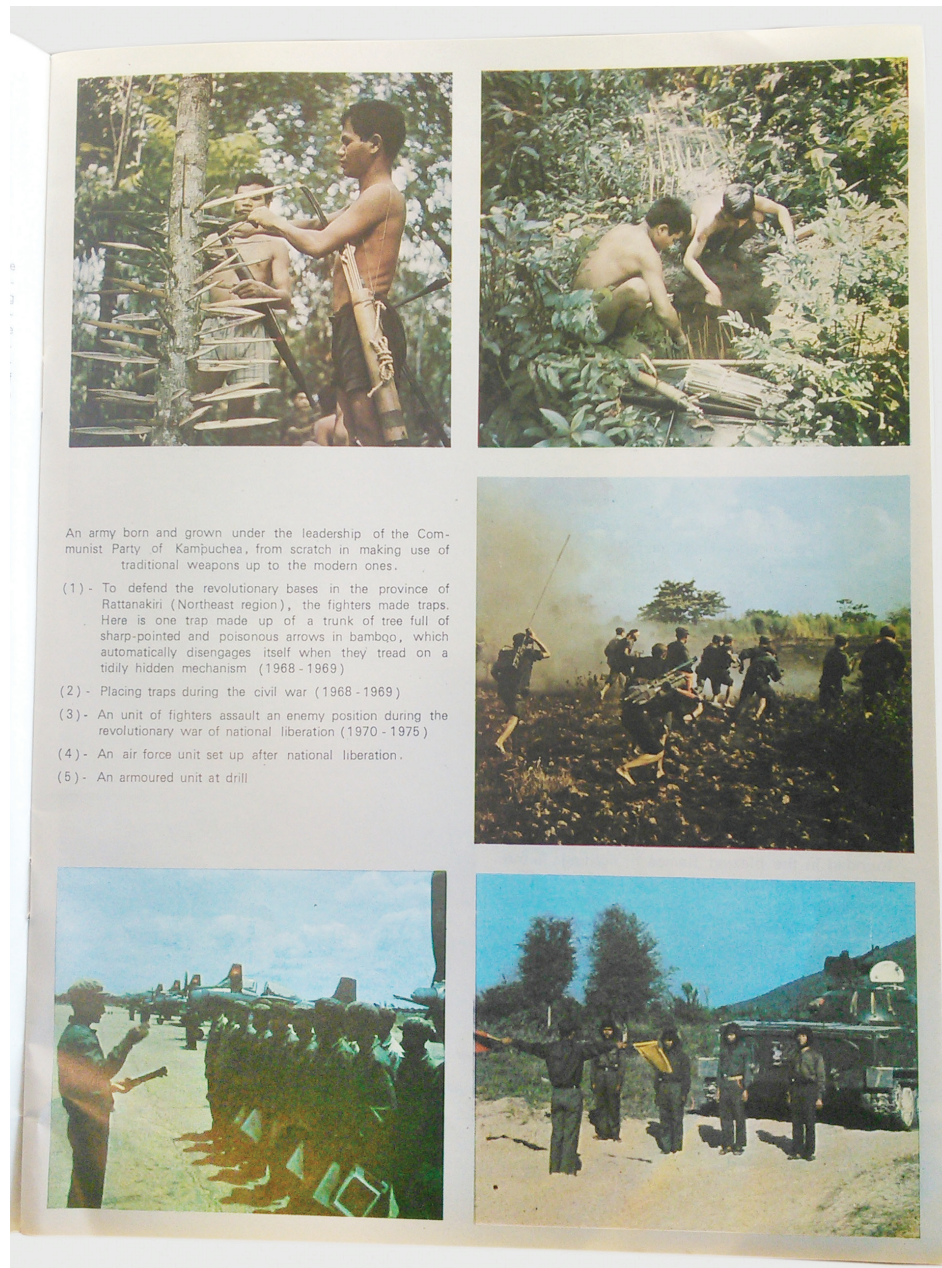


Figure 9: Tenth anniversary of the founding of the revolutionary army of Kampuchea. Source: *Democratic Kampuchea* (DK, March 1978).

The fraternal relations between guerillas/soldiers and the population were a recurrent motif too. Troops and farmers were often pictured working together (in paddy fields or construction sites) and sharing food and goods. The looming conflict with Vietnam gave military imagery a new meaning. The photos and movies that celebrated in 1977 and 1978 the anniversaries of the “liberation” of Phnom Penh and the founding of the Khmer Rouge Army did not only commemorate the past. They also sent a clear message to the enemy. Combined with images of modern air forces and naval units, they warned the Vietnamese that Cambodia was a military force to be reckoned with.

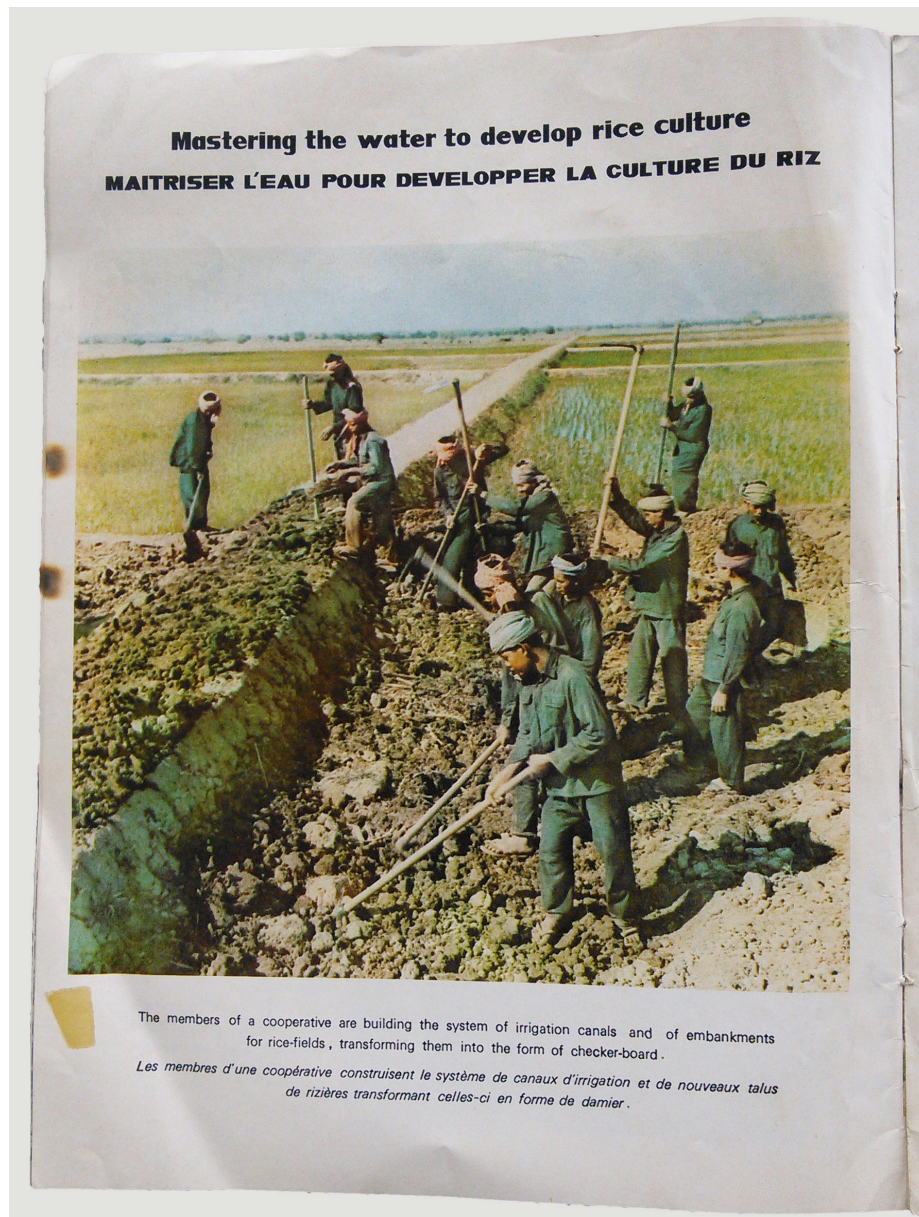


Figure 10: Mastering the water to develop rice culture.
Source: *Pictures of Democratic Kampuchea* (DK, 1977).

The transformation of nature—or rather, the control of nature by man—was another central theme for the Khmer Rouge (figure 10). It was not represented often during the civil war, as the focus was rather the national liberation, but it quickly became a staple in materials of the DK period. Nature (monsoon floods, draughts) was an enemy to defeat like any other. In this new fight, the Khmer Rouge stressed their engineering a rational organization of the space. Ancestral irregular rice fields were gradually replaced with checkerboard-shaped plots (figure 11). Water works, one of the most often described achievements of the regime, produced a substantial iconography (figures 12-13). Publications featured an impressive amount of images showing the construction and inauguration of dams, dykes, and reservoirs across the country.

MASTERING THE WATER

«Taking agriculture as fundamental factor and industry as important factor on the basis of the principle of independence, sovereignty and self-reliance», such could be defined the line set up by the Revolutionary Organization of Democratic Kampuchea for the edification of an independent national economy.

In Democratic Kampuchea, an agricul-

tural country, agriculture is the main source of capital accumulation in order to progressively edify light and heavy industries. In the present phase of national edification, everything including industry is put into the service of the development and modernization of the agriculture and most particularly on rice-growing. For this purpose, the mastery of the water is a vital necessity.

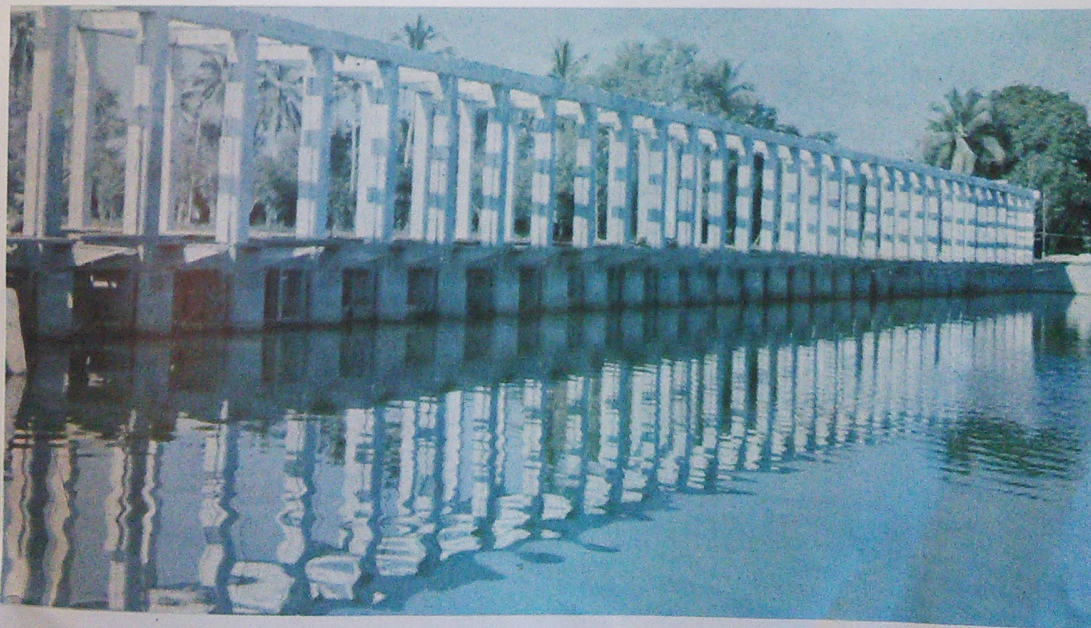


Harnessing the rice-fields in form of checker-board and the systems of irrigation

Figure 11: Mastering the water. Source: *Democratic Kampuchea is Moving Forward* (DK, August 1977).



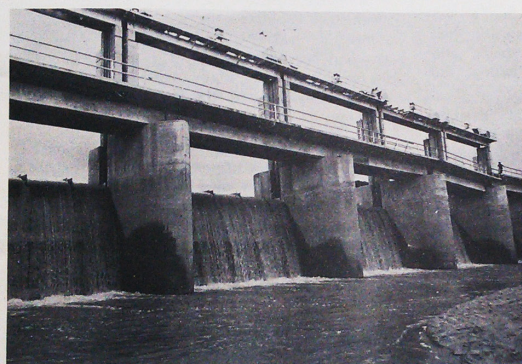
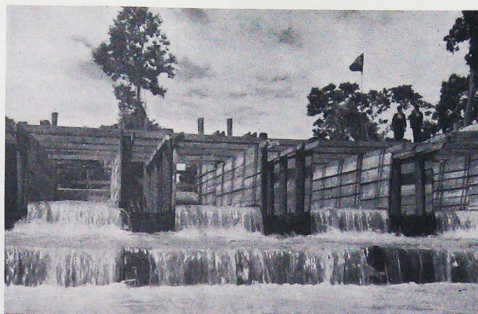
Dam on the Chinit river, province of Kompong Thom (Central region). The construction of this dam lasted five months from January to May 1977. The water of this dam can irrigate 20,000 hectares of rice-fields.



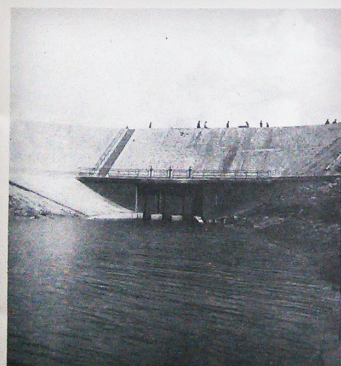
Damnak Ampil dam on the Pursat river, province of Pursat (Northwest region)

Figure 12: Dams on the Chinit River and Damnak Ampil dam. Source: *Democratic Kampuchea, a Workers' and Peasants' State in South-East Asia* (Embassy of DK in GDR, March 1977).

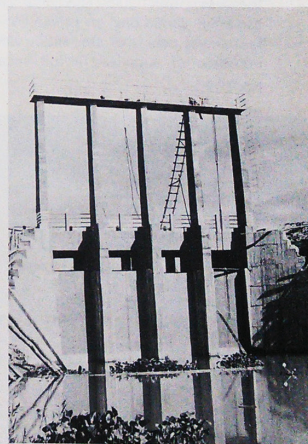
Watergate in Pursat region entirely built out of wood.



The dam on the Prek Thnot river in Kompong Speu region (in the West) damaged during the war has been completely repaired by the cooperative peasants.



The dam of Baray Tuk Thla in Siemreap region built in the period of Angkor, damaged during the war, has been rapidly repaired and can keep water for irrigating the rice-fields in both districts of Siemreap and Puok.



Water-gate in the district of Ponhea Lu (near Phnom Penh) regulating the water from the Tonle Sap river for irrigating the rice-fields.

Figure 13: Watergates in Pursat and in the district of Ponhea Lu, dams on the Prek Thnot River and Baray Tuk. Source: *Pictures of Democratic Kampuchea* (DK, 1977).

Among them, the building of the 1 January Dam on the Chinit River in the Kompong Thom province (January-May 1977) supplied its share of iconic views, starting with the “anthill” where rushed thousands of black-clad workers carrying heavy loads of earth. While the Cambodian landscape was being progressively remodeled, a new Kampuchea was also taking form. At the time of the civil war the Khmer Rouge had little possibility to show how their policies were to shape a new society. Aware that some of their reforms could be a deterrent for many people, they kept social experimentation at a low level, visually speaking. Although it was introduced in liberated zones as soon as 1973, collectivization, for instance, made a late appearance in DK materials (1977). From then

on, though, it featured prominently in the regime's publications, which detailed every aspect of daily life in cooperatives, from the work in paddy fields to the newly built housing, from collective dining halls to political sessions and artistic performances organized for workers.



Figure 14: Cover of *Khèm* (Botschaft des DK, 1976).

The parallel transformation of man and nature was visualized through the tension between tradition and modernity. This became apparent early in FUNK materials. On the one hand, the Khmer Rouge tried to present the liberated zones as places of social progress. The condition of women was an example of it. Women were considered the equals of men, able to perform the same tasks including fighting. Girls were pictured shooting, cleaning AK-47 rifles, and biking as “messengers” (figure 14). On the other hand, the Khmer Rouge made a point of respecting Khmer traditions, culture, and religion, as showed photos of traditional dances and Buddhist ceremonies. There was indeed something schizophrenic in pretending to protect the very customs (religious rituals, family structures) and artifacts that were scheduled for destruction. But the emphasis on tradition was not only a smoke screen. This tension reflected the CPK leaders' own conflicted relation to these issues—being a nationalist and revolutionary

movement, navigating between foreign-trained cadres and a popular basis, attracting the local people and keeping international support. It explains in part the recurrence of Angkor Wat as motif in both periods. The temple complex warranted the “Khmer-ness” of the Khmer Rouge social and political project (the revolution) and endowed it with an aura of prestige.

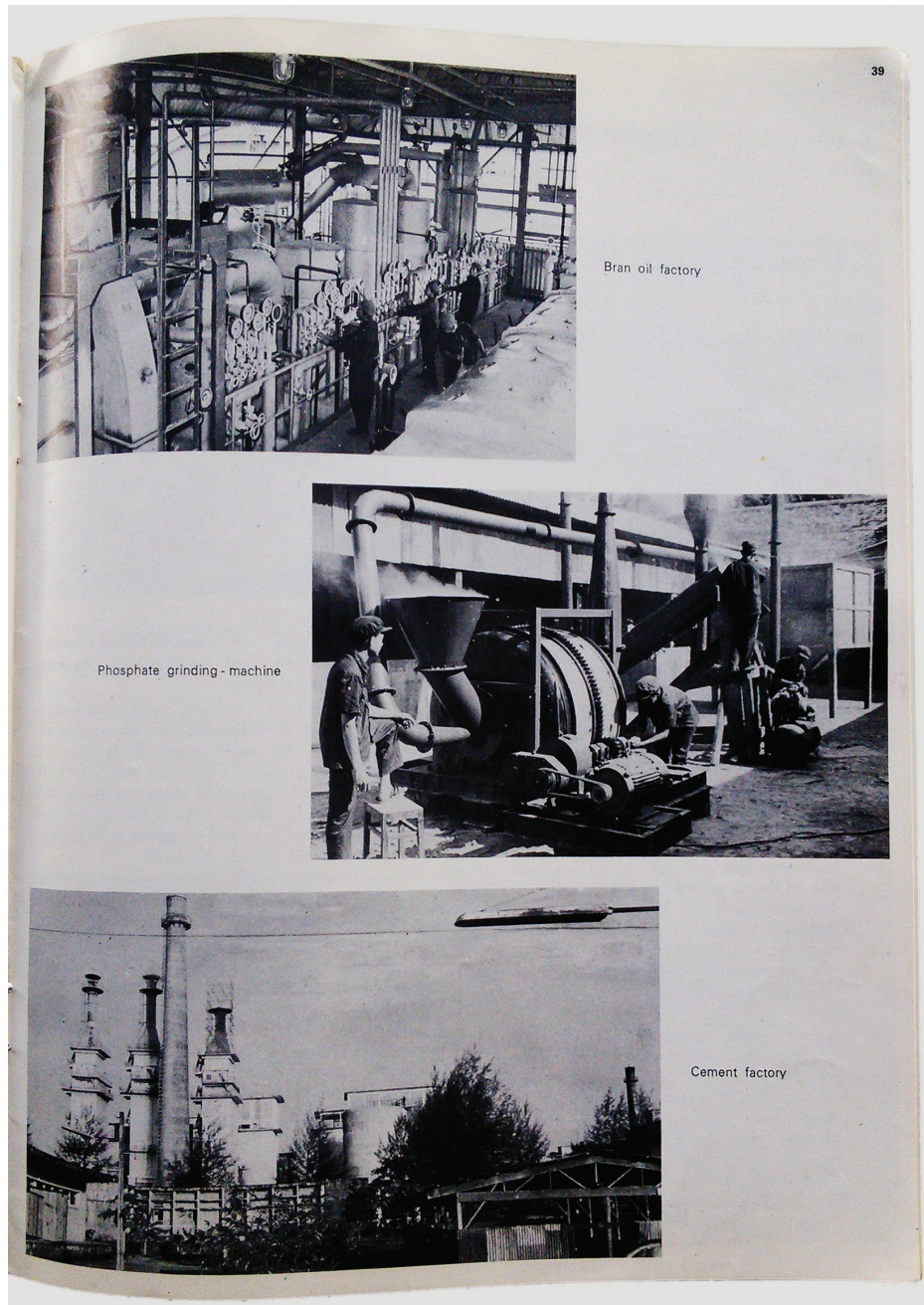


Figure 16: Bran oil factory, phosphate-grinding machine, cement factory.
Source: *Pictures of Democratic Kampuchea* (DK, 1976).

The same tension structured later representations of the Pol Pot's regime. Tradition and modernity coexisted in every possible field, from agriculture to dam construction,

from shipbuilding to medicine. The Khmer Rouge praised themselves for creating a country “where all kinds of corrupted and depraved cultures and customs have been wiped out.”⁷¹ Cambodia was cleansed of Western influences. Finally, the ingenuity of the Khmer people, able to devise makeshift irrigation systems with two petrol cans joined together, could be fully expressed.

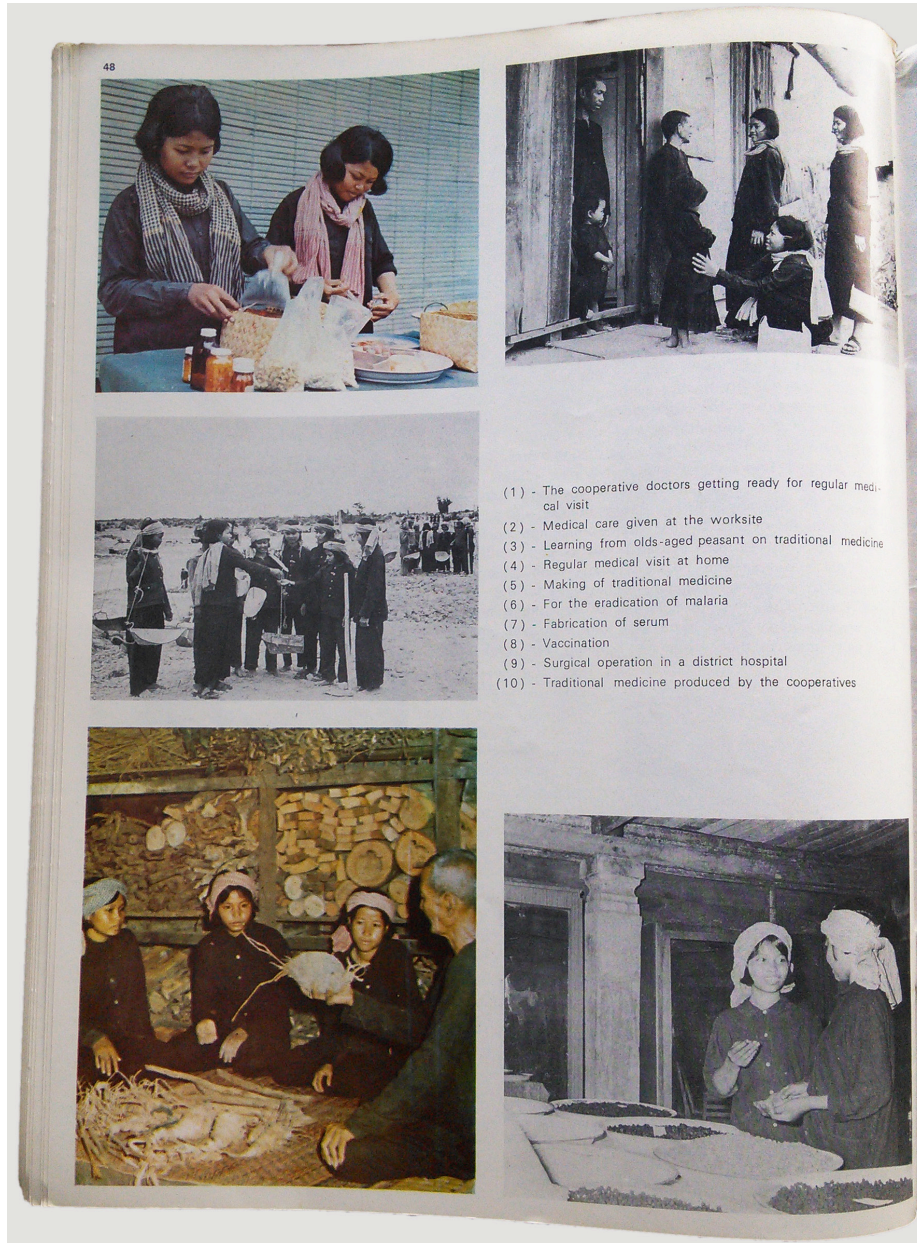
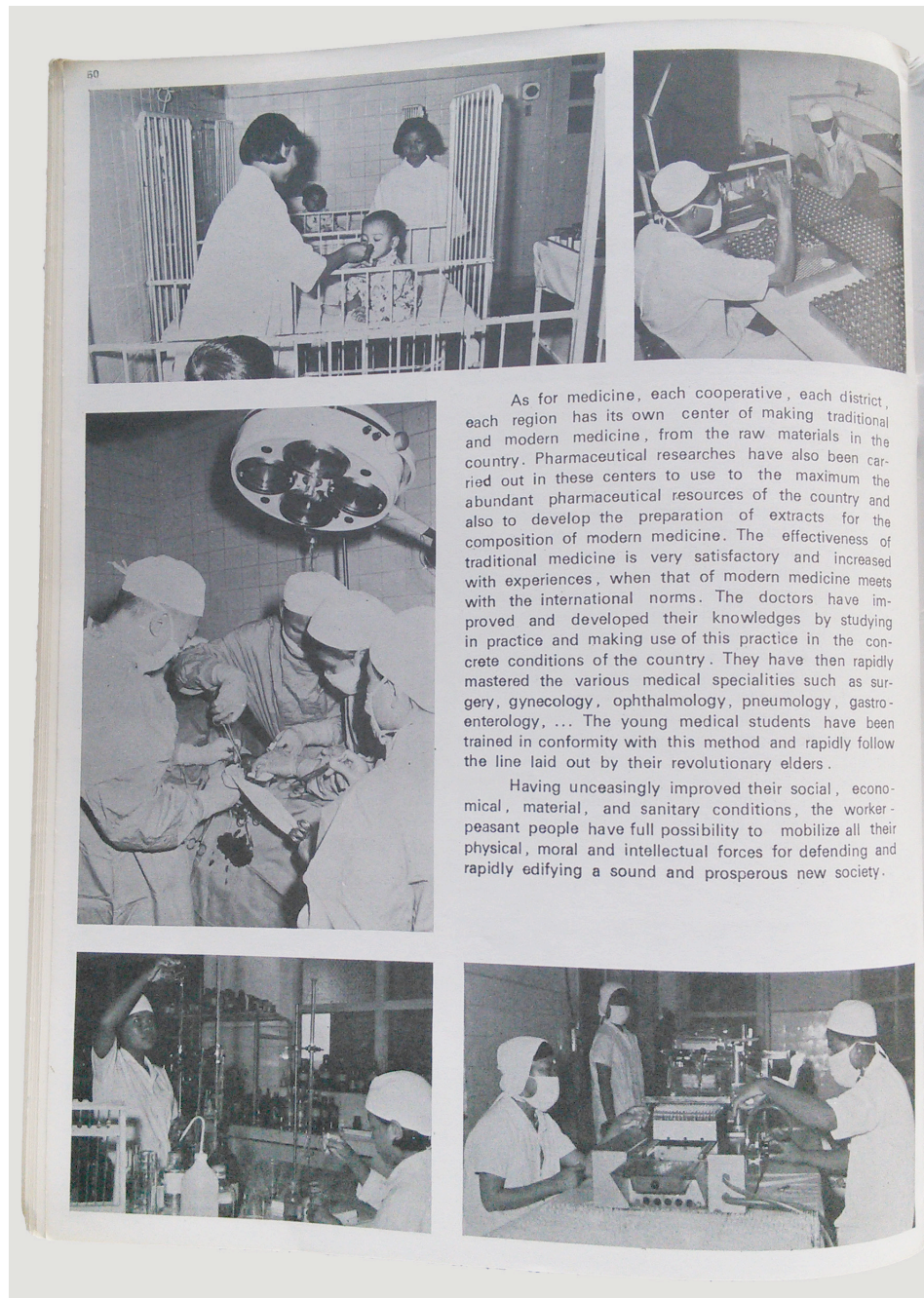


Figure 17: Traditional medicine. Source: *Pictures of Democratic Kampuchea* (DK, 1976).

At the same time it was out of the question for the CPK leaders to present Cambodia as a country stuck in the old days. It did no good to the regime’s international image. Worse even, it confirmed colonial clichés about Khmer backwardness. The Khmer Rouge has

⁷¹ *Democratic Kampuchea is Moving Forward* (Phnom Penh: Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 3.

thus to show that they had jumped the bandwagon of modernization. Consequently, the photos and movies must document this other aspect of Cambodia, as a country offering modern-equipped hospitals and laboratories, and a growing light industry with cement factories, bran oil factories, foundries, factories producing threshing machines, cigarettes, blankets, and so forth (figures 15-19). Compared to developments in China and Vietnam, modernization in DK was certainly limited. Yet, to foreigners who kept in mind the terrible destruction suffered by Cambodians during the civil war, it was the promise of a radiant future.



As for medicine, each cooperative, each district, each region has its own center of making traditional and modern medicine, from the raw materials in the country. Pharmaceutical researches have also been carried out in these centers to use to the maximum the abundant pharmaceutical resources of the country and also to develop the preparation of extracts for the composition of modern medicine. The effectiveness of traditional medicine is very satisfactory and increased with experiences, when that of modern medicine meets with the international norms. The doctors have improved and developed their knowledges by studying in practice and making use of this practice in the concrete conditions of the country. They have then rapidly mastered the various medical specialities such as surgery, gynecology, ophthalmology, pneumology, gastroenterology, ... The young medical students have been trained in conformity with this method and rapidly follow the line laid out by their revolutionary elders.

Having unceasingly improved their social, economical, material, and sanitary conditions, the worker-peasant people have full possibility to mobilize all their physical, moral and intellectual forces for defending and rapidly edifying a sound and prosperous new society.

Figure 18: Modern medicine. Source: *Pictures of Democratic Kampuchea* (DK, 1976).

MAKING OF VACCINES AGAINST CHOLERA AND SMALLPOX AT THE INSTITUTE
OF RESEARCH AND MEDICAL EXPERIMENTATION IN PHNOM PENH

FABRICATION DES VACCINS ANTI-CHOLERIQUES ET ANTI-VARIOLIQUES A L'INSTITUT
DES RECHERCHES ET D'EXPERIMENTATIONS MEDICALES DE PHNOM PENH

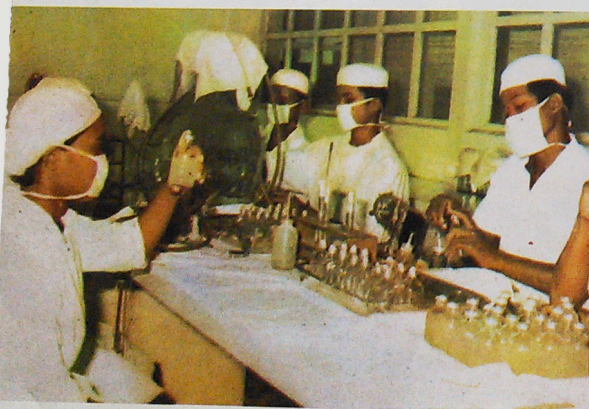


Figure 19: Making of vaccines against cholera and smallpox at the institute of research and medical experimentation in Phnom Penh. Source: *Pictures of Democratic Kampuchea* (DK, 1977).

4.2 Analysis of the “photo-album”

4.2.1. A country at war

“Even from the air we can see the devastation caused by the American bombing.”⁷²

The theme of war structured the guided tour in many ways. The extensive destruction of the civil war period made the achievements of the Khmer Rouge regime even more admirable. It formed the perfect background for telling visitors the story of the Kampuchean phoenix rising from the ashes. The enlightened CPK leaders had managed to put the country back on tracks in record time with the enthusiastic support of the population. The Khmer Rouge certainly hoped their guests, witnessing this early stage of development in the country, would feel the kick of “a rebellion raw with promise.”⁷³ Yet, they could not completely rule out the possible disappointment of the Westerners at Cambodia’s backwardness. The desolation left by American bombing provided thus a convenient explanation for the minimal living conditions in DK. Better even, it could shame the visitors for the country’s situation was the result of the actions (or non-actions) of their governments in the region over the past decades. In that sense, the Khmer Rouge knew well how to harness one of the most powerful drives for the delegates, the wish for repentance. Fellow travelers in Cambodia (as in other Third World countries) felt guilty, to varying degrees, of the sins of colonialism and imperialism. Visiting the very countries that had been pillaged and destroyed by the West out of greed and desire for hegemony became in some way a form of redemption.⁷⁴ This was an affective dimension that left hardly any space for critical thinking.

The conducted tour began as soon as the plane flew over Cambodia. Ekerwald writes in her diary that she cried when she discovered from the window the scarred landscape.⁷⁵ Bomb craters, napalmed trees, villages and towns leveled to the ground were familiar and painful sights to Westerners who had been long involved in anti-Vietnam War activities. Martyr cities gave flesh to the horrific figures provided by the Khmer Rouge guides.⁷⁶ Delegates dutifully photographed rubbles and the remaining houses in Skoun (Skuon), a small town in Kompong Cham province that had been razed by B-52s (figure 20). Siem Reap, another martyr city, proved especially distressing for the American delegates. Burstein and his comrades were brought to a school and a childcare center, which, they

⁷² The Forge, *Kampuchea will win!* 23.

⁷³ Caute, *The Fellow Travellers*, 350.

⁷⁴ Pascal Bruckner, *Le Sanglot de l’Homme Blanc. Tiers Monde, Culpabilité, Haine de Soi* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983), 11-13.

⁷⁵ Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 21.

⁷⁶ According to the CPK leadership, the official figures of the destruction of the civil war period were: 800,000 killed (twelve percent of the population); 240,000 maimed; eighty percent of factories and plantations destroyed; eighty percent of paddy fields and lands; eighty to eighty-five percent of the forest; ninety to one hundred percent of the villages; ninety percent of the pagodas; fifty to sixty percent of the livestock; sixty-five to seventy percent of rubber plantations; seventy to eighty percent of roads and bridges; fifty to sixty percent of harbors; eighty percent of the railways. Ieng Sary, in *Nouvelles du Kampuchéa Démocratique* (Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique de Gentilly, France, November 1978), 15-16.

were told, had been destroyed by U.S. air forces in February 1976 in an attempt to kill Sihanouk. Twelve kids had died in the airstrike.⁷⁷ Photos of the crater at the place of the childcare appear in both the report of *The Call* and the book of Kline, as a visual testimony to American barbarism (figure 21). Years later, Ieng Sary revealed that there had been no such raid on a school. The target had been an arm depot.⁷⁸



Figure 21: “This crater was a child care center before bombing [Siem Reap].” Source: *Kampuchea Today*: (The Call, December 1978).

⁷⁷ Burstein, *Kampuchea Today*, 35-37.

⁷⁸ The bomb crater the visitors were shown “dated from the war,” Ieng Sary said, quoted in Philip Short, *Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 354-355. Regarding the 1976 air strike, several hypotheses were formulated. The Khmer Rouge accused the United States. For outside observers, however, Thai Air Force jets, MiGs (either Vietnamese or Chinese), and DK aircraft were possible suspects. High-ranking Khmer Rouge plotting a rebellion against Pol Pot had gathered in Siem Reap the day before the aerial operation. Did Brother Number One discover it and retaliate? Purges of military and administrative apparatus of the Northern Zone (Siem Reap area) began shortly afterwards. Koy Thuon, the former Secretary of the Zone, then Minister of Commerce, disappeared within a few weeks. Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 316-319.

It was of course the conflict with Vietnam that occupied center-stage during the tour. The denunciation by the Khmer Rouge of Hanoi's politics took many forms, starting with publication of the *Black Book* on Vietnamese acts of aggression (1978). In this context the CPK leaders needed to strike a fine balance. On the one hand, Cambodia was depicted as the victim of Vietnam, a small country threatened by the region's "mightiest military machine."⁷⁹ On the other hand, this underdog image was not dissuasive enough. The Khmer Rouge had to show their preparedness and power in a way that would not jeopardize the "David versus Goliath" picture they were so keen to paint. This was achieved by intertwining two themes, the suffering and the mobilization of Cambodians. The situation of the Khmer Krom refugees (Khmer minority living in South Vietnam and border zone) epitomized the ordeal of the Cambodian people. After a short trip in border areas, the Western delegates were taken to Ang Knor (Ang Knol) in the district of Koh Andet. It was a newly built cooperative where villagers chased out of their home by the Vietnamese attack in December 1977 had been resettled. After district secretary Comrade Soeung welcomed them, the visitors strolled among the cooperative's one-family houses and discovered the different workshops in function.⁸⁰ The highlight of the visit was the interview of refugees, and the terrible stories of destruction, killing, rape, and torture they told the delegates (figure 22).⁸¹ These testimonies featured later on in reports and articles illustrated with photos (groups and portraits) of the refugees interviewed. The Norwegian paper *Klassekampen* (10/250, 28 October 1978) even dedicated a double-page spread to the Khmer Krom refugees "forfølgelsene i Vietnam" ("persecuted by Vietnam"). Of course, it was out of the question for the Khmer Rouge to display only this victimized side. They wanted to show as well the warrior side. This dimension was manifest in the visitors' photos of the mass-mobilization of the population. The pictures emphasized both the farmer-soldier model the Khmer Rouge tried to promote, and the engagement of each and every Cambodian in the fight, even the youngest ones. One of Kline's photos for instance represents two children, one of them being equipped with an AK-47 rifle, and is captioned as follows: "We felt this symbolized the resolve of the people of Kampuchea, young and old alike, to defend their country's independence."

The depiction of Cambodia on the warpath included other familiar visual themes. The old imagery of captured enemy equipment, as a demonstration of both Khmer Rouge self-reliance and military superiority, appeared in many photos. The visitors' publications usually featured at least one image of war trophies, either armored vehicles, anti-tank guns, or Soviet rifles (with a close-up on the Russian inscription on the rifle scope). Toward the end of 1978 photos of military preparations became a dominant motif. Becker thoroughly documented the situation in the border area. Her pictures showed troops (men, women, children) driving a tank in rice field, carrying ammunitions, trying to move an anti-tank canon, surrounding a corpse on the ground, escorting prisoners. The Canadians devoted the major part of their report, published early 1979, to Cambodia's military situation. It was essential then to show that Khmer Rouge army forces were capable to re-

⁷⁹ Jan Myrdal, "When the Peasant War Triumphed," *Kampuchea August 1978: Records from a Journey made by a Delegation from the Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association* (Stockholm: Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association, October 1978), 8-9. Rigaux develops the same argument in "Témoignage," *Infor-Kampuchea*, 29.

⁸⁰ The Forge, *Kampuchea will win!* 25; Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np.

⁸¹ Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np.

take the lost territories and chase away the invaders. “The final victory of the Kampucheans is certain,” the members of the Communist League claimed, quoting DK ambassador at the UN Keat Chhon.⁸² The collapse of the Pol Pot’s regime created a new context for the pictures of the Canadian delegates. Their photos of military commanders, soldiers marching, and stocks of ammunition were no longer images of a geographically situated conflict but of a worldwide war against Moscow’s “social-imperialism.” Their report *Kampuchea will win!* featured a cartoon that represented Brezhnev standing on a map of Southeast Asia. His boots covered Vietnam and Kampuchea. He was winding up the mechanism of two soldier puppets, one with a sticker that read “Vietnamese aggressors” and one with a sticker that read “National United Front for National Salvation” (figure 23). The list of international crimes committed by the Russians was long, the Canadian Maoists reminded their readers. It included the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the use of Cubans in Angola, and the interventions in Ethiopia, Yemen, and Afghanistan. It was now the turn of Southeast Asia. The deposed Khmer Rouge, back to guerrilla warfare, were thus depicted as a new force standing at the frontline of the struggle for world peace against Soviet fascism. (Democratic) Kampuchea had become the new Republican Spain, a cause worthy of global solidarity.

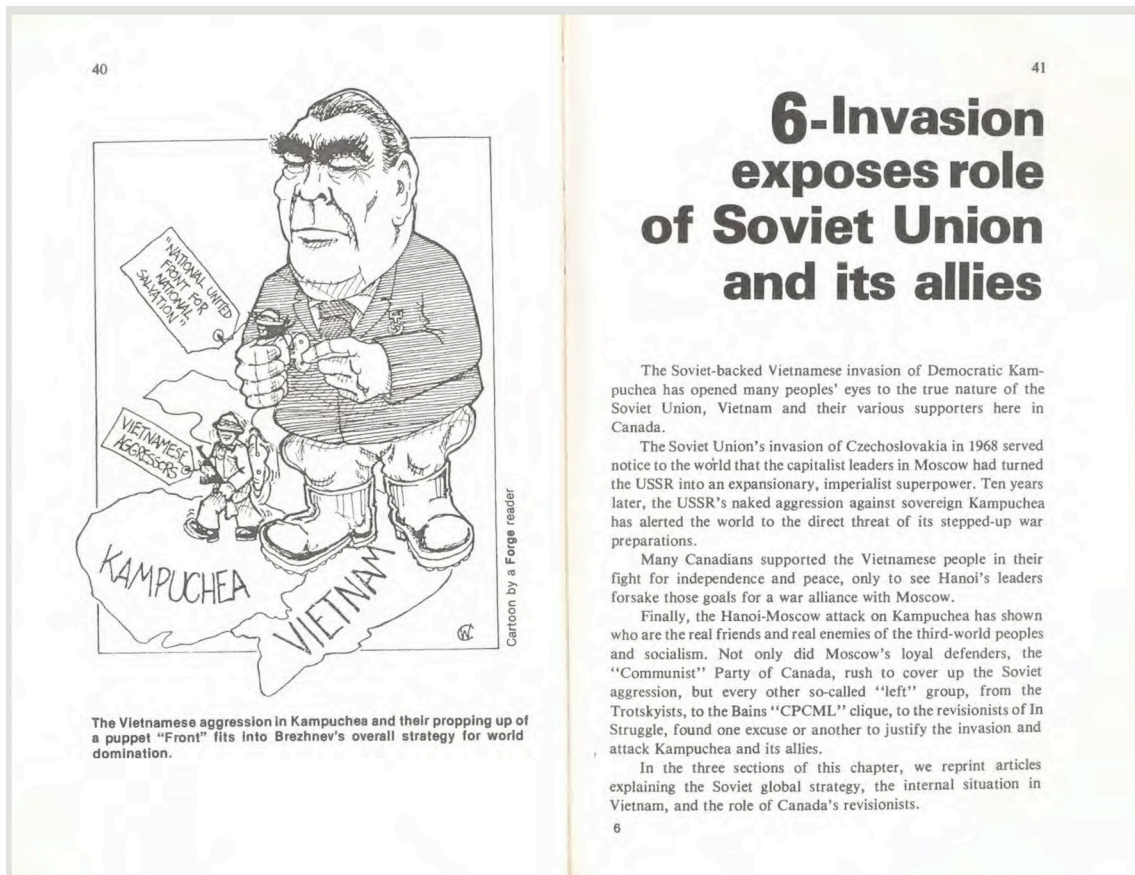


Figure 23: Cartoon (1979). Source: Canadian Communist League (Marxist-Leninist), *Kampuchea Will Win!* (Canada: The Forge, 1979).

⁸² The Forge, *Kampuchea will win!* 11-13.

4.2.2 In the countryside

The tour was the opportunity for the visitors to finally explore in real-life the social experimentation encountered so far in the pages of Khmer Rouge publications. It was basically the same itinerary for all guests, Western Maoist delegations and diplomats from friendly countries alike (see map 2).⁸³ Traveling across Cambodia must have felt at times like browsing through the glossy magazines of Ieng Sary's Foreign Ministry. The Khmer Rouge masterly played with Western imaginaries. They combined Third World visual propaganda and orientalist clichés to create an "excursion into a pastoral past where sturdy rural values merged with and prefigured the humane essence of Marxism."⁸⁴

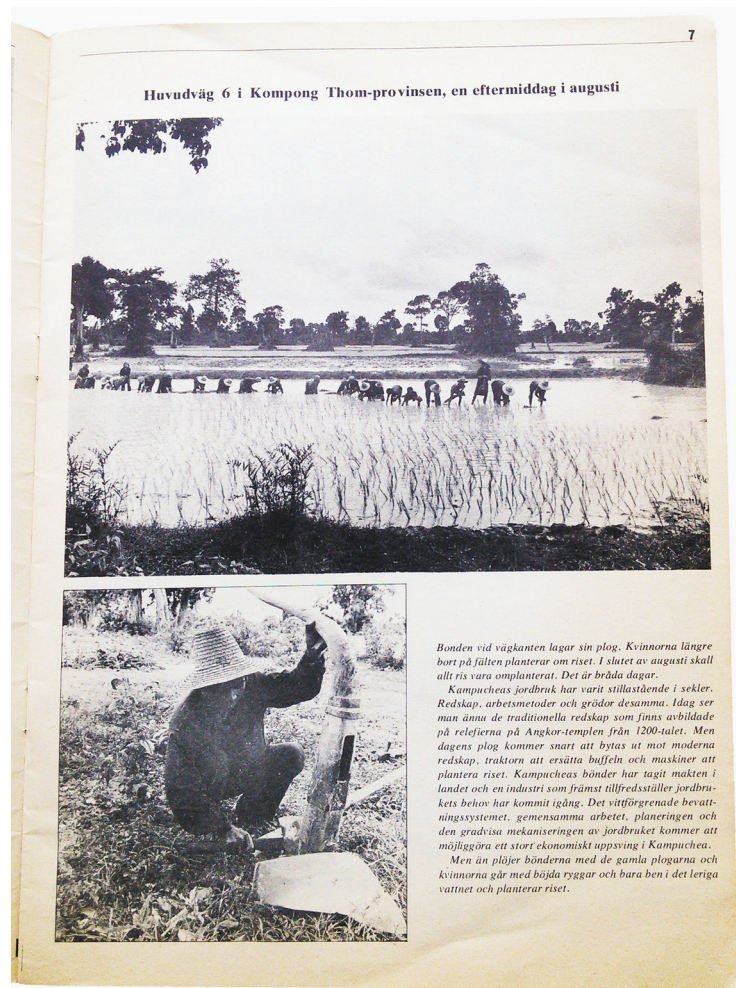


Figure 25: Kompong Thom province.
Source: "Kampuchea-resan," *Kampuchea*, nos. 3-4, 1978.

⁸³ There are of course differences mostly due to the length of the stay (one or two-week stay). For instance, Kompong Som (ex-Sihanoukville) is not included in the one-week tour. Other variations come from the accessibility of some areas, especially in the border zones threatened by the Vietnamese army.

⁸⁴ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 311.

The visitors were enchanted with life in the countryside and expressed this feeling through numerous photos of agricultural activities, showing peasants planting rice in paddy fields, threshing rice, drying rice in the sun, and hauling sacks of rice; men with oxcarts plowing the fields; children clapping their hands to chase birds from the fields, and so on (figures 24-25). It was a postcard-like vision of DK. Wikander, for instance, describes a peaceful evening on the veranda of a guesthouse in Kompong Thom. Farmers are going home with their buffalos. Children splash in the pond. Old women sit in front of their houses and chat.⁸⁵ Western visitors dreamed of some communion with Cambodians through the simple things of life. On the way to Takeo, the Swedes stopped at a cooperative for a concert of traditional music. “That night in Baray,” Ekerwald writes in her diary, “we spoke the same language, although we did not know Khmer and the musicians did not know French.”⁸⁶

Western dreams of Asian revolutionary societies were also shaped by the potent iconography of China’s Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. Contemplating thousands of black-clad workers digging and carrying earth on a dam construction site, French delegate Jurquet thought: “It was a spectacle of the kind I had already seen in Chinese movies about the big works conducted after the victorious revolution, when the physical force of huge crowds compensated for the lack of energy.”⁸⁷ This impression of déjà-vu confirmed the expectations of visitors. It facilitated the decoding of sights, hence their photographic reproduction. In that sense, the rural landscape in DK was less a physical space than a visual text to be deciphered. For being fully understood, it had to include the basic and immediately recognizable elements that had come to symbolize the emergence of the new Kampuchea, namely water works and cooperatives.

Of all the water works built in DK, the 1 January dam was, as said earlier, the most iconic one, represented in many publications and the film *Democratic Kampuchea*. Foreign experts had tried and failed to build it for ten years. After the revolution, the dam had been finished in five months thanks to popular fervor and ingenuity—or so the story went, embellished over the months.⁸⁸ Since the dam had been completed in May 1977, there was not much to see on the spot anymore. Therefore, the visitors were taken along a canal to another site on a parallel river not far from Kompong Thom. It was the 6 January dam, which still mobilized 4,000 people. The French delegates found the atmosphere lovely. The workers laughed, spoke with them, even giggled when Jurquet tried to say a few words in Khmer.⁸⁹ Ekerwald went into raptures over the “calm pace of work.” In Cambodia people can leave and rest whenever they want to, she claimed. “The work is

⁸⁵ Marita Wikander, “The First Report from the Closed Country,” *Kampuchea August 1978: Records from a Journey made by a Delegation from the Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association*, (Stockholm: Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association, October 1978), 21.

⁸⁶ Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 123.

⁸⁷ Jurquet, *A Contre-courant*, 280.

⁸⁸ The number of workers mobilized on site went from 10,000 to 20,000. See Burstein, *Kampuchea Today*, 4; The Forge, *Kampuchea will win!* 26. The French delegates even speak of 30,000 people working there day and night. Camille Granot, “Mille kilomètres à travers le Kampuchéa Démocratique,” *L’Humanité Rouge* 951, October 14-15, 1978.

⁸⁹ Camille Granot, “Mille Kilomètres à travers le Kampuchéa Démocratique,” *L’Humanité Rouge* 953, October 18, 1978.

not forced on people as it can be in any Swedish factory.”⁹⁰ The Turkish journalists marveled at the “beehive.”⁹¹ The visitors tried to capture the ambiance of the site—activity, enthusiasm, and dedication—in the spirit of the movie *Democratic Kampuchea*. Their photos mostly showed long lines of people carrying earth in baskets, close-ups of smiling workers, and wide-angle views of the dam being built (figures 26-27). The anthill aspect of dams under construction, a familiar image, was thus easy to decode for any viewer. It reflected the radical changes that had taken place in Cambodian society. This was now a place where all people were equals (as signaled by the identical black clothing) and local industriousness, finally cleansed from colonial influence, defeated bare hands the so-called technical superiority of the West.

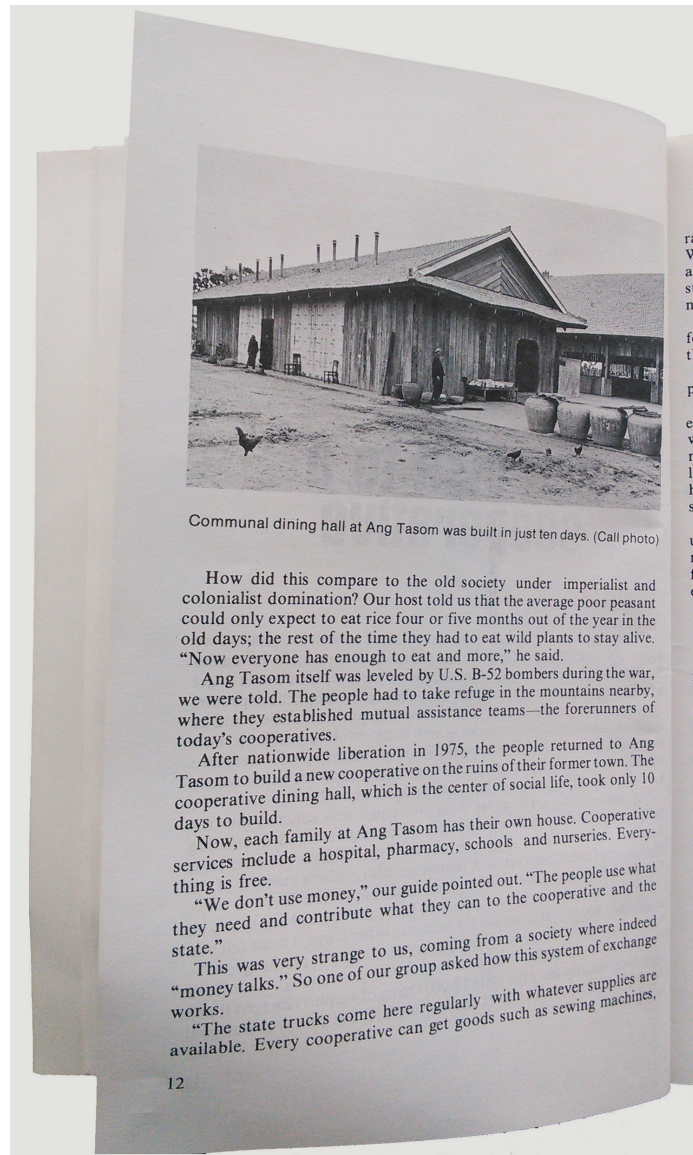


Figure 28: Communal dining hall at Ang Tasom.
Source: *Kampuchea Today* (The Call, December 1978).

⁹⁰ Ekerwald, “Kampuchea Does All to Rebuild after the War,” 11.

⁹¹ Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np.

Model cooperatives (*sahakor kumruu*) too demonstrated the successful transformation of Cambodia, especially the positive effects of collectivization. The tour included the visit of several sites, among which Ang Tasom (Ang Ta Saom) and Leay Bo in Takeo province, Kandal Sung in Kandal province, and Phum Preah Meas (Proeus Meas) in Kompong Cham province. Ang Tasom was the most often photographed cooperative. It had been built on the ruins of the former town, which had been destroyed by B-52s, and was now one of the richer cooperatives in DK. About nine thousand people worked there, half coming from Takeo and half coming from Phnom Penh.⁹² Ang Tasom was the proof that city dwellers had adjusted well to new living conditions. Who wouldn't have, considering the wonderful life the Khmer Rouge depicted to their guests? The cooperative had all the equipment of which one could dream—workshops, hospital, pharmacy, school, and nursery. Delegates enjoyed taking pictures of happy, smiling children and their caretakers. They loved even more the communal dining hall and the well-stocked kitchen (figures 28-30). Food was the focus of the visit, unsurprisingly so since it remained a controversial issue in the West. Mainstream media often denounced forced collective eating and the undernourishment of the Cambodian population. Truth could finally be reestablished: “Rice is cooking on the stove, piles of shiny eggplants are lying in a corner, and fruit fills baskets on the floor.”⁹³ This was the menu of a typical evening meal in cooperatives.⁹⁴ Myrdal even filmed big bowls of rice on the tables and what people put in their plate. Such images showed that Cambodians were both satisfied with the new system and far from being starved contrarily to what Western media kept claiming.

“The kingdom of righteousness is being built,” Myrdal exulted, and it is “based on “justice, equality and solidarity.”⁹⁵ The new houses built across the country were the ultimate expression of this new kingdom. Along the road, in cooperatives, one could see wooden houses on stilts, those reserved for collective functions being topped with a red tile roof. Photographed by visitors at every stage of development, under construction or completely finished, they became an iconic representation of the improved situation of farmers in DK. Now ninety percent of the population lived in decent conditions (the regime said). Health was another sector in which the Khmer Rouge had supposedly made great progress. They had eradicated malaria thanks to disease prevention campaigns and a careful dosage of traditional and modern medicine. Pharmaceutical factories stood as the symbol of this alleged victory. The one at Kompong Cham, and its white-clad workers decanting liquids and filling ampoules, was a must-see of the guided tour (figure 31). So were the rubber tree plantation and rubber factory at Chamcar Andong (Dong) in Kompong Cham. These had been once the property of French colons, and American bombardment had partly destroyed them during the civil war. A few years later, they were fully operational again. The visitors were brought to a very neat and effective

⁹² Rigaux, “Témoignage,” *Infor-Kampuchea*, 26.

⁹³ Wikander, “The First Report from the Closed Country,” 18.

⁹⁴ Gunnar Bergström, “The First Report from Within: Kampuchea's Peasants Create a Tolerable Existence,” *Kampuchea August 1978: Records from a Journey made by a Delegation from the Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association* (Stockholm: Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association, October 1978), 22.

⁹⁵ Myrdal, “When the Peasant War Triumphed,” 3-4.

factory, a plantation beautifully maintained, and containers filled with rubber (figure 32). Even to ever-suspicious Becker, it seemed to work well: “From previous reporting I had done on rubber manufacturing in Cambodia, this operation looked to me both efficient and producing high-quality rubber.”⁹⁶ The model factory-plantation Chamcar Andong was the perfect demonstration of what happened when workers finally became their own masters.

Myrdal’s remark, it turns out, does not fall wide of the mark after all. “To view Soviet model sites of socialism as Potemkin villages built solely to dupe foreigners is to misunderstand their importance for the push to transform the Soviet population,” David-Fox argues.⁹⁷ The same argument applies to the Khmer Rouge conducted tour. The Kampuchea the Pol Pot’s regime showcased was more than a façade. It was a vision of the future. Cambodia as it was visualized in the visit was the country described in the 1976 four-year plan. The Upper Brothers fantasized a place where each family would have a neat house and enough to eat, where light industry would develop thanks to agriculture and in turn sustain the building of heavy industry.⁹⁸ The tour simply proved that this future was within reach. Creating showplaces was not a problem since one day these creations would stop being showplaces and become typical.⁹⁹ This possibly explains why the delegates believed in Cambodia’s Potemkin villages. These responded to their expectations of development in a Third World revolutionary society. The visitors grasped the “prophetic” dimension of what they were shown as something perhaps not “real” yet but underway. The Khmer Rouge certainly understood at some deep level the utopia-seeking dimension of Western political pilgrimage for it had been theirs too for years. They had been dreaming up a new society in the isolation of their jungle bases, and tried to materialize this dream once in power. In that sense, the CPK leaders may have seen the fantasies of their guests not only as Western projections onto the Cambodian landscape but recognized them, in part, as their own vision.¹⁰⁰

4.2.3 In the city

It was easier for the Khmer Rouge to stage idyllic situations in the countryside since their Western guests, for the most part, had little clue as to rural life in Southeast Asia. But the far more familiar environment of the city was a place where the fantasy was most

⁹⁶ Becker, “The Cambodian experiment,” 11.

⁹⁷ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 8.

⁹⁸ “Four-Year Plan,” *Pol Pot Plans the Future. Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977*, eds. David P. Chandler, Ben Kiernan, and Chanthou Boua (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), 110-111, 97-98.

⁹⁹ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 390.

¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, the Four-Year Plan deals with the development of tourism, especially in the region of Siem Reap and Angkor, and lists what must be created for that purpose, from hotels to running water, from electricity to communication routes (including civil aviation). There is a need for “places to relax and visit: the regions of Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, Banteay Srey, the system of dikes, irrigation channels, canals, rice fields, vegetable gardens, fishing areas, Baray Tuk Thla, etc,” it reads. The trajectory described here is basically the one followed by the Western delegations that travelled across the country. Was the conducted tour for political friends a testing ground for future plans? Were the Khmer Rouge ready to replace tourists of the revolution with tourists *tout court*? “Four-Year Plan,” 114-115.

likely to wear off. The Khmer Rouge did their best to give an impression of normalcy, especially in Phnom Penh. They organized visits to all the “tourist” spots of the city, the Royal Palace, the Silver Pagoda, and the National Museum, which was a good way for them to prove the respect of the regime for Khmer traditions, culture, and history (figure 33). As for the rest of the urban tour, it was based on the same narratives as described above, namely the emphasis on war and the showcasing of the new Kampuchea. The bunker of Republican commander-in-chief Sosthène Fernandez allowed the Khmer Rouge to retell their victory over the pro-American government of Lon Nol. Photos in the reports of the delegates showed the war room preserved in the same state as it was on April 17, 1975 and the guide (a soldier who had supposedly participated in the “liberation” of the city) using the maps still hanging on the room’s wall to recount the battle for Phnom Penh. The visit continued with an open-air museum, not far from the bunker, which displayed military equipment seized from the enemy.¹⁰¹ Norwegian delegate Pål Steigan even posed proudly with a few Khmer Rouge troops on the top of a Soviet tank (figure 34).



Figure 34: Norwegian delegate Pål Steigan in Phnom Penh (October 1978).
Source: “Kampuchea,” *Klassekampen* 262, November 11, 1978.

Other key sites of the tour were schools and hospitals. The Mechanical School was supposed to demonstrate the superiority of the Khmer Rouge educational system in response to the slanderous campaign in the West about child labor. Mirroring the Cultural Revolution in China, education in DK combined study and work. The visitors documented the two sides: on the one hand, the studious classroom where children solved calculations on the blackboard under the approving eye of the teacher; on the other hand,

¹⁰¹ Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np.

the busy workshops where boys and girls repaired engines and welded metal sheets (figures 35-36). Although captions hardly give any information, it is likely that foreigners visited the 17 April Hospital, former Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital.¹⁰² The equipment one sees in the photos of the delegates (especially the color ones of the Swedes) looks technically advanced (figures 37). It was reserved for high-ranking members of the CPK—something the guests were probably not told by their guides. So were the maternity and children's hospital. The French delegates went in raptures over the beautiful garden, the dedicated staff, and the lady director who had studied medicine in the jungle during the civil war.¹⁰³ They took pictures of babies sleeping under a checkered blanket, nurses tending to newborns, and doctors examining sick children. The guests were driven to monuments, hospitals, and schools under good escort. There was no possibility to wander in the city. Yet, what they could grasp of Phnom Penh now and then showed them that it had become a most peculiar environment.

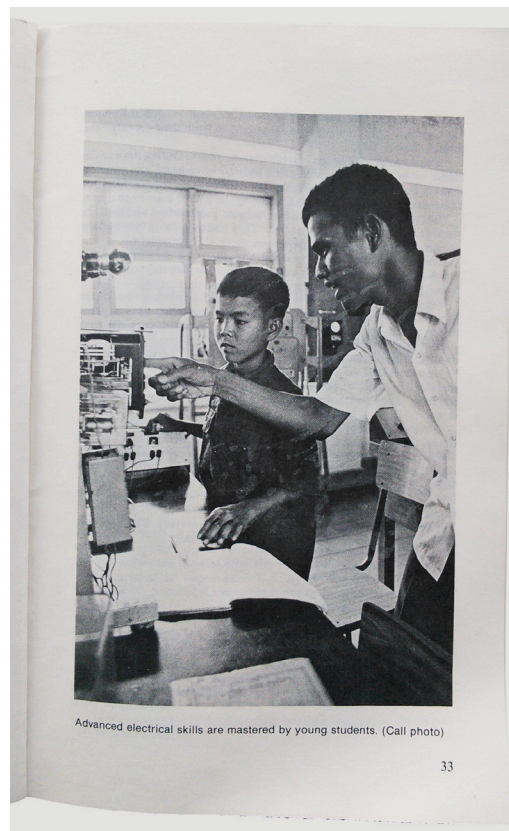


Figure 35: Electrical school in Phnom Penh.
Source: *Kampuchea Today* (The Call, December 1978)

¹⁰² At least seven hospitals had been re-opened in Phnom Penh. This included the 1 January Hospital (former Calmette Hospital) for the children of CPK members, the Andoung Hospital (P-98) for soldiers, and Hospital P-3 near Pochentong airport for the Chinese technical advisors. James Tyner, Samuel Henkin, Savina Sirik, and Sokvisal Kimsroy, "Phnom Penh during the Cambodian Genocide: A Case of Selective Urbicide," *Environment and Planning A* 46 (2014): 1886.

¹⁰³ Annie Brunel, "Mille Kilomètres à travers le Kampuchéa Démocratique," *L'Humanité Rouge* 955, October 20, 1978.

By 1978, Phnom Penh did no longer resemble the capital of the civil war period, overcrowded by refugees. It was now completely empty and in some part mausoleum-like:

Government buildings were freshly painted; the railway station was a muted coral color, the ministry of information a soft yellow. The parks were immaculate, the lawns reseeded and mowed, the flowerbeds weeded and in bloom. There was no litter on the streets, no trash, no dirt.¹⁰⁴

The city was an eerie sight, even for die-hard sympathizers. Jurquet speaks of its “unexpected, even surreal” aspect.¹⁰⁵ The Turkish journalists describe Phnom Penh as a museum of life as it was before the fall of the Lon Nol’s regime (figure 38).¹⁰⁶ “There is no escaping the fact that the towns make a strange impression with their almost empty streets and overgrown houses,” Bergström commented.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, even Khmer Rouge such as Suong Sikoeun and Y Phandara had felt some unease when they discovered the new aspect of Phnom Penh upon their return in Cambodia.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, the Western visitors refused to add grist to the mill of imperialist governments and media. The evacuation of Phnom Penh had been a major news item in 1975 and become a recurrent argument for all politicians and journalists condemning the Khmer Rouge regime. Kissinger—of all people—had called it an “atrociousness of major proportions” (*New York Times*, May 14, 1975). In spite of their good intentions, the delegates still had to work hard to find plausible explanations regarding the situation in the city. They used a set of arguments. First of all, there were still inhabitants in Phnom Penh. *The Call* gave a figure of 200,000 city dwellers.¹⁰⁹ Did the Khmer Rouge realize that no one would believe so high a figure? Thereafter they corrected their numbers, which kept oscillating more reasonably between 20,000 and 60,000.¹¹⁰ Bourgeois media claimed Phnom Penh was a dead city. “Not at all!” the French delegates asserted, “When we arrive, at noon, shutters are down because of the heat. But in the evening, there is light in houses that one thought abandoned.”¹¹¹ Bergström made a similar observation:

It has been said that the city is empty at night but this is not correct—those who work in Phnom Penh live there. We saw day nurseries and schools, wash on the line, and chickens around the houses, all signs of a settled population.¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 399.

¹⁰⁵ Jurquet, *A Contre-courant*, 276.

¹⁰⁶ Ataberk and Çolakoğlu, *Savaşın Kamboçya*, np.

¹⁰⁷ Bergström, “The First Report from Within,” 25.

¹⁰⁸ Both speak, for instance, of the coconut trees planted at the Central Market, an architectural Art-Déco landmark of Phnom Penh. Suong Sikoeun, *Itinéraire d’un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge*, 181-182, 185; Y Phandara, *Retour à Phnom Penh*, 66.

¹⁰⁹ Burstein, *Kampuchea Today*, 8.

¹¹⁰ According to Suong Sikoeun, there were around 20,000 people in Phnom Penh: soldiers, military and civilian cadres, and workers. Most came from small villages and had never seen electric lights before coming to the city. Suong, *Itinéraire d’un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge*, 184.

¹¹¹ Camille Granot, “Mille Kilomètres travers le Kampuchéa Démocratique,” *L’Humanité Rouge* 950, October 13, 1978.

¹¹² Bergström, “The First Report from Within,” 25.

The delegates photographed any sign of life they could find in Phnom Penh. The article “Phnom Penh, en ‘forlat spøkelsesby?’” (“Phnom Penh, an abandoned ghost city?”) in *Klassekampen* included pictures of small groups of people walking around, chickens in front of a house, and workers standing at the gate of a factory (figures 39-40).¹¹³ Similar images appeared in articles in *Aydinlik*, the report of *The Call*, and Kline’s book, which featured a few photos of people riding bicycles on their way to work or to school. Myrdal filmed some cars and trucks on Boulevard Monivong. Yet, he knew these pictures would hardly convince viewers at home. Hence the second argument: “The abandoned cities do raise questions,” Myrdal admitted. “Yes, large sections of Phnom Penh resemble a ghost town. But it is possible to discuss these questions rationally,” he continued. What did a rational discussion of such an issue imply? The evacuation of cities had been hasty and badly planned, Myrdal recognized, but the CPK leaders had excellent reasons for ordering the population to leave Phnom Penh. There were threats of mass starvation and bombing by the U.S. Army. Furthermore, the disrupted environment of the city made it an ideal base for reaction and counter-revolution.¹¹⁴ CIA and KGB agents were lurking everywhere. “They all had spectacular arms caches [underground] and electronic communication equipment to stay in touch with their masters” and plan a coup.¹¹⁵ The delegates could now support this argument with visual evidence, such as photos of the remnants of the National Bank allegedly blown up by the CIA days after the liberation (figure 41).



Figure 38: Phnom Penh (September 1978). Source: newspaper *Aydinlik*, October 20, 1978.

¹¹³ “Kampuchea!” *Klassekampen* 10/255, November 3, 1978.

¹¹⁴ Myrdal, “When the Peasant War Triumphed,” 6.

¹¹⁵ Burstein, *Kampuchea Today*, 7-8.

The third argument was that Europeans “spoiled by centuries of urban civilization” could not understand the choice of equality made by the Khmer Rouge when emptying the cities. The role of urban centers was to be radically different in the new society. It would be limited to accommodating the administration and nascent industry.¹¹⁶ One could not judge Phnom Penh as it was right now because the city was still in a period of transition. It had “gone to hibernation and in the shells new city cultures are already growing up.”¹¹⁷ The regime intended to re-populate Phnom Penh, but the city had to be cleaned and beautified before being fully operational. Photos of workers sweeping the streets or removing weeds and rubbles showed that the operation was already underway (figure 42). In hindsight, the guests were not completely misguided. The CPK leaders had retained administration and trade functions in Phnom Penh and certainly intended to keep the city as economic and political node, albeit in a modified form.¹¹⁸ In this respect, the spectacle the guests were offered in Phnom Penh was not a total window dressing.

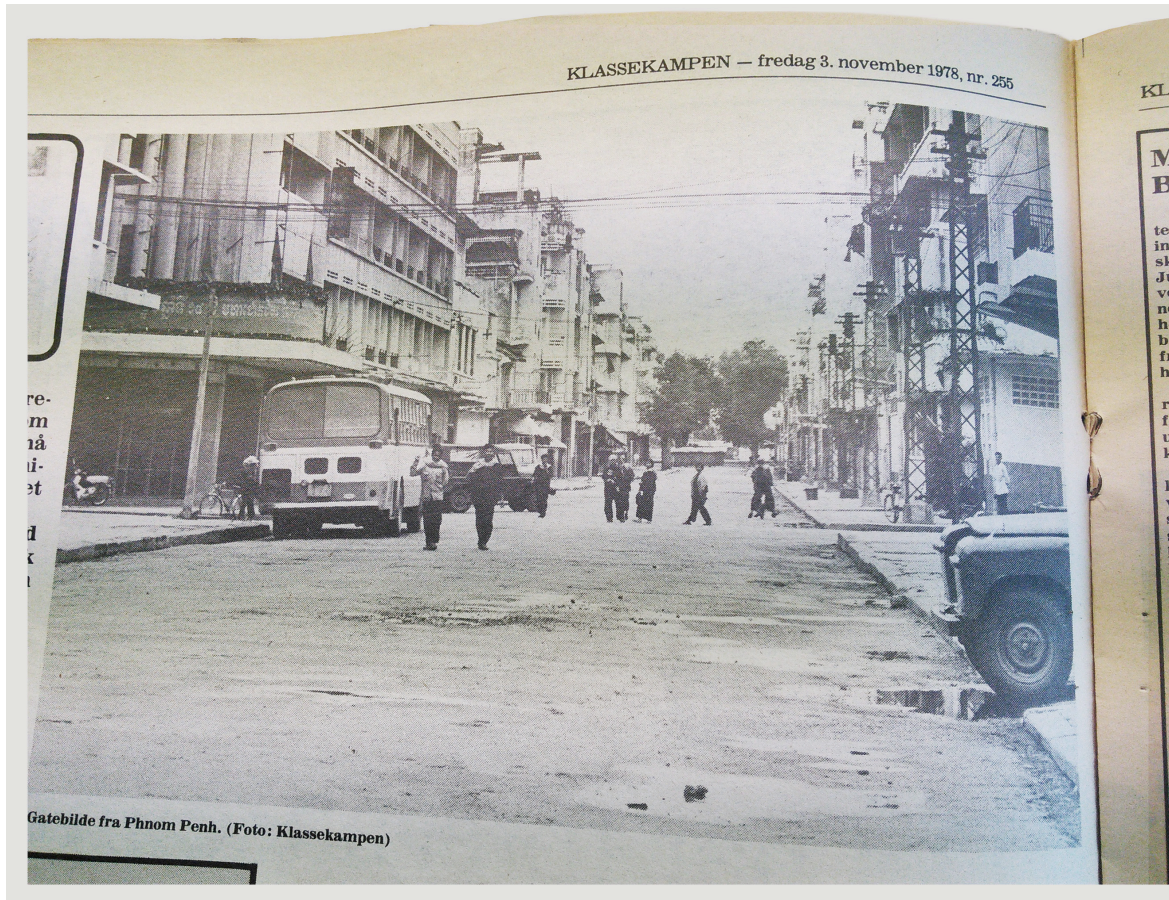


Figure 39: Phnom Penh (October 1978). Source: “Kampuchea,” *Klassekampen* 255, November 3, 1978.

¹¹⁶ Rigaux, “Témoignage,” 25-27.

¹¹⁷ Myrdal, “When the Peasant War Triumphed,” 7.

¹¹⁸ See: Tyner et al., “Phnom Penh during the Cambodian Genocide.”



Figure 40: Workers in front of a factory, Phnom Penh (October 1978).
 Source: "Kampuchea," *Klassekampen* 255, November 3, 1978.

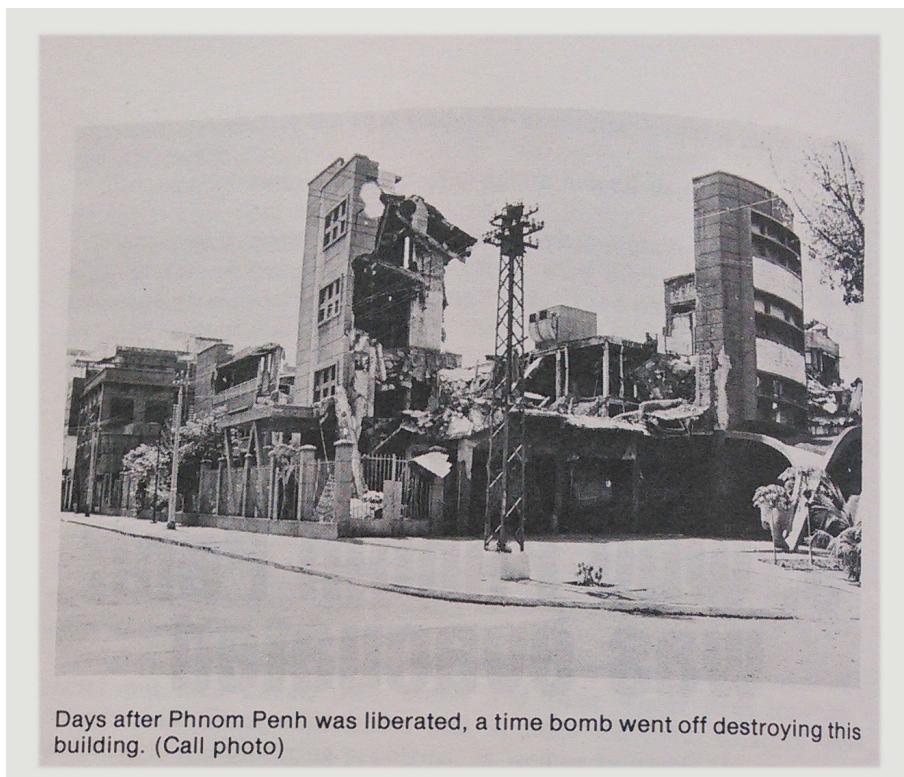


Figure 41: Destroyed National Bank.
 Source: *Kampuchea Today* (The Call, December 1978).



Figure 42: Team working to clean up Phnom Penh.
Source: *Kampuchea Today* (The Call, December 1978).

However, the city remained for a major part nothing more than a Potemkin village. After a first unsuccessful attempt to walk alone in Phnom Penh, Becker tried again the day after. This time, she discovered that:

Before Monivong, beyond the stage-set perfection of the boulevard, the city had been left to rot. Down the side streets, the houses with their sweet gardens, the small bungalows and shops, were overgrown with weeds. Some yards were now garbage dumps. Not all of the shops on Monivong itself were empty, in fact. They were warehouses of sorts. Furniture was thrown inside some of them, stacked in a haphazard fashion. Others were crammed with appliances.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 403.

Bergström had a hard time shaking the “peculiar impression” the city made on him: “In Phnom Penh, the roll-fronts are pulled down over the window of the shops but sometimes one can look through the cracks and see how all sorts of rubbish lies littering about.”¹²⁰ This image indeed is quite symbolic of the effort some visitors had to perform to continue believing in the myth of Khmer Rouge Cambodia—they kept a lot of inconvenient or forbidden judgments in the back of their mind.

4.3 Back in the West

“A highly selected version of what refugees have reported under quite unfavorable conditions was transmitted by observers of evident bias and low credibility, and given massive publicity as unquestionable fact. Reports of visitors [in DK] were ignored or distorted,” Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman argue in *After the Cataclysm*.¹²¹ This was not exact. Upon return the delegates accessed mainstream media. Italian delegate Pesce published in *Corriere della Serra*, the Swedes in *Dagens Nyheter*, and French Maoist Jurquet in *Le Monde* and *Libération*. Journalists from *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Voice of America*, and Associated Press among others attended the press conference held by Burstein in May 1978. The delegates were also invited to participate in national television shows (Burstein on Educational TV and CBS in June 1978) and radio programs (Jurquet on France Inter in October 1978). Needless to say, these programs were organized as confrontations. Burstein was pitted against Anthony Paul and Tim Carney (no friends of the Pol Pot’s regime), Jurquet against Lacouture and Ponchaud. Still, this gave the pro-Khmer Rouge groups a national platform. As well, the delegates were free to organize public meetings as they wished. The journalists of *The Call* gave talks in Detroit, Atlanta, San Diego, New York City, Washington DC, and other cities across the United States.¹²² The Swedish delegates organized slideshows and lectures in thirty-nine different places.¹²³ Early 1979, the members of the Canadian Communist League did a cross-country tour of eighteen cities, including Halifax, Ottawa, Windsor, and Winnipeg.¹²⁴ So much for a conspiracy of silence!

Furthermore, the reports of Becker and Dudman were published in mainstream media, the *Washington Post* and the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* respectively. Of course, these were wary views of DK, which had little to do with the dithyrambic reports of Maoists. Still, they did not criticize harshly the Khmer Rouge regime. Although he thought that Cambodia had become “one huge work camp,” Dudman said that he had not seen any trace of coercion on working sites or signs of malnutrition. On the contrary, it seemed that living conditions had improved for most Cambodians in terms of housing, clothing, and food. In the journalist’s view, the economy of the country even appeared viable.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Bergström, “The First Report from Within,” 25.

¹²¹ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *After the Cataclysm: Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1979), 201.

¹²² The Call, “Call Journalists Speak in 17 Cities. Tour Educates Thousands on Kampuchea,” *The Call*, October 25, 1978.

¹²³ Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 179.

¹²⁴ The Forge, *Kampuchea will win!* 8, 58.

¹²⁵ Dudman, “Report,” 4-5. Interestingly, “positive” parts of Dudman’s report were even quoted

Becker was far more cautious, but she too admitted that she had seen “little indication” of the horrors reported by Cambodian refugees.¹²⁶ Moreover, she was “forced to conclude” that the economic system of the Khmer Rouge seemed to be working. The figures she had been given were not “too misleading.” However, how this was achieved, she stressed, was “an entirely separate matter.”¹²⁷

The tour of Western delegations in Khmer Rouge Cambodia was soon forgotten, as are the trips of many other fellow travelers in communist countries. For the visitors themselves, though, this was another story. The journey in DK was a life-changing event, which came to define much of their further professional and political choices. Some kept supporting officially the deposed Khmer Rouge for a few more years. They participated in the pro-Khmer Rouge conference held in Stockholm on November 17-18, 1979, in the presence of honor guests Ieng Thirith and Ok Sakun, or they joined the various support committees forming or reforming in the wake of Vietnam’s victory over Cambodia.¹²⁸ In these new groups hardcore Maoists fought side by side with anti-Communists, united in their common hatred for Moscow, Hanoi, and the “puppet government” in Phnom Penh. Some left their party but continued campaigning against Vietnam alongside the Khmer Rouge, such as Brunel who left the PC-ML but collaborated with the Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique de Gentilly.¹²⁹ Other delegates quickly regretted their past position vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge and did a complete and public turnabout. Many changed their mind sometime in the eighties and after that preferred not to be mentioned anymore in relation to the Kampuchean episode. Only a minority kept a positive opinion about Pol Pot until the present-day. Jan Myrdal is one of the few (perhaps the only one now) in this case, and he remains vocal about it. Jurquet defended a similar position for a long time, blaming Khmer Rouge terror on the ultra-leftist “Pol Pot clique” under the influence of China’s Gang of Four, and salvaging the rest of the movement deemed worthy of support.¹³⁰ Mostly, former delegates kept silent out of a mix of guilt, shame, remorse, and fear of being associated with a murderous regime. For years they were haunted by the same questions: How could I be deceived so easily? What

by Defense Counsel for Nuon Chea Victor Koppe during the Tribunal’s hearings in March 2015. “Witness Richard Dudman, 76 years a newspaperman, keeps his skepticism,” Testimony of Richard Dudman, ECCC, March 30, 2015.

¹²⁶ Becker, “The Cambodian Experiment,” 11.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 12.

¹²⁸ At the initiative of Jan Myrdal, Alain Bouc, and Han Suyin, a preparatory meeting was organized in Paris on June 30-July 1, 1979, in the presence of Thioung Prasith. “Sosteniamo la Conferenza Internazionale per l’Indipendenza del Kampuchea Democratico.” *Linea Proletaria*, no. 22, August 4, 1979. About 250 delegates out of thirty-five countries attended the conference in Stockholm, chaired by Marita Wikander. The speakers were Ieng Thirith, Jan Myrdal, Pierre Foncier, Samuel Noumoff (Canada), Tokumatsu Sakamoto (director of the Japan-Kampuchea Friendship Association), T. Dastidar (Bangladesh Gano Front), George Hildebrand (United States), Mehmet Ataberk (Turkey), Acacia Barreiros (Portugal), Pradith Vongbandith (Committee for the Independence of Laos) and Count Pietersen (Pan-African Congress of Azania). “Stockholm Conference, a Big Success,” *Class Struggle*, December 20, 1979; Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique de Gentilly, *Nouvelles du Kampuchéa Démocratique* 64 (November-December 1979).

¹²⁹ Interview of Brunel, Aberdam, “Visites Guidées,” np.

¹³⁰ Jurquet, *A Contre-courant*, 288.

could I have done different? Some chose to put the journey-related materials in boxes and never look at them again. It was a way as good as any other to repress painful memories, but for how long?

5. Old images, new debates?

5.1 “Thou shalt repent”

5.1.1 Returning to Cambodia (2008)

Shortly after the journey in DK Gunnar Bergström publicly recognized his misguided judgment vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge. At the end of 1978 he published an article in a major Swedish newspaper in which he declared that he and the other delegates had been wrong supporting the Pol Pot’s regime. At the time he had already moved away from Stockholm and resettled in the country’s far north, where he worked with drug addicts. Of course he lost many friends over this claim. Yet, in spite of his change of opinion, the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association (that dissolved only a few years later) proposed him to remain a member. The association was forming a new resistance front against the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and needed to show that it represented a broad coalition where even criticism could be expressed. Bergström refused to join them and stayed away from the reshuffled group and the events it organized.¹³¹ He kept the trip-related material in a box in his cellar. The idea to look at it again came up after the broadcast of the radio program *Tystnaden I Phnom Penh* (“Silence of Phnom Penh”) of Bosse Lindqvist on Sveriges Radio (September 25, 1999). Lindqvist mentioned the travel of the delegation and wondered how the delegates could have ever supported the Khmer Rouge regime. Bergström realized that he was not finished with the story yet. Around the same period, someone even suggested that he write a book, but he thought that no one would be interested in the subject. His first change of mind occurred after his meeting with Peter Fröberg Idling. In the early 2000s Fröberg Idling, a young Swedish lawyer working for a human rights organization in Cambodia, had come across the report of the delegation *Kampuchea mellan två krig* in a bookshop in Phnom Penh. Astonished by the photo of the four association members in front of Angkor Wat, he decided to find and interview them. His quest is narrated in the book *Pol Pots Leende: Om en Svensk Resa genom Röda Khmerernas Kambodja* (“Pol Pot’s smile: a Swedish journey in Khmer Rouge Cambodia”) published in 2006. Fröberg Idling’s search for the delegates was half successful. Ekerwald received the writer, showed him some photos, and spoke about the past. But she changed her mind and told him she did not wish to continue, having had too many bad experiences with interviewers.¹³² At first Myrdal supported the initiative, but he suddenly backed off (possibly on Ieng Sary’s advise) and turned down Fröberg Idling’s further attempts to talk to him.¹³³ From the start, Wikander was not receptive to the project, probably because at the same period her son Jesper Huor was writing a book

¹³¹ Unless mentioned otherwise, the information comes from Gunnar Bergström, personal communication to author, April 20, 2015.

¹³² Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot*, 206.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 71.

about the story of his parents.¹³⁴ Bergström was the only one who agreed to be interviewed at length by Fröberg Idling. It was at this occasion that the writer suggested the idea of a return to Cambodia. The real turning point for Bergström was the encounter with Youk Chhang. In 2007 the director of the DC-Cam came to Sweden for a seminar on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. Bergström saw an advertisement for the event. He went there to meet with Youk Chhang and proposed a donation of his materials to the DC-Cam (a hundred original slides made after the travel and other documents collected during the trip).¹³⁵ Youk Chhang and his assistants came for a dinner at Bergström's and it was then that the idea to publish a book and organize a return journey to Cambodia began to take shape.

Bergström arrived in Phnom Penh, for the second time of his life, in November 2008 for the launch of the book and exhibition *Gunnar in the Living Hell* [thereafter *Living Hell*]. From the beginning his travel was mediatized. The Levande Historia Forum, which partnered with the DC-Cam for the project, recruited Julia Stanislawka and Michael Krotkiewski, two students from the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts, to film the journey of the former delegate in Cambodia. This became the documentary movie *I dreamed about Pol Pot* (2009).¹³⁶ The travel of Bergström across the country replicated the trajectory of the Swedish delegation in August 1978. He took the same road north to Battambang and Siem Reap, but came back via the other side of the Tonle Sap, unlike in his previous trip. The DC-Cam tried to take the Swede to locations he had visited thirty years earlier. This was partly successful. Some places, such as model cooperatives, did not exist anymore. Youk Chhang had the idea to organize besides the exhibition encounters between Bergström and villagers, survivors, and community leaders. These forums took place in cities where the DC-Cam could arrange such events—in Phnom Penh at the National Institute of Education and the Reyum Gallery, in a tent at Wat Boeung Kok in Kompong Cham, and in Battambang. At first, the purpose of the meetings was to explain why Bergström had been so blind to the terror in DK, but his return in Cambodia took more and more the form of a cathartic break with the past. The forums became a platform from which the Swede apologized to Cambodians and atoned for his mistakes. The idea to apologize came in a natural way, Bergström says. While writing the text of *Living Hell*, the Swede realized that survivors and families of victims would read it. He felt that something more was needed for them, some closure or excuse. In a way history repeated itself. Once more, Bergström was on a mission. In 1978, he had come to tell a story. In 2008, it was the same, only the story had changed. This time it was in line with the context of the project. As other events organized within the outreach activities of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, it promoted reconciliation and resilience.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Published as *Sista resan till Phnom Penh* (“The last trip to Phnom Penh”) in 2006.

¹³⁵ These were the original documents. Bergström had kept a copy. Personal communication to author, Julia Stanislawka, June 29, 2015. See also: Stéphanie Gée, “Les excuses d'un Suédois pour son Soutien aux Khmers Rouges,” *Ka-Set*, November 22, 2008; Erika Kinetz, “Pol Pot’s Former Dinner Guest Admits to Lapse in Judgment,” *The Cambodia Daily*, November 1, 2007.

¹³⁶ Both were familiar with the story of the Friendship Association, thanks to the book of Fröberg Idling. Personal communication to author, Julia Stanislawka, June 29, 2015.

¹³⁷ I thank Julia Stanislawka for pointing out this parallel and discussing with me the complexity of the situation. She felt that the tour in 2008 replicated the 1978 visit in many ways. Once again, Bergström was at the center of attention, though as a sort of “anti-hero” this time,

How was the apology received? According to DC-Cam staff member Faily Sa, who accompanied Bergström to the forums, it went well. There was some incomprehension from the side of Cambodians, who could hardly figure out the Swede's blindness to the nature of the Khmer Rouge regime. Still, his excuses were generally accepted, even if some said it would not bring their family back to life.¹³⁸ The Christian-like aspect of Bergström making amends struck a chord in Buddhist Cambodia. Few people in the audience doubted the Swede's sincerity. The fact a Westerner took responsibility for his acts—whereas no senior Khmer Rouge had apologized as yet—was received positively. Sarah Jones Dickens, the American intern at the DC-Cam who participated in the organization of the project, gives a feedback similar as Sa's.¹³⁹ Bergström says he found it sometimes difficult to explain things in the Cambodian context. In Kompong Cham, his audience was mostly made of monks. Maoism did not speak much to them but they were receptive to the idea of belief, although they could not understand how one would believe in Pol Pot. In Battambang, the audience was made of people from Hun Sen's CPP. They wanted Bergström to say that the Khmer Rouge were the creature of the Americans and the Chinese, but he did not want to and insisted on the Khmer dimension of the CPK. In Phnom Penh, he did not hear it but was told later that some people at the back said he was lying when he claimed he had seen nothing during his journey in Cambodia. One of them was a survivor of S-21. Bergström patched up things with him afterwards. The more interesting discussions he had, he thinks, happened in the street when he showed the photos of the 1978 trip. The only time he got an angry reaction was a woman who had lost her whole family in DK. At first she was furious at him and said all Khmer Rouge leaders should be killed. Then she changed her mind and explained that revenge would make Cambodians the same kind of bad persons as the Khmer Rouge themselves.¹⁴⁰

The apology was considered as a form of reparation not only for Cambodians, but for Bergström as well. It was a "healing process," in the words of Youk Chhang, who added: "He [Bergström] is part of our history now, and it's our mission to help people reconcile and move on."¹⁴¹ Undeniably, the journey deeply affected Bergström. Jones Dickens writes she saw him once stand to take a picture exactly at the same spot where he had stood in 1978, and had a feeling of "uncanny reenactment."¹⁴² The most emotional moment happened in Siem Reap. Bergström had visited Tuol Sleng just before traveling northwest. He had been given only one hour to tour the prison because a bus waited for him to take him to Siem Reap. The visit in the museum was rapidly completed, under

and no longer as the pampered chairman of a support committee. Personal communication to author, June 29, 2015.

¹³⁸ Faily Sa, personal communication to author, October 2014. See also: Stéphanie Gée, "Le Pèlerinage Expiatoire de Gunnar Bergström Laisse les Cambodgiens en Quête de Réponses," *Ka-Set*, December 4, 2008.

¹³⁹ Sarah Jones Dickens, November 27, 2008, "The Power of an Apology: Gunnar Bergström," Chandrapong007.

¹⁴⁰ Julia Stanislawska also mentions this encounter as one of the strongest moments of the journey. Personal communication to author, June 29, 2015.

¹⁴¹ Ker Munthit, "Swede Apologizes for Sympathizing with Khmer Rouge," *Taiwan News*, November 16, 2008.

¹⁴² Sarah Jones Dickens, "New Revelations: Gunnar Bergström's Return to Cambodia. From the Field, Kompong Cham, Cambodia," *Searching for the Truth*, November 21, 2008.

great stress as some thirty journalists and cameramen constantly followed him. After the visit a Japanese journalist accused the Swede of having reacted too little to Tuol Sleng. In fact, the reaction came much later, in Siem Reap. Bergström went to Sihanouk's residence (where the delegates had slept) but it was locked. Then he went to the pagoda he had found in 1978 (at the time, he says, they were followed by guards but still could walk freely in the city). The Khmer Rouge had converted it into a warehouse. Now it was a pagoda again, Wat Prum Raot. There he met the chief monk, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge regime, who had lived at the pagoda before April 1975 and was deported to the countryside. The two men had a long conversation, during which Bergström cried. The day after the monk organized a big ceremony to say that he was forgiven.

5.1.2 The narrative of repentance

The story of the Swedish delegation (and Bergström especially) set the tone. From there, the narrative of repentance went far beyond that particular example and came to structure in a much broader way the public reception of other stories and materials of fellow travelers in DK. Fröberg Idling's book *Pol Pots leende* was pivotal in this development. The Swede was not the first one to investigate the issue. In 2004 Danish historian Peter Frederiksen had published *Kindkys af Pol Pot. Kampuchea og den Danske Forbindelse* ("Kiss on the Cheek of Pol Pot. Kampuchea and the Danish Connection") based on research in the archives of the delegation's party (the KAP) and interviews with delegates Bischoff and Madsen. The book of Frederiksen did not have the same international echo as Fröberg Idling's. Since none of them was translated into English, the difference in methodology—that is, archive-based historical research versus postmodern narrative—possibly explains why these works encountered a different reception. Through "technologies of memory that generate biographical archives or are grafted onto biographical artifact," Fröberg Idling transforms a political experience into "emotive currency."¹⁴³ Indeed, emotions are at the core of his project. How do the former delegates feel about their trip in DK twenty-five years later? Do they regret their support to a genocidal regime? These questions appear legitimate, yet they also hint at a more disturbing idea—repentance. This is no longer repentance as described by Bruckner thirty years ago, the almost ontological sin of being a Westerner, a white man, hence belonging to a civilization that had oppressed and colonized so many others. Repentance in this new context means making amends for having erred ideologically. *Pol Pots leende* neither clarifies the particular circumstances of fellow traveling in DK nor nuances the stages by which those concerned acknowledged past misjudgments. Instead, Fröberg Idling walks a very thin line between asking public people to take responsibility for their acts (which is absolutely fair) and exposing individuals in a way that forces them to apologize. Although he himself does not cast the first stone (would I have done better, he wonders at several occasions), there is a virtuous dimension in Fröberg Idling's work, as if he were righting some wrong. This possibly accounts for the impact of the book beyond Swedish intellectual and political circles.

¹⁴³ Allen Feldman, "Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma Aesthetic," *Biography*, vol.27, no.1 (2004), 167.

Pol Pots Leende met with unexpected success in Sweden. Fröberg Idling thought that only a few thousand people would read his book but it sold 30,000 copies.¹⁴⁴ This paved the way for the exhibition organized at the Levande Historia Forum (LHF) in Stockholm in September 2009, *Middag med Pol Pot: en Utställning om Ideologiska Skygglapar och Selektivt Seend* (“Dinner with Pol Pot: an exhibition on ideological blinkers and selective vision”).¹⁴⁵ The exhibition focused on the visit of the Swedish delegation in Cambodia in 1978. It presented a wide range of materials: photos and maps (printed on large sheets of textile), documentary movies, objects, and a comprehensive documentation fact-checked by historian David Chandler. The general tone of the project was clear. Pictures taken by the delegates in DK were displayed in a section called “Paradise,” in stark contrast with photos of S-21 prisoners shown in the section “Hell.” Of course the “atonement” of Bergström was a major theme, represented through images of his return journey in Cambodia and the screening of the film *I dreamed about Pol Pot*. From the start the exhibition proved controversial. The promotional video *Mao-Glasögon*, an ironic take on the delegation’s travel, was widely criticized.¹⁴⁶ The exhibition itself gave rise to negative reviews. Journalists pointed out the selective vision of the LHF and the historical simplifications of the display.¹⁴⁷ The public discussion reached a whole new level when Parliamentary Ombudsman (Justitie Ombudsman, JO) Hans-Gunnar Axberger received complaints from journalist Stefan Lindgren and Ekerwald herself.¹⁴⁸ Ekerwald claimed that she had been deceived by the LHF. She had consented to their using a photo she had taken in DK and also a quotation of her words, but this was before the context had been explained to her. She wrote to the JO: “The entire exhibit functions as punishment for what I have said and written on the subject of the Red Khmers in Cambodia.”¹⁴⁹ Surprisingly, the Ombudsman agreed with Ekerwald. The exhibition, then about to open at the Östergötlands Läns museet (County Museum) in Linköping, had to close until problematic elements were corrected. However, the decision to complain to the JO backfired for Ekerwald. The story put her in the spotlight. When the exhibition reopened, it attracted far more visitors than usual. Ekerwald became famous for being someone who had misjudged the Khmer Rouge regime and was still unable to make amends.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ Peter Fröberg Idling, “Myrdal, du har inget lärt på 25 år,” *Aftonbladet*, March 30, 2006. *Pol Pots leende* was translated in Dutch, German, Russian, Polish, and Italian.

¹⁴⁵ The exhibition, curated by Erika Aronowitsch, was on display from September 9, 2009 through February 22, 2010. For more information about the LHF and the exhibition, see: Conny Mithander, “From the Holocaust to the Gulag: The Crimes of Nazism and Communism in Swedish post-1989 Memory Politics,” *European Studies* 30 (2013).

¹⁴⁶ See Appendix G.

¹⁴⁷ Åsa Linder, “Middag med Suharto,” *Expressen*, September 20, 2009; Lars Linder, “Levande Historia, Middag med Pol Pot,” *Dagens Nyheter*, September 14, 2009; Per Wirtén, “Middag med Pol Pot,” *Expressen*, September 17, 2009.

¹⁴⁸ As director of the pro-Khmer Rouge journal *Kampuchea*, Lindgren had been a guest of the ousted leaders in November 1980 (Appendix D). His name is listed in Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique, *Nouvelles du Kampuchéa Démocratique* 70 (December 1-6, 1980), 5.

¹⁴⁹ Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsman, “Criticism of the Living History Forum and its Exhibition *Middag med Pol Pot* [Dinner with Pol Pot],” (Sweden: Stockholm, November 4, 2010), 2-3.

¹⁵⁰ During the closure of the exhibition (from November 5, 2010 to January 7, 2011), the Östergötlands Läns museet was allowed to show only the movie *I dreamed of Pol Pot*. When

Needless to say, the Swedish context is a specific one, and the country's past position on the left side of the political spectrum as champion of Third World revolutions explains reactions to Fröberg Idling's book and *Middag med Pol Pot*. Both acted as a catalyst revealing the difficulty Sweden had coming to terms with her own socialist past. Approval of the Pol Pot's regime had been widespread among Swedish politicians and intellectuals in the seventies. The repentance of some of them (designated "culprits") became to some extent a catharsis for many others who had shared the same sympathies for the Khmer Rouge. At the same time, it was this very demand for expiation implied in both projects that made the book and the exhibition the subject of public debates. But of course revisiting politics through a highly emotional prism offered only a limited insight into the intricacies of Cold War international relations.

Sweden's "outing" of former Maoists proved inspirational to others. Calling it a witch-hunt would be excessive, yet popular reactions that can be gathered in mainstream and social media show an undeniable fascination of the public for this kind of exposure. The more the former delegates try to evade the past (dropping militant activities from their resume), the higher their current jobs in institutional or business environments, the more satisfied the public, as if such stories confirmed deeply ingrained views that far left movements always support the wrong regimes, or always betray their ideals. Sometimes, tracking those who traveled in DK is not devoid of specific interests. This is the case with the campaign that law student and teaching assistant at the Free University of Brussels Anthony Bochon, referring to Fröberg Idling's work, tried to launch via the national press in Belgium against former chairman of the Belgium-Kampuchea Friendship Association François Rigaux. In March 2010 Bochon published in the Belgian daily *Le Soir* an opinion column entitled "Les Belges qui ont soutenu les Khmers Rouges doivent sortir de leur silence" ("The Belgians who supported the Khmer Rouge must speak"). He summoned the delegation members, especially Rigaux, a famous law scholar and human rights defender related to the Permanent People's Tribunal, to explain their support to the Pol Pot's regime. Rigaux did not answer himself but two of his colleagues at the Catholic University of Leuven, physicist Jean Bricmont and historian Anne Morelli, replied to Bochon in April 2010 via *Le Soir* in the article "Khmers Rouges: au-delà du repentir" ("Khmer Rouge: beyond repentance"). What or who motivated Bochon into attacking Rigaux remains unclear, perhaps a personal quest for belated justice or some academic conflict between law schools. In contrast, Bricmont and Morelli's answer is enlightening as to the way present-day anti-imperialist militants keep justifying past mistakes. After denouncing, correctly so, the pervasiveness of repentance in current political debates, the two scholars go into more questionable arguments. Cambodia was a faraway cause and at the time it was difficult to fully grasp what was happening there, they say. Then, they continue, it is easier to prey on a small group that had no influence whatsoever, be it in Cambodia or in Belgium, than to attack the actual culprit, namely the United States. The problem is that Bricmont and Morelli do not mention other culprits such as China,

Middag med Pol Pot finally re-opened, there were no major differences in the exhibition materials. Only the name of Ekerwald was no longer mentioned in the texts. However, the Ombudsman's verdict and debates in the media had a huge effect. Whereas the Östergötlands Länsmuseum usually had visitor groups of ten people, these were suddenly groups over 150 people who turned up to see the show. Curator Lena Lindgren, personal communication to author, February 27, 2015.

Vietnam, and the Soviet Union. But of course these are irrelevant since the purpose of their reply is ultimately to blame everything on the American power, past and present, as the article ends up with mentioning the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Bricmont and Morelli's answer—however biased—is a rare occurrence in the debates about fellow travelers in DK. Cold War ideologies and geopolitics are easily overlooked in a context that favors affect and judgment over reflection. The Internet offers a perfect platform for pillorying the former delegates. In November 2011 blogger Casey Nelson, an American expatriate living in Cambodia, uploaded on his blog some chapters of David Kline's book *Kampuchea*, and a short text about the travel of *The Call* members in DK. Nelson raised the usual question (how come they did not see what was going on). The interesting part is the reaction of Kline in person. He posted two long comments on his experience and his attempt to redeem himself in the following years. "So even since I have tried to make amends by doing work that tries to expose the truth of people's lives and their suffering rather than deny it." Later on: "I stopped being a leftist ideologue (...) And I decided to become a REAL journalist." Apparently, Kline has decided to become more vocal about his experience in DK. He is one of the few guests of the Khmer Rouge who accepted to be interviewed by Adrien Le Gal, correspondent for *Le Monde*, for the forty-year anniversary of the fall of Phnom Penh.¹⁵¹ Coming back on his shock at the sight of the empty city, Kline explains that, "I was haunted by [this image]. It took months before I realized I was in denial and events in Cambodia had been terrible. At that point, I broke with leftist ideology. No more Potemkin villages for me." The article of Le Gal in *Le Monde* gives a good indication of the power of the repentance narrative. The journey in Khmer Rouge Cambodia is made meaningful in hindsight through emotional reinterpretation, with a focus on feelings of guilt, shame, and atonement. The emphasis on the biographical aspects of the visitors' story facilitates the affective relationship of the public to the events described. In this narrative, ideology plays a minor role as a briefly sketched explanation for the so-called blindness of visitors ("under the influence," as Le Gal's title suggests). It does not open to any further political or cultural contextualization of the visit in DK, the influence of China, or the rhetoric used in leftist publications in the Cold War period. Detached from the geopolitical and ideological environment that produced them, Western fellow travelers are turned into scapegoats, their role blown out of proportion especially in comparison to the actual role of major powers in the Cambodian tragedy.

5.2 The public presentation of photos in Cambodia

So far, there have been only two attempts to present the materials in Cambodia, each addressing different audience groups and pursuing different objectives. The first one, as we have seen, is *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (2008). The second attempt is the exhibition *A Reporter's Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* (2012), based on the photos taken by Elizabeth Becker in 1978. The two projects point to the construction of a double figure of the Western bystander in the Khmer Rouge context, the ideological accomplice and the objective journalist. Each of these sides implies specific political and historiographical

¹⁵¹ Adrien Le Gal, "Voyage sous influence chez Pol Pot," *Le Monde*, April 17, 2015. I thank Anne-Laure Porée for sending me the article.

effects. These are created through distinct kinds of public display, which will now be analyzed.

5.2.1 *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (2008)

The project *Living Hell* targeted Cambodians and non-Cambodians. On the one hand, there was the publication with color photos and texts in English for a limited international audience. On the other hand, there was the touring exhibition and abridged version of the book in Khmer language with black-and-white photos for mass diffusion. The opening and first presentation of *Living Hell* took place at the Reyum Arts Gallery in Phnom Penh on November 18-22, 2008. The exhibition was moved to the building of the ECCC that same month. Then it toured in the country going to cities such as Kampong Cham, Takeo, and Battambang. It finally came back to Phnom Penh in December 2008, and from then on it was displayed as permanent exhibition at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (figure 43). The project *Living Hell* included ninety-three pictures based on the original slides. It covered most aspects of the travel of the Swedish delegation in DK: Phnom Penh, model cooperatives, water works, happy workers, children at play, temples at Angkor Wat.¹⁵² Images came with a set of three captions. “I did not want to simply exhibit the old propaganda photos again,” Bergström explains on the website *Kambodja* (which he created later as an expansion of the project). Therefore, he defined three categories: “thoughts from 1978,” “thoughts today,” and “forbidden thoughts at the time.” Once asked by a journalist why he had not noticed the atmosphere of violence in DK, German delegate Joscha Schmierer said, “Because there was nothing to see.”¹⁵³ *Living Hell* compensated this absence of concrete signs of terror by emphasizing the off-frame of the photos. The palimpsest-like captioning of images kept the viewer-reader on alert, thinking that there is more to see than meets the eye. Not all Bergström’s pictures, however, lent themselves easily to such a hermeneutic enterprise. Many remained uncaptioned apart from basic information about the location. It worked better with issues that had been debated at the time, such as the evacuation of the cities. For instance, the caption of the photo entitled “mobile brigade building a smaller dam north of Phnom Penh” read:

Thoughts from 1978: We heard about city people being persecuted. We wanted to see if this was true. We asked to talk to anyone from a city working at this site. Our hosts said there were city people but they were too “busy” working for the revolution. I did not believe that, not even then.

Thoughts Today: These brigades seem to part from the larger scheme of commanding and ordering people around for a larger goal, while forgetting to consider the individual and personal circumstances. The larger scheme seems to be an excuse for violating basic human rights.

Forbidden Thoughts at the Time: What if the stories are true? What if they have in fact killed most of the cities’ inhabitants?¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² The Swedish delegation had only one camera for all the members. So many years later, it is impossible to attribute pictures to their authors, which is why Ekerwald is credited alongside Bergström.

¹⁵³ Jürgen Elsässer, *Jungle World* 34, August 14, 1997.

¹⁵⁴ *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2008), 19.



Figure 43: Exhibition *Gunnar in the Living Hell*, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (2009). Source: Flickr CC.

Obviously, survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime did not need any caption—past, present, or repressed—to know that these pictures were just propaganda materials. At the opening of the exhibition at the ECCC, Prum Met, a sixty-six year old farmer, declared: “In fact people looked really upset under the Pol Pot regime. They were forced to work, not smiling.” Keo Sovann from Phnom Penh said about the photo of the technical school where a boy does math on the blackboard: “This is just a fake photo that the Khmer Rouge set up to show the world that the regime looked good, that they were educated people but in fact there was none.” Som Pov, a sixty-three year commune chief, said: “Gunnar was just taking the already arranged photos.”¹⁵⁵ The Tribunal’s spokesman Reach Sambath expressed his concern that some survivors find the photos unacceptable. This points to a social rather than explanatory function of the captions in the Cambodian context. The organizers of *Living Hell* tried to defuse any possible misunderstanding. Aware of the tensions such materials might trigger in Cambodia, they made it certain that no person watching the photos would think that Bergström was still rooting for the Khmer Rouge. The forums further ensured the “correct” reception of the pictures by the Cambodian public. *Living Hell* was performative in that it relied on the mutually reinforcing dynamic of speech and image. The objective of the project was less to

¹⁵⁵ Stan Starygin, December 16, 2008, “A rejection of photos, not the photographer,” ECCC Reparations blog, 2015.

produce knowledge about Western fellow travelers than to generate intercultural discussion. The captioning functioned differently in the international environment. It shifted the focus back to Bergström himself and his effort at recollecting, unearthing repressed memories. The palimpsest form clarified the mechanisms by which the Swede had kept inconvenient thoughts at bay during his journey in Khmer Rouge Cambodia and how these thoughts had returned with a vengeance at a later stage. Obviously, it had some informative value. Yet deprived from any critical or comparative apparatus it remained the depiction of an individual experience captured through a psychological prism.

For a project supposed to deal with ideology, *Living Hell* appeared surprisingly devoid of ideological issues. Paradoxically, this de-politicization of a subject requiring a strong geopolitical contextualization might be construed as a political act. For the DC-Cam the collaboration with Bergström did not represent any first step in a process of collecting archives of fellow travelers in DK, although the acquisition of such documents, which shed another light on the foreign politics of the Pol Pot's regime, is within the remit of the research institution. Rather, *Living Hell* looked like a onetime opportunity, fitting well in the narrative of reconciliation promoted by the ECCC and its Cambodian partners. The project, as the DC-Cam conceived of it, reflected the Tribunal's extraction of the DK period out of its historical and political context. It did not prelude to any further inquiry into the international relations of the Pol Pot's regime, likely to affect the generally accepted perception of Khmer Rouge Cambodia as isolated and sealed off. By singling out a small, marginalized group and focusing on the emotional dimension of the experience of its members in Cambodia, the DC-Cam managed to skirt the vexed issue of the structural involvement of Western governments in the region and the normalization of diplomatic relations with DK that was potentially underway toward the end of 1978. In *Living Hell*, shared history became an individual story rather than a construct to be assessed critically. At the interplay of the DC-Cam's institutional politics and the memory politics of the international community, *Living Hell* offers what Feldman calls an "effaced ground," where affective inter-subjective relations conveniently replace the more embarrassing issues of transnational complicities of violence.¹⁵⁶

5.2.2 *A Reporter's Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* (2012)

The exhibition of Elizabeth Becker's photos at the Bophana Center for Audiovisual Resources in Phnom Penh proposed a different approach. *A Reporter's Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* opened on February 9, 2012 for three weeks. It was a success. About three hundred people, half of whom were Cambodians, attended the opening (a good figure for a cultural event in Cambodia). Bophana Center had even to open on Sundays to accommodate the crowds.¹⁵⁷ The exhibition displayed about twenty photos selected out of the one hundred Becker had taken in DK. After her return in the United States, the journalist had packed away her slides and forgotten about them. Shortly after retiring, she began sorting the materials she had boxed-up over the years and came across the Khmer Rouge-related materials. Becker donated some to the University of Washington in Seattle (where she had studied) and to the ECCC upon the Tribunal's request. Then she thought that, "the Cambodian people should have access to these

¹⁵⁶ Feldman, "Memory Theaters," 197.

¹⁵⁷ Stanislas Touzet, personal communication to author, November 11, 2014.

documents too.”¹⁵⁸ In 2011 she gave Bophana Center digital copies of the slides and the interviews of Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, and Ieng Thirith she had recorded in 1978. The center proposed to organize an exhibition with the materials. Stanislas Touzet, a Frenchman in charge of Bophana Center’s communication, fundraising, and organization of cultural events, supervised the project. Becker made herself totally available for it, providing information about her trip in DK, helping with the selection of photos, and writing the captions. The project was completed within a year.¹⁵⁹ The American embassy in Phnom Penh sponsored it, certainly delighted at this opportunity of “philanthropic diplomacy.” Becker’s photos were of course not presented as the propaganda images of a fellow traveler. She was a professional journalist, and furthermore she had from the off a critical position vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge. Before departing, she had read the reports of the other delegations. She traveled to Cambodia with her eyes wide opened.¹⁶⁰ Her motivation was to document the situation in DK as objectively as possible. Bophana Center tried to bring this dimension to the fore through a simple and didactic display. The captioning of Becker’s photos was factual and made no space for any narrative of repentance. Instead it stressed the duty of information.



Figure 44: Central Market in Phnom Penh (December 1978). Flyer of the exhibition.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Starkweather, “A very dangerous holiday in Cambodia,” *Expat Advisory Services*, February 11, 2012.

¹⁵⁹ Stanislas Touzet, personal communication to author, November 11, 2014.

¹⁶⁰ Testimony of Elizabeth Becker, ECCC, February 10, 2015.

Some photos were meant to establish the reliability of Becker as credible witness by referring to both her job as journalist and her longtime ties with Cambodia. These aspects were evoked through a reproduction of her official press card made in Phnom Penh in November 1973. Other pictures showed Becker during the civil war, with Catholic Relief Service's worker Betsy Kennedy at the front near Sihanoukville, or in the company of French photographer Christine Spengler and war correspondent Neil Davis as they covered an inspection of President Lon Nol, commander Sosthènes Fernandez, and Prime Minister Long Boret on the frontline. Another section clarified the circumstances of Becker's travel to DK with photos of the journalist at the UN in October 1978 talking with Ieng Sary, Ieng Thirith, Thiounn Prasith, Keat Chhon, and Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. The main part of the exhibition was dedicated to the visit itself and organized around themes such as rural life, the city, and the war with Vietnam. It included photos of workers doing agricultural tasks, children and adults cleaning at Angkor Wat, Khmer Rouge soldiers in various poses, and the iconic image of the Central Market area in Phnom Penh completely deserted but for some lonely Khmer Rouge soldier on a bike (this photo was made into the flyer of the exhibition, figure 44). A group picture showed Becker, Caldwell, and Dudman standing with military commander Pin on the eastern front near the Vietnamese border. It was important for Becker and the exhibition organizers to give Angkar a face. Therefore, a last section focused on senior Khmer Rouge with photos of Ieng Sary hosting a dinner for the guests, or in the company of Thiounn Prasith, as well as the famous portrait of Pol Pot that Becker had made while interviewing him in the former French colonial headquarters on the riverfront (figure 45). This series was completed with audio interviews of the CPK leaders available via three computers.¹⁶¹ The last point was essential for Becker: "Any Cambodian can come in, push a button and hear the voice of Pol Pot. I do not want mysteries around these people. I want a complete and total transparency, and access by the public."¹⁶² Becker was happy with the outcome:

I saw Cambodians taking each other's photographs in front of my large portrait of Pol Pot. When I asked one young woman why, she answered that she had never seen a photograph of Pol Pot before and that some of the young people questioned whether he existed. I couldn't have been happier to see my thirty-year old photographs and recordings boost interest in discovering the history of that unspeakable time.¹⁶³

This was in line with Bophana Center's conception of archive photos as source of information and transmission of knowledge to young generations. Indeed, the organizers had devised the exhibition-related activities with the student population in mind.¹⁶⁴ Prior to the opening, Becker led two informal discussions at Bophana Center about the exhibition. She first addressed members of NGOs working with the Tribunal, high school and university teachers, and researchers studying the Khmer Rouge regime. The second

¹⁶¹ Stanislas Touzet, personal communication to author, November 11, 2014.

¹⁶² Celine Ngi, "Elizabeth Becker: A Reporter's Dangerous Guided Tour through Democratic Kampuchea," *Le Petit Journal*, February 10, 2012.

¹⁶³ Elizabeth Becker, February 21, 2012, "Beneath the Khmer Rouge veil," guest contribution to the blog New Mandala.

¹⁶⁴ Stanislas Touzet, personal communication to author, November 11, 2014.

time, she spoke to thirty-five students from the Royal University of Fine Arts and the history department of the Royal University of Phnom Penh. Over the next days Becker and her husband Army Major General (Ret.) and Vietnam veteran William Nash lectured over six hundred university students from the Department of Media and Communication of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, the Pannasastra University of Cambodia, and the Khemarak University.¹⁶⁵ *A Reporter's Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* was not only meant to generate debates about the Khmer Rouge regime. It had educational objectives too. Consistent with the mission of Bophana Center to train people in the visual realm, the organizers hoped to stimulate young generations into thinking critically about images—what you see is not always the reality. This was the political message conveyed in the exhibition. In a country where the illiteracy rate remains high and political parties fight through the visual marking of public space (billboards, banners, buildings), it hinted at the necessity to educate image-savvy citizens as a condition for the good, democratic functioning of the state. However, the figure of the hero-reporter used as the motif of the show was perhaps too “mythical” (and unquestioned) to fully achieve this objective. In that respect, the exhibition would perhaps have gained from being put back in the context of photojournalism during the Indochina Wars, with a reminder that fellow traveling and embedded journalism often overlap.

6. Conclusion

The chapter examined a set of photos and films produced by Western fellow travelers (mostly representatives of Maoist groups and friendship associations) invited in DK in 1978, as part of the CPK leadership's effort to improve its public image in the midst of growing accusations of human rights violations. It first situated these visual records within a genealogy of Khmer Rouge imagery. As explained, the movement had started to circulate propaganda materials abroad in the early seventies during the civil war period. Once in power the Khmer Rouge continued communicating through illustrated publications and movies, which remediated to a great extent China's iconography of war and revolution and mixed it with Khmer symbols. Cambodia was depicted as a self-reliant and sovereign country, balancing tradition and modernity, rebuilding man and nature, and maintaining a high degree of militarization. The Khmer Rouge materials shaped the view of Western supporters and possibly contributed to “blinding” them once they were in Cambodia. In that sense, the pictures taken by the delegates during their trip in DK might be seen as documenting the Khmer Rouge's attempt to organize the invisibility of terror. They shed light on the control system used by the Pol Pot's regime, which was best expressed in the guided tour crafted for the guests. At the same time the chapter underlined the collaborative dimension of this visual production. It resorted to the notion of “co-creation” to describe the complex interplay of national imaginaries, and the combination of Orientalist and Third World fantasies of Western visitors with the utopias of Khmer Rouge leaders. Furthermore, the chapter stressed that fellow travelers were

¹⁶⁵ In addition, Nash gave an informal talk at a think tank called the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace for students in the military and police. He discussed peacekeeping operations and conflict management, a field in which he had acquired firsthand experience as commander of the Task Force Eagle in Bosnia and UN regional administrator for northern Kosovo. Press release of the Embassy of the United States to Cambodia, February 6-10, 2012.

more alert than it is usually believed, especially when they stayed in Phnom Penh. It is often said that the delegates wore an ideological blindfold during the trip, which prevented them from seeing the “reality” in DK. Yet, what was ideological was less this blindfold than the gag some delegates imposed on themselves upon return. Then, they refrained from writing their actual thoughts for fear of betraying China’s political line. This explains in part why the photos quickly disappeared from sight after the fall of DK. To fellow travelers who had changed their mind about the Pol Pot’s regime, these images were a painful reminder of their Kampuchean experience, and as such they were something to be buried deep down and forgotten.

Lately, however, some photos emerged anew in the form of book and/or exhibition. These were primarily the materials of the Swedish delegation (with a focus on Gunnar Bergström) and American journalist Elizabeth Becker. Concurrently, the Western public showed a growing interest in non-Cambodian bystanders. The latter provided a zone of shared history with Cambodians and the opportunity for people to engage with the role of Western political and intellectual circles in the events. Thus emerged a double figure of the Western bystander: the “leftist” as ideological accomplice (Bergström), which serves locally and internationally a discourse of guilt and repentance; the “hero-reporter” as courageous and reliable witness (Becker), which helps repair the damaged image of the West. Interestingly, the distinction between these two figures is not perceptible in the pictures themselves. The photos of Becker and Bergström are deceptively similar. The only difference between them is not what they represent (which attests to the power of the Khmer Rouge scopic regime imposing its way of seeing), but how they are captioned. It is thus essential to have a clear idea of the identity of the institutions that bring these images back into the public sphere, since it shapes the interpretation of these records. The emphasis on biography, emotion, and catharsis certainly ensures a better circulation of the story in a transnational environment but it also opens the door to historiographical distortions and political half-truths. It hardly sustains any reflection about the ideological context of the Cold War. It makes it easy to forget that approval of the Pol Pot’s regime went far beyond Maoist groups at the time, and that it was the war with Vietnam more than the atrocities perpetrated in DK that justified for many in progressive circles their turning away from Cambodia. As well, the Maoist scapegoat, blown out of proportion, obscures the far bigger role of Western governments in the rise to power of the Khmer Rouge in the seventies and the revival of the ousted movement after its demise.

In 1979 and the early eighties, the international community believed, or rather pretended to, in the Khmer Rouge’s metamorphosis. Driven by anti-communism (of the Soviet kind) seasoned politicians and journalists had apparently no qualm about supporting the idea that communist mass murderers had become overnight respectable allies converted to the virtues of capitalism. This turnabout was not due to a sudden change of heart of Western governments, but was in fact the result of a longer process of talks. DK is often depicted as isolated and hermetically closed. This is grossly exaggerated. As said earlier, there was a steady stream of visitors in Cambodia between 1975 and 1978. Moreover, representatives of DK regularly traveled abroad for attending bilateral or international meetings. The Khmer Rouge had a foreign policy and Office B-1 was not a fake ministry. Researcher Marie Aberdam even suggests that the visits of Western Maoist groups were a way for Beijing to signal China’s involvement in Cambodia in the context of Sino-American talks about Southeast Asia. These trips

prepared the ground for the recognition of the Khmer Rouge as the only legitimate representative of the Cambodian people at the UN from 1979 onward.¹⁶⁶ Clearly, the international contacts of the Khmer Rouge reached far beyond neighbors and socialist countries. The normalization of diplomatic relations was underway by 1978. France and the UK, for instance, had even begun to arrange their renewed diplomatic presence in Cambodia.¹⁶⁷ The reintegration of the Khmer Rouge into the international community, however reluctant, was thus the outcome of a process of negotiations initiated long before the fall of DK.

It is such continuity from the seventies into the eighties that the records of Western visitors in Cambodia urge us to re-visit. They document the Khmer Rouge's foreign policy, and as such are best understood in relation to the reports made by later visitors. The flow of guests did not abate after the overthrow of DK.¹⁶⁸ The Khmer Rouge kept inviting reporters, politicians, aid workers, and faithful friends to their jungle bases at the Thai border. Journalist Henry Kamm of *The New York Times* was one of them. He gives a surreal account of life in the guest camp, "the very latest in jungle luxury," he writes.¹⁶⁹ Within a short time, it appears, the Khmer Rouge had greatly improved their techniques of hospitality. Since the new regional order made the CPK leaders far more attractive to the international community, Western diplomats began to pour into areas under Khmer Rouge control. Site 8 became a showcase refugee camp, where visitors were able to chat with cheerful people dressed in bright colors, buy Coca Cola and other goods at the black market, have a look at the human rights office and the Buddhist temple.¹⁷⁰ The Khmer Rouge remolded their public image. Bidding farewell to Communism (at least officially), they now presented themselves as the champions of the very Khmer values and culture they had tried to wipe out. On the other side of the border, the newly established Cambodian government and its Vietnamese allies were well aware of the media battle that the Khmer Rouge and their new backers had engaged against them. Of course, they too were experienced in organizing guided tours, and they could rely on a solid network of socialist countries and sympathizers. Foreign journalists were thus soon invited to report and film in the People's Republic of Kampuchea. It is such a production that the next chapter examines.

¹⁶⁶ Aberdam, "Visites Guidées," np.

¹⁶⁷ Suong, *Itinéraire d'un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge*, 275.

¹⁶⁸ For a list of visitors in Khmer Rouge-controlled zones from 1979 to 1982, see Appendix D.

¹⁶⁹ He was served plates of fruit brought from Bangkok and renewed each day. Ample supplies of freshly laundered towels were laid out in the bathrooms next to cakes of Lux soaps, replaced by unseen hands immediately after a single use. Visitors could choose from a great variety of Cambodian, Chinese, and Western dishes, as well as Thai beer, Johnnie Walker Black Label scotch, American soft drinks, and Thai bottled water with ice brought from Bangkok. Henry Kamm, *Report from a Stricken Land* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 178-181.

¹⁷⁰ Nick Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner: The Story of Comrade Duch and the Khmer Rouge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009 [2005]), 202-203.

Chapter 3

Framing Famine: John Pilger's *Year Zero* (1979)

1. Introduction

“Pilger's Piss Poor Propaganda,” reads a message posted by Capital_9 on the online community forum Khmer440 in October 2013:

I wasted 52 minutes of my life watching John Pilger's *Year Zero* documentary (...) He made a documentary, which while I'm sure was worthwhile in bringing the first pictures of the KR committed atrocities to the rest of the world, was also a propaganda vehicle for his demented view of world politics (...) In fairness to Pilger or anyone else making such a documentary in 1979, there were at that time probably many facts not widely known outside the Pentagon and other government agencies in other countries. But that does not excuse Pilger's anti-American propaganda in the face of clear guilt of the gravest degree committed by none other than Cambodians on their own people. I also found Pilger's haircut to be effeminate. I needed to get the above off my chest.¹

Several movies were made in the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in 1979 after the demise of the Pol Pot's regime. The film *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* of London-based reporter John Pilger is certainly the best known of them. Its broadcast in primetime on the British channel ATV on October 30, 1979, was considered a media event. A seasoned journalist, Pilger had envisioned a whole media campaign in favor of the new regime in Cambodia.² Besides several articles published in the leftist journal *New Statesman* in September and October 1979, his report “Death of a Nation” appeared in the newspaper *The Daily Mirror* on September 12 and 13, 1979.³ *Year Zero* should have aired the same week but a strike of ATV technicians delayed the telecast. This delay probably contributed to the impact of the movie on spectators. The British Film Institute recently declared that *Year Zero* was “one of ten most influential documentary movies of the twentieth century.” Half of the fifty-two minute long film dealt with the issue of starvation in Cambodia. *Year Zero* galvanized huge popular support for the relief campaign that the aid agency Oxfam coordinated then in the country. Pilger's film was purchased in some sixty countries and viewed by some 150 million people.⁴ Today, it

¹ The discussion thread includes fifteen messages all posted on October 17, 2013.

² He had done the same in Australia in September 1979. The articles published on three separate days in *The Melbourne Herald* newspaper coincided with the screening of *Year Zero* on national television. Jeffrey C. Gunn and Jefferson Lee, *Cambodia Watching Down Under: A Critical View of Western Scholarship and Journalism on Cambodia since 1975* (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1991), 107.

³ It was what the newspaper's editorial director Hugh Cudlipp called a “shock issue” entirely devoted to Pilger's article. Anthony Hayward, *Breaking the Silence: The Films of John Pilger* (e-book, Profile International Media at Smashwords, 2013), Chapter 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

continues its international career, especially as Pilger had the good idea to make all his movies available on his website and YouTube channel.

Year Zero both illustrated and contributed to people's perception of Khmer Rouge atrocities in 1979 through the prism of starvation and refugee crisis. Famine in Ethiopia in 1984 is often considered the first big humanitarian cause. Still, five years earlier, Cambodia too had been a major news item in mainstream media. The charity concerts organized in London with the bands Queen and the Who or in Paris with Joan Baez in support to Khmer refugees predated Bob Geldof's Band Aid for Ethiopia.⁵ Images of emaciated Cambodians fleeing to the Thai border reached the public abroad at the beginning of 1979. This was the first wave of refugees, many of them being Khmer Rouge on the verge of collapse. The flow of refugees accelerated and the world began to sense a possible food crisis in Cambodia. Relief agencies settled at the Thai border. However, the geopolitical configuration made the organization of humanitarian assistance in the region complicated.⁶ The international community did not recognize the PRK since the new regime was considered a client government in Vietnam-occupied Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge retained Cambodia's seat at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (vote on September 21, 1979).

As a result, the PRK could not access relief schemes operated by the UN, the World Bank, and bilateral agencies. Only the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), two agencies with a mandate enabling them to work with non-diplomatically recognized states, were allowed to intervene in Cambodia. Merged into a Joint Mission in March 1979, they proposed a plan to the PRK. The Phnom Penh authorities first turned down the proposal. In June 1979, however, Foreign Minister Hun Sen sent a letter to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. He stated that 2.25 million Cambodians were facing mass starvation and requested large-scale international aid. Was it a trick of the PRK to get international recognition? Was there actually famine in Cambodia? If yes, was it the legacy of four years of Khmer Rouge rule? By the fall of 1979, media and politicians in the West claimed that Cambodians were "on the edge of extinction."⁷ The disappearance of the "Khmer race," an enduring cultural construct dating back to the French colonial power, resonated strongly in the post-Khmer Rouge context.⁸

With *Year Zero*, Pilger pushed humanitarian issues out of international politics and specialized agencies, and straight to the public and donors. Obviously, the film is not a

⁵ Jamie Frederic Metzl, *Western Responses to Human Rights Abuses in Cambodia, 1975-1980* (Oxford: Macmillan Press, 1996), 163.

⁶ On humanitarian assistance in the PRK and refugee camps on the Thai border see: Ben Kiernan, "Kampuchea 1979-1981: National Rehabilitation in the Eye of an International Storm," *Southeast Asian Affairs* 9 (1982); Linda Mason and Roger Brown, *Rice, Rivalry, and Politics: Managing Cambodian Relief* (Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Orlin Scoville, "Relief and Rehabilitation in Kampuchea," *The Journal of Developing Areas* 20, no. 1 (1985); Eva Mysliwiec, *Punishing the Poor: The International Isolation of Kampuchea* (Oxford, UK: Oxfam, 1988).

⁷ William Shawcross, "Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster," in *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, Eds. David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983), 231, 253.

⁸ On this concept, see: Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

transparent documentation of the situation in Cambodia in the aftermath of the Pol Pot's regime. By summer 1979 the food crisis in the PRK had become a political weapon used by both sides of the conflict. Pilger entered the media battlefield eagerly, and produced a carefully crafted movie mixing emotions, political pamphlet, and call for urgent action. In that respect, *Year Zero* is emblematic of a moment when humanitarian and political issues overlapped with reference to Cambodia. How do we look today at this early documentation of Khmer Rouge crimes? Anthropologist Liisa Malkki argues that practices of humanitarian representation and intervention are not timeless and interchangeable, but deeply grounded in complicated histories.⁹ *Year Zero* was a product of its time, when "virtually all appeals for charity (...) tended to picture helpless, passive victims and heroic saviors. Virtually all imagery of disasters in 'distant land' was (by present-day standards) patronizing to the victims."¹⁰ It was also a product of the Cold War with defined ideological positions.

With its focus on famine, it participated in the creation of a new imagery of Khmer Rouge atrocities, in which the starving, dying bodies of children impersonated the extreme violence of Democratic Kampuchea leaders. Pilger and his team (together with other television crews and film directors) produced iconic images of Pol Pot's reign of terror, starting with the prison S-21 and Phnom Penh as "ghost city." As a report made in the PRK, a state in quest for legitimacy, *Year Zero* offered a new "plot" about what had happened under the Khmer Rouge as well as the geopolitical situation in the immediate aftermath of the Pol Pot's regime. How might a movie so enmeshed in its original context of production be perceived thirty-five years later? How do we look at the imagery of starvation used in *Year Zero* now that the humanitarian iconography has changed so much? What is left of it in the twenty-first century "canon" of Khmer Rouge memory? To what extent can the movie be used to create a bigger picture of the situation in the PRK in 1979?

These are the questions the chapter tries to answer. First, it situates the movie in the context of reporting from the PRK in 1979. It compares *Year Zero* with accounts of other eyewitnesses (films, press articles, books, and reports) that were released at the same period. The comparison sheds light into what a visit in the PRK looked like and what it entailed for the foreign guests of the newly established government. Second, the chapter examines how *Year Zero* cinematically articulates humanitarian issues across a set of political and cultural themes. The analysis draws on the literature about media and humanitarianism, especially the notion of "emergency news" coined by media scholar Lillie Chouliaraki in *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006). Last, the chapter considers the afterlife of *Year Zero* and its transposition from television culture to digital media culture. It looks at the environment the online video-sharing platform YouTube produces for the movie, with a focus on the spectatorship generated by this new format of diffusion and the multidirectional reception of *Year Zero*'s political themes.

⁹ Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," in *Genocide, an Anthropological Reader*, Ed. Alexander Laban Hinton (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 354.

¹⁰ Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief, and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 177.

2. Filming in the People's Republic of Kampuchea in 1979

2.1 A guided tour for foreign guests?

Pilger arrived in Phnom Penh at the end of July 1979 with a crew of four men. Three worked for the broadcaster ATV: director David Munro (1944-1999), cameraman Gerry Pinches, and sound recordist Steven Philipps. Since Pilger covered the events for the *Mirror*, photographer Eric Piper joined the team too. *Year Zero*, Pilger declares at the beginning of the movie, was the “first Western complete film report” ever made in the PRK (3:47-3:52). In a context of Vietnam and PRK-bashing in British media, it was important for the journalist to assert his authoritative position.¹¹ Unlike his colleagues, he had been in Cambodia. He was an eyewitness. Yet, his claim was far from exact. The “first Western complete film report” about the situation in the PRK had been released much earlier, in April 1979. It was *Cambodge, un Pays à Refaire* (“Cambodia: A Country to be Rebuilt”), a documentary movie produced for the French channel TF1.¹² Journalist Roger Pic (1920-2001), director Jacky Kargayan, sound recordists Jean Henaff and Pierre Boucher were the first television crew to enter post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, following the Vietnamese army fighting against China. Furthermore, there was at least another Western television team working in Phnom Penh at the same time as Pilger. It came from France and included film director Jérôme Kanapa (1946-2014), cameraman Charlet Recors, and sound recordist Olivier Schwob.¹³

Summer 1979 was a critical period for the PRK. The new regime was about to hold the trial of the “Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique” in Phnom Penh (August 15-19, 1979). The event needed extensive media coverage. Therefore many observers were invited for the occasion. A booklet distributed by the PRK ambassador Chea Soth during a press conference in Hanoi on November 15, 1979 states that “foreign delegations have visited Kampuchea in rapid succession. Concerning the media alone, nearly four hundred journalists, filmmakers, and television cameramen from many countries have come to Kampuchea.” Many were from the Eastern bloc, affiliated with the socialist press, or fellow travelers. This was the case of Roger Pic. The reporter had first visited Vietnam in the early sixties and worked in the north until 1967. He had personal relations with Ho Chi Minh whom he had interviewed at several occasions. Pilger offered a similar profile. His relationship with Vietnam dated back to 1965, when he had taken his first trip there. From 1966 onward the *Mirror* had sent him to Saigon once or twice a year to write about the war. Pilger had also realized several movies that left no doubt as to his pro-North Vietnam stance: *The Quiet Mutiny* (1970), *Vietnam, Still America's War* (1974), *To Know Us it to Love Us* (1975) and *Do You Remember Vietnam?* (1978). Since they worked for mainstream media, men like Pic and Pilger ensured that Vietnam and the PRK reach out to a wider public. Being aware that people abroad would easily discard friendly reports as biased, the Cambodian government had no choice but to enlarge the group of visitors politically speaking. Over the months the country experienced a relative

¹¹ R.S. Stephenson, “Kampuchea. Relief Agency Appeals in the British Press, 1979-1980,” *Disasters* 4, no. 2 (1980): 271.

¹² It aired on April 12, 1979 in the program *L'Événement* on the French channel TF1.

¹³ Kanapa's movie *Cambodge: Années Néant* (“Cambodia: Years Zero”) aired on October 12, 1979 on the French public channel FR3.

opening, especially after relief workers began to arrive in the PRK.¹⁴ Of course, not all of these visitors could be fully trusted. The challenge was thus to make it sure that these people would not report too many inconvenient stories through a controlled tour of Cambodia.

When we arrived in Vietnam en route to Phnom Penh, David Munro and I set about arranging our freedom of movement inside Cambodia. We were aware that we might be accused of being “shepherded.” We laid down three pre-conditions to the Vietnamese. We wanted our own van, our own fuel in Cambodia, and the right to travel anywhere we wanted. Considering the state of Cambodia, which had no fuel, almost no transports and ruined roads, bridges and communications, our requests bordered on the outrageous. After a week’s negotiations, we got all that we had asked for.¹⁵

Pilger’s assertion is certainly questionable. Guests could not move freely inside the PRK. War and safety were not the only reasons why travels were monitored. “Guiding” visitors ensured that they would not poke their nose in everywhere. The government had crafted an itinerary that included specific locations to be visited. As for suggestions the guests may have had, it was up to PRK officials to approve or not the trip. It seems that television crews traveled separately, sometimes with a few other journalists or fellow countrymen. There was no bus or truck chartered for group visits.¹⁶ What did the guided tour include? Was the experience of Pilger any different from that of other journalists? To answer these questions, I compared *Year Zero* with filmic and written accounts of other visitors.¹⁷ Needless to say, all these movies and texts are edited and consequently offer a limited view of what the trip actually looked like. Still, they provide some scheme of the tour in the PRK.

It clearly appears on the basis of these accounts that guests were taken to the same locations. The visit in Phnom Penh included the site where the nineteenth century-built Catholic cathedral once stood (it had been entirely dismantled by the Khmer Rouge), the train station, the Olympic Stadium, and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (former S-21 prison). Several accounts mention conversations with Ung Pech, one of the few survivors and director of the museum in 1979. The orphanage no.1 (also referred to as Le Premier orphanage), the primary school of Komarey, the 17 April Hospital (former Buddhist Monk’s hospital) and the 7 January hospital appear in most accounts and were probably compulsory visits. The hospital of Takoam in Kompong Speu is also mentioned by most visitors, although not necessarily nominally. This forms the basic structure of the tour. Obviously, visits differed to some extent. For instance, in *Cambodge: Années Néant* director Jérôme Kanapa focuses on the Royal Ballet, which appears only briefly in Keo Pech’s movie and not at all in other accounts.¹⁸ Anthropologist Françoise Corrèze writes about the school Sotheras where children received ballet lessons in the afternoon. The textile factory of Russey Keo is mentioned in several reports, but Helen Ester is the only

¹⁴ For a partial list of Western visitors in the PRK in 1979, see Appendix C.

¹⁵ John Pilger, *Heroes* (London: Vintage Books, 1986), 402.

¹⁶ Olivier Schwob from Kanapa’s team remembers traveling sometimes with Francis Crémieux (France Inter) and Jean-Claude Labbé. Personal communication to author, January 16, 2015.

¹⁷ See list in Chapter 1.

¹⁸ Kanapa and his team also filmed the first performance of the Royal Ballet at Angkor Wat. Charlet Recors, personal communication to author, January 9, 2015.

one to describe a visit in the SPK Pneumatic Factory (thongs, mats, rubber accessories, tires) reopened in April 1979 and a drink factory (cordial drink, wine, perfume) reopened in January 1979. She also writes about her journey fifteen kilometers north of Phnom Penh to a village that was used by the Khmer Rouge as prison. Other visitors do not mention it. The encampment at Kilometer 7, where thousands of Cambodians gathered waiting for the permission to enter Phnom Penh, appears only in the movies of Pic and Kanapa. Such differences are often either due to the dates of opening or reopening of factories and schools, the unreachability of some areas because of the war situation, or the length of the visitor's stay. For example, those who spend a longer period of time in the PRK were taken to the port of Kompong Som (ex-Sihanoukville) where they witnessed the unloading of Soviet cargos. They could also follow the weekly travel of the train loaded with seed and rice going from Phnom Penh to Battambang in the northwest of the country. The comparison of *Year Zero* with other accounts shows no major difference. Pilger visited the same places: Tuol Sleng, the orphanage no.1, the primary school, the hospitals in Phnom Penh and Kompong Speu. The British television crew may have followed at times a different trajectory, but from what is reflected of it in the movie, their itinerary did not depart much from the basic pattern.

“I interviewed dozens of people without permission and at random, as indeed have countless journalists, researchers, and others,” Pilger claims.¹⁹ This again is questionable. Guides and translators mediated between foreign guests and Cambodian witnesses, and influenced the content of the exchange.²⁰ In his memoir Y Phandara recalls seeing on his way to the hospital a group of foreigners interviewing a young woman (these foreigners happened to be French physicians Jean-Yves Follezou and Jean-Michel Vinot, who feature prominently in *Year Zero*). He wanted to talk to them but feared the interpreter:

Troubled, I did not hesitate to tell anything that could placate the new government and my interlocutors with the aim to ask them to do me a favor. I praised convincingly the regime in Phnom Penh and the Vietnamese army. As well, I vented my anger vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge. I thought that if my words were being recorded, it was because they would be listened by someone.²¹

The identity of guides and translators depended on the nature of the hosting administration or organization. The ladies of the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Australian Women's Association, who had been invited by the National Association of Women for the Salvation of Kampuchea, were supervised by Mien Son An (president of the association), Soille Phoroun (Kampuchean Red Cross), and translators So Savy and Kim So Pheak.²² The Dutch Maarten Van Dullemen and Aantoon Claassen, as representative of the Medisch Comité Nederland-Vietnam, were guests of the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in charge of

¹⁹ Pilger, *Heroes*, 419.

²⁰ A Cambodian translator and a Vietnamese officer dressed in civilian accompanied the team of Kanapa everywhere, for instance. Charlet Recors, personal communication to author, January 9, 2015.

²¹ Y Phandara, *Retour à Phnom Penh: Le Cambodge du Génocide à la Colonisation* (Paris: Editions A.-M. Métailié, 1982), 264.

²² Her name is also spelled Mean Sam An and Mien Xam An.

journalists. The latter were under the responsibility of Thoeum Tim Rom and Sam Peng, and more precisely of the chief of the newspaper section of the ministry Chreng Vornata, and the head of the reception committee for foreigners of the newspaper section Chum Bun Rong.

In this context it was unlikely that visitors had unmonitored conversations with survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. Still, some of them report spontaneous exchanges with Cambodians. These are for instance Pic meeting with a former businessman fluent in French called Uong Nhim while visiting Kilometer 7, or Kanapa and his crew coming across a group of English-speaking farmers as they stood on the road after their car broke down. Was everything staged? Were these people brought for the occasion, for delivering a rehearsed speech in front of the camera? It is difficult to answer this question. The visitors were not so sure themselves. This was even trickier for Frenchmen as chances to bump into French-speaking Cambodians were quite high. Of all the accounts examined though, one encounter at least appears blatantly staged. It features in the movie *Kampuchea: Sterben and Auferstehen*, when East-German directors Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann meet with German-speaking witness Victor Yoyo. The film alternates between Yoyo's testimony and images of his past. The man studied electro-engineering in Dresden, married a German woman, and had two children with her. The last time he saw his family was April 1975. Heynowski and Scheumann show the diploma he received in Dresden, some family pictures, and a small note they transmitted to Yoyo's wife, who replied from Leipzig (saying she was very happy to learn that he was alive). The "dozens of people" Pilger supposedly interviewed without any supervision do not feature in *Year Zero*, unless one considers that the Khmer Rouge prisoners Pilger supposedly met by chance in the street of Phnom Penh are some of them. The journalist focuses on two of the men. The presence of the translator is not concealed. Pilger addresses her directly several times in the course of the interview and the woman's voice can be heard (19:53-22:56). Against Pilger's claim it is hard to believe that this meeting happened by accident. One of the two rank and file he interviewed for *Year Zero* appears again in *Kampuchea: Sterben and Auferstehen*. He even repeats word for word what he had already told Pilger.²³

2.2 Tragedy and rebirth as scripted narratives

Reporting from the PRK was not free communication but a partly scripted exercise. The template—which the guests followed more or less strictly—opposed the total destruction unleashed by the Khmer Rouge to the courageous reconstruction undertaken by the new regime with the backing of Vietnam. A compilation of articles published in Moscow set the tone. It told the story of Kampuchea "from tragedy to rebirth" (figure 1). The first part described the "medieval barbarity" of the "reactionary pro-Peking Pol Pot

²³ The man is Sin Samonh. The second interviewee, who does not feature in *Kampuchea: Sterben and Auferstehen*, is Men Khuon. Both testified during the trial of the "Pol Pot and Ieng Sary clique" in August 1979. Their photo appears in the book *Dossier Kampuchea: The Dark Years* (Hanoi: Vietnam Courier, 1979). Kanapa also interviewed a Khmer Rouge prisoner but he did not keep the interview in the final version of *Cambodge: Années Néant* probably because the speech of the prisoner sounded far too rehearsed. Charlet Recors, personal communication to author, January 9, 2015.

and Ieng Sary regime” that had implemented “anti-popular reactionary Maoist principles.” The second part praised the “new and genuinely free Kampuchea [where] the people have become the masters of the country and their own lives.”²⁴

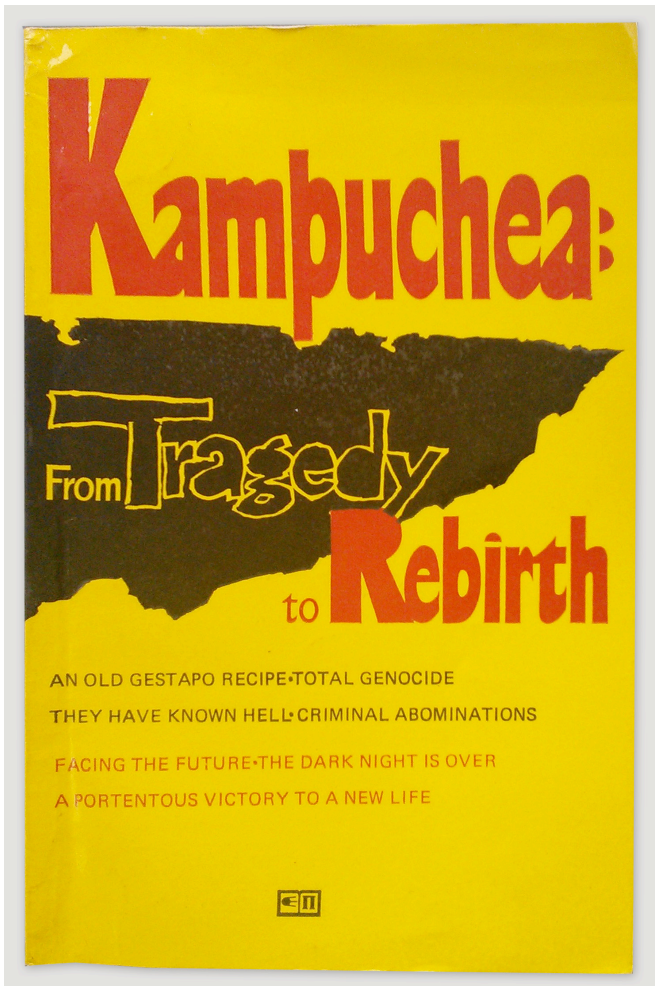


Figure 1: Cover of *Kampuchea: From Tragedy to Rebirth* (Moscow, 1979).

The Khmer Rouge regime was presented in the worst possible light. Published accounts of DK terror were horrifying stories of torture, deprivation and extermination (figure 2). They came with graphic images provided by SPK, VNA, and TASS, the news agencies of Cambodia, Vietnam and the Soviet Union respectively. By contrast reports about the situation in the PRK were tales of courage and success against all odds. *The Rebirth of Kampuchea*, a booklet produced by the Cambodian government, enthusiastically reviewed what had been accomplished in the course of the year (up to November 1979). It celebrated forty factories repaired; 500,000 hectares planted with summer rice; 515,400 pupils schooled again; three art troupes created; cinema halls reopened in Phnom Penh; pagodas and churches restored, and monks ordered anew.

²⁴ E.V. Kobelev, *Kampuchea: From Tragedy to Rebirth* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), 5-7, 110.

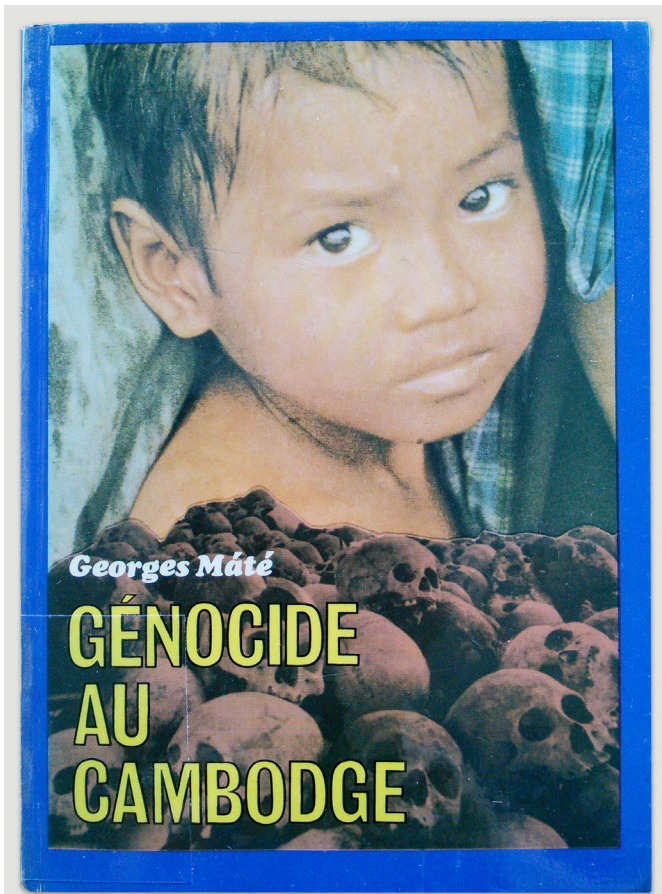


Figure 2: Cover of *Génocide au Cambodge* (Conseil Hongrois de la Paix, 1979).

Pilger's cinematic articulation of tragedy and rebirth did not differ much from that of his colleagues. To deal with the tragedy part, all resorted to the trope of the ghost city. The Cambodian capital city was undeniably a shocking sight, especially when coming from Ho Chi Minh City, the transit place for foreign visitors until the Pochentong airport reopened. Movies usually included sequences that showed the empty streets of Phnom Penh, some popular sites such as the Central market completely vacant, dilapidated buildings reclaimed by the jungle, ransacked flats, furniture and cars abandoned on the pavement, barely dressed children scavenging amidst the rubbles (figures 3-4). *Year Zero* combined street and aerial views of Phnom Penh (figure 5).²⁵ In a series of montages contrasting images of the post-Khmer Rouge city and archive footage of pre-war Phnom Penh when it was still bustling with life, it emphasized the utter desolation of the capital (4:00-5:25; 8:08-10:29; 44:39-45:58). For the public abroad, the ghost city was certainly the first iconic image of Khmer Rouge atrocities. It allowed the spectator to pick up the story where it had been left four years earlier. Empty streets were the last sight of Phnom Penh that foreign journalists had been able to capture from the trucks driving them to the Thai border in May 1975. The ghost city provided, thus, historical continuity by

²⁵ Helicopters were put at the disposal of reporters for filming aerial views of the city. Charlet Recors, personal communication to author, January 9, 2015.

connecting the present-day devastation of the capital with the forced evacuation of its inhabitants in April 1975. Furthermore, it functioned as visual synecdoche for the destruction of the entire country. Not only did it illustrate the insanity of Khmer Rouge policy of social and material tabula rasa. It also made visible the immensity of the task ahead for the new government of Cambodia.



Figure 3: Empty streets of Phnom Penh (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

The idea of rebirth was expressed in many ways. The message to be conveyed was that any realm of life in Cambodia had improved over the past months. Economy was rebuilt from scratch. Factories had reopened and farmers were back in rice fields. Markets and street vendors reappeared, proving the tolerant policies of the new government toward non-socialist commercial practices. Traditional weddings, religious ceremonies, crafts, spectacles of music and dance illustrated the revival of Khmer culture. Increasing numbers of children were sent to school and new teachers were trained. The PRK promoted the image of a strong and watchful state, militarily equipped and progressively forming its national army. Even villagers could protect themselves thanks to weapons delivered by Vietnam. Each sign of return to normal life was emphasized. Emblematic institutions such as the post office and the library in Phnom Penh were shown in full work again.²⁶

²⁶ The Grande Poste (central post office) of Phnom Penh reopened on January 3, 1979. SPK press release SPK033, January 6, 1979.



Figure 5: Aerial view of Phnom Penh. Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

The theme of Cambodia reborn also received a literal interpretation. In *Cambodge: Années Néant* Kanapa interviews an obstetrician and shows several pregnant women waiting at the maternity. A sequence in the movie of Keo Pech and Mil Speum presents the nurses of the revolutionary hospital holding babies in their arms. For months it had been said that women could no longer conceive children. Years of suffering and malnutrition, causing amenorrhea, had made them infertile. Images of babies signaled the resilience of the Cambodian population, ready to look into the future again. The healing of the physical body served as a metaphor for the political body in the making as new state. *Year Zero* included such rhetoric. The representation of Cambodia on tracks to (relative) recovery demonstrated the good work performed by the PRK. It helped establish the legitimacy of the new government. It also gave Vietnam a positive image as the main architect of Cambodia's rebirth. Pilger, however, had to strike a fine balance. If he reported a success story of resilience, people in the UK would be less receptive to the plight of Cambodians. At the same time, describing Cambodia as on the verge of collapse was no great publicity for the new regime. This points to the ambivalent role played by the humanitarian issue in *Year Zero*. It allowed Pilger to both call for the compassion of the British public and put the blame on the international community for everything that was going wrong in the PRK. Thus, the journalist matched together his concern for the Cambodian population with his support to the PRK. How this was achieved cinematically is the question to be discussed in the next part of the chapter.

3. Analysis of *Year Zero*

3.1 Pilger's humanitarian network

In June 1979 Pilger began to receive phone calls from Louise Vidaud de Plaud, a widower who lived in Oxfordshire. She and her late husband had worked in Phnom Penh in the early seventies, arranging for civilians to be trained in Vietnam to make artificial limbs for amputees. Deeply worried by the news coming from Cambodia, she contacted people she thought could be of help to the population there. She felt even more concerned after she read about the speech given by Wilfred Burchett during an all-party meeting at the House of Commons in July. The journalist—a good friend of Vietnam—had traveled in May 1979 to the PRK in the company of Jean-Michel Vinot and Jean-Yves Follezou, two communist physicians of the Comité Français d'Aide Médicale et Sanitaire (French Committee for Medical and Sanitary Aid). On the way from Ho Chi Minh City to Phnom Penh Burchett had seen no villages, no markets, and no cultivation. His snatching conversations with “road people,” small groups mostly made of women and children heading to their native villages, had revealed the horror of the Khmer Rouge regime.²⁷ During the trip the three men drew up a list of needs for Cambodians. It was this list that Burchett read at the House of Commons. Vidaud met Burchett shortly afterward and she decided to take further action. She was instrumental in making contact between Follezou and Jim Howard, a technical engineer at Oxfam who had attended the speech of Burchett too. She also put Pilger in touch with the two French doctors. The journalist said that if he were authorized to take a television crew with him, he would accompany them in their next trip to Cambodia.²⁸

Pilger's proposal came at a crucial moment. Following the call for help sent by Hun Sen to the Food and Agriculture Organization at the UN, the PRK had allowed two representatives of the Joint Mission (François Bugnion for the ICRC and Jacques Beaumont for UNICEF) and UN official Victor Umbricht for a stay on July 17-19, 1979. The reports they sent from Phnom Penh to their respective headquarters were alarming. So was the report of Oxfam's representative Jim Howard who had arrived in the capital city in August 1979 in a jumbo-jet chartered in Luxemburg and filled with aid supplies. The goods had been collected by the thirty-three NGOs from Europe, North America, and Australia that formed the Consortium for Cambodia working under Oxfam's umbrella.²⁹ This created a tense situation for all relief workers involved, and the relations between Oxfam and the Joint Mission got strained. Bugnion and Beaumont tried to negotiate for their organizations the possibility to work inside Cambodia without impacting on aid distribution at the Thai border. But the Cambodian government, which considered that assistance in refugee camps was a disguised form of support to the Khmer Rouge, rejected their offers. As a result, Bugnion and Beaumont were authorized to stay but they could neither travel in the country as they needed nor get entry visas for their staff. The

²⁷ Narrated in *The China Cambodia Vietnam Triangle* (London: Vanguard Books, 1981) and *At the Barricades* (Melbourne: MacMillan, 1981).

²⁸ Pilger, *Heroes*, 399-401. Hayward, *Breaking the Silence*, Chapter 4, np.

²⁹ Brian Walker, “NGOs Break the Cold War Impasse in Cambodia,” in *Humanitarian Diplomacy. Practitioners and their Craft*, Larry Minear and Hazel Smith, eds. (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007), 135.

Joint Mission was caught in limbo. By contrast, Oxfam could operate freely inside Cambodia (that is, as freely as the PRK permitted it). The collaboration between the Joint Mission and Oxfam did not work well in spite of the emergency. Writing years later about that period, Oxfam lead field representative in Cambodia Brian Walker declared that Phnom Penh authorities had advised him at the time not to cooperate with the ICRC and UNICEF. On the other side, Beaumont thought that Oxfam's work was in part responsible for the Cambodian government's pressure on the Joint Mission. In his view, if Oxfam had not interfered the PRK would have been forced to work with the Joint Mission. Nevertheless, the Heng Samrin government, knowing their best interest was to get international recognition, kept negotiating with Bugnion and Beaumont much to the annoyance of Oxfam. It was in that particular context that Pilger and his team arrived in Cambodia.

"During twenty years as a journalist, most of them spent in transit at wars and places of contrived upheaval, I had not seen anything to compare with what I saw in Cambodia," Pilger writes in the *New Statesman* on September 21, 1979.³⁰ The network around Pilger (i.e. Vidaud, Howard, Burchett, Follezou, and Vinot) explains much of the journalist's positioning. A primary motivation of *Year Zero* was to cry for help on behalf of the Cambodians. But it was a cry for help not devoid of political motives, as said earlier. Taking the side of Oxfam offered Pilger a unique opportunity to attack the international community through UNICEF and the ICRC. In that respect, the movie served the interest of the PRK and Vietnam, depicted as both victims of the sordid calculations of the West and China and the only shield for the suffering Cambodian population. By transposing Cold War politics into the humanitarian realm and at the same time reshaping assistance as an ideological struggle, Pilger could hope to achieve a twofold objective: the British public's participation in Oxfam's aid campaign and popular political action in favor of the PRK. This combination of philanthropy and pamphleteering, two historical tropes for the representation of suffering according to media scholar Lilie Chouliaraki, makes *Year Zero* a distinctive filmic object among the several movies made at the same period in Cambodia, and it certainly explains its impact on the audience in the UK.³¹

To understand how such combination was produced, it is best to situate the analysis of Pilger's film within the literature about media, compassion, and catastrophe. The way printed, electronic, and digital media shape public responses to suffering and disaster has been widely discussed in academic and journalistic realms. The mediation of "distant suffering," entangled with morality and action, is traced from the Enlightenment context (Boltanski 1999) to the current digital environment (Torshin 2012). Part of the debate focuses on the negative effects of media imagery on public and private engagement with the story that is told. Terms such as "compassion fatigue" (Moeller 1999), desensitization (Sontag 1977, 2003), "fragility of empathy" (Dean 2005) and "cultural anesthesia" (Feldman 1994) have become major notions in the discussion about media and human rights. The interaction of older and newer icons, borrowed from different cultural and historical repertoires, forms another part of academic inquiry into the transformation of journalistic language in the face of catastrophe (Campbell 2005-2013, Keenan 2004, Taylor 1998, Zelizer 2010). The analysis of such mediating processes provided by Lilie

³⁰ John Pilger and Anthony Barnett, *Aftermath: The Struggle of Cambodia & Vietnam* (London: New Statesman, 1982), 63.

³¹ Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (UK: Sage, 2006), 81.

Chouliaraki in *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006) offers a good entry point into *Year Zero*. The media scholar distinguishes between three regimes of news that enable mainstream media to mobilize the audience through pity. These are adventure news, emergency news, and ecstatic news. Each regime “construes suffering as an aesthetic spectacle but each offers the spectator a different quality of emotional and practical engagement with the distant sufferer.”³² These three regimes differ in several ways: the visual and verbal language they use (multi-modality); the representation of proximity to the scene of suffering (space-time); the representation of action on the sufferer’s situation (agency).³³ Pilger’s movie undeniably belongs to the second category defined in *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. Therefore, I propose to apply Chouliaraki’s conceptualization of “emergency news” to *Year Zero* in order to clarify its construction as emotion-cum-politics televisual message.

3.2 *Year Zero* as emergency news

The verbal and visual language of emergency news develops increasing degrees of affective power, Chouliaraki argues in *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. The reporter’s narration progressively turns into exposition. It incorporates the point of view of the journalist within the news, and doing so, explicitly articulates ethical judgment concerning the reported suffering.³⁴ This is achieved, for instance, through “theatrical agency.” The emotions of the spectators are displaced to either focus on benefactors so they feel gratitude vis-à-vis their acts of charity, or on persecutors so they feel indignation at the causes of the sufferers’ misfortune.³⁵ The model lends itself particularly well to Pilger’s objectives, and it enables the journalist to articulate the themes of tragedy and rebirth in a powerful fashion.

3.2.1 The scene of geopolitics: persecutors and benefactors

The first and immediate persecutors are, obviously, the Khmer Rouge, defeated but alive and kicking, and regaining their strength thanks to the international community. *Year Zero* follows closely the PRK’s basic arguments about Pol Pot and his henchmen. The new regime was eager to demonstrate that the so-called communism of the Khmer Rouge had nothing to do whatsoever with communism as practiced now in Cambodia, or communism at all. The world had to be shown that the crimes of the Pol Pot’s regime were “more atrocious (...) than those committed in the Dark Ages or those perpetrated by the Hitlerite fascists.”³⁶

³² *Ibid.* 8.

³³ *Ibid.* 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 78.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 125. Chouliaraki’s model is inspired by Luc Boltanski’s analysis of denunciation and sentiment as mediation for moral and political action. See: Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁶ National United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea, *Declaration* (NUFSK Information Service, January 1979), 7.



Figure 6: Tuol Sleng (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

Analogies with Nazism and the Holocaust, which had filled mainstream media prior to the ousting of the Khmer Rouge, became thus common rhetoric among the friends of the PRK. The comparison was likely to tug at the heart of Western audiences. Furthermore, it helped deflect attention from the Marxist-Leninist elements in Khmer Rouge ideology. References to the Third Reich were often combined with denunciations of Beijing's expansionism and Mao's "genocidal ideology." Like their Chinese revisionist masters, the leaders of DK were fascists. Pilger draws the comparison between Khmer Rouge and Nazi atrocities at several occasions.³⁷ The culminating point is the sequence filmed in Tuol Sleng, the "Asian Auschwitz" (16:30-19:37). As come on screen pools of blood on the floor, torture instruments, and photos of dead and mutilated prisoners, Pilger comments in voiceover: "A Gestapo called S-21 tortured and killed all those designated as sub-people, virtually anybody who'd lived in a town, who had modern skills, who knew foreigners." He continues: "Like the Nazis, the Khmer Rouge photographed their victims when they were brought to the camp and as they were being tortured and hanged, drowned, disemboweled and electrocuted. In this camp alone fourteen thousand people died" (figure 6).

³⁷ The comparison came all the more easily as two months before traveling to Cambodia, Pilger and Piper, who covered the return of Pope John Paul to Poland, had visited Auschwitz. "Now in Southeast-Asia," Pilger said, "we saw [Auschwitz] again." Pilger, *Heroes*, 393.



Figure 7: Busts of Pol Pot (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

Archive images of Pol Pot's official visit in Beijing remind the spectator that China backed DK all along. The association with Mao is also visually evoked through images of Pol Pot's cult of personality (the busts and painted portraits that were made by prisoners in Tuol Sleng), so similar to that of the Great Helmsman (15:11-15:20) (figure 7). Offering a simplified interpretation of the Asiatic Mode of Production theory, Pilger postulates that the actual source of inspiration for DK was the pre-modern Khmer civilization.³⁸ Pol Pot was under the delusion of being "a heir to Angkor Wat," the journalist explains as images of the world-famous temples appear on screen. "In Khmer Rouge ideology, communism was seldom mentioned. Instead there was the Angkar, an organization which demanded slavery in an agrarian society without towns or machines" (14:47-15:09). Pilger gives a simplistic view of the Khmer Rouge regime. In line with the People's Revolutionary Tribunal's narrative, he focuses on the arch-villains, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary. His interview of rank and file is succinct at best. He only asks them how many people they killed and why (figure 8). The men come out as brainwashed executioners, robots that obeyed orders out of fear for their life. Pilger makes no attempt to understand why they joined the Khmer Rouge, whether they acted out of belief. These internal factors are irrelevant to his demonstration. They could even obscure the political message

³⁸ The Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) is a concept formulated by Marx in the 1850s. It refers to structural elements and social formation in pre-capitalist non-Western societies, characterized by a despotic system, the absence of private property, and the collective organization of rural life. In *Cambodia 1975-1982* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), Michael Vickery argues the limited relevance of the AMP model to the Khmer Rouge system, 268-271.

he wants to convey—that the Khmer Rouge would never have happened without the intervention of a second persecutor, the United States. The American style was different from Pol Pot’s, Pilger said, but the result for the Cambodians was the same.



Figure 8: Interview of Khmer Rouge soldier (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

Year Zero is as a merciless indictment of the American government and the role it played in the Cambodian tragedy. This is clear from the start as Pilger delivers his opening statement just after a short and violent sequence that shows aerial bombardment and Cambodian civilians trying to escape (figures 9-10):

At 7:30 am on April 17, 1975, the war in Cambodia was over. It was a unique war for no countries ever experienced such concentrated bombing. On this, perhaps the most gentle and graceful land of Asia, President Nixon and Mister Kissinger unleashed 100,000 tons of bombs, the equivalent of five Hiroshima’s. The bombing was their personal decision. Illegally and secretly, they bombed Cambodia, a neutral country, back to the Stone Age. And I mean Stone Age in its literal sense.

Year Zero makes a direct linkage between the bombing of Cambodia by the U.S. Army and the advent of the Pol Pot’s regime, as if there had been no interruption between the two events. As an illustration of this rearranged timeline, photos of the fall of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975 and its evacuation shortly afterward come straight after Pilger’s statement (0:00-3:56). No doubt American policy had a part in the rise to power of the Khmer Rouge. But popular support to Pol Pot’s guerrillas had also social and economic causes, which the journalist does not discuss. The movie’s elliptic montage does not

allow for any critical analysis of the civil war in Cambodia. After a brief reminder of the country's recent history, Pilger comes back to the American bombing. *Year Zero* alternates between footage images of B-52s in action (in Vietnam? in Cambodia?) and graphic photos showing the effect of aerial operations on the ground (houses destroyed, maimed civilians).



Figure 9: John Pilger (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.



Figure 10: Archive image of Cambodians fleeing American bombardments. Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

By 1979 the role of the United States in the destabilization of Cambodia was not a scoop. Still, the just-released book *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* brought new materials on the subject. The author, British journalist William Shawcross, had conducted a thorough analysis of American policy in Cambodia between 1969 and 1973 based on hundreds of interviews and files obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. *Sideshow* was a source of inspiration for Pilger. *Year Zero* includes many elements of the book.³⁹ President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, who both appear in a montage of archive footage, are painted as cunning and neurotic politicians obsessed with the idea of revenge at past American defeats in Southeast Asia (figure 11). On the order of “madman” Nixon, the U.S. Army preserved secrecy about the bombing of Cambodia at all costs. Logs were falsified and pilots sworn to lie to their superiors so the Congress never gets a complete picture of American operations. “The cover-up of the bombing was the real beginning of the Watergate,” Pilger asserts as images of B-52s and top-secret military cables with a For Your Eyes Only warning on their cover alternate on screen (5:26-7:34) (figure 12). By emphasizing the irrationality of Nixon’s policy in Cambodia in the past, Pilger casts doubt on the rationality of the position of the United States vis-à-vis the PRK in 1979. He suggests that the current policy of the American administration continues an old vendetta against Vietnam, and punishes Hanoi through a proxy without any consideration for collateral damages.



Figure 11: Archive photo of President Richard Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

Pilger declared later that this stance probably cost him the broadcast of *Year Zero* in the

³⁹ Among them, the anecdote of Nixon watching the movie *Patton* before ordering the bombardment of Cambodia, in William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London: Deutsch, 1979), 135, 144.

United States:

When I flew to Washington and offered it to the national public broadcaster, PBS, I received a curious reaction. PBS executives were shocked by the film, and spoke admiringly of it, even as they collectively shook their heads. One of them said: “John, we are disturbed that your film says the United States played such a destructive role, so we have decided to call in a “journalistic adjudicator” (...) Not surprisingly, [the latter] gave my film the thumbs-down. One of the PBS executives confided to me: “These are difficult days under Ronald Reagan. Your film would have given us problems.”⁴⁰

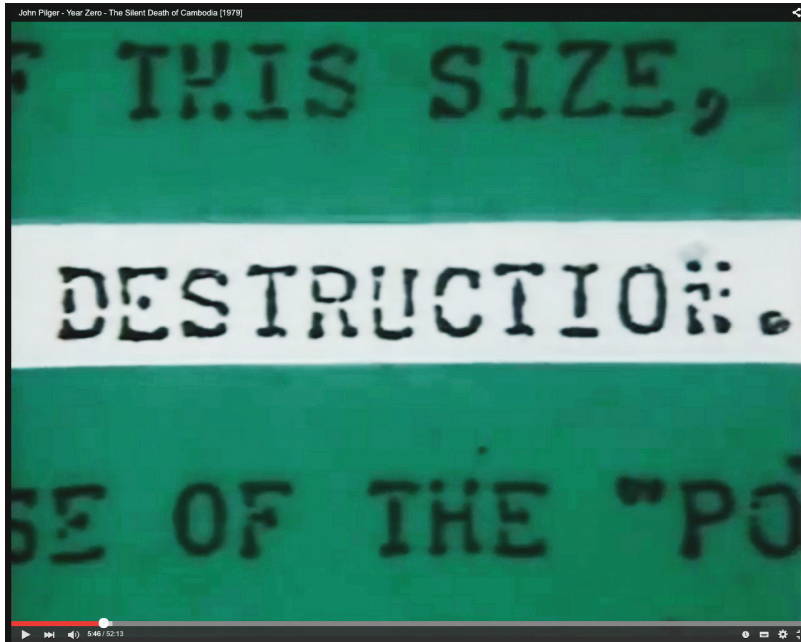


Figure 12: Top secret military files. Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

Year Zero does not spare the international community either. Pilger points out the “extraordinary spectacle” offered by Western democracies as they vote “to continue recognition of a defunct regime which they themselves acknowledged as the most thorough mass murderers since Hitler.” The journalist exposes the double standards of Western powers, eager to condemn Vietnam’s intervention as invasion and to deny the PRK recognition on the ground of sovereignty. But sovereignty, Pilger reminds, was not an argument that was put forward when dictator Idi Amin was chased away earlier that year. The new government in Uganda, although installed by a foreign power (Tanzania), received its UN seat without any problem. This shows the cynical inconsistency of the West that uses principles of international law when convenient and is prompt to switch sides when needed. This attitude could be laughable but for its disastrous effect on human beings, the Cambodians, left to fend for themselves in the midst of a terrible crisis, with

⁴⁰ Pilger, “The Real First Casualty of War,” Information Clearing House, April 20, 2006. The “journalistic adjudicator” in question was Richard Dudman, the reporter of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* who had traveled with Elizabeth Becker and Malcolm Caldwell to DK in December 1978. According to Pilger, Dudman’s pro-Khmer Rouge stance (this is Pilger’s view of Dudman’s position) explains why he advised PBS against *Year Zero*.

the help of a few friends only.

These friends are of course the Vietnamese, the main benefactor in *Year Zero*. At the time presenting the role of Vietnam in the PRK entailed a set of basic arguments. First, the idea that Hanoi had invaded Cambodia was to be denied. Vietnam had intervened in support of a genuine Khmer uprising against a deviant regime. It had helped true bearers of communism access national self-determination. Second, Vietnam's continued presence in Cambodia was to be justified as fraternal aid to a country under threat of famine and war. Last, the "lethal myth" propagated by the Khmer Rouge and their allies accusing Vietnam of blocking assistance from the international community was to be disproved.⁴¹ Worse even, Hanoi was accused of diverting the aid reaching Cambodia for its own people and perpetrating a "subtle genocide" (François Ponchaud) against Cambodians so it could replace them with its own population. Reports such as Pilger's were meant to counter this Vietnam-bashing and offer a positive view of the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia. *Bodoi* [soldiers] and advisors were shown distributing sacks of rice, feeding the children and the sick, training Khmer farmers to self-defense, and repairing running water systems and electric plants. Cambodians interviewed by foreign journalists praised the Vietnamese and called them saviors, protectors, friends, and the only reason of hope for the PRK. *Year Zero* sticks with the model and builds up on the theme of sacrifice. Vietnam does not take; it gives, even if it has nothing. A sequence that shows Vietnamese soldiers in the midst of rice distribution to Cambodian civilians in Kompong Speu stresses the contrast between Vietnam's altruism and the West's indifference (12:34-13:11) (figure 13). Pilger comments:

The Vietnamese, which are in a difficult situation, give some drugs and some food. Vietnam sent 25,000 tons of food to Cambodia. They managed to do it by asking each family in southwestern Vietnam to give six pounds of rice. By contrast, the West has sent a fraction to the People's Republic of Kampuchea but supplies to refugee camps for the Khmer Rouge.

The point is hammered in another sequence, a conversation with French physicians Follezou and Vinot (34:09-34:53):

Pilger: Because of the West's attitude towards the boat people refugees, they're not allowing aid to come through to Cambodians?

Follezou: Yes, the same as the cut of expedition of milk to Vietnam.

Vinot: The European Economic Community has suppressed recently the food assistance to Vietnam.

Follezou: It is an unimaginable situation. The Vietnamese, which is in a very difficult situation at alimentation level and at medical level, give themselves some drugs and food to this country.

To give the spectator a visual idea of what Vietnam's generosity concretely means, the ATV crew films a food convoy arriving in Phnom Penh (34:56-36:15) (figure 14). This is one truck after another in a seemingly non-ending line, "the only guaranteed life line" as Pilger says:

⁴¹ Pilger and Barnett, *Aftermath*, 69.

At the southern end of Monivong Avenue, the first swaying, snorting, venerable festooned Ford could be seen, then another and another, then a ribbon of them with no end in sight. Fords, Dodges, and Internationals laden with rice, building materials, utensils, agricultural tools, tents and clothing. This was a civilian convoy from Vietnam whose drivers, from Saigon, included former members of the defeated Saigon army.⁴²



Figure 13: Rice distribution in Kompong Speu (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.



Figure 14: Vietnamese food convoy (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

⁴² Pilger, *Heroes*, 398.

The “Vietnamese David” versus the “American Goliath” was a familiar narrative for friends of Vietnam. To elicit the public’s sympathy for the underdog, they could rely on the memory of the conflict between the United States and Vietnam, the (romanticized) image people had kept of Vietnamese as forming a popular army fighting with little against the heavily equipped U.S. war machine. After having sacrificed so much during decades of war, these courageous soldiers and their families were now ready to sacrifice even more for the sake of their Cambodian neighbors. In the face of such brotherly dedication, how could one give any credence to claims that Hanoi siphoned aid off or created famine to control Cambodia? Of course, British mainstream media reacted to Pilger’s idyllic depiction of the relation between Vietnam and Cambodia. The *Daily Telegraph* pointed out the allegiance of the journalist to Vietnam (October 31, 1979). The *Observer* refuted his description of the Vietnamese as “philanthropists” (November 4, 1979). In an open letter to the *Observer* Pilger dismissed the comment as “Cold War bigotry that has allowed so many people to die” (November 11, 1979).⁴³ The rebuke did not leave much space for further debate. Yet, the actual tour de force of *Year Zero* was not so much in silencing opponents as much as in keeping it quiet on more problematic aspects. For instance that Vietnam had nurtured and supported the Khmer Rouge until 1978, or that Pilger himself had not been very vocal about Khmer Rouge atrocities at least until Hanoi went to war against DK. “In a world of saturation news, there has been no news of what was really done to more than seven million people,” the journalist declared in *Year Zero* (3:20-3:24). But he did not add that, at the time, he had been one of those who had kept their mouth shut.

3.2.2 The scene of suffering: Cambodian victims

Year Zero is not meant just “to assault your emotions but to end the silence and indifference and to put Cambodia back on the human map,” Pilger tells the spectator at the end of the movie. Emotion had always been part of Pilger’s journalistic style. When he came under fire for being too emotional in his work about Vietnam, he replied that, “the charge of emotional reporting usually [comes] from correspondents who [have] been so long exposed to the war that their compassion [has] been deadened.”⁴⁴ No doubt *Year Zero* reflected the shock of the ATV crew at the situation in Cambodia. Sometimes the men could hardly cope with what they saw. Gerry Pinches is described as stopping filming children because tears were running down his face. “We ate little and spoke rarely, and I found myself gulping neat whiskies, without effect,” Pilger recounts. The days passed “in slow motion,” there was a “macabre repetitiveness” in the work the crew accomplished.⁴⁵ The emotional style of the movie aimed, first and foremost, to punch British spectators in the face, to stir up feelings of anger and shame, and to drive viewers into action. In that respect, it was a conscious aesthetic decision. This was not the first time Pilger dealt with starvation. With Piper, he had covered famine in Bangladesh in 1975. The resulting movie *An Unfashionable Tragedy* showed emaciated children and their mothers, corpses brought to a cemetery near Dacca, skulls and bones scattered on the ground, and the

⁴³ Hayward, *Breaking the Silence*, Chapter 4, np.

⁴⁴ Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Mythmaker from the Crimea to Kosovo* (London: Prion, 2000 [1975]), 420.

⁴⁵ Pilger, *Heroes*, 391, 394, 404.

distribution of food in a soap factory turned into relief famine center.

Yet, for Pilger as for many UK-based reporters, there was a major precedent in the depiction of famine: Biafra.⁴⁶ This was even the first reference that came to Oxfam's representative Jim Howard (who had firsthand experience in the matter) when he returned from his first mission in Phnom Penh. He talked about "starvation at the worst Biafra level."⁴⁷ Biafra was the first conflict in Africa that drew so much media attention in the West. The breakthrough in the news in the UK occurred in June 1968, when a Christian missionary took a group of British journalists to a hospital to see starving children. The newspaper *The Sun*, followed by *The Daily Sketch*, launched a charity campaign for "the land of no hope." According to reporter Michael Leapman from *The Sun*, "it was the pictures that really made the first story, some marvelous pictures of kids in great distress. And talking to the doctor who said: 'This one here is going to die tomorrow'. It was very moving stuff." This turned starving children into an icon of human suffering. Popular response to the imagery was huge. People marched, demonstrated, and went on hunger strike. They formed support committees and petitioned parliamentarians.⁴⁸ Pilger could not but have the Biafra model in mind with respect to Cambodia. Planning a campaign in both printed and electronic media, he certainly hoped to achieve a similar effect. Indeed, the situation in the PRK evoked Biafra in many ways. At the time the debate about the civil war between secessionist Biafra and Nigeria had polarized around accusations of genocide. Britain had chosen to side with Nigeria. Her siding with the Khmer Rouge in 1979 appeared sadly reminiscent of her former engagement against a suffering population. As well, the blockade by the federal army of Nigeria, the major cause of famine in Biafra, reminded of the embargo the international community imposed on Vietnam and the PRK. By contrast, Oxfam (which had been active in Biafra) appeared again on the right side, helping the weak and dying.

Against such a backdrop, it is not a surprise that the key scene of suffering in *Year Zero* takes place in children hospitals in Phnom Penh and Kompong Speu. The direct encounter of the spectator with the scene of suffering is carefully introduced. Pilger builds up a climatic progression. First, he interviews UNICEF representative Jacques Beaumont. The man looks worn out and desperate (figure 15). He tells the journalist about his visit at the children hospital in Kompong Speu on July 18, 1979. *Year Zero*

⁴⁶ There were other histories of starvation that could echo in Britain's collective memory: Great Irish Famine in the 1800s, famine in India during the Second World War, Bergen Belsen. But the 1967-1970 Civil War between Biafra and Nigeria (former colony of the British empire) following the secession of the Igbos was a more recent case. It left a deep mark in Britain, since the latter was the major foreign power supporting the Nigerian government and shipping arms to Lagos.

⁴⁷ Metzl, *Western Responses*, 147.

⁴⁸ Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer, *News out of Africa. Biafra to Band Aid* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1986), pp. 29-34. See also: Ken Water, "Influencing the Message: The Role of Catholic Missionaries in Media Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War," *The Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (2004); Lasse Heerten, "The Dystopia of Postcolonial Catastrophe: Self-Determination, the Biafran War of Secession, and the 1970s Human Rights Movement," in *The Breakthrough. Human Rights in the 1970s*, Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Kevin O'Sullivan, "Humanitarian Encounters: Biafra, NGOs and Imaginings of the Third World in Britain and Ireland," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, nos. 2-3 (2014).

alternates between images of the interview and images of the children on-location (10:45-12:33) (figure 16).

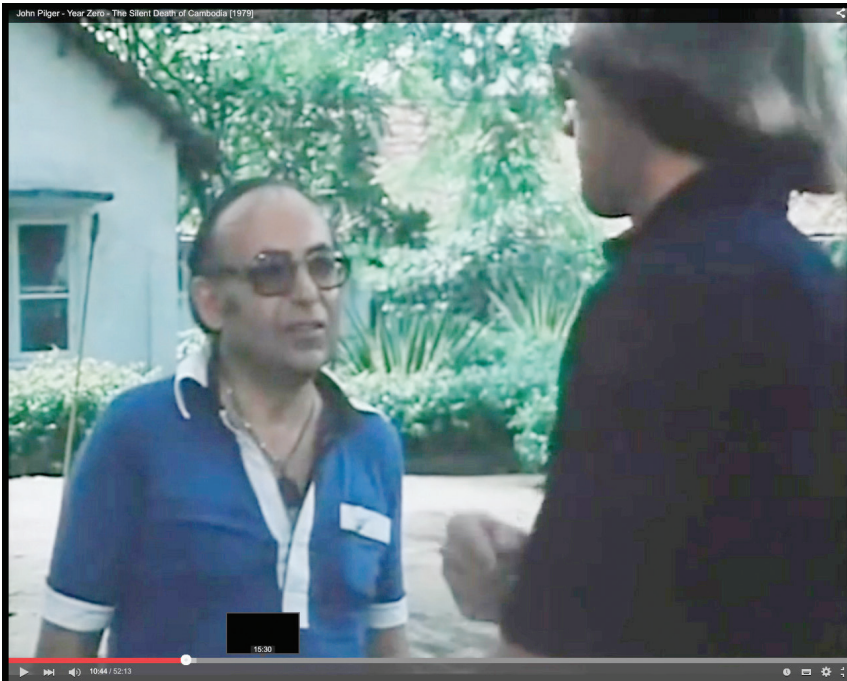


Figure 15: John Pilger interviews Jacques Beaumont (1979).
Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.



Figure 16: Children at the hospital of Kompong Speu (1979).
Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

The town, which had remained a Khmer Rouge stronghold until February 1979, was in a terrible state. When Pol Pot's troops retreated, they destroyed the former central market and many other buildings, including the town's hospital. The montage renders the hopelessness of Beaumont even more tangible. Within a few days several of the children he saw in Kompong Speu were dead, he explains. "I did not do anything because we had nothing." The account goes crescendo with Pilger visiting the children hospital in the company of French physicians Follezou and Vinot (figure 17). Although it is not clearly identified, the place filmed is probably the children hospital in Phnom Penh (29:41-32:09). Children lie there, moaning, in squalid conditions, the hospital lacking basic equipment. There is a tiny newborn in the arms of his mother. There are skeleton-like children unable to move and to chase away the flies covering their face. Pilger focuses on a ten-year old boy, in dire need of penicillin and milk, lying motionless on a mat (figure 18). The next image shows the same mat, empty. The boy just died (29:09-29:33).



Figure 17: John Pilger and French physicians Jean-Yves Follezou and Jean-Michel Vinot at the hospital in Phnom Penh. Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.



Figure 18: Young boy about to die (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

It is now the turn of Follezou and Vinot who list the problems suffered by Cambodians. The biggest problem is advanced malnutrition, they explain. It concerns a majority of children. With the doctors, Pilger heads toward an emaciated woman who sits with her daughter and a baby girl. Follezou points at the bloated belly and thin limbs of the older girl (figures 19-20). The baby is in a worse state even. The physician clarifies her age. She is one year old but does not look older than a few months. Then, Vinot describes what the population has been through during four years: poor nutrition, hard labor, horrifying psychological conditions, and separation of families. Follezou leads the small group to a twelve-year old boy looking like six (figure 21). It is a typical malnutrition case. The doctor holds the head of the child, ravaged with skin disease. “This little boy is literally skin and bones,” Pilger comments. “What can you do to save him?” It is possible, the two physicians reply, but they need a laboratory, an X-ray machine to diagnose other diseases. Unfortunately, there is no equipment and only forty-eight doctors survived out of the 550 physicians in activity before 1975. Pilger slowly moves on to the adult hospital. The French doctors stress again the “real emergency to get food and to get drugs, to feed and to treat the sick population.” They express their anger at the fact “adults are dying of inadmissible diseases in our time.” This becomes even more detailed in the end sequence. It shows sick grown-ups and a young girl, suffering

from anthrax, who will be dead within a few days if she does not get penicillin (37:45-41:06).



Figure 19: French physician Jean-Yves Follezou examines a young girl (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.



Figure 21: French physician Jean-Yves Follezou examines a young boy (1979). Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

What *Year Zero* proposes is an “ambivalent regime of representation.”⁴⁹ Sufferers are usually reduced to mere biological presence. Now and then, Pilger individualizes some of them with a brief line about their story. His decision to show the empty mat where the boy used to lie before dying may be construed as a kind of memorial gesture. Pilger gives the name of the boy, his age, and says he was found on a pile of rubbish (29:11-29:33). However, sufferers primarily remain body parts—belly, arms, legs, mouth, and scalp—offered to medical inspection. As such, they could easily become the symbol for the failure of the body politic itself, the PRK, a fragmented and dysfunctional power unable to deal with the crisis. Aware that he is walking a thin line, the journalist introduces, thus, a more active kind of survivor. Ung Pech in Tuol Sleng (17:12-18:53; 19:33-19:52; 22:57-24:23) and a young woman who testifies about her ordeal in DK (15:48-16:29) (figures 22-23). They are not only witnesses who give Pilger’s report further authenticity. They are also survivors endowed with agency, with speech, thereby offsetting the anonymous and silent corporeality of other victims.⁵⁰ The journalist quotes other witnesses as well, a woman who lost sixteen members of her family, a teacher who was evacuated with the children of his school. Nevertheless, what prevails is the image of suffering children. In this respect, *Year Zero* is typical of the representation of humanitarian assistance in the seventies (Benthall 1993, Vestergaard 2013). “The impression of children’s total dependence on outside forces for protection and care may inflate donors’ sense of external efficacy, authority, and power to the advantage of the NGO but at the expense of the integrity of the beneficiary.”⁵¹



Figure 22: John Pilger interviews survivor Ung Pech at Tuol Sleng (1979).
Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

⁴⁹ Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*, 136.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 88-89.

⁵¹ Anne Vestergaard, “Humanitarian Appeal and the Paradox of Power,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 10, no. 4 (2013): 459.



Figure 23: John Pilger interviews unnamed female survivor.
Source: screenshot of *Year Zero*.

Those who speak on behalf of the children (and sometimes their mothers) are the French physicians. This depiction reinforces the idea that help can only come from the outside. It supports a patronizing view of the PRK, which surprisingly echoes old colonial representations of the exotic “other.” There are no Cambodian doctors in *Year Zero* but for a very brief appearance of a nurse and two orderlies in the background when Pilger talks with Follezou and Vinot. The only time non-Westerner physicians are mentioned is when the journalist praises in a short sentence the work of Vietnamese doctors. The absence of local personnel is all the more striking as other observers emphasize their tireless activity. Pic’s movie *Cambodge, un Pays à Refaire* shows the work of doctors preparing the reopening of hospitals in Phnom Penh. Dr. My Samedy (the dean of the Medical and Pharmaceutical School) is mentioned in several reports (Corrèze, Van Dullemen) and features in the movies of Kanapa. Corrèze, who follows the Joint Mission to the northwest of Cambodia, visits the hospital of Chuon Bun Thuol and writes at length about the young Cambodian nurse-surgeon she meets there. In Siem Reap she finds three Cambodian doctors as well as several nurses and midwives.⁵² Helen Ester describes her meeting with head of the 17 April hospital So Soren and technologist Dr. Tok Baron. The staff, she specifies, includes 213 nurses, five doctors, a chemist, four dentists, and fifteen part-trained medical students.⁵³ The representatives of the Women’s International Democratic Federation mention a staff of nineteen, including three doctors and four helps, working at the hospital rebuilt in the former Chinese hospital in Phnom

⁵² Françoise Corrèze, *Choses vues au Cambodge* (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1980), 118-120.

⁵³ Helen Ester, *Vietnam, Thailand, Kampuchea: A First Hand Account* (Canberra: The Australian Council for Overseas Aid, March 1980), 46.

Penh.⁵⁴ While Kanapa interviews Follezou and Beaumont in *Cambodge: Années Néant*, he also includes local physicians and medical students, deputy minister of public health Ms. Chey Kanh Nha, and Dr. Tan Li who works at the Kilometer 7 dispensary. Last, but not least, the brochure *The Rebirth of Kampuchea* lists among the PRK achievements the opening of short-term medical classes and the setting up of mobile medical teams. This means twenty-five hospitals, sixty infirmaries, and a hundred medical stations in function by September 1979.

Why are Cambodian medical workers so conspicuously absent from *Year Zero*? That Pilger, fierce anti-imperialist if any, resorts to an iconography fraught with colonial and exploitative aspects is surprising yet best understood as sensationalism and quest for efficacy. White “heroes” (even communist ones) provide spectators in the UK with a stronger form of identification. They ensure massive public participation in the charity campaign, whereas the presence of Cambodian doctors would pointlessly complicate the message. More even, it would diminish the potential effect of the movie. British journalist Frederick Forsythe once wrote about media and Biafra that, “people who couldn’t fathom the political complexities of the war could easily grasp the wrong in a picture of a child dying of starvation.” It was a lesson Pilger remembered perfectly.⁵⁵ The debate about *Year Zero* often stopped at just that—emotion. And often, emotion replaced judgment.⁵⁶ However unbelievable, the shock images of dying children tended by only two white doctors short-circuited any critical perspective on starvation in Cambodia within a context of international tension. This helped Pilger convey his message, a gross simplification that obfuscated the complexities of aid distribution in Cambodia and made assistance the stake of a battle between Good and Evil.

3.3 Sensationalizing the politics of aid distribution in Cambodia

In an article entitled “The ‘filthy affair’ of denying relief” published in the *New Statesman* on 12 October 1979, Pilger declared:

I have been working in an editing room above Berwick Street in Soho watching some of the twelve hours of footage, which director David Munro and I brought back from Cambodia for an ATV documentary (...) The images of dying, crying, starving children are so horrific that I suggested that viewers may not be able to “take it,” that we should delete some of them. But we are not going to do that; for those eyes set in faces that are almost skulls, which still bring tears to those of us who filmed them, will indict every accessory to their preventable death; every relief agency man who makes his craven excuses for doing nothing, every impeccable politician and foreign policy bureaucrat who never sees such children and participates, in however a minor role, in the “filthy affair” that is the denial of food and medicines for political reasons. All the children in our film can now be presumed dead.⁵⁷

Pilger had a long-standing interest in the politics of aid distribution. In an earlier movie

⁵⁴ Fédération Démocratique Internationale des Femmes, *Vietnam, Cambodge, Laos. Témoignages Oculaires* (DDR: Berlin, 1979), 20.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*, 33.

⁵⁶ Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*, 82.

⁵⁷ Pilger and Barnett, *Aftermath*, 74-75.

Zap! The Weapon is Food (1976), he had reported about the Zap office (officially, Office of Multilateral Diplomacy) that monitored food agreements between the American government and countries asking help from the United States. Kissinger used food as a weapon, Pilger argued. The Secretary of State withheld relief for countries he considered expandable. This view of agro-power and state policy colored Pilger's understanding of the situation in the PRK.

Year Zero offers an over-simplified depiction of the food crisis in Cambodia. At first sight starvation is presented as "a multifaceted and dynamic reality."⁵⁸ It is visualized through multiple spaces of suffering such as makeshift or reopened hospitals, orphanages, locations for rice distribution in Phnom Penh and other cities in Cambodia. But there is no map enabling the spectator to follow the trajectory of Pilger and his crew in the PRK (apart from a basic map that appears at the beginning of the movie and situates Cambodia in Southeast Asia). There is no written information, no linguistic reference. The movie leaves the British viewer with the impression that mass starvation spreads evenly through the whole of Cambodia. Such homogenization did not correspond to reality. Pilger overlooked the analyses of Cambodia watchers who tried to figure out the extent of the crisis and the differences between regions due to a variety of factors: crops, governmental evaluation of harvests, storage, forms of distribution (rice was used as salary for people who did not perform agricultural tasks), secondary crops farmers were allowed to grow.⁵⁹ As relief workers began to travel more freely in the PRK toward the end of 1979, they noted the discrepancy between areas. When Malcolm Harper from Oxfam and Hans Page from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization went to Battambang (northwest of Phnom Penh) in November 1979, they did not see any trace of famine. This was not said publicly as Harper was told by Oxfam officials in Oxford not to talk about it.⁶⁰ *Year Zero* did not discuss it either. Instead, the movie made good use of what cultural theorist Barbie Zelizer calls "possible death," or the transformation of the "image's denotative aspects (...) into a symbolic proxy for what is not shown or said."⁶¹ In the same way the ghost city symbolized the devastation of the entire country, starving children at the hospitals in Kompong Speu and Phnom Penh stood for the whole population of Cambodia.

The message of Pilger was plain and simple: the PRK and Vietnam were waiting for international relief. The journalist said that in Hanoi he had talked with Vietnamese ambassador to Phnom Penh Vo Doan Giang and Vietnam's Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. Contrarily to what Western media pretended, the Vietnamese put no condition to the coming of aid goods. Those who put conditions were the representatives of the Joint Mission under the command of the international community.⁶² Unsurprisingly, the situation on the ground was far more complex than Pilger wanted to say. Filmed in August, edited in September, and aired (in the UK) in October 1979, *Year Zero* ran across

⁵⁸ Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*, 122.

⁵⁹ Serge Thion and Michael Vickery, "Cambodia 1981: Background and Issues," in *Watching Cambodia. Ten Paths to Enter the Cambodian Tangle*, Serge Thion, ed. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993), 108.

⁶⁰ Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 212-213.

⁶¹ Barbie Zelizer, *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124.

⁶² Pilger and Barnett, *Aftermath*, 69.

a period filled with dramatic developments. As explained earlier, the negotiations between the Joint Mission and Phnom Penh authorities had been ongoing since Hun Sen's call for help to the UN. The Joint Mission was ready to comply with the Cambodian government's requirement to control the distribution of goods in the country. However, it could not accept to stop delivering aid to the Khmer Rouge in refugee camps, as Hun Sen demanded it. This violated the principles of impartiality of the agencies and could set a dangerous precedent for relief operations in the future. For the PRK, this last condition was non-negotiable. In their view, the international community's use of assistance at the border as a magnet for the Cambodian population aimed to destabilize the new regime and bring Pol Pot back to power. It had to stop.

By September 1979 the situation between parties seemed to improve. Agreement was on the way when both the catastrophic vote at the UN in favor of the Khmer Rouge and internal struggles within the PRK government changed the outcome. The ministries of Economy, Commerce, Health, and Agriculture fought over the distribution of assistance. Permits that one ministry granted could be revoked by another ministry the next day, as the Joint Mission experienced it. The authorization of establishing permanent offices in Phnom Penh received from Ros Samay, Minister of Economy and Livelihood, was cancelled shortly afterward by Foreign Minister Hun Sen, who quickly got rid of his competitor.⁶³ Oxfam proposed its assistance with no strings attached. The agency signed an agreement with the Cambodian government on October 6, 1979. The agency accepted to turn the distribution over to the PRK authorities and not to deliver goods to the Khmer Rouge. Some days later, the representatives of the Joint Mission met with Hun Sen again. They put pressure on him. Thailand would not authorize shipment through its national airports unless there were guarantees that transport and distribution in Cambodia were under the full responsibility of the Joint Mission. If other ASEAN countries decided to adopt the same position as the Thais, Bugnion and Beaumont argued, it would be the end of international assistance—at least through the Joint Mission—to the PRK. A compromise was finally reached. The Joint Mission was allowed to set up permanent offices in Phnom Penh, and Oxfam was told to cooperate with them. The agency agreed (not without reluctance) and reverted to its traditional mission of development, leaving food assistance in the hands of UNICEF and the ICRC.

Year Zero did not reflect such intricacies. According to Pilger things were far more black and white:

Three million people are beginning to starve to death in Cambodia and the ICR and relief agencies and the governments are doing virtually nothing because the new leaders of this country have yet to be recognized, to be approved of.

The journalist attacked the agencies themselves, but not their representatives in Cambodia. On the contrary, he praised Beaumont and Bugnion for their efforts. He considered them as victims of their own directors in Bangkok, New York, and Geneva, who even tried to damage the men's reputation by describing them as "unreliable and drunks."

⁶³ Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 81-86. These rivalries are also evoked by Shawcross in *The Quality of Mercy*, 211-212.

These were among the first and many smears mounted against these who told a truth unpalatable to some Western governments, to sections of the Western media, to the secular missionaries of the established aid industry and to ideologues from the right and far left.⁶⁴

Predictably, the unpalatable truth in question concerned the pressure put by Western politicians on aid agencies. According to Oxfam's representative in Cambodia Brian Walker, Bugnion and Beaumont held a double discourse. When they talked officially on behalf of their organizations, they expressed "anger at Oxfam's action, which, they claimed, cut the ground from their efforts to negotiate access." However, in private conversations, they approved Oxfam's work and deplored the impact of Cold War politics on the situation in Cambodia.⁶⁵ Confidentially, Bugnion even asked Pilger to help. The journalist reported their conversation in the article "Letting a Nation Die," published in the *New Statesman* on September 21, 1979:

During my interview with Jacques Beaumont, I asked him why UNICEF had done so little. At this, he marched away from the camera and led the director, David Munro, and me to a distraught Red Cross man. "He will explain," said Beaumont. The Red Cross man asked me if I, being Australian, had contacts in the Australian government who might arrange the dispatch of a Hercules C-130 cargo plane. "With transport, food, and drugs," he said, "one of these planes would save thousands of lives *now*."⁶⁶

Bugnion requested from Pilger not to reveal his name.⁶⁷ The ICRC representative did not appear in *Year Zero* but the journalist repeated what he had told him. To the question why the Red Cross did not supply such a plane itself, Bugnion had answered this was "because my directors in Geneva have to consider the overall framework for a plan of relief for Cambodia." This, Pilger said, meant that "the UN, Britain included, still recognize the defeated murderous regime of the Khmer Rouge, and it is difficult to get official help for people whose new government still does not diplomatically exist." Once more, it boiled down to the same argument. The West was consciously "letting a nation die" because feeding Cambodians would have amounted to recognizing the PRK and endorsing Vietnam's presence in the country (27:05-28:25).

The postscript of *Year Zero* was filmed on the eve of the movie's broadcast on ATV. That same day, Pilger had called UNICEF headquarters in Geneva and asked how much relief the Joint Mission had sent to Cambodia.⁶⁸ Since the film was released, Pilger explained in the last sequence of *Year Zero*, the international community had sent so far

⁶⁴ Pilger, *Heroes*, 397.

⁶⁵ Walker, "NGOs Break the Cold War Impasse," 142. It is interesting to juxtapose Walker's statement and the story reported by Shawcross. In October 1979 Bugnion cabled ICRC headquarters on his relations with Oxfam. He described them as good at the start but deteriorating after the departure of Jim Howard and the arrival of Brian Walker. Bugnion said Walker tried to disassociate from the Joint Mission and become the leader of all NGOs working in the PRK. Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 151, 167.

⁶⁶ Pilger and Barnett, *Aftermath*, 68.

⁶⁷ Pilger, *Heroes*, 396.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 410.

1,300 tons of relief goods to the PRK. It was clearly a ridiculous figure compared to the assistance effort of socialist countries and popular donations already channeled via Oxfam. That the Joint Mission did not deliver much aid because of the obstacles it encountered in Cambodia (i.e. a skeleton staff in Phnom Penh due to restricted entry visas, no communication with Thailand as their radio equipment had been taken away) was not mentioned.⁶⁹ Pilger preferred sweeping statements. “There’s six months to save a nation mostly of children. Is that impossible?” he asked at the end of *Year Zero* (50:28-50:32). For British spectators confronted with heartbreaking images of suffering children and babies, the subtleties of the politics of aid distribution did not matter. What prevailed was outrage at all those, governments and aid agencies alike, that let people die in the name of inhumane politics.

3.4 The impact of *Year Zero*

Pilger’s views were widely believed in Britain and elsewhere and, as a result, the offices of UNICEF and the Red Cross received many calls from horrified people who demanded to know why they were letting Cambodians starve. By contrast (...) Oxfam was at once deluged with donations and offers of help, and some, not all of its officials actually encouraged the notion that the Vietnamese had in no way hindered any relief effort and that Oxfam alone was prepared to help Cambodia live.⁷⁰

Understandably enough the ICRC reacted to *Year Zero* with anger. In November 1979 Sir Evelyn Shuckburg, chairman of the British Red Cross, contacted the chairwoman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Lady Plowden about Pilger’s claims concerning the work of the Red Cross in Cambodia. He wanted to stop the distribution of the movie abroad. Lady Plowden discarded the complaint on the grounds that the film had been vetted before it aired on ATV. Furthermore, she replied, the IBA had no influence whatsoever on broadcasters in other countries. According to journalist Tim Robinson, there were two reasons why *Year Zero* had managed to get past the IBA: “Emotions—because children who dare to look like that are difficult to refuse. And, possibly, guilt—because when the South-East Asian wars were in full flood our media tended to accept without much question the US line of truth.”⁷¹ Within two days of the movie’s broadcast on October 30, 1979, forty sacks of post arrived at ATV-Birmingham. The station amassed GB£1 million almost all of it in small amounts. Money came from an anonymous bus driver from Bristol who sent his week’s wage, or an elderly woman her pension for two months, and so on. Pilger remembers the phone call of a single mother who said: “I’ve got only GB£50. I’ve been saving it for three years. Where do I send it? Listen, I’m not starving, am I?” People stopped the journalist in the street to write checks. They came to his home, “with toys and letters, and petitions for Margaret

⁶⁹ The personnel of the Joint Mission in Phnom Penh in October 1979 amounted to fifteen people. In December 1989, these were seventy-one people working for the ICRC and UNICEF in the PRK. CICR, *Kampuchéa: Sortis du Gouffre. Compte-Rendu par le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge sur l’Action Conjointe CICR/UNICEF en Thaïlande et au Kampuchéa* (Genève: CICR, October 1981), 14.

⁷⁰ Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 141.

⁷¹ Tim Robinson, “And Nothing But...,” *New Scientist*, 15 November 1979, 549.

Thatcher and poems of indignation for Pol Pot.”⁷² On November 1, 1979, the BBC Television children’s program *Blue Peter* launched a bring-and-buy sale through all Oxfam’s shops in the UK. It fetched US\$8 million, out of which Pilger’s movie helped raise two.⁷³ Another consequence of *Year Zero* was to undermine on a long term the propaganda of the Khmer Rouge and their support groups abroad. In the March-April 1981 issue of the *Kampuchea Bulletin* the chairman of the British Kampuchea Support Campaign Michael McColgan complained that the widespread publicity of John Pilger to justify the Vietnamese occupation had made the campaign’s work difficult.⁷⁴

Indeed Pilger was relentless. In 1980 he released his second movie about Cambodia, *Cambodia: Year One*. He introduced the film by praising the “historic” dimension of the public response to his coverage of starvation in the PRK. Using a before/after structure, *Year One* recycled some of *Year Zero*’s footage: Phnom Penh as ghost city, bombing of Cambodia, Khmer Rouge takeover, mass graves, and starving children. This reminder of the situation as it was in 1979 emphasized the remarkable progress of the country within a year. Of course the movie included a special sequence about the children hospital in Kompong Speu. Pilger visited the place once more in the company of physicians Follezou and Vinot. The three men marveled at the improvement. Now the hospital was equipped with instruments, beds, and antibiotics produced in laboratories in Phnom Penh and the Soviet Union. Children did not starve anymore. Newborns looked healthy. When he interviewed Jim Howard about Oxfam’s operations in the PRK, Pilger called the answer of the British public “extraordinary.” Howard agreed. “It touched the very depth of human compassion,” he said. Then he listed what people had sent to Oxfam, from food to money, from pencils to footballs. Some GB£19 million had been raised following the broadcast of *Year Zero*. Pilger, thus, had a duty to show British spectators what their “compassion and generosity [had] achieved.” He and ATV had made it sure that the money went to actual projects, he explained. These were fresh water supplies, a pharmaceutical laboratory producing readymade drugs such as penicillin, a textile factory reopened and employing three hundred people, mostly widows. As is often the case with Pilger, things were extremely simplified. Oxfam had no choice but to work on development projects since food assistance was under the control of the Joint Mission. The organization was involved in repairing water works and restarting industries (Bull 1983, Charney and Spragens Jr. 1984). Where the money went did not depend on Pilger’s demands. It was true that Oxfam supplied the textile factory, but the latter had reopened much earlier without the help of the agency or British donations.⁷⁵ *Year One* continued

⁷² Pilger, *Heroes*, 410.

⁷³ Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 191-192.

⁷⁴ Michael McColgan, “BKSC: Changes in Constitution, AGM Report,” *Kampuchea Bulletin*, no.6 (March-April 1981), 2.

⁷⁵ Alain Ruscio, who visited the textile factory of Ressey Kaov (also spelled Russey Keo) on November 6, 1979, writes that it had reopened on April 9, 1979 with 569 employees. Ruscio, *Cambodge An I*, 145. Corrèze mentions the same factory and gives April 1979 as the date of reopening too. *Choses vues au Cambodge*, 70. Chanthou Boua writes that Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and Cuba contributed to the reopening of the factory. “Observation of the Heng Samrin Government 1980-1982,” in *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983), 273.

the same political line as the former movie. It kept deconstructing the “lethal myth” of Vietnam diverting aid and it vilified the action of the international community in refugee camps at the Thai border. Careful to distinguish between individuals and agencies, Pilger showed a repelled UNICEF worker who had to deliver, much against her will, relief goods to the Khmer Rouge basis Phnom Chat. There, the journalist interviewed the camp administrator Nam Pham (nicknamed “the butcher”) who confirmed the support of China, the United States, and Europe to Khmer Rouge guerrillas via humanitarian canals.

4. The afterlife of a media event: watching *Year Zero* on YouTube

In 1984 Kimmo Kiljunen from the Finnish inquiry commission about the situation in the PRK concluded that the relief operation mounted in Cambodia had fully demonstrated the power of mass media. “The positive impact was that international solidarity was raised so effectively that plenty of funds were available” and the worse could be prevented, he wrote in the commission’s report. “The negative aspect (...) was that part of the information was pure propaganda and humanitarian work also suffered from the propaganda in the press.”⁷⁶ Nothing illustrates this convergence of media, human rights, disaster, and political manipulation better than *Year Zero*. What happens, though, when the context that generated such a combination disappears? In 1979 people looked at Khmer Rouge atrocities through the prism of famine and dying children. But how is *Year Zero* as “emergency news” perceived when there is no longer any emergency?

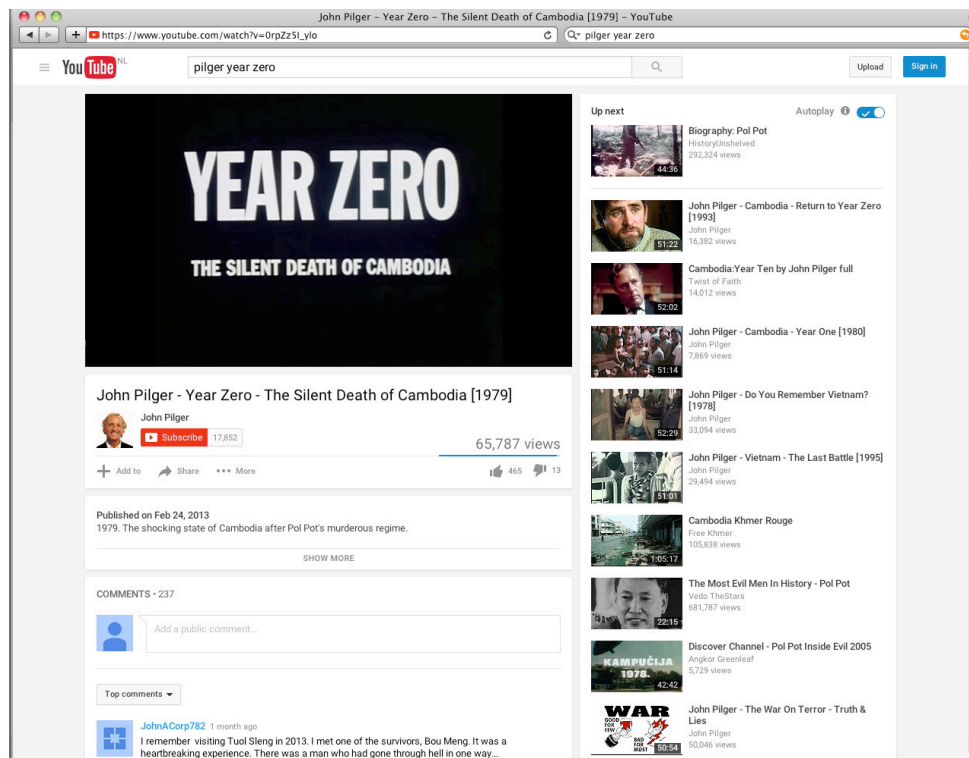


Figure 24: Screenshot of John Pilger’s YouTube Channel (2016).

⁷⁶ Kimmo Kiljunen, *Kampuchea: Decade of the Genocide: Report of a Finnish Inquiry Commission* (London: Zed Books, 1984), 99-100.

Nowadays, Pilger's movie remains easily accessible. It is presented in exhibitions dealing with the Khmer Rouge period (see Chapter 5) and film festivals such as the "John Pilger film festival" organized at the Barbican in London in September 2006. Above all, *Year Zero* has a strong presence on the Internet. Pilger made all his movies available on his website as well as on the video-sharing websites Vimeo and YouTube (with his own channel for the latter). Furthermore, alternative media broadcasters and online articles about the work of Pilger in Cambodia often remediate one of these versions. This stands in stark contrast to the situation of other movies made in the PRK in 1979. *Kampuchea: Sterben and Auferstehen* of Heynowski and Scheumann can only be seen in archive institutions or by ordering a DVD on Amazon. *Cambodge: Années Néant* of Kanapa is available on the website of the National Audiovisual Institute (INA) in France, but only the first five minutes are in free access. One has to pay 1.99 Euro to download the entire movie. It is a small amount, but it might put off potential viewers used to the (apparently) free of charge environment of social media.

The last part of the chapter focuses on the version of *Year Zero* posted on YouTube. It uses it as an example of the present-day perception of Pilger's movie. The latter exists in different formats on the video-sharing website, either as entire version or short excerpts.⁷⁷ In some cases, users recycle only a few images of *Year Zero* in mash-up videos. A good example is the "song documentary" *Khmer Rouge* of Gabriele Grecchi and Johnny Collato, which mixes contemporary footage of Cambodia with Khmer Rouge propaganda materials and images of documentary movies, including *Year Zero*'s sequence about the children at the hospital in Kompong Speu.⁷⁸ For methodological reasons I decided to restrict the study to the version posted by Pilger himself on his YouTube channel since it gives a clear context for interpreting the reactions of viewers (figure 24). The film was uploaded on February 24, 2013. Since then it was viewed 61,546 times and it generated 206 comments (as this is written).⁷⁹ I propose to examine these comments. Of course, there are limitations to such an analysis, especially due to the absence of reliable information about the users themselves or their motivations, and the aggressiveness of comment culture on YouTube.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, these comments offer uncensored opinions that reflect a wide range of positions, marginal and dominant ones alike, with respect to Pilger's movie. Therefore, they can be taken as an indication of the topics that retain or not the attention of people watching *Year Zero* today. Based on the number of times they are mentioned, the general themes discussed in the comments are the following: United States (49 times); John Pilger (31 times); Communism/Socialism (27 times); Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge (21 times); Vietnam (19 times); China and Mao (15 times); Jews (13 times); West (12 times); USSR/Russia (9 times); UK (7 times); current situation in Cambodia (7 times); personal relation to the events (6 times); media (5 times); Hitler and the Holocaust (4 times); religion and culture (3 times); humanitarian

⁷⁷ For a partial list see Appendix H.

⁷⁸ Posted on September 4, 2007, it was viewed 1,279,913 times (as this is written).

⁷⁹ The version of the movie posted on Vimeo in 2011 generated only four comments.

⁸⁰ On those aspects, see: Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of Platform." *New Media & Society*, vol.12, no.3 (2010) and Aaron Hess, "Resistance up in Smoke: Analyzing the Limits of Deliberation on YouTube," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol.26, no.5 (2009).

assistance (3 times); neoliberalism (3 times); Sihanouk (2 times); colonialism (2 times); Lon Nol (1 time). Of course two or more themes might overlap in a same comment. Conversely, there are comments, such as those thanking Pilger for the movie or insulting other users in the course of a thread, which do not refer to any specific theme.

The role of the United States is by far the dominant topic. It is divided into several subthemes, among which the bombing of Cambodia occupies a major position. Pilger's denunciation of the American administration finds a sounding board on YouTube. Kissinger and Nixon are said to be "among the 20th century's worst war criminals" (user Che Guevarra, 2015). In their case, justice has not been served: "I don't normally agree with the death penalty, but Nixon and Kissinger should have been hung for crimes against humanity" (user magicwandaful, 2014). Comments tend to focus on the former Secretary of State. User shelagh mcgee thinks that Kissinger is "one of the most evil beings that has ever lived – I hope he burns in agony for eternity and some!" (May 2015). That he could get away with murder and be rewarded with the Nobel Prize is hard to swallow for some users. "This again makes me question the point of the Nobel Prize when it's given to warmongers like Kissinger and Obama" (user itkapatanka, April 2016). For user K2Karakoram, the Nixon administration was very bad but it cannot represent the entire American foreign policy (May 2015). Here, the bombing of Cambodia segues into another subtheme—whether the intervention in Cambodia was justified or not in the context of the Indochina Wars and the Cold War. Several people share the opinion of user warriorprince101010: "The Communists of Vietnam and Cambodia slaughtered 5 to 6 million people with their wars and mass murder (...) The USA tried to help the Vietnamese people to stand up to the Communists but sadly it failed in the end, evil won" (August 2015). Communists are thus pointed out as the culprits and America becomes the "white knight" that saved Cambodia from the grip of murderous fanatics.

What Communism exactly means for viewers on YouTube remains unclear. It seems to function as a catchall term that does not correspond to any precise geopolitical, ideological, and historical entity, but rather defines a generic enemy of the United States and the Western world. Differences between different interpretations of Communism (or Marxism-Leninism), starting with Maoism, are not clearly established. Terms such as Sino-Soviet conflict, Cultural Revolution, Three Worlds theory—which are critical to understanding the situation in Cambodia—barely appear in comments. The only attempt to discuss more thoroughly the ideology of the Pol Pot's regime (by user Michael) is cut short by other users since "for the victims of the Khmer Rouge, ideology means shit" (user am1966ath claims, 2015). For a marginal group of people, Communism is the product of the Jewish lobby, in line with the old cliché of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy. What happened in Cambodia was "Jewish handiwork," user LoTechRevolt explains:

The Hebrews have a long tradition of doing shit exactly like this because us Goyim are their slaves living in their world... And Pol Pot, like the Jewish Chinese 'revolution', Hungary and Russia before that are the blue print of what's planned for all of humanity.

At the same time, the Jewish lobby is also behind the foreign policy of the United States in Southeast Asia: "The Americans via Nixon just wanted some quick dough, and the

German Jewish Kissinger wanted more power and more for ‘his’ people a so called minority back then” (User General Dis, 2014).

The intervention in Cambodia as a response to the communist threat merges with another subtheme, the role of the United States in conflicts all over the world, beginning with the aftermath of the Second World War. User Flounder defends the patriotic view that the United States saved Western Europe from Soviet invasion (August 2015)—a benevolent role that is of course contested by other viewers. The linkage of Cambodian history with other stories of violence involving the United States does not go unchallenged:

User Rob Kennedy: its amazing, the u.s. openly spies on a global level, has been involved in roughly 2 wars a decade but never anywhere near their own territory, but still people believe that a change in president every 4-8 years means a fresh slate.

User jokin57: 2 wars a decade? How do you figure? The 1970s? None after the January 1973 peace accord with North Vietnam [...] 1980s? None directly, unless you count Grenada. 1990s? With UN support, Iraq in 1991 after Saddam Hussein invaded sovereign Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia. Somalia was initially a humanitarian effort in response to the mass and international starvation of the people by the Somali warlords. The UN sponsored dealing with the former Yugoslavia in response to the Serb attempts at genocide of its political and ethnic rivals. 2000s? The Taliban was an international pariah, harboring Al Qaeda and terrorizing its own people. And Iraq, Saddam had sponsored an assassination attempt on Bush’s life and had repeatedly violated UN mandates and international law. Care to try again?

User fullmetaljaco replies with a list of coups and dictatorships in Africa (Angola, Mozambique, Somalia, Guinea, Liberia, Ethiopia) and Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Chile, Argentina), in which the CIA had a hand—a claim that user joking57 dismisses as “regurgitated Communist claptrap.” Several viewers refer to the current situation in the Middle East (Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Syria) as well. Some point out the analogy between the Khmer Rouge and the Islamic State. “The parallels between ISIS and the Camara [sic] Rouge are uncanny. As pertinent today as this was 40 years ago,” user Tom Birmingham writes (July 2015). Pilger himself made the comparison at a number of occasions, considering that ISIS and the Khmer Rouge are both “the product of an American-made apocalypse.”⁸¹

Viewers pay much less attention to *Year Zero*’s other protagonist, Vietnam. The few comments on the subject show that the role of Hanoi in the Cambodian tragedy remains a polarizing issue. Some people think that Vietnam saved Cambodia. “Vietnam itself had nothing, yet it did everything to help Cambodia” (user BrinaFlautist, December 2015). Vietnamese are praised for their “strength of character not to bow to the yolk of a perverted regime [United States]” (user Shasha, February 2016). On the other hand, some

⁸¹ John Pilger, “From Pol Pot to ISIS: Anything that Flies on Anything that Moves,” John Pilger’s website, October 8, 2014, and “Cambodia Year Zero Continues to Raise Awareness About the History of Khmer Rouge,” *Truth-out*, August 26, 2015. See also: Robert Freeman, “‘ISIS’ is Arabic for ‘Khmer Rouge,’” *Common Dreams*, September 7, 2014. Others go further and compare the Islamic State or Daech to the Pol Pot’s regime. Andrew Lam, “ISIS, Echoing the Purges of the Khmer Rouge?” *New Media America*, February 4, 2015.

viewers believe that Vietnam was responsible for the slaughter of Cambodians. They supported the Khmer Rouge during the civil war (user Flounder, January 2016). User Larry Kwan goes even further. In one of his four posts, he argues that Vietnamese spies oversaw Khmer Rouge prisons in Phnom Penh while Cambodians themselves worked as guards (2015). Vietnam remains a danger for Cambodia today, he claims in another post. Vietnamese spies fluent in Khmer occupy top positions in the Cambodian government. He even gives the example of five Cambodian workers killed in 2014 by Vietnamese passing off as police while they were demonstrating for better wages. This kind of comment reflects a longtime enmity of Vietnam and Cambodia, anchored in the history of the Indochina Wars and centuries-old territorial conflicts between the two neighbors.

The role of the West (here again a catchall term meaning past and present Western powers, the UN, mainstream media, and neoliberal capitalism) is not overlooked. Some viewers express a feeling of shame at the non-intervention of Western governments turning away from Cambodians at the worst of Pol Pot's terror, or on the contrary at the involvement of Western powers in Cambodian affairs. "I don't see how any government can try to take the morale high ground on the issue when they knowingly supported mass murderers for over 15 years" (user Jason Pollard, February 2016). Some viewers disagree on that matter. Those who bear the guilt are not politicians but leftists or "progressives" (user David Well, 2015). They sugarcoated the "realities of third world countries," user Cliff Works writes, and they found it easier to blame violence on the white man rather than on Khmer culture, which is filled with "slavery, torture, murder" (October 2015). Out of anti-Americanism, they never reported the crimes of Vietnam (user Flounder, July 2015). User am1966ath evokes Scandinavian socialism, which has "a passion for third world socialist fantasy." In Sweden leftists supported the Khmer Rouge regime and "to this day there is a mentally deluded minority of Swedish intellectuals who still admires Pollpot [sic]" (2015). *Year Zero* is just "the usual hippy nonsense: everything is America's fault," user Dexter Pinion claims, thereby conflating the distinct, albeit related, phenomena of anti-imperialism, anti-Vietnam War activism, and counter-culture in the sixties (2015).

Unsurprisingly, Pilger epitomizes Western leftist journalism and as such keeps generating contrasted perceptions. Some people call *Year Zero* "one of the greatest documentaries of all times" (user Greatanotherchannel, March 2016) and "one of the best, if not the best [video] about Cambodia done by westerners" (user Che Ti Frega, January 2016). User Johny22032 praises the journalist's integrity, as he does not hesitate to go against American foreign policy, unlike other media (March 2016). This makes him "the most courageous investigative journalist in the world" (user Che Guevarra, 2015), more even "the only man speaking up the truth for us Cambodians that don't have a voice (...) our only justice in this world" (user BorossAngkor, 2015). User Jovial Mushahary compares Pilger to "Oliver Stone, Noam [Chomsky], Julian Assage [sic] and Slavo Zizek" (2015). For user magicwandaful, the journalist is "in a league of your own. This doc remains as powerful today as it was when first released" (2014). Indeed, one is tempted to agree, considering the wave of negative reactions *Year Zero* still triggers. The movie is an "oversimplified and very politicized expose" (user BPiperDude, September 2015) and a "melodramatic agenda riddled factually incorrect nonsense" (user StupidJack1, May 2015). It is not journalism but some narration based on opinions and conveyed in a "sensationalist manner" (user Flounder, July 2015). Pilger is described as

“a supporter and apologist of Communists throughout his career” (user warriorprince101010, August 2015), and a “second defense line journalist” hired when “first line brainwash did fail” (user Vera Maier, May 2015).

As it appears from these comments, many viewers articulate Pilger’s interpretation of Cambodian history within a contemporary context that combines post-Cold War and post-9/11 debates. They transpose the anti-imperialist stance of the journalist from the bipolar environment in which it was shaped into a multipolar environment where it takes new meanings. The bombing of Cambodia by the U.S. Army becomes a symbol of other American military and covert operations throughout the second half of the twentieth century up to the recent conflicts in the Middle East. It resonates strongly with concerns over the forms of aerial warfare that developed in the past years and the current military strategies of no-man-on-the-ground that justify massive destruction coming from the air. As a result, the episode related by Pilger becomes increasingly detached from the chain of events to which it originally belonged, and integrated into a more general discourse about the conduct of war by Western powers. In the process, viewers also rewrite the history of the Cold War through stereotypes and clichés: the anti-patriotic Western commie, the “Jew Kissinger,” the great American, the devilish CIA, the Russian/Soviet invader, the murderous Pol Pot, the heroic (or treacherous) Vietnamese, and so on. This oversimplification is possibly the outcome of the “emergency news” format of *Year Zero* and the “theatrical agency” it implies. Pilger’s Manichean worldview is so pervasive that it keeps informing spectators today.

Interestingly, those who do not appear in the comments are the starving Cambodian children and the foreign doctors and aid workers depicted in the movie. Although they were key issues of *Year Zero* at the time, famine and the politics of aid distribution in the PRK are not topics that garner the attention of viewers today. Only three comments out of 206 address the question of humanitarian assistance in some way. The first one, by user Topov Slurry (2014), reminds the impact of Pilger’s movie on the British public in 1979 and how it galvanized mass donations:

Broadcast in the UK on Oct 30 1979. By Xmas, £45 million had been sent in – entirely unsolicited – by the British people. Most of it was in the form of the modest amounts that was all the overwhelmingly working class donors could spare: thousands of unopened wage packets came in from miners, builders, tea ladies. Pensioners pawned their overcoats. £4 million alone came from schoolchildren, who posted their pocket money or made their parents send in what would have been spent on their Xmas presents. £45 million in 1979, raised in less than 2 months, that no-one had asked them to give.

The second comment, by user Derek Watson (2015), makes a bridge with the situation in Cambodia today:

Even today I guess that the majority of foreign aid does not get where its going [sic]. There are about 14 million Cambodians now. Last year Australia alone gave over \$200 million in aid... Where did it all go I wonder. Still suffer power cuts, no medical, terrible roads etc.

The last comment, by user E. Kam (September 2015), is the only one to mention the UNICEF:

Khmer Rouge leaders did admit killings of criminals but not of millions of civilians. They admitted that the war did provide death and by starvation, but you hear here that they asked UNICEF for food but UNICEF did let die the Cambodian people by delivering virtually nothing.

The position of Pilger vis-à-vis Oxfam, UNICEF, and the ICRC is not discussed in any serious way. What remains is a picture from which the complexities of humanitarian assistance in the PRK were erased. The violent debates about starvation at the time and the intricacies of aid delivery fade in the background, replaced with a story of goodies versus baddies. In this lies the paradoxical success of *Year Zero*. While the very reasons for which the movie was made have been forgotten, it is Pilger's version of the events, according to which the rescue of Cambodia came from Vietnam, Oxfam, and the British people, that prevails today—a version that the journalist keeps defending, as demonstrated in recent interviews.⁸²

5. Conclusion

The chapter examined the production of “emergency news” in the aftermath of the Pol Pot's regime. Through the example of journalist John Pilger's movie *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia*, it explored early reporting in the PRK, as the newly established government and its Vietnamese allies sought to counter Khmer Rouge propaganda in Western mainstream media. It investigated how famine—then a crucial issue in Cambodia—was made into a mass media campaign in a context of international tensions. The chapter tried to reconstruct Pilger's itinerary in the PRK, through the comparison with accounts of other eyewitnesses, and explain his stance vis-à-vis the protagonists (governments, relief agencies). The broadcast of *Year Zero* on ATV in October 1979 was followed by a massive effort of the British spectators in support to Cambodians. The chapter analyzed how this was reached through the cinematic articulation of political pamphlet against the United States and Western powers and emotional reporting about suffering children. The image thus produced was an oversimplification of the politics of aid distribution in Cambodia. Acclaimed by the public, *Year Zero* received also its share of criticism for its pro-Vietnam bias and fudging with the reality on the ground, Pilger's advantage “being he could manipulate all our emotions through the ‘truth’ of dying children to accept the rest of the message.”⁸³ The film was made in a period of transition when human rights crystallized as an alternative to the discourse of Cold War politics (Eckel and Moyn 2013). *Year Zero* illustrates well this overlap of political and humanitarian issues, and as such points to a specific moment in the representation of Khmer Rouge atrocities, when these were seen through the prism of starvation and refugee crisis.

Journalist William Shawcross once asked an unnamed Oxfam official why Cambodia had become such a cause célèbre. “It had everything,” the man replied, “temples, starving

⁸² David Hutt, “Tell Me No Lies.” *Southeast Asia Globe*, 11 December 2014; Daniel Pye “Q&A with Journalist John Pilger: ‘What the US Did to Cambodia Was an Epic Crime,’” *The Phnom Penh Post*, 27 September 2014.

⁸³ Robinson, “And Nothing But...,” 549.

brown babies, and an Asian Hitler figure. It was like sex on a tiger skin.”⁸⁴ The chapter asked the question what such a major news item becomes once there is no longer any emergency. To answer it, the last part focused on a limited set of contemporary reactions to *Year Zero* in the version posted by Pilger on his YouTube channel. The analysis of comments showed that the movie retains its communicative power over the years. Its long-lasting effect comes in part from the quasi-novelistic style of journalism of Pilger.⁸⁵ The powerful photography of cameraman Gerry Pinches is another reason of the impact on present-day viewers. Last, Pilger himself, still extremely active in mainstream and social media, explains the users’ strong reactions to the film. The journalist, whose work is “invariably described as crusading or biased depending on whether or not one agreed with his perspective on the issue under discussion,” remains a divisive personality.⁸⁶ However, issues of relief in the PRK (although simplified in the movie) seem to be lost on a majority of viewers today. Their intricacies and the gap between the visualization of famine in *Year Zero* and current representations of humanitarian disasters might explain this lack of interest. What prevails is the other key issue of the film, the bombing of Cambodia by the United States (Nixon and Kissinger). YouTube users reinterpret the action of the American government in the region within multiple historical and political contexts. It is associated with a variety of situations in which the United States were/are more or less directly involved from older instances of dictatorship to recent conflicts in the Middle East. In that respect, *Year Zero* remains a political pamphlet. While people may not be able anymore to comment on the specifics of aid distribution in Cambodia and the “filthy affair” of denying relief, there is no de-politicization of the movie but a rearrangement of its political meanings so they fit in the contemporary world.

How does this affect the representation of Khmer Rouge atrocities? Famine has been an ongoing issue in Cambodia. In 1976 George Hildebrand and Gareth Porter from the Indochina Resource Center (a pressure group opposed to the American war effort in Vietnam) published *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution*. The book praised the Khmer Rouge policies and described the struggle of the new masters of the country to overcome the food crisis they had inherited from the civil war and the American bombing. This is more or less the story told in *Year Zero* with some necessary changes in the identity of the actors involved of course. What happens when such a significant theme disappear from popular representations? How long can it be kept aside from the memory canon? Recent discussions at the ECCC show that famine remains on the agenda of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. So far, the focus in Case 001 and Case 002 has been physical violence. Famine is a more elusive issue. It demands legal frameworks which the Court, running against time, has difficulty establishing.⁸⁷ In the meantime the Khmer Rouge Tribunal has delegated its treatment to organizations in charge of outreach activities (with a radio program for community led by the DC-Cam, for instance). Does it mean that *Year Zero* might one day start a “third life,” as possible eyewitness account of what the CPK leaders

⁸⁴ Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 423.

⁸⁵ According to sociologist Luc Boltanski, this combination in a context of mediating the suffering of others is a discursive practice generally found in the novel. *Distant Suffering*, 86.

⁸⁶ Gunn and Lee, *Cambodia Watching Down Under*, 106.

⁸⁷ Randle C. DeFalco, “Topic: Background and Introduction.” DC-Cam Community Radio Program Pilot Voices of Genocide: Justice and the Khmer Rouge Famine. Cambodia: Phnom Penh, March 2013.

left behind them? In spite or perhaps because of its bias, Pilger's movie remains an important historical document about the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime, nationally and internationally. It provides a valuable insight into the geopolitical tensions of that period and the situation in the PRK. It bears witness to the first moment of reconstruction and resilience in Cambodia, and the hard struggle of people against material, physical, and psychological distress. *Year Zero* showed one side of the border. But what happened on the other side, in the liminal zone of refugee camps where hundreds of thousands of Cambodians had tried to find shelter? This will be examined in the next chapter, which shifts the focus away from inside the PRK toward the margins at the Thai border.

Chapter 4

The arts of witnessing: Phare, from art school in refugee camp to international art center

1. Introduction

In the book *Cambodia 1975-1982*, Michael Vickery describes the exhibition of drawings of children refugees organized by the UNESCO in 1980 in the camps Khao I Dang and Sakeo at the Thai-Cambodian border. Influenced by adults, especially school art teachers, the children produced standardized depictions of Khmer Rouge violence that had little to do with what they had actually witnessed, Vickery argues. Even adult refugees were guided by what they thought foreigners wanted to see, he continues. “Artists of Khao I Dang kept turning out, for sale to the international aid personnel or visitors, atrocity scenes increasingly grotesque in detail and thus increasingly the result of imaginative reconstruction rather than what they had experienced.”¹ The argument of Vickery transposed into the visual realm an older debate on the reliability of Cambodian refugees as eyewitnesses. During the Pol Pol’s regime Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman had systematically denied the atrocity stories published in mainstream media on the grounds they were based on the accounts of refugees. In their view refugees could not be trusted because they were biased (due to social origins and political orientation), coached by camp administrators, or influenced by the journalists interviewing them. For this reason, Chomsky and Herman had publicly attacked books such as *Cambodge Année Zéro* (1976), the compilation of testimonies Father François Ponchaud had collected in refugee camps, and *Murder of a Gentle Land* by John Barron and Anthony Paul (1977).²

The chapter looks at drawings of children refugees, and investigates the relation of testimony, individual healing, and social reconstruction through artistic practices. It focuses on the drawings made at the school that French artist Véronique Decrop had created in 1986 in the refugee camp Site Two under the aegis of a Catholic humanitarian NGO. What kind of visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities do these drawings propose? To what extent does Western influence shape or alter the narratives of the children? Are the drawings, as Vickery suggests, so “tinkered with” that they cannot be used as documents? To what do they bear witness, if it is not to Khmer Rouge violence? What do

¹ Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 38-41.

² The controversy began with an open letter of Chomsky to the *Christian Science Monitor* (April 26, 1977) that he accused of having published a biased editorial based on the positive review that French journalist Jean Lacouture had made of Ponchaud’s book for the *New York Review of Books* (March 31, 1977). The debate spread over a period of several months as Lacouture and Chomsky engaged in a series of aggressive arguments via newspapers, including Chomsky’s article “Distortions at Fourth Hand” (*The Nation*, June 6, 1977). Sophal Ear, “The Khmer Rouge Canon 1975-1979: The Standard Total Academic View on Cambodia” (master’s thesis, University of Berkeley, 1995).

they record? The chapter takes these questions further, as it explores the development of the drawing school in the post-UNTAC context. After the repatriation of refugees in Cambodia under the control of the United Nations (UN), Decrop settled in Battambang and together with a group of her former students founded the art center Phare (1994). It was named after the association she had established in 1988 for promoting abroad the activities of the school. Decrop returned to France in the late nineties. Phare became Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS). With a new management team, it took new directions. PPS is now a successful and well-known cultural hub, training new generations of Cambodian artists, active in the formation of the local art scene, and engaged in international projects. How does such a development transform both the status and perception of the original drawings? What is the contribution of the center to the emergence of new forms of representation of the past in Cambodia? To what extent does the Western origin of the center keep affecting the expression of personal and collective stories through images?

As an experience born at the border and transplanted in Cambodia, Phare is in many ways a hybrid structure—French and Cambodian, based on art therapy and modern aesthetic practices, dedicated to artistic and social missions. The center has a story that spreads over almost thirty years from the aftermath of DK to post-conflict Cambodia. Being told in different contexts, to different audiences, for different purposes, this story changes, favoring some versions or protagonists over others. The competitive non-profit sector in which Phare has to evolve today, struck by what geographer Tim Frewer calls “neoliberal development at the margins,” gives it a new turn, at the dismay of some stakeholders.¹ This raises the additional question how to write the story of Phare. As is the case with any collective effort, this story presents multiple narratives and unspoken issues. It is also emotionally loaded. My objective in the chapter is obviously not to write the “true story” of Phare, but to produce a coherent narrative based on fragments. The resulting multifaceted perspective is, in my view, a good way to clarify the complex interaction of drawing and witnessing as well as the relation of Phare and the visualization of DK. The drawings of the boys of Site Two never became iconic representations of Khmer Rouge atrocities. At the same time, they belong to a “genre” (therapy for traumatized children), and as such introduced a new paradigm in the visual representation of the horror of the Pol Pot’s regime and its effects in Cambodia.

The chapter is divided in five parts. First, it focuses on the period 1986-1992. After introducing the situation in refugee camps at the Thai border and specifically in Site Two, it retraces the establishment of the drawing school, the founding of the association PHARE [to be distinguished from the center Phare], and the projects through which Decrop promoted abroad the activities of the school. Second, the chapter looks at the relation between drawing and resilience as a narrative constructed in the promotional materials of PHARE and analyzes some of the children’s drawings as they are presented in book and movie. Third, it provides background information about the repatriation process and narrates the creation of the art center Phare in the outskirts of Battambang City. Fourth, it summarizes the expansion of the original center in the 2000s. Against this backdrop, it examines the role of the founding myths of Phare as public discourse mediated to different kinds of audience, from tourists to faith-based organizations, from artists to non-profit sector. Last, the chapter looks at the influence of Phare in the

¹ Tim Frewer, “Doing NGO Work: The Politics of Being ‘Civil Society’ and Promoting ‘Good Governance’ in Cambodia,” *Australian Geographer* 44, no. 1 (2013).

development of artistic scenes in Cambodia, particularly the local one. It explores the relation between the center's cultural hybridity and the professional issues emerging out of the rise of Battambang as Cambodia's "cultural capital."

2. The drawing school and the founding of the association PHARE in Site Two

2.1 Site Two: history and background information

2.1.1 Refugee camps in Thailand and at the Thai-Cambodian border

As seen in the previous chapter, the Cambodian crisis reached a critical mass in international media throughout 1979 as alarming reports came in increasing number from the PRK and the Thai border area. There, Cambodians had been dispatched in ad hoc refugee camps, holding centers as well as satellite and hidden camps that served as military bases for anti-PRK forces. It was under the watchful eye of the international community that Thailand dealt with "land people" (as Khmer refugees were called in contrast to Vietnamese "boat people"). The Royal Thai Government was not a signatory to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the Protocol on Refugees amending it (1967). Therefore it did not recognize refugees as such but as "displaced persons" in breach of the Thai Immigration Act (1950). This Act, which was amended in 1979, meant that the government had the right to accept or not people crossing the border. The task of discriminating between "displaced person" and "illegal migrant" was left to the Ministry of Interior. However, Thailand was a member of the executive committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and as such supposed to respect the principle of non-expulsion of refugees. This is the reason why it had allowed the international agency to conduct missions on Thai soil concerning "statutory refugees."²

As Thailand's Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chamanand told journalist William Shawcross, Khmer refugees "were conceived by U.S. policies during the 1970-1975 war and were delivered by Vietnam. Why should they be left at our doorstep?"³ Consequently, during the first months of 1979, Cambodian refugees were systematically expelled by the Thai army. The situation changed in June 1979 when the army rounded up about 45,000 people in camps and forced them back to Preah Vihear in Cambodia via the mine-littered Dangrek Mountains. Thousands refugees lost their life. To the world's dismay, Thailand had made it clear that it would not carry alone the burden of the refugee crisis. This caused an international outcry. As a result, the Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in Southeast Asia convened by the UN Secretary General in Geneva on July 20-21, 1979, made the situation at the Thai-Cambodian border a priority. It was proposed to resettle refugees to third countries and supply aid to the Thai villages

² Christel Thibault, *L'Archipel des Camps: L'Exemple Cambodgien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 12-13.

³ William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust, and Modern Consciousness* (UK: Fontana/Collins, 1985 [1984]), 88.

affected by the border conflict upon condition that the Royal Thai Government opens the country to Cambodians.

This meeting marked the beginning of a new phase in Thailand's policy vis-à-vis the refugees. From October 1979 to February 1980 the Royal Thai Government applied the "Open Door" system. The visit of Kriangsak in the camps at the western border area in October 1979 played a role in this development. The Prime Minister was shocked by what he saw there. A boy even died in front of him.⁴ Shortly afterward Kriangsak authorized the UNHCR to open temporary holding camps for 40,000 people in the border town of Sakeo. This was followed in December 1979 by the opening of Khao I Dang, a camp for non-Khmer Rouge refugees, north of Sakeo. Obviously, Kriangsak's emotional reaction was not the only reason why Bangkok decided to change its policy. The Thais felt more and more nervous about the presence of Vietnamese forces so close to them and wanted to create a buffer zone.⁵ Applying the old adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," the Royal Thai Government turned to opponents of Hanoi and the "puppet government" in Phnom Penh—the Khmer Rouge and the nationalists (*Khmer Serei* or Free Khmers).⁶ China and the United States fully supported the initiative since it enabled them to supply overt and covert assistance to anti-communist movements in the region. Refugee camps, by making it possible to funnel aid and arms to Khmer resistance forces, were the perfect façade for the war effort against the Soviet-backed regimes in Vietnam and the PRK. From the start, thus, humanitarian assistance at the Thai-Cambodian border was deeply entangled with geopolitical interests. As Asian scholar Justus M. van der Kroef wrote at the time: "Not only an impression of the human misery in the camps lingers in the mind of the observer, but also the conviction that too many interest groups wish the present Thai-Kampuchean border problem to continue as it is."⁷

The situation of the Cambodian refugees changed again in 1980. By January the number of refugees at the border had swelled. Bangkok decided to shut down Sakeo and Khao I Dang to new entrants. Therefore hundreds of thousands of refugees remained in border camps just inside Cambodia.⁸ The Royal Thai Government (headed by Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond) refused to have permanent settlements at the border for fear of attracting even more refugees. From February 1980 onward it applied the "Humane Deterrence" policy. This meant that humanitarian aid as well as the living conditions and

⁴ *Ibid.* 172.

⁵ The Thais did not think that Vietnam would leave Cambodia any time soon but they refused to confront Hanoi directly on this issue. Instead, they engaged in diplomatic maneuvers, playing the Soviet Union, the United States, and China against each other, and trying to convince ASEAN countries to follow their lead, in spite of Malaysia's and Indonesia's attempt to find another solution to the regional problem. See: Larry A. Nicksch, "Thailand in 1980: Confrontation with Vietnam and the Fall of Kriangsak," *Asian Survey* 21, no. 2 (1981); Leszek Buszynski, "Thailand, the Soviet Union and the Kampuchean Imbroglia," *The World Today* 38, no. 2 (1982); Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Strategic Implications of the Indochina Conflict: Thai Perspectives," *Asian Affairs* 11, no. 3 (1984).

⁶ Fiona Terry, "The Cambodian Refugee Camps in Thailand," in *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*, Fiona Terry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 117.

⁷ Justus M. van der Kroef, "Refugees and Rebels: Dimensions of the Thai-Kampuchean Border Conflict," *Asian Affairs* 10, no.1 (1983): 28.

⁸ Lindsay French, "Enduring Holocaust, Surviving History: Displaced Cambodians on the Thai Border, 1989-1991" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1994), 17.

safety in the camps were kept at a minimal level. For instance, secondary education and markets were forbidden. Assistance was restricted to emergency requirements. A safe zone was created along the border on the Thai side upon condition that aid was delivered on the Cambodian side so the flow of refugees would be limited. Cambodians who still managed to reach Thai territory were placed in closed retention centers and could not benefit from resettlement in a third country. As a result, the refugee population along the border included “internally displaced persons” on the Cambodian side, and “displaced persons” on the Thai side (see map 3).⁹

In January 1982 the UN-established United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) took over from the Joint Mission (the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UNICEF) that had been in charge so far. UNBRO was an ad hoc operation based in Bangkok. It had for function to assist the World Food Program (WFP), which had been appointed as the lead agency administering the relief program at the border. The UNBRO’s mandate was to supply refugees with basic food, shelter, aid materials, fuel, water, medicines, primary education, and social services support. It was also responsible for organizing the evacuation of camps in periods of shelling by the PRK. The UN did not finance the operation. Instead, a special trust fund with money from bilateral donors was created in New York.¹⁰ This often generated financial crises, especially for the NGOs working in the camps since they were coordinated and funded by UNBRO on a yearly basis. There had been a massive involvement of NGOs at the border at the beginning of the operation, up to sixty agencies in 1980. By 1987 UNBRO had managed to reduce the number to twelve (among which Handicap International, Catholic Relief Services, and Japan Volunteer Centre). The NGOs that were left specialized in the same activity, such as health care, nutrition service, or vocational training, across the different camps.¹¹

2.1.2 Site Two (1985-1993)

After the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) was established in June 1982, the civilian camps came under the control of the three factions in the new formation—the Khmer Rouge (renamed Party of Democratic Kampuchea in 1981), Prince Sihanouk’s Funcinpec, and Son Sann’s Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF). Each faction was represented in a group of camps. Refugees became “political pawns” in the hands of their leaders in many ways. The camps served as behind-the-lines bases for the armies of the CGDK factions and recruiting grounds for guerrilla soldiers and skilled civilians such as medical trainees.¹² Because of the mix of fighters and civilians among residents and the spatial proximity with combat bases, the government in Phnom Penh considered the border refugee camps as military objectives and did not hesitate to shell them. The dry season offensive in 1984-1985 led to a new evacuation of

⁹ Thibault, *L’Archipel des Camps*, 20, 31.

¹⁰ Josephine Reynell, *Political Pawns: Refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean Border* (Oxford: Refugees Studies Program, 1989), 61-62.

¹¹ Charlotte Benson, “The Changing Role of NGOs in the Provision of Relief and Rehabilitation Assistance: Case Study 2-Cambodia/Thailand” (working paper no. 75, London: Overseas Development Institute, Regent’s College, November 1993), 30-33, 43.

¹² Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 66; Thibault, *L’Archipel des Camps*, 76.

refugees who crossed into Thailand. This forced the Royal Thai Government, UNBRO, and donor nations to strike a new deal. In 1985 UNBRO built eight new camps inside Thailand, just across the border. Aid agencies were made responsible for the maintenance of the displaced populations. There, Cambodians, who were not classified as “refugees,” remained under the control of the CGDK (recognized as the legitimate government-in-exile of Cambodia). The border zone was placed under martial law, therefore under the authority of the Thai army, and the camps were declared a “closed” area.¹³

Site Two was one of these new camps (figures 1-2). Situated between the border and the Chiang Daoy hospital where KPNLF soldiers were treated, it was particularly vulnerable and often hit by Vietnamese artillery.¹⁴ It included five different camps. Each corresponded to the previous KPNLF encampments that had been combined to create a single unit. Site Two was divided into two sectors separated by a road and entry points guarded by Thai paramilitary forces. Site Two North regrouped the populations from Ban Sangae, Dong Rek, Sam Lor, and Nong Chan (the former camp Nam Yun had been incorporated into Nong Chan). Site Two South regrouped the populations from Non Samet and O’Bok. It also housed a group of three thousand Vietnamese refugees eligible for resettlement.¹⁵ About 160,000 people (a population fluctuating between 140,000 to 195,000 over the years) lived in Site Two.

The first impression is always good. Big avenues, transversal roads, order, cleanliness (...) The buildings themselves (...) have some beauty: these are well-aligned, small, and clean houses, many of which have a tiny garden (a few square meters) with vegetable and flowers; more impressive buildings, offices, hospitals, schools, administrative centers.¹⁶

This good impression, however, did not last long. Father Ceyrac, the relief worker who wrote these lines, evokes the monotony of life in Site Two, the poverty, and violence behind the pleasant façade. For some visitors, this façade barely hid the reality and their first contact with the camp was a shock. As they arrived in Site Two for an evaluation of the living conditions and the impact of camp life on the psychological wellbeing of refugees, American psychiatrist Richard Mollica and former policy maker Russell Jalbert wondered whether it was “a ghetto, an immigration prison or a concentration camp.”¹⁷ Site Two was located three kilometers from the border on a big flat plain. Deprived from natural defenses, it did not make the residents feel safe in case of cross-border fighting.

¹³ Tony Jackson, “Just Waiting to Die? Cambodian Refugees in Thailand: Report of a Tour to the Thai-Cambodian Border and Subsequent Research” (Oxford: Research and Evaluation Unit, OXFAM, June 1987), 5.

¹⁴ French, “Enduring Holocaust, Surviving History,” 75-76.

¹⁵ Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 45-46.

¹⁶ Father Ceyrac, “Preface,” in *Voyages dans les Rêves des Enfants de la Frontière* (Paris: Éditions Hervas, 1988), 4.

¹⁷ Their mission was supported by a small grant from the Episcopal Church in Boston. Mollica explains that the travel in Cambodia came out of the request of a refugee family he was treating at the Indochinese Psychiatry Clinic. They showed the staff a photo of their relatives’ hut in Site Two. It had been struck by lightning and burned to the ground, and everyone inside the hut had been killed. The patients asked if someone at the clinic could go to Site Two and help the surviving relatives. Richard F. Mollica, *Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 2006), 90-91.

The camp, the second biggest Cambodian city in the world after Phnom Penh, was called the “capital of refugees.” Sixty percent of the Khmer refugee population lived there, in a territory no bigger than eight square kilometers. Site Two was established on a poor, barren, and dusty land. Since there was no ground water, UNBRO had to organize a daily transportation of water to the camp. According to anthropologist Josephine Reynell, “strategic reasons were paramount in influencing the decision to locate the largest population of Khmer in this particularly inhospitable area.”¹⁸ Living conditions in refugee camps depended on the political affiliation of the residents. Ninety-five percent of the population in Site Two was pro-KPNLF.¹⁹ It was unfortunately the faction with the least influence. In contrast, the China-backed Khmer Rouge had great bargaining power over Thailand and the international community. As well, Sihanouk, who kept considerable influence as former ruler of Cambodia and distant kin of the Thai monarchy, obtained better arrangements for people in Greenhill camp, the camp affiliated with the Funcinpec.²⁰

Refugees in Site Two were thus doubly captive, within the camps and within a border zone of safety, as displaced persons hardly tolerated on a foreign soil and dependent on political factions.²¹ Inside the camp, the residents were subject to a complex hierarchy of local, regional, and international groups, which included the Royal Thai Government, the governments of donor states, CGDK factions, UNBRO, voluntary agencies, and different levels of the Khmer military and civilian administration. The socioeconomic distribution of population in Site Two replicated the socioeconomic status of residents in pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. Military commanders, civilian administrators, and people with relatives abroad or trading with the Thais formed an elite class. Just below were families capable to supplement UNBRO’s basic assistance either through gardening or providing services. Families without extra resources or means to improve their daily allowance were at the bottom. The topography of the camp reflected these divisions. The poorest families lived at the edge of Site Two in the most dangerous zones, whereas the richest were close to the center of the camp and the main roads.²² Knowing how to maneuver

¹⁸ Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 69.

¹⁹ The KPNLF stemmed from the Association des Cambodgiens à l’Étranger (ACE, Association of Overseas Cambodians) established in Paris after April 1975 by a group of neutral intellectuals. ACE’s president Son Sann (1911-2000) was a former Prime Minister of Sihanouk (1967-68) and ex-governor of the Cambodian National Bank, in exile in France since the coup of 1970. The core group wanted to pursue armed resistance against the Khmer Rouge. After months of negotiations conducted by General Dien Del, several resistance leaders at the Thai-Cambodian border agreed to merge into the Khmer People’s National Liberation Armed Forces in March 1979. The Khmer People’s National Liberation Forces was proclaimed in October 1979 in the “liberated zone” of Sokh Sann in southwestern Cambodia. As a pro-West and anti-communist movement, the KPNLF was first a favorite of ASEAN and the United States. But the forced collaboration with the Khmer Rouge in the CGDK from 1982 onward and internal strife greatly weakened it. See: Jacques Bekaert, “Kampuchea: The Year of the Nationalists?” *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1983), and Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, “A Study of the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front and the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 12, no. 3 (1990).

²⁰ Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 59-60.

²¹ Thibault, *L’Archipel des Camps*, 76.

²² *Ibid.* 57-58, 49-50.

their way around these networks was essential for the refugees if they wanted to access food, household items, education, construction materials, jobs, and protection.

Site Two (...) epitomizes the hopelessness and futility of the border populations. Thais from the surrounding area sense this and on Sundays visit Site 2, sometimes handing out fruit. An UNBRO official said residents complained that this made them feel like “chickens in a cage.” Others complain of feeling like animals in a zoo, or of being in prison.²³

Aid workers and observers describe the arbitrariness and vulnerability of daily life in Site Two. Violence in the camp was unpredictable. “We laugh during the day but we cry at night,” Khmer refugees often said. In the report *Community of Confinement* (February 1989), Mollica and Jalbert compared the psychological state of residents in Site Two to that of survivors of Nazi concentration camps. Visiting the camp in 1991, physician Andrew Kanter stressed the extreme conditions experienced by the refugees.²⁴ Raids of bandits (deserters and regular soldiers alike) were not the only danger for people in Site Two. The rangers of Task Force 80, the Thai special corps guarding UNBRO-run camps, were possibly even worse. With the exception of officers, men were recruited from local militias, even among juvenile delinquents and paroled convicts. They did not have the training and discipline of Thai Army soldiers. Nor did they have the pay. They robbed, beat up, tortured, raped, and killed refugees in response to minor infractions and often without any relation to violations of the camp rules.²⁵

Refugees also fell victim to their own countrymen, including sometimes the administrators supposed to protect them, often in the context of smuggling or black-market activities. Violence against women and children was frequent. Rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, and child kidnapping added to the traumas of the civil war, the Khmer Rouge period, the escape to the border (refugees were often robbed, gang raped, and beaten on the way), and the shelling by the PRK army of refugee camps in the mid-eighties. Overcrowding in the camp and lack of traditional social structures were also conducive to more violence and despair. The collapse of family structures, the hopelessness, the feeling there was no future, and the impossibility to go anywhere formed the background of daily life for people in Site Two. “Virtually nothing was solid or reliable, not physical security, material assets or social relationships,” anthropologist Lindsay French writes. Life in the camp was a “combination of fundamental insecurity and a profound underlying crisis of meaning.”²⁶ For many residents, the only hope left was the children. As the only way to access a better life, education was for this reason a major issue in refugee camps.

²³ Jackson, “Just Waiting to Die?” 11.

²⁴ Andrew S. Kanter, “Topics for our Times: Life in a Refugee Camp—Lessons from Cambodia and Site 2,” *American Journal of Public Health* 5, no.5 (1995): 620-621.

²⁵ Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Seeking Shelter: Cambodians in Thailand* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1987), 35-36. Task Force 80 was finally replaced with the paramilitary corps Displaced Persons Protection Unit in August 1988. Thibault, *L’Archipel des Camps*, 77.

²⁶ French, “Enduring Holocaust, Surviving History,” 229.

2.2 The drawing school and the association PHARE

That was the situation French artist Véronique Decrop encountered when she arrived in Thailand in 1985 as Handicap International administrator for the ward of Khao I Dang. Initially, Decrop had travelled to Thailand with the idea to find Father Pierre Ceyrac, a Jesuit priest she had met in 1974 in India, where he was running assistance programs. The charismatic figure of Father Ceyrac (1914-2012) is central to understanding the history of Phare, which would probably never have seen the day without him (figure 3).



Figure 3: Father Pierre Ceyrac. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.

Father Ceyrac was a member of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), a humanitarian program founded by the Company's director Father Pedro Aruppe in 1980. That same year, he joined Fathers John Bingham and Paul Macawan in the Chonburi refugee camp in Thailand. At the time the Jesuits did not have any official representation in the country. Therefore the priests worked under the umbrella of the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR).²⁷ As the only Thai NGO active in refugee camps and

²⁷ COERR had been established in 1978 by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand under the direction of Father Bunlert Tharachatr with the aim to give relief to refugees seeking asylum in Thailand. Following the collaboration in Chonburi, the Archbishop of Bangkok had suggested, insistently, that the JRS be placed under the aegis of COERR. In August 1981 Father Aruppe accepted the offer, with the agreement of the Jesuits in Thailand. He appointed Father Alfonso de

being close to both the Thai army and the Royal Thai Government, COERR had relatively more leverage than other NGOs and could launch initiatives other agencies did not dare try.²⁸ In the context of Site two it meant that COERR was in position to support the establishment of two unofficial secondary schools (one in Site Two North and one in Site Two South) against the “Humane Deterrence policy” enforced by the Thais.²⁹ According to this policy, only primary and non-formal adult education were authorized, and coordinated by a four-member UNBRO Education and Social Service Unit. Due to its mandate, UNBRO acted within a strict frame, with which all collaborating voluntary agencies had to comply. The relations between the UN agency and the NGOS were usually good. Yet, the influential position of UNBRO as coordinator and funder was a recurrent cause of problems. Voluntary agencies were too dependent on the UN operation to express any disagreement with its orientations. Aid workers felt sometimes controlled and muzzled, which could lead to tense situations between them and UNBRO. Working with COERR gave the JRS team much more space for maneuver. Thus, Father Ceyrac, himself an outspoken critic of the shortcomings of international assistance in refugee camps, could implement educational programs with less difficulty than he would have encountered if he had worked with other NGOS.

The contract of Decrop with Handicap International came to an end in 1986. Father Ceyrac proposed her to join his team and teach drawing to children in Site Two. Decrop first hesitated. Her experience with Handicap International had not been very good. It had made her allergic to any form of control and statistics. As the boss of a Khmer refugee more qualified than she was, she had often felt useless, trapped in some “absurd and false situation.” Decrop looked at humanitarian work and the attitude of aid workers in a critical way. In her view the abnormal life in refugee camps generated biased relations between refugees and aid workers, which turned easily into “us versus them” representations and misunderstanding of one another’s position. She thought that expats unconsciously felt the need to “erect boundaries” between the refugees and themselves. Things worked differently in the team of Father Ceyrac. The priest wanted the staff to be at the same level as the refugees. For instance, he forbade them to use a car when they had to move inside Site Two. They usually went by foot or by bike. Father Ceyrac thought it was crucial that the team understands the monotony of life in the camp and its destructive effect on people after a couple of years. He gave his staff complete freedom of action. He did not try to control them and always backed them, but demanded absolute commitment. Decrop eventually accepted the proposal. In November 1986, she started working with children aged between ten and thirteen.³⁰ The drawing school was organized at the orphanage center of Site Two. There were 380 children living there, and some of them—such as Khuon Det (one of the founders of the center in Battambang)—

Juan, a Jesuit from the Thai region, as JRS coordinator. Fathers Ceyrac and Bingham went to work in the camps Khao I Dang and Ampil, where they supported COERR’s educational and social activities. Website “Thai/Cambodia Border Refugee Camps 1975-1999: Information and Documentation.”

²⁸ Benson, “The Changing Role of NGOs,” 33-34, 56; French, “Enduring Holocaust, Surviving History,” 129.

²⁹ Secondary education was allowed in Site Two only in 1988. Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 165-170.

³⁰ Website “History of PHARE.”

participated in the drawing activities conducted by Decrop.³¹ After a while the school opened to children who lived in Site Two with their family as well.³²

As a conclusion of the first ten months of the school Decrop decided to organize an exhibition-auction. The event took place on August 21, 1987, in Site Two in the presence of the students and about fifty aid workers. Some four hundred drawings were for sale. It was an important moment for the children. Their work was recognized and they realized that they possessed something that was worth more than a handful of rice and sardine cans. “For twenty-four hours, the roles were reversed. The children, whose existence was usually little more than a name in the camp headcount books, suddenly occupied the front stage,” Decrop writes. It was a new position for the aid workers too. For once, they were not on the giving side but had to ask for something.³³ Decrop reinvested part of the money in materials for the school. She kept another part for the children but did not make any direct payment to their families. Tor Vutha remembers:

Once there was an exhibition at the camp. I earned a lot of money, and my friends too. There were about ten people who earned money. Right now that would be like \$1,000 or \$1,500. We had never earned any money before that. The money went back to the school, to pay the materials we had used. Véro made a list of the materials we had used: how much paper, how many pencils (...) She never gave us the money we had earned [with the auction]. That’s very French! [He laughs]. In fact, every weekend she took us to the market. What do you want, trousers, a T-shirt, a football? Then she was paying for us.³⁴

The children devised small strategies with the market vendors so they could get back some of the money for their parents. It was essential for them. It both improved the daily diet of the whole family and showed the parents, who did not always see the school in a positive way, that drawing was not a fancy activity but a paid job. Still, Decrop did more than just take care of the short-term needs of the children. In fact, a third part of the money collected during the auction was put aside. “She kept the money for us, for after the camp. She was right. She organized things. We didn’t know. We didn’t think so much about the future.”³⁵

The exhibition-auction marked the beginning of the international circulation of the children’s drawings. “The quality of the drawings was so good that people told me, ‘you should do something with them. You should show them’,” Decrop recalls. So was born the idea of a book and an exhibition with the drawings of the children, *Voyages dans les Rêves des Enfants de la Frontière* (“Journey into the dreams of the border children”) (figure 4). The publishing process was difficult. Decrop had found a faith-based association ready to support the project. When she announced that Father Ceyrac would

³¹ Khuon Det, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014.

³² Among them were founding members Tor Vutha and Svay Sareth. Tor Vutha’s father, a teacher, was affiliated with Sihanouk’s Funcinpec. Eager to go back to Cambodia, he had turned down the opportunity to resettle in the United States although he had relatives there. Tor Vutha, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014. Svay Sareth’s father had come to the border camps because he wanted to fight communism. Svay Sareth, personal communication to author, July 19, 2015.

³³ *Voyages dans les Rêves des Enfants de la Frontière*, 35, 57.

³⁴ Tor Vutha, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

author the foreword, though, she was told she had to choose between their financial contribution and the Jesuit priest. Of course Decrop chose the latter and kept looking for subsidies. She eventually found two sponsors, Terre des Hommes in Switzerland and Peuple et Culture de l'Isère in France. This made it possible for her to publish not the pocket book she initially had in mind but a luxury hardcover edition.³⁶ Decrop followed the advise of Father Ceyrac that, “if you want to speak about the refugees, you must show their greatness and dignity, not their misery.” She organized the book around the creativity of the children, their capacity to transcend the living conditions in the camp and dream about other places. Between 1988 and 2000 the book sold around eight thousand copies through volunteer networks and in exhibitions.



Figure 4: Cover of the book *Voyages dans les Rêves des Enfants de la Frontière* (Paris: Éditions Hervas, 1988).

Terre des Hommes suggested that an association be created so new funds could be collected. Therefore, Decrop founded the association PHARE in 1988 with Philippe Merlan, Maurice Decrop, Claude Nanquette, and Marie-Pierre Touron. The acronym meant Patrimoine Humain et Artistique des Réfugiés et des Enfants (“Human and Artistic Heritage of Refugees and Children”). It also translates as “lighthouse” in French. PHARE allowed Decrop to engage in further projects ensuring the promotion of the children’s works and the school far beyond the borders of Site Two. Over the years the association organized several events and exhibitions, mostly in France. In 1988 the children’s drawings were exhibited at the Institut de l’Enfance et de la Famille (“Institute of Childhood and Family”) in the presence of Danielle Mitterrand, the wife of then President François Mitterrand, and at Centre Beaubourg in Paris; the association Relais 14 in Grenoble; the offices of the organization Terre des Hommes in Geneva and in Luxemburg. In 1993 two exhibitions were organized at the Musée Guimet and UNESCO

³⁶ Website “History of PHARE.”

in Paris. The drawings were also shown at the Hexagone de Meylan, near Grenoble, in the frame of a week of conferences dedicated to economy and humanism. This was a collaboration of Father Ceyrac with the Catholic University of Lyon and the umbrella association Comité Rhodanien d'Accueil des Réfugiés et de Défense du Droit d'Asile (CRARDA). That same year PHARE partnered with the UNHCR to organize exhibitions in Montpellier and Geneva, and with Amnesty International at the Municipality Hall of Ferney Voltaire in France near the Swiss border. The Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP) in Paris organized the exhibition *Site 2, Mémoires Arrachées: Dessins des Enfants Réfugiés du Cambodge* ("Site Two, torn memories: drawings of Cambodian children refugees") from July 1 through November 10, 1997, on the initiative of Marie-Pierre Tournon of PHARE.³⁷ The last public presentation of the drawings took place in the Maison des Citoyens du Monde in Nantes in 2000.

In 1993, PHARE released a fifty-seven minute-long movie *Ombre et Lumière: La Supplique des Enfants de la Frontière* ("Shadow and light: the plea of the border children"), which credits Decrop, the eighty children of the drawing school, and COERR as authors. The film brings together children's drawings, scenes of daily life in Site Two (such as the distribution of food and children games), the repatriation process, interviews of protagonists, and animation sequences based on some of the drawings. The production of *Ombre et Lumière* took a couple of years. The synopsis had received a prize of the Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme (National Consultative Committee for Human Rights) in 1991, but Decrop had to restart five or six times before she completed the project. Eventually, *Ombre et Lumière* was filmed by Alain Gaillard in Site Two between January and August 1992. It was screened at the Grande Arche de la Défense, Musée Guimet, Espace Kronenbourg, and UNESCO in Paris in 1993, and at the Municipality Hall of Montbonnod and the Centre Théologique de Meylan near Grenoble in 1996. After a hiatus of several years (apart from a presentation at the Festival Accès Asie in Montreal in 2005), *Ombre et Lumière* was projected in October 2013 at the conference organized in Paris by College International de Philosophie, Théâtre du Soleil, and the University of Leeds at the end of the tour of the theater play *L'Histoire Terrible mais Inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, Roi du Cambodge* ("The terrible but unfinished story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia"). Philosopher and writer Hélène Cixous and theater director Ariane Mnouchkine had created the play at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes in 1985 upon their return from the refugee camps at the Thai-Cambodian border. In 2007 anthropologist Ashley Thompson (herself a former student of Cixous) proposed to re-create it in Khmer and have it performed by Cambodian actors from the Théâtre du Soleil and the performing arts school of Phare Ponleu Selpak.³⁸ The second

³⁷ Tournon knew the museum's director Michel Colardelle. When she proposed to make an exhibition with the children's drawings, he supported the idea although it went beyond the mission of the institution, focused on French artifacts. For the project, the association worked with the MNATP curators Frédéric Maguet and Marie-France Noël. Well-known Holocaust survivor and politician Simone Veil and director of the Museums of France Françoise Cachin inaugurated the exhibition. "Mémoires Arrachées," *Lettre d'Information, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication* no.13, July 13, 1997, 13-14.

³⁸ Cixous, Mnouchkine, and some of the actors of the original play fully committed to this re-creation. Thompson describes the project in: Eric Prenowitz and Ashley Thompson, "Cambodia's Trials: Theatre, Justice and History Unfinished," in *Contemporary Southeast Asian Performance:*

version of *L'Histoire Terrible* premiered in France in 2011 and was presented in several festivals throughout 2013. The screening of the movie at the conference concluding the tour triggered a new creative process around *Ombre et Lumière*. Impressed by the work, French film director Eric Chevillard reached out to Decrop and met with her in her studio in Marseille. After she showed him some children's drawings, Chevillard decided to make a follow-up movie focusing on two of the former students, Roat and Khuon Det, and the young actress San Marady who plays the role of Sihanouk in the new version of *L'Histoire Terrible*.³⁹

3. Teaching resilience through drawing

As a result of this process of internationalization, the drawings acquired new functions. Initially, they were conceived of as a tool for the individual reconstruction of traumatized children. In that respect, they broke with the usual depictions of Khmer Rouge atrocities and their long-term impact. Once mediated for the outside public, they became the illustration of a new narrative of the children's experience at the refugee camp. They were turned into a memory-commodity for international consumption, centering on notions of resilience and hope. Interestingly, before she started working at Site Two, Decrop had shown little interest in children's drawings, which were mere scribbles in her view. She had even thought at first that opening a drawing school was a bad idea. There were other priorities, she believed. Soon, however, she came to see the point. Refugees were in great psychological distress. For them, there was hardly any future, the present was desperate, and the past offered little comfort. It was thus essential to rebuild people's trust in life and in others as well as their self-esteem.

I had to make a choice. Either I considered drawing as a pastime or I looked at it as a search for personal expression. I knew that each of my students had an exceptional and dramatic story. Consequently, the second option was the obvious choice... As there are as many individual forms of expression as there are students, there is no specific way of teaching.⁴⁰

Decrop taught the children basic principles such as perspective, first in theory then in practice through observation sketching (landscape, buildings, streets). She did not include any art historical and pictorial references. Nor did she teach Khmer traditional grid-based copy techniques. Decrop did not impose any theme. Instead, she encouraged the students to use their imagination. She never intruded into the children's "bubble" and did not look at their drawings before they asked her for comments. "The students must find things by themselves. The role of the teacher is to support, reassure, figure out where the child wants to go, and help him go there," she explains.⁴¹ When the drawing was bad, it was

Transnational Perspectives, eds. Matthew Isaac Cohen and Laura Noszlopy (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

³⁹ The movie *Et Nous Sortîmes de la Nuit pour Voir les Étoiles* ("And we went into the night to see stars") is still in the project phase. Chevillard posted the digitized version of *Ombre et Lumière* (the movie was in a 16 mm format) on the online video-sharing platform Vimeo.

⁴⁰ *Voyages dans les Rêves des Enfants de la Frontière* (Paris: Éditions Hervas, 1988), 56.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

cut in two. The back of the sheet served as test for colors since the school had few materials (figures 5-7).

The school did not have a strict schedule. Children were free to come and go. As a result of her open door policy, Decrop faced an ongoing flow of new students. Therefore she devised a month-long “probationary period.” The newcomers sat with a sheet of paper and basic drawing material. She did not give them any advise or subject. They had to manage alone. If they passed the “test” (if they came back every day for a month and tried to draw), then she started teaching him. Tor Vutha remembers his first encounter with Decrop. A friend had taken him to the drawing school.

In Site Two, the lesson took place in a thatch hut. There were windows and bamboo. I looked inside the classroom. Véro was distributing pencils. She saw me. I smiled. She said: “What do you want?” She said it in Khmer. I said: “I want to draw.” She said: “Come here.” And I began to draw. She gave me a sheet of paper and some pencils. First, she told me I could draw whatever I wanted, imaginary things. At the beginning we mostly drew things about the war. After the lesson, she often gave sweets. I liked it so much. These sweets, it was like a dessert. We never had any dessert at home. Life was difficult. So these sweets, I kept them for my mother. I gave her the sweets.⁴²



Figure 5: Children drawing outside. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.

⁴² Tor Vutha, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014. Svay Sareth and Srey Bandol mention the sweets as well. In the presentation he gave at Asia Art Archive in America in New York at the occasion of the event *Season of Cambodia* (May 3, 2013), Svay Sareth tells: “I started to learn to draw and she would give me candy!” Srey Bandol tells that “if someone did well, she gave them candy or a football to play with.” Caroline Vernailen, “In the Refugee Camp, Art was just a Fun Children’s Game,” *Southeast Asia Globe*, April 10, 2013.



Figure 6: Decrop distributing sheets of paper. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.



Figure 7: Children drawing. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.

Decrop had a poor command of Khmer and a strong accent. The fact she could not speak fluently with the children opened up another way of communicating, through the

image. A graduate at the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris, Decrop had no intention to create an art therapy workshop. Still, the activities of the drawing school had much in common with art therapy practices (Looman 2006, Lustig and Tennakoon 2008). For instance, Decrop too conceived of drawing as a means for children to gain symbolic control over their problems and distance themselves from traumatic events either from the past or daily life in the camp:

What we witnessed as children was very violent. It was war. Even in the camps, it was hard. When we did not have enough food, we had to go outside the camp. We passed the checkpoints. With the police and guards, it was very dangerous. Once with my father, I was very young then, perhaps thirteen or fourteen, we went out to look for food, mushrooms, frogs, and things like that. When we came back to the camp, we bumped into the Thais. My father was a good man, so they were not too hard on him. They beat him up but they did not shoot him. But I saw everything. The people in the camp, they were punished by the Thais when they tried to go out (...) That was really hard. We Cambodians, we always smile, but we hide all kinds of things in our head.⁴³

The functioning of the camp also brought out forms of structural violence, for instance the distribution of food coupons. Until December 1987 UNBRO had used a “women only” system at the camp (only females over eight years old were eligible) meant to facilitate food distribution and prevent soldiers from receiving food rations.⁴⁴ The policy was unfair for families who had a larger proportion of male adults and boys. Therefore parents often dressed their boys in girls’ clothing and sent them to the headcount. Tor Vutha recalls that he kept long hair, dressed like a girl, and had his genitals held with tape for the headcount, but he never managed to get any coupon. It was a humiliating moment for the children since workers usually examined their genitals. The experience remained deeply engraved in the mind of refugees.⁴⁵

The drawing school had a positive effect on many children. What had started like a fun thing became much more meaningful over time. Khuon Det recalls:

Like my friends, the other founders, we came to the lesson just for fun, to spend time together. But little by little, it became something else. We came for the activity itself, not just for fun. After the class, we felt lighter. I think it helps you build your life. It’s not only a fun activity (...) Participating in the drawing activities made me feel better. I could express things. Usually, children, especially Cambodian children, are not used to talking about their problems. When you’re a child, it’s difficult. I was born during the war. I was displaced. Véro, she was very close to the children. They trusted her. For us... I don’t know how to say it... staying with her was not just for fun, we felt better when we were with her.⁴⁶

⁴³ Tor Vutha, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014.

⁴⁴ Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 74-77, 159.

⁴⁵ Tor Vutha, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014. It also appears in a recent exhibition of Srey Bandol at Romeet Gallery (November 2014) showing the video-performance *Site 2* (2014) that was filmed at the former camp, and the multimedia installation *Under the Sarong* that includes a set of sculpted figures covered with old sarongs. Michelle Vachon, “Artist Explores Ambiguity ‘Under the Sarong’,” *Cambodia Daily*, November 22, 2014.

⁴⁶ Khuon Det, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014.

The movie *Ombre et Lumière* gives an idea of the atmosphere at the school. It shows children sitting either at a desk inside or outside with a board placed on their knees, drawing with great concentration and intensity. Decrop tried to build a safe haven for the children, if only for a few hours, and to create a group, family-like dynamic. In this relatively protected environment the students could heal and dream. The book *Voyages dans les Rêves des Enfants de la Frontière* and the movie *Ombre et Lumière* illustrate this process of reconstruction. Both arrange the children's drawings in a linear way that emphasizes a shift from trauma and despair to coping and hope. In their works the students confront past and present violence—civil war period, American bombardments, Khmer Rouge atrocities, “liberation” of Cambodia (episodes which the older of them had experienced), as well as the ongoing conflict with the PRK/Vietnam and the structural violence of life in refugee camps. Drawings in the book represent a man in uniform holding a machine-gun (figure 8); a huge tank approaching a tiny house (figure 9); a scene of stabbing drawn in striking red, pink, and orange colors (figure 10); a group of men in a possible position of attack (figure 11). The film includes a series of drawings that show the progression of a helicopter ready to bomb a house (figure 12); a guard escorting a prisoner (figure 13); a man standing in front of a pile of skulls in a forest (figure 14); Vietnamese attacks on the refugee camps and the flight of people (figure 15). The works representing Site Two often leave the viewer with an impression of desolation. In *Voyages dans les Rêves* these are mostly empty streets and geometric alignments of houses (figures 16-18). In contrast *Ombre et Lumière* offers a more lively side of the camp by introducing human figures, for instance with the building of a house and people walking in the streets of Site Two (figure 19).



Figure 12: Animation. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.



Figure 13: Animation. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.



Figure 14: Animation. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.

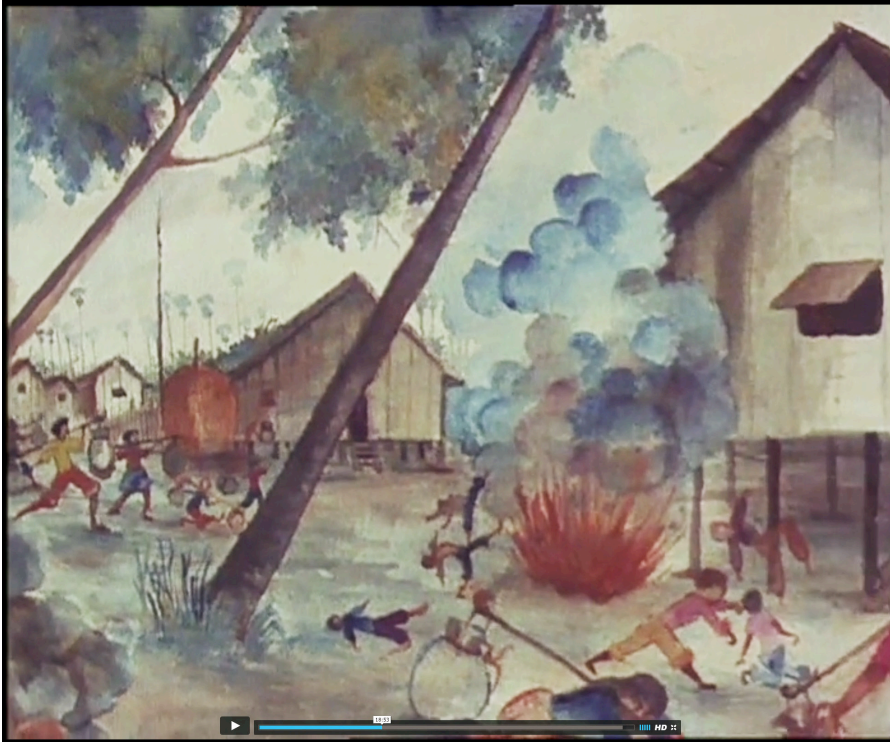


Figure 15: Animation. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.



Figure 19: Animation. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.

Since Decrop stimulated the children to draw stories happening outside the camp, the representation of violence soon gives way to imaginary landscapes that combine dreams

and memories of Cambodia. The drawings depict houses and small villages in the midst of luxuriant vegetation, often near rivers (figures 20-23). Some of them express a feeling of longing through figures that look at the horizon (sometimes symbolized by three hills like the three towers of Angkor Wat on the Cambodian flag) or across a wide expanse of water (figures 24-25). A very touching drawing represents three houses reflected into the river as if the author wondered whether the “other side” would be any different (figure 26). The children also fancy Cambodia as an urbanized country. Their representation of cities is probably based on photos or videotapes of Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Singapore available in Site Two. They imagine buildings that are several stories high and in some cases topped with television antennas (figures 27-28). How to escape the camp and reach this dreamland is an ongoing motif in the children’s drawings. One of them shows a river with a house on one side, a tree on the other side, and a rope stretched between their tops. Although there is a bridge, two figures hang on this rope, trying to cross the river (figure 29). The children use a variety of symbols expressing escape and departure: boats, birds, balloons, and flying animals such as horse, elephant, and snake/dragon. But leaving the camp is not always easy, even in dream. In *Ombre et Lumière* an animation represents a man on a shore waiting for a boat, but the latter goes further away, and tired to wait, the man falls asleep while the boat finally vanishes (figure 30).



Figure 30: Animation. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.

In other cases, however, the dream has a happy end. For instance, a girl on a horse manages to get rid of the uniformed man who holds the animal’s tail in an attempt to retain her (figure 31). One of the animations in *Ombre et Lumière* depicts the journey of a boy on a horse to the city, which is represented as a labyrinth of buildings (in stone? in steel and glass?) connected by gateways and stairs. He reaches a nicely furnished office, where he is given a bag. Once out of the city, the boy lets off the big green bird that was

inside the bag. The bird puts him on its back and both fly away to a small house near a river where a couple is waiting for them (figure 32).

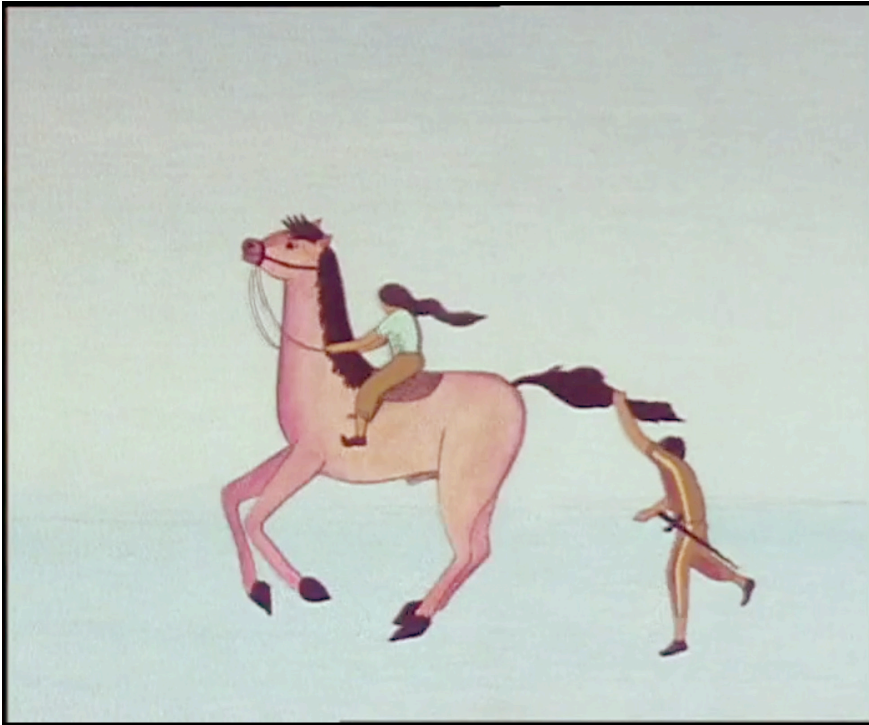


Figure 31: Animation. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.

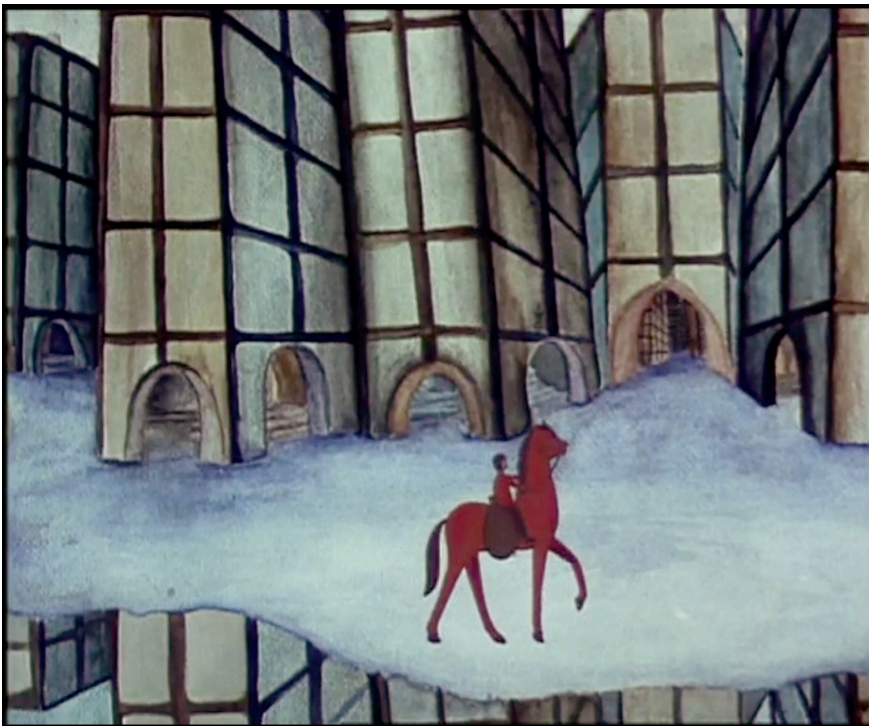


Figure 32: Animation. Source: screenshot of *Ombre et Lumière*.

Decrop did not want the children to feel like victims or pawns of external forces, but masters of their own life. Drawing was her way to empower them and to give them a “self-reconstruction tool.” She even speaks of the “metamorphosis” some of the students underwent within the five years of school activities. “I saw them stand up and defeat the forces of death that had dragged them to the bottom,” she writes.⁴⁷ As such, the children’s drawings are less evidence of traumatic events than images bearing witness to a process of resilience. The drawing school was a bridge between places, times, and cultures. In that respect, the free style of Decrop, largely informed by her training in a Western art school, evokes the methods used by anthropologist Ashley Thompson when she taught English to refugees in Site Two as part of Father Ceyrac’s educational projects (1988-1990). She devised exercises adapted from poetry books used in the New York public school system and read British poems and translations from Sanskrit and Chinese to her students “as a means of developing familiarity with other worlds. It was a way for them and me to consider Cambodia in relation to other parts of a single world.”⁴⁸ Decrop and Thompson wanted to enlarge the world of their students. People in Site Two were stuck in a space no bigger than eight square kilometers but the French art teacher tried to open new realms of possibility for the children. The latter immersed in a double culture, which in some way became their new identity. “By appropriating drawing as an authentic means of expression, not only for themselves but also for the community, the children became witnesses and messengers,” Decrop thought.⁴⁹ In *Ombre et Lumière* she even uses the term “spokesperson” (4:25-4:31). Yet, who were the people on behalf of whom the students were supposed to “speak”? Were these only the refugees of Site Two or the Cambodians in general? Was it only Decrop’s idealized view of her work? The question of the participation of the students in the construction of Cambodian collective memory became all the more pressing after they were repatriated and on the initiative of Decrop began to develop the drawing school of Site Two into a local artistic center open to all Cambodians.

4. From the border area to Cambodia: the creation of the artistic center Phare in Battambang

4.1 The repatriation of refugees in Cambodia

After years of negotiations, the CGDK and the government in Phnom Penh finally signed the Paris Peace Agreements on October 23, 1991. The accords placed Cambodia under the administration of the UN until general elections were held. In the meantime, the sole legitimate source of authority was the Supreme National Council (SNC), created as interim body and chaired by Sihanouk. The mission of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was to organize free and fair elections, monitor a cease-fire, disarm the population, and repatriate border refugees. In November 1991 the SNC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Royal Thai Government and the

⁴⁷ Website “History of PHARE.”

⁴⁸ Ashley Thompson, “Oh Cambodia! Poems from the Border.” *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 24, no. 3 (1993): np.

⁴⁹ Website “History of PHARE.”

UNHCR concerning the repatriation process. The latter was to be based on voluntary return, and repatriation completed by April 1993 so the returnees could vote during the elections (May 1993). Otherwise, the three factions of the CGDK would have no political representation at all in the country since Hun Sen's Cambodia was not as yet a multiparty society.⁵⁰ Repatriation began in March 1992 and ended in May 1993. It concerned about 370,000 people. The UNHCR had established five preconditions for it: overall peace and security; provision of adequate agricultural land for the returnees by the government of Cambodia; demining of settlement land by the government of Cambodia and the UN; repair of major repatriation roads and bridges; strong donor support.⁵¹

However, things did not work so well on the ground. First, there was still a high level of insecurity in Cambodia, especially after the Khmer Rouge resumed warfare against the Phnom Penh authorities and the UNTAC. This caused internal displacements as the population fled the northwestern areas (where the Khmer Rouge were particularly active) to safer central areas. It was so bad that the SNC created a National Committee for Displaced Persons to manage the situation.⁵² Shortage of land for resettlement was certainly the biggest obstacle to repatriation. Poverty of soil, problems of accessibility, occupancy of land by others, antipersonnel mines greatly hampered the implementation of the options the UNHCR had designed for repatriated refugees.⁵³ Mines were certainly the most pressing concern. The mandate of the UNAMIC (United Nations Advanced Mission in Cambodia) included mine clearance and the training of mine-clearing experts. By March 1993, UNAMIC and UNTAC, which had taken over in 1992, had managed to train about two thousand mine-clearing experts. They had destroyed around twelve thousands out of Cambodia's estimated four to ten million antipersonnel mines.⁵⁴ By September 1993, less than three square kilometers out of the three thousand to be mine-cleared had been neutralized.⁵⁵ Under these circumstances, it became clear that there was not enough land and other options had to be formulated. A new range was finalized by mid-1992.⁵⁶ Left with little or no choice, a majority of returnees chose the option including reintegration money.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Thibault, *L'Archipel des Camps*, 112.

⁵¹ Court Robinson, "Rupture and Return: Repatriation, Displacement and Reintegration in Battambang Province Cambodia" (Occasional Paper Series No./007, Indochinese Information Center, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, November 1994), 8.

⁵² Thibault, *L'Archipel des Camps*, 116-117.

⁵³ Option A included up to two hectares of agricultural land per family, a housing plot, wood for construction of a house frame, \$25 to buy thatch and bamboo, a household/agricultural kit, and food from the WFP for four hundred days. Option B included a plot of land to build a house, wood for construction of a house frame, \$25 to buy thatch and bamboo, a household/agricultural kit, and food from the WFP for four hundred days.

⁵⁴ Robinson, "Rupture and Return," 11.

⁵⁵ Thibault, *L'Archipel des Camps*, 130.

⁵⁶ It included four new options. Option C offered reintegration money amounting to \$50 per adult and \$25 per child under age twelve, a household/agricultural kit, and food from the WFP for four hundred days. Option D included a kit of specific tools. Option E proposed a job in one of the UNTAC-developed programs. Option F was a help to family gathering. Vance Geiger, "The Return of the Border Khmer: Repatriation and Reintegration of Refugees from the Thai-Cambodian Border," in *Between hope and insecurity: The social consequences of the Cambodian*

One of the articles of the Paris Peace Agreements concerning repatriation stated that, “choice of destination within Cambodia should be that of the individual. The unity of the family must be preserved.” Out of the 314,073 refugees who had expressed the voluntary intent to return to Cambodia, nearly sixty percent (that is, 187,400 people) indicated Battambang province as their preferred settlement destination (figure registered by the UNHCR in January 1992). In many cases, people were just returning to their home region. Half the refugee population in border camps originally came from Battambang and Banteay Meanchey provinces (northwest). Several reasons explained why those who were not from this area nevertheless chose it as place of resettlement. For many, restarting agricultural activities in a fertile region was probably a central motivation. Furthermore, Battambang province had a relatively important urban center (Battambang City), which offered the returnees a way of life to which they had grown accustomed in the refugee camps. As it was close to the border, it also provided an easy escape road if the conflict escalated anew.⁵⁸ Returnees formed sixteen percent of the population in Battambang province.⁵⁹ Unsurprisingly, the situation generated socioeconomic tensions, especially as repatriation, an emotionally loaded issue, became a subject of political propaganda. The CPP’s rhetoric pitted the refugees against those who had stayed in Cambodia. As scholar Kathryn Poethig explains: “The burden of suffering was borne not by those who fled, the common refugee plight, but by those who remained. Refugees had chosen self-preservation over duty. Statelessness was thus reconfigured as voluntarism and abandonment.”⁶⁰

By casting a shadow on the loyalty of returnees, Hun Sen’s party hoped to undermine the Funcinpec and the KPNLF in the coming elections. The CPP’s discourse fueled feelings of betrayal among the population, which combined with fears about the competition for resources, jobs, and business opportunities. Locals resented the returnees for having fled the country for an easier life at the border (or so they thought). They did not understand why they received special assistance now they were back in Cambodia.⁶¹ Mistrust between the two groups kept growing. On one side, the locals suspected refugees of being former Khmer Rouge or still politically active, hence a potential threat to the community. On the other side, returnees were suspicious of local authorities and community structures. They did not rely on them for anything. For example, they built houses on lands belonging to others without asking permission, which further infuriating the locals.⁶² Understandably, returnees were anxious about their future in Cambodia. They were afraid of becoming materially worse off, of being unable to practice their

peace process, Peter Utting, ed. (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1994), 192.

⁵⁷ According to Thibault, ninety percent of the refugees chose the Option C, *L’Archipel des Camps*, 121. Geiger gives a figure of seventy percent, “The Return of the Border Khmer,” 192.

⁵⁸ Thibault, *L’Archipel des Camps*, 95-98.

⁵⁹ Kate Halvorsen, “Repatriation in Safety and Dignity? Reintegration and Rehabilitation Activities of the International Catholic Migration Committee in Cambodia” (internal report for Collaborative Learning Projects, October 1995), 3.

⁶⁰ Kathryn Poethig, “Sitting Between Two Chairs: Cambodia’s Dual Citizenship Debate,” in *Expressions of Cambodia. The Politics of Tradition, Identity, and Change*, eds. Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier and Tim Winter (New York: Routledge, 2006), 75-77.

⁶¹ Robinson, “Rupture and Return,” 31.

⁶² Halvorsen, “Repatriation in Safety and Dignity?” 9.

profession, separated from relatives, and sent to malaria and mine-infested areas. They dreaded problems with the government or the community, and did not know whether they would be recognized as citizens legally and socially.⁶³ As this overview demonstrates it, the reintegration of refugees into Cambodian society was a long and complex process. The history of Phare is about this process.

4.2 From Site Two to the reunion in Battambang

As repatriation was about to begin, Decrop became increasingly concerned with the future of “her children,” as she called the students. She had in mind to create an artistic center in Battambang where they would be able to work teaching the local community drawing and painting, and perhaps at a later stage to open a circus.⁶⁴ She talked with the older students and asked them what they intended to do once back in Cambodia. The idea of “returning” to an unknown country made the boys anxious. Therefore Decrop’s project became for them an anchor, something to cling to for the future. Ten of the students agreed to continue with her.⁶⁵ Site Two closed on March 30, 1993. By the time, the students were all in Cambodia. Like many returnees, they struggled to find their place in the “new” society. In 1993 Decrop and Father Ceyrac escorted heavily handicapped refugees to Battambang under the aegis of UNBRO and ICRC. Once the mission was completed, Decrop traveled across the country. What she saw during the trip convinced her of the potential of her idea. The artistic center would be a small enterprise where the students could practice what they had learned with her at the drawing school.⁶⁶ She found two students, Lon Lao and Chan Vouthouk, in the transit camp in Battambang City and took them out of there. Altogether, they began looking for the other boys, Lao and Vouthouk acting as investigators and interpreters. It is important to understand the emotional dimension of the reunion. For many refugees repatriation meant the “breaking up of a community in which [they] had lived for almost a decade—a community in which many had found support.”⁶⁷ Decrop formed this community again. In that sense, Phare was more than just an artistic center. It was a home with Decrop as maternal figure and the students as brothers.

Decrop settled in Phnom Penh to prepare the project with the help of the organization SIPAR (Soutien à l’Initiative Privée pour l’Aide à la Reconstruction des Pays du Sud-Est Asiatique). She finally received the agreement of the Ministry of Culture and returned to Battambang at the end of 1993.⁶⁸ Helped by Lao and Vouthouk, she started looking for a land where to build the center.⁶⁹ Eventually they found a paddy field for a cheap price at the end of a road, near Anch Anh village in the Ochar commune, Svaypor district, in the outskirts of Battambang. It was a place where landless farmers and refugee families lived in extreme poverty. This aspect was important for Decrop who wanted the center to

⁶³ Robinson, “Rupture and Return,” 31.

⁶⁴ Véronique Decrop, personal communication to author, October 12, 2015.

⁶⁵ Tor Vutha, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014.

⁶⁶ Website “History of PHARE.”

⁶⁷ Geiger, “The Return of the Border Khmer,” 197.

⁶⁸ Véronique Decrop, personal communication to author, October 12, 2015.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

contribute to the wellbeing of local communities.⁷⁰ The beginning was hard. Safety and lack of money and support (Decrop was virtually the only member left of PHARE) were ongoing issues.⁷¹ Battambang province remained unstable, dangerous, raided by Khmer Rouge guerrillas who also killed district officials and foreign aid workers.⁷² Amidst tensions with the local community, Decrop and the boys began to dry the land and build the road (650 meters long) that would connect the center to the national highway. The situation gradually improved with the assistance of the Food-for-Work program of the WFP and the involvement of the villagers in the construction work.⁷³

By 1995, the school was completed and houses for teachers were built. The center opened to neighborhood children. The transition from student to teacher did not go smoothly at the start but after a while the boys found their way and soon were able to get small wages. The center began to attract the interest of outsiders. Due to health problems Decrop had to return to France in 1998. Her unexpected departure left the team in a difficult situation: “We could teach but the administrative work, we didn’t know how to do it.”⁷⁴ Before leaving, Decrop contacted Enfants Réfugiés du Monde (ERM), a French NGO developing educational and social projects in Cambodia.⁷⁵ The organization helped Phare open a circus school and develop a library and a leisure activities center for children. The years 1999-2002 were a period of crisis. Phare broke up with ERM on the grounds the NGO had used the center’s funds for other projects.⁷⁶ After she recovered, Decrop resumed her activities in France. In 2001 she and PHARE treasurer Jean-Marc Douay created the association Phare Ponleu Selpak in Cambodia, which was to be in charge for the center.⁷⁷ The latter was renamed Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS) or “brightness of the arts.” Over the years, PPS progressively expanded its activities, adding performing arts schools, graphic design and animation studios, public education and social services to its initial mission (figures 33-34).⁷⁸ This growth implied changes in the identities of stakeholders, the orientations and functions of the center, and consequently the way the story of Phare-PPS is told. It is this aspect that will be studied now.

⁷⁰ The Manamadurai farm-cooperative Father Ceyrac had founded with the National Indian Students’ Movement (AICUF) in 1967 during the last great famine in Bihar (South of India) might have been a source of inspiration for Decrop. Website “Association Père Ceyrac.”

⁷¹ Véronique Decrop, personal communication to author, October 12, 2015.

⁷² “Khmer Rouge report gains on highway to major city,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 1989, 5-7; Charles Wallace, “Khmer Rouge claims attacks in Cambodia’s no.2 city,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 7, 1990, 17; “Khmer Rouge report attacking Battambang,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 1990, 6-7; “55,000 Cambodians flee homes as Khmer Rouge increase raids,” *The New York Times*, May 4, 1994, 4-5; Bruce Cumming, “Pol Pot reverts to terror,” *The Guardian*, February 6, 1995, 11.

⁷³ Véronique Decrop, personal communication to author, October 12, 2015.

⁷⁴ Khuon Det, personal communication to author, October 20 2014.

⁷⁵ Information accessed on July 14, 2015, <http://vivrekhmer.free.fr/fr/assoc/erm.htm>

⁷⁶ Corey and Thompson, “Histories and Stories of Phare Ponleu Selpak,” 188.

⁷⁷ The members of the new organization were Khuon Det, Svay Sareth, Srey Bandol, Lon Lao, Rin Houeth, Say Ha, Yem Samnang, Chan Vouthouk, and Dy Mala.

⁷⁸ For a more detailed presentation of the development of PPS, see Appendix I.



Figure 33: The School of Visual Arts at Phare Ponleu Selpak, Battambang (2014). Source: personal documentation.

5. The founding myths of Phare Ponleu Selpak

Tensions mostly crystallize around the founding of Phare in Battambang and the role of Decrop. Some protagonists do not see the center as the continuation of the experience in Site Two but rather as something new. This change of perspective creates a conflicted relation to the narrative that was proposed in public materials about the drawing school (the children drawing their way out of trauma and becoming “spokespersons” for their people). In the process the children’s drawings themselves change status again. To understand better how the stories of PPS are articulated, it is important to have an idea of the transformation of the center in the past years. As often happens, the development of PPS over time is the result of a combination of ambitions, circumstances, and tactical moves. Since donors frequently shift their focus on other countries or other priorities, the structural crisis in the global non-profit sector puts NGOs in a dilemma. Either they adjust their activities to the new objectives of sponsors or they continue in the same field of activity with the risk of losing financial support.⁷⁹ PPS made the choice to diversify its activities with the hope it would ensure access to a wider range of potential donors. However, this also made running the school’s many programs very costly. Consequently, PPS had to look for other sources of income and adjust its structure to new demands.

The Circus School played a central role in this transformation. Circus was in the back of Decrop’s mind but it was Khuon Det who made it happen. Being himself trained in acrobatics and martial arts at Site Two, he was convinced that that it could be a good thing for children whose energy he did not manage to channel through drawing. He founded the Circus School in 1998 with almost nothing—some bamboo, plastic

⁷⁹ Thomas Parks, “The Rise and Fall of Donor Funding for Advocacy NGOs: Understanding the Impact.” *Development in Practice* 18, no.2 (2008): 214.

taraulins, rice skin as carpet, and very few children attending it at the start.⁸⁰ Built from scratch, the Circus School rose to fame within a few years: tours in Europe and Asia, performances in Battambang and Siem Reap praised by tourists, articles in international media, collaboration with French theater company Théâtre du Soleil. Behind this success story is the recent turn of PPS to some proactive and deliberately commercial policy under the guidance of Jean-Christophe Sidoit. The latter, a French aid worker long involved in PPS, was appointed interim director in 2011 with the objective to stabilize the institution financially.⁸¹ To him it was clear that the center had to become less dependent on external sponsorship and generate its own income. Since the circus was the driving financial force of PPS, Sidoit reorganized everything around it. Turning to the social entrepreneurship model, he established in Siem Reap an association managing the circus, Phare Performing Social Enterprise (PPSE).⁸² This new structure is now central to financing PPS. Money does not come only from the circus performances. The Phare boutique in Siem Reap sells artifacts produced by the students, mementos for the circus, locally made handcrafts, original music CD from the play *Sokha* (one of the most popular shows of the Circus School), and a Phare T-shirt. PPSE also runs an open-air Phare Café Restaurant on the same spot. The idea is to make the evening at PPSE a total experience. Visitors attend the performance, buy souvenirs at the shop, and eat at the restaurant. PPSE collaborates with local travel agencies for pre-sales of circus show tickets.

Although PPSE contributes to improving the overall situation of PPS, the center's financial instability remains an issue. Moreover, the focus on the circus affects the politics of funding. Most donors want to have their action visible, thus their money goes to things that attract the public—mainly the circus and specific art projects. They are not interested in structural issues, such as repairing the rooftop of the School of Visual Arts.⁸³ The funding of the European Union gave the center some respite for a couple of years, but the recent downsizing of contributions by historical donors such as the French Embassy, due to drastic cuts in its budget, has been a blow for PPS.⁸⁴ The center needs to turn to private donors and associations, many of which share a long history with Phare. PPS relies on a broad network of friends in France. The Khmer community is very supportive. As heir to a program run by COERR and the JRS, the center also keeps open access to faith-based organizations and Catholic churches. For example, the Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (a committee created in 1961 by the Catholic Church in France) and Apprentis d'Auteuil (a Catholic foundation created mid-nineteenth century for the training of youngsters with social issues) are regular partners of PPS. Yet, even with financial and material help coming from many different corners, PPS remains in dire need of new sponsors. This makes public relations a major issue for the center. Consequently, the story of Phare comes to play a central role in marketing

⁸⁰ Svay Sareth, personal communication to author, July 19, 2015.

⁸¹ Myriam Léon, “Des travailleurs sociaux français au Cambodge... Pourquoi?” *Lien Social*, no.1065, June 7, 2012, 16.

⁸² Commercial activities among Cambodian NGOs have tripled in the past years, especially in the fields of tourism, education, and vocational training. Khieng Sothy and Heidi Dahles, “Commercialization in the Non-Profit Sector: the Emergence of Social Enterprise in Cambodia.” *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* 6, no.2 (2015): 219, 226, 230.

⁸³ Valentin Sam, personal communication to author, October 21, 2014.

⁸⁴ Borin Kor, personal communication to author, November 13, 2014.

PPS in the non-profit sector. In that respect, how the story is told becomes less a matter of historical accuracy than of good branding—a situation that is not to the taste of all protagonists.



Figure 34: Drawing class, School of Visual Arts at Phare Ponleu Selpak, Battambang (2014). Source: personal documentation.

“The history issue, it’s important. She [Decrop] did everything. What came after, it’s something else. The problem, it’s when people do not acknowledge it. It’s politics,” Tor Vutha says.⁸⁵ As for any collective undertaking, there is not a single story but several versions of what happened. Who did what, who was involved from the start, who stayed to fight for the school’s survival are matters of debate among the founders themselves—sometimes to the point of confusion for the volunteers working at PPS.⁸⁶ The objective of the chapter, as previously stated, is neither to establish the truth nor to ascribe roles and responsibilities. Different versions of the creation of Phare circulate in websites, blogs, press articles, documentary movies, and online forums. What matters is the way these stories—or founding myths—are mediated and contested, and the purposes they serve in changing contexts. Their narrative arrangements illustrate, as Corey and Thompson aptly put it, the struggle around the definition of “relations between foreign and native modes of agency.”⁸⁷ To be sure, PPS does not deny the involvement of foreigners in its activities. The center usually promotes collaborations with partners worldwide since they form a substantial part of its image as international artistic hub. Rather, it is in the story of the center’s founding that postcolonial issues, in the form of a claim to ownership, fully deploy.

The official version of PPS emphasizes Cambodian agency and the narrative of reconstruction (individual/psychological, cultural, social). The website attributes the idea

⁸⁵ Tor Vutha, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014.

⁸⁶ Valentin Sam, personal communication to author, October 21, 2014.

⁸⁷ Corey and Thompson, “Histories and Stories of Phare Ponleu Selpak,” 172.

of creating the center to the group of nine children, willing to “help other children express the trauma of war,” and mentions Decrop mostly as lending a hand in the process.⁸⁸ PPSE tells the same story, more vaguely even, as the website describes the “nine children and their art teacher [who] returned home from a refugee camp after the fall of the Khmer Rouge.”⁸⁹ It does not make it clear anywhere that the art teacher in question is French. Kate O’Hara, then director of Romeet Gallery, the antenna of PPS in Phnom Penh, even excludes Decrop from the list of founders, referring to her only as giving “informal lessons (...) on and off” in Site Two.⁹⁰ As well, Decrop does not appear in the documentary movie of Christophe Moutot *Phare Ponleu Selpak, une Association à Battambang* (2005). A sequence shows Khuon Det holding a photo-album and explaining that: “We took four years of lessons with a French drawing teacher. We met again in Battambang and we opened PPS. At the time, we wanted to help people find back Khmer culture.”⁹¹ Interestingly, *Sokha*, the performance he created for the circus in 2012 on the basis of his own experience at Site Two, follows a similar narrative line. It tells the story of Sokha, a young woman who lives through the civil war and the Khmer Rouge period, escapes to the refugee camps on the Thai border, and finally returns to Cambodia as an art teacher. There is no reference to any Westerner having taught her principles of art.⁹²

The indigenization of Phare possibly reflects the insecurities of returnees who feel they have to prove they are more local than the locals. Yet, as a public discourse for international visitors and sponsors as well as Cambodian authorities, it might have tactical rather than psychological motivations. The narrative of reconstruction, which PPS promotes, certainly works better when it is associated with Cambodian survivors only. Phare becomes the story of young Khmer refugees who went through hell, found in art a way to heal, and decided to continue their work back in Cambodia for the benefit of the community. This of course has roots in the narrative Decrop circulated about the drawing school in Site Two, emphasizing a linear trajectory from trauma to resilience. But it also fits in a more general storytelling, observed earlier in the narration of Cambodian recent past as tragedy and rebirth. Furthermore, describing “Phare adventure” as another post-UNTAC NGO-project developed in part by Westerners would only make it a banal undertaking, less attractive to visitors and donors. A brief sample of reactions in mainstream and social media demonstrates that people clearly prefer the romanticized version. According to the travel agency Footsteps in Asia, PPS was “set up in 1994 by young returnee Cambodians from the refugee camps in Thailand who learned about using art as a means of coping with trauma.” For some visitors, “Phare Ponleu Selpak is a Cambodian NGO created by former refugees having fled Cambodia to Thailand during the Khmer Rouge” (Jérémie Lusseau). An article in the *Phnom Penh Post* about the work of Svay Sareth explains that, “while at the refugee camp, he had a chance to learn arts from Westerners and after being repatriated to Cambodia in 1993 he and other refugees

⁸⁸ Website “Phare Ponleu Selpak.”

⁸⁹ Website “Phare Performing Social Enterprise.”

⁹⁰ Kate O’Hara, “Some Thoughts on Space while Working with Artists from Battambang, Cambodia,” *Noiswre Contemporary Art Magazine*, issue 13 (December 2013), 32.

⁹¹ Christophe Moutot, *Phare Ponleu Selpak, une Association à Battambang*, 2005.

⁹² See for instance: Emily Martin, “Understanding the symbolism in ‘Sokha,’” Phare Circus, December 6, 2014.

founded the now-renowned circus school Phare Ponleu Selpak in Battambang.”⁹³ The French newspaper *Le Monde* goes even further and puts Khuon Det (in spite of the latter using the plural “we” throughout the interview) at the forefront. According to the journalist, he alone found the land and he alone built the school. “At the beginning, there was one man: Khuon Det, a farmer’s son; and there was one need: survival,” the journalist writes.⁹⁴

One could keep reviewing articles, posts, and comments and find the same simplified story repeated over and over again. In general, it stands uncorrected but it happens that people familiar with Phare come across it and react. This was the case with the article of Hana Levy, “Cambodge: Jongler avec les Maux” published in the online version of the newspaper *Témoignage Chrétien* (March 30, 2011). Levy presented Decrop as “a young aid worker from Marseille” who had created a drawing school in Site Two and continued the work in Cambodia with a group of nine students after repatriation. Although it was relatively accurate, PHARE treasurer Jean-Marc Douay decided to clarify some points. His email underlined the role of Decrop in initiating and conducting the project until illness forced her back in France. “Her role was thoroughly erased by expats who care only about themselves,” he adds, before concluding: “During her last stay [at PPS], Véronique was very proud of you, guys. But beware those who re-write history, you are the guardians of it” (April 2011). His message triggered a round of negative reactions. An anonymous writer, replying from the general information e-mail address of PPS, blamed Douay for transforming a collective experience into the creation of a single individual: “What a lack of humility! No one tries to erase the role of Véronique. But history is moving forward. Personality cult is outdated” (April 2011). Another message, signed Ly Sok Penh, criticized the “patronizing” attitude of Douay and accused him of downplaying the role of the local community (April 2011). In a belated reaction (April 2012), Douay expressed his dismay at these replies, starting with the anonymous message from PPS where he thought he and Decrop had only friends.

Around the same period, the association PHARE launched the blog Phare-historique. It makes available a broad range of documents about the center: texts of Decrop, short biographies of some students, timelines, reproductions of the children’s drawings, photos of the drawing school in Site Two and the construction of the school in Battambang. Unsurprisingly, Phare-historique does not tell the same story as PPS. For a start, the role of Father Ceyrac, COERR, and the JRS receives pride of place in Decrop’s narrative, with a whole section entitled “At the beginning of the program PHARE, Father Ceyrac...” PPS omits the Catholic origins of the school. The fact that the center still maintains strong connections with faith-based circles makes this absence all the more conspicuous. Cambodia being a Buddhist country, there is obviously a rationale to this downplaying of the Christian origins of Phare. As an educational center, PPS cannot allow itself to be identified as a missionary structure (which it is not, let’s make it clear). Furthermore, to people who have no such commitment, the association of the center with the Catholic Church—or with any religious institution for that matter—might act as a deterrent and have negative consequences for PPS in terms of funding. Yet, it is a simplification of the story that borders on distortion.

⁹³ Roth Meas, “The Weight of the Past,” *Phnom Penh Post*, May 31, 2012.

⁹⁴ Catherine Bédarida, “Le Cirque des Enfants Perdus,” *Le Monde*, December 10, 2005.

Through “Phare-historique” Decrop reaffirms her decisive role in the creation of the center in Battambang. “I organized the whole project almost alone,” she writes. The students were too young to carry it and more involved in the “turbulences” of young adult life. Her texts elaborate a complex positionality. In line with her sharp criticism of humanitarian work, Decrop presents herself as someone who was able to let go. Her experience in aid organizations had made her attentive to “colonial prejudices” in humanitarian work. In her view NGOs often fail to associate local communities when developing programs. As a result, once the organizations depart, people are unable to run these programs.⁹⁵ In contrast Decrop felt she had done her best to prepare the boys to run the center by themselves. At the same time, the fact she left Phare does not mean that she should be deprived of “rights” over the structure. She returned to Cambodia for the first time after nine years of absence, and since then has been visiting in PPS regularly. She describes Phare as a “hope [that] fulfilled its promises. My students have become sowers as I had been a sower myself before them.”⁹⁶ By making the founding members—now teachers and directors at the center—her followers, Decrop emphasizes a sense of continuity with the project she pioneered. She reasserts her “spiritual authority” over PPS. This points, perhaps, to a more symbolic dimension in the center’s attempt to erase her role, the new myth becoming a way for the (now grown-up) children to finally emancipate from the ever-present mother.

Interestingly, the tension over the founding of the center is about to move into another realm—the tangible heritage of Phare. In the process the drawings of Site Two children come to play a new role. Once defined as documents bearing witness to the resilience of their authors, they are now presented as elements of Cambodian collective memory, visual testimonies of life in refugee camps, thereby finally achieving the representative function Decrop had in mind for them. As such, they are artifacts that should be kept in Cambodia so younger generations might access them. Furthermore, for some of the founders of Phare who are now recognized professional artists, the drawings are the first original works they ever made, hence pieces on which they might claim authorship and ownership. However, the drawings are still in Decrop’s possession, packed at her studio in Marseille. In her view they are the evidence of an experience that transcended borders and the basis for potential international exhibitions about the drawing school and the early period of Phare. Lately, there have been talks of displaying the drawings at PPS, in newly constructed exhibition rooms. When asked about it, Tor Vutha said:

Tor Vutha: The drawings we did in the camps, it’s heritage, artistic heritage. They are in Véro’s basement in France. I always go to the basement when I visit her. She kept everything, the drawings, the film, the books.

Question: She’s the memory of what happened?

Tor Vutha: Yes, all the traces of memory. It’s very important, not only for the children. It’s part of Cambodian heritage. These are traces of Cambodia’s history... She wants to give them back but we are not ready yet. It’s only here that we’re not ready. She wants to send them back but we’re not ready [the rooms were still under construction at the time of the interview].

Question: You mean, you need to have a space.

⁹⁵ Website “History of PHARE.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Tor Vutha: Yes, yes, a space, like a museum.⁹⁷

From her side, Decrop, interviewed on the same topic, neither confirmed nor denied. Invoking some disagreement with PPS, she said she was still thinking about it.⁹⁸

6. Phare Ponleu Selpak and the artistic scene in Cambodia

“There is a real need for the Battambang histories to be written beyond the mythology of Phare Ponleu Selpak and the narrative of an art practice coming from refugee camps,” writes Kate O’Hara, former director of Romeet Gallery.⁹⁹ In the past years the nascent contemporary art scene in Battambang has become hype. The city is depicted as a long-established cultural center once destroyed by the Khmer Rouge and now revived by the young generation. It is presented as the emerging contender of Phnom Penh in terms of artistic production. Mainstream and social media gush over the number of galleries and artist studios that opened in the city since 2010. There are even master and doctoral studies (completed and in the making) about the local artistic community. Unsurprisingly, PPS plays a major role in this development, for a practical reason—many of the young artists active in Battambang studied at Phare—but not only. O’Hara’s criticism of the monopoly of PPS over the art scene in Battambang shifts the discussion about the founding myth of the center away from the non-profit sector to the realm of art. The urge to indigenize Phare does not appear only in the public discourse circulated by PPS. It also shapes the school’s conception of its artistic mission. As such, it generates tensions that are expressed through a series of interrelated oppositions—Khmer culture versus foreign culture, art therapy versus contemporary art, local role versus international career.

As explained in the introduction chapter, the interaction of local and foreign influences in Cambodian culture has been an ongoing debate in the country since the period of the French protectorate. “One must remember that the term ‘Cambodian culture’ is an intellectual construct and that ‘Khmer traditions’ (as so defined by both scholars and native Khmer) have long undergone transformations wrought by both endogenous and exogenous forces,” anthropologists May Ebihara and Judy Ledgerwood argue in introduction to *Cambodian Culture Since 1975*.¹⁰⁰ The debate about Cambodian culture often proceeds through dichotomies: destruction versus reconstruction, tradition versus experimentation, and authenticity versus copy. The doctoral dissertation of the late Ingrid Muan on Cambodian arts as well as the seminal study by Penny Edwards of the formation of “Cambodge” as a nation further demonstrate how much the intricate relation of modernity, colonialism, and politics in Cambodia informs the definition of “arts” and “crafts” since mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ Phare, thus, comes at the end of a long list of intellectual attempts to redefine local culture in a transnational environment. As a bridge

⁹⁷ Tor Vutha, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014.

⁹⁸ Véronique Decrop, personal communication to author, October 12, 2015.

⁹⁹ O’Hara, “Some Thoughts on Space,” 34.

¹⁰⁰ May M. Ebihara, Carol A. Mortland, and Judy Ledgerwood (eds.), *Cambodian Culture since 1975: Homeland and Exile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5-6.

¹⁰¹ Ingrid Muan, “Citing Angkor: The Cambodian arts in the age of restoration, 1918-2000” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2001); Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

between two worlds or two cultures, PPS faces the difficult challenge of balancing a conservative stance based on the preservation of traditions with the need for aesthetic innovation. In the context of global art market, this dilemma takes on new forms.

At an opening of Romeet this issue rose again in a discussion with a young Khmer American artist about art education here. He mentioned that he found it unfathomable that no one key text of art theory or history (from the Western established canon) had been translated into Khmer by Phare Ponleu Selpak. I tried in vain to argue that deeming “canonical” texts as fundamentals or as the priority was the wrong approach.¹⁰²

The concern voiced by the Khmer American artist over the lack of common art historical references sounds legitimate. It is safe to assume that the non-practice of contemporary art’s visual and conceptual language affects negatively the chances of Cambodian artists to succeed in the global art market. The latter is not an undefined entity but refers to a set of clearly identified institutions (museums, galleries, universities), individuals (collectors, curators, artists, critiques), events (biennales, art fairs), and publications that are connected to the corporate world and promote specific trends and mediums in the arts. There are of course many ways to be an artist, but for those willing to emerge internationally there is no way out of this restricted system. The question is whether PPS is familiar enough with this system to teach its students how to integrate it (if they wish so). At this point, the tension between Khmer and Western culture becomes a tension between art therapy and international artistic practices.

In theory, global art market and art therapy are mutually exclusive spheres. The first looks at the second as a subspecies of visual expression (unless it is about collections of outsider art, such as Art Brut, but that is another discussion). Art therapy is not concerned with the artistic criteria and interests of the global art market. The porosity of boundaries between the two realms crystallized as a professional issue in the Cambodian context in the early 2000s, when Khmer Rouge atrocities became a subject for which artworks were commissioned (as explained in the introduction chapter). Since then, the relation has been often ambiguous. Artists participate in projects with a strong art therapy component. Conversely, art events integrate pieces that might be considered visual testimonies more than artworks.¹⁰³ This led to what Phnom Penh-based American curator Erin Gleeson calls the “two T’s,” the reduction of Cambodian artistic identity to temples and trauma. In reaction, some Cambodian artists sought to reestablish a divide line. The founding of the collective Stiev Selapak (“Art rebels”) and the gallery Sa Sa Bassac in 2009 opened the way to another business model for the arts, wary of anything “trauma” and at ease with the codes of the global art market. This new art scene had its first big international

¹⁰² O’Hara, “Some Thoughts on Space,” 33-34.

¹⁰³ The project *Eyes on Darkness* is a good example of such confusion. The NGO Youth for Peace organized it in 2009 with the support of the German Civil Peace Service (ZFD). The project combined drawings that had been made by survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime in art therapy workshops with artworks that had been initially displayed in the exhibition *The Art of Survival* held in January 2008 at the media center Meta House in Phnom Penh. See: Youth for Peace, *Eyes on Darkness: Paintings of Memory* (Phnom Penh: Youth for Peace, 2010) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Cambodia, “Cambodian Artists Speak Out: The Art of Survival” (Democratic Development, vol. 14, 2008).

breakthrough with the edition of *Seasons of Cambodia* in New York in spring 2013.¹⁰⁴ Gleeson, who co-curated the program of exhibitions, lectures, performances and artist-in-residence with Leeza Ahmady, tried to engineer a clear rupture. Cambodian art, as it was represented in New York, had little to do with exotic clichés and therapeutic practices for traumatized communities. The only artists associated with PPS who had been selected for the event were Svay Sareth and his wife Yim Maline, a former student at Phare, who live in Siem Reap and keep away from Phare (although in friendly terms). This was not well received at the center and in February-March 2014 the project *Made in Battambang* was organized at the French Institute in Battambang as an answer to *Seasons of Cambodia*. The exhibition presented over a hundred works of local artists and underlined of course the leading role of PPS in the renewal and development of Cambodian arts.¹⁰⁵

“A final paradox of global exchanges is that PPS, though considered a cultural hub in Cambodia, is called a social center in France.”¹⁰⁶ Phare has difficulty navigating between these two poles—being a center born out of art therapy and having a local social mission on the one hand, being an artistic center with a complex cultural identity and international ambitions on the other hand. PPS tries to perform on two separate levels. In the past years the center worked hard catching up with national and international developments in contemporary art. It professionalized and updated the curriculum at the School of Visual Arts, and opened Romeet Gallery in Phnom Penh in October 2011 as an outlet for advanced students and a platform to reach out to collectors and institutions abroad.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, the association Phare-France (French antenna of PPS) sells artworks via its website side by side with crafts such as silk scarves, purses made out of recycled materials, and patchwork bags. This creates a confusing environment for the students, especially as the term “artist” is still to be clearly defined in Cambodia (it translates in different ways in Khmer). They do not know in what circles their works circulate and whether they are assessed on aesthetic or moral criteria. The question that looms behind is the survival of the new generation of artists trained at PPS. Cambodia cannot offer each graduate a career path in the arts, and there are not many creative positions yet in related realms. The center itself is not the solution since it has only limited job opportunities.

¹⁰⁴ *Season of Cambodia* is an initiative of the association Cambodian Living Arts, created in 2012 and further developed in collaboration with Bophana with the aim to advance Cambodian arts and culture and promote them internationally.

¹⁰⁵ Alain Troulet, the curator of the exhibition, said: “For us in Battambang, this was a very big professional mistake made by the direction of the show, because the Seasons of Cambodia became Seasons of Phnom Penh only.” Emily Wight, “Battambang Artists in Focus,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, February 13, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Fresh Circus #2, *European Seminar on the Sustainable Development of Circus Arts* (12-13 April 2012, Parc de la Villette, Paris, France), 7.

¹⁰⁷ On July 30, 2015, Romeet Gallery announced on its Facebook page that it would close on August 14, 2015 after a last retrospective exhibition, *Phare Celebration: Last But Not Least*. Curator Camille Baczynski gave confusing information in national media. She first talked about a rebrand. Then she declared that Phare preferred to keep an advisory role for students who want to exhibit in Phnom Penh. PPSE chief executive Hout Dara was more explicit. Invoking financial issues, he explained that if the center ever decided to open a new place, it would probably include commercial activities such as a café. Harriet Fitch Little, “Romeet to Close Doors, Ponder Future,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, July 31, 2015; Aria Danaparamita, “Group Retrospective Exhibit Celebrates End of Romeet Gallery,” *The Cambodia Daily*, June 18, 2015.

Furthermore, selling is difficult in a country that is deprived of private and institutional collectors. Inexperienced students, with no contact abroad, have to rely on intermediaries such as Alain Troulet, former cultural attaché at the French Cultural Institute in Battambang, businessman, and now owner-director of the gallery-museum Romcheik 5 (figure 35).



Figure 35: Artist studio at Gallery Romcheik 5, Battambang (2014). Source: personal documentation.

The involvement of Troulet with PPS began when Jean-Christophe Sidoit asked him fifty dollars to help one of the students. It was a boy who had been sold by his parents in Thailand and had no one to turn to. Troulet gave the money but declined to meet with the student. The encounter took place later on Sidoit's insistence. Troulet was impressed by the works of the boy and appalled by the conditions in which he was living. He decided to commit further and support him. Shortly afterward, he was introduced to three other students who had all been sold as children in Thailand. In 2013 Troulet found a house where the four boys could live and work. He built on the top of the building a small house for himself and a storage room for the paintings of the boys. On the adjacent plot of land he started the construction of the gallery-museum, which opened in March 2015.¹⁰⁸ Troulet also helps the boys manage their works. He welcomes visitors at Romcheik 5 and shows the collection. He takes paintings, and sometimes the artists,

¹⁰⁸ Alain Troulet, personal communication to author, October 21, 2014.

abroad. The works sell for a few hundred dollars, which is quite overrated.¹⁰⁹ When he presents the paintings, Troulet brings forward the past of the students. For buyers, the acquisition of a work combines a potential good deal (who knows what it will be worth in a few years) and the satisfaction of being a do-gooder. Trauma becomes, thus, an emotional currency. This might be effective as a commercial argument but it hampers the possibility of serious aesthetic judgment.

The fact of continuously emphasizing the underprivileged economic background or the difficult family history of some artists who graduated at PPS is detrimental to them. Indeed, it reduces them to being second-rate artists, their work being perceived first and foremost as a social rehabilitation undertaking rather than a contemporary art piece.¹¹⁰

Obviously, Phare students and alumni do not remain passive. They look for new ways of producing and exhibiting artworks. These young artists run their own spaces and studios. For instance, the Sangker collective rents a house with a shared exhibition space and smaller rooms where the members live and work (figures 36-37). Other examples are Make Maek and Sammaki Gallery, both opened by PPS graduates Mao Soviet and his wife Phin Sophorn in response to the exodus of young artists from the city: “We want to bring an art market to Battambang so artists don’t leave” (figure 38).¹¹¹ The self-organization model allows them to invite participants and tackle more experimental forms of art. They often switch from the “traditional” painting taught at Phare to mixed media, installation, photography, and performance. They tackle all aspects involved in mounting an exhibition from the preparation of the space to public relations, including the education of the local public through workshops and monthly “art walks.” In many ways they attempt to break with social determinism and develop a more critical discourse on political and societal issues in Cambodia. By taking this step forward, young artists emancipate—or at least try to—from Phare financially and psychologically. PPS puts a lot of energy in teaching and expects some return. It is a sort of moral contract stipulating that artists should give the center a percentage of their sales (which is not without reminding Decrop’s management of the auction money) and keep referring to PPS when they communicate about their artworks.¹¹² Of course, things do not work so smoothly. Against this backdrop, one might appreciate how quickly the idea of family that Phare is always keen to emphasize becomes a form of pressure.

¹⁰⁹ Up to \$4,000 for a work sold in France, according to Informer no. 2, conversation with author, October 22, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Marie-Eve Samson, “Expression de Soi et Subjectivité Bouddhiste chez des Artistes en Arts Visuels Contemporains de Battambang au Cambodge” (master’s dissertation, Université de Laval, 2014), 174.

¹¹¹ Diana Montano, “Gallery Sparks Artistic Rebirth,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, March 22, 2012.

¹¹² Borin Kor, personal communication to author, November 13, 2014.



Figure 36: Groundfloor of the gallery of the Sangker Collective, Battambang (2014). Source: personal documentation.

In so small a professional circle, however, emancipation is necessarily limited. PPS is influential, hence better not be antagonized. The center plays a major role in the Battambang Arts Association (which it contributed to establishing). It is a source of contacts and potential buyers. Its directors and teachers belong to advisory committees in a variety of bodies that young artists might need in the future. Whether they are self-organized or not, these artists still depend heavily on foreigners. For instance, Sammaki Gallery would never have seen the day without the involvement of co-founder Darren Swallow (a Brit who settled in Battambang years ago and opened the art-café Lotus Gallery in the city center) and the British NGO Cambodia Children’s Trust, which also supports the gallery-restaurant Jaan Bai.¹¹³ The revival of Battambang as cultural capital is not the rosy picture people seem so eager to paint in blogs and newspapers. Rather, it is (once again) a myth that hides a more complex reality at the interplay of art, speculation, and tourism. This comes as no surprise considering that the launching pad of this revival was the event “Angkor Art Explo” in 2011, an initiative of Filipino Loven Ramos and

¹¹³ The NGO withdrew in 2015, leaving Gallery Sammaki in a precarious situation. Harriet Fitch Little, “Battambang Gallery Offers ‘Safe Space’ to Stumble as Artists Take their First Steps,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, August 14, 2015.

his partner Canadian David Ramjattan, owners of the art gallery-café Art Deli and the boutique hotel-gallery Hotel 1961 in Siem Reap.¹¹⁴



Figure 37: Exhibition space of the gallery of the Sangker Collective, Battambang (2014). Source: personal documentation.

This points to the particular configuration of arts in Cambodia, often entangled with non-artistic commercial activities—the very system Sa Sa Bassac tries to replace with a Westernized model. Exhibiting in hotels and restaurants and selling to tourists-cum-collectors from Singapore who try get cheaper deals in Cambodia remain for many local artists the only way to eke out a living, but for how long? The rise of Battambang as cultural capital foreshadows a process of gentrification of the city, as a growing number of spaces will be needed to accommodate the flow of tourists the municipality hopes to attract. Artists will be among those who pay the price of this transformation. Chances are that, within a few years, they will no longer be an argument in the city’s business pitch, but undesirable dwellers occupying houses promised to real estate speculation. This sheds another light on the action and legacy of PPS. Undeniably, the center helped rebuild Battambang. The city would not be the same without it. At the same time, as a tourist magnet and the main attraction in the area, Phare contributes to a form of urban development with potentially disastrous social effects. In that sense, the late 2000s and

¹¹⁴ Joel Gershon, “Battambang’s Claim to be Kingdom’s New Art Capital,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, November 4, 2011.

early 2010s mark the end of a phase—the period of survival and reconstruction now encapsulated in the founding myths of Phare—and the beginning of a new era for PPS, for better or worse.



Figure 38: Gallery Maek Make, Battambang (2014). Source: personal documentation.

7. Conclusion

The chapter proposed to shift the focus away from Cambodia to refugee camps at the Thai border through the example of the drawing school and artistic center Phare, and look at a new phase and context of visualization of Khmer rouge atrocities. The questions raised at the beginning of the chapter were to what the drawings of the children of Site Two testify and how they can be used as documents. As their authors grew up, moved back to Cambodia, and (for many) entered professional artistic life, it became clear that

the drawings acquired new functions over the years—tool of empowerment, representation of individual healing, symbol of collective resilience, memory-commodity for international consumption, cultural heritage, and original artworks. This reflects the long and complex process of reintegration of “outsiders” (the refugees) into homeland society, and through them, the progressive incorporation of new visual tropes into the depiction of Cambodia’s recent history. For Cambodians, the remembrance of the recent traumatic past has been dislocated for years across Cambodia, Thailand, America, and Europe. The return of refugees and exiles throughout the nineties did not change the situation much. While they concerned hundreds of thousands people, memories of the border were not included in the post-repatriation national narrative. Only recently did they find a way into Cambodian collective consciousness.

Phare played a role in the process as one of the actors making refugee memories more visible in the public space. In that respect, the story of the center bears witness to a process of social reconciliation between groups of population that had been separated, experienced the post-Khmer Rouge period in different ways, and were finally reunited amidst political and social tensions. The founders of Phare were outsiders who had to fight to regain their place in Cambodia, in the eyes of the locals and in theirs as well. In his anecdote about the art contest organized by the UNESCO in Khao I Dang and Sakeo camps, Vickery deplors the influence of foreigners on the drawings of refugees. He considers them biased, hence unreliable testimonies. In his perspective as historian, they cannot be used as documents. Yet, these drawings document something—the interaction of Cambodians and outsiders at a precise moment, in a precise setting. In that sense, the story of Phare also bears witness to the transformation over the years of transnational dynamics of reconstruction in post-conflict Cambodia and changes in the roles foreigners assume in the process of rebuilding the country.

In the same way Site Two was an interface between local, regional, and international actors and interests, Phare is a cultural and socioeconomic interface between Cambodians and partners abroad. While this hybrid identity makes the specificity of the school, it also generates disagreements, expressed through claims over ownership and spiritual authority as well as the redefinition of the center’s mission and orientations. Once one goes beyond the endearing story of Decrop and the students as “Mother Courage and Her Children” (even if there is of course something true in it), what appears is the more complex picture of a collective undertaking filled with tensions. Furthermore, rumors of embezzlement and paedophilia (among the expat personnel in the latter case) paint a far cruder and sadder portrait of PPS at the opposite of the benevolent image the center offers to visitors, journalists, and donors.¹¹⁵ This might occur anywhere but the context of PPS and the center’s discourse about the protection of children makes these rumors even more disturbing. Thus, the myth of Phare gradually gives way to a reality entangled with free market, tourism, urban and land issues, economic and sexual exploitation.

In that, the story of the center mirrors the overall development of Cambodia in the past twenty years. This makes it easy to forget all the good things that happened thanks to Phare as well—the emergence of talented artists, the development of social and artistic life in Battambang, the increasing number of local children going to school and learning a trade, the artistic contribution to a plural visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities and the

¹¹⁵ Informer no. 2, conversation with author, October 22, 2014, and Informer no. 4, personal communication to author, December 6, 2015.

aftermath of the Pol Pot's regime. Phare was a groundbreaking attempt to create new ways of making art and living in Cambodia and as such it remains a driving force for many young Cambodians. Indeed, history repeats itself. The recent endeavors of a young generation of artists and art entrepreneurs to produce new models remind of the undertaking of Decrop and her students. Phare is not only a template for cultural brokering of Cambodian arts at home and abroad. It is also the model after which or against which art histories in Cambodia will still be articulated for a time. For these reasons, writing about Phare does not mean writing about a triumphant myth, but about a bittersweet story of reconstruction against all odds, with its successes and its failures.

Phare marked the emergence of a new interpretation of Khmer Rouge terror, a kind of trauma aesthetic that is less ideologically oriented and more focused on the individual. The story of Phare as drawing school and art center also points to a new form of involvement of Westerners in the preservation and circulation of Cambodian memory. Such a form appeared in the mid- and late eighties in refugee camps, sites of transnational interactions par excellence, and reflected a clear humanitarian stance in the place of political commitment. Within a few years, it spread inside Cambodia as the post-UNTAC process of "normalization" reopened the door of the country to Westerners, and produced different types of memorialization and visualization of the DK terror. It is such an experience that will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

The photos of S-21 prisoners in and out of Cambodia: The Photo Archive Group

1. Introduction

Early 2011 visitors in the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh could see in one of the rooms on the second floor of building C an odd art exhibition. These were portraits of S-21 prisoners based on the original Khmer Rouge mug shots and laced with vivid colors (figure 1).¹ The author was Dutch artist Peter Klashorst. On a short trip to Phnom Penh in January 2010 to renew his Thai visa Klashorst had decided on a whim to visit the museum. He was struck by what he saw there. Back in Bangkok, he began to paint a series of portraits on the basis of the photos he had snapped in Tuol Sleng with his mobile phone. Later that year he returned to Phnom Penh. This time he stayed in a backpacker guesthouse where he kept painting more portraits of S-21 prisoners. Then he proposed the museum to hold an exhibition of his works. Surprisingly, the project received the green light of the Cambodian Ministry of Culture (the patron of Tuol Sleng). It was even purportedly supported by the UNESCO. The international organization was a partner of the museum and had financed in part its renovation. The exhibition *Faces Cambodia, Never Again, 1975-1979* was supposed to be on display from January 14 through April 15, 2011, but things did not go as planned.

Visiting the museum a couple of days after the opening, American expat blogger Casey Nelson found the exhibition room closed. The door was wired shut and the paintings still leaned against the walls. The staff at Tuol Sleng office told him that when Klashorst had brought the paintings, no one had understood what his work was about. The museum director had thus requested a letter of explanation from the artist. When Nelson asked when or whether the exhibition would open again, one of the staff answered, “maybe next week.” The American shared this story online, and reactions toward Klashorst’s work were rather harsh: “disgraceful,” “very bad taste,” “pointless bunch of crap.” Some people accused the Dutch artist of cashing in on the misery of Cambodians. Others advised him to try his luck in Treblinka or Auschwitz. “They should lock him for a few months, then he might have an ounce of credibility,” a forum participant declared. Nelson concluded:

And in so far as some artist might presume to use the victims of genocide as base for his art—to add something to them—he needs some moral authority such as may be derived from being a survivor or directly affected or at the very least carry some great artistic weight as to expand on their memory and meaning.²

¹ It included fifty-two paintings, thirty were 45 x 60 cm and twenty-two were 150 x 200 cm.

² Comment posted on the thread “Tuol Sleng art show” on the forum Khmer440.com. The thread includes twenty-seven messages posted between January 16 and April 18, 2011.



Figure 1: Poster and photo of the exhibition of Peter Klashorst at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (2011). Source: Flickr, CC.

Since the late nineties several artists—Cambodians and non-Cambodians alike—have recycled photos of S-21 prisoners in their work, according to practices of appropriation in modern and contemporary art.³ This development points to the changing nature of the

³ This includes the following artists: Vietnamese-American artist Dinh Q Lê with the series of works *Cambodia: Splendor and Darkness* (1998), *The Texture of Memory* (2000-01), and *The Penal Colony* (2008); Cambodian artist Ly Daravuth: *Messengers* (2000); Brazilian artist Alice Miceli: *88 out of 14,000* (2004); Cambodian-American artist Binh Danh with the series of works: *Ancestral Altars* (2006), *In the Eclipse of Angkor: Tuol Sleng, Choeung Ek, and Khmer Temples* (2008), *The Iridescence of Life* (2008), and *Collecting Memories* (2010); Greek artist Despina Meimaroglou: *Discovering the Other. Tuol Sleng. After All Who Rewrites History Better than You* (2008); Cambodian artist Khvay Samnang: *Reminder* (2008); Cambodian artist Chhim Sothy: *History Wheel* (2008); Cambodian-American artist Linda Saphan and Chinese artist Qudy Xu: *Dreams of Life* (2011). See: Stéphanie Benzaquen, “Remediating Genocidal Images into Contemporary Art: The Case of Tuol Sleng Mug Shots,” in *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence*, Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). The Ukrainian artist Nikolay Grokh visited Cambodia in 1984 as part of a Soviet delegation. The drawings he made after the photos of S-21 prisoners were exhibited at the Karas Gallery in Kiev in 2013 with a video interview by Nikita Kadan.

Tuol Sleng mug shots as they are progressively integrated into an ever widening web of uses and meanings, from administrative record of extermination to legal evidence in the courtroom, from *memento mori* for the families of the victims to museum artifact representing the cruelty of the Pol Pot's regime (figures 2-4). The "artistic turn" is the one of the latest stages in the social life of the photos of S-21 prisoners. The images are now referenced in the syllabus of art academies and curatorial studies. They became a genre. Such a multiplication of regimes of visibility raises the question what discourses and practices make it possible for these pictures to become part of global visual culture. Unlike the historiographical, legal, and testimonial contexts, the artistic environment is often considered as possessing a threatening "potential for decontextualization."⁴ This is indeed what Casey Nelson implies when he brings to the fore the argument of "moral authority" and "great artistic weight." In other words, the photos of S-21 prisoners are at risk unless the artist belongs to the right community or institutional circle. Is this debate limited to the realm of art? Or is it one more manifestation of the ongoing discussion about the proper uses and users of the Tuol Sleng mug shots?

The question who is a member of the "community of records" surrounding the photos of S-21 prisoners—to borrow archive scholar Michelle Caswell's expression—has received many different answers over time.⁵ Spanning over a period of two decades, from the mid-nineties to the present day, the history of the Photo Archive Group provides an interesting perspective on the changing Khmer Rouge memory landscape. It crystallizes a set of issues related to the presentation ex-locus of the Tuol Sleng mug shots and the transnational dislocation of the museum's photographic archive. The Photo Archive Group, a non-profit organization founded by American photographers Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley, cleaned and catalogued six thousand negatives stored in Tuol Sleng. It also made contact prints of a selected set and on this basis elaborated an exhibition entitled *Facing Death*. The collection (103 photos) was presented in museums, centers for photography, and university galleries in North America, Australia, and Western Europe. To what extent did the project of the Photo Archive Group signal a change in the visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities? How did Niven and Riley's work affect the circulation of the photos of S-21 prisoners in broadening geographic, cultural, and institutional contexts? What new role for the pictures did it generate?

Due to changing political circumstances (in the Cambodian and international contexts alike) a new phase in the memorialization of Khmer Rouge atrocities began in the mid-nineties. Concurrently with the formation of institutional memory around specific sites and practices, new stakeholders emerged in Cambodia and abroad. The older "community of records," based mostly on ideological positions, gave way to a new configuration of users. This applies particularly to the photos of S-21 prisoners. As seen in Chapter 3, the Tuol Sleng mug shots contributed from the start to visualizing the barbarity of the Pol Pot's regime, alongside other images such as Phnom Penh the "ghost city" and piles of skulls and bones. But from the mid-nineties onward the photos of S-21 prisoners achieved another status as iconic images of the Cambodian Genocide. The birth of an aesthetic gaze at them points to the transformation of the scopic regime that had so far determined the public's perception of these pictures. The objective of the chapter is to

⁴ Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable. Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 164.

⁵ *Ibid.* 158.

understand how the project of the Photo Archive Group both shaped and was shaped by these processes in a period of transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War. Through the story of the collection the chapter also aims to clarify how Western intervention in visualizing Khmer Rouge crimes was articulated anew at that period. Over the years, many articles, papers, and theses have referred to the Photo Archive Group. It is usually acknowledged that without Niven and Riley's action the negatives would certainly be in a near-disaster state by now. Nevertheless, some scholars also voice criticism regarding the preservation side of the project, stressing the problematic narratives of discovery and rescue that framed the whole story. Suspicions about a possible neo-colonial exploitation of the mug shots were later confirmed when the Photo Archive Group allowed the controversial exhibition of a selected set of photos of S-21 prisoners at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1997) and made commercial use of the prints.

These are the moot points on which critiques of Niven and Riley's project tend to focus at the expense of other presentations of the collection. As a result, the existing literature about the Photo Archive Group produces some sort of canonic and self-referential version, repeating the same texts and turning them into dogma. As it mostly looks back at the Niven and Riley's work in Cambodia in 1993-1994 through the prism of their later debatable decisions, this version raises a set of interrelated issues. First, it does not place the story of the Photo Archive Group within the dynamics of Khmer Rouge memory. It captures neither the nature of the project, as it was originally conceived of and conducted in Phnom Penh, nor the many transformations that affected the perception of the collection over the years. Second, it eludes the intercultural dealings that are part of any collaboration involving partners from different backgrounds. By fixing roles (powerful Americans versus disempowered Cambodians) this version does not manage to reflect the nuances of transnational power relations. Last, it leaves open a big interrogation: What does it mean to show the Photo Archive Group's collection nowadays? The exhibition *Facing Death* resumed its international tour after an interruption of eight years (for reasons that had nothing to do with the project itself). During this gap, books, documentary movies, mass tourism in Cambodia, social media and the trial of Duch at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal created a new visual environment for the perception of the photos of S-21 prisoners. In what ways does this affect the display of the collection in public settings today? To what extent does the current presentation of the prints differ from exhibitions held in the late nineties?

These are the questions the chapter will try to answer. Drawing on the study by media scholar Adrian Johns of intellectual property, it first situates the discussion about the project of the Photo Archive Group in the context of copyrights and transnational dynamics of memory. Second, the chapter retraces the history of the Photo Archive Group in Cambodia in 1993-1994, and follows the collection as it was presented in museums and universities in North America, Australia, and Western Europe in the years 1996-2001. It elaborates further on two critical moments of that period: the publication of the book *The Killing Fields* and the show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in contrast to the exhibition at the Australian Center for Photography in Sydney (1997). Third, the chapter looks back at Cambodia and the impact of Niven and Riley's work on the life and actions of Nhem En, probably the better known Khmer Rouge member of the photography subunit at S-21. Through the analysis of recent displays of the Photo

Archive Group's collection in London, Gwangju (South Korea), and Toronto, the last part of the chapter examines the relation of present-day debates and earlier controversies related to the project of Niven and Riley.



Figure 2: Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum today after renovation (2012). Source: Flickr, CC.



Figure 3: Photos of S-21 prisoners at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (2011). Source: personal documentation.



Figure 4: Photos of S-21 prisoners at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (2011). Source: personal documentation.

2. Copyrights in the context of transnational memory

Niven and Riley were not the first ones to present photos of S-21 prisoners outside Cambodia. In May 1983 an exhibition called *Cambodia Witness* opened at the Rotunda in the Cannon Office Building of the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington DC (figure 5). It showed materials collected in the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) by David Hawk, former relief worker in Bangkok and former executive director of Amnesty International USA, and curated by Joan Libby for Amnesty International. The exhibition toured in the United States and Europe (starting in Helsinki with the opening speaker Thomas Hammarberg, who was then general secretary of Amnesty International). It consisted of fifty-two photos including Tuol Sleng buildings, mug shots of prisoners, mass graves at Choeung Ek (the orchard and Chinese cemetery near Phnom Penh where S-21 prisoners were killed and disposed of), survivors, and destroyed pagodas (figure 6). Associated first with the oral history program of the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University for collecting testimonies of Cambodian survivors, then with the Cambodia Documentation Commission, a non-governmental organization he had himself established, Hawk had traveled back and forth to Cambodia in 1981-1982. While working in the archives in Tuol Sleng he had re-shot the photos of prisoners with the objective "to get this rare archival material to the West so that it could be analyzed and circulated globally."⁶ Besides *Cambodia Witness*, Hawk reproduced some of the mug shots in articles in the *New Republic* (1982), *Index on Censorship* (1986), and with his essay "The Photographic Records" in the book edited by Karl D. Jackson, *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death* (1989).

It is important to understand the specificity of the photos of S-21 prisoners, considered so far the only existing documentation of the process of extermination in DK. No such records were found in other prisons in Khmer Rouge Cambodia, which raises the question how the CPK leaders planned to use the documents. It certainly had to do with the role of S-21 in the terror apparatus of the Pol Pot's regime as the place where the political police *santebal* extracted "confessions" from purged Khmer Rouge cadre and military.⁷ Inmates were photographed upon arrival and the picture attached to their confession file.⁸ According to journalist Nic Dunlop, the photos were meant for

⁶ David Hawk, "Confronting Genocide in Cambodia," in *Pioneers of Genocide Studies*, Eds. Samuel Totten and Steven Leonard Jacobs (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 530-532.

⁷ This explains the controversy that came with the inauguration of the Tuol Sleng *stupa* (Buddhist funerary monument) in 2015. The names of the 12,272 victims (official number) were to be inscribed on the marble slat around the memorial. This angered S-21 survivors and relatives of victims, who refused to have the name of perpetrators written next to the name of their beloved ones. Poppy McPherson, "Memorial Plan Prompts Debate About Victims and Perpetrators of Genocide," *The Phnom Penh Post*, May 9, 2014. According to DC-Cam director Youk Chhang, eighty percent of those killed at S-21 were Khmer Rouge. Only twenty percent of the prisoners "fall strictly into the category of victim," he says. Robert Carmichael, "Cambodia Inaugurates Memorial for Genocide Victims," *Voice of America News/Asia*, March 26, 2015.

⁸ See Appendix J for firsthand accounts of the identification photo-taking at S-21.

identification purposes in the case prisoners escaped.⁹ Historian David Chandler thinks they might have had a psychological dimension as objectifying the paranoid fears of the CPK leaders, or been part of a “raw documentation for a massive, unwritten history of the Party,” which Pol Pot and his comrades intended to create.¹⁰ When he fled Phnom Penh in January 1979, S-21 commander Duch left behind him the prison records, including the photos. These were a goldmine for the new authorities. As S-21 was refurbished and reopened as Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes under the guidance of Vietnamese museum expert Mai Lam, the passport-size photos were displayed in various formats on the walls. Juxtaposed with torture instruments and a twelve-square meter map made out of three hundred skulls on which the Mekong River was painted in blood-like red, they functioned as artifacts emphasizing the cruelty of the Khmer Rouge regime.¹¹ Mai Lam, who had already organized the Museum of American War Crimes in Ho Chi Minh City, found inspiration in former Nazi death camps when he traveled to Eastern Europe to research other memorial museums.¹² The photos of S-21 prisoners also served as means of identification since the pictures had been detached from their files in the confusion of the “liberation.” In the first years, the Cambodians came the museum to search for missing relatives. People stood “in line for hours to file through, carefully checking each photo.”¹³ The pictures were also published in newspapers so the victims could be identified.¹⁴ It was such complex documents that Hawk proposed to present for the first time out of their original location.

Unlike *Facing Death* in the nineties, the exhibition *Cambodia Witness* did not draw any criticism in part because it had a clear institutional framework of legal activism. “The establishment of accountability on a national and international level has been largely ignored for the sake of political convenience. Murder by government will not lessen or be

⁹ Nic Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner: The Story of Comrade Duch and the Khmer Rouge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009 [2005]), 274

¹⁰ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 49-50. The last suggestion is Steven Heder's, quoted in Chandler, *ibid.*

¹¹ The map was dismantled in 2002, due to the natural decay of the skulls. It was replaced with a photo and the skulls are now preserved in a glass case.

¹² Judy Ledgerwood, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes: National Narrative,” in *Genocide, Collective Violence and Popular Memory. The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, David Lorey and William Bezley, eds. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 2002), 109. References to the Nazi regime and the Holocaust in Mai Lam's design for the Tuol Sleng museum might be analyzed productively through the notion of “historical distance” and creation of the past as “a foreign country” in the context of (dark) heritage. In the case of Tuol Sleng, it is clear that the Vietnamese curator aimed to widen the gap between Marxism-Leninism and the ideology of the Khmer Rouge regime by associating the latter with the Third Reich through a display reminding of Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration and extermination camps turned into memorials. For a detailed study of historical distance in the context of heritage, see: Maria Grever, Pieter de Bruijn, and Carla van Boxtel. “Negotiating Historical Distance: Or How to Deal with the Past as a Foreign Country in Heritage Education.” *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 48, no. 6 (2012).

¹³ Ledgerwood, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes,” 110.

¹⁴ Thierry Cruvellier, *Le Maître des Aveux* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 287.

halted until this is changed,” curator Joan Libby stated in the exhibition brochure.¹⁵ At the time the Khmer Rouge still held the seat of Cambodia at the United Nations, and DK was still the officially recognized state and government. Hawk campaigned for the application of the Genocide Convention to Khmer Rouge atrocities, which could open the way to the prosecution of the CPK leaders. The exhibition was part of his lobbying strategy. He spoke on behalf of those who could no longer speak: “Witness means knowledge, understanding, wisdom. A witness is someone called to be present and testify to an event having taken place.”¹⁶ This human rights dimension was not the only reason why *Cambodia Witness* was better received than Niven and Riley’s project years later. The review of Susanna Rodell in the *Boston Phoenix* points to a further explanation: “This exhibit makes no claim to be art. Much of it is photographs of photographs... David Hawk had no professional background in photography when he went to Cambodia. He is producing evidence, not evoking sensual response.”¹⁷

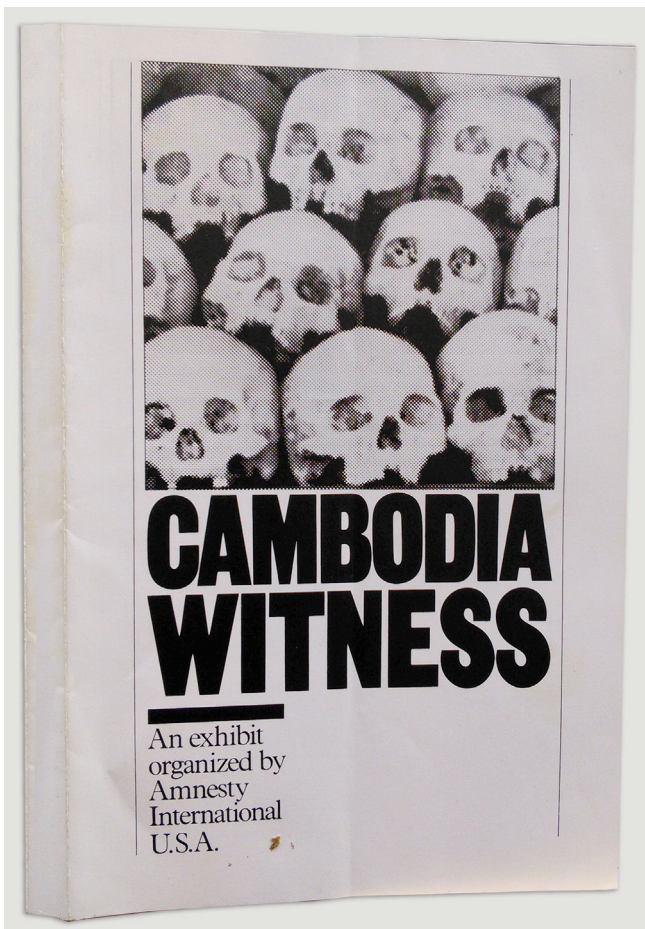


Figure 5: Brochure of the exhibition *Cambodia Witness* (Amnesty International U.S.A., 1983).

¹⁵ Amnesty International. *Cambodia Witness. Murder by Government 1975-1979*. Exhibition leaflet. United States: Amnesty International, 1983.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Susanna Rodell, “Bearing Witness to Horror. David Hawk’s Photographs Present the Evidence,” *The Boston Phoenix*, October 25, 1983.

By re-shooting the mug shots, thus presenting the photos in the way they are displayed in Tuol Sleng, Hawk managed to maintain some distance between the image and the viewer. This mediating presence disappeared in the work of the Photo Archive Group. Hawk's amateurism guaranteed the documentary nature of his task.

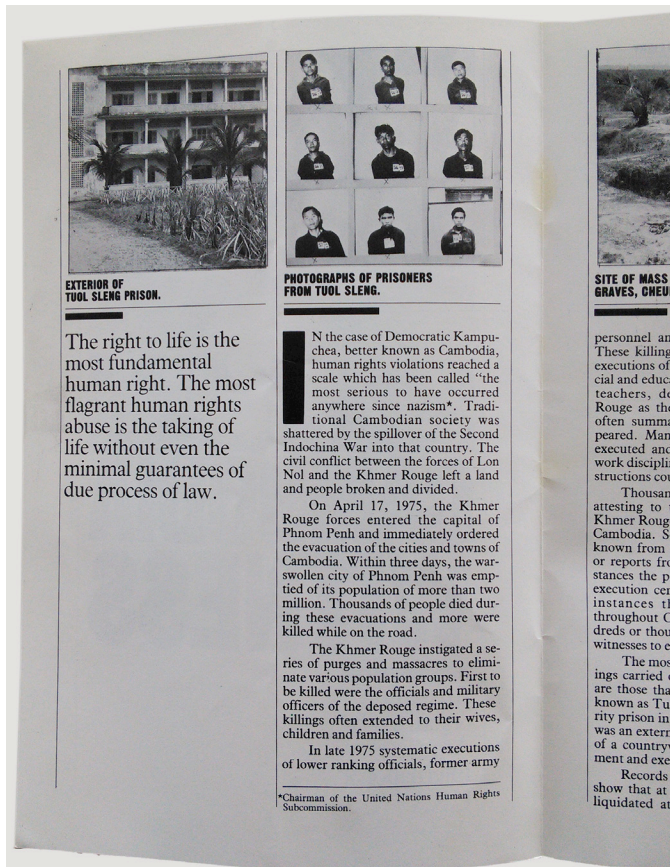


Figure 6: Interior page of the brochure with photos of prisoners in *Cambodia Witness* (Amnesty International U.S.A., 1983).

However, Niven and Riley were professional photographers, and as such, they engaged in a technically distinct process—making contact prints of negatives. To put it in simple terms: they were “reproducing evidence.” This created a new position for the viewer, faced with direct evidence of the crime instead of remediated artifacts. The shift had further consequences. As noted by Caswell, since the negatives were contact-printed full frame, they revealed details that had been cropped from the photos hanging on the walls in Tuol Sleng. These could be mothers holding children in their arms, or prisoners photographed in collective cells. In that respect, the work performed by Niven and Riley with the museum’s photographic archive had a strong effect on later perception and understanding of the photos of S-21 prisoners.¹⁸ The testimonial dimension was not absent from their project. “As photographers, finding this material and recognizing we could do something [with the negatives] with our training, there was never a question of

¹⁸ Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable* 73.

why. It was like this has to be done. And more people need to see these,” Riley says in a BBC documentary movie made about the project.¹⁹ Yet, this testimonial dimension, because of the craftsmanship and expertise of the American photographers, was expressed through a radically different materiality. It is this specific materiality which, I would suggest, caused the later controversies around the collection.

“Sometimes people come here and cry, and I ask them what's the matter,” former director of Tuol Sleng Chea Sopheara said once. “They say it's their mother and ask me to print the photos on the wall for them.”²⁰ This raises the question of who has the right to print—that is, the “right to copy”—the photos of S-21 prisoners? Journalist Patrick Falby puts it in blunt terms. “Who owns the mug shots of S-21 prisoners?” he asks in *The Phnom Penh Post* (2002). His article discusses the decision of Niven and Riley to copyright the prints and sell them to museums, and the disappointment of Cambodians who felt betrayed and dispossessed by the Americans, starting with Chea Sopheara and DC-Cam director Youk Chhang. Who owns the Tuol Sleng mug shots? Are the families of S-21 victims the owners of the photos? Is it the Cambodian people? If so, who is entitled to act as its representative? Is it the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum? Is it the State of Cambodia? The Ministry of Culture indeed holds copyright of the photos of S-21 prisoners to protect them against “illegal exploitations.” What is the status of these photos? Are they “seized enemy property”? Are all interests of DK on these photos extinguished through laws and decrees passed at later stages? Can these images be assessed, like German photos of the Second World War, within the international copyright system that is shaped by conventions and treaties and determines what images fall into the public domain? Ownership is undeniably a vexed issue. One may try to solve it by choosing a narrow interpretation of the notion of provenance, as archivist Michelle Caswell explains. According to it, the photos of S-21 prisoners are “government records whose custody can be confined to the current government of Cambodia, as the successor state of the Khmer Rouge, under the doctrine of inalienability.” In contrast, a broader interpretation of provenance encompasses both creators and objects of the records as well as anyone else who has activated these records over time.²¹ This leaves the door open to many users, hence to ongoing struggles over the proper uses of the mug shots and the identity of those defining these uses.

The ownership discussion is often formulated in moral terms at the expense of legal, material, and technical considerations. No one will deny that ethical aspects are essential, especially in a country which, as Cambodia, has been under the control, either military or financial, of external powers for many years, and now reclaims its inheritance. Still, more often than not, moral views may hamper the attempt to address the complexity of the changing memory landscape in the transnational context. It is important to keep in mind that the Tuol Sleng archive was, from the outset, the result of a collaborative construction which involved Cambodian and non-Cambodian partners altogether. It began with the Vietnamese authorities who cleared the documents (with problematic outcomes as some records might have disappeared in Vietnam for political reasons). As seen earlier, Hawk was one of the first Westerners to carry out a project in Tuol Sleng's archive in the early

¹⁹ Quoted by Caswell, *ibid.* 71.

²⁰ Patrick Falby, “Who Owns the Tuol Sleng photos?” *The Phnom Penh Post*, August 16, 2002.

²¹ Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable*, 18-19.

eighties. A few years later, Cornell University in turn committed to preserving S-21 records. The institution acquired Hawk's documentation (1985 and 1991) and conducted a microfilming project of Tuol Sleng's archive under the direction of Judy Ledgerwood (1990-1993). The Cambodian Genocide Program (CGP) at Yale University scanned for its Cambodian Tuol Sleng Image Database the negatives restored and printed by the staff at Tuol Sleng and Niven and Riley. The digitized photos were made available online via the CGP website. The records were associated with details such as gender, age, clothing, and an interactive response form so Cambodians could identify the victims pictured.²² In 2009 Tuol Sleng initiated new collaboration projects for the preservation of S-21 records and the training of staff with the UNESCO and the Okinawa Prefecture Peace Memorial Museum in Japan. The museum's archive was even inscribed in the Memory of the World Register of the UNESCO (report no. 2008-04). The work of the Photo Archive Group is thus part of a long history of duplicating and displacing the photos of S-21 prisoners into other physical or digital settings, often for safety reasons, but also out of political motivations. Yet, one hardly finds the question "Who owns the mug shots?" formulated with respect to Cornell, Yale's CGP or the UNESCO. Its emergence a propos the Photo Archive Group shows that it is less a moral issue than an operative one, which both determines and reflects the state of relations between the parties involved. That it is asked at all signals in fact a dramatic re-ordering.

The project of Niven and Riley took place in a vacuum at many levels. First in Cambodia as the country transitioned from socialist republic to multiparty kingdom under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). Then, for the international community that switched from putting an embargo on Vietnam-occupied Cambodia and supporting the Khmer Rouge to "enforcing" the prosecution of their former allies for crimes against humanity. For the Khmer Rouge, once considered possible partners in a peace process, then declared outlaws. Last but not least for the Cambodian population, isolated for so many years and suddenly brought to interaction with Westerners from media and aid organizations. In this period of vacuum, the identity or situation of the very stakeholders who would later be deeply engaged in memorializing Khmer Rouge atrocities was not clearly defined or strong enough yet. A couple of years later, Niven and Riley would most probably not have been granted the permission to carry out their project with the negatives and present prints in museums outside Cambodia. Considering the issue of ownership only through a moral lens simplifies an intricate situation in terms of agency and motivation. There are no black-and-white but grey zones where national and international, institutional and non-institutional, political and historical interests are endlessly rearticulated. In the process Cambodian authoritative voices emerged. While they were not audible enough in the mid-nineties, they gained power over the next years and reaffirmed their control over the reproduction of photos of S-21 prisoners.

Piracy, says media scholar Adrian Johns, is the "unavoidable price of doing business on a global scale."²³ The same could be said of memory. "Piracy" of memory artifacts is the price of having local events of violence integrated into transnational consciousness. It is something that can be felt as a transgression, a misappropriation, even a theft—or the

²² Craig Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields. Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005), 56-61.

²³ Adrian Johns, *Piracy. The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1.

opposite, as participation to the common knowledge, an act for sharing information, a duty of memory. There are indeed striking analogies between intellectual creation and memory. Piracy is a matter of the history of reception and a matter of place.²⁴ In the Renaissance period, Johns explains, a book could be authentic in one place and piratical in another place. So is goes for memory. What appears a respectful and appropriate presentation of memory artifacts in one place will be considered offensive in another place. This transformation over borders (whether they be geographical, institutional, or cultural) becomes even more sensitive in a postcolonial context. Suspicions of neocolonial abuse often provide a subtext for interpreting Western involvement. Ownership is a way to control the definition of appropriateness. It points to a shift from politics of memory to the policing of memory—what is to be remembered and how it is to be remembered. Piracy, as reproduction and circulation of artifacts, plays thus a contradictory role. On the one hand, it challenges monopolies on memory. On the other hand, it reinforces them for there would be no monopoly at all if “non-authorized” uses were not defined. Consequently, friction is the price to be paid for the worldwide visibility of Khmer Rouge crimes.

The ubiquity of the Tuol Sleng mug shots means the multiplication of regimes of interpretation of both the images and the history attached to them. In this context, friction is less the tension between local and global uses of the photos than the tension between major centers of distribution and numerous peripheral relays. Ownership is thus better rephrased as the articulation by a variety of groups and individuals, with varying degrees of relation to the events, of their own legitimacy in memorializing Khmer Rouge atrocities and defining the meaning of events in Cambodia during the Pol Pot’s regime. The comparison of memory and intellectual property in a context of piracy underlines the ongoing reconfiguration of power relations between the different stakeholders. As said, these relations are not necessarily modeled after the tension between local and global, but rather after the tension between center and periphery. The center in this case is not (only) geographical, but mostly institutional. It involves organizations and individuals inside and outside Cambodia. A good illustration of it is the DC-Cam’s collaboration with the ECCC and Tuol Sleng in Cambodia, and with the Cornell, Yale, and Rutgers universities in the United States. In contrast, the Photo Archive Group is a “decentralized” project. It moves at the periphery, at times having strong ties to major centers and their representatives (when it gives catalogues to Tuol Sleng and Cornell University or collaborates with historian David Chandler), at times operating in a more loose way (when it shows the photos at the MoMA or in Gwangju). These are all these lines between center and periphery, knotted in different ways and places, which weave the fabric of Khmer Rouge memory around the Tuol Sleng mug shots.

3. The work of the Photo Archive Group

3.1 In Cambodia (1993-1994)

The story of the Photo Archive Group began in March 1993. Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley, two photographers from Los Angeles, were covering the UN-

²⁴ *Ibid.* 13.

monitored elections in Cambodia for the AFP (Agence France Presse) and *The Phnom Penh Post*. Both men had visited Tuol Sleng at several occasions (Niven had been in the museum for the first time in 1990), and were familiar with the photos of S-21 prisoners. Seeing the fading images hanging on the walls, they thought they could do better prints if they found the negatives. One Sunday afternoon on a whim they took a translator over to the museum and asked about the negatives. To their surprise a woman took them upstairs to an office. She opened a wooden drawer where the six thousand original negatives were crammed, accumulating mildew and dirt. When they held them to light, Niven and Riley saw they were well exposed and fixed but needed cleaning and preserving.²⁵ They came up with a plan to contact-print all negatives and create two complete catalogues, one for Tuol Sleng and one for Cornell University. They also planned to print approximately one hundred images in museum/exhibition size and quality in several sets. One set would stay at the museum, one would go to Cornell, one would be used for publishing, and the rest was to be determined. In April 1993 Niven and Riley established the non-profit organization Photo Archive Group to carry out these tasks. They submitted a written proposal to the Ministry of Culture of Cambodia, which gave its agreement in May 1993. The collaboration with Cornell University came out of personal contacts. The American institution had been active in Cambodia for several years. Since 1985 John Badgley, the curator of the Cornell's John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia, and two graduate students, Judy Ledgerwood and Eva Mysliwicz, were involved in a project for the preservation of artifacts at the National Archives in Cambodia.²⁶ In 1989 the project was extended to Tuol Sleng where a team conducted by Ledgerwood microfilmed 380,000 pages of confessions. Niven and Riley met Lya Badgley, the daughter of John Badgley and member of the microfilming team. She put them in touch with her father. Cornell University agreed to act as umbrella organization providing the Photo Archive Group with charitable status.

Now in position to raise funds for the project, Riley came back to the United States. He stayed there for several months, collecting about \$25,000 from the Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund, the Indochina Memorial Fund, Calumet Holdings Inc., private individuals (including David Chandler and Don Riley) and through a loan. The commercial photographic firms Zone VI of Vermont, Light Impression, the Saunders Corporation and

²⁵ The S-21 photography subunit used large format cameras that produce high-quality negatives: 35 mm, 6 x 6 cm (films were easy to find because the format was popular at the time), and 16 mm. Doug Niven, personal communication to author, December 9-10, 2013.

²⁶ The project at the National Archives included two parts. The Cornell University team first brought to Cambodia microfilm copies of two thousand works in Khmer or about Cambodia from the Cornell's Cambodian collection, so archives could be restored and even supply the Ministry of Education with material for future textbooks. Then, the team microfilmed onsite several thousands of endangered palm leaf manuscripts (Buddhist texts) and trained the National Archives staff in preserving the works. John H. Badgley, "Preserving Myanmar's Manuscripts and Historical Documents" (International Symposium, International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University, Yangon, Burma, January 2006); Michael J. Okoniewski, "Cornell Tries to Help Cambodia Preserve its Past," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1989.

Freestyle Photo of Los Angeles donated at discounted prices or even for free photographic materials and equipment. Cathay Pacific Airline discounted the air freight.²⁷ In February 1994, Riley returned to Cambodia with Mark Norris, a high school friend whose help he had enlisted. They brought with them darkroom equipment, chemicals, and photographic paper—over 350 kg of material in twenty-two boxes.²⁸ While Riley and Norris passed the customs at Pochentong airport, their cargo was taken away to a storage building across the street. After spending an hour locating it, the two Americans tried to recover their materials. They showed the letter from the Ministry of Culture but the staff refused to move without a letter from the Ministry of Customs. Here began a journey of several days to get the document. It was a race against time as heat could ruin the photographic paper and chemicals.

We had our translator [Sok, a reporter for the AFP] fill out detailed forms that even he couldn't understand. Then we had to fill them out again because each Air-bill needed a separate form. It was at this point that we began to wonder where they store all this paperwork—their desks had no drawers and the rooms were barren of file cabinets. It seemed like they were playing a game and would use our papers to cook dinner with. When we finally had the forms in order, customs wanted to inspect each box. We opened boxes explaining in vain through our interpreter what an enlarger is, what a print washer is, and please don't open those boxes of light-sensitive paper (thanks). After inspecting ten boxes, the agent stamped our forms and sent us to the final hurdle. The last stamp we needed was in the hands of a bureaucrat who took the trouble to note that our letter from the Minister of Customs refers to Air-bill #0516320 instead of #0516350 and he will not release our stuff without a signed and stamped correction from the Minister.²⁹

A few days later, the team finally retrieved the materials and equipment. The work could start.

Over the several months it took to complete the project, three Cambodians worked with the Americans, helping mostly in translating jobs. The other volunteers were Jeff Apostolou and Michael Perkins. Law scholar Peter Maguire, also a high school friend of Riley, joined the team later in 1994. Since Niven worked for the AFP, the Photo Archive Group could use the agency's villa. It was an old French colonial house, staffed by a full-time security guard, a maintenance man and his family.³⁰ A large extension to the kitchen, used as a laundry room, was converted into darkroom, cleaned and painted afresh. The windows were covered with sheets of plywood, and holes cut for a fan and air conditioner. Local carpenters built tables, shelves, and print drying racks.³¹ There was no stable electricity, no running water. The voltage was adjusted from 220 volts to 110 volts. Hundreds of gallons of water were delivered daily via motorcycle and supplied the system

²⁷ Letter of Chris Riley to Deborah Ely, Director of the Australian Center for Photography, Paddington, Australia, March 11, 1996; Associated Press, "Photos Capture Cambodian Atrocities," *Lodi News Sentinel*, 1994.

²⁸ Mark Norris, "Cambodia 1994 Part 1," Far East Asia Review Blog, February 2, 1994; Riley to Ely, 1996.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Peter Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 17.

³¹ Norris, "Cambodia 1994 Part 1."

the team had designed (it pumped filtered water in for washing the prints).³² This looks primitive but compared to the situation of others, this was a great improvement. When the Cornell University team conducted the microfilming project, there was no available refrigerator in Phnom Penh. They had to use the one in a veterinarian's office a few kilometers away from the city. Each time she needed a roll, Ledgerwood was motorbiked to and from the office.³³ Furthermore, as films could not be developed in Cambodia due to the absence of facilities, the reels were taken to Bangkok via the International Red Cross diplomatic bag, thence to Ithaca, United States, where they were processed and inspected within a day by the preservation staff of Cornell. The results were then faxed back to Bangkok for final delivery to Phnom Penh.³⁴

Against such a backdrop, one better understands the conditions in which the Photo Archive Group members carried out their work. The book *Facing Death* (2005) by Maguire, possibly the only firsthand account published about the Photo Archive Group, captures the thrill of the project, the sense of physical danger (the Khmer Rouge were never far, as they had their office in Phnom Penh a few blocks away from the AFP villa), the dedication of all members and their ability to improvise in front of difficulties. It echoes a narrative of "heroic" photojournalism familiar to American audiences in the context of the Vietnam War. Maguire's is an important testimony because it situates the work of Niven and Riley within a tradition. For decades photojournalists had been central to mediating conflicts in Indochina to the Western world. Tim Page, Horst Faas, Sean Flynn, Al Rockoff, and Roland Neveu are names attached to wars in Vietnam and Cambodia. The book *Facing Death* brings the reader closer to the intimate side of the project. It helps understand what it might have been for the members of the Photo Archive Group to be confronted day after day with the Cambodian genocide not only in the darkroom when looking at the faces of dead prisoners, but also outside when meeting survivors and watching the country struggle its way to recovery amidst social violence and AIDS epidemics (one of the outcomes of the UN peacekeepers' presence in Cambodia).

In the Project Proposal of the Photo Archive Group (1993, unpublished), Niven and Riley described the Tuol Sleng photographic archive as "threatened by a volatile political situation, years of neglect, a lack of resources, and the absence of trained staff."³⁵ The sense of emergency expressed in the document was not overstated. Tuol Sleng was in a bad state. The situation of the museum had always been shaky, even when the PRK authorities considered it a key element in their politics of memory. In the nineties, however, it had reached its nadir. The government did no longer supply funds. Due to widespread insecurity in Cambodia, the other source of income, tourists, had disappeared. Electricity bills could not be paid. The buildings remained in the dark and air-co was switched off in the archive rooms.³⁶ The maintenance of the museum was not the only

³² Doug Niven, personal communication to author, December 9-10, 2013.

³³ Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable*, 70-71.

³⁴ John F. Dean, "Collections Care in Southeast Asia: Conservation and the Need for the Creation of Micro-Environments," in *A Reader in Preservation and Conservation*, Ralph W. Manning and Virginia Kremp, eds. (Munich: Saur, 2000), 98.

³⁵ Quoted by Rachel Hughes, "The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide." *Media, Culture and Society* 25, no. 1 (2003), 29.

³⁶ Ledgerwood, "The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes," 119-120.

issue at stake. At the time, Niven told journalist Patrick Falby, “there was talk of closing Tuol Sleng, of including the Khmer Rouge in the government, of burning all the various things at Tuol Sleng in the name of national reconciliation.”³⁷ Niven and Riley thought it would be difficult to secure the official approval of the Cambodian government for their project. They knew it would be hard to work without it, as the microfilming staff of Cornell University had already experienced it. Since they had only an oral agreement with the Minister of Culture, and the government refused to grant a formal written permission, the Cornell team had to deal with a “constant interruption of the work by various government officials backed by troops and a consequent defection of the Khmer projects staff.”³⁸

To their surprise, Niven and Riley got the permission from the start. The French-trained archeologist and deputy Minister of Culture Michel Tranet (Funcinpec) was supportive and provided the official letters needed. In addition, in exchange for their work, Niven and Riley were granted the right to print, publish, and present abroad one hundred prints. That it went so smoothly can certainly be explained by the electoral context. The project of the Photo Archive Group was a godsend for both Hun Sen’s CPP and Sihanouk’s Funcinpec. By mid-1992 the Khmer Rouge had reverted to an offensive line, refusing to disarm, attacking state infrastructures and killing civilians.³⁹ Still, they remained a force to be reckoned with, especially as they defended a nationalist stance that could appeal to some segments of the Cambodian population. Everything that contributed to painting the Khmer Rouge in bad colors was thus welcome. After the elections (May 1993), the major concern of the Photo Archive Group was that things could change any time, and the agreement with the Ministry of Culture over the printing be revoked. The situation had become increasingly unstable. Although the Funcinpec had won the elections, the CPP refused to turn over the power. Wary it could lead to a civil war, King Sihanouk announced the formation of a provisional government with two prime ministers, his son Prince Ranariddh for the Funcinpec and Hun Sen for the CPP. A new constitution was promulgated in September 1993, and the State of Cambodia became the Kingdom of Cambodia. Power sharing was extended to all levels. Ministerial portfolios were divided between the two parties, and in each ministry a deputy was appointed from the party other than the one represented by the minister.⁴⁰

³⁷ Falby, “Who owns the Tuol Sleng photos?”

³⁸ Dean, “Collections Care in Southeast Asia,” 98.

³⁹ Steven Heder, “The Resumption of Armed Struggle by the Party of Democratic Kampuchea: Evidence from National Army of Democratic Kampuchea Self-Demobilizers,” in *Propaganda, Politics and Violence in Cambodia: Democratic Transition under United Nations Peacekeeping*, Steven Heder and Judy Ledgerwood, eds. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996); Ben Kiernan, “The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian Peace Process: Causes and Consequences,” in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: The Khmer Rouge, the United Nations and the International Community*, Ben Kiernan, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1993).

⁴⁰ Grant Curtis, *Cambodia Reborn? The Transition to Democracy and Development* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 16. It was the same division of power at the provincial level. Half the governorships were CPP, and half Funcinpec. In each case, deputy governors represented the other party. However, the staff below remained the old staff (that is, CPP members) As well, the CPP retained power at the district level, which means it kept controlling the police, armed forces, and tax collection. “In the new Cambodia, the SOC [i.e.

A project such as Niven and Riley's could easily become a pawn in the hands of political parties at each other's throat. What the two Americans feared most was a change of personnel inside ministries, or a change of mind of their supporters at the Ministry of Culture. They better made no waves and carried out the entire print project in complete secrecy. Only a small group knew about it: Michel Tranet, the director of Tuol Sleng Chea Sopheara, the librarian of the museum, and the Cambodians who worked with the Photo Archive Group. It was a tedious work process conducted as discreetly as possible. The team "checked out" small batches of negatives out of Tuol Sleng. They cleaned, contact printed, and catalogued a set, then brought it back to the museum and took another one. After the catalog project was completed in March 1994 Niven and Riley worked with the six thousand contact prints and did a big editing job, selecting one hundred for printing on fiber paper. It was a cross-section of S-21 victims in terms of age and gender, with an additional criterion: the photos were full-frame and not cropped as many pictures displayed in Tuol Seng. They took five to ten negatives at a time, printed them (a procedure that had sometimes to be repeated because of the state of the negatives) and exchanged them for a new set. The only lapse in the secrecy policy happened toward the end of the project, when Niven and Riley showed the work to U.S. ambassador Charles Twining and colleagues from other embassies. The work was completed in June 1994. It was a relief for the Photo Archive Group when a set of prints and the catalog for Cornell were taken out of Cambodia. Only then did they relax a bit. Three more printed editions followed the same way:

Hand carried on the plane! We had 11 x 14 inches boxes for the prints, and the catalogs were in binders so both were small enough to hand carry, though it took a few trips. Thankfully we had several folks working with us and could count on them and other friends to carry stuff in and out.⁴¹

3.2 In North America and Europe (1996-2001)

Niven and Riley were motivated by a desire to keep the photos of S-21 prisoners in the public realm and inform people in the West about the tragedy of the Cambodians under the Khmer Rouge regime. They believed that the photos would have a strong effect on viewers and stimulate people to engage with the history of Cambodia. "Once the work was out," Niven says, "we then embarked on finding a publisher and exhibition locations, and also utilized contacts we had already amongst the journalism community to shed some light on our project."⁴² Reportages and interviews appeared in several media throughout 1994 and 1995. *American Photo* carried a story about the project in its November/December 1994 issue. The Associated Press ran a favorable article that was picked by numerous papers across the United States. England's *The Daily Telegraph* and Australia's *The Age* also printed stories. Niven and Riley gave interviews to the BBC and

State of Cambodia, the old structure inherited from the PRK] was still a principal actor. It had metastasized into a political party," former UN representative to Cambodia Benny Widyono concluded in his book *Dancing in Shadows: Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge and the United Nations in Cambodia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 144-146.

⁴¹ Doug Niven, personal communication to author, January 9-10, 2014.

⁴² Doug Niven, personal communication to author, December 9-10, 2013.

the Australian Radio Network. *Photographers International*, a periodical from Taipei, dedicated the entire issue of April-May 1995 to the photos of S-21 prisoners to mark the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Phnom Penh. *Time* ran a two-page spread of the photos in its April 17, 1995 international edition also to mark the anniversary. In March 1996 David Okuefuna realized for the BBC a thirty-minute long movie entitled *Secrets of S-21: Legacy of a Cambodian Prison*. It documented the work of the Photo Archive Group and included interviews with former prison guards and prisoners. This was a good timing for the project of Niven and Riley. In the early nineties the interest of Americans in conflicts in Southeast Asia and their aftermath was exhausted. For the first time, there was even a drop in numbers of Cambodian refugees allowed in the United States.⁴³ But things changed in April 1994 when the U.S. Congress passed the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act. It brought Cambodia back in the news.

The book was the first achievement of Niven and Riley. The two photographers created a packet of color Xeroxes of the hundred images, included a couple of 8 x 10 inches (20 x 25 cm) prints on plastic coated resin-coated photo paper, a letter, and some background information. They sent it out to various publishers. They had first hoped for the well-known foundation and photography publisher Aperture but they learned it was a vanity publisher (i.e. authors pay to have their books published), which ruled them out. The Santa Fe-based art and photography publisher Twin Palms contacted Niven and Riley immediately upon receiving the packet. They said they wanted to do the book with their gravure printing press.⁴⁴ The art director and founder Jack Woody was enthusiastic about the project. "I thought they were the most amazing photographs I'd seen in years," he said. "The emotional rapport the viewer has with subjects, I hadn't experienced in a long time. I thought to myself: 'That's a good as photography gets'."⁴⁵

Niven and Riley selected seventy-eight photos out of the set of one hundred. The book came out in 1996 under the title *The Killing Fields* (figure 7). It was a luxury edition, an oversize volume with titles embossed on the side. For the photos, Twin Palms used sheet-fed gravure, which produces high-quality impressions. The book contained two essays. One was "The Pathology of Terror in Pol Pot's Cambodia" by David Chandler, a major authority on Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge regime. The other was the interview Sara Colm, a journalist and human rights researcher in Phnom Penh, had made exclusively for the book with Vann Nath, one of the few S-21 survivors.⁴⁶ *The Killing Fields* was selected by the International Center for Photography and *American Photo* magazine as the Photography Book of the Year. It also received its share of criticism. Some journalists and writers pointed out the glossy aspect of the book and the aesthetic treatment of the photos.⁴⁷ Indeed, not everything in the publishing process had turned out as Niven and Riley expected it. They did not choose the title.⁴⁸ They were

⁴³ Thy Phu and Doug Niven, "The S-21 archive and Cold War human rights," Cold War Camera Blog, September 2, 2013.

⁴⁴ Doug Niven, personal communication to author, January 9-10, 2014.

⁴⁵ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 166.

⁴⁶ It would become the memoirs *A Cambodian Prison Portrait. One Year in the Khmer Rouge's S-21*, published separately two years later.

⁴⁷ Guy Trebay, "The Killing Fields of Vision: Was Cambodia's Genocide just a Moment of Photographic History?" *The Village Voice*, June 3, 1997, 34.

⁴⁸ Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia*, 150-151.

presented the layout of the book too late to correct problematic decisions such as the absence of captions.⁴⁹ Still, they were not dissatisfied with the result:

We had seen some of [Twin Palms] other books and knew their commitment to quality and though we were naive about business details, we went with them and were happy how the book came out, though we would have liked a photo on the cover.⁵⁰

The print was only three thousand copies, all sold out during the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in the spring of 1997. It did not go into another printing to the disappointment of Niven. He and Riley hoped for a paperback version of the book, or even an Asian knockoff copy with excellent print quality, to extend the life of the book experience. But that never happened. Nowadays *The Killing Fields* is a collector's item. To make the photos available to the wider public Niven created the website *Tuol Sleng: Photographs from Pol Pot's Secret Prison*. He added a few propaganda photos of DK and provided further context with links to books and movies about S-21 and the Khmer Rouge (figure 8).



Figure 7: Book *The Killing Fields*. Source: Internet.

⁴⁹ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 166.

⁵⁰ Doug Niven, personal communication to author, January 9-10, 2014.

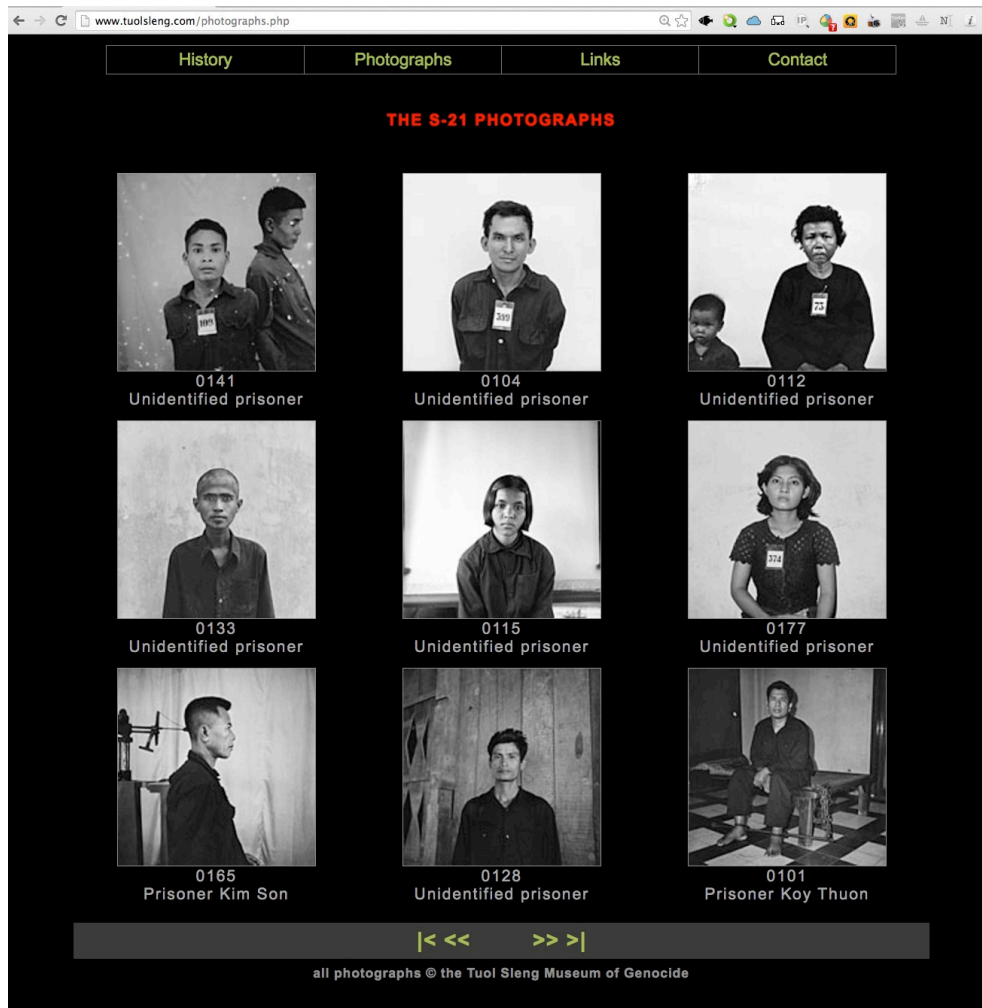


Figure 8: Website “Tuol Sleng: Photographs from Pol Pot’s Secret Prison” (2015).
Source: screenshot of the website.

Exhibitions were the main outlet for the prints of the Photo Archive Group. From 1996 onward the collection circulated in institutions in North America (mostly the United States), Western Europe, and Australia. Riley, who was in charge for the coordination, kept the fee low so that even small galleries and museums could present the S-21 photos.⁵¹ The collection was shown at: Ansel Adams Center for Photography in San Francisco (1996); Museum for Design in Zurich (1996); Boston Photographic Resource Center (1997); Australian Center for Photography in Sydney (1997); Museum of Modern Art in New York City (1997); Festival Rencontres Photographiques d’Arles (1997);

⁵¹ Lindsay French, “Exhibiting Terror,” in *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, Eds. Mark Bradley and Patrice Pero (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 134. In her study on *Facing Death* at the Canadian Museum for Contemporary Photography in Ottawa (2000-2001), Jacqueline Sischy provides the following numbers: \$50,000 for the exhibition’s insurance value, \$1,500 for participation, and one way shipping. Jacqueline Sischy, “The Ethics of Remembrance: The S-21 Photographs” (master’s diss., Concordia University, 2009), 88.

Museet for Fotokunst in Odense, Denmark (1998); University of Arizona's Center for Creative Photography (1998); Riverside's California Museum of Photography (1998); Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego (1998); Parc de la Villette in Paris (1998); Southeast Museum of Photography in Daytona Beach, Florida (1999); Helen Foresman Spencer Museum of Art at the Kansas University (1999); Center for Documentary Studies at the Duke University, North Carolina (2000); Snite Museum of Art at the University of Notre-Dame in South End, Indiana (2000); Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in Ottawa (2000-2001); Frederick Weisman Museum of Art at the University of Minnesota (2001).

Niven and Riley did not impose any specific conditions on the display. Once they had checked the intentions of the museum or gallery, worked out practical details of shipment and insurance, and supplied background information, it was up to the curator to decide how the photos of S-21 prisoners were to be presented. Many did a good job, very close to what Niven considers an effective presentation of the collection:

There should be as much context as possible, with a separate room with one of the Nhem Ein documentary movies playing, copies of the book, confessions, the entire 6,000 contact sheet catalog (electronic or paper), survivors, experts [he names Chandler and Maguire] or someone from the Khmer diaspora.⁵²

Curators understood the importance of adding “depth and context to the images.”⁵³ The display at the Boston Photographic Resource Center and the Australian Center for Photography included maps, timeline, documentary movies, brochures with background information and bibliography. Experts were invited to give a talk about the Khmer Rouge regime. Both institutions collaborated closely with the local Cambodian community, organizing visits for those who lived in the greater area and introducing the general audience to Khmer culture through performances of traditional music and dance.⁵⁴ In many ways this kind of presentation was consistent with the “new museum” paradigm developed over the past decades (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2000, Van Mensch 1992, Vergo 1989). Community practices and emphasis on pedagogy were strategies widely applied by institutions, especially when dealing with sensitive material like perpetrator photography.⁵⁵

A closer view at the exhibition at the Australian Center for Photography (June 6-July 5, 1997) gives a good insight into the general format of presentation of *Facing Death*. The Center associated Amnesty International, the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, the Refugee Council of Australia, and Yale’s CGP to the development of the exhibition. Since Australia was home to an important Cambodian refugee population, the staff was eager to have the Khmer community in Sydney involved in the project as well. The opening took place in presence

⁵² Doug Niven, personal communication to author, December 9-10, 2013.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Lindsay French, “Exhibiting Terror,” 147-149.

⁵⁵ A well-known example is the traveling exhibition *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Since it began touring the United States in 2000, each museum or center that showed the postcards used a wealth of contextualizing material and organized educational projects around the exhibit.

of Por Heang Ya, the president of the Sydney Khmer community. It included a short Khmer performance and the forum “the Khmer Rouge and Tuol Sleng prison” with speakers David Chandler and Helen Jarvis. The Khmer Community lent materials to the Center. Via the Khmer Interagency, it also provided guides who were at the Center every Saturday of the exhibition. The curators were concerned “that the photographs in the exhibition be placed as fully as possible within their social and historical contexts and that the exhibition be made full use of as an educational tool.” The prints were displayed in two rows around the three walls of the Center’s main gallery. They sat directly against the wall and were held in places by sheets of perspex. The walls were lit evenly, avoiding the highlighting of any specific image. Small text panels with contextual information were provided in English and Khmer.

The intention of the curators was “to minimize the aesthetic sense of the photographs as ‘art-works’, to ‘frame’ the interaction between viewer and subjects with as little clutter as possible, and to give a sense of the whole as an archive rather than a set of singular works.” A resource area located in Gallery Two supplied contextualizing materials. A television monitor played a copy of the BBC documentary. A timeline made of photocopies of news articles about Cambodia from 1994 onward had been prepared in collaboration with Amnesty International. Six photos from a larger series by Melbourne photojournalist Jerry Galea depicting victims of landmines in Cambodia were also displayed. It was a loan from Community Aid Abroad, which had commissioned the project. Galea had taken the photos during the period December 1995-January 1996 in Phnom Penh and in the north of the country in government-run hospitals and hospitals run by overseas organizations such as UNICEF and the Red Cross. The Khmer community had provided several Khmer traditional costumes for wedding and special events as well as photographic panels showing elements of community activities in the Sydney area, including the building of a new temple in Western Sydney and images of the Khmer New Year’s celebrations. Information on Yale’s CGP was made available via a computer workstation which provided access to a cached version of the CGP website (certain online functions within the website, particularly database search facilities, could not be accessed). This was a success. After the exhibition, Jarvis had a number of enquiries about the database. She even took a laptop version to the Khmer community in Sydney so members could work more closely with it.⁵⁶

In most cases, curators in charge for the display of the collection were careful to provide the photos of S-21 prisoners with a broad context of interpretation through information materials and/or adjunct exhibitions. The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in Ottawa presented *Facing Death* alongside a thematic exhibition entitled *The Space of Silence*. The latter featured works by Canadian artists Jack Burman and Isaac Appelbaum on the Holocaust and by Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar on Rwanda.⁵⁷ The Center for Documentary Studies at the Duke University showed the Photo Archive Group’s collection as part of a program called *Cambodia x 3*. It included two other photo exhibitions. *Across the Temple Gate* was about the New Year’s celebrations held by the Cambodian community of Greensboro, North Carolina.

⁵⁶ Australian Center for Photography, “Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia’s Killings Fields,” exhibition report, 1997.

⁵⁷ Sischy, “The Ethics of Remembrance.”

Cambodia Now was a documentary project made by students of the San Francisco Art Institute during a school visit in Cambodia.

Strikingly, a major part of the literature related to the Photo Archive Group overlooks these exhibitions and focuses on the one that did not fit the pattern: the MoMA's. Over the years no other presentation of the collection has been so consistently commented upon in newspaper articles (Kimmelman 1997, Nahas 1997, Pinchbeck 1997, Roma 1997, Trebay 1997) and essays (French 2002, Hughes 2003, Williams 2004 and 2007, Maguire 2005, Dunlop 2009[2005], De Duve 2008, Munro 2009, Sischy 2009). To date, this is even the only exhibition of S-21 photos outside Cambodia that triggered artistic responses. Vietnamese-American artist Dinh Q Lê reacted to it with an art installation *The Quality of Mercy* (CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, New York), whose title referred to the eponymous book by William Shawcross (1984). Playwright Catherine Filloux created a short play called *Photographs from S-21* (1998) in which two mug shots, a woman and a man, come to life out of their frame during a museum exhibition.

Facing Death was held at the MoMA from May 15 through September 30, 1997. Twenty-two photos were presented in Gallery Three, a small room situated in the galleries displaying the MoMA's permanent collection of American photography 1890-1965. The wall text at the entrance provided limited information about S-21 and the Photo Archive Group. There were two sofas in the middle of the space. Visitors could sit, browse through copies of *The Killing Fields* put on the coffee table alongside books on the MoMA's photo collection and write comments in the guestbook.⁵⁸ Clearly, the display was at odds with attempts by other curators to deal with the collection of the Photo Archive Group. Nothing could have been more alien to things Khmer Rouge than the white cube of a New York museum. In that respect, the exhibition at the MoMA embodied the tension at its highest between the scene of production and the scene of consumption of the photos of S-21 prisoners. This certainly explains why it became a catalyst for all issues arising from the presentation of the mug shots outside Cambodia.

It is fascinating to see how easily some critics took a moral stance and became self-appointed "guardians" of the proper way to present audiences with images of atrocity. Reviewers underscored a poor curatorial work from the side of the museum. The MoMA team had created the "flimsiest framework" for the photos.⁵⁹ Information about the Khmer Rouge regime, S-21, and the Photo Archive Group was sketchy at best (when it existed) and not up-to-date. The year 1997 had been eventful in Cambodia, with the first interviews given by Nhem En to journalists, the coup of Hun Sen, and the show trial of Pol Pot in the hands of a competing Khmer Rouge faction. None of this made its way to Gallery Three. The absence of context reinforced suspicions that the MoMA had never intended to go beyond an aesthetic treatment of the photos. The prisoners were turned into objects of contemplation—of "highbrow voyeurism" in the words of Nic Dunlop.⁶⁰ The photos were "like colonial spoils," anthropologist Rachel Hughes argued, connecting the MoMA exhibition to "the long history of 'exotic' displays in the West." In her view, this fit within a narrative that lent "a certain heroism to Niven and Riley's actions, which contrast[ed] dramatically with the anti-heroism and victimhood of the S-21 prisoners."

⁵⁸ French, "Exhibiting Terror," 134-135.

⁵⁹ Trebay, "The Killing Fields of Vision."

⁶⁰ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 166.

The display reflected the weight of political imaginaries opposing Western order and technology to Cambodian chaos and passivity.⁶¹

In *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, the reviewer Thomas Roma went further, and questioned the process of photography editing itself:

How could someone look at 6,000 of these images and make decisions about which 100 to print? I found myself asking: Whose portrait was good enough to make the cut? By what measure? When I discussed these questions with Todd Gitlin, a professor of culture, journalism, and sociology at New York University and a columnist for *The New York Observer*, he compared the prospect of selecting which images to print and display to having to decide who was going to live or die.⁶²

In an unexpected application of the *reductio ad hitlerum* principle, Paul Williams followed in Roma's footsteps and compared the process of selecting twenty-two photos for the exhibition to "Nazi practices of separating for disposal unfit concentration-camp prisoners."⁶³ This demonstrated the reviewers' ignorance of—and maybe lack of interest in—the conditions in which the project had been carried out. Niven and Riley could never have printed the six thousand negatives under the precarious circumstances that were theirs in Phnom Penh. Furthermore, they had to make a selection if they wanted to show the prints in public exhibitions. Where would they have found a museum capable and willing to present thousands and thousands of photos of S-21 prisoners? Not even Tuol Sleng does it.

Such reviews hint at further issues. These were effectively outlined and discussed by anthropologist Lindsay French in her essay "Exhibiting Terror" (2002). She considered that a major issue in the display at the MoMA was the loss of documentary and evidentiary value of the S-21 photos. This loss generated a problematic interpretation of the pictures: either formal and aesthetic, or heroic and allegorical—in any case, without any relationship to the particular history of the Khmer Rouge regime.⁶⁴ According to Dunlop, this amounted to a programmed political amnesia: "Showing the images in this way can also encourage us to forget what governments do in our name."⁶⁵ The question of the legitimacy of the MoMA to present the photos of S-21 prisoners was thus twofold. First it was its legitimacy as a modern art institution: Was it its role to present such images if it could not teach the history that had produced them? Second it was its legitimacy as a major American institution: Did it have a special responsibility talking about the role of the United States in the Cambodian tragedy? To the European reader, the self-referential aspect of the latter part of the discussion is striking. The debate, it turns out, shifted away from Cambodian memory toward America's expiation of her political and military sins. No doubt the MoMA should have mentioned the massive carpet-bombing of Cambodia by the U.S. Army and how it helped the Khmer Rouge rise

⁶¹ Hughes, "The Abject Artifacts of Memory," 36, 33.

⁶² Thomas Roma, "Looking into the Face of Our Own Worst Fears through Photographs." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 31, 1997.

⁶³ Paul Williams, "Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 245.

⁶⁴ French, "Exhibiting Terror," 138.

⁶⁵ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 167.

to power. But then, it should also have mentioned—to be historically fair—the undying support of China to Pol Pot, the cunning politics of Thailand, the weakness of the UN, and the involvement of Western European governments in Khmer Rouge warfare against the successor state, the PRK. In other words, it should have constructed the exhibition as crash course into Cold War geopolitics.

The decision of the MoMA curators to go for a de-contextualized and universal interpretation of the photos of S-21 prisoners appears, against this backdrop, more understandable. But it raises another issue: What space did the museum make for Cambodians in the exhibition? None, it seems. This, according to French, was the biggest failure of the MoMA. The curators showed no consideration for the Khmer community. They did not consult anyone. They did not take into account the possible reactions of Cambodian visitors to the exhibition. French recounts that when the collection of the Photo Archive Group was shown in Boston a woman recognized her husband in one of the pictures. She had been separated from him at the beginning of the Khmer Rouge regime. She did not know that he had been in S-21 and that he was dead. “Apparently, the curators of the MoMA show did not imagine this exhibition might be problematic for Cambodians, or else they did not expect any serious protest.”⁶⁶ The lack of interaction of the MoMA with a group concerned in the first place by *Facing Death* did not only lay bare the working of museum politics. It also demonstrated, quite tellingly, that Cambodians were not strong enough (yet) to be heard in the loud and busy game of community politics. The comparison with the Jewish American community was a matter of course for many observers. “If Holocaust photos were displayed without any real context in an art museum, would we find that morally acceptable?” asked Jeff Yang, publisher of the national bimonthly of Asian American culture *A. Magazine*.⁶⁷ “Would Holocaust survivors allow pictures of Nazi terror to be presented in the same way?” Dunlop wondered.⁶⁸

The failure of the exhibition was also blamed on Niven and Riley. “They assumed a certain responsibility when they became the international stewards of these photos over which they have chosen to assert only limited control.” The two photographers, who had no experience of the art world, put themselves in the hands of people whose agenda concerning photography was completely distinct from theirs. They relinquished their responsibility and let the MoMA team make decisions for them, even if those decisions were likely to end up in a bad exhibition, French assessed.⁶⁹ This indeed is open to discussion. Niven considers that “the effect of walking into that room and being confronted with these faces was probably one of the most effective exhibitions of these prints ever, and also very emotional.” Nevertheless, both he and Riley were disappointed that the MoMA did not present more photos.⁷⁰ They certainly could have been more insistent on some aspects of the exhibition. For instance, although they had provided MoMA’s photography curator Adrienne Williams with the names of five identified

⁶⁶ French, “Exhibiting Terror,” 148, 143.

⁶⁷ Quoted by Trebay, “The Killing Fields of Vision,” 1997.

⁶⁸ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 167.

⁶⁹ French, “Exhibiting Terror,” 145.

⁷⁰ Doug Niven, personal communication, 9-10 December 2013.

victims, these were not included in the display.⁷¹ It was a typical double-bind situation. Niven and Riley should have “protected” the photos by imposing conditions regarding the display. Yet, had they dictated a way to present the photos in public settings, they would have been criticized for taking control over them. This shows the complexity of the decision-making process in which the two men were engaged, caught between the possibility of reaching out to a wide audience through an emblematic art institution on the one hand, and compromise about a display reduced to the bare minimum on the other hand. The MoMA exhibition revealed the fragility of Niven and Riley’s position as cultural brokers of Cambodian memory in the West.

The questionable legitimacy of the museum in holding *Facing Death* was the door open to questions about the legitimacy of Niven and Riley themselves—an issue that did not arise, I believe, in any other presentation of the collection. Of course, not all reviews were negative.⁷² Still, the show at the MoMA was turned over the next couple of years into a textbook case for what *not* to do with the prints. This made the following move of Niven and Riley even more problematic:

Although motivated initially by a desire to save the precious negatives from destruction, Riley's and Niven's ensuing decision to sell art-quality portfolios of 100 prints from the Tuol Sleng archive, and to obtain international copyright on them for their recently incorporated non-profit, raises serious questions. “Photographs furnish evidence,” as Susan Sontag once observed. The pictures from Tuol Sleng are the sole remaining evidence of 6,000 human lives. Can anyone truly own them?⁷³

Journalist Guy Trebay refers here to Niven and Riley putting on the back of the prints the name of the Photo Archive Group and a copyright mark, and selling several prints to the MoMA, the Museum of Los Angeles County Museum, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1997-1998). To those whose suspicions had been aroused at first by the copyrighting, this was the confirmation that the two men had been seeking personal profit with the project. Not at all, Maguire countered, the sale had to do with covering the debts they had accumulated in Phnom Penh, not with any commercial interest.⁷⁴ The Photo Archive Group did not make a penny on it. The money went to reimbursement, servicing the collection (maintenance), and a charity organization in Cambodia. Although Niven discarded it as “petty squabble,” the “copyright debate” clearly hit a raw nerve.⁷⁵ It demonstrated once again the confusion over the question of ownership as legal issues were muddled with moral ones. The Ministry of Culture in Cambodia had granted the Photo Archive Group rights over one hundred prints. This did not mean it had given Niven and Riley copyrights over the negatives, which remained under the strict control of the Cambodian government. In that respect, accusations that the two Americans tried to

⁷¹ Sarah Munro, “Exhibition Atrocity: A Preliminary Exhibition for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre’s State Identification Card Portrait Collection” (master’s diss., Ryerson University, 2009), 49.

⁷² Michael Kimmelman, “Poignant Faces of the Soon-to-be-Dead,” *The New York Times*, June 20, 1997 and “Hypnotized by Mug Shots That Stare Back: Are They Windows or Mirrors?” *The New York Times*, August 27, 1997.

⁷³ Trebay, “The Killing Fields of Vision.”

⁷⁴ Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia*, 151.

⁷⁵ Falby, “Who Owns the Tuol Sleng Photos?”

limit the access to the S-21 photos were irrelevant. Anyone can access images of Tuol Sleng victims (in the museum, online, and so on). As for the negatives, those who control access to them are the museum and its patron the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. Putting a copyright mark on the back of the prints was perhaps not the most elegant gesture (and selling prints to art museums even less). Still, legally speaking, Niven and Riley were authorized to do so.

A comment by Niven to the journalist Patrick Falby hints at something more: “[That was] so we could get some recognition for the hard work we did.”⁷⁶ This explains, perhaps more than misguided suspicions about their intentions, why copyrights remained for Niven and Riley so sensitive an issue. Chea Sopheara said that Niven and Riley had exploited the pictures.⁷⁷ Youk Chhang declared to Rachel Hughes: “In Cambodia, the Tuol Sleng photo archive project is considered by some as having wrongly wrestled control of the artifacts (and their use) from Cambodians.”⁷⁸ This was somewhat unfair because without the work accomplished by Niven and Riley in 1993-1995, the Tuol Sleng archive would certainly have ended up in a worse state (a fact Chea Sopheara concurred with in the interview he gave to Falby). It also dismissed the concern of Niven and Riley for researching the archive and interviewing S-21 survivors and former guards.⁷⁹ Both men, and their volunteers, had given much of their time to it. In 1994 Riley and Maguire traveled to Ho Chi Minh City to meet with Mai Lam and ask him, unsuccessfully, what had happened to the nine thousand other negatives in Tuol Sleng. Maguire pursued the inquiry in Germany in 1995 when he had the opportunity to interview filmmaker Gerhard Scheumann and get some information about the negatives he and his partner Walter Heynowski (former Studio H&S in East Germany) had borrowed when filming in Tuol Sleng in 1980.⁸⁰ The project of Niven and Riley was more than cleaning and cataloguing the negatives, and showing prints abroad. The Photo Archive Group fixed something that was in flux and gave it a form (the consultable catalogues containing the six thousand negatives) that made it possible to conduct further research about S-21 victims. Denying this aspect in favor of an easy moralization of their later actions gives only a very partial view of what Niven and Riley tried to do in and for Cambodia.

4. The story of Nhem En, from S-21 photographer to “artist”

During all these years, there was someone in Cambodia whose life was being directly affected by the project of the Photo Archive Group. This was former Khmer Rouge Nhem En (figure 9). Until he surrendered to government forces in 1996, no one knew the identity of the members of S-21 photography subunit. Riley said, “some survivors

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Hughes, “The Abject Artifacts of Memory.” 33. In an interview with Michelle Caswell on January 9, 2012, Youk Chhang said that the members of the Photo Archive Group even tried to sell copies of the photos to the DC-Cam. Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable*, 75.

⁷⁹ In the foreword to *A Cambodian Prison Portrait: One Year in the Khmer Rouge’s S-21* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1998), Sara Colm writes that it was Riley who first encouraged Vann Nath to put his memories to paper.

⁸⁰ Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia*, 85-97.

vaguely remembered a guy who took pictures—quite a decent man, it seems, who would slip prisoners water when the guards weren't looking.”⁸¹ Niven was the first to discover who En really was. He came across an article in *The Phnom Penh Post* about a Khmer Rouge defector who said he had trained as a photographer in China. “Niven had always suspected the Tuol Sleng photographer had foreign training. ‘We’d even thought that a Chinese adviser had helped them get started, as the work they did there was technically very good—good exposures, good processing’.”⁸² Niven contacted En in January 1997. He and historian David Chandler made the first interview of the Khmer Rouge photographer shortly afterward.⁸³ The reappearance of En enabled researchers to learn more about the functioning of S-21, especially the photography subunit. At the time Duch was still hiding under a false identity in Samlaut in northwestern Cambodia where he worked for the Christian aid agency World Vision International. He would be discovered (by Nic Dunlop with the assistance of American journalist Nate Thayer) only in 1999.

Fragments of Nhem En’s life were progressively pieced together. He was born in 1959 (or 1961) in a poor farmer family from Kompong Cham. His mother died when he was two. His father struggled to raise eight boys. En and his brothers joined the Khmer Rouge at the beginning of the civil war. For two years he served as a food transporter. He also worked for the National United Music, a group of young boys and girls who performed at victor celebrations in the liberated zones. He was moved to a combat unit in 1973. After April 1975 En worked as a messenger delivering communications by bicycle between Ta Khmau prison on the city outskirts and Monivong hospital in Phnom Penh. It was there that he met Duch for the first time (or so he says).⁸⁴ In 1976 En was chosen with forty other boys to study in China. He stayed six months in Shanghai, training in photography, printing, filmmaking, and map-making.⁸⁵ Upon his return in Cambodia he began to work at S-21 photography subunit.⁸⁶ He stayed there until January 1979. He claims he was chief photographer in charge of five apprentices.⁸⁷ En often mentions in interviews that he got the job because he was hard working and honest and possessed the correct family background. Yet, even devoted workers risked their life in Tuol Sleng. En told Chandler that he came under suspicion in December 1977. He was sent to a reeducation camp on the accusation of doctoring photos of Pol Pot’s visit in Beijing (October 1977). He was freed a few weeks later when it was discovered that the flaw was

⁸¹ P. Jacobson, “The Photographer of Death,” *Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, 1998.

⁸² Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 154.

⁸³ Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia*, 108.

⁸⁴ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 157.

⁸⁵ In his memoir, Nhem En writes that he was chosen with 141 children out of a group of two thousand for additional skills training in China on the order of Son Sen. Nhem En, *Personal Memoir: Nhem En, the Khmer Rouge’s Photographer at S-21, Under the Khmer Rouge Genocide* (Cambodia: self-published, 2015), 17. When En testified at the ECCC in April 2016, Nuon Chea defense counsel Victor Koppe, referring to the testimony of Duch on the subject, contested that the photographer even went to China. Testimony of Nhem En, ECCC, April 19, 2016.

⁸⁶ The other members of S-21 photography subunit were Nhim Kim Sreang, Song, Nith (Nyt), Sam, and Ry, as cited in Nhem En, *Personal Memoir*, 33.

⁸⁷ It was in fact Nhim Kim Sreang. Asked at the ECCC why he had declared that he was S-21 chief photographer, Nhem En answered that “he was more specialized in photography than the others.” He maintained that he had studied photography in China, and rejected the declaration of Sreang that En was his apprentice. Testimony of Nhem En, ECCC, April 20, 2016.

in the Chinese negatives.⁸⁸ When the Vietnamese took over Phnom Penh in January 1979, En retreated to the jungle with other Khmer Rouge cadre. He was assigned to taking photos for the newsletter the Party of Democratic Kampuchea circulated in the areas under its control. The post-defection “career change” of En was a model in itself. The man showed a remarkable capacity to carve out a place for himself in post-conflict Cambodia. After struggling for years as a photographer and a businessman of sorts selling Khmer Rouge artifacts, he was finally appointed deputy governor of the former Khmer Rouge stronghold Anlong Veng in the district in Oddar Meanchey—a position he occupied until 2014.

The relationship between the Photo Archive Group and Nhem En is best understood as a form of mutual dynamics. On the one hand, the project of Niven and Riley put En in the spotlight. The photos prepared the ground for him in terms of public interest. On the other hand, En added an unexpected layer to the project of the Americans. At last there was an identified photographer. More even, he was a figure who could easily crystallize fascination and revulsion. The Western press rushed to him. En quickly understood how to play the media game and became his own impresario. Many interviewers, scholars and reporters alike, stress the greed of the ex-Khmer Rouge, always asking his interlocutors for introductions and money. When Maguire met En (for the second time) in 1999, the latter tried to sell him Khmer Rouge memorabilia. These were photos of Pol Pot and Nuon Chea’s daily life in their jungle bases and in Thailand. Thinking he could donate them to the DC-Cam, Maguire bought the pictures. He required the copyrights and original negatives, and was pleasantly surprised when En supplied them without any difficulty. A few months later Maguire discovered the same photos published in a newspaper. En had given him only copies of the negatives.⁸⁹ Before he went to interview En in 2001, a Cambodian friend warned Dunlop: “He’s very talkative but when the interview is over he changes. He wants money.” The former Khmer Rouge first asked Dunlop for three hundred dollars for an hour of his time. “He knew what he was worth,” Dunlop comments. He also knew where to stop. Dunlop managed to bargain him down to fifty dollars.⁹⁰ The journalist John Maloy, well aware of the reputation of En as “a man who doggedly pursues money,” was less successful than his colleague. He had to pay two hundred dollars for an interview.⁹¹

Who was Nhem En? Did he feel any remorse or guilt for what he did? These questions were at the core of the journalists’ inquiries. The more they tried to figure him out, the more elusive the S-21 photographer became. In a 1997 interview Tuol Sleng survivor Vann Nath had described him as “a fine young man, very gentle, not cruel like the others.”⁹² En gave some interviewers the impression that the teenage boy turned cog in the wheel in the terror system could still be reached deep down inside his grown-up version, and that he kept carrying the burden of his actions. Times and again he told that there was not much he could do when he worked in S-21, even if he wanted to. One day, he recognized behind the lens a cousin from his home village, accused of “being CIA” (a

⁸⁸ Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 28.

⁸⁹ Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia*, 150-151.

⁹⁰ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 153-155.

⁹¹ John Maloy and Pin Sisovann, “S-21 Photographer Has a New Vision: KR Tourism,” *The Cambodia Daily*, March 1, 2009.

⁹² Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia*, 113.

traitor in the pay of the Americans). But he did not say a word and just clicked. He confided to Associated Press journalist Robin McDowell that he went back to Tuol Sleng [after his defection] “to see if I could find [my cousin’s] picture, but it was missing. Being there made me feel very, very sad.”⁹³ This is consistent with what Youk Chhang, the director of the DC-Cam, thinks of S-21 photographers: “[They] did not kill anybody and, probably, they did not beat anybody, but I think, morally, they live in guilt.”⁹⁴ At the same time, En was a Khmer Rouge hardliner who had been indoctrinated since his childhood. One could not rule out that he still held on his convictions and simply adjusted his discourse to circumstances, saying what he believed people wanted to hear from him. Interviewing En for the first time in 1997, Maguire was struck by the former Khmer Rouge’s “well practiced denials.”⁹⁵ Denial may be construed as a sign of traumatic repression, but this is not how Maguire interpreted it: “Above all, he seemed pretty secure, even smug, for someone who had been at the heart of horror, taking photos for the afterlife.”⁹⁶ Niven, who had several long discussions with the former Khmer Rouge, remembers that questions about his work at S-21 made him uneasy:

As far as I’m aware, En has never shown any remorse for what he was doing at Tuol Sleng, which I find pretty disturbing. On the other hand, I’m certain he understands that his role in the genocide is quite likely to come for examination one day and that makes him very wary.⁹⁷

Film director Steven Okazaki who made the movie *The Conscience of Nhem En* in 2008 says the same:

I asked him numerous times: “Did you ever just give these people a sympathetic look as if to say ‘I’m sorry’,” and he said, “Absolutely not. Why should I?” I found that disturbing. He appears to be a friendly, gentlemanly guy, but that’s just on the surface. Underneath, he’s a soulless, cold person.⁹⁸

“I’m living history,” En declared once.⁹⁹ Why would he think otherwise? Are these not his photos that hang on the walls of the most visited museum in Cambodia and that are re-photographed by thousands of tourists every year? Are these not his photos that are shown in exhibitions worldwide, preserved in archives of American universities, and commented upon in photography and art journals?

When En saw the beautifully produced book of his photographs from Tuol Sleng, says Niven, you could see him figuring out if there was going to be anything in this for him.

⁹³ Robin McDowell, “Cambodian Photographer Recalls Victims of the Khmer Rouge,” *Daily News*, February 9, 1997.

⁹⁴ Quoted by Chris Decherd, “Photographer of Death Poses Moral Quandary for Cambodians,” *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*, May 12, 2001.

⁹⁵ Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia*, 124.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Quoted by Jacobson, “The Photographer of Death.”

⁹⁸ Quoted by Hugh Hart, “A Photographer with No Soul,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 14, 2009.

⁹⁹ Thomas Bell, “Chilling Start to Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” *The Telegraph*, November 1, 2007.

His new life was hard, he told Niven, describing how the present Cambodian government had trained him to recruit other defectors in a distant province where he lived in an old wooden house with a tin roof and a battery-powered television set.¹⁰⁰

En understood from the start that the work of the Photo Archive Group could affect his life at many levels. Changes over the years in his discourse about the photos and himself as photographer show how each new phase in the project of Niven and Riley reflected onto En's self-perception and status. Asked by Dunlop in 2001 "how he wanted people to react when confronted with his photographs in New York," he answered:

"Firstly... they should thank me. Some people sold these images and some made news out of them to make money. For me, when they see that the pictures are nice and clear, they'd admire the photographer's skill." As he talked he became more animated, his mood changed. "None have any technical errors. Secondly, they would feel pity and compassion towards the prisoners." He thought for a moment and then corrected himself. "Firstly, that they feel pity for the prisoners in the pictures, who are all dead; secondly, they'd say the photographer could take very nice shots."¹⁰¹

His statement to Thomas Bell from *The Telegraph* a few years later was quite a leap forward: "Calling me an artist is kind of correct. As a photographer you try to make it look good."¹⁰² What did En call "being an artist"? Did he consider himself one because his photos had been acquired by prestigious museums? Did he rather refer to the technical and visual qualities of his pictures, demonstrating the "beau métier" in which he took pride?¹⁰³ Concepts of vernacular and artistic photography were certainly not part of his daily routine. Still, there was a notion that was not lost on him, namely intellectual property. "My photos are famous around the world but no-one ever thinks of my copyrights."¹⁰⁴ Why should he not make a profit from his own photos? "I cannot say right now if I will sell the photographs or not," he told Ann Hyland from the *South China Morning Post*. "I will have to get permission from the government and if they say I can sell them, then of course I will sell them." Did he feel he had gone too far? Over the course of the interview with Hyland, En changed his mind several times. First, he said he would seek advice of fellow journalists and photographers as to whether it was the right or wrong thing to do. Then he backpedaled and claimed that he would never sell photos of S-21 prisoners, only those of top Khmer Rouge leaders.¹⁰⁵

Was it just empty talk? In 2007 En was trying to embody a new persona, the good guy on the way to redemption. In January that same year, during a media roundtable organized for the occasion at the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh, he apologized to his compatriots: "I would like (...) to say sorry to all the victims of the genocide. I hope all the spirits of the victims are able to rest in peace." American ambassador Joseph

¹⁰⁰ Jacobson, "The Photographer of Death."

¹⁰¹ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 168.

¹⁰² Bell, "Chilling Start to Khmer Rouge Tribunal."

¹⁰³ Nhem En declares that his photos were "about 95% accurate and without mistakes. The other five percent turned out badly because prisoners moved or closed their eyes while I was pressing the button." Nhem En, *Personal Memoir*, 39.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Anne Hyland, "A Grim Picture," *South China Morning Post*, February 1, 2007.

Mussomeli shook hands with the former Khmer Rouge and said that he set “a good example.” Youk Chhang was positive about it: “I admire [Nhem En’s] courage of doing something, if not for all, for himself. If his apology can make a difference among even ten people, then it’s worth it.”¹⁰⁶ Redemption, though, had its limits. En could have donated his collection of photos of Khmer Rouge leaders to the DC-Cam as a symbolic gesture. But the DC-Cam has a policy of not paying for the material it collects, and En had anyhow another plan in mind. He was set on opening a Khmer Rouge museum where he would present his photos and other DK memorabilia, including Pol Pot’s sandals and hats and a replica of Khmer Rouge’s collective farms.¹⁰⁷ So far, the project has not come to fruition, and En seems now to pursue another path.

The project of the Photo Archive Group, among other factors, stimulated Nhem En to rethink his position from perpetrator to custodian of memory. To some extent it changed the S-21 photographer’s perception of his actions. “The world should thank me for my work,” En told Akazaki, adding that “his photos are the reason that the world cares one jot about Cambodia and the suffering it went through.”¹⁰⁸ In the end what he produced was not a record of extermination but the last memory of the prisoners. Of course one might see it as a cynical twist in the story. At the same time, without over-psychologizing the situation, one might also consider that the project of the Photo Archive Group helped En recode his actions and provided him with a means to escape his guilt about the past. On a more prosaic level the project of the Photo Archive Group showed En the functioning of transnational memory dynamics. The S-21 photographer understood how strongly people were attracted to traumatic history. What worked in other parts of the world could work in Cambodia as well. “Like Hitler died a hundred years ago, yet there are still a lot of people go to see the place where he died,” En said. “So why not Cambodia? The Khmer Rouge regime just recently ended.”¹⁰⁹ The appeal of dark tourism to so many people, especially foreigners, was a revelation for En. One just needs to milk these potential customers ready to buy mass-produced archetypical Khmer Rouge black clothes and sandals or copies of DK songs.¹¹⁰ In that respect, En mimicked what he saw working on a bigger scale. The Cambodian government supplies an endless source of inspiration in that matter.¹¹¹ But as En recently learned it the hard way, authorities prefer to be in control and do not always welcome individual players. In January 2015 he published with the assistance of survivor Dara Duong his “personal memoir,” *Nhem En: The Khmer Rouge’s Photographer at S-21*, which he plans to translate into seventeen languages (figure 10).¹¹² Claiming that he too was a victim of DK, he tried to obtain a

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Lindsay Murdoch, “‘Gentle, Intelligent’ Man Turned Tyrant: Photographer Plans Pol Pot Memorial,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 7, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Maloy and Pin, “S-21 Photographer Has a New Vision.”

¹⁰⁹ Sam Rith, “Former S-21 Photographer Revisits Old Plan to Build a Khmer Rouge Heritage Museum,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, July 14, 2009.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ For instance, the government had great plans of historical tourism for the development of the Anlong Veng area (the last Khmer Rouge stronghold). See: Timothy Dylan Wood, “Touring memories of the Khmer Rouge,” in *Expressions of Cambodia. The Politics of Tradition, Identity, and Change*, Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier and Tim Winter, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹¹² Testimony of Nhem En, ECCC, April 19, 2016.

stall at Tuol Sleng next to S-21 survivors Chum Mey and Bou Meng's to sell his book. In February 2015 the Ministry of Culture banned him from doing so, arguing that his claims to victimhood were "dubious" and his book may contain plagiarized photos since he was not the sole photographer at S-21.¹¹³

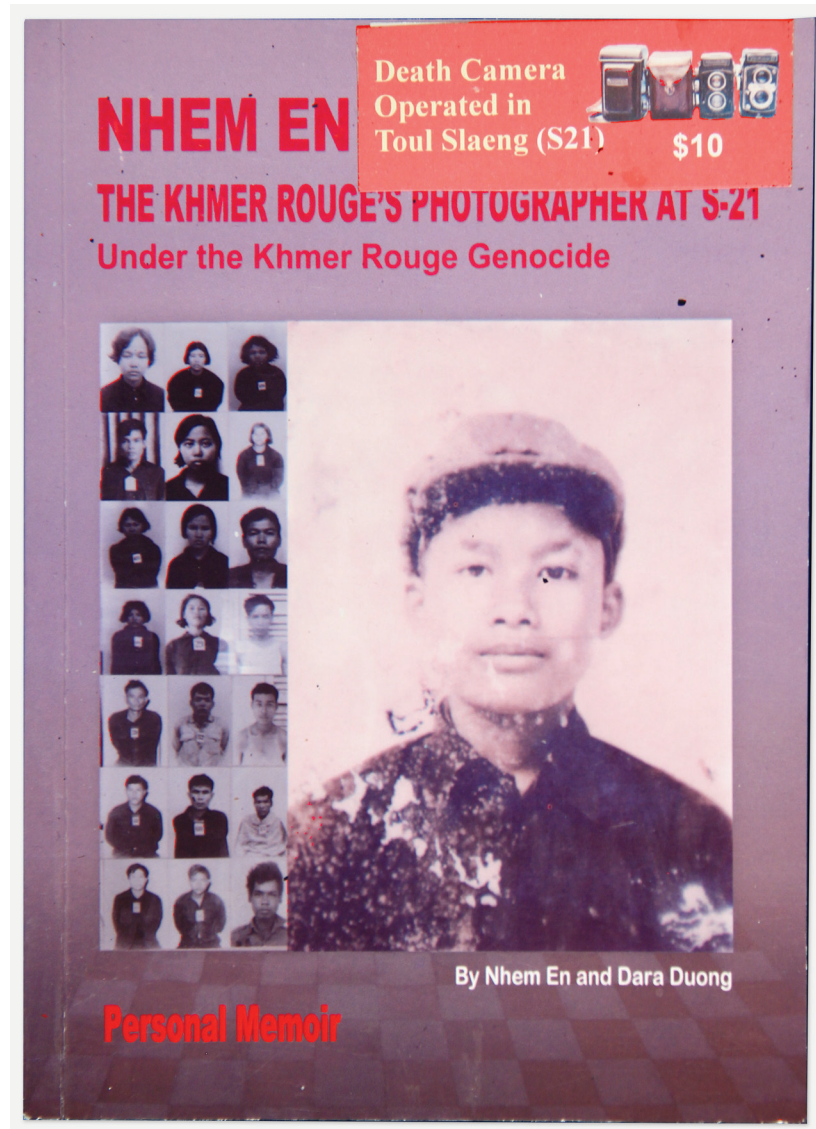


Figure 10: Cover of Nhem En, *Personal Memoir* (Cambodia, 2015).
Source: personal documentation.

The fact En tries to occupy so central a position in the transmission of memory, even claiming a status of victim for himself, is a disturbing thought. Yet, he is not the only one. Other former Khmer Rouge (who made themselves more palatable than boasting and

¹¹³ Vong Sokheng, "S-21's En to Release Memoir," *The Phnom Penh Post*, December 30, 2014. Khuon Narim, "S-21 Photographer's Book Sales Banned at Museum," *The Cambodia Daily*, March 6, 2015. I thank Anne Laure Porée for drawing my attention to these recent developments in the story of Nhem En.

clumsy Nhem En) are in charge of writing the history of DK. The competition may be hard, but En has an advantage. He knows that his photos are a valuable currency and he can negotiate business and reputation through them. He skillfully exploits the small “fame” his interviews with foreign journalists had brought him as well as the access he had gained to media over years of interaction with interlocutors from all over the world. This is not a guarantee of success though. His applications to international funds for his museum have often been turned down.¹¹⁴ Still, a Google search with the terms “Nhem En” gives a few thousand hits (including Nhem En’s own website). Even if only a small part of these results actually concerns him, this is by far more than any other middle-rank Khmer Rouge could ever claim.

5. The collection of the Photo Archive Group (2009-the present day)

In the late nineties Niven and Riley “were in a position to arrange exhibitions internationally while Cambodian officials were not.”¹¹⁵ When the touring of *Facing Death* resumed in the late 2000s, the situation had changed dramatically. Over time authoritative voices had emerged in Cambodia and were now in a position to mediate their own history on the international scene. Concurrently, the photos of S-21 prisoners had become familiar to a widening circle of people. The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is a tourist hotspot. No one staying in Phnom Penh for a few days will leave the city without visiting it and posting photos or videos of the place on social media. The prosecution of former S-21 commander Comrade Duch at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in 2009-2010 was another important element. Journalists often included images of Tuol Sleng and interviews with S-21 survivors when covering the trial. Rithy Panh’s movie *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003) also played a determining role. First better known in France, it gained momentum over the years, being screened in numerous festival all over the world. This created a whole new environment for looking at the photos of S-21 prisoners, hence for presenting the prints of the Photo Archive Group. The three exhibitions that will be studied now in detail reflect contrasted perspectives on Niven and Riley’s project. Each reinterprets earlier controversies in a specific way. This provides a multifaceted approach to what showing the Photo Archive Group’s collection means today.

5.1 *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia’s Killing Fields*, Photofusion, London (2009)

It was at the gallery Photofusion in London that the first exhibition of the Photo Archive Group’s collection took place after a gap of several years. *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia’s Killing Fields* was on display from May 1 through June 26, 2009. Photofusion was originally the Photo Co-Op founded in 1979 by a collective of documentary photographers interested in social and communal issues. First installed in Wandsworth (South London), the Co-Op re-located in Brixton in 1991. Under its new name (Photofusion) it developed into a large photography resource center, hosting a

¹¹⁴ Rith, “Former S-21 Photographer Revisits Old Plan.”

¹¹⁵ French, “Exhibiting Terror,” 144.

gallery and equipped photo studios. Today it keeps running community outreach projects, working with socially and culturally marginalized people.

The curator of *Facing Death* Paul Ellis, a photographer himself, had heard about the photos of S-21 prisoners for the first time in the mid-nineties from Nic Dunlop as the two men traveled together in and around the Thai/Burma border for their work. He kept track of the project of the Photo Archive Group ever since. The year 2009 seemed to him the right moment for presenting the photos in London. “It was thirty years since the Khmer Rouge were driven from power and it was also the beginning of the trial of Duch, the ex-head of S-21.”¹¹⁶ He contacted the Photo Archive Group.¹¹⁷ After they checked the intentions of Photofusion, they gave Ellis the same freedom as the curators who had previously exhibited the collection. They had “no particular stipulations other than to use the supplied mattes.”

Ellis was concerned with creating a proper presentation for the photos, as they had never been shown in the UK until then. He was “acutely aware” of the discussion raised by previous exhibitions, especially the one at the MoMA.

I remember endless references to the damaged parts of the images, which printed black, to be metaphors for blood and violence. I distinctly remember one image of a young man with a number pinned to his chest being compared to Christian images of Saint Sebastian (the number was in fact taped to the young man’s chest) and numerous other examples whereby the politics that caused these images to be made was almost forgotten.¹¹⁸

Ellis did his best not to aestheticize the presentation. Instead he tried to create a didactic environment for the photos, and dedicated two out of the six walls in the gallery space to texts. Large panels were prominently displayed so that visitors could read them easily. They included maps, historical and political information, for instance on the Vietnam War and the colonial past of Cambodia as French protectorate. One panel described how the photos of S-21 prisoners had been rescued and archived by the Photo Archive Group. It explained how many negatives had survived and that the *Facing Death* exhibition was just of a selection. Ellis considered that it was his curatorial duty to give visitors as much information as possible about the pictures. The duty of the viewer, on the other hand, was to read it. Voyeurism, Ellis felt, was too easy an argument, often used by people who did not make the effort to inform themselves about the historical circumstances of the photos.¹¹⁹ Photofusion also organized several movie screenings. The program included: the BBC documentary *Secrets of S-21: Legacy of a Cambodian Prison*, the well-known movie *The Killing Fields* (Roland Joffé, 1984), Rithy Panh’s *S-21 The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, and *Year Zero: Story of a Khmer Rouge Soldier* (John Severson, 2008). The gallery also linked to the play *S-27* by Sarah Grochala performed at the Finborough Theatre at the same period. The play, that had won Amnesty International’s first “Protect

¹¹⁶ Unless specified otherwise, all quotes by Paul Ellis come from personal communications to author, June 5 and 12, 2013, and November 29, 2013.

¹¹⁷ The set of prints usually exhibited belongs to Chris Riley. Niven’s set has remained idle for several years. Doug Niven, personal communication to author, December 9-10, 2013.

¹¹⁸ The comparison is Michael Kimmelman’s in his article “Hypnotized by Mug Shots.”

¹¹⁹ Paul Ellis, “*Facing Death*: Interview,” Interviews Directory, podcast audio, 2009.

the Human Playwriting Competition” in 2007, was about a woman called May charged with taking pictures of prisoners before they are executed.

Ellis “was completely aware of the possibility of the sensational and the spectacle” attached to the photos of S-21 prisoners. As someone who had witnessed atrocities in Bosnia and Rwanda, he was also “aware of how photojournalism itself had often morphed into Fine Art Photojournalism, whereby images of suffering appeared more and more in galleries and limited edition books with little or no explanatory text.” This echoed what his colleague Nic Dunlop had argued in the context of the MoMA exhibition. He too had raised the issue of the frameworks by which photojournalism is now elevated “to realms of a higher calling among the ranks of great literature, opera and fine art. Critics drape photographs of starvation in grandiloquent and generalized language and comparisons are made to the works of Goya or to Picasso’s *Guernica*.” The end result was that photos of terror and suffering “hang cleansed by the antiseptic of the art world.”¹²⁰ This did not mean, at least for Ellis, that galleries were necessarily a bad place where to show such images. In an ideal world, he said, London would have a “dedicated genocide memorial place” where photos like those of S-21 prisoners could be presented. Since such a place did not exist, it behooved other institutions to assume the role. This, however, demanded that they have a clear position toward the use of documentary photos in their space. Tellingly, Ellis invited curator and theorist Julian Stallabrass for a talk about this subject (June 11, 2009). A writer and lecturer at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and a politically engaged cultural figure (he is on the editorial board of the *New Left Review* and *Third Text*), Stallabrass had himself professional experience with photos of violence. The year before he had curated the third Brighton Photo Biennial *Memory of Fire: The War of Images and Images of War*. His concerns were very close to those of Ellis. His conception of curatorial intervention with respect to non-artistic photography was to support the photo in producing critical knowledge about the political or historical situation in which the image had been created. There was no universal reading of images but a highly contextualized environment:

A photograph of a boot stamping on a head is not an invocation of Orwell but shows a perpetrator with a name, a victim with a name, and a specific time, place, and circumstance, from which a portion of light has reflected into a lens. Is it right to handle these representations for instrumental purposes, rather than present them as what they are in themselves and with as full an elaboration of their particularities as possible?¹²¹

Images had to call to the consciousness of viewers, especially when their government had been involved with the military action leading to the act of violence depicted in the photos. This accurately reflected the position of Ellis vis-à-vis the photos of S-21 prisoners. He wanted to create a link between the events in Cambodia and the public in the UK. To do so, he had one of the most relevant guests, journalist John Pilger, who came for a Q&A on May 30, 2009. The session was preceded by the screening of two of the movies Pilger had made in Cambodia with the late David Munro: *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* (1979) and *Year One: The Effect of Aid to Cambodia and the Extent of the Country New-found Stability* (1980). According to Ellis, “to show this

¹²⁰ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 168-169.

¹²¹ Julian Stallabrass, “Rearranging Corpses, Curatorially,” *Photoworks* (2008).

documentary [*Year Zero*] and for John Pilger himself to give and talk and to answer questions really helped to politicize the exhibition.” Besides *Year Zero* and *Year One*, Pilger had made two more documentary movies, *Cambodia: Year Ten* (1989) and *Cambodia: Return to Year Zero* (1993). Thirty years after the events, the journalist was still on a mission. “His only concern was that the exhibition informed the viewer about the politics and history that led to the Genocide and the aftermath of the Genocide,” Ellis says. During the Q&A, Pilger detailed the role Western powers had played in the region after the collapse of DK. According to Ellis, this came as a shock for the audience as few knew that:

Their government at the time, the first Thatcher government not only recognized Pol Pot’s man at the UN (and didn’t recognize the newly installed Cambodian government) but also sent special forces troops to Pol Pot in order to help train the Khmer Rouge.

Pilger has written at length about the role of the British government in the protracted civil war between the PRK and the Khmer Rouge. The first reports about the involvement of soldiers from the highly secretive Special Air Services (SAS) training Khmer Rouge guerrillas had appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* written by the newspaper’s defense correspondent Simon O’Dwyer-Russell. The information was first buried but resurfaced in the military journal *Jane Defence’s Weekly*. It revealed that troops were “all veterans of the Falklands conflict” and the first operations were conducted in Siem Reap province in August 1986.¹²² The controversy erupted in London after Pilger’s film *Year Ten* aired on ITV in November 1989. It condemned the recognition of the Khmer Rouge by the United Nations. The claim was backed by five major British agencies, including Oxfam. They sent a letter to Thatcher urging her to take firm action to challenge the international support to the Khmer Rouge.¹²³ The movie was shown in thirty-six countries throughout 1989. The public response was such that governments, in Sweden or Australia for instance, had to change their supportive stance toward the Khmer Rouge. Pilger and Munro had made decades ago the commitment to “telling Cambodia’s story until the world repays its blood debt.”¹²⁴ It was a done deed at Photofusion. Ellis was not the first curator to tackle Cold War issues when presenting the collection of the Photo Archive Group. But he was certainly the first one to engage so frontally with ideological questions. This was due in part to the mission and interests of Photofusion. It was also that in the 2000s, in the post-Cold War environment, many people in the audience had no point of reference whatsoever regarding debates in the sixties and seventies about the Indochina Wars, American imperialism, and the effect of the Sino-Soviet conflict on the Western Left at the time. The intervention of someone like Pilger, a witness and active participant in the events, made this past burst in the present. It both created a direct link with the history of Cambodia and encouraged the public to question the role of the British government in more recent conflicts.

¹²² John Pilger, *Distant Voices* (London: Vintage Books, 1994 [1992]), 414.

¹²³ Harish C. Mehta, *Cambodia Silenced. The Press under Six Regimes* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1997), 174.

¹²⁴ Pilger, *Distant Voices*, 403.

5.2 *10,000 Lives*, the 8th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2010)

The 8th Gwangju Biennale *10,000 Lives* that took place in South Korea from September 3 through November 7, 2010 was a total change of scene for the collection of the Photo Archive Group (figures 11-12). The Biennale's director was the Italian Massimiliano Gioni, superstar curator in today's global art market.¹²⁵ With works by 134 artists (which meant a total of nine thousand pieces produced between 1901 and 2010) *10,000 Lives* was a "mammoth exhibition."¹²⁶ It spread across three venues: the Gwangju Biennale Hall, the Gwangju Museum of Art, and the Gwangju Folk Museum. Finding the photos of S-21 prisoners in such an environment is at first sight surprising. After all, neither the Photo Archive Group members nor Nhem En are artists. This indeed was precisely what had attracted Gioni. The Biennale, the latter explained, explored "the relationships that bind people to images and images to people."¹²⁷ The theme, it seems, goes far beyond the art historical realm. Yet, one should not be mistaken: *10,000 Lives* was perhaps one of the most self-reflexive art events produced in the 2000s. This prompts the question what interpretation the photos of S-21 prisoners were given in so specific a context.

The collection of the Photo Archive Group was presented under the title *Tuol Sleng Prison Photographs* in the Gallery 3 of the Gwangju Biennale Hall. In the introduction text for the guidebook assistant curator Chris Wiley declares:

The ethical complexity of these images makes such presentations difficult as some critics object to their inclusion in art exhibitions. The concern that such images will be viewed as art and that their historical context will be obscured is largely misplaced: although they are documents of the Khmer Rouge's brutal campaign of genocide, the images radiate a potent sense of their subjects' suffering in the face of unspeakable injustice.¹²⁸

That was on the paper. But how did it look in the physical space? The works displayed in adjacent rooms helped create around the Photo Archive Group's collection the "correct" environment, focused on war, violence, and memory. There was a minimalist sculpture-installation by American artist Carl Andre entitled *War and Rumors of War* (2002). The installation *2009-05-02* (2009) by Chinese artist Gu Dexin showed a row of painted panels with texts in blood-red Chinese characters reading short sentences like "WE KILLED HUMANS," "WE ATE HUMAN HEARTS." The video *Unforgettable Memory* (2009) by Chinese artist Liu Wei dealt with the memory of the student revolt at Tiananmen in 1989. The last work was *Historic Photographs* (1994-) by famous art-world figure Gustav Metzger, a mixed media installation based on enlarged photos of traumatic historical events. In this case, the iconic image was that of the young boy raising his hands during the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. Was it enough? For one critic at least, the answer was no. In his review of the Biennale, Ben Davis argued that the

¹²⁵ He is currently associate director and director of exhibitions at the New Museum in New York City and artistic director of the Nicola Trussardi Foundation based in Milan.

¹²⁶ Roberta Tenconi, "10,000 Lives, Gwangju Biennale 2010," *Domus*, September 23, 2010.

¹²⁷ Gwangju Biennale, *Guidebook of 10,000 Lives: 8th Gwangju Biennale* (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale Foundation, 2010), 1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 80.

only space where the “slippery syncretism” of Gioni became “perilous” was the Gallery 3, due in part to the presence of the collection of the Photo Archive Group.¹²⁹

Reviewing the Biennale for the art magazine *Frieze*, Christy Lange writes that the photos of S-21 prisoners were “the most controversial inclusion” in the Biennale. More than this, they were a “controversial inclusion” that already had some history in the world of art—the exhibition at the MoMA.¹³⁰ This was the only show Wiley mentioned in his introductory text. That the Photo Archive Group’s collection had been presented in twenty or so institutions since 1997 was apparently not relevant to the Biennale’s curatorial team. Nor was the discussion about the different ways to contextualize this specific photographic material. In that respect it was telling that the Tuol Sleng mug shot chosen to illustrate the Biennale’s guidebook was that of the young man with a number pinned on his chest, the very one Michael Kimmelman had compared to Saint Sebastian in his *New York Times* article (1997). The discussion Gioni intended to initiate by including the *Tuol Sleng Prison Photographs* in the Biennale was clearly a discussion about art—more exactly, about art institutions.

As the MoMA is so directly referenced in *10,000 Lives*, it might be interesting to come back to one of the few art historical analyses of *Facing Death* in New York, written by Belgian art critic and historian Thierry de Duve for the art journal *October* (2008), and see how it clarifies Gioni’s enterprise in Gwangju. The labeling of art, de Duve stated, is deeply connected to the role the museum is called to play when challenged by the “vast gray zone where the boundary between art and non-art is constantly shifting and being re-negotiated on aesthetic, ideological, and institutional levels.”¹³¹ According to the art historian, the MoMA’s agenda regarding vernacular photography (the category in which the photos of S-21 prisoners were hastily put) was dictated by a situation of institutional crisis. Museums are “under threat of becoming theme parks run for profit by the private sector with the involuntary help of well-intentioned leftist scholars who see it as a victory to dissolve the singularity of ‘art’ into the heterogeneous relativity of ‘cultural practices’.” Therefore the museum needs a legitimation other than the humanist one, “one for which the S-21 photographs may provide the most adequate—because the hardest conceivable—test case.”¹³²

Fifteen years later, the collection of the Photo Archive Group played a similar role in the Gwangju Biennale. Although he never referred to any crisis, Gioni emphasized in conferences and interviews the effect of mass-produced images. He spoke of our “obsession” and “pathological fascination” with them, the “acute form of iconophilia” that characterizes our society.¹³³ The art museum had to be rescued from this visual overflow that threatened its authoritative position. *10,000 Lives* was conceived of as an answer to this situation. When elaborating the Biennale’s list of artists, Gioni dramatically expanded the common selection criteria. In this, he followed traditional museum practices. The museum institution had always appropriated non-artistic objects, especially in the West, especially in the nineteenth century. The novelty lay in Gioni conducting such a project out of the art museum and claiming a new territory for

¹²⁹ Ben Davis, “Gwangju Rules,” *Artnet Magazine*, October 19, 2010.

¹³⁰ Christy Lange, “Review 8th Gwangju Biennale,” *Frieze* no. 136, January-February 2011.

¹³¹ Thierry De Duve, “Art in the Face of Radical Evil,” *October* 125 (2008): 5.

¹³² *Ibid.* 9.

¹³³ *Guidebook*, 1.

reasserting the authority of the institution over a “deregulated” visual field. The Biennale even lost for the occasion its status of biennale as Gioni turned it into “temporary museum.”¹³⁴ The result was a “deliberately bizarre and broad selection of objects, with outside art, documentary, artifacts, found objects, and commercial photographs set alongside more conventional biennale fare.”¹³⁵ Drawings by Emma Kunz, the dolls of Morton Bartlett, and Kokdu funerary statuettes were hanging side by side with works by world-famous artists such as Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman, and Jeff Koons.¹³⁶ Among “outsider images” the photos of S-21 prisoners were certainly the most extreme case—a litmus test for the capacity of art institutions to adjust to the new conditions of visibility in the twenty-first century. The encyclopedic drive in Gioni’s undertaking—everything must be included, even the least likely—symbolized the ever-expanding expertise of the museum and its endless capacity of reconfiguration.¹³⁷ On the paper it looked like an attractive idea in tune with the Zeitgeist. In practice, it had more to do with a hegemonic move on the conservative side. Gioni did not intend to continue the postmodern deconstruction of the art museum but to reconstruct the institution on a larger basis.

In this “new” art museum Gioni created an equalizing frame for viewing the exhibited artifacts. No matter where or why they had been produced, how they were used, all were “images.” The term is not neutral, at least in critical and art theory discussions. By referring to it Gioni underlined the centrality of affect in our relation to the visual. Since the mid-nineties notions like “images of pain,” “performance of images,” and “images looking back at us” have gained momentum in the humanities and shifted the focus away from semiotics toward modes of response such as body, sensation, empathy, experience. This “affective turn,” as it is often called, was born out of a widespread dissatisfaction with post-structuralism. “We live in a world suffocated by images, and yet we still seek comfort in them: we congregate around images, adore them and crave them. We consume images and destroy them, carrying out wars in their name,” Gioni writes in the guidebook, paraphrasing the famous opening sentence of David Freedberg’s seminal book *The Power of Images*.¹³⁸ Unsurprisingly, Freedberg, one of the key thinkers of the affective turn, had a prominent place in the Biennale catalogue, alongside art historian W.J.T. Mitchell, who too had consistently challenged postmodern structures of viewing. This conceptualization situated the Biennale in a defined intellectual context, engaging theorists such as Aby Warburg, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Elaine Scarry, John Taylor, Rei Terada, Hans Belting, Susan Sontag, Brian Massumi, Jill Bennett, and Marie-José Mondzain—and fields as diverse as anthropology, medieval studies, queer theory, philosophy, Byzantine studies, cognitive sciences, media studies,

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁵ Davis, “Gwangju Rules.”

¹³⁶ Emma Kunz (1892-1963) was a Swiss medium. She produced geometric drawings and used them in healing rituals. Morton Bartlett (1909-1992) was an American commercial photographer and graphic designer. He collected dolls and used them in staged tableaux he photographed. Kokdu statuettes are small carved-wood sculptures used in Korean funerary rituals from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

¹³⁷ Gioni continued in this direction in 2013. Appointed director of the Venice Biennial, he elaborated the event around the same theme, *The Encyclopedic Palace*.

¹³⁸ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1.

art history and trauma studies. This institutional takeover was one more nail in the coffin of post-structuralism. Postmodern art had danced “on the museum’s ruins” (to draw on the art historian Douglas Crimp’s famous essay) and thoroughly unknit the power structure of the institution. With the Biennale Gioni made it clear that the party was definitely over.

The photos of S-21 prisoners, it turns out, were “hijacked” in a highbrow art debate that had little to do with the Khmer Rouge regime. This appropriation had a positive side. In her analysis of *Facing Death* at the MoMA French had stressed the potential of the photos of S-21 prisoners to make a powerful emotional connection (“to establish a human link”) precisely because they contained little information.¹³⁹ It was this potential Niven and Riley had first spotted in the photos in Tuol Sleng, and which, they believed, would help Westerners relate more strongly to the tragedy of Cambodia. In that respect, the emphasis Gioni put on the emotional impact of the collection of the Photo Archive Group was a kind of return to the roots of the project. Affect theory was not a bad starting point for reflecting on the “potent sense,” as Wiley writes, of the Tuol Sleng mug shots. More problematic, however, was Gioni’s overall design of the exhibition as “a gallery of portraits.” Inspired by the thirty-volume epic poem *Maninbo* (“Ten Thousand Lives”) in which imprisoned Korean author Ko Un describes every person he ever met in real life or literature, the Biennale’s director wanted to create “a family album.”¹⁴⁰ Were the photos of S-21 prisoners included in this “album” to remind the viewer of the fragility of the human condition? This was reminiscent of the allegorical/heroic reading of the display at the MoMA which, French argued, turned the photos of S-21 prisoners into “icons of cruelty, of injustice, or man’s inhumanity to man.”¹⁴¹ Ben Davis offered a similar comment:

It’s just that I think that part of recognizing the actual reality of these photos, which are the actual documents of the killing fields, would be to actually have something to say about the realities of the terror under Pol Pot (...) Otherwise these documents become simply the avatar of some kind of abstract, universal human tragedy, sapped of specificity and gravity. In a show that Gioni says “cultivates the exercise of memory,” the gesture becomes one of forgetting.¹⁴²

The aesthetic answer of Gioni hinted at some possible redemption of the photos (not unlike the one suggested by Thierry de Duve).¹⁴³ The Italian curator pointed to a form of “universal memory” in which all viewers were to be united independently from their origins or relation to the events.

Political or historical contextualization—of the photos of S-21 prisoners or any other artifact—was by no means on Gioni’s agenda. Which explains, in part, why he was appointed director of the Biennale. His interest in a more poetic or aesthetic approach

¹³⁹ French, “Exhibiting Terror,” 150.

¹⁴⁰ *Guidebook*, 1.

¹⁴¹ French, “Exhibiting Terror,” 140.

¹⁴² Davis, “Gwangju Rules.”

¹⁴³ “Calling the photos by the name of art, baptizing them, in the second person—‘You are art’—is just one way, the clumsiest, certainly, of making sure that the people in the photos are restored to their humanity; and this, not their so-called art status, is of course what matters.” De Duve, “Art in the Face,” 23.

seemed consistent with the event's policy. The Gwangju Biennale was created in 1995 for the anniversary of the Gwangju Uprising (commonly known as 5.18), a ten-day long popular revolt against the South Korean government of Chun Doo Hwan in May 1980. Ko Un, the writer whose poem *Maninbo* had given the 8th Biennale its title, was a Buddhist monk who spent two years imprisoned in solitary confinement for his participation in the uprising. In spite of its origin, the Biennale is not a politically active clearinghouse. It was established in a period of de-politicization of the memory of the 5.18, and as such reflects the shift from *minjung* ("masses") to *simin* ("citizen") movements that occurred in South Korea in the nineties. Social classes issues were progressively dropped from the narrative of the uprising, which was reshuffled into a "struggle for democracy."¹⁴⁴ This appears in the discourse of Gioni when he refers to Ko Un's involvement in the "South Korean democratic movement," and in the discourse of Yongwoo Lee, CEO of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation and director of the first Biennale.¹⁴⁵ Lee was heavily involved in 5.18. In the following years, he explains, as he knew there was no social or political solution, he tried to find a channel for citizens' expression. It was the function the Biennale was assigned, being "a friendly outlet where citizens can speak out about democracy things and daily life, and participate actively, as a place of civil action."¹⁴⁶ Descriptions of terror in DK or the American role in Cambodian affairs (which could have been a subject of particular interest to the Korean audience) did not fit in the context the Biennale Foundation wanted to create. This, perhaps, was the inadvertent lesson taught by *10,000 Lives* with respect to the Tuol Sleng mug shots and Khmer Rouge memory. The 8th Gwangju Biennale, perfect illustration of a multiple-hand rewriting of the past through a cultural project mixed with tourism, market economy, and national narrative, is a warning about the effect of transnational memorializing when the latter renounces the particularity of the event in favor of a highly communicable and shareable version of the past—in other words: when it proposes a soft consensus in the place of debate.

5.3 *Observance and Memorial, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (2012- 2013)*

The exhibition *Observance and Memorial: Photographs from S-21, Cambodia* was held at the Institute of Contemporary Culture (ICC), Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto from September 22, 2012 through March 10, 2013. It is to date the latest display of the entire collection of the Photo Archive Group. The curators were museum expert and genocide scholar Carla Rose Shapiro and Michael Perkins from the Photo Archive Group. At the time, Shapiro was a fellow at the Asian Institute of the Munk School of Global Affairs in Toronto, where she conducted the research project "Exhibiting the Cambodian genocide: the past and present at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeng Ek Genocidal Center." She examined "the representation of the Cambodian genocide through the prism of memorial sites on the grounds of the former Killing

¹⁴⁴ Linda Lewis, *Laying Claim to the Memory of May. A Look Back at the 1980 Kwangju Uprising* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁵ *Guidebook*, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Marisa Mazria-Katz, "Interviews with Yongwoo Lee and Massimiliano Gioni," Artonair, podcast audio, October 4, 2010.

Fields” and proposed a “museological reading” of Tuol Sleng from 1979 onward.¹⁴⁷ *Observance and Memorial* was Shapiro’s second exhibition in this framework. In 2011 she had presented *From Impunity to Accountability: The Khmer Rouge Tribunal* at the Munk School of Global Affairs. The exhibition was originally conceived by the DC-Cam for Tuol Sleng.¹⁴⁸ Based on photographic portraits of former Khmer Rouge leaders, scans of official documents, and photos of cultural artifacts, it could easily be transported and mounted out of Cambodia. It included two parts: *The Duch Verdict: Khmer Rouge Tribunal Case 001* and *The Importance of Case 002*. Text panels were written by Anne Heindel, legal adviser to the DC-Cam, and Jaya Ramji-Nogales, a law scholar long involved with the ECCC.

With *Observance and Memorial*, Shapiro shifted the focus away from perpetrators to victims. In terms of display the exhibition came close to the kind of presentation Niven considers best for the photos of S-21 prisoners: “with as much context possible.” Shapiro was interested in reflecting on “the highly complex interplay between the exhibition constituents, the imperatives of historical accuracy, the political messages conveyed, the sanctity required by the exhibition’s commemorative functions.”¹⁴⁹ She created a multilevel display for which former presentations of the collection of the Photo Archive Group provided a useful template. *Observance and Memorial* followed on the curatorial model that had developed since the first exhibition at the Ansel Adams Center for Photography: detailed historical background, collaboration with experts, involvement of the local Cambodian community, and organization of outreach activities. Shapiro applied “new museum” principles all the more thoroughly as the exhibition was held in a national environment especially attentive to issues of violent past and multicultural reception. How public institutions should present the darker side of history is actively discussed in Canadian academic circles. The conflict-ridden relationship with First Nations and the fabric of Canadian society, whose diversity of communities and traditions is channeled into multiculturalism policy, reflect onto museum practices.¹⁵⁰ Leveraging the past in the present is no longer performed through confrontation but via modes of communication able “to kindle social aspirations like empathy, identification, cross-cultural dialogue, to

¹⁴⁷ Carla Rose Shapiro, “Exhibiting the Cambodian genocide: the pasts and present at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeung Ek Genocidal Center” (research abstract, Asian Institute, Munk School of Global Affairs, Toronto, 2010), 1.

¹⁴⁸ It was on display from October 14 through November 7, 2011. Shapiro also organized a conference about the ECCC, which took place at the Munk Center for International Studies on October 18, 2011. *From Impunity to Accountability* was presented at the Scott Library of York University in Toronto in March 2012.

¹⁴⁹ Shapiro, “Exhibiting the Cambodian genocide,” 1.

¹⁵⁰ The ROM had previous experience of the communal tensions such exhibitions might generate. In 1989 it presented *Into the Heart of Africa* (curator: Jeanne Cannizzo). It showed the origins of the ROM’s African collection within the context of white Canadian imperialist history. Afro-Canadians picketed the ROM in protest, asking for the exhibition to be either changed or closed. The ROM refused to comply but cancelled the North American tour of the exhibition that had been planned. Michael A. Ames, “Museums in the Age of Deconstruction,” in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on a Paradigm Shift*, Gail Anderson, ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 85-86.

recognize multiple perspectives, or to catalyze action.”¹⁵¹ This aptly describes what Shapiro intended to achieve with *Observance and Memorial*.

From the start, Shapiro and the ICC team were adamant in their communication that *Observance and Memorial* was not an art exhibition. A journalist even speaks of “curatorial anxiety over labeling.”¹⁵² The photos of S-21 prisoners had to be seen as “documentary evidence” even if they had an “artistic merit,” as Shapiro acknowledged in a conversation with Francisco Alvarez, the managing director of the ICC. There was a “tension between their documentary function (...) and a certain aesthetic engagement,” but what prevailed was the “educational potential” of the images and their status as “witnesses to the atrocities” perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge regime.¹⁵³ This was clearly indicated in the exhibition’s title, as Shapiro explained to a journalist:

They’re documents and portraiture. Primarily their function here—and the name of the exhibition is *Observance and Memorial*—and that this is an honorific. There is no denying the artistic merit of the portraits. But that is not their primary function here, nor should it be anywhere.¹⁵⁴

The location of the exhibition in the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, a characteristic Daniel Liebeskind building featuring the architect’s signature work angles, did not help much. “Due to the odd shape and size of the space you are unable to see all the shots in a single glance but as you make up your way around, more photos are revealed and more faces are met.”¹⁵⁵ Aware this could easily lead to an art experience, Shapiro made the choice of a “stark change from the traditional approach of presenting images.” The photos were hung two inches apart on black painted walls. They formed a continuous band, at the eye level, around the perimeter of the space. The ROM exhibition graphic designer Emilio Genovese gave the graphic material a sober treatment. Shapiro tried to convey a “memorial type atmosphere.”¹⁵⁶ The attempt, according to some reviewers, was not so successful, and the display remained more consistent with that of an art gallery.¹⁵⁷

Shapiro protected the photos of S-21 prisoners “by a padding of explanatory materials” (figure 13).¹⁵⁸ It both minimized the potential aesthetic impact of the display and emphasized the educational dimension of the exhibition. *Observance and Memorial* was conceived of as pedagogy, informing Canadians about past and present events in Cambodia. Text and pictures covered all aspects before and after DK—Vietnam War, civil war in Cambodia, American bombardments, People’s Republic of Kampuchea, role of the international community after 1979, UNTAC. The ideology of the Khmer Rouge

¹⁵¹ Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Wilson and Monica Eileen Patterson, eds. *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

¹⁵² Jill Glessing, “Cambodian Genocide Photos at ROM Raise Art vs. Documentary Difficulties,” *Canadian Art*, November 28, 2012.

¹⁵³ Francisco Alvarez, “ICC: In Conversation,” *ROM Magazine*, Summer 2012, 11-12.

¹⁵⁴ Tiffy Thompson, “Observance and Memorial: Photographs from S-21 Cambodia,” *Toronto Standard*, October 19, 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Audio-transcript of “Observance and Memorial: Photographs from S-21, Cambodia,” 18.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ James Adams, “At the ROM, Photos Document Cambodia’s Record of Horror,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 18, 2012; Glessing, “Cambodian Genocide Photos.”

¹⁵⁸ Glessing, “Cambodian Genocide Photos.”

was described through propaganda photos of workers and soldiers, and excerpts of the DK's anthem. Khmer Rouge slogans projected on the walls as text flashed at steady intervals. Special attention was paid to S-21. There were photos of Duch, Nhem En, guards, adult survivors, Vietnamese troops rescuing child survivors, excavations at Choeng Ek in the early eighties, and Tuol Sleng as it is today. Panels provided information about the role of the security center in the Khmer Rouge terror network, the identity of prisoners (purged cadre and military), the function and original size of the photos.

Furthermore, the ICC presented a program of public lectures, screenings, and performances "to augment the exhibition."¹⁵⁹ It partnered with the association Facing History and Ourselves in organizing educational activities for high school students and teachers.¹⁶⁰ A symposium (November 10, 2012) elaborated further on the themes introduced in the exhibition. Arranged in several sessions, it dealt with: journalism and human rights, preservation of survivors' testimonies, transitional justice in Cambodia, and exhibition of difficult knowledge. Speakers were primarily Canada-based experts in these fields, such as Erica Lehrer and Eve-Lyne Cayouette (CEREV, Concordia University), Sharon Sliwinski (University of Western Ontario), and Robert Petit, the former International Co-Prosecutor at the ECCC.¹⁶¹ Shapiro had also invited Cambodian survivors from the Greater Toronto Area, Kunthear Thorng (who had already participated in her 2011 conference) and the filmmaker Sarorn Sim. A session was dedicated to Nhem En, with the screening of the movie *The Conscience of Nhem En* (2008) in the presence of Steven Okazaki.

Unlike the curators in Gwangju and London, Shapiro had to take into account the presence of a Khmer community in the city.¹⁶² The analysis by Lindsay French of the exhibitions held in New York, Boston, and Sydney is thus relevant in the context of the ROM. It was crucial to give a respectful treatment to both the dead and the living, and Shapiro made "sensitively memorializing" the photos a critical part of the exhibition.¹⁶³ Concerned with the anonymity of the victims, the risk of objectification or voyeurism, she tried to re-individualize the prisoners by providing biographical information about

¹⁵⁹ Press release of *Observance and Memorial: Photographs from S-21, Cambodia*.

¹⁶⁰ Facing History and Ourselves is an organization founded in 1976 in the United States. It opened an office in Canada in 1981. It develops educational programs about genocides and crimes against humanity, and provides teachers with training and resource collections.

¹⁶¹ Robert Petit is a Canadian legal officer with a well-established career in the field of transitional justice (he worked with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, United Nations missions in Kosovo and East Timor, Special Court of Sierra Leone). He was International Co-Prosecutor at the ECCC. He resigned in September 2009 when his request to expand the investigation of Cases 003 and 004 was rejected.

¹⁶² Most Cambodians currently settled in Canada came as "designated class" refugees during the eighties under federal government and private sponsorship programs. There were Khmers in Canada before 1980, mostly diplomats, businessmen, and students who lived in Quebec and were granted permanent resident status after the Khmer Rouge takeover. Under the United Nations convention, Canada provided asylum for a small number of refugees who succeeded in fleeing Cambodia before it was sealed off. After 1979, these groups sponsored surviving family members from refugee camps in Thailand. Janet McLellan, *Many Petals to the Lotus. Five Asian Buddhist Communities in Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 135.

¹⁶³ Alvarez, "ICC: In Conversation," 11-12.

them. This, she said, was one of her “most important accomplishments.”¹⁶⁴ Yet, this was a surprisingly limited one, considering that the names of several prisoners were known for years already. *Observance and Memorial* identified only four inmates. In contrast, ten prisoners were presented with their names in the exhibition at Photofusion. Furthermore, out of the four prisoners, three of them were already familiar figures: the artist and S-21 survivor Vann Nath; senior member of the Communist Party of Kampuchea and high-ranking Khmer Rouge leader Koy Thuon (killed in 1977); Bophana, a young woman arrested for writing love letters to her husband (killed in 1977).¹⁶⁵ The photo of Bophana was not originally part the collection of the Photo Archive Group, but the woman’s story compelled Shapiro to include it in the exhibition: “Bophana is a kind of Anne Frank figure, an iconic figure of the Cambodian genocide.”¹⁶⁶ The fourth identified prisoner, thirteen-year old Chea Hong, was the young girl whose photo was the first image to be encountered upon entering the exhibition.

Giving Cambodian visitors a space where they could deal with emotional reactions if they felt overwhelmed or wished to pay homage to the dead was also crucial for Shapiro. The work “under close consultation” with the Cambodian-Canadian community of the Greater Toronto Area was manifest in the design of the “space for contemplation and reflection.”¹⁶⁷ It closed the exhibition and provided a transition back to the rest of the museum and to daily life. The space included usual elements, such as chairs and guest book, but its “Khmer identity” was strongly marked and defined, interestingly, in religious terms. A seventeen-feet high *stupa* (Buddhist funerary monument) made of laminated reclaimed plywood beams stood in the middle of the space (figure 14). Recordings of Cambodian Buddhist chants performed during rituals for the dead played in the background.¹⁶⁸

There is silence in the community. Although everyone in the Cambodian community is affected by it, people are reluctant to talk about it. This painful experience has buried deep inside of us. It is painful to bring it up in a conversation. For us survivors, we just want to close the chapter and move on.¹⁶⁹

Kunthear Thorng (born 1963) lost his family during the Khmer Rouge regime. He spent the post-1979 period in refugee camps on the Thai border and migrated to Canada in

¹⁶⁴ Monica Eileen Patterson, “Review,” CEREV Blog, November 25, 2012.

¹⁶⁵ Rithy Panh made a movie about her, *Bophana. Une Tragédie Cambodgienne* (1996). When he and Ieu Pannakar established their Centre of Audiovisual Resources in Phnom Penh in 2002 they chose to call it Bophana because they wanted to “bear witness to the message of dignity and courage” exemplified by this young woman during her S-21 detention. In 2010 the journalist Elizabeth Becker, who had already written about Bophana in her book *When the War was Over* (1986), published the biography *Bophana, Love in the Time of the Khmer Rouge*. The story of Bophana also inspired *Winds of Angkor*, “the first Western musical ever to be performed in Cambodia” (2010). Composer Sarah O’Brien conceived it after reading fragments of Bophana’s letters in British newspapers.

¹⁶⁶ Samantha Del Frate, “Photo Exhibit Presents Memorial of Cambodian Genocide,” *The Newspaper, University of Toronto Independent Weekly*, November 16, 2012.

¹⁶⁷ Press release of “Observance and Memorial.”

¹⁶⁸ Audio-transcript of *Observance and Memorial*, 20-21.

¹⁶⁹ *S-21 Survivor Story: Kunthear Thorng*, directed by Leib Kopman.

1983. He was one of the four video stories made by filmmaker Leib Kopman about Cambodian survivors who had resettled in Canada (figure 15). The videos were profiled on a touch screen monitor. The inclusion of survivor testimonies was the most direct engagement of Shapiro and the ICC with the Cambodian-Canadian community. It was a way to break the silence at many levels. First, it gave survivors the floor. Cambodian refugees had not found much psychological or therapeutic support when they arrived in Canada, for lack of trained specialists in ethno-psychiatry and interpreters. Moreover, their priorities at the time had been somewhere else. They had to adjust to the new country, find a house and a job. Past stories were progressively repressed. “Who would listen? Who would care?” Kunthea Thorng asked.

By offering its help to record, preserve, and share these stories, the ICC showed it was ready to assume the role of listener. For second-generation Cambodians the exhibition was the opportunity to learn more about the experience of their parents under the Khmer Rouge regime and their resettlement in North America. It could fill blanks in a family story that too often offered a fragmented narrative recovered through occasional references by the parents or photos of deceased relatives in the shrine. *Observance and Memorial* thus helped foster dialogue in the place of what anthropologist Carol Kidron calls the “silent or semi-silent inter-generational process of survivor-descendant memory work” in the Cambodian-Canadian community.¹⁷⁰ For Canadians, the testimonies of fellow citizens were a direct link to events remote in time and space. How many Canadians knew about the terrible past and difficult integration of Cambodian refugees in the country? Now they could perhaps understand better the problems citizens of Cambodian descent still encounter in Canada today.¹⁷¹ In that respect *Observance and Memorial* enabled Canadians to bond with a community with which they had little interacted until then.

Including stories of survivors in the show demonstrates the good community practices of the ROM. In the context of an exhibition about extermination, it also raises the issue of the narrative structure the curator wishes to emphasize. Shapiro made the “ethical choice (...) to celebrate life over death,” Patterson argues in her review of *Observance and Memorial*. The question is: Does not this choice belie the “documentary impulse” Shapiro said she was driven by? The post-1979 part of the exhibition was constructed along a timeline that read as follows, “the ongoing trials of Khmer Rouge leaders in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, the reconstruction and recovery of Cambodian society, documentary film featuring Cambodian survivors living in Canada, links to human rights organizations.”¹⁷² This timeline points to a normative periodization in which a radical break engineered through legal and spiritual procedures—trial as collective answer, forgiveness as individual answer—separates the “archaicized past” (Khmer Rouge years) from the post-conflict period.

¹⁷⁰ Carol Kidron, “Silent Legacies of Trauma: A Comparative Study of Cambodian Canadian and Israeli Holocaust Trauma Descendant Memory Work,” in *Remembering Violence: Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission*, Nicolas Argenti and Katharina Schramm, eds. (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 198.

¹⁷¹ See: Janet McLellan, *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario. Resettlement, Religion, and Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

¹⁷² Press release of *Observance and Memorial*.

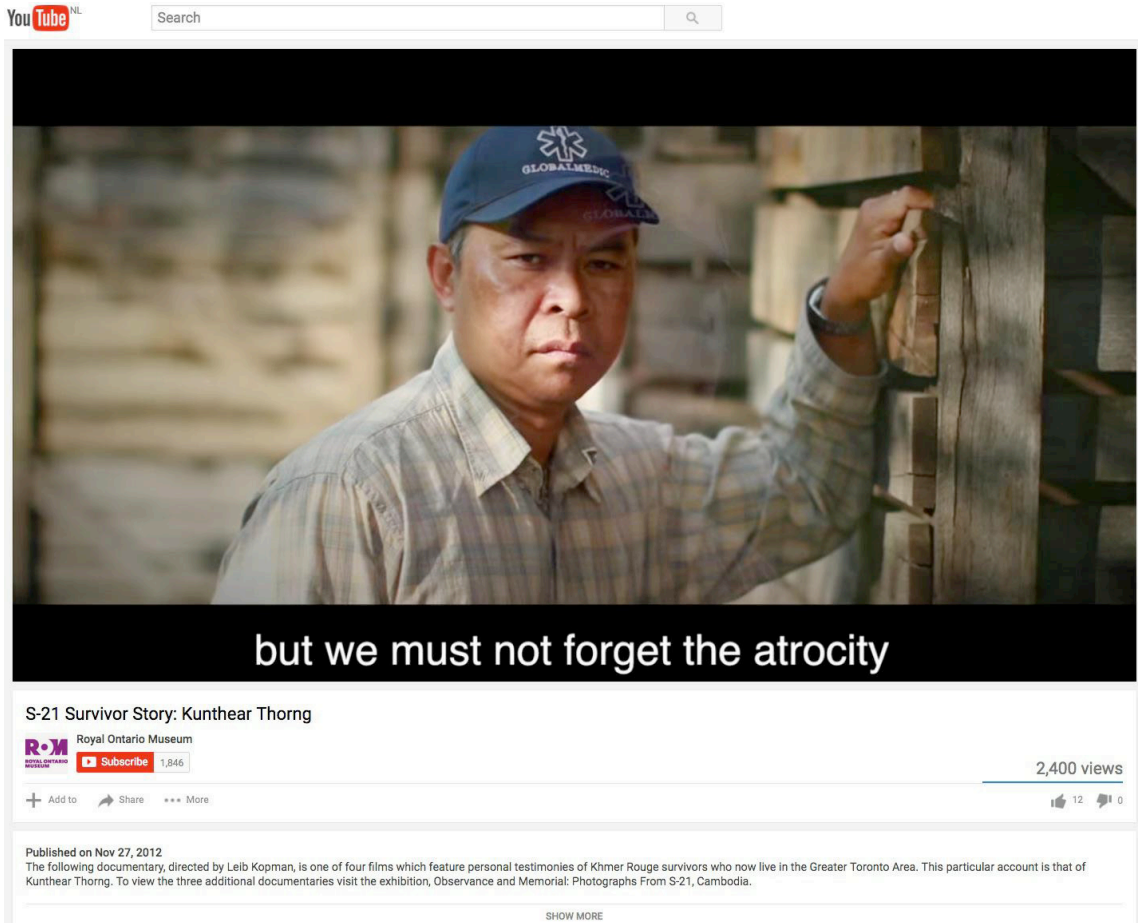


Figure 15: Kuntheart Thorng (2012-2013). Source: Screenshot of the video *S-21 Survivor Story: Kuntheart Thorng*.

This corresponds to the narratives developed in Cambodia since the establishment of the ECCC. The Khmer Rouge Tribunal itself and other institutions, such as the DC-Cam, strongly promote interwoven notions of accountability, justice, reconciliation, and resilience. These narratives came under scrutiny in the past years as the ECCC did not perform so well and experts voiced their doubts regarding the conflation of therapeutic and legal aspects (Hinton 2008, Hughes and Pupavac 2005, Maguire 2011). Of course, this is not limited to Cambodia but fits the “prescriptive plotting in human rights” or trauma aesthetic described by cultural anthropologist Allen Feldman.¹⁷³ Unfortunately, the reality in Cambodia is not as appeased as *Observance and Memorial* has it. So far, only five Khmer Rouge leaders have been brought to court. Victims and perpetrators—among the latter, many being in power positions—keep living side by side. Against this backdrop, the choice by Shapiro of a photograph of the Kamping Pouy reservoir as the ending image of the exhibition appears somewhat problematic:

This was one of the Khmer Rouge’s grandiose agricultural projects where thousands of people perished during its construction. Today the lake is home to an abundance of lotus

¹⁷³ Allen Feldman, “Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma Aesthetic,” *Biography* 27, no.1 (2004), 165.

farms. The image of vegetation sprawling atop a sky-blue pond evokes a sense of tranquility and is symbolic of healing and regeneration.¹⁷⁴

Healing is not what comes first to mind when considering the long-term impact of Pol Pot's agrarian utopia. Land grabbing, a key issue in Cambodia today, seems more to the point as both direct and indirect legacy of Khmer Rouge policies. Shapiro, however, did not intend to convey an ongoing story of structural violence in Cambodia. On the contrary, she meant to build the exhibition as a cathartic experience for the viewer. The visitor in *Observance and Memorial* was first taken through a lengthy depiction of terror and suffering, then provided with emotional closure. Some people survived, perpetrators are now punished, and Cambodia is rising anew from ashes. The resource center, which supplied information about human rights in Cambodia with links to organizations such as Amnesty International and Stop Genocide Now, was the final element in this narrative structure. With its message encouraging "activism to help build domestic and international will to confront crimes against humanity," it suggested that no one is powerless in front of atrocities.¹⁷⁵

The way Shapiro articulated political, moral, and aesthetic issues around the photos of S-21 prisoners reflected a form of exhibition-commodity that conceives of the presentation of political violence only through the redeeming prism of survival and justice. It is a narrative scheme that may be applied to Cambodia, as well as to ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda, or any other situation of mass killing. In that respect, *Observance and Memorial* demonstrates how easily the project of the Photo Archive Group may be integrated into the overarching discourse of human rights and transitional justice—or, as Feldman puts it, into "the transnational cultural intelligibility of trauma narratives."¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, for someone investigating the complexity of memorializing Khmer Rouge atrocities, Shapiro made a radical choice of erasing all the tensions and rough edges that shape the memory of Khmer Rouge crimes in the twenty-first century. It paid off, as show some comments of visitors in the guest book, such as "Thank you for bringing this tragedy to light," "I will never forget these faces," and "Hopefully we will learn from these events and act faster in the future." Nevertheless, the question remains whether such a curatorial choice is only a matter of pedagogy for non-informed audiences. Could it rather indicate that the outsider's legitimacy to express critical views on Khmer Rouge memory is still so fragile today that curators prefer to stick with more consensual narratives?

6. Conclusion

The chapter explored a turning point in the visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities in transnational contexts of memory, the transformation of the photos of S-21 prisoners into iconic images of the Cambodian Genocide. Wondering a few years ago "why do the rows and rows of prisoners' photographs in Tuol Sleng seem like such an apt metaphor for the period," scholar John Marston suggested that the power of these images had to do in part

¹⁷⁴ Audio-transcript of "Observance and Memorial," 28.

¹⁷⁵ Julie Mollins, "Toronto S-21 Exhibition Urges Vigilance Against Genocide," Thomson Reuters Foundation, January 30, 2013.

¹⁷⁶ Feldman, "Memory Theaters," 184.

“with the ways a conceptual framework has been constructed for looking at the German Holocaust in relation to the experience of modernity” and with the capacity of the S-21 photos to “show the individual in direct relation to a central state mechanism.”¹⁷⁷ Indeed this might explain, in part at least, the attraction of the Tuol Sleng mug shots on people from all over the world. Yet, this transformation did not happen in one day but was the result of a multilevel process in which archive preservation, databases, books, documentary movies, and exhibitions played a role alongside the trial of Duch at the ECCC, the development of mass tourism in Cambodia, and the effect of social media.

A wide range of stakeholders were involved in the process, among which the Photo Archive Group. The project of Doug Niven and Chris Riley began in a vacuum—a period of transition in many ways. Over the years Niven and Riley’s self-appointed position as cultural brokers of Khmer Rouge memory in the West became increasingly challenged in Cambodia and abroad. This was due on the one hand to the emergence on the national and international scene of Cambodian authoritative voices that filled the earlier void; on the other hand to some problematic decisions the two American photographers made regarding their sets of prints. The project of the Photo Archive Group encapsulates a key moment in the memorialization of Khmer Rouge atrocities, with the emergence of a new kind of visualization. It marks the end of an older scopic regime—in which the photos of S-21 prisoners were a bureaucratic record of extermination and the documentary proof of the cruelty of the Pol Pot’s regime—and the rise of a new one—in which the mug shots become icons of pain and as such enable an aesthetic gaze. This process came together with narrative changes, due to the collapse of earlier ideological positions, and a shift in the role Westerners might be called to play in the making of Khmer Rouge memory.

Against a black-and-white view of Niven and Riley’s project and later developments, the chapter attempted to reconstruct the complexity of both the working process of the Photo Archive Group in Cambodia and the presentation of the collection in different environments abroad—and the tensions arising in both cases. The issue that best summarizes these tensions is that of copyright, which expresses conflicts over ownership and legitimacy in a transnational context of memory. It pervades the whole enterprise of Niven and Riley, and will probably keep doing so in the future. Although the collection of the Photo Archive Group was initially conceived of as a unit to be shown in its entirety, there has been recently an exception with the display of a single photo in the large-scale exhibition *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath* that toured in the United States throughout 2013 and 2014.¹⁷⁸ One of the five hundred or so

¹⁷⁷ John Marston, “Democratic Kampuchea and the Idea of Modernity,” in *Cambodia Emerges from the Past: Eight Essays*, Judy Ledgerwood, ed. (DeKalb, IL: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 2002), 42.

¹⁷⁸ Curators Anne Tucker, Natalie Zelt, and Will Michels initiated this exhibition in 2002 soon after the Museum of Fine Arts of Houston acquired the negative of Joe Rosenthal’s photo of Iwo Jima. They reviewed more than a million photos in seventeen countries in archives, military libraries, private collections, historical societies, news agency, and photo festivals. The exhibition was presented in the Museum of Fine Arts of Houston (November 11, 2012-February 3, 2013), the Annenberg Space for Photography in Los Angeles (March 3-June 3, 2013), the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC (June 29-September 29, 2013) and the Brooklyn Museum in New York (November 8, 2013-February 2, 2014).

artifacts presented in the show (including photos, books, magazines, photo equipment) was a photo of a S-21 prisoner. The label of the image read:

Nhem En, Cambodian (born 1959), *Untitled (prisoner #389 of the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979)*, gelatin silver print (printed 1994), courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art; Arthur M. Bullowa Fund and Geraldine Murphy Fund. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA Art Resource, New York.¹⁷⁹ Used with permission of the Photo Archive Group.

With such a labelling, one could hardly be any further from Tuol Sleng, the museum, its archive, and its history. It seems that the full “power of decontextualization” of art has finally been reached here. That such a disturbing label exists at all demonstrates how dramatically the status of the photos of S-21 prisoners has changed since the Western public discovered them in mainstream media and documentary movies. It also raises the question of the discourse that has developed around the Tuol Sleng mug shots in the past years. As explained in the chapter, the project of the Photo Archive Group, especially after the MoMA experience, was pivotal in the emergence and fixation of certain themes into a discourse. The latter is twofold. On the one hand, it rejects the artistic or aesthetic dimension of the pictures in favor of an anthropological and postcolonial analysis of the photos of S-21 prisoners. On the other hand, it dismisses technical, material, and historical facts in favor of cultural generalities.

In that sense, the endlessly quoted comparison made by Susan Sontag between the Tuol Sleng mug shots and the painting *The Flaying of Marsyas* by Titian is enlightening. We face, she writes, people who are “forever looking at death, forever about to be murdered, forever wronged.”¹⁸⁰ While this might shed some light on the unease experienced by some viewers in front of these photos, it does not clarify in any way the situation depicted in the images. The moment that was captured in these pictures is far more complex and varied than that. Repeating Sontag’s observation as a mantra will certainly not help elaborate the critical potentiality of art theory vis-à-vis the photos of S-21 prisoners. By grounding the perception of the Tuol Sleng mug shots into some “ethics of remembrance” (Sischy 2009)—thereby supposing an invariant way of looking at them—such a perspective might even obscure the mechanisms through which Khmer Rouge atrocities are visualized worldwide. In contrast, the chapter proposed a contextual interpretation of the curatorial proposals implemented in a set of exhibitions that were held in different countries and as such are more likely to reflect transnational dynamics of memorialization of the DK terror.

Interestingly, the discourse about the photos of S-21 prisoners mirrors the very ambiguity of the Photo Archive Group project itself as the latter replicates the decision of the Cambodian authorities to focus memory politics on a single site. In other words, as much as Niven and Riley made the crimes of the Pol Pot’s regime more visible to a wider public, they also contributed to making them invisible. It is a paradox that Richard Rechtman describes powerfully:

¹⁷⁹ Founded in Italy in 1953, SCALA group S.p.a is an international multimedia company that acts as the exclusive image rights representative of museums worldwide.

¹⁸⁰ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 61.

To see what is invisible: I need to avoid focusing on the things everyone sees and says. To what extent S-21, including its photos and narratives about murdered people, connects to genocide, as I already argued, is that genocidal criminals always try to conceal traces of death. To do so, they must first make something so visible that the rest becomes invisible. When you focus only on S-21—17,000 victims, it's terrible, I know it—you forget the other two million dead who left absolutely no trace!¹⁸¹

The spotlight on Tuol Sleng and the photos of prisoners leaves in the shadow many sides of the terror apparatus in DK. In some respect the kind of visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities emerging in the mid-nineties and prevailing in the later decades does not differ much from earlier phases of memorialization, when propaganda materials concealed inconvenient truths. The main rupture, though, lies in the shift from the ideological to the cultural perspective toward images of Khmer Rouge crimes, and the problematization of the act of representing itself. How these aspects deploy in the public space back in Cambodia is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁸¹ Quoted by Stéphanie Gée, “Entretien avec Richard Rechtman: ‘Je ne Crois Pas au Témoignage Salvateur’,” *Ka-Set*, February 5-6, 2009.

Chapter 6:

Sculpting transitional justice in the public space: *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* memorial in Phnom Penh

1. Introduction

Everywhere you saw people with smiles on their faces. Even store associates, peddlers in the markets, and pedicab-men came over to watch. Phnom Penh had become a scene of great joy, more spectacular than New Year, water-sprinkling festival, Prince Sihanouk's royal sightseeing procession, welcoming ceremonies of foreign heads of state or Asian Games of the Newly Emergent Countries.¹

The scenes of jubilation described by former Khmer Rouge Keng Sieu Lim in his memoir were short-lived.² Within hours of the takeover of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, the inhabitants were forced at gunpoint to evacuate the city. Some tried to take refuge at the French Embassy, the only diplomatic representation still open in Phnom Penh. Among them was the family of thirteen-year old Ing Phousera—or Séra, his professional name. A multimedia artist based in France, Séra is known for his graphic novels. Those he dedicated to the recent history of Cambodia are to some extent the equivalent of Art Spiegelman's Holocaust graphic novel *Maus*. They created a new genre of representation of Khmer Rouge atrocities inspiring other authors such as Tian and Loo-Hui Phang. On April 17, 1975, Séra, his siblings, and his mother (a Frenchwoman) were allowed inside the embassy, but his father (a Cambodian without a French passport) could not enter the compound. The artist saw him for the last time that very day. "After I crossed the gate of the embassy, I was no longer a teenager," Séra says.³ The gate still stands in the embassy garden, a barely accessible monument signaled only by a discreet memorial plaque. Is this quasi-invisibility the reason why Séra decided to build a monument in the public space in Phnom Penh, not far from the French Embassy?

Séra's memorial *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* is one of the thirteenth projects selected by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) as moral and collective reparations in Case 002/01 (first segment of the trial of senior Khmer Rouge Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan). The mandate of the ECCC is clear. Victims are not to receive any monetary compensation. Instead, the Tribunal designed a series of symbolic projects such as memorials and exhibitions. Reparations—as these projects are known—are awarded only if the accused is found guilty. Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan were convicted in August 2014. As a consequence, the 3,866 victims admitted as Civil Parties in Case 002/01 were granted collective reparations. The selected projects pivot around the

¹ Keng Sieu Lim, *Red Undertow: From Khmer Rouge's Cambodia to Freedom* (Mirror Books, 2006), 326.

² According to Father Ponchaud, people in Phnom Penh cheered the end of the war, not the Khmer Rouge pouring into the city. Gilles Herzog, "Entretien avec François Ponchaud," *La Règle du Jeu*, February 6, 2010.

³ Céline Dréan, *The Watchman* (Galactica/Vivement Lundi, 2010).

crimes prosecuted during the trial, namely the evacuation of cities in April 1975 and the forced transfers of population in the period 1975-1977. The ECCC's shift away from financial to symbolic reparations reflects the diversification of transitional justice initiatives worldwide. International criminal courts increasingly look at the transformation of post-conflict societies through measures ranging "from changes in criminal codes to those in high school textbooks, from creation of memorials, museums and days of mourning, to police and court reform, to tackling the distributional inequities that underlie conflict."¹ Through the ECCC's collective reparations it is a new phase of memorialization in Cambodia that is engineered. Obviously, the implementation of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal's program, which involves actors from state authorities, supra-national institutions, international and domestic NGOs, local and diaspora communities, does not go unchallenged. As visual markers activated by people who have different demands and expectations, memorials can easily turn into matters of debate. Furthermore, the political and social reforms that transitional justice aims to convey through symbolic reparations do not necessarily agree with the Hun Sen government's vision of politics and collective memory.

What is the position of Séra in this context? To what extent does *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* contribute to creating new visual forms of engagement with the past? How does the project's aesthetic and content articulate changes in transnational dynamics of memorialization in Cambodia? Séra's proposal comes last in a long line of hybrid representation of the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime. There is no purely national Khmer Rouge-related memorial style in Cambodia, but a style that was from the start shaped by external influences, starting with Vietnam's (itself influenced by both the French colonial heritage and Soviet monumental propaganda). In that respect *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*, created by a bi-cultural artist from the Khmer diaspora with the support of an international ad hoc tribunal, cannot be considered as a radical departure from earlier forms and practices of memorialization. However, with his project Séra introduces in the Cambodian public space new questions about the act of representing Khmer Rouge atrocities. By using figurative and abstract means in his memorial, he reorganizes the visibility of the past. Not only does the artist intend to build something new for the public. His proposal also comments on Khmer Rouge memorials built in the country since 1979, which he sees as "tragic, horrific places, where one is more quickly plunged into sadness than brought to a feeling of reconciliation and peaceful remembrance of loved ones."²

The chapter proposes to situate *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* within a series of tensions and to examine how these tensions are articulated across a set of discourses and practices. First is the tension between transitional justice and artistic practices. Expert opinions about the relation of the legal and aesthetic realms differ greatly. For some, such as law scholar Peter Rush, memorials "give value and meaning to the enterprise of transitional justice—as a system of knowledge, an institutional craft, and as a subject

¹ Naomi Roht-Arriaza, "The New Landscape of Transitional Justice," in *Transitional Justice in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Truth versus Justice*, Naomi Roht-Arriaza and Javier Mariezcurrena, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

² Emily Wight, "Sculptors Plans Genocide Memorial for Historic French Embassy Ground," *The Phnom Penh Post*, February 21, 2014.

matter and material of social policy.”³ For others, such as theater and performing arts scholar Catherine Cole, art and transitional justice are “odd bedfellows” since the aim of art is to raise questions and produce critical perspectives whereas transitional justice aims at transparency and evidence.⁴ Second is the tension between artistic and documentary practices. The fall of Phnom Penh is quite well documented since foreign reporters still circulated in the city and took pictures on April 17, 1975. At the same time, the deportation itself is a “missing picture” (to draw on Rithy Panh’s movie) as journalists could not follow Cambodians to the countryside. Séra has thus to find a position mediating between these two extremes, the media event and the black hole. Third is the tension between the aesthetic and narratives in Séra’s proposal and memorial culture in Cambodia. Last is the tension between Cambodian and Western conceptions of the relation between public space and collective memory. This connects with issues of urban policy and different visions of the city. The intervention of the ECCC in the public space through collective reparations could be seen as a positive development. Yet, the memorials through which the Tribunal aims to transform social and political practices in Cambodia might easily become unwilling accomplices in processes of modernization, beautification, and social control at the expense of the population. This raises the question whether a memorial project initiated by an individual has the capacity to retain any autonomy when caught in such a dynamic.

After providing a historical background about the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, the chapter explains the system of collective and moral reparations established by the ECCC and how it works with respect to Case 002/01. The next section describes the development of Séra’s memorial project as public art, with a focus on the partnership established and fundraising strategies through social media. Then, through a set of selected examples, the chapter discusses features of Khmer Rouge-related of memorial culture in Cambodia. Against this backdrop, it analyzes the proposal of Séra. Building on the notion of “social aesthetics” coined by Holocaust scholar James E. Young, it looks at the aesthetic, relation with local public taste, and historical referentiality of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*. Finally, it examines the relation between public space and collective memory in the context of Phnom Penh’s urban development. Elaborating on the exhibition *Unfinished*, the latest project of the artist in Cambodia, the chapter questions the role of memorial initiatives such as Séra’s in a context shaped by neoliberal capitalism and modernization.

2. The Khmer Rouge Tribunal’s moral and collective reparations

2.1 History of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia

The establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) came after a long process of negotiation between the Cambodian government and the United Nations (UN) (figure 1).⁵ The first steps toward the creation of a Tribunal

³ Peter D. Rush, “Preface,” in *The Arts of Transitional Justice: Culture, Activism, and Memory after Atrocity*, Peter D. Rush and Olivera Simić, eds. (New York: Springer, 2014), vii.

⁴ Catherine M. Cole, “At the Convergence of Transitional Justice and Art,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8, no. 2 (2014): 315.

⁵ See: Mikael Baaz, “Bringing the Khmer Rouge to Trial: An Extraordinary Experiment in International Criminal Law,” *Scandinavian Studies in Law* no.61 (2015); John Ciorciari and Anne

occurred in the troubled post-UNTAC context. Political rivalry between co-Prime Ministers Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh had reached new peak, and both tried to use the Khmer Rouge as a means to win the battle for total power. In July 1994 the National Assembly passed the Law Proscribing the Democratic Kampuchea Group under the pressure of Hun Sen. It continued the People's Republic of Kampuchea's policies vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge. Whereas defectors were promised pardon and reintegration into society, those continuing armed opposition activities were to be punished. This did not apply if they surrendered within a six-month period. Hun Sen and Ranariddh hoped to attract defectors (which meant an input of seasoned soldiers, military equipment, and financial resources) to their respective party. Both initiated contacts with mid-level cadre and military. Ieng Sary defected in August 1996 with half the movement's troops. He received Sihanouk's royal pardon shortly afterward. Caught between military repression on the one hand, and promises of amnesty on the other hand, the Khmer Rouge movement imploded. It was in such a context that Hun Sen and Ranariddh sent a joint letter to the UN in June 1997, as a means to pressure indecisive Khmer Rouge. They requested assistance in the prosecution of the movement's leaders: "We are aware of similar efforts to respond to the genocide and crimes against humanity in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia and ask that similar assistance be given to Cambodia." Hun Sen's coup in July 1997, the crushing of the Funcinpec, and the escape of Ranariddh to France brutally interrupted the process. As the United States cut bilateral aid following the coup, Hun Sen had little choice but to resume talks with Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia Thomas Hammarberg. The Cambodian Prime Minister agreed to the coming of a group of experts appointed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to assess the situation and check options for a trial. Experts Rajsoomer Lallah, Steven Ratner, and Ninian Stephen arrived in Cambodia in November 1998 for three months. Negotiations about the judicial process were tense. The United States suggested the creation of an international criminal court for Cambodia in The Hague. The international community doubted the capacity and willingness of the Cambodian government to ensure fair and credible trials. Moreover, it thought that a tribunal in Cambodia would help legitimize the post-coup regime, considered authoritarian and corrupt. Hun Sen of course wanted to keep things under his control via a domestic court. Given the role of the international community before, during, and after the Khmer Rouge, he argued, he did not have any reason to trust international justice.

The arrest of Ta Mok, Nuon Chea, and Khieu Samphan in December 1998 was a turning point. Hun Sen's party, the CPP, began negotiating with Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan, who were then under Thai military house arrest. The two men, happy to escape Ta Mok, were ready to deal with the Cambodian government but expressed their fear of being arrested and turned over to an international court. In private Hun Sen assured them that "as long as they cooperated with him politically, they would not be tried

Heindel, *On Trial: The Khmer Rouge Accountability Process* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2009); Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with Genocide? Elusive Justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Steven Heder, "Hun Sen and Genocide Trials in Cambodia: International Impacts, Impunity and Justice," in *Cambodia Emerges from the Past: Eight Essays*, Judy Ledgerwood, ed. (Chicago: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002).

internationally, and if they were tried domestically, the process would end in a pardon.”⁶ The former Khmer Rouge leaders were moved to Pailin in northwestern Cambodia, where Ieng Sary had already settled. Under these circumstances the report that the UN mandated experts had released in February 1999 was not welcome. It proposed the establishment of an international ad hoc tribunal like the ICTY and ICTR, and suggested that up to thirty perpetrators (including Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, and Khieu Samphan) be indicted. In March 1999 Hun Sen wrote to Kofi Annan that a trial was no longer a priority for the Cambodian government now that the Khmer Rouge movement had been totally defeated. However, the Prime Minister, in need of legitimacy on the international scene, could not burn his bridges. In June 1999 he sent to the UN a new letter requesting assistance for the drafting of a new legislation for a special court. The negotiations between the UN and the Cambodian government resumed in August that year. Parallel negotiations were opened with the U.S. State Department. In October 1999 American ambassador to Cambodia Kent Wiedemann and American ambassador for War Crimes David Scheffer came up with the idea of a special chamber within the Cambodian court system. Cambodia agreed. Talks with the UN, represented by Under-Secretary General for Legal Affairs and Legal Counsel of the UN Hans Corell, continued on this new basis. The idea of a mixed tribunal raised a new set of issues concerning the “balance of influence” at the court, the appointment of personnel, the laws forming the tribunal’s legal apparatus, the identity of candidates for prosecution, and the nature of the crimes for which they would be prosecuted.⁷ Against the advise of the UN experts, Cambodian officials wanted to focus on four or five senior Khmer Rouge (Ta Mok being a likely first candidate), arguing that a narrow scope was the only way to avoid social unrest and renewed civil war. According to historian Steven Heder, Hun Sen tried to stick to the scenario established for the 1979 trial of the “Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique,” that is:

The core of the model was that the trial should be limited to those who it was politically convenient to convict, that it should rewrite international law as necessary to make “genocide” fit the purported crime, and that it should incorporate an “international” aspect that would provide window-dressing legitimacy but not interfere with political control of the proceedings.⁸

In contrast, the UN tried to establish a court functioning without political interference from the Cambodian state but also “whitewashing” the international community for its interventions in regional affairs. In January 2001 Cambodia’s National Assembly approved the Law on the Establishment of the ECCC for the Prosecution of Crimes Committed during the Period of Democratic Kampuchea. The draft established Cambodian majorities in the Pre-Trial and Trial Chambers and gave Cambodia control over appointments of the Court’s judges and personnel (the law was amended in 2004). The UN rejected the proposal and withdrew from the discussion. France and Japan forced it back to the negotiation table. The UN and the Cambodian Government finally signed in

⁶ Heder, “Hun Sen and Genocide Trials in Cambodia,” 199.

⁷ John Ciorciari, “History and Politics behind the Khmer Rouge Trials,” in *On Trial: The Khmer Rouge Accountability Process*, John Ciorciari and Anne Heindel, eds. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2009), 64-71.

⁸ Heder, “Hun Sen and Genocide Trials in Cambodia,” 205.

2003 the Agreement concerning the Prosecution under Cambodian Law of Crimes Committed during the Period of Democratic Kampuchea. The result was a hybrid or mixed tribunal combining national and international law, where Cambodian and international personnel share functions at key levels. Over the years it has become clear that the ECCC is not “an integrated institution but a body comprised of two distinct components, hardly coordinated between themselves and operating under different rules and lines of responsibility.”⁹ Many problems encountered by the Tribunal originate from differences in legal and political cultures.¹⁰ From the start the ECCC has been mired in controversy. Its shortcomings—state interference, budget overruns, corruption and kickback system, lack of witness protection, problematic legal apparatus (prosecution of offenses that did not exist in the law at the time of the events), limited jurisdictional scope, slow pace of proceedings, failed communication with Cambodians, fatigue of the donor community—are often pointed out in mainstream media, Cambodian and international ones alike. The ECCC spent “five years and approximately \$100 million to convict a single death camp commandant,” law scholar Peter Maguire writes.¹¹ Furthermore only two out of the four Khmer Rouge leaders originally indicted still sit in the dock. Their trial sometimes looks more and more like a race against time, and the future of the Tribunal after their case seems uncertain. Does this all make the ECCC “a shining example of all that is wrong with the UN’s post-Cold War paradigm of therapeutic legalism,” as Maguire strongly argues?¹² The question goes far beyond the walls of the courtroom. For years observers have expressed concerns over the Tribunal’s impact on Cambodian society (Herzog and Ponchaud 2010, Hinton 2008, R. Hughes 2015, C. Hughes and Pupavac 2005, Prenowitz and Thompson 2010, Zucker 2013). The transposition of the human rights discourse in Cambodia and its interaction with Buddhism were questioned even before the opening of the ECCC (Ledgerwood and Un 2003). Unsurprisingly, these issues of cross-cultural misunderstanding are not confined to

⁹ Giorgio Tortora, “The Financing of Special Tribunals for Sierra Leone, Cambodia and Lebanon,” in *The Realities of International Criminal Justice*, Dawn L. Rothe, James D. Meernik and Thordis Ingadóttir, eds. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2013), 107.

¹⁰ Law scholar Mikael Baaz underlines the difference between on the one hand the Cambodian lawyers and judges educated in Cambodia, Vietnam, USSR, and East Germany, and trained in socialist legal thinking; on the other hand “an informal group of jurists who travel from one site to another and sometimes work as a prosecutor (...) as a judge or even a defense counsel, but always highly paid and fairly isolated from the context in which they work.” Baaz, “Bringing the Khmer Rouge to Trial,” 313. The documentary movie of Bernard Mangiante *Le Khmer Rouge et le Non-Violent* (2011) powerfully illustrates this difference. The film follows French lawyer François Roux, Duch’s defense counsel, while he prepares the case with his client and his Cambodian colleague Kar Savuth. Roux thinks it is essential that Duch pleads guilty and takes responsibility for his acts. In his view, the judicial process goes with moral transformation. But this clashes with the technicality-based line favored by Kar Savut. The relation between the two counsels deteriorates and ends up with an open crisis in the courtroom and Duch’s recusal of Roux two weeks before the verdict for “loss of trust.”

¹¹ Peter Maguire, “Cambodia and the Pitfalls of Political Justice,” *The New York Times*, June 20, 2011.

¹² Peter Maguire, “Ieng Sary’s Death Highlights the Failures of the KR Tribunal,” *The Cambodia Daily*, March 20, 2013.

the legal realm. They also inform and spread to academic and popular perceptions of the ECCC's extended activities, the latter including moral and collective reparations.

2.2 Moral and collective reparations

“Moving forward through justice,” “reconciliation as a basis for Cambodia’s prosperity,” and “dealing with the past and building the future” are the mottos of moral and collective reparations.¹³ This ambitious program is in line with the oft-criticized holistic approach of transitional justice, decried as both an instrument of Western imperialist tendencies and a top-down imposed “toolkit” unadjusted to local conditions (Barghava 2000, Charbonneau and Parent 2012, Hinton 2010, McEvoy and McGregor 2008, Roht-Arriaza 2006, Shaw and Waldorf 2010). Moral and collective reparations [thereafter collective reparations] come from one of the Tribunal’s innovations, the inclusion of survivors in the trials as Civil Parties. The victims, who are represented by pro-bono lawyers, are granted rights similar to those of the prosecution or defense, such as requesting investigative action, submitting evidence, summoning witnesses, and making closing and rebuttal statements.¹⁴ The Victims Unit, later renamed Victims Support Section (VSS), was established early 2008 with the aim to facilitate “the meaningful participation of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime in the legal proceedings of the ECCC.”¹⁵ Due to the number of Civil Parties and the impossibility to quantify their suffering and losses, the Tribunal chose collective and symbolic reparations over individual and monetary compensations. In 2010 the VSS received the further mission to coordinate “the process of seeking reparations through legal and non-judicial measures and programs.”¹⁶ The latter are defined as:

Measures that acknowledge the harm suffered by Civil Parties as a result of the commission of the crimes for which an Accused is convicted and, provide benefits to Civil Parties, which address this harm. These benefits shall not take the form of monetary payments to Civil Parties. The cost of the reparations shall either be borne by the convicted person, or by external funding which has already been secured to implement a project designed by the legal representatives of the Civil Parties in cooperation with the Victims Support Section.¹⁷

These measures correspond to two different mandates. Collective reparations are granted to Civil Parties by the judges in the final verdict. Non-judicial measures are organized by the VSS in collaboration with external partners and address the broader interests of victims. Collective reparations were first formulated in the context of Case 001 (the trial of former S-21 commander Duch). The Civil Parties requested then a range of reparations including apologies from Duch, the construction of memorial pagodas at the crimes sites,

¹³ Victims Support Section and Civil Party Lead Co-Lawyers of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, “ECCC Reparation Program 2013-2017: For the Victims of the Khmer Rouge Regime 1975-1979” (Phnom Penh, 14 January 2013).

¹⁴ Sarah Thomas and Terith Chy, “Including the Survivors in the Tribunal Process,” in *On Trial: The Khmer Rouge Accountability Process*, John Ciorciari and Anne Heindel, eds. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2009), 217, 246.

¹⁵ Website “ECCC”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

access to free medical care, and educational measures. The Supreme Court Chamber turned down the requests on the grounds they lacked specificity, were beyond the scope of the Tribunal, and could not be funded because of the accused's indigence. Eventually, two types of reparations were awarded—a compilation of Duch's apologies on the ECCC website and in print version, and the inclusion of the Civil Parties and their deceased relatives in the Tribunal's final judgment. For transitional justice scholar Renee Jeffery, this was the "easiest course of action in both political and financial terms."¹⁸ Indeed, Civil Parties felt these measures were insufficient and inappropriate. Therefore the program was reviewed at the beginning of Case 002/01, the first "mini-trial" of Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan.¹⁹ The ECCC Internal Rules were amended, adding opportunities for moral and collective reparations through external funding sources.

According to the new rule, the VSS works in coordination with the ECCC Lead Co-Lawyers (LCL), who represent the Civil Parties collectively at trial, and with external actors from Cambodian civil society.²⁰ These NGOs are usually partners of the ECCC, already collaborating with the VSS and the Public Affairs Section (PAS) in organizing the Tribunal's outreach activities. The most active are the DC-Cam, the Center for Social Development (CSD), the Khmer Institute for Democracy (KID), the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), the Center for Justice and Reconciliation (CJR) and the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO).²¹ The process of decision-making concerning collective reparations starts with a consultation organized by the VSS and the LCL with Civil Parties and other stakeholders. The VSS and the LCL take proposals from potential partners and assess their viability and appropriateness. They look at the project innovation (the benefit or service the project offers that Civil Parties might not access otherwise; how it is tailored to Civil Parties and the case) and the legal basis (the links of the project to the alleged crimes; the harms it addresses or repairs). A limited number of proposals is then selected and prioritized for further development. This phase lasts about six months. The phase of development itself begins after that. When hearings draw to a close, the Trial Chamber asks for the Final Claims for Reparations. It is a description of reparations projects that is submitted to the initial approval of the judges. Under ECCC "Rule 23quinquies(b)," judges have the

¹⁸ Renee Jeffery, "Beyond Repair? Collective and Moral Reparations at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal," *Journal of Human Rights* 13, no.1 (2014): 117. See also: Mary Orsini, "Quest for Justice through Symbolic Reparations: Lessons Learned from the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia" (International Justice Project, August 7, 2012).

¹⁹ In September 2011, the ECCC issued a severance order, dividing Case 002 into segments by topic and chronology. There is a sentence for each segment or "mini-trial" as these parts have been called for a time. Case 002/01 began in November 2011 and the judgment was pronounced in August 2014. Case 002/02 began in October 2014.

²⁰ Julian Poluda, Judith Strasser, and Chhim Sotheara, "Justice, Healing, and Reconciliation in Cambodia," in *Peacebuilding, Memory, and Reconciliation: Bridging Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches*, Bruno Charbonneau and Geneviève Parent, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 105.

²¹ Christoph Sperfeldt, "Cambodian Civil Society and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no.1 (2012): 151. Media work is carried out by the Public Affairs Section of the ECCC. Clara Ramírez-Barat and Maya Karwande, "Outreach Strategies in International and Hybrid Courts" (Research Unit International Center for Transitional Justice, April 2010), 12.

power to “recognize that a specific project appropriately gives effect to the award sought by the LCL and may be implemented.”²²

In spite of a lack of infrastructure, staff, and expertise to launch proactive fundraising campaigns, the VSS and the LCL are responsible for securing the funding of collective reparations.²³ They work in a difficult context, pressed by time as the reparations scheme was conceived “within the ECCC’s lifespan.”²⁴ The Cambodian state does not give the program any financial support. This, indeed, is a pattern at the Tribunal. From the outset the international community has been prompt to cover the Cambodian side of expenses each time Hun Sen’s government balked. This patronizing attitude set problematic precedents. Since there is no provision in the ECCC’s mandate allowing the Tribunal to compel the Cambodian state to commit to the program, the VSS and the LCL are left to their own devices. They differentiate between reparations awards paid by the accused if the latter is found guilty on the one hand, and reparations projects financed externally and recognized as reparations by the Trial Chamber on the other hand. The design of the system is at odds with the logic of donor funding. The granting of reparations awards happens only after the final verdict, which makes it difficult for the VSS to convince donors to support projects before the judgment is passed.²⁵ The second problem relates to the dependency of funding on the accused. If the latter is declared indigent, there is no money for reparations. Moreover, the Tribunal is not authorized to investigate the assets of the accused or freeze them before the trial.²⁶ When Ieng Sary passed away, the Co-Prosecutors dropped the case since he could no longer be convicted. Consequently, his houses in Phnom Penh and the Banteay Meanchey province as well as his twenty million dollars bank account in Hong Kong escaped the ECCC. Although Civil Parties in Case 002/01 called for his assets to be seized and distributed to victims, the Cambodian government did not lift a finger.²⁷ Recently, the system has been slightly modified. The VSS received the permission to implement requested reparations as non-judicial measures. This allows the unit to go forward independently of the judges’ decisions. At the same time, it makes the system even more confused since the different kinds of reparations can no longer be clearly distinguished. On April 21, 2014, the VSS announced that it had secured wide-ranging support for collective reparations, except for one project. It was just on time as the Trial Chamber had set the deadline on March 31, 2014.²⁸ Yet, this was a limited success, the amount secured (\$770,275) barely reaching a

²² Civil Party Lead Co-Lawyers, “Guidebook on Judicial Reparations in Case 002/02 before the ECCC” (Phnom Penh, November 13, 2014), 8, 4.

²³ Sperfeldt, “Collective Reparations,” 482-483; Open Society Justice Initiative, “The funding challenge for reparations in Cambodia” (Briefing paper, Open Society Foundation, September 2013).

²⁴ Sperfeldt, “Collective Reparations,” 482-483. As Sperfeldt underlines it, the question what happens once the Tribunal is shut down and reparations have not been completed at the time is still unanswered.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.* 478.

²⁷ Phorn Bopha and Simon Lewis, “In Death, Ieng Sary’s Riches Beyond Reach, Reparation,” *The Cambodia Daily*, March 20, 2013, and “Victims Call for Ieng Sary’s Assets to be Seized,” *The Cambodia Daily*, March 21, 2013.

²⁸ Press release of the ECCC, “Wide Ranging Support Secured for the Reparations of Victims of the Khmer Rouge,” April 21, 2014.

third of the amount needed (\$2.5 million) according to the Open Society Foundation's estimate.²⁹

2.3 The selection of projects in Case 002/01

The consultation process about Case 002/01 reparations began in May 2011. In December 2012 president of the Trial Chamber Judge Nil Nonn issued a memorandum requesting the LCL to identify the prioritized list of reparation projects and to provide information regarding the current status of the funding of the selected projects. Case 002/01 focused on the evacuation of Phnom Penh and other cities in April 1975 and the forced transfers of populations from various zones between September 1975 and December 1977.³⁰ Consequently, the proposals had to deal with these events.³¹ The sixteen projects selected at that stage included the creation of a commemoration day, the construction of memorial sites, exhibitions and educational initiatives, the organization of therapy groups, and the establishment of the Victims Foundation of Cambodia in charge of administering the funding of the reparations.³² The key components of these projects were further elaborated through collaborative meetings, workshops, and conferences. The final list of projects was published on April 4, 2014. Besides Séra's *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* it included twelve proposals, among which figured a National Remembrance Day, exhibitions on forced transfers, history books, testimonial therapy for Civil Parties, local memorials, the publication and distribution of the ECCC judgment.³³ The list reflects the Tribunal's emphasis on "remembrance and memorialization," one of the ECCC's three fields of collective reparations alongside "rehabilitation" and "documentation and education":

The development of accessible, meaningful and well-maintained public memorials will play an important role in the recovery of Cambodian society (...) The monuments provide an essential space for honoring deceased and living victims, especially Civil Parties; serve as a permanent reminder of Khmer Rouge atrocities, especially the forced movements of the population; thus helping to ensure their non-recurrence; generate and preserve the history of this period; and promote intergenerational dialogue, thus improving social cohesion and de-stigmatizing the harm suffered by the Civil Parties.³⁴

²⁹ Open Society Justice Initiative, "The funding challenge for reparations in Cambodia," 2013.

³⁰ Closing order (October 19, 2012, updated November 11, 2013). Case 002/01 also focused on the execution of former Khmer Republic officials and military at Tuol Po Chrey (Pursat province) in April 1975. Case 002/02 deals with crimes at the work cooperative Tram Kok in Takeo province, Kraing Ta Chan security center, and some dam works; genocide against Cham Muslim and Vietnamese communities; forced marriages and rapes; internal purges.

³¹ For a detailed list, see Appendix K.

³² The Victims Foundation of Cambodia (VFC) is supposed to monitor the implementation of the program for the period 2014-2018 with the support of the German Federal foundation EVZ, Stiftung Erinnerung Verantwortung Zukunft ("Remembrance, Responsibility and Future"). It is not operational yet, and projects are still processed directly with partner organizations.

³³ For a detailed list see Appendix L.

³⁴ Lead Co-Lawyers, "Indication to the trial chamber of the priority projects for implementation as reparations (internal rule 80BIS(4)) with strictly confidential annex," submitted by Pich Ang and Elizabeth Simonneau-Fort (Phnom Penh, February 12, 2013), 4-5.

In the past the Tribunal and its partners had already organized outreach activities focused on memorials, such as visits in Tuol Sleng for Cambodians from the provinces brought to attend hearings at the court. These activities ensured a direct linkage of the atrocities depicted at these sites of memory, the moral authority of the Tribunal, and narratives of justice and reconciliation (Elander 2014, Lesley-Rozen 2014, Manning 2011). The construction of memorials is thus a new and logical phase in ECCC's policies. The use of memorials as reinforcement of the legal and sociopolitical discourse of the court is not specific to the Cambodian case. Transitional justice sees memorialization as part of its mission in post-conflict societies. It supports the dynamics of social reconstruction and political transformation that international tribunals try to engineer in affected countries. According to a 2007 comparative survey of transitional justice's interventions worldwide, memorials serve a broad array of objectives, including: repairing damaged relations among groups; encouraging civic engagement; recasting national identity; symbolizing a community's or nation's commitment to values such as democracy and human rights. Memorialization comes primarily in the form of crime sites preserved and converted into memorials, places built specifically for remembrance purposes (such as museums), walls of names of victims, virtual memorials on the Internet, activities such as remembrance days, apologies, or temporary exhibitions.³⁵

As the list of Case 002/01 reparations shows, the ECCC punctiliously follows this chart. For Jeffery, the Tribunal's decision to focus collective reparations on memorials is doubly problematic. It narrows the reparations agenda and does not respond meaningfully to the victims' perceptions of how their suffering should be treated.³⁶ In October 2014 a group of two hundred Civil Parties in Case 002/01, claiming to represent 1,780 Civil Parties at the ECCC, released a statement in which they criticized collective reparations, calling them "worthless for victims and Civil Parties." They called for the amendment of the Tribunal's rules so Civil Parties are allowed to receive monetary reparations instead. The protesters said that they intend to petition the UN, the Cambodian government, and donors from the international community.³⁷ This points to the big misunderstanding on which collective reparations are built. The Tribunal never clarified what the program actually entails and let people imagine a different kind of outcome. Cambodians think about reparations in tangible terms, either as financial compensation or socioeconomic developments benefiting the community (such as roads, schools, hospitals, and housing).³⁸ If the feeling of dispossession and of not being heard expressed by the protesters resonates so strongly in Cambodian society, it is because it points to a deep malaise vis-à-vis the representation, participation, and agency of locals in the collective reparations process. Civil Parties are supposed to be associated to decision-making, yet they are not given an important role in the procedure. The dominant position of NGOs and the divergence of interests between organizations and survivors are a major

³⁵ Judy Barsalou and Victoria Baxter, *The Urge to Remember: The Role of Memorials in Social Reconstruction and Transitional Justice* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, January 2007), 4, 8.

³⁶ Jeffery, "Beyond Repair?" 113.

³⁷ Kuch Naren and Holly Robertson, "Victims Call for Money from ECCC," *The Cambodia Daily*, October 17, 2014.

³⁸ Jeffery, "Beyond Repair?" 113.

problem.³⁹ Some Cambodians see reparations projects as just a way for NGOs to get money from Westerners, and nothing more.⁴⁰ As protester Pen Soeun argues: collective reparations are “just made by some NGOs to exploit the victims of the Khmer Rouge and Civil Parties for their own interests.”⁴¹ The powerlessness of Civil Parties in a process that concerns them directly reflects on a smaller scale a national problem—the absence of a nationwide consultation to ask Cambodians what kind of commemorative fixtures they want.⁴² In that respect, the control of the Tribunal over the reparations procedure is not without evoking the authoritarian grasp of the Cambodian state on its citizens. In both cases the rights and desiderata of the population seem to be given little consideration.

3. Creating a public art project in Cambodia

3.1 Beginning and development of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*

To Those Who Are No Longer Here was born in August 2012 when Séra conducted a research project on memorials in Cambodia. As he looked for traces of public memorials in Phnom Penh, the artist was struck by the fact that “nowhere in Cambodia is there on public grounds something to mark this tragedy.”⁴³ Crime sites such as water works are not signaled, not even with a memorial plaque. Families mourn their dead at memorial stupas, at home, or at the pagoda. There is no public space where Cambodians can gather and remember the victims, apart from Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek. And the latter are specific places of political prisoners. What about the other victims, Séra wondered.⁴⁴ *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* was conceived of as a response to this absence, with the twofold objective of commemorating these other victims and creating a different kind of commemorative space for Cambodians. It is not the first time Séra designs a memorial related to the tragic history of Cambodia. A few years ago he created the piece *Aux Sans-Noms* (“To Those Without a Name”) for the Khmer community in Bussy-Saint-George, a small city in the remote suburb of Paris. The sculpture combined dark woods, metals, and resinous color drips on the millstone (250 x 100 x 55 cm). It was installed at a newly built square and inaugurated in June 2007. The inauguration was somewhat controversial since the organizers rejected the Cambodian embassy’s proposal to name the place “Place Norodom Sihanouk” (“Square Norodom Sihanouk”). They thought that the king was too compromised with the Khmer Rouge, and instead they christened the square “Place du Royaume du Cambodge” (“Square of the Kingdom of Cambodia”).⁴⁵

³⁹ It was already the case in the context of outreach activities. Sperfeldt, “Cambodian Civil Society,” 153-154, 157.

⁴⁰ Joseph Freeman, “Cambodia is Finally Starting to Get Serious about Commemorating Genocide Victims,” *Global Post*, June 12, 2014.

⁴¹ Kuch and Robertson, “Victims call for money from ECCC.”

⁴² Stan Starygin, “More on the Misconceived Reparations Process,” ECCC-Reparations Blog, May 1, 2014.

⁴³ Michelle Vachon, “Graphic Novel Depicts the Years Before Zero,” *The Cambodia Daily*, April 4, 2015.

⁴⁴ Wight, “Sculptors Plans Genocide Memorial.”

⁴⁵ Interview of Séra with former mayor Hughes Rondeau, “Une Sculpture pour Raconter l’Histoire du Cambodge,” August 5, 2007; Emmanuel Lemieux, “Le Jour Séra,” *Témoignage*

Séra describes his new memorial project as “a group of sculptural monuments on a raised triangular platform adjacent to the Embassy of France in Phnom Penh.” *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* will conjure up “events, which affected the population of Phnom Penh in April 1975 when the city’s inhabitants were forced by the Khmer Rouge to abandon their homes.”⁴⁶ Of course, the context in Cambodia differs greatly from the system of public art commission in France. Therefore Séra needed to find a framework and partners for his new project. This was all the more important as the location chosen for the memorial, a plaza facing the French embassy called Square Daun Penh, is central and situated in an area of intensive traffic (figures 2-3). It was from the embassy’s compound that Séra had witnessed the population evacuating the city in April 1975. Understandably the artist was keen on the location, as it had a strong symbolic meaning for him: “It’s a crossroads of history, of destiny, of time.” It is not only the place where Séra lost his father, but also the place where he saw for the first time war deaths. In 1972, a commando of Vietcong insurgents exploded the nearby Chroy Changvar Bridge. They were killed and their body exposed onsite.⁴⁷

I’m eleven years old. The day after the destruction of the Chroy Changvar Bridge by North Vietnamese commandos during the night of 6-7 October 1972, my father takes us to the site. A family outing. Just to see. We approached a traffic circle where people fled from what looked like a big pile. They were holding their noses. We had no idea what was happening there. It was a big, blackish pile. And there, stacked upon each other, were the carbonized bodies of North Vietnamese sappers. I can no longer remember what that pile looked like. But the smell! The smell follows me to this day. I think that one can never forget such an odor, such a trace. It constitutes a veritable engram, a memory imprint that has guided my representation work.⁴⁸

Talks with municipal and national authorities for the memorial required partners with political weight. The French embassy, which had supported Séra’s exhibitions and educational workshops in Cambodia at several occasions, endorsed the new proposal of the artist and accepted to finance about half of it.⁴⁹ To help him manage legal and administrative aspects in Cambodia, Séra turned to the association Anvaya, a Khmer

Chrétien, July 7, 2007. Since then, the roundabout has been renamed “Place Phnom Penh (“Square Phnom Penh”).

⁴⁶ Press release of the ECCC, “Wide Ranging Support.”

⁴⁷ Séra and Anou’savry Thom, *À Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là. Un Mémorial en Hommage aux Victimes des Khmers Rouges, 17 Avril 1975 – 7 Janvier 1979* (Paris, 2014), 17.

⁴⁸ Quoted in the catalogue of the exhibition *Séra* at the Institut Français in Phnom Penh (2012), 78.

⁴⁹ In the past ten years Séra has conducted regular workshops at the Centre Culturel Français (CCF) in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, including the program dedicated to Cambodian graphic novels (*Re*)-GÉNÉRATIONS in 2008. Several exhibitions were organized, among which *Séra* at the Institut Français in Phnom Penh in 2012, *Deux Faces* at the CCF in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap in 2007, and *Retour à Phnom Penh* at the CCF in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap in 2005. Séra also gave the “pictorial performances” *Immanence* at the Institut Français in Phnom Penh in 2012 and *Gisants I and II* at the CCF in Phnom Penh in 2011.

diaspora apolitical and non-profit organization based in Phnom Penh.⁵⁰ The association did not hesitate long before giving a green light.⁵¹ In November 2013 Anvaya finalized the agreement with the French embassy regarding the building of the memorial. The association's president Ke Bin Soreasmey declared, "We want this project to remain Cambodian-led, even if initiated with the support of the French authorities." Anvaya campaigned to have the project included in the list of the ECCC's collective reparations. "We are willing for this project to be recognized by the tribunal, as this will give us a real legitimacy. But even if we do not have this recognition we will do it," Ke Bin said.⁵² There were several meetings with the Civil Parties and their representatives during which Séra and Ke Bin had to explain the project itself and show that authorizations and funding were secured.⁵³

In January 2014 the LCL agreed to include the project. *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* appeared on the list released officially in April that same year. On ECCC documents the main partners are listed as follows: Séra Ing, Anvaya Association, Embassy of France, Ouba SAS (web agency), and Acyc SARL Architects (architect office based in Gentilly, France, with a branch in Phnom Penh). The memorial's donors are listed as: Republic of France, Ms. Catherine Quéré (French MP), Mr. Avi Assouly (French MP), Anvaya Association, Ouba SAS, and Acyc SARL Architects. The association Anou'savry Thom (which translates as "big memory," thereafter Anou'savry) was specially created in Paris in May 2014 to help Anvaya organize the fundraising and promote the project.⁵⁴ The cost of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*, first estimated between \$90,000 and \$120,000, was soon revised upwards.⁵⁵ The new figure (\$160,198) includes the costs related to the memorial itself (\$139,500) and the costs of activities associated with the memorial among which the production of a website, a book in two thousand copies, and a thirty-minute long documentary movie (\$20,698).⁵⁶ The Embassy of France pledged 50,000 Euro (\$68,700), and the Groupe Amitié France-Cambodge, Assemblée Nationale ("France-Cambodia Friendship Group of the French National Parliament") pledged 10,000 Euro (\$13,500).⁵⁷ However, in the frame of collective reparations these subventions can be accessed only if there is equal funding from

⁵⁰ Anvaya began as an informal initiative launched in Phnom Penh in March 2010 by two young entrepreneurs, French-Cambodian Ke Bin Soreasmey and Cambodian American David Yim. It helps overseas Cambodians planning to return to Cambodia settle in the country and it connects them through professional and social networks. Anvaya received legal association status in Cambodia, France, and Switzerland. As other well-known Khmer diaspora artists, Séra is a member of the association.

⁵¹ Ke Bin Soreasmey, personal communication to author, December 12, 2015.

⁵² Wight, "Sculptors Plans Genocide Memorial."

⁵³ Ke Bin Soreasmey, personal communication to author, December 12, 2015.

⁵⁴ The members of the association are: Véronique Donnat (president), Eric Joly (treasurer), Adrien Genoudet (secretary), and Julianne Sibiski (communication).

⁵⁵ Wight, "Sculptors Plans Genocide Memorial."

⁵⁶ For a breakdown of the budget, see Appendix M. Some agencies contacted by Anvaya for support found the budget disproportionate (especially Séra's fees) in the context of Cambodia. Informer no. 3, conversation with author, May 30, 2015.

⁵⁷ Séra/Anou'savry, *A Ceux qui ne sont plus là*, 18. Marina Shafik, "Survivor Fashions Genocide Memorial," *Khmer Times*, April 16, 2015.

voluntary sources. In other words, Séra had to collect the remaining 73,000 Euro (\$82,000).



Figure 2: Location of the memorial *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* (2014).
Source: Séra and Anou'savry Thom, *À Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là* (Paris, 2014).

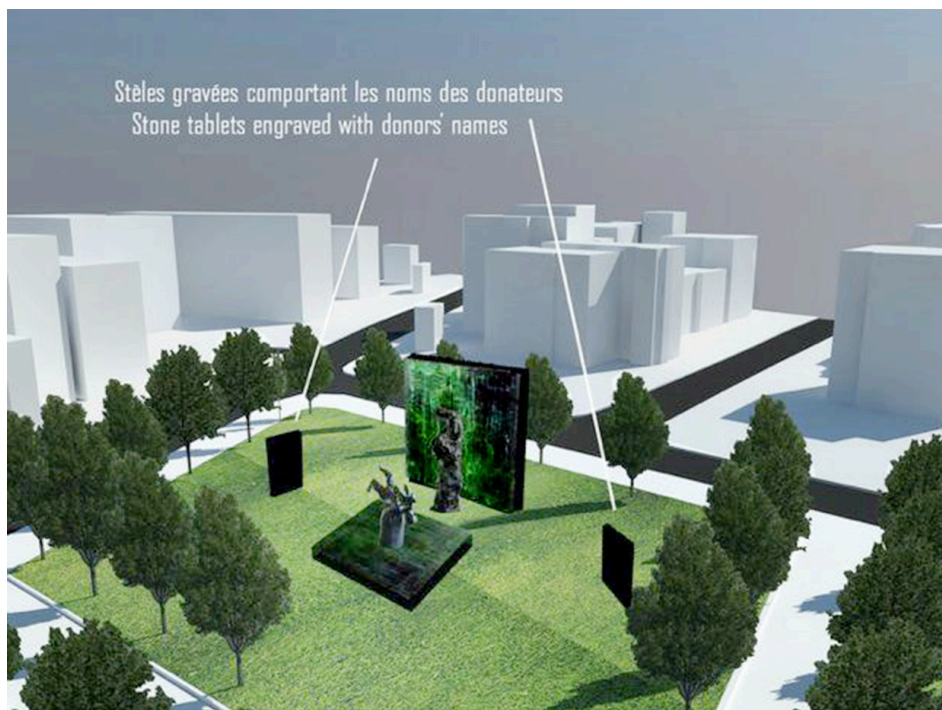


Figure 3: Location of the memorial *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* (2014).
Source: Séra and Anou'savry Thom, *À Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là* (Paris, 2014).

3.2 Crowd-funding the memorial

It is to honor *Those Who Are No Longer Here* as well as their loved ones who keep their memory alive that this Memorial project was initiated. This Memorial belongs to them. This Memorial belongs to you who make the decision to support it. This Memorial will belong to the new generations of Cambodians so that they may live and grow in awareness.⁵⁸

To collect new funds Anou'savry and Séra, with the support of Anvaya, resorted to the social media form of an old practice, the emission of public subscriptions—that is, the financial participation of individuals in the costs of the memorial's construction in exchange for a certificate (it was widespread in the twenties and thirties for the building of monuments commemorating the dead of First World War for instance). On June 17, 2014, the partners launched a campaign on the crowd-funding platform Kickstarter with the aim to collect \$85,000. *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* was not the only project of that kind on Kickstarter. Similar platforms are often used to raise funds for memorials and funerals. The Korean War Memory Tour, the WWI National Sikh Memorial, and the Somme Memorial for British Soldiers are some of the other projects listed on Kickstarter. In January 2014 Séra and Anou'savry created a Facebook page for the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial, as the proposal had been renamed for the occasion. It gave updates about the progress of the project (agreement of the ECCC, meeting with DC-Cam's) and from June 2014 onward about the progress of the fundraising campaign. It even ran a countdown to encourage donations.

Anyone using a platform such a Kickstarter to collect funds for a project must devise a real communication strategy via social and (if possible) mainstream media to ensure the circulation of the project. Therefore two websites were created, one in English (cambodiantragedymemorial.com) and one in French (cambodiantragedymemorial.net). Furthermore, Séra twitted regularly about the results of the Kickstarter campaign. The visual communication of the project was based on a wide range of images, such as pictures of the evacuation of Phnom Penh by photographer Roland Neveu, sketches of the planned sculptures, and photos of the shooting tests of the documentary film about the development of the memorial in Cambodia. It also included press articles, ECCC documents, and support messages. As recommended by Kickstarter, Séra and his partners posted a video presenting the project. After a short historical introduction on the fall of Phnom Penh in April 1975, the video focused on Séra's story (told by the artist himself in voice over) through family pictures, as baby in his mother's arms, as a child at Angkor Wat, and with his parents and sibling in the early seventies. It was interspersed with images of Séra at work, creating a small model of one of the memorial's sculptures (filmed by Julianne Sibiski and Adrien Genoudet) and images of the memorial's location in Phnom Penh (filmed by Alain Guillemot).

Marketing is central to Kickstarter campaigns. The project must be attractive visually and conceptually. Furthermore, as people pledge money in return for something, a system of rewards must be devised. Rewards are organized in a cumulative way. There is a new reward at each new level of pledge, which adds to those promised at previous levels. The creator handbook of Kickstarter suggests all kinds of ideas for rewards, pivoting around

⁵⁸ Website "Kickstarter."

personalization, customization, collector's edition, and access to the behind-the-scenes of the project—in short, anything that makes the donor feel special. The reward system designed for the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial followed these recommendations. It included thirteen levels, ranging from special personal thanks on the website's project up to the title of “Honorable Patron of the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial” rewarded with artworks.⁵⁹ Anou'savry and Séra demonstrated a good skill set in combining people's wish for being thanked in a meaningful way, Séra's status as famous artist, and the promise of “authentic” and “original” drawings, paintings, and bronzes. The contrast with commercial painting in Cambodia—serialized and copy works representing Angkor Wat at sunset or *apsara* dancers (Khmer classical dance of the Royal Ballet)—was all the more striking.

Some parts of Kickstarter reward system fitted in with the Cambodian public as they echoed Khmer Buddhist traditions and patronage. The proposal to engrave names on the official stone at the memorial site evoked the display of donor names on pagoda walls or in books kept inside the pagodas, as reminder of the place's history and the donor's social status and respectability. Consequently, the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial should have been appealing across cultures, especially as it seemed well tailored for potential backers in the Khmer diaspora. Still, the fundraising attempt was unsuccessful. When the campaign stopped on July 27, 2014 Anou'savry and Séra had collected only \$11,036 out of the \$85,000 requested, or twelve percent of the total. Since Kickstarter is based on an all-or-nothing principle, they received nothing. Eighty-six people had pledged money, among which some—journalists, artists and scholars—are known for their involvement in things Cambodian (such as Elizabeth Becker, film director Davy Chou, Soko Phay-Vakalis, Ariane Mathieu, and John Weeks). A majority of people pledged between \$10 and \$80.⁶⁰ The failure to reach the goal raises the question whether Kickstarter was the right strategy for Séra's project. Dadaly Duong, a young Cambodian lady who had first posted a support message just after the start of the campaign, sent a second email a couple of days later, on June 19, 2014:

I am trying very hard to promote this project to all my friends. They seemed somehow uninterested and do not really understand what the whole project is about. Have you tried promoting the project any other place besides kickstarter? I see in the project information that you have been published on The Cambodia Daily and such, but for this specific project, I don't really see any promotion aside from in here. Kickstarter seems very foreign to most Cambodians, so I have a feeling that just raising fund through here would not be enough to get the project well funded. Have you had or thought about a Plan B in case this project is not successful???

Whereas the project's team had warmly answered to her first declaration of interest, it did not reply to Luong's second message. Yet, she had raised a good question. The inability of the DC-Cam to reach \$7,000 with a Kickstarter campaign for its Genocide Education Memorial Project (construction of memorials in ten secondary schools across Cambodia)

⁵⁹ For a detailed list of the rewards, see Appendix N.

⁶⁰ Fifteen backers pledged \$10; sixteen backers \$50; seventeen backers \$80; ten backers \$150; three backers \$250; two backers \$350; four backers \$500; and only one backer \$1,300.

⁶¹ Website “Kickstarter.”

later in July 2015 proves her correct. The crowd-funding platform seems unadjusted to the Cambodian context. Social media might work for young and/or cosmopolitan classes in Phnom Penh, but not for the majority population, due to accessibility issues (access to the Internet and online banking, problems of literacy). Potential donors, locals and diaspora members alike, might favor more traditional means of support over this digitally mediated form of public recognition. This points to the core ambiguity of Séra's project. For whom does the artist want to build *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*? If it is conceived for locals and Civil Parties, or all Cambodians, then why to use strategies that are "foreign to most Cambodians" and will probably only reach a limited group? Strategies devised for fundraising and communicating reveal the hybrid nature of Séra's project itself, situated across Cambodia and the West, tradition and technological innovation, memorial or artisanal art and contemporary art. To clarify to what extent *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* departs (or not) from the memorial culture usually encountered in Cambodia, the next part of the chapter gives an overview of commemorative fixtures in the country with a focus on aesthetic and socioeconomic aspects.

4. Memorial culture in Cambodia

4.1 Architectures of memory

As mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, the very idea of "local" hardly applies to memorials in Cambodia since "foreigners" (non-Cambodians) were involved from the outset in Khmer Rouge-related memorialization. The seminal study of anthropologist Rachel Hughes on the memorial politics of the PRK in the eighties thoroughly explains how the memorial fabric was woven as an assemblage of different forms. The Cambodian government at the time did not initiate new styles but imposed a syncretic aesthetic that combined Buddhist traditional architecture, colonial influences (ossuaries), and socialist realism.⁶² The site of Choeung Ek, also known as the "Killing Fields," is a good illustration (figures 4-5). The Khmer Rouge had used this former Chinese cemetery located fifteen kilometers from Phnom Penh to kill and dispose of S-21 prisoners. Mass exhumations were conducted in 1980. The excavated remains of about nine thousand individuals were chemically preserved and housed in a wooden memorial-pavilion. In 1988 the Cambodian government appointed architect Lim Ourk to build a large memorial glass-windowed *stupa* (traditional hemispherical structure housing relics). While symbolizing the reinstatement and revival of Buddhism, the stupa did not contain cremated remains, as the structure customarily does. Instead it exhibited skulls and bones—those of the corpses excavated onsite.⁶³

⁶² These forms were themselves influenced by Vietnam's commemorative style, a combination of French memorial style (materializing the nation), indigenous motifs, and Soviet "monumental propaganda" (which eventually became the dominant form). Christina Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 113-114.

⁶³ Rachel Hughes, "Memory and Sovereignty in post-1979 Cambodia: Choeung Ek and Local Memorials," in *New Perspectives on Genocide: Cambodia and Rwanda*, ed. Susan E. Cook (New Haven: Yale Centre for International Area Studies, 2004), 270, 273-279.



Figure 4: Stupa memorial at Choeung Ek (2011). Source: personal documentation



Figure 5: Stupa memorial at Choeng Ek (2011). Source: personal documentation.

Bones and skulls played an important role in the PRK's communication about the Khmer Rouge. Displayed as gruesome evidence of the atrocities perpetrated by the Pol Pot's regime, they justified the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia and legitimized the Heng Samrin government. Human remains were thus a visual argument pushed into the face of visitors and used in international political negotiations. The skull map created by museum expert Mai Lam at Tuol Sleng in 1979 is certainly the icon of the regime's crude aesthetic. It was a twelve-square meter map made out of three hundred skulls on which the Mekong River was painted in blood-like red (figures 6-7).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The map was taken apart in March 2002 after a ceremony for the rest of the souls (*Bang Sakol*). The skulls were put on glass-cased shelves, and displayed next to a photo of the map. Samnang Ham and Bill Myers, "Tuol Sleng Workers Dismantle Skull Map," *The Cambodia*



Figure 7: Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum after the skull map was dismantled.
Source: personal documentation.

Provincial and municipal memorials erected across Cambodia in the early eighties (after the Ministry of Information and Culture’s memorandums in October 1983) followed a similar model. They were often located inside or near a *wat* (sacred compound with monastery, temple, and building for lessons) since the Khmer Rouge had often used these structures as prisons and killing centers. They usually hosted remains that were taken from neighboring mass graves.⁶⁵ There was a utilitarian dimension to this practice. In the eighties the Cambodians, in dire need for farming land, tried to reclaim plots for agricultural use and often found skulls and bones. They collected and gathered them, but what to do with them then? Memorial stupas answered that question, although in a problematic way. State memorialization in the PRK relied on a contradiction. The conservation and display of human remains for political objectives went against Buddhist rituals of cremating the dead to free their souls. This politics created black holes of memory, as people feared to go to some places, which they thought were still haunted. The issue kept surfacing in post-UNTAC political debates with King Sihanouk’s call for cremating the human remains exhibited. At the same time, memorial stupas offered Cambodians who had no idea where their beloved had died a place where to perform rituals in honor of the dead, such as making offerings during *Pchum Ben* (Ancestors’ Day). In that respect, however alien they might appear, they mixed with local traditions and were progressively integrated into the Cambodian memory landscape to the point of becoming a feature of it.

Daily, March 11, 2002; “Victims’ Shrine Made of Skulls is Dismantled by Cambodia,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 2002.

⁶⁵ Hughes, “Memory and Sovereignty in post-1979 Cambodia,” 277-279.

Over time many of these stupa memorials collapsed, and the human remains they contained either dispersed or disappeared in a state of decay. Those rebuilt or newly constructed in the period of the early nineties to the mid-2000s repeated the earlier model, such as the Tuol Ang memorial in the Takeo province (early nineties), the Batheay pagoda in the Kampong Cham province (2002), and the Troap Kor Pagoda in the Kandal province (2004). Located at Phnom Sampeau (Sampeau hill) fifteen kilometers away from Battambang city, the Killing Caves offers a good example. About ten thousand people were murdered there. Halfway up to the hill stands a pagoda (Wat Kirirum), which the Khmer Rouge used as prison and torture center. Prisoners were taken further up and thrown off the mountain. Once the stench got away, locals picked up the bones and kept them in an onsite memorial. A few years ago the pagoda was rehabilitated and redecorated with scenes from the Ramayana (epic poem written in Sanskrit) thanks to donations of local people. Not far from it, on the way to the caves, a painting depicts in a crude way the killing of prisoners. It is supposedly based on the memories of the locals (figure 8).



Figure 8: Drawing displayed on the path to the “Killing Caves” in Battambang (2014). Source: personal documentation.

Stairs, which were made in the eighties when the place was converted into memorial, lead down the cave where the bodies piled. The memorial was reshuffled and dedicated in 2007. Today it hosts a glass-walled cabin containing skulls and bones. The old memorial made of chicken wire fencing is still there, on one side of the stairs, partly filled with human remains. On the other side of the stairs, a drawing describes an execution (figure 9). It was allegedly made by one of the Khmer Rouge guards. An impressive feature of the Killing Caves is the reclining golden Buddha (figure 10). A nun sits nearby the whole day, praying and blessing visitors for their small donations.



Figure 9: Drawing (supposedly by a Khmer Rouge) at the “Killing Caves” in Battambang (2014). Source: personal documentation.

The memorial of Wat Samrong Knong (Somrong Knong) in the village of Norea near Battambang city presents another striking example. The Khmer Rouge used the wat’s buildings as prison. The first memorial (a stupa filled with human remains) was built in 1979 through the effort of Seang Nam, a survivor. The construction of a new stupa was initiated in 2002, financed in part through donations of Khmer communities in Australia, France, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.⁶⁶ There were delays in the building

⁶⁶ Ariane Mathieu, “Lieux de Mémoire/Mémoire des Lieux: La Pagode de Wat Samrong Knong,” in *Cambodge, le Génocide Effacé*, Pierre Bayard and Soko Phay-Vakalis, eds. (Nantes: Éditions Nouvelles Cécile Defaut, 2013), 136-139.

due to lack of funds. Local Buddhists finally helped complete the stupa in 2008.⁶⁷ The shrine, a glass-chamber filled with skulls and bones, sits atop a sculpted basis. The stone carvings depict in a graphic fashion life under the Khmer Rouge regime (figures 11-12). The president of the United States-based Generous Khmer Organization Oknha Dul Phouk (also called Ban Doeun) conducted the project. Local craftsmen carried out the work. Phouk says of the frescoes:

I want the sculptures to be lively and imaginative. The construction will make people who have ever experienced the Khmer Rouge get excited and burst into tears unconsciously (...) I have also experienced the regime and saw it with my two eyes. Additionally, I have listened to victims' description concerning tortures and killings the Khmer Rouge did to them. I had imagined the pictures of actions the Khmer Rouge did to the victims and then asked artists to sculpt. If the sculptures are not so logical, we have to correct them.⁶⁸

The carved images are either generic, or inspired by individual and local stories. Some sections describe the takeover of Cambodia: Khmer Rouge guards forcing the inhabitants to evacuate Battambang city, emptying the hospital, and confiscating bicycles. Other sections represent hard labor in Democratic Kampuchea: people cutting jute in the water, building dams (Kamping Poy), and creating a new village. The frescoes also show forced marriages at mass weddings, as well as scenes of interrogation and torture such as rape, plastic bag suffocation, and water dunking. Scenes of executions are particularly graphic. The prisoners are tied to trees and “the torturers split open their victim’s chests and abdomens, remove their livers and cannibalize their organs” (caption of the image). The carving captioned as “a Lon Nol officer and his family are tortured, the children are killed while the parents are forced to watch then they are executed” shows a powerless family looking at a Khmer Rouge soldier bayoneting a newborn. The captions are in English, as was planned initially. The locals who achieved the stupa kept the original idea. “The English is for the foreigners to understand the stories,” the village chief explains, “Cambodian people have already learned and experienced the Khmer Rouge regime.”⁶⁹

4.2 The economy of memorials

Memorial culture in Cambodia is grounded in small jobs economy and international (dark) tourism. This dimension hardly appears in Séra’s project, which rather reflects the ECCC’s abstract discourse. It looks good on paper and sounds good to donors’ ears, but it seems detached from reality in Cambodia and the role sites of memory play (or not) in the daily life of the population. As sociologist Peter Manning underlines in his study of memorial politics in Cambodia, memorials are “subject to economic demands that can

⁶⁷ Youth for Peace, *Stories from the Ground: Memorial Sites in Cambodia. Diary 2010* (Phnom Penh: Youth for Peace, 2010), np.

⁶⁸ “Construction of Memorial Statue for Khmer Rouge Victims in Samroang Knong Pagoda,” *Khmernews*, January 4, 2007 (The original text was published in *Rasmei Kampuchea* 14, no. 4157, December 13, 2006).

⁶⁹ Youth for Peace, *Stories from the Ground*, np.

entail the ‘commoditization’ of memories of violence.”⁷⁰ Memorials, thus, are not only a constant reminder of the past for people. They also sustain a trickle-down economy. For instance, the Killing Caves in Battambang provides sustenance for tuk-tuk drivers, motorbike-equipped guides who take tourists up to caves and the hill’s summit, nuns who pray near the reclining Buddha statue, owners of food stalls and makeshift cafes down the hill. While the objective of transitional justice, besides preventing violence from happening again, is to improve the life of survivors and disadvantaged communities, tribunals are often oblivious of the material dimension of memorials.⁷¹ The marketization of sites of memory in Cambodia stands in stark contrast to the ECCC’s vision, which is “predicated on affording a sense of justice and dignity for victims of the regime rather than through generating revenues.”⁷²

For some Cambodians, though, the Tribunal’s reparations program is a good way to boost local economy. The NGOs mediating between top levels and grassroots levels are well aware of this. In December 2013 the DC-Cam launched its permanent exhibition on forced transfer at two of the five provincial museums involved in the project, in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey. The room where the Battambang museum proposed to host the exhibition had a gaping hole at one corner of the ceiling. After trying unsuccessfully to get another room, the DC-Cam team agreed to pay for the repair.⁷³ For institutions that are structurally underfunded and hardly get any visitor, collective reparations are clearly a chance to get funds, material improvements, and training for the staff. Some NGOs dealing with memorialization projects seek to create a greater sense of ownership among local communities. They ask members to contribute small donations to the development of the memorial and involve them in its maintenance so it becomes “theirs” and a properly managed interface with tourists.⁷⁴ These NGOs supply a framework through which the trickle-down economy of memory is better controlled, in the line of sustainability and autonomy usually promoted by humanitarian organizations in developing countries. By doing so, they try to bend it to ways certainly more

⁷⁰ Peter Manning, “Justice, Reconciliation and Memorial Politics in Cambodia” (PhD diss., the London School of Economics and Political Science, 2014), 160.

⁷¹ Barsalou and Baxter, *The Urge to Remember*, 13.

⁷² Manning, “Justice,” 160.

⁷³ Vinita Ramani, “Provenance unknown” (Asian American Writers’ Workshop, February 26, 2015). The exhibition, a joint project of the DC-Cam and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, supported by the BMZ, uses the train deportation as common thread for the five museums (the three other museums being located in the Kampong Thom, Takeo and Svay Rieng provinces). See: *The Forced Transfer: The Second Evacuation of People during the Khmer Rouge Regime* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2013).

⁷⁴ This is what the NGO Youth for Peace attempted to do at the Krang Tachan security center in the Takeo province (about ten thousand people were murdered there). The organization initiated a memorial art project with the hope it would make the site stand out and attract tourists. The pictures drawn on the wall next to the memorial stupa were the result of discussions with the villagers. Youth for Peace also asked each family in the village to contribute 15,000 riels (around four dollars) to the building of the nearby museum. The experience is depicted in Ngo Menghak and Chheng Sambo’s movie *Building Art as a Memorial Site Together* (2010). Youth for Peace intends to do the same with the Community Peace Learning Center project planned at Samrong Khnong (collective reparations), asking the community to contribute human and financial resources to the center’s development and maintenance.

acceptable to the international community but not necessarily appropriate to the life of those concerned at first.

Yet, the issue—for the ECCC and partner NGOs—is less the fact people try to make ends meet than the profits some officials reap with memorials. This latter aspect is best understood in the context of the state’s financial disengagement from memorials (even if the latter are attached to specific ministries). Over the years the lack of maintenance has endangered many sites. As said above, some were rebuilt thanks to foreign donations and local communities. Members of the government and the CPP also happen to sponsor the construction of stupas and pagodas as a way to ingratiate constituencies and show off their power. Still, the situation remains difficult. Even a pillar of Cambodia’s memory politics such as Tuol Sleng went through hard times, as we have seen in Chapter 5. This led in 1997 to the proposal of South Korean businessman Seo Seong-ho to give one million dollars for the renovation of the museum. Seo planned to build new displays, add a park and murals, and create a sound and light spectacle with slides and music. Fortunately, Seo’s proposal was eventually turned down.⁷⁵ As this shows, the boundaries between the adoption of commercial solutions as last resort and sheer speculation prove particularly thin.

The Choeung Ek Killing Fields is a textbook case when it comes to such grey areas. The site was privatized in 2005 and put in the hands of JC Royal (JCR) Co, Ltd. The firm, a joint venture between Cambodians and the Japanese NGO Sun Fund, was supposedly involved in rebuilding the educational system in Cambodia. The deal was that JCR would invest \$150,000 to improve and maintain the road to Choeung Ek; build fences around the compound; take care of the garden; prepare a space for people to pay their respects to the dead; preserve the mass graves; build a multimedia center. In exchange the firm was to pay \$15,000 to Phnom Penh Municipality yearly for a period of five years. After that, this amount was to be increased by ten percent every five years until the end of the agreed thirty-year long lease. Cambodians were outraged at this selling of national memory for commercial profits, especially after it came to light that chief of cabinet Chea Vandeth was also chairman of JCR’s board of directors and secretary general of Sun Fund. Furthermore, Sun Fund was not registered anywhere and the address of its office in Phnom Penh had no physical existence. When journalists tried to investigate the matter, no one could be reached.⁷⁶ JCR made an attempt to quiet critics. It declared that the entrance fees paid by tourists would be used to finance scholarships for underprivileged Cambodian students. Still, to many it kept looking like a murky deal. The Japanese embassy in Phnom Penh preferred to distance itself from JCR and issued a

⁷⁵ Som Sattana, “Businessman Proposes Renovation of Infamous Khmer Rouge Museum,” Associated Press, January 21, 1997, quoted in Judy Ledgerwood, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes National Narrative,” in *Genocide, Collective Violence and Popular Memory. The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, David Lorey and William Bezley, eds. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 2002), 119-120. Recent solutions found for the maintenance of Tuol Sleng involve more “ordinary” partners such as the UNESCO, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ, or German civil service), and the Okinawa Peace Museum in Japan.

⁷⁶ Kuch Naren, “Japanese Firm to Manage Choeung Ek,” *The Cambodia Daily*, April 4, 2005, and “Official Linked to Choeung Ek Tourism Deal,” *The Cambodia Daily*, April 5, 2005.

press release declaring it was not involved and had never been consulted by any organization on the matter.⁷⁷

In both cases, Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, state representatives were quick at deflating controversies, painting the government as responsible custodian of national memory against foreign encroachment. The behind-the-scenes is certainly less shiny, and probably the kind the ECCC and its Cambodian civil society partners are tempted to clean off and professionalize (a process which is already taking place in some structures). The socioeconomic question, thus, segues into a political one. Transitional justice associates proper practices of memory in terms of narrative and management with good governance. Through collective reparations the Tribunal (the international community) suggests that the Cambodian government change its practices. In this light, the protest of Civil Parties in October 2014 might easily be construed as the message back of Hun Sen and his party, never the last ones to exploit or manipulate popular discontent—a reminder that balance in Cambodia is a very delicate thing and often depends on the goodwill of the government.

5. Analysis of the proposal of Séra

5.1 The “social aesthetics” of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*

While contemporary designs are welcomed by the artists and architects, critics and curators, however, they often run up against a wall not only of public bewilderment but also of survivor outrage. For many survivors believe that the searing reality of their experiences demands as literal a memorial expression as possible. “We weren’t tortured and our families weren’t murdered in the abstract,” the survivors complain, “it was real.” In reference to his Warsaw Ghetto Monument, for example, the sculptor Nathan Rapoport once asked plaintively, “Could I have made a rock with a hole in it and said, ‘Voilà! The heroism of the Jewish People?’ Probably not.” All of which raises the question of the dual roles of public and memory in public art: for, as becomes clear, not every work of public art is a monument, nor every memorial a work of public art.⁷⁸

The tension described by cultural theorist James E. Young with respect to Holocaust memorials fully applies to the project of Séra. As a memorial conceived by a non-local artist in a country that has no tradition of commissioning public artworks and only a nascent contemporary art scene, *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* occupies a complex position. I propose to look at it through Young’s notion of “social aesthetics.” The latter emphasizes the “dialogical quality” of the memorial, considered as an interactive presence in the public space.⁷⁹ It brings together formal questions and issues of historical

⁷⁷ Puy Kea, “‘Privatized’ Killing Fields Site Tries to Quiet Critics,” *The Japan Times*, January 13, 2006. In the early 2000s the Cambodian government privatized many other state enterprises and services (agriculture, post, telephone). Springer, *Cambodia’s Neoliberal Order*, 133.

⁷⁸ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meanings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 9.

⁷⁹ James E. Young, “Memory and Counter-Memory: Towards a Social Aesthetics of Holocaust Memorials,” in *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art*, Monica Bohm-Duchen, ed. (London, UK, 1995), 100.

referentiality and public accessibility.⁸⁰ Since the project of Séra has not been built yet, it is impossible to know what reactions it will trigger once it is in place. Still, debates about the proposal itself and the successive descriptions and transformations of the project over the last year give a good indication of what might happen in the future.

Since the beginning of the project, Séra has produced several versions of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*. The initial proposal includes six pieces of bronze sculpture. A central human-like form, three to four meter high, is surrounded by four smaller forms, about two meter high, and a large wall. All these forms have missing limbs. The second version of the memorial includes two fourteen-meter high cast bronze walls towering over a single sculptural piece and a nine square meter large water basin. Containers around the basin are filled with earth so visitors may plant incense sticks (a traditional practice at Buddhist shrines). The central sculpture is a ten-meter high and six-meter wide figure in position of prayer or supplication, reversed as it symbolizes the upside-down of everyone's life after April 17, 1975 (figures 13-14).⁸¹ The piece is fixed on a five-meter high pedestal, which it touches only at the shoulders. The bronze is worked with acids in a way that evokes the passing of time and reminds of the ruins at Angkor Wat temples.⁸² The current and final version of the proposal remains the same apart from the two walls that are replaced with a single one made of Cambodian earth.



Figure 13: Early proposal with several pieces.

Source: Séra and Anou'savry Thom, *À Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là* (Paris, 2014).

⁸⁰ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 12.

⁸¹ Loraine Canayer, Renaud Villain and Nathalie Heydel, *Cambodge: L'Art au Secours de la Mémoire*, ARTE, April 17, 2015.

⁸² Séra and Anou'savry Thom, *À Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là*, 7.

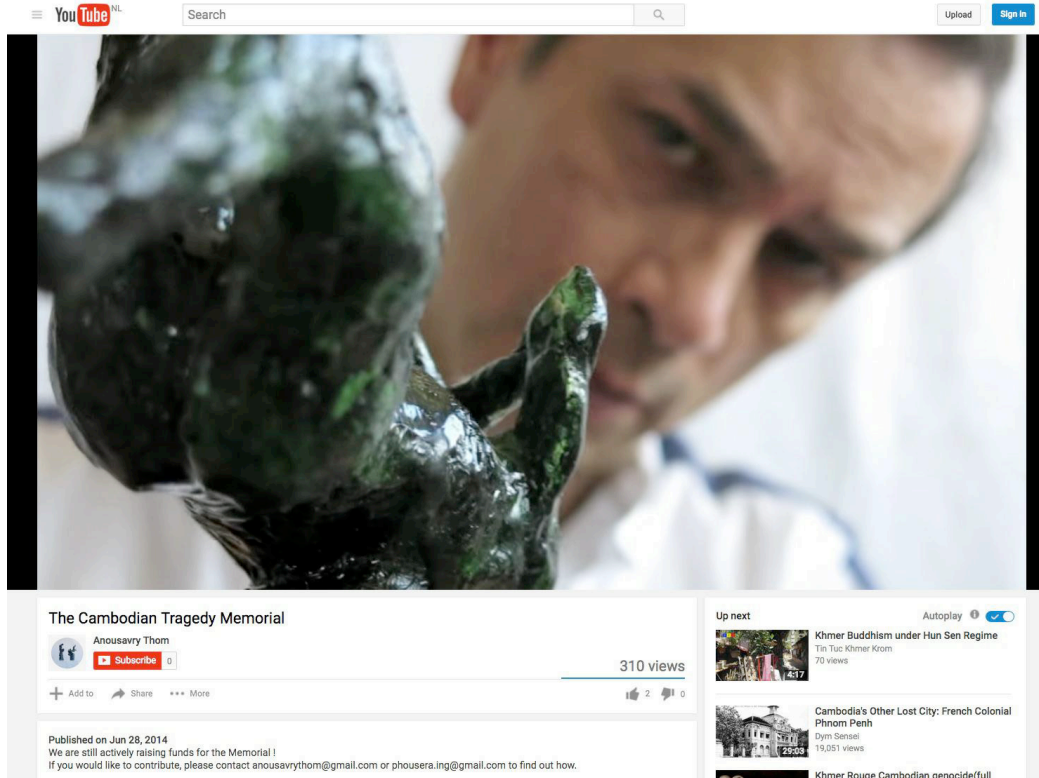


Figure 14: The reversed figure and main sculptural piece of the memorial (2014).

Source: Screen shot of the video originally posted on Kickstarter.

The downscaling and modifications of the project were due to the pressure of Phnom Penh authorities. They told Séra that his sculptures expressed suffering too graphically. After some talks the artist agreed to change the concept (not that he had much choice anyhow if he wanted to placate the municipal authorities):

Indeed on public grounds one cannot display something that overtly disturbs. So I came up with a much more soothing form (...) It is a figure that invites appeasement and contemplation, meant not so much to recall but to evoke, providing a place for people to reflect and pay homage to those who are no longer here.⁸³

According to Young, balancing the sensibilities of contemporary art against the needs of a lay audience unfamiliar with contemporary art is a problem that artists creating public art memorials often encounter in the process.⁸⁴ For the partner of Séra, the association Anvaya, the mediation between the two proved a difficult job. Ke Bin was careful to protect the integrity of the artist, yet he had to convey the remarks of other local parties, especially the families of victims and the people who will live with and around the memorial.⁸⁵ The postcolonial context complicated further the dialogue of Séra with local public taste because of the overlap of tensions between experimental and traditional or popular forms of art and tensions between Khmer and foreign cultures.

⁸³ Vachon, “Graphic Novel.”

⁸⁴ Young, “Memory and Counter-Memory,” 92.

⁸⁵ Ke Bin Soreasmey, personal communication to author, December 12, 2015.

The abstract anthropomorphism proposed by Séra with *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* has little to do with the kind of the “testimonial realism” (or documentary realism) found in memorials across Cambodia.⁸⁶ It is better described as a form of “affective justice,” which Rush defines as “not so much an emotion, as a bodily feeling, a corporeal sonority, a rhythm that places bodies on the line.”⁸⁷ Séra is not looking for any cathartic effect of the sculpture, but rather for an experience of empathy. There is a tension between the historical event the artist wants to denote and the decontextualized forms he chooses to create for that purpose. The set of suffering figures or the reversed body in the latest version of the project do not depict any actual individual; they symbolize all those, anonymous, who are gone. Therefore they become surfaces onto which any visitor might project a personal story. In that respect, the project falls into the category of trauma aesthetic and its aspiration to generic, universally understandable representations. In that specific frame the metaphorical equivalence between the “disfigured body” (in this case, the non-figurative bodies) and the “traumatized speech” of the victim underlines the role of the memorial as physical transposition of the Tribunal’s testimonial display into the public space.⁸⁸ In the same way survivors struggle to put their experience into words that will be decisive for the pursuit of justice and memory, the sculptures are caught in a process of formation, emerging out of chaos but not as clearly identifiable forms yet. This affective dimension is present in the paintings of Séra as well, especially the “pictorial performances” in which the artist fights bodily with the white surface/canvas to be “written” or painted—finding forms instead of finding words.⁸⁹ Seen in such continuity, *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* is thus not only a sculptural ensemble but also a performance site where the memory rituals to be conducted are totally different from the religious rituals performed at stupa memorials.

Interestingly, though, “testimonial realism” is not alien to Séra’s practice. Indeed, it plays a central role in his graphic novels, especially the Cambodia tetralogy formed by *Impasse et Rouge* (2003), *L’Eau et la Terre* (2005), *Lendemain de Cendre* (2007), and *Les Concombres Amers* (2015).⁹⁰ Séra appropriates and integrates into the four graphic novels a broad range of historical sources, such as maps, studies about DK, archive photos including Khmer Rouge propaganda materials, reproductions of magazines and newspapers covers, television footage (figure 15). Sources are clearly identified, and Séra provides bibliographies at the end of the books. This discursive, even scientific apparatus “validates” the individual stories recounted in the graphic novels (some being real, some

⁸⁶ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 11; “Memory and Counter-Memory,” 94. This sheds another light on the concerns expressed by Phnom Penh authorities over the possible shock effect of Séra’s descriptive pieces. The initial rejection of the piece might have had other reasons, as we will see.

⁸⁷ Rush, “Preface,” vii.

⁸⁸ Allen Feldman, “Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma Aesthetic,” *Biography* 27, no.1 (2004), 191.

⁸⁹ Séra explains that for years he painted on any kind of surfaces but white ones. He calls it the white sheet or canvas “forbidden surface,” the white being for him the color of mourning (as it is in Asia). Ludovic Foulon, “Rencontre avec Séra and Yves H,” *BD-Best*.

⁹⁰ *Impasse et Rouge* deals with the civil war period, *L’Eau et la Terre* with the Democratic Kampuchea period, and *Lendemain de Cendre* with the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime. His latest graphic novel *Les Concombres Amers, les Racines d’une Tragédie* [*Bitter Cucumbers*] is about the sixties and the American bombardment of Cambodia.

being fictional). At first sight there is little connection between the style of Séra in the tetralogy and his visual proposal in *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*. Yet, it might be argued that the four graphic novels and the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial are two sides of the same coin, two forms (one two-dimensional, one three-dimensional) of monuments to the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime. What unites these apparently opposite practices is the same question how to represent the past at the interplay of personal memories and collective history. The mosaic structure of the graphic novels that are based on fragments of lives and the engram-like function of the memorial's sculpture as a non-descriptive form able to reactivate memories both indicate that traumatic historical events can neither be grasped as a whole, nor depicted in a linear or illustrative fashion. In that sense, both refer to a "missing picture," to draw on Rithy Panh's movie. By patching together biographical pieces and combining them with visual sources, the graphic novels build a visual memory that does not exist as unity.⁹¹ The memorial, however abstract, aims to generate an image in a place where there is (supposedly) nothing. This, I suggest, is the reason why Séra's memorial is so radically distinct from other memorials in Cambodia, beyond obvious aesthetic differences. The novelty of his project resides in that it introduces into the Cambodian public space a new debate—the representation or non-representation of genocide.

Séra brought forward this question at several occasions in Cambodia, although in each case he addressed only a limited audience gathering primarily young artists (for instance, the workshop *Cambodge: L'Atelier de la Mémoire* organized by Soko Phay-Vakalis at Bophana Center in 2009). The aesthetic premises of Séra, those he applies and those he teaches, are clearly Western: the relation between artistic and documentary images, the performative dimension of art, and the rejection of any form of closure, whether it is beautification, illustration, or narrative linearity. These are figures usually discussed in debates about the representation of extreme violence in art, starting with the Holocaust.⁹² By deploying these tropes in the Cambodian context Séra contributes from within to connecting Khmer Rouge atrocities to the broader, globalizing frame of collective memory. It is such a transformation that the Cambodian Genocide Memorial is called to embody one day in the public space of Phnom Penh. The potential of the project for internationalization is both the force and the weakness of Séra's proposal (especially when it comes to negotiating for construction permits). This "alien" aspect of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* becomes an effective argument in the hands of those willing to dismiss the proposal or at least change its location. It is one thing to address young artists in a workshop and try to open them to wider aesthetic and conceptual horizons—as Séra says, "I think that these young people need to learn more about contemporary creation in the world. My goal is not to teach them how to be local image-makers (...) [but] to lead

⁹¹ Adrien Genoudet, "Mettre en Gage: l'Art Bédéistique de Séra," Fovéa Blog, January 20, 2014.

⁹² It is not surprising then to find a set of references to Holocaust-related literatures in analyses of Séra's work such as Alain Genoudet's. The latter refers to Georges Didi-Huberman's well-known opening sentence of *Images Malgré Tout* (2003), "Pour savoir il faut imaginer" ("To know, one must imagine"); Giorgio Agamben's discussion of the integral witness in *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1998); Primo Levi's use of the figure of the Gorgon in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986). *Ibid.*

them to an absolute creation.”⁹³ But it is another thing to address municipal authorities and Civil Parties. In this context the discussion about new or modern versus old or traditional memorials quickly segues into a discussion about Khmer versus foreign culture.

It is something that DC-Cam director Youk Chhang, one of Séra’s supporters, understands well for he himself has to deal with it. Recently, the Sleuk Rith Institute (the new incarnation of the DC-Cam) commissioned from Indonesian artist I Nyoman Nuarta a sculpture for the institute’s future Museum of Memory. *Pillar of Hope* honors the women who survived the Khmer Rouge regime. It represents a woman who rises from the earth and carries a child. The comments on the Facebook page of Voice of America Khmer, after the news agency had published a small article on the subject illustrated with the photo of the model released by the DC-Cam, were not all appreciative. For Ah Bot Bot, “Not sculpture in khmer cultural it looks like Europe style,” and for Hang Hero, “it seem not in Cambodian style.”⁹⁴ The debate, thus, goes far beyond Séra’s proposal. It shows that those promoting a “multicultural” development of memory in Cambodia may need to tread carefully and rephrase their proposals in terms more broadly acceptable:

In Phnom Penh, there are public sculptures of the old/ancient cultural heritage, but not of the modern one. Today, Cambodia and Phnom Penh especially need ancient and modern things alike as a source of reconciliation and healing. The work of Séra would be the first modern sculpture inspired by the heritage of Khmer culture, and I wholeheartedly support it.⁹⁵

This declaration of support demonstrates the negotiating skills of Youk Chhang. He presents the “looking forward” motto of transitional justice as resonating with the desire for modernization of Cambodian authorities and the desire of segments of the population for global modernity. At the same time, aware of the nationalistic dimension of the debate, he reframes the project of Séra into a more local context. As Ke Bin puts it: “It’s sure that we can’t build a one hundred percent abstract art memorial in Cambodia, as it will not be well perceived and received by the public. It has to be balanced.”⁹⁶

Séra has learned to bring this argument forward in interviews and other promotional materials. He emphasizes his references to Angkor Wat and Khmer traditional sculpture. The missing limbs of the human forms in his first proposal are explained as both a mutilation indicative of the Khmer Rouge’s attempt to break people and identities (“By representing figures without heads, without arms, I speak of this mutilation of the mind and spirit as well as the body”) and a common feature in Khmer statues:

⁹³ Anne Laure Porée, “Vann Nath et Séra, Passeurs de Mémoire et de Création,” in *Cambodge: L’Atelier de la Mémoire*, Soko Phay-Vakalis, ed. (Cambodia and France: Bophana Center, Paris 8 University and Sonleuk Thmey, 2010), 158.

⁹⁴ Sokummono Khan, “Sculpture Honoring Women Survivors to be Placed at Genocide Institute,” *Voice of America Khmer*, September 30, 2015.

⁹⁵ Séra and Anou’savry Thom, *À Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là*, 5.

⁹⁶ Ke Bin Soreasmey, personal communication to author, December 12, 2015.

What is left to us today of the ancient statues are more often than not without heads, without arms. The significance of these figures, therefore, resides in their duality evoking Khmer memory and history, of this country and of centuries past.⁹⁷

Séra also situates his project within the history of cultural exchange between France and Cambodia. The reference to French artist Auguste Rodin, for instance, resounds in many ways, past and present.⁹⁸ In 1906 Rodin made about 150 drawings of *apsara* (Royal Ballet of Cambodia), after attending their performance at the Colonial Exhibition in Paris. One hundred years later forty of these drawings were exhibited at the National Museum in Phnom Penh (December 2006-February 2007). The reactions of the local public to the work of Rodin are quite telling. The artist had westernized the royal dancers by dressing them in Grecian robes or placing Greek symbols in their hands. This did not work for Cambodians. Some told the exhibition's curator that Rodin's drawings were "ugly" and "unfinished."⁹⁹ Do these comments possibly foreshadow future perceptions of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*? By walking a thin line between two cultures, underlining what his own artistic practice owes to Khmer traditional sculpture, Séra runs the risk of having the local public disappointed by his reinterpretation of long-established cultural forms. As will be discussed in the next section, cultural misunderstanding is not only an aesthetic issue. It is also a matter of historical referentiality.

5.2 Narratives issues and shared history

On April 17, 1975, Séra and his family tried to find shelter at the French embassy with the hope to be evacuated to safety. His mother was a Frenchwoman who had settled in Cambodia at the end of the fifties. His father, Ing Phourin, was a Cambodian businessman with French university degrees. Unfortunately, unlike his wife and children who had French passports, Ing was not allowed inside the compound. In the confusion at the embassy's gate, Séra lost sight of his father and did not even have the time to part from him.¹⁰⁰ The last thing he remembers is his father slapping him as Séra announced he had seen Khmer Rouge soldiers in the street of Phnom Penh. "It's taken me thirty years to get over that', [Séra] said, adding, 'I'll never know exactly why my father slapped me. Was it confusion, emotion, anger? Did he try in his own way to prepare me for what lay ahead, or to make me lose my innocence? I lost my childhood on that day, 17 April 1975. All of us did'."¹⁰¹ Recently, Séra managed to reconstruct in part what happened to his father after that day. Ing Phourin was taken to the old stadium where he stayed for one or two months. Then he was sent to work in a village in the area of Siem Reap. Séra talked to someone who knew his father and assured him that Ing Phourin had been among the

⁹⁷ Wight, "Sculptors Plans Genocide Memorial."

⁹⁸ The presentation booklet of the project contains a letter (dated July 21, 2014) by French artist Alain Kirili, himself author of a Second World War memorial in Grenoble, who stresses the dialogue of Séra with Khmer statuary and the work of Rodin. Séra and Anou'savry Thom, *À Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là*, 13.

⁹⁹ Erika Kinetz, "Turn-of-the-century Apsara Drawings Come Home," *The Cambodia Daily*, December 23, 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Canayer et al., *Cambodge: L'Art au Secours de la Mémoire*.

¹⁰¹ Wight, "Sculptors Plans Genocide Memorial."

village's intellectuals arrested and killed in December 1978.¹⁰² Grounded in so specific a story, the project of *Séra* raises a set of issues in terms of historical referentiality.

To Those Who Are No Longer Here evokes a complex episode of French-Cambodian relations. On April 17, 1975, the French embassy was the only diplomatic representation that remained open in Phnom Penh.¹⁰³ Therefore hundreds of Cambodians try to find refuge there, but many were rejected at the gate. Finally over 1,200 people (including expats and foreign journalists) settled on the compound. Living conditions deteriorated quickly and fear of Khmer Rouge storming into the compound grew by the minute.¹⁰⁴ The embassy offered little protection even to the Cambodians who had been authorized inside. Within days Republican politicians such as Prime Minister Sirik Matak were handed over to the Khmer Rouge. When it became clear that evacuation was underway, the embassy personnel advised the remaining Cambodians (those without a French passport) to leave the compound for their own safety. Firsthand accounts provide contrasted views of these events. Some point out the limited options of vice-consul Jean Dyrac in so threatening and isolated a context. Others blame him for not doing enough. "France let us down," a witness (a Frenchman of Cambodian descent) declared.¹⁰⁵ It is a feeling shared by *Séra*, who says he still "resents" France for not having protected his father.¹⁰⁶ The controversy took a legal turn when the widow of one of the Cambodian politicians expelled from the French embassy decided to take the case to court in France. In the process documents were declassified, including telegrams proving that from the start the French government at the time had had no intention to protect the Republicans.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Michelle Vachon, "Graphic Novel Depicts the Years Before Zero," *The Cambodia Daily*, April 4, 2015.

¹⁰³ See: Stéphanie Benzaquen, "Looking at the West Looking Away? Khmer Rouge, Western Blindness, and Documentary Images," in *On Not Looking: The Paradox of Visual Culture*, Frances Guerin, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁰⁴ There was food shortage, and water supplies were cut on April 19, 1975. "Tour de Babel, Cour des Miracles: les 400 Heures de l'Ambassade de France," *Le Figaro*, May 10, 1975. It is the situation Roland Joffé describes in the film *The Killing Fields* (1984), focused on the figures of Dith Pran and Sydney Schanberg. See also: François Bizot, *The Gate* (London: The Harvill Press, 2003 [2000]); Roland Neveu, *The Fall of Phnom Penh* (Bangkok: Asia Horizons Books, 2014); Sydney Schanberg, *The Death and Life of Dith Pran* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985); Jon Swain, *River of Time* (London: Heinemann, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Philippe Broussard, "Le Jour où la France Céda aux Khmers Rouges," *L'Express*, May 12, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Arnaud Dubus, "Dans l'Intimité du 'Veilleur' Séra," Les Carnets de Phnom Penh Blog in *Libération*, December 1, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Billon Ung Boun-Hor, the widow of former president of the National Assembly Ung Boun-Hor (delivered to the Khmer Rouge at the same time as Prime Minister Sirik Matak), decided to sue "persons unknown" for "crimes against humanity. She targeted the French government in power in 1975 (Prime Minister Jacques Chirac and President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing), which in her view denied her husband asylum. Since she initiated the procedure in 1999, the trial has been on and off. See: Billon Ung Boun-Hor, *Rouge Barbare* (France: Respublica, 2009); Broussard, "Le Jour où la France Céda"; Soren Seelow, "Khmers Rouges: La Justice Rouvre le Dossier de l'Ambassade de France," *Le Monde*, February 26, 2010; Piotr Smolar, "Phnom Penh 1975: Nuits Rouges sur l'Ambassade," *Le Monde*, January 17, 2007.

The role of public art, Young argues, is “the very creation of shared spaces that would lend a common spatial frame to otherwise disparate experiences and understanding.”¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, the “shared space” that might potentially emerge out of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* invites a reflection on both the responsibility of the French government and the place Westerners are to be given in Cambodian collective memory. The challenge for Séra is thus to link together a story that concerns a group that was small in number but diversified in composition with the bigger story of Pol Pot’s reign of violence. The connection might be obvious on paper, as the presentation booklet shows: “The intention of the artist is to offer to the city of Phnom Penh and its inhabitants a spectacular memorial space commemorating a specific event of Cambodia’s contemporary history: the 17th of April 1975.”¹⁰⁹ In reality, though, the choice of April 17 proves more problematic. Although it is the day of the fall of Phnom Penh hence the starting point of the Khmer Rouge rule over Cambodia, it is a contested date of commemoration, a zone of friction between domestic and transnational conceptions of memorialization.

The PRK authorities selected January 7 (Liberation Day) as commemorative fixture in an attempt to legitimate both Vietnam’s intervention in Cambodia and the new government that had been established as a result of it. Of course, for political opponents and members of the Khmer diaspora (as well as for many Cambodians who stayed in the country), January 7 was less a liberation day than the beginning of another tragedy, the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. The Heng Samrin government also elected May 20 as second commemorative fixture. It became *Tivea Chang Kamheng*, which translates as “Day of Anger” (or more precisely “Day to Remain Tied in Anger”).¹¹⁰ It was held for the first time in 1984. In the context of tension with the international community, it had everything of a propaganda ploy emphasizing the solidarity of Cambodia with Vietnam and denouncing the country’s enemies. People were encouraged to vent their anger not only against the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique but also against the “American Imperialists” and the “Chinese expansionists.”¹¹¹ Organized at commemorative sites, the ceremony included speeches by officials, survivor testimonies, burning of paper effigies of Pol Pot, carrying of banners, prayers, wreath laying. The event had a strong cathartic dimension (until today) as performances reenacted the extreme violence suffered by the population in Democratic Kampuchea. The Day of Anger was stopped for several years during the UNTAC period and resumed in the late nineties. It was re-christened Day of Remembrance in 2001.

In Cambodia, April 17 has certainly not the same meaning it has for overseas Cambodians and the international community. Documented by foreign journalists, it remains a moment of shared history. The evacuation of cities is also a trope central to Khmer Rouge-related testimonial literature (Affonço 2005, Bizot 2003, Haing 1987, Ly 2002, Pin 1980, Ung 2000, Vallantin Dullac 2007). But to what extent does it relate to the

¹⁰⁸ Young, “Memory and Counter-Memory,” 84.

¹⁰⁹ Séra and Anou’savry Thom, *A Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là*, 4.

¹¹⁰ The date referred to a double event, the forced collectivization in the Takeo province (May 20, 1973) and the initiation of mass killings in Cambodia (May 20, 1976). See: Fawthrop and Jarvis, *Getting away with Genocide?* 73-74; Hughes, “Memory and Sovereignty in post-1979 Cambodia,” 279-281.

¹¹¹ UPI, “Cambodian Day of Hate marks Pol Pot’s victims,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 1984.

experience of the majority population? By April 1975, “base people” in the countryside had been living under Khmer Rouge rule for several years already. What is described in memoirs (often written by educated Cambodians resettled abroad) is not what they remember. In terms of commemoration, the forty year-anniversary of the fall of Phnom Penh (2015) was the occasion for international bodies (ECCC included) and their partners from Cambodian civil society to take a step further toward making April 17 an “official” day of remembrance and to organize various events in Cambodia and abroad.¹¹² To be sure, authorities in Phnom Penh do not fully reject April 17 and even supported some of these events. The issue, thus, is rather how much space the Cambodian government is willing to make in its commemorative apparatus for April 17, what the date symbolizes, and those for whom it is meaningful. The decisions to be made with regard to the building of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* in Phnom Penh might answer, in part at least, the question of the place the Cambodian authorities are ready to give the Khmer diaspora and returnees.

6. “Unfinished”... or the public space of memory

6.1 Controversy around the location of the memorial

For survivors, documenting for the public their experience of the Pol Pot’s regime might be perceived as “an alienating form for dealing with issues that are intensely private and that call for private mourning,” Khatharya Um writes.¹¹³ As graphic novelist and visual artist, Séra is familiar with transposing his story from the intimate realm to the public sphere. With the memorial, however, the artist is confronted with a new dimension of this process. Building a sculpture in the urban space demands that he deal with a set of rules that have little in common with the world of contemporary art and graphic novels. The issue for Séra is less how he articulates his experience in such a way that it echoes the memory of others than how he interacts with new partners and obligations. *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* reorganizes the visibility of Khmer Rouge atrocities in a twofold way. On the one hand, it visualizes the past in a monumental form at a site that does not bear any trace of the event. On the other hand, it reveals other dynamics of memorialization, those by which state and/or city authorities use (or not) the past to create public space and communities. Young speaks of “the memorial’s capacity as locus for a shared self-image.”¹¹⁴ It is this capacity that the municipality of Phnom Penh seems to deny to *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* by questioning the integration of Séra’s project into their vision of the city as window of the “new Cambodia.”

To Those Who Are No Longer Here should have been inaugurated on April 17, 2015, for the forty-year anniversary of the fall of Phnom Penh. On that very day, though, the plaza near the French Embassy remained empty. The project had come to full stop. It was blocked by the municipality, which refused to authorize the construction of the memorial

¹¹² For a selected list of commemorative events organized in March and April 2015, see Appendix O.

¹¹³ Khatharya Um, *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 202.

¹¹⁴ Young, “Memory and Counter-Memory,” 94.

on Square Daunh Penh. Instead, the City Council of Phnom Penh suggested that Séra erect the sculpture at an existing commemorative location, either Tuol Sleng or Choeung Ek.¹¹⁵ The artist turned down the proposal straightaway, arguing that the victims honored at the two places were mostly Khmer Rouge. “This fact should not be manipulated to represent the entire genocide,” he said.¹¹⁶ Séra expressed his anger in different outlets, including a short video and his Facebook page. Why was the project blocked? For the Kickstarter campaign, Séra and his partners had to assess the “risks and challenges” of the project so potential donors are aware of the situation before pledging money. They mentioned a problem with the building authorization due to the renovation/construction of the nearby new Chroy Changvar Bridge.¹¹⁷ The team was optimistic about the outcome: “We are already resolving potential issues through close cooperation with a Technical Working Group that has been established within the municipality’s Urban Development office.”¹¹⁸

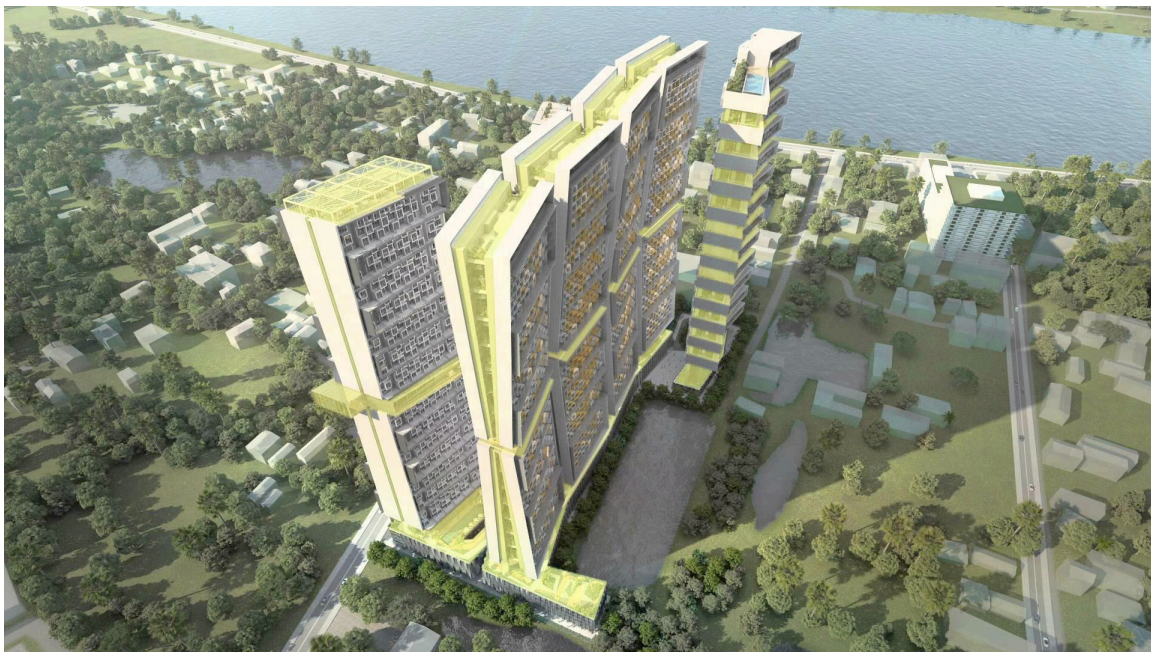


Figure 16: Project development The Bay at Chroy Changvar Peninsula, Teho SBG Development Co Ltd (2015). Source: Screen shot of the promotional video on YouTube.

¹¹⁵ The City Council of Phnom Penh includes a Governor and two Vice Governors elected by the Royal Government of Cambodia. It is responsible among other things of organizing public works, and developing and managing public utilities.

¹¹⁶ Shafik, “Survivor Fashions Genocide Memorial.”

¹¹⁷ Built in 1966, this bridge (also known as the Cambodia-Japan Friendship Bridge) connects Phnom Penh with the Chroy Changvar peninsula across the Tonle Sap River. Since it was ruined by years of heavy traffic, the municipality decided a few years ago to ease the congestion by building a second bridge running parallel to the first one, thanks to a \$27,5 million loan by the Export-Import Bank of China. The company commissioned for the project was the Beijing-based China Road and Bridge Corporation. The construction was launched late 2011 and completed in April 2014. The new bridge, named Cambodia-China Friendship Bridge, opened at the end of 2014. Website “China Road and Bridge Corporation.”

¹¹⁸ Website “Kickstarter.”

In fact, the negotiations with the City Council of Phnom Penh stalled on that very point. In January 2014 Youk Chhang sent the governor His Excellency Pa Socheatevong a letter of request for approval for the memorial. The DC-Cam director mentioned that he knew the Municipality had a plan to construct another bridge that could possibly have an effect on the location of the statue, but he still hoped that under this circumstance the statue could be placed there.¹¹⁹ The answer arrived a few weeks later, carefully worded. “Phnom Penh Municipality does not disagree on the request for the public display of a statue to commemorate the deceased under the Khmer Rouge regime as well as to provide civil compensation to victims of the Khmer Rouge regime,” it said. But the exact location must be determined “in line with the meaning and the content of the statue” since it might affect the flow of traffic when the construction of the second Chroy Changvar Bridge is completed.¹²⁰ It was a negative answer in disguise. For Séra, the reason behind this rejection was obvious: the Cambodian authorities did not want the memorial in an easily accessible public space because they wanted to hide history from public view. It might be true, but for practical rather than political reasons: Séra’s dream of building a spectacular urban monument in Phnom Penh collides with Cambodian reality, namely the real estate situation in a Southeast Asian city in full boom.

In the past years the Chroy Changvar peninsula has become “one of the city’s high-potential investment destinations,” attracting developers and driving upward the land and housing markets around (figure 16).¹²¹ In these conditions it is no wonder that the City Council tries to control what is happening in the area and ponders whether a memorial to the victims of the Khmer Rouge will add to the value of the neighborhood. Looking backward is at odds with their agenda of building the future. Phnom Penh must display power and modernity, not the failures of history. The question of the place such policy leaves for the past goes beyond the Khmer Rouge case and encompasses other episodes of Cambodian history, especially the colonial era and post-independence period.¹²² The municipality wants to create a perfect city for investors and tourists. In this fantasized Phnom Penh, the past functions only as an image, providing a touch of exotic and easily commercialized nostalgia or, in circumscribed cases, the thrill of dark tourism. The modernization of the city goes hand in hand with its homogenization through cleaning-up (or “beautification”). This rearrangement of public spaces is both an instrument of social

¹¹⁹ Letter dated January 24, 2014, and reproduced in Séra and Anou’savry Thom, *A Ceux Qui Ne Sont Plus Là*, 31.

¹²⁰ Letter dated February 12, 2014, *ibid.* 33.

¹²¹ Key Real Estate general manager Sorn Seap, quoted by Sum Manet, “Chroy Changvar Emerging as Phnom Penh Property Investment Hotspot,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, December 26, 2013. The luxurious developments projects under construction—such as the mixed-development Bay Phnom Penh of Singaporean firm TEHO International and the Sokha Hotel and Residence of the Cambodian Sokimex Group—are worth several hundreds of millions dollars.

¹²² Touch Sopor and Touch Yin Yayith, “Cambodia’s Last Chance to Cash in on Colonial Architecture,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, July 28, 2010; AFP, “Southeast Asia’s Colonial Heritage Victim of Modernization,” *The Independent*, September 18, 2011; Va Sonyka and Jonathan Cox, “White Building Residents Receive Another Safety Warning,” *Khmer Times*, July 21, 2015; Aria Danaparamita, “Projects Give Voice to White Building’s Residents,” *The Cambodia Daily*, January 27, 2015; Kate Wills, “Phnom Penh’s White Building is Dilapidated, Riven with Crime and Facing Demolition,” *The Independent*, August 30, 2015.

and political control and a form of “economic cleansing” sacrificing underprivileged inhabitants to the interest of new elites and foreign firms.¹²³

The urban violence engendered by neoliberalism is the context with which Séra has to deal if he wants his memorial to be built. The interference of the second Chroy Changvar Bridge with *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* has thus less to do with technical reasons than with the municipality’s development plan for the area. In that respect, the memorial project of Séra crystallizes two conflicting approaches to modernization and change in post-conflict societies. One is advocated in transitional justice and considers that new forms of social intercourse and political agency can be engineered through reformed practices of memorialization. The other is promoted by the state and the city and imposes fast-paced economic and social transformations through authoritarian practices. In such a ruthless and lawless environment, entirely committed to the race for becoming the most attractive destination in Southeast Asia for foreign capital, memorials (even those supported by the ECCC) are of little weight and might be discarded easily if they stand in the way to “progress.”

6.2 The exhibition *Unfinished* or the new orientation of Séra’s memorial project

On April 22, 2015, instead of inaugurating the memorial, Séra opened the exhibition *Unfinished* at the National Institute of Education in collaboration with the DC-Cam and the Ministry of Culture (figure 17). “*Unfinished* is as much a direct and metaphorical gesture towards the work of art as it is towards the work of memory of the genocide: nothing is ever finished, nothing is ever forgotten,” the artist declared.¹²⁴ The exhibition included a series of eight abstract paintings (acrylic, oil, pastels, ink, resin) entitled *Hidden Urns*. Positioned as to block the room’s windows, the works represented “ghost-like urns in white” against an earthen color background.¹²⁵ Séra worked with another artist, his partner Julianne Sibiski. She created a mixed-media installation consisting of two long wooden boats placed in the middle of the exhibition space, one upright, one upturned. Both were covered with Kampot salt. The carcass of a white hare covered with crystals of salt had been put inside one of the boats, as a reference to the fall of Phnom Penh, which occurred during the Year of the Hare. The boats symbolized “the crossing from life to death of those who perished under the regime.”¹²⁶ It was a work-in-progress, ever changing as salt was moved by visitors or melted because of humidity. Sibiski also

¹²³ Harold R. Kerbo, *The Persistence of Cambodian Poverty from the Killing Fields to Today* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011); Simon Springer, *Cambodia’s Neoliberal Order: Violence, Authoritarianism and the Contestation of Public Space* (New York: Routledge, 2010); the numerous reports of Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) about forced evictions, published on the website of the NGO.

¹²⁴ Marina Shafik, “Carriers of Unfinished Memories,” *Khmer Times*, April 28, 2015.

¹²⁵ The series of paintings relates to a discovery made by Youk Chhang in February 2015. As he was mourning at Wat Langka for his sister who had recently passed away, he found hundreds of urns that had been left before April 17, 1975 at the pagoda in a passage behind a Buddha statue. For the forty-year anniversary of the fall of Phnom Penh, the urns were displayed at the pagoda itself under the title *The 464 Urns: Nothing is permanent*. Harriet Fitch Little, “Artists Preserve Khmer Rouge Memories in Half a Ton of Salt,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, April 25, 2015.

¹²⁶ Michelle Vachon, “Using Abstractions, Pair of Artists Shed Light on Unhealed Wounds,” *Cambodia Daily*, April 18, 2015.

suggested that Séra use irregular pieces of wood from Wat Langka instead of labels for carrying the titles of the paintings. The titles indicated the longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates of mass graves in Cambodia.¹²⁷

“Since 1975, I am in conflict with the uprooting that history imposed on me. I did not experience the Cambodian Genocide. I went only through its premises,” Séra says.¹²⁸ This reflects the complexity of the artist’s feelings vis-à-vis his own “legitimacy” to represent an event he did not live through. Against this backdrop, his idea to partner with a Western artist for *Unfinished* appears all the more striking. The decision sends mixed signals for an event supposed to commemorate the very beginning of Year Zero. “The choice to stage an exhibit about memory featuring two artists who did not live through the Khmer Rouge may not meet with universal approval,” the journalist of *The Phnom Penh Post* commented.¹²⁹ Indeed, the two artists justified at length their collaboration, at least to the reporter. It was the result of Séra’s discerning approach to choosing the person with whom he wants to work, Sibiski explained. “If he didn’t do it [choosing an artist who lived under the Khmer Rouge], it’s because there are none that inspire him enough. He’s very demanding in this way.”¹³⁰ To Séra, the personal way in which every Cambodian relates to the Democratic Kampuchea period sometimes makes collaboration uncomfortable. “We all have our own personal experiences, and I can’t share what I have lived with someone else—that’s very difficult to do (...) Working with an ‘outsider’ like Sibiski avoided the challenge of competing memories.”¹³¹ It also emphasized the specific status of Séra as French-Cambodian artist in Cambodia. Over the years he carved out a place for himself locally (exhibiting and giving workshops), while remaining external to the Cambodian contemporary art scene represented by young galleries and artist-run spaces. *Unfinished* asserts this specificity. But does it not weaken the position of Séra vis-à-vis the municipality? Does it not provide the City Council with a further argument (so far unused) for delaying the memorial—that, perhaps, it should be a Cambodian artist who creates such a monument, rather than a bicultural one?

This is where the collaboration of Séra with the DC-Cam takes its full meaning. The emergence of Youk Chhang’s center as new key partner for *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* originates in part from the increasingly tense relation between Séra and his initial partner Anvaya throughout 2014. In a message posted on Facebook on March 13, 2015, the artist blamed the delay with the memorial on both the municipal authorities and Anvaya. Of the latter he wrote: “They decided unilaterally to follow the rule of the French Embassy: ‘It is urgent to wait’. The casting of the sculpture could not be completed. The 17th of April, it’s the day after tomorrow...” Still, disagreement does not completely explain why Séra changed his strategy. For the artist, the partnership with the DC-Cam is the door open to participating in a broader movement of memorialization in Cambodia. The DC-Cam is currently engaged with the biggest memory project in the country, the building of the Sleuk Rith Institute (SRI). Replacing the original center, it will be a “highly innovative facility combining a Museum of Memory, a Research and

¹²⁷ Shafik, “Carriers of Unfinished Memories,” *Khmer Times*.

¹²⁸ Christian Marmonnier, “Interview,” *Bandes Dessinées Magazine* no. 6, April-May 2005.

¹²⁹ Fitch Little, “Artists Preserve Khmer Rouge Memories.”

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

National Policy Development Center, and Academy of Genocide, Conflict and Human Rights Studies” (figure 18).¹³²



Figure 18: Sleuk Rith Institute (2015).
Source: Promotional poster, image of the Zaha Hadid project and the DC-Cam.

With the SRI Youk Chhang intends to engineer a radical break from the conventions of memorialization, be they Western (“ominous tomb-like structures”) or local (although the new project draws heavily on Cambodian religious architecture).¹³³ The development of the SRI illustrates well the complex relation of representatives of civil society and state institutions. The Cambodian government donated the land (an empty plot on the site of

¹³² Website “Sleuk Rith Institute.”

¹³³ Presentation of Youk Chhang at the School for Oriental and African Studies in London in April 2015.

the former Khmer Rouge Boeung Trabek reeducation camp), but money must come from foreign donors. The cost of the SRI is estimated at \$35 million and world-famous London-based Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid was commissioned for the design.¹³⁴ This choice did not meet with unanimous approval. Indeed local architects criticized the selection of a non-Cambodian firm in a context that touches so directly upon the memory of Cambodian people.¹³⁵ The SRI was from the start conceived of as a prestigious project, a statement meant to show both the international importance and forward-looking orientation of the new center. This points to a remarkable convergence of interests between the DC-Cam and the Cambodian government. In such a context the decision of Séra to attach the fate of his memorial to the DC-Cam and make the collaboration official is a well-thought move. It will be hard for the City Council to deny the artist what the highest authorities in the country have approved in the case of the SRI. If Séra himself entertains at times some doubts concerning his “legitimacy,” the partnership with the DC-Cam offers him a clear and unassailable position. Under the protective wing of Youk Chhang, the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial is validated as part of a new wave of memorialization that fully assumes its transnational dimension. Therefore *Unfinished* is not the sign of a defeat or a consolation prize but the attempt to put *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* back on tracks with a powerful partner. As a message to the City Council of Phnom Penh, it resounds like a programmatic title: Séra is not done yet, just waiting for the next phase.

7. Conclusion

Was the message heard? In May 2015 the association Anvaya announced that they had received a green light from the City Council regarding the form and location of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*. There was no triumphant tweet of Séra or message on Facebook, just an update of the artist’s Wikipedia page on May 31, 2015. Yet, in April 2016, the memorial was not finished. The only information came from a few photos posted on Facebook in January and February 2016 showing the development of the sculpture at the workshop of Kong Bolin at Tonle Bati (in charge for blending and designing the memorial’s environment) and the work with art caster Nov Chay. This low-key announcement reflected the persistence of relational and financial problems. The chapter explored a set of issues arising from building such a monument in Phnom Penh—especially for a bi-cultural artist—in terms of aesthetic challenges and cultural misunderstanding, integration into the local trickle-down economy of memory, historical referentiality, urban policies and public space. These are the many obstacles to be overcome before *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* finally sees the day.

The chapter analyzed the manifold reorganization of visibility at play in the proposal of Séra, starting with transitional justice’s conception of memorialization and its intended sociopolitical impact on post-conflict societies. It argued that debates around the artist’s

¹³⁴ Michael Gadd, “We Will Remember Them: Cambodia Designs Poignant Memorial Dedicated to Millions of Genocide Victims in Phnom Penh,” *Mail Online*, November 30, 2014. The death of Hadid in April 2016 will not affect the construction of the Sleuk Rith Institute as her firm will keep working on the project. Will Jackson, “Zaha Hadid’s Firm to Push Ahead on Sleuk Rith,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, April 4, 2016.

¹³⁵ Joe Freeman, “DC-Cam Taps Hadid for Institute,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, October 28, 2013.

project—particularly those concerning its location—acted as a revealer of other dynamics of memorialization and engagement with the past, deeply entangled with the municipality and the state’s vision of the role of Phnom Penh as Southeast Asian modern metropolis. Interestingly, this evokes the “hauntology” described by political scientist Alvin Lim, according to whom the urban space in Phnom Penh is equally shaped by the ongoing presence of traumatic memories and current forms of socioeconomic brutality. In other words, it is haunted by different temporalities of violence.¹³⁶ The Cambodian Tragedy Memorial expresses this situation by making visible both the tragic evacuation of Phnom Penh in 1975 and the rationale behind the delivery of construction permits today. In that respect, *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* links the formation of collective memory with the creation of public spaces. The artist also introduces new questions regarding the act of representing visually Khmer Rouge atrocities. His proposal easily merges into the forty-year long history of mixing commemorative forms. But it also suggests a kind of trauma aesthetic that breaks from the totalizing and graphic recollections of the past embodied in Cambodia’s memorial culture.

At the same time, the project of Séra raises the question of the monumental form itself. Emptiness is the heritage left by the Khmer Rouge in the urban environment (in contrast to the waterworks they built in the countryside). They destroyed architectural landmarks such as the Catholic Cathedral and the First World War Memorial. They did not construct anything, possibly for lack of time, and just converted buildings to other functions. The Pol Pot’s regime tinkered with the Republican westernized city-text and tried to create a new urban landscape where signs could be read differently. More than this, emptiness is of course that of the city itself, after its inhabitants were relocated in villages and cooperatives. Rather than filling the gap, is it not the task of a memorial to physically maintain this disruption in the present-day urban space of Phnom Penh and point to an absence that cannot be healed? At this current stage of non-realization (and certainly against the will of Séra), *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* plays this very role, being an interstice that interferes with the montage of the city. It remains an unfilled and “unfinished” space that reminds of the fractures in Cambodian history and society (death of millions, exile of hundreds of thousands, conflicted remembrance after their return). In that sense, the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial—or rather the whole process of building it—becomes a sort of counter-monument mirroring the friction between politics of memory and politics of representation, Khmer and Western cultures, private and public spaces.

[Memorials associated with the Khmer Rouge] become features of the environment and the landscape and have the potential to evoke different tales. These sites may not have the same fluidity of meanings that features of the landscape do; however, it would be wrong to try to predict what their meaning might become to future generations.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Alvin Cheng-Hin Lim, *Cambodia and the Politics of Aesthetics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 72. Lim draws on Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1993).

¹³⁷ Eve Zucker, *Forest of Struggle: Moralities of Remembrance in Upland Cambodia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 187.

Séra's project has not been built yet so, as anthropologist Eve Zucker says, it is not the time now to predict what its future will be for it will be made over time by Cambodians themselves, regardless of what the artist, the ECCC, or the City Council wish to express.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In January 1979 Polish journalist and writer Wieslaw Gornicki was invited for several weeks in Cambodia, where he was to report about the aftermath of the Pol Pot's regime. He carried out the task dutifully, judging by the graphic account he published later that year with the World Peace Council (an international organization founded in 1950 on the initiative of the Soviet Union). Like other guests of the PRK, Gornicki was struck by the eeriness of Phnom Penh, the city's empty and silent streets littered with papers and photos. As he walked around, he spotted two pictures on the ground. They showed a couple that looked "far too happy and prosperous to have escaped the massacre." The journalist kept them. "Sooner or later, these photos will fade away in the monsoon rains and tropical sun, and the couple represented on them will vanish forever into the unspeakable typhoons of history." Gornicki was aware of the indecency of his gesture, looting the properties of the dead, but the urge to save the faces of these people was too strong to be resisted.¹ Let us jump forward in time. In December 2008 user Mistifarang posted on the photo-sharing website Flickr a photo representing a small altar on which were placed sticks of incense and the black-and-white picture of a young woman with a label carrying the number 246 pinned on her chest (figure 1).² He had photographed it in an empty house on Nimitmai Road in Bangkok. He hoped that Flickr members could help him identify the woman. User stygiangloom replied that the girl had been a prisoner at S-21, and added a link to an online database of prisoner photos. User Mistifarang was baffled. On the original picture, the girl showed up with a baby. Was it her child? Could it be that the baby survived and made this altar? User jdaoust75 crushed his hopes: no child had ever survived S-21. The investigation ended up there. Still, user Mistifarang and another participant in the online discussion, user hbbks, got in touch again a few months later. "I look at this photo almost every day," user hbbks wrote. "To be honest, I have a print of the photo at my office, so same same!" user Mistifarang replied.

The two stories describe thirty years apart a same impulse to relate to the DK terror through the faces of the dead, and the subsequent transformation of photos of the victims of the Pol Pot's regime into *memento mori*. At the same time, they show how our "ways of looking" at Khmer Rouge atrocities changed in the past decades. As such, they stand at the opposite sides of the spectrum the dissertation proposed to explore. They offer two distinct organizations of the visibility of Khmer Rouge crimes. The idea of an invisible and forgotten Cambodian Genocide suddenly resurfacing in the public space through the judicial process was questioned from the start in the dissertation. While the trials at the ECCC are without doubt a milestone in the recovery and production of documentation about the DK period, one should not forget what happened in the previous decades.

¹ Wieslaw Gornicki, *Vietnam—Kampuchéa 1979: Le Rapport d'un Témoin Oculaire* (Helsinki: Centre d'Information du Conseil Mondial de la Paix, Avril 1979), 28-29.

² "Bangkok, Nimitmai Rd (Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Toul Sleng) 1975-1977," image, Flickr, posted by Mistifarang, December 20, 2008.

Images of Khmer Rouge atrocities began circulating in both the socialist and non-socialist worlds early on. This continued on and off, periods of “vacuum” and periods of claim for recognition alternating, especially as Cambodians at home and abroad became more and more vocal about their past. The core idea of the research was to investigate how the abuses of the Pol Pot’s regime are visualized in transnational contexts of memory from 1975 to the present day. For this purpose, the scope of selection of the images that were examined in the dissertation was enlarged beyond the limited corpus of evidentiary documents of Khmer Rouge crimes in such a way that archive images and afterimages produced in Cambodia and abroad might be included as well. As explained in the introduction chapter, this opens up a discussion about visual culture. However, the very field of “Khmer rouge visual culture” is presently too much under construction as both an object of study and a disciplinary realm to provide a theoretical basis. Therefore, the research was conducted using the notions of “sedimentation” and “trauma aesthetic” as a mediating framework that made it possible to look at the visualization of Khmer Rouge crimes in time and space. To answer the central question, three sub-questions were further formulated.

The first sub-question was: To what extent do images clarify continuity and shifts in the group identities of those involved in memorializing Khmer Rouge atrocities? The dissertation shows the existence of a double movement—in fact two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, there is a multiplication and diversification of stakeholders, especially from the post-UNTAC years onward. The making of memory progressively slips away from the controlling hands of the Cambodian authorities to those of a widening range of people, communities, organizations, governments, and supra-national bodies. On the other hand, there is process of institutionalization of Khmer Rouge memory. This double movement is best addressed in relation to the “floating gap” characterizing the formation of cultural memory. That more and more groups and individuals worldwide engage in the remembrance of Khmer Rouge crimes does not mean that there is a “liberation” of images, even if we attend in the past years an unprecedented circulation of visual material across borders and media. What appears instead is the transition from a situation of state monopoly or “structure of participation” (which involved a specific set of actors such as political activists, fellow travelers, journalists, and aid workers, as well as a network of socialist powers—as described in Chapters 2 and 3) to a situation in which several monopolies are forced into coexistence. Chapter 5 gives some insight into this transition, retracing a moment of articulation between a period of vacuum and the emergence of new “specialist” voices in Cambodia. Against the dispersion of images over multiple networks (among which some have nothing to do with the Khmer Rouge or Cambodia), these voices, often coming from the country’s nascent civil society, reclaimed the centralization of DK-related materials in specific institutions, some being located in Cambodia and others abroad. Conceived of in the framework of sedimentation, hence within continuity, these monopolies do not appear as being created *ex-nihilo*, but rather as configuring older networks anew. In that respect, the idea of monopoly as it materialized during the Cold War period does not completely disappear after the mid-nineties but is reshuffled. Consequently, the question of Cambodian agency in the memorialization of the Khmer Rouge past is best raised in a different, more nuanced way—that is, not as something that has been lost and regained (or the opposite) but as a phenomenon taking multiple forms.

While today's monopolies appear more fluid than the older ones and able to integrate partners in and out of the institutional realm, their mission remains the same—to ensure that the story is told the right way. As the dissertation makes it clear, the “specialists” of Khmer Rouge memory are not defined only in ethnic, communal, or national terms, but also in professional or political ones (being affiliated with the right party, belonging to the Tribunal's environment, working for the same university, and so on). Therefore, the mapping of centers and peripheries that defines these monopolies is best understood as both geographical and institutional. Conflicts about images are still often articulated through the notions of “Cambodian,” “Khmer,” “foreign,” and postcolonial and neocolonial arguments. Undoubtedly, this setting is crucial when it comes to the legitimacy of stakeholders (Chapters 4 and 5). Obviously, images have a different meaning if one has or not a direct relation to the events. Photos of perpetrators and victims, for example, do not have the same significance in Cambodia or among the Khmer Diaspora, and for non-Cambodian audiences in Euro-America (Chapters 2 and 5). Yet, the existence of contact zones opens the door to a new distribution of roles and the possibility of shared history between Cambodians and non-Cambodians. Although it does not cover the entire range of positions, the multifaceted representation of the Western bystander coming up in the dissertation gives some hint as to how this shared history might be elaborated in the future. The former ideological accomplice of the Pol Pot's regime and fellow traveler (Gunnar Bergström) is accepted on a repentant and apologetic mode. The figure of the reporter appears in several versions throughout the study. One is the objective hero-reporter, embodied by Elizabeth Becker (Chapter 2). John Pilger offers a more contrasted version: on one side the investigative and committed journalist who challenges big powers and mainstream media in his quest for truth and justice; on the other side—for those Pilger's reporting style antagonizes—the embedded propagandist for Vietnam (Chapter 3). The members of the Photo Archive Group perpetuate the figure of the hero-reporter in a romantic take on the great photojournalists of the Vietnam War. They also introduce the role of the international memory-broker, and as such become potential exploiters of Cambodian misery (Chapter 5). The figure of the humanitarian worker which appears with Véronique Decrop—partly related to that of the missionary in the person of Father Ceyrac—offers a similar ambivalence. She is actively engaged in the material and psychological reconstruction of Cambodia, and at the same time suspected of patronizing colonialism (Chapter 4). The situation of French-Cambodian artist Séra illustrates a very complex position, as a bi-cultural returnee from the Khmer Diaspora who has to justify (to himself and others) under what “identity” he contributes to the remembrance of the DK terror (Chapter 6). As much as they are a reflection of the past, these constructs or archetypes also translate how Cambodians reinterpret their relations with the West and the outside world in the light of the present.

The second sub-question was: How does the medium affect both the modalities of circulation of images and the formats of perception? It is not only about who is involved in the memorialization of Khmer Rouge atrocities, but also how this involvement materializes. The number of participants grows, and the composition of stakeholders diversifies. So do the media used for remembering the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime. The dissertation shows a broad array of roles that images play in the construction of Khmer Rouge memory—as objects of commemoration, means for implementing or challenging historical narratives in the public sphere, documents for historiographic

inquiry, emblems used in political or ideological campaigns, visual testimonies in the court and museum arenas, tools for social reconciliation, links between individual healing and collective recovery, forms of critique and resistance, and of course souvenirs of the past. These functions depend to a great extent on the medium or media in which they are performed. Indeed, a same image might have several “lives” in distinct media. For example the photos of S-21 prisoners come up as negatives, prints, illustrations in books, pictures displayed in exhibitions, visual quotes in artworks, or images recycled online (Chapter 5). The drawings of the children of Site Two provide a good illustration as well, since the original works are remediated in a book, a movie, and the Internet. As records of daily life in the refugee camp, a means of healing for traumatized boys, traces of exile and nostalgia, and memory-commodity circulated in European cultural circles, they become documentary, performative, and symbolic images for authors and viewers alike (Chapter 4). How people understand these roles is not connected only to their biographical background or political views, but also to their assumptions vis-à-vis the medium itself. Films and photos are paramount in our perception of the DK period. Unlike the Holocaust or the Armenian Genocide, which are mostly seen in black-and-white, Khmer Rouge-related visual materials are not only black-and-white but also often color images. This possibly creates for viewers a feeling of immediacy and contemporaneity with the events, and trust in the indexical function of the medium. For instance, the first reaction of otherwise well-informed Swedish writer Peter Fröberg Idling while watching for the first time the movie made by Jan Myrdal in DK in 1978 was not to doubt the images on screen but to think that after all things were perhaps not so bad in Pol Pot’s Cambodia.¹ This demonstrates the importance of deconstructing the belief that moving and still images are transparent records of reality and introducing into the analysis the questions of medium-specificity, materiality of the image, and technical apparatus alongside the context of production.

Explaining how the image is constructed becomes all the more pressing as films and photos are easily remediated artifacts, especially in the digital environment. Their reproducibility opens up endless possibilities for popularization (as is the case with Pilger’s *Year Zero* on YouTube). At the same time, it generates divergent kinds of canonization, appropriation, and decontextualization. Photos are captioned inaccurately, cropped, retouched. Films are cut, presented without opening or closing credits. Unsurprisingly the multiplication of regimes of visibility for images of Khmer Rouge atrocities is a matter of contention, and it triggers a counter-movement of controlling and fixing the uses of these images. The medium is crucial to the dispersion of visual sources. In the same way it informs their centralization and the discussion about how images should be stored, preserved, and authorized to circulate. In that respect, it crystallizes conflicts, which the postcolonial and/or neocolonial context in turn exacerbates. It comes with a feeling of dispossession, even exploitation, and the need to repossess images. Issues of legitimacy, then, often translate in terms of ownership and copyright. As said above, though, monopolies are transnational entities. Therefore “piracy” is not only the (unauthorized) displacement or reproduction of images of Khmer Rouge crimes out of Cambodia, but also out of the communal, professional, political, or even commercial

¹ Peter Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot. Over en Zweedse Reis door het Kambodja van de Rode Khmer* (Amsterdam: Nieuwe Amsterdam, 2009 [2006]), 34.

frameworks defined by these monopolies. This shapes in very distinct ways the appearance of Khmer Rouge memory in the public domain. The recent acquisition by American agency Getty Images of a huge stock of Cambodia-related photos (including pictures taken in the PRK and Khmer Rouge military bases in 1979-1981) shows the price to be paid for a right to images in the neoliberal environment. For sure, rights over these pictures will be granted either by paying for the photos or obtaining a “valid licensed usage.” Nevertheless, this points to renewed zones of friction where interests of Cambodians, researchers, photoreporters, and the corporate will clash in more than one way. The drawings of the children of Site Two offer an additional perspective on these issues (Chapter 4). Over the years the works acquired different statuses. As early creations of individuals who are now professional artists they might be claimed as artworks and property of their authors. The fact that these are original drawings adds to their re-definition as Cambodia’s tangible cultural heritage. Yet, they are not kept in Battambang but in France. Only a fraction of them is currently accessible in the form of photos in a book, itself existing in a few thousand copies. Lately, possibly due to disputes over the history of the art center Phare, some drawings resurfaced on the Internet via the digitized version of the movie *Ombre et Lumière* and the website of Decrop’s association. But of course the “mechanical reproduction” of the children’s drawings does not convey the “aura” of the originals, which themselves remain out of sight. This contributes to the organization of scarcity and potentially the transformation of a memory-commodity into currency. In that sense, conflicts about the proper uses of images do not relate only to the memory or story they carry (how and what part of the past should be told) but also to the value of the image as material object.

The third sub-question was: What changes do images articulate with regard to the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War context? The dissertation describes the process by which ideological and graphic depictions of the DK terror fade into the background while (apparently) less politicized images supporting themes of reconciliation and resilience come to the fore. This shift was conceived of within the framework of “trauma aesthetic,” or the re-plotting of local episodes of violence into a universalizing human rights discourse. The emphasis on the biographical, affective, and redemptive dimensions of the image in a number of recent projects dealing with the Khmer Rouge’s violence falls into this category (Chapters 2, 5, and 6). Yet, the notion of “sedimentation” calls for looking at trauma aesthetic not as a brutal change but as an ongoing thread in the organization of the visibility of Khmer Rouge crimes even during the Cold War. From that perspective, the chapters unravel the existence of a narrative pattern around which images and visual practices are articulated since the mid-seventies—namely, the “Phoenix rising from the ashes.” This pattern owes much to the colonial co-creation of Cambodia, or “Cambodge” as scholar Penny Edwards demonstrates it. The “discovery” of Angkor Wat (which the locals had never forgotten) by French naturalist Henri Mouhot in 1860 was the starting point for the construction of a “homogenizing, national narrative” based on sequences of glory, decay, and regeneration. Of course, this narrative fully discarded the complexity of the site itself and the religious and cultural role it had been playing in the life of people in the region for centuries. Through it, the French colonial power imposed on the Khmer population a “totalizing secular frame of reference,” which came to embody history itself for all political regimes

in Cambodia.² The “Phoenix rising from the ashes” is thus an old colonial rhetoric that resurfaces time and again in new guises, and as such resonates strongly for Cambodians and non-Cambodians alike. The Pol Pot’s regime used it to emphasize their “great leap forward” in rebuilding the country destroyed by American bombardments and the Lon Nol regime (Chapter 2). The PRK used it in the form of “tragedy and rebirth” to distance themselves from the predecessor regime and claim international legitimacy (Chapter 3). Resistance forces in border refugee camps used it to denounce the physical and cultural genocide Vietnam allegedly perpetrated in Cambodia and stress their role as guardians of an authentic Khmer identity. The “Phoenix rising from the ashes” is a narrative with which the periodization offered by the ECCC merges easily since both suggest a “cathartic break” with the past (the trials of senior Khmer Rouge being the caesura between sociopolitical chaos and a reordering of society). As scholar Ruti Teitel points it out, “transitional histories have their own narratives, but also link up and re-appropriate strands of longer state history.”³ The “Phoenix rising from the ashes” also appears in the context of the artistic center Phare through interrelated individual healing and social reconstruction combined with the cultural revival of Battambang City (Chapter 4). It supports the project of the Photo Archive Group at Tuol Sleng, described as a rescue mission of the museum’s records on the verge of disappearance (Chapter 5). The memorial project of French-Cambodian artist Séra too might be interpreted through this prism as participating in the “myth” of Phnom Penh, “ghost city” reborn as a modern, beautified metropolis with global ambitions (Chapter 6).

In all these examples the theme of the “Phoenix rising from the ashes” helps engineer a moralizing narrative of history, a clear divide between before and after the events. Trauma aesthetic takes multiple forms throughout the transition from Cold War to the post-Cold War period. In the seventies and the eighties Cambodians are embraced as a collective, the “people” suffering, fighting, killing, their flesh becoming the symbol of the body politic. This collective is engaged against entities or geopolitical blocs described in general terms as “the West,” “Moscow,” “the revisionists,” and so on (Chapters 2 and 3). From the mid-nineties onward freedom fighters become victims, and victims are individualized. Entities are redefined through the life stories of a small set of representatives (Chapters 4, 5, 6). The question that arises then is whether the contemporary version of trauma aesthetic is less political in some way than the older one. The answer is no. One chapter especially shows how the more recent interpretation of it, performed through the re-captioning and affective display of propaganda images, remains a political narrative (Chapter 2). The role of Westerners in the Cambodian tragedy is reduced to the involvement of marginal leftist groups, whose experience in DK is articulated through the themes of guilt, repentance, and redemption. Such a presentation disrupts the relation between individual and collective (or state) responsibility. It organizes the visibility of Khmer Rouge crimes in such a way that key actors stay in the backstage and only extras appear on the front stage. In other words, governments are let off the hook. This is in line with the ECCC’s version of the events. The Tribunal’s jurisdiction covers only the period from April 17, 1975, to January 6, 1979. Therefore it conveniently leaves off-frame embarrassing issues such as the effect of American

² Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 24-26.

³ Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71.

bombardments on the rise to power of the Khmer Rouge, the negotiations between China and the United States, and the support of the international community to the former CPK leaders long after their demise. Interestingly, while trauma aesthetic in the Cold War period is an ideological staging of history, in its recent incarnation it contributes to the de-ideologization of images of the Pol Pot's regime (with as a consequence many aspects of DK and the CPK becoming more elusive to younger generations). This is exactly what makes trauma aesthetic a political act in that it re-writes history again. The ideas of reconciliation, resilience, and redemption it conveys must be seen in such a light. However, the highly loaded issues supposed to vanish from sight, buried deep down underneath layers of emotional narratives, often resurface in the same way the repressed usually returns, with a vengeance. The radical discourse of the Cold War is not dead, as might be seen in the way people link the role of the United States in Southeast Asia and American intervention in past and present conflict zones all over the world, or in their strident denunciation of Communism under all its forms (Chapter 3). A "sedimentary" view of trauma aesthetic, thus, points to the effaced ground of transnational geopolitics, reshaped over and over again, but always involving the same actors.

Is the visual culture of the Holocaust "so prevalent that it has become an integral part of our own understanding and recollection of the event," Barbie Zelizer wonders half a century after the events.⁴ It might be too early as yet to ask the same question about "Khmer Rouge visual culture." There are signs of a similar development. For example, the photos of S-21 prisoners are now iconic representations of Khmer Rouge atrocities. They shape our perception of Khmer Rouge violence to such an extent that we might overlook other forms of terror people experienced in DK and for which there is not such documentation. Clearly, trying to assess today the impact of visual culture on our "understanding and recollection" of the Pol Pot's regime would be premature. But it is never too late to underscore the role of visual culture itself in contrast to ideas of invisibility and non-representability of the Cambodian Genocide. Formulating questions within the broadly defined field of visual culture allows the researcher to explore not only the representation of past violence but also the violence of memory politics in the present and how these two might be related. In a Q&A in October 2014 at Meta-House in Phnom Penh, Father François Ponchaud argued that the problems that had brought the Khmer Rouge to power still exist. The situation today, he concluded, is not so different from what it was on the eve of the civil war. What spark will set off the powder keg? Will an oppositional discourse reinterpreting the Khmer Rouge nationalistic stance and claims for social and economic justice rise again one day? Will it find a public? The Khmer Rouge still have some "cultural of sympathy" in Cambodia, especially among their late supporters in the Pailin and Anlong Veng areas. They look at the Khmer Rouge legacy in a positive way. In their view the former leaders were honest and disinterested champions of Khmer identity. Of course this is a rosy picture. The Khmer Rouge were in money too and made millions thanks to the traffic of gems and rubber. But how different is it from CPP elites and "tycoons" (some being former Khmer Rouge anyhow) who make fortunes through land grabbing and illegal logging? Will the fantasized vision of the Khmer Rouge as a pure regime on the side of the people take hold strongly enough to trigger some revision of the past? The place where Pol Pot was cremated—located across a

⁴ Barbie Zelizer, "Introduction: On Visualizing the Holocaust?" in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, Barbie Zelizer, ed. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 1.

gigantic Thai-owned casino nowadays—has become a pilgrimage site where people pray for good luck with lottery numbers, jobs, business prosperity, and malaria protection. Ta Mok “the Butcher” is celebrated as someone who took good care of his people, and built roads, a bridge, a school, and a hospital for them.⁵ Against that, one understands the urgency to form a picture of the events that leaves as little space as possible for the simplification and denial of history. Our challenge, researcher and former Victims Unit chief at the ECCC Helen Jarvis said twenty years ago, is “to move beyond (...) reductionist images to arrive at a deeper understanding of what took place in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979.”⁶ By juxtaposing the “emotive and dramatic images of skulls and black-clothed ant-like slaves building dykes” that usually represent Khmer Rouge atrocities with a different set of visual materials from Cambodia and abroad, visual culture might well be a step further toward that goal.

⁵ See: Harriet Fitch Little and Vandy Muong, “Dark Tourism in Anlong Veng;” *The Phnom Penh Post*, August 8, 2015; Roth Meas, “A Horrifying Past Explains Some Truth,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, July 6, 2012.

⁶ Helen Jarvis and Nereida Cross, “Documenting the Cambodian Genocide on Multimedia,” working paper GS04 (Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University, October 1, 1998), 1.

Appendix A

State and party apparatus in Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)

1. Parliamentary, State, and Government Offices
2. Party Standing Committee and Central Committee (1978)

Based on: Timothy Carney, "The Organization of Power," in *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*, ed. Karl D. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 101-104.

1. Parliamentary, State, and Government Offices

People's Representative Assembly (PRA)

Name	Function
Nuon Chea [Brother Number Two]	Chairman and first deputy secretary
Ta Mok [Brother Number Five]	First vice chairman and second deputy secretary
Peou Sou	Second vice chairman, PRA representative of Northwestern region peasants

State Presidium

Name	Function
Khieu Samphan [Brother Number Four]	Chairman, member of the party Central Committee, and head of its Central Office (from 1977)
So Phim (May 1978)	First vice chairman, member of the Party Standing Committee, Party secretary of the Eastern region
Nhim Ros (June 1978)	Second vice chairman, Party secretary of the Northwestern region

Government

Name	Function
Pol Pot [Brother Number One]	Prime Minister, PRA representative of rubber plantation workers
Ieng Sary [Brother Number Three]	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of

	Foreign Affairs
Vorn Vet	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economy, member of the Party Standing Committee
Son Sen [Brother Eighty-Nine]	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of National Defense, chief of general staff
Hu Nim (April 1977)	Minister of Information and Propaganda, PRA representative of Phnom Penh factory workers
Thiounn Thoeun	Minister of Health
Ieng Thirith (Mrs. Ieng Sary)	Minister of Social Affairs, PRA representative of Phnom Penh factory workers
Toch Phoeun	Minister of Public Works, PRA representative of Phnom Penh factory workers
Yun Yat (Mrs. Son Sen)	Minister of Culture, Education and Instruction, PRA representative of Phnom Penh factory workers

2. Party Standing Committee and Central Committee (1978)

Standing Committee

Name	Function
Pol Pot	Secretary of the Party Standing Committee, chairman of the Party military committee,
Nuon Chea	Deputy secretary, chairman of the Standing Committee of the PRA
Ta Mok	Second deputy secretary, Party secretary of the Southwestern region, first deputy chairman of the Standing Committee of the PRA
So Phim (May 1978)	Member, Party secretary of the Eastern region
Ieng Sary	Member
Vorn Vet	Member
Son Sen	Candidate member, Minister of Defense, chief of general staff
Ta Keu	Candidate member

Phnom Penh

Name	Function
Khieu Samphan	Member, head of central office of Central Committee (from 1977), chairman of State Presidium
Pang ** (purged)	Member, chief of protocol of Central Committee, deputy head of central office
Koy Thuon (March 1977)	Member, Party secretary and chairman of Commerce committee
Doeun *	Member, Party secretary of Commerce committee, head of central office of Central Committee (until 1977)
Non Suon (November 1976)	Member, Party secretary and chairman of Agricultural committee, former regional Party secretary Sector 25
Mei Prang **	Member, chairman of Communication committee, PRA representative of railway workers
Toch Phoeun (January 1977)	Member, Party secretary for Communication and Transport, Minister of Public Works
Cheng An **	Member, Party secretary and chairman of Industry committee
Hu Nim (April 1977)	Member, Party secretary of Propaganda Ministry
Pok Chhay	Member, cadre in Service 870 (aka central Committee)
Hou Yuon (1975 or 1976)	Member
Tum **	Member, member of general staff, regional Party secretary Sector 4
Chan Chakrey (May 1976)	Member, deputy secretary of general staff, political commissar brigade 170

The dates in parentheses are the dates of arrest.

* Name cited by Vorn Vet

** Name listed on Radio Phnom Penh

Appendix B

Visitors in Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1978)

1. Diplomatic delegations (heads of state, prime ministers, ministers, ambassadors, and political representatives)
2. Press delegation
3. Economic delegations
4. Cultural delegations
5. Delegations of friendship associations and communist Marxist-Leninist parties of non-socialist states

1. Diplomatic delegations (heads of state, prime ministers, ministers, ambassadors and political representatives)

Date	Name and/or function	Country
1975		
June	Secretary general of the communist party Le Duan	Vietnam
September	Minister of Foreign Affairs Bichai Ratakul	Thailand
12 October	General Wang Shang Rong	People's Republic of China
November	Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs Director of Erewan International Chatichai Choonhavan	Thailand
December	Delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Socialist Republic of Romania
15 December	Deputy Prime Minister and minister of Foreign Affairs Phoune Sipraseuth	Laos
1976		
February-March	Ambassador Kaj Björk	Sweden
February-March	Hamad Abdul Aziz al Aydi	PLO
February-March	Representatives	Zambia, Egypt, Tunisia, and Afghanistan
9 March	Special representative Mohamed Ould Sidi Ali	Mauritania
April	Deputy Prime Minister Zhang Chunqiao	People's Republic of China
May-June	Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs Phan Hien	Vietnam

June	Minister of Foreign Affairs Bichai Ratakul	Thailand
July	Representatives of the FRETILIN (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) Abilio Araujo and Rogerio Lobato (1)	East Timor
7 August	Deputy Prime Minister Ho Tam	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
September	Ambassador Aly Dioum	Senegal
September	Ambassador of Egypt Kamal Eldin Sabet	Egypt
September	Ambassador Sekou Yansana	Republic of Guinea
September	Mumtaz Ali Alvie and Masood Ahmed	Pakistan
December	Representative of Minister of Foreign Affairs Fang Yi	People's Republic of China
28 December	Minister of the Interior Sergio del Valle Jimenez	Cuba
1977		
15-17 February	Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs Hoang Van Loi	Vietnam
July	Ambassador Ali Saleh Moawad	Yemen
30 August	Minister of Foreign Affairs U Hla Phone	Burma
24 October	Ambassador U Myint Maung	Burma
26-29 November	Head of state U Ne Win	Burma
December	Minister of Foreign Affairs Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen	Malaysia
December	Ambassador Jean-Christophe Oberg	Sweden
3-13 December	Deputy Prime Minister Cheng Younggui	People's Republic of China
18-20 December	Head of state Prince Souphanouvong	Laos
1978		
18 January	Deng Yingchao (widow of Zhou Enlai) Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs Han Nien Director of the Asia department of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Shen Ping	People's Republic of China
January	Ambassador	Sweden

January	Ambassador	Denmark
January	Ambassador	Finland
31 January	Minister of Foreign Affairs Upadit Pachariyangkun	Thailand
April	Ambassador Rakolofininga	Madagascar
April	Ambassador Torleiv Anda	Norway
28-30 May	Head of state Nicolae Ceașescu and his wife Elena	Romania
15-22 July	Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Hyeung Ryoul	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
12-19 August	Ambassador Daouda Kourouma	Republic of Guinea
5-6 September	Gamal Eldin Sabet	Egypt
5-6 September	Shoji Sato	Japan
5-6 September	Georgy Kondov	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
5-6 September	U Khim Maung Win	Burma
24 September	Representative of the Foreign Ministry Chamras Chombuhol	Thailand
November	Head of state Prince Souphanouvong	Laos
4-8 November	Deputy president of the communist party Wang Dong Xing	People's Republic of China
December	Counselor at the Indonesian embassy in Bangkok Djun Junan	Indonesia
December	Ambassador Mohammed Yunus	Pakistan
December	Ambassador Yadu Nath Khana	Nepal
December	Oktay Cankardes	Turkey
December	Werner Stigg	Switzerland

- (1) According to Suong Sikoeun, besides the FRETILIN, there were representatives of the Thai and Indonesian communist parties and the African National Congress (South Africa) staying in Democratic Kampuchea. Suong Sikoeun *Itinéraire d'un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2013), 209.

2. Press delegations

Date	Name and/or function	Country
1976		
July (two weeks)	Delegation of news agency, including Hoang Tung, chief	Vietnam

	editor of the communist party's newspaper <i>Nhan Dan</i>	
December	Delegation of journalists	People's Republic of China
1977		
January	Delegation of journalists led by editor of the newspaper <i>Rodong Simun</i> Kim Seuk Rai	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
March	Alexandru Andritzoiou of the newspaper <i>Scinteia</i>	Socialist Republic of Romania
1978		
March	Team from Belgrade Television (Televizija Beograd) led by director Nikola Vitorović, journalist Dragoslav Rančić from the daily <i>Politika</i> , and correspondent Slavko Stanić for the news agency Tanjug	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
22-30 April	Editor Daniel Burnstein, journalist David Kline, photographer Robert Brown and unidentified representative of <i>The Call</i> , journal of the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist or CP-ML (1)	United States
9-16 September	Editor Mehmet Ataberk and political correspondent in Ankara Nuri Çolakoğlu of the daily newspaper <i>Aydinlik</i> (2)	Turkey
September	Journalists Mak Wah-cheung for <i>Wen wei po</i> and Fung Chun-lian for <i>Ta king poa</i>	Hong-Kong
September	Delegation of XinHua news agency led by Li Nan, deputy director of XinHua's international department	People's Republic of China
9-23 December 1978	Journalists Elizabeth Becker for the <i>Washington Post</i> and Richard Dudman for the <i>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</i> (3)	United States
December	Journalist (4)	Peru

(1) The CP-ML was the outcome of a series of split-offs as leftist student movements in the United States radicalized throughout the 1960s. Of all the Maoist groups that emerged in

- the process, the CP-ML (first called October League when it formed in 1971) was the only one to enjoy China's official recognition as fraternal party. A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1988), 84-88.
- (2) At the time *Aydinlik* was a very successful paper, possibly the largest Maoist daily in the world outside Chinese communities. See: Ahmet Samim, "The Tragedy of the Turkish Left," *New Left Review* 1, no.126 (1981), 70-77.
 - (3) Becker and Dudman were familiar with the region. Becker had covered the civil war in Cambodia for two years. Vietnamese communists inside Cambodia had held Dudman prisoner for a few weeks in 1970.
 - (4) Unidentified and mentioned by Suong Sikoeun, 283.

3. Economic delegations

Date	Name and/or function	Country
1977		
January	Minister of Foreign Commerce Mugbil Bejzat, Luka Radojic and Dragoljub Popovic	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
July	Delegation of civil aviation led by Phoune Khammoun Huang	Laos
1978		
May	Milos Minic	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
June	Team of researchers on tropical cultures led by Lieu Wen Houei	People's Republic of China
17 November	Director of Erewan International (airline) Chatichai Choonhavan	Thailand

4. Cultural delegations

Date	Name and/or function	Country
1977		
February	Union of Women led by president Ha Thi Khiet	Vietnam
20 April	Union of Democratic Women led by president Khampheng Bopha	Laos
1978		
12-26 (?) August	Folkloric group "Crown of the	Socialist Republic of

	Carpathians” led by president Norica Popescu (Romania)	Romania
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5. Delegations of friendship associations and communist Marxist-Leninist parties of non-socialist states

Date	Name and/or function	Country
1977		
27-30 December	Edward Fowler Hill, chairman of the Communist Party of (Marxist-Leninist) and his wife	Australia
1978		
8-15 July	Delegation of the Central Committee (CC) of the Unified Communist Party of Italy (Partito Comunista Unificato d'Italia, PCUI), led by secretary general of the CC Osvaldo Pesce, and including members of the CC politburo Giuseppe Burgani and Michele Semerano, and CC members Antonio Cardellicchiono and Gian Franco Farci	Italy
22-29 July	Delegation of the Belgium-Kampuchea Friendship Association (Association d’Amitié Belgique-Kampuchéa or Vereniging België-Kampuchea), led by François Rigaux (1)	Belgium
29 July-5 August	Delegation of the Communist Workers’ Party (Kommunistisk Arbejderparti, KAP) led by Peter Bischoff, member of CC politburo and director of <i>Arbejder Avisen</i> (Workers’ Newspaper) and Sven Aage Madsen, the paper’s editor in Aarhus (2)	Denmark
12-26 August	Delegation of the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association (Vänskapsföreningen Sverige-Kampuchea) including Gunnar	Sweden

	Bergström (chairman), Hedwige Ekerwald, Jan Myrdal and Marita Wikander	
9-16 September	Delegation of the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist including secretary general Jacques Jurquet and members Annie Brunel [Marie-Thérèse Dufour], Camille Granot [Monique Cuisinier-Dagron], Alain Castan (3)	France
16-30 September	Delegation of the Japan-Kampuchea Friendship Association, including president Kozo Sasaki, director general, and Tokumatso Sakamoto, director of the association, and Kyodo News Service journalist Tadashi Ito and Japan National Radio photographer Mutsumi Iida	Japan
23-30 September	Delegation of the Communist party Marxist-Leninist (Arbeidernes Kommunistparti, AKP), including president Pål Steigan and members Elisabeth Eide, Sveinung Mjelde, and Tron Øgrim	Norway
December	Delegation of the Workers' Party, led by the secretary general of the CC of the party, Shosaku Itai	Japan
December	Delegation of the Communist League of West-Germany (Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland, KBW) led by secretary Hans-Gerhart ("Joscha") Schmierer	GDR
9-23 December	Malcolm Caldwell, lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London	UK
23-30 December	Delegation of the Canadian Communist League (Marxist-Leninist) including Danielle Bourassa, Simon Brault, Roger Rashi (chairman), Julian Sher	Canada

- (1) Rigaux is the only identified delegation member. The other Association's members were Monique Benout (from the Centre de Diffusion et de Documentation pour le Vietnam), Fernand and Marianne Lefèbvre, Erika de Decker, and someone with the family name Canneel. I did not find any document so far identifying which one(s) of them accompanied Rigaux in Cambodia.
- (2) This Svend Aage Madsen should not be confused with the writer of the same name.
- (3) Formed first as a movement, the PC-ML became a party in 1967 with China's blessing. It had nothing to do with the glamorous 'Mao-Spontex' Gauche Prolétarienne/Cause du Peuple supported by Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean-Luc Godard. The PC-ML was a hardcore party born as split off from the French Communist Party in the context of destalinization. The party went underground in 1968 after the banning of leftist organizations by the French Interior Ministry. Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes. La Folle Histoire des Gardes Rouges Français* (Paris: Plon, 1996), 139-140, 286-288 ; Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism*, 191-215.
- (4) Like its American counterpart, the Canadian Communist League was the result of split-offs in the Canadian Communist Movement (Marxist-Leninist) in the wake of the China-Albania conflict. Rashi's party was loyal to China. Robert J. Alexander, *Maoism in the Developed World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 41-47.

Appendix C

Partial list of Western visitors in the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979)

Name	Function/organization	Country
Alain Ruscio (first Westerner to enter Phnom Penh on January 25, 1979)	Correspondent in Hanoi for the French communist newspaper <i>L'Humanité</i>	France
Roger Pic	Journalist for television channel TF1	France
Jacky Kargayan	Film director for television channel TF1	France
Jean Henaff	Sound recordist	France
Pierre Boucher	Sound recordist	France
Francis Crémieux	Journalist for radio France Inter	France
Jean-Pierre Gallois	Correspondent of AFP (Agence France-Presse) in Hanoi	France
Oskar Ruhmen	Correspondent for <i>Aftonbladet</i>	Sweden
Dr. Jean-Luc Lubrano-Lavadera	Médecins Sans Frontières	France
Françoise Vandermeersch	Nun	Unknown
Jérôme Kanapa	Film director	France
Charlet Recors	Cameraman	France
Oliver Schwob	Sound recordist	France
Gerhard Scheumann	Film director, Studio H&S	DDR
Walter Heynowski	Film director, Studio H&S	DDR
John Pilger	Journalist for television channel ATV and the newspaper <i>Daily Mirror</i>	UK
David Munro	Producer for television channel ATV	UK
Gerry Pinches	Cameraman for television channel ATV	UK
Steven Philipps	Sound recordist for television channel ATV	UK
Eric Piper	Photographer for the newspaper <i>Daily Mirror</i>	UK
Miriam Vire-Tuo-minen	Women's International Democratic Federation (1)	Unknown
Dr. Florence Hervé	Women's International Democratic Federation	GDR
Florence Crosswell	Women's International	UK

	Democratic Federation	
Helen Ester	Australian Women's Association (2)	Australia
Françoise Corrèze	Anthropologist	France
Jean-Claude Labbé	Photographer for the magazine <i>Paris Match</i>	France
Father Yves Buannic	Priest	France
Pastor Henriet	Comité Inter-Mouvements Auprès des Evacués (CIMADE)	France
José Osaba	Comité Catholique contre la Faim	France
René Lacoste	Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace	Canada
Unnamed physicians	Comité Français d'Aide Médicale et Sanitaire	France
Gilbert Avril	Secours Populaire Français	France
René Mauries	Journalist for the newspaper <i>La Dépêche du Midi</i>	France
Kirk Allinan	Church World Service	United States
Douglas Beane	Church World Service	United States
Perry Smith	Church World Service	United States
Paul Quinn Judge	American Friends Service Committee (Quakers)	United States
Pastor Jean Clavaud	Priest	France
Antoon Claassen	Medisch Comité Nederland- Vietnam (3)	The Netherlands
Maarten van Dullemen	Medisch Comité Nederland- Vietnam	The Netherlands
Unnamed journalist	Television channel ATV	UK
Unnamed journalist	Television channel ABC	United States
François d'Aubert	Representative of Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) (4)	France
Gilbert Barbier	Representative of Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF)	France
Jean-Pierre Bloch	Representative of Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF)	France
Pascal Clément	Representative of Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF)	France
François Léotard	Representative of Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF)	France
Alain Madelin	Representative of Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF)	France

(1) The Women's International Democratic Federation (FDIF) convened in East Berlin on April 2-4, 1979 and decided to send representatives to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (April 9-26, 1979).

- (2) Helen Ester and other representatives of the Australian Women's Association visited in the PRK from December 14 to 17, 1979.
- (3) Maarten van Dullemen and Antoon Claassen visited in the PRK from December 17 to 21, 1979. The visit was part of a one-month trip in Vietnam with other members of the Medisch Comité Nederland-Vietnam (Ben Polak, A. Pen, W.V. Daalen-Feenstra and N. Fekkas).
- (4) The UDF was the party of French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

Sources

Françoise Corrèze, *Choses vues au Cambodge* (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1980)

Maarten van Dullemen, unpublished report, December 1979.

Ben Kiernan, *Genocide and Resistance in Southeast Asia: Documentation, Denial and Justice in Cambodia and East Timor* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 298, 293.

Alain Ruscio, *Cambodge An I: Journal d'un Témoin, 1979-1980* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2008), 78, 107.

William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust, and Modern Consciousness* (UK: Fontana/Collins, 1985 [1984]), 208.

Appendix D

Visitors in the Khmer Rouge-controlled zones from 1979 to August 1982 (formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea)

Based on the monthly reports published in *Nouvelles du Kampuchéa Démocratique* (Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchéa Démocratique de Gentilly, France)

Date	Name and/or function and organization	Country
1979		
September	Jan Myrdal, writer	Sweden
1980		
February	Savino Marinelli, president of the Italian-Kampuchean Friendship	Italy
February	M. Liveravi and Dr. Giuseppe, Italian Foundation for the Support to Kampuchea	Italy
February	Journalists	Japan
February	Journalist of the news agency Tanjug	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
June	Dr. Berndt Atmer	Unknown
5-6 July	8 journalists (all members of the Japanese Center of Support to Kampuchea) working for television channel NTV RPT, cinema production society Nippon-Film and newspaper <i>Asahi Shinbun</i>	Japan
8-9 July	Journalists for television channel TF1	France
8-9 July	Journalist of the news agency Tanjug	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
8-9 July	Photographer for Sygma photo-agency	Unknown
8-9 July	<i>Newsweek</i> , <i>Far Eastern Economic Review</i> and <i>Libération</i>	Unknown, at least one from France
23-24 July	R.P. Jean Cardonnel, Professor Edmond Jouve, Dr. Georges Afanassief, Mouvement Solidarité	France

	Cambodge	
End of July	Professor Stephen Robert Orlov	Canada
End of July	Journalist for <i>La Presse</i>	Canada
30 July-10 September	Journalists for Radio Beijing, China Central Television and printed media	People's Republic of China
18-19 August	Joel Henri, Agence France-Presse	France
18-19 August	Silvana Foa, UPI	United States
18-19 August	Denis D. Gray, AP	Unknown
3 November	Muri Moto and Ishii, Kyoto Committee of Support for the Kampuchean People	Japan
5-7 November	Stefan Lindgren, editor of the magazine <i>Kampuchea</i>	Sweden
5-7 November	Dr. Johan Brohult	Sweden
7-9 November	Yoso Komine, secretary general of the Japanese Center of Support to Kampuchea	Japan
7-9 November	Takehige Torada, president of the Center for the province of Kanazawa	Japan
7-9 November	10 members of the Japanese Center of Support to Kampuchea	Japan
20 November	Ray Cline, advisor to elected president Ronald Reagan	United States
26 December (for two weeks)	In Thaddée, Groupe Tiers Monde	France
1981		
January	Enver Boila Husin for news agency Tanjug	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
January	Li Kim Chew for <i>Strait Times</i>	Singapore
January	Hiyomada for <i>Yomiuri Shinbun</i>	Japan
January	Nori Fumimori for news agency Kyodo	Japan
January	Christel Elizabeth Pilz for <i>Die Welt</i>	GDR
9 January	Nathalie Nghet and Sylvain Chauvelot, Mouvement	France

	Solidarité Cambodge	
12-25 January	Koichi Nakapora, Tada Yoshi Komatsu and Yoshimi Ino for television channel TBS	Japan
12-25 January	Soji Tani, Japan-Kampuchea Friendship Association	Japan
31 January – 5 February	Siri Leelaratna	Sri Lanka
31 January – 5 February	Jochen Noth	GDR
31 January – 5 February	Wolfgang Ranke	GDR
31 January – 5 February	Francis Deron, AFP	France
31 January – 5 February	Manuel de Dompablo for news agency EFE	Spain
31 January – 5 February	Dennis McIntish and Bruce Murphy for television channel CTV	Canada
5 February	Diegos Gianno and Jean Carlo Liberati, president and vice president of the Italian Centre for Kampuchean Refugees	Italy
5 February	Silvana Foa, UPI	United States
5 February	Clara Hollingworth for the <i>Daily Telegraph</i>	UK
5-11 February	Alexander Bowie (alternative identification: D.A.G. Bowie), for <i>Nieuwerov</i> (?) [probably photographer Alex Bowie]	Netherlands [most probably UK]
18-21 February	Takeshi Ayari and non-identified members of the Japan-Kampuchea Friendship Association	Japan
21-25 February	Vincente Romero, journalist at <i>Pueblo</i> and editor of the weekly <i>La Calle</i>	Spain
1-13 March	Daniel Burstein and Craig Buck	United States
6-10 March	Lugano Joseph, Guido Nadone and Constantino Papadopoulos for non-identified television channel	Italy
8 March	Moni Moto, Aid Program for Kampuchean Refugees	Japan
11-15 March	James Gerrand	Australia

25-30 March	Peter Torkil, Norel Bischoff, Sonja Erika Schulte, Nanne Susanne Solem Dahl, Kjeld Allan Larsen, Soeren Rud, Lars Becker-Larsen, Walter Juul Hansen from the Committee Denmark-Kampuchea	Denmark
20-27 April	Yang Mu, Chi Xinshie, Chou Zong Yao and Shun Yeh Xing for Xinhua news agency	People's Republic of China
25-29 May	Professor Stephen Robert Orlov and his wife	Canada
14-26 June	Two groups of twenty-one delegates	Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland
15 June	Jurgen Horlemann	GDR
15 June	Ermanno Trentini	Italy
15 June	Boult Wood and two non-identified journalists for Euro-Television	Unknown
29 July-3 August	Journalists Jane Hamilton Kirsty, Erik Derk Sauer, Dereck A.G. Bowie, Justin Kemp Ackerman, Eugene Bernard Squires, Naoki Mabuchi	Several countries, non-identified
3-8 August	Hatoyo Ono, Elizabeth Homan, Fujiki Kunito, Osamu Ono, Muramaya Yasu Hiro and Kakamura Hitoshi, from the Aid Program to Kampuchean Refugees	Japan
13-16 August	Christel Elizabeth Pilz for <i>Die Welt</i>	GDR
13-16 August	Catherine Campbell for Reuter	UK
13-16 August	Ikeuchi Hideks for news agency Kyodo	Japan
13-16 August	Yamada Kozo for <i>Yomiuri Shimbun</i>	Japan
13-24 August	Dennis Lucien Richle for the magazine <i>Paris-Match</i>	France

18-19 August	Father Ciaran Kitching and Mary Keogh for the humanitarian organization Concern	Ireland
22-31 August	Philippe Revillon and Françoise Capucines Leroux, Assistance Médicale Internationale	France
25-28 August	Mohammed Eissa, chief editor of <i>Al Ahram</i>	Egypt
6 November	Dr. Jean-Marie Ponvet, Claudine Nègre and Marie-Claudette Cadillac, Médecins pour le Cambodge	France
30 November-18 January 1982	Zong Ying Min, Zhui Ke Zhi, Sin He Peng and Cheng Han Shen for Radio Beijing	People's Republic of China
2-13 December	Patrick Sauvaget and Bernard Geay, Mouvement Solidarité Cambodge and Groupe Tiers Monde	France
15-19 December	Sylvana Foa, UPI	United States
15-19 December	Etto Redicio for <i>France Magazine</i>	France
15-19 December	Journalists of <i>Corriere della Sera</i>	Italy
15-19 December	Marie-Alexandrine Martin, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique	France
1982		
4-6 January	Maj Illa, editor of <i>Bichitra</i>	Bangladesh
16-19 January	Hari Stajner for <i>Nin</i>	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
22 January	Senator Hideo Den, president of the Center of Japanese Assistance to the People of Kampuchea	Japan
22 January	Tatsuo Isikawa, secretary general of the Liberal Party	Japan
29 January	Dr. Johan Brohult and his wife	Sweden
22-24 February	Yang Mu for news agency Xinhua	People's Republic of China

22-24 February	Wang Wiyun for newspaper <i>Guangmin Ribao</i>	People's Republic of China
22-24 February	Xin Yesiv, interpreter	People's Republic of China
27 February	Professor Wolfgang Friedl, University of Salzburg	Austria
27 February	Professor Helmut Stockhammer, University of Klagenfurt	Austria
27 February	Carl Resteter, ambassador in Bangkok	Austria
2 March-2 April	Huang Qun, Cheng Shao Guang, Lu Yun, Wang Zhi Guang, Feng Zong You and Zhang Wang Shen, for <i>People's Daily</i> and <i>Beijing Information</i>	People's Republic of China
6-8 March	Marc Renault, Gil Gourmand, Paul Roger Boussart and Claudio Luca for non-identified television channel	Canada
6-8 March	Lucio Lamy for <i>Il Giornale Nuovo</i>	Italy
6-8 March	Mario de Ringis for <i>Il Tempo</i>	Italy
15-18 March	Professor Mitsu Sada, Mamoro Isibasi, Soichi Kat, Kenko Kakei, Kosakai Amsuko Fujimoto and Atsuko Fujimoto, Center of Japanese Assistance to the People of Kampuchea	Japan
18 March	Jean-Louis Morillon for the newspaper <i>France Soir</i>	France
23-25 March	Sister Elizabeth Hofman, Muramaya Yasu and Ichi Roshi, Center of Japanese Assistance to Kampuchean Refugees	Japan
4 April	Journalist for non-identified television channel	Spain
16-18 April	Miko Metadao for <i>Daily News</i>	Japan
16-18 April	Mori Tochisachiko, wife of the correspondent of the news agency Kyodo in	Japan

	Bangkok	
8-10 May	Delegation of the Committee Denmark-Kampuchea	Denmark
16 May	Najman, deputy director of the UNESCO	
25-27 May	Yang Mu, chief of the Bangkok branch of news agency Xinhua	People's Republic of China
25-27 May	Huang Yong Giao, chief of the Bangkok bureau of <i>People's Daily</i>	People's Republic of China
25-27 May	Wu Yong Xiao and Sun Ye Seng	People's Republic of China
28-30 July	Kiki Yuvada, president of the Movement for Peace in Asia	Japan
28-30 July	Tada Susi Kuchi	Japan
28-30 July	17 non-identified members of the Organization Committee of the Kampuchea Conference in Tokyo	Japan
3-25 August	Michel Pidoux, Groupe Tiers Monde	France
6-8 August	Masoyo Kodama, Sister Marie Homan and Yokata Arioshi, Center of Japanese Assistance to Kampuchean Refugees	Japan
11-15 August	Benni Bundsgaard, president of the Solidarity Committee Denmark-Kampuchea	Denmark
11-15 August	6 non-identified members of Klunsergruppe i Ollerup	Denmark

Appendix E

Text materials used for the analysis of the Khmer Rouge guided tour in Chapter 2

Materials published in 1978 and 1979

Kampuchea Today: An Eyewitness Report from Cambodia: report released by *The Call* in October 1978 including the eleven articles serialized in the weekly between May and October 1978.

Kampuchea: A Photo-record of the first American Visit to Cambodia since 1975: book published by David Kline in 1979 at the PC-ML's publishing house Liberator Press.

“Témoignage de la Première Délégation d'Association d'Amitié dans le Monde Invitée par le Gouvernement du ‘K.D.’ à Visiter ce Pays, Août 1978” [Account of the first friendship association's delegation invited by the DK government to tour the country, August 1978] published in *Infor-Kampuchea*: October 1978 issue of the bulletin of the Belgium-Kampuchea Friendship Association dedicated to the visit of the delegation in DK.

Kampuchea August 1978: Records from a Journey made by a Delegation from the Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association: English translation of the articles published by the members of the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association in the national press in the fall of 1978.

“Mille Kilomètres à travers le Kampuchéa Démocratique” title [One thousand kilometers through Democratic Kampuchea]: ten serialized articles published by French delegates Annie Brunel and Camille Granot in *L'Humanité Rouge* from October 12 to 24, 1978.

“The Cambodian experiment: great change at heavy cost” by Elizabeth Becker for the *Washington Post* (December 29, 1978) and the report of Richard Dudman from the Congressional Record-Senate reprinted in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* on January 18, 1979: articles published in the brochure *New War in Southeast Asia: Documents on Democratic Kampuchea and the Current Struggle for National Independence*, a collection of texts assembled by the New York-based Kampuchea Support Committee in 1979.

Kampuchea will win! Glimpses of Kampuchea (Cambodia): report published early 1979 the delegation of the Canadian Communist League (Marxist-Leninist) with journalists from the party's newspaper *The Forge*.

“Pol Pot: Una Visita Storica per la Causa della Lotta Rivoluzionare dei Popoli Cambogiano e Italiano” [Pol Pot: a historical visit for the revolutionary cause of the Cambodian and Italian peoples] and “Un' Autentica e Profonda Rivoluzione Socialista”

[An authentic and radical social revolution]: articles published by the Italian delegation in the party's journal *Linea Proletaria* on August 5, 1978 and September 23, 1978.

“Die Aggressoren werden sich am Demokratischen Kampuchea die Zähne Ausbeißen,” *Kommunistische Volkszeitung*, no. 51, December 18, 1978.

Savaşan Kamboçya [Fighting Cambodia]: report of the Turkish journalists Ataberk and Çolakoglu released in 1979.

Materials published at a later stage

Memoirs

Elizabeth Becker, *When the War was Over* (1986)

Jacques Jurquet, *A Contre-courant, 1963-1986* (2001)

Y Phandara, *Retour à Phnom Penh* (1982)

Suong Sikoeun, *Itinéraire d'un Intellectuel Khmer Rouge* (2013)

Secondary sources

Marie Aberdam, “Visites Guidées au Kampuchéa Démocratique,” *Relations Internationales* (2015)

Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime* (1996) for the excerpts of the diary of Caldwell and the report of Thiounn Prasith about the visitors

ECCC testimonies

Elizabeth Becker (February 10, 2015)

Richard Dudman (March 30, 2015)

Sar Sarin (April 29, 2013)

Investigation

Peter Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot. Over en Zweedse Reis door het Kamboedja van de Rode Khmer* (2009 [2006])

Appendix F

Visual materials used for the analysis of the Khmer Rouge guided tour in Chapter 2

1. Reports and newspapers
2. Photos presented in exhibitions
 - 2.1 *Gunnar in the Living Hell*
 - 2.2 *A Reporter's Dangerous Guided Tour through Democratic Kampuchea*

1. Reports and newspapers

The Call delegation: 172 black-and-white photos, dividing into 52 in the delegation's report *Kampuchea Today: An Eyewitness Report from Cambodia* (April 1978) and 120 in Kline's book *Kampuchea: A Photo-record of the first American Visit to Cambodia since 1975* (1978).

The Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association: 31 black-and-white photos from the information bulletin *Kampuchea* 3-4 "Kampuchea-resan," the issue dedicated to the travel of the delegation in DK (1978).

Color movie filmed by Jan Myrdal during the journey and broadcast on the Swedish public channel TV1 on April 1, 1979. Probably through informal contacts Myrdal had managed to get camera from the Drama Department of the public broadcaster STV. The movie was edited in secret, by bits, as soon as a studio got free.¹

The delegation of the Canadian Communist League (Marxist-Leninist): 44 black-and-white photos included in the booklet published as supplement by the party's weekly *The Forge* in 1979, *Kampuchea will win! Glimpses of Kampuchea (Cambodia)*. Unfortunately, I do not know the whereabouts of *The Truth about Kampuchea* (twenty minute-long slideshow) and *Kampuchea will win* (thirty-five minute-long 16 mm color film with English and French soundtrack) the Canadian delegation produced as a result of the trip in DK.

The delegation of the French PC-ML: 21 black-and-white photos illustrating the serialized reportage "Mille kilomètres à travers le Kampuchéa Démocratique" in the party's daily *L'Humanité Rouge* from October 12 to 24, 1978.

The delegation of the Workers' Communist Party (Norway): 21 black-and-white photos illustrating five articles about the visit in DK published under the title "Kampuchea!" in the party's daily *Klassekampen* on October 26, 1978; October 28, 1978; October 31, 1978; November 3, 1978; November 11, 1978.

¹ Peter Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot. Over en Zweedse Reis door het Kambodja van de Rode Khmer* (Amsterdam: Nieuwe Amsterdam, 2009 [2006]), 33.

The delegation of the PCUI (Italy): 8 black-and-white photos illustrating five articles about the visit in DK published in the party's weekly *Linea Proletaria* on August 5, 1978; September 23, 1978; October 14, 1978; October 21, 1978, November 11, 1978.

Aydinlik delegation: 7 black-and-white photos illustrating four articles about the visit in DK published in the newspaper from October 17 to 20, 1978.

The delegation of the Communist League of West-Germany: 1 black-and-white photo published in the party's weekly newspaper *Kommunistische Volkszeitung* on December 18, 1978.

The Belgian delegation produced a super 8-mm film, over one hundred slides, and dozens of photos for public lectures, but the whereabouts of these materials are not known.

2. Photos presented in exhibitions

2.1 *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (2008): 93 color photos of the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association

1. The delegation's staff
2. Bombed or blown up bridge (Chruoy Xhang Var) over the Mekong (Phnom Penh)
3. Phnom Penh, August 1978
4. The Royal Stupa
5. The Royal Palace
6. Phnom Penh, an evacuated city
7. Phnom Penh, August 19, 1978
8. Phnom Penh boat ride, August 19, 1978
9. Lon Nol's bunker (according to our hosts)
10. This was part of the town of Skun (according to our Khmer Rouge hosts)
11. Destroyed building in the Kompong Cham area
12. A typical stop on the trip to film and take photos
13. Mobile brigade building a smaller dam north of Phnom Penh
14. Ferry crossing north of Phnom Penh
15. Young female brigade waiting for the bus at the ferry crossing north of Phnom Penh
16. A young brigade boarding a bus north of Phnom Penh
17. Female workers from a cooperative in a rice field
18. Women working in the rice fields
19. Children at the cooperative, protecting the crop
20. Communal eating at the cooperative
21. Communal eating
22. Family from the city
23. Farmers and their buffalo
24. Children catching frogs

25. Men and horse along the road
26. The former bus station in Kampong Cham
27. Women workers at the bus station in Kampong Cham
28. Rice fields on the road from Kampong Cham
29. Rubber factory near Kampong Cham
30. Rubber factory workers
31. Rubber factory
32. Rubber factory worker
33. Women in brick factory
34. Medicine factory Kampong Cham
35. Woman worker in medicine factory
36. Medicine factory Kampong Cham
37. Medicine factory Kampong Cham
38. Guesthouse outside Kampong Thom
39. On the road north toward Siem Reap
40. Irrigation dam construction on the road north
41. Dam construction
42. Dam construction
43. Workers at dam construction
44. Dam construction workers
45. Part of the constructed dam
46. Crocodile farm near Siem Reap
47. Bayon
48. Angkor Thom, gateway to Bayon
49. Angkor Thom, gateway to Bayon
50. Bayon
51. Irrigation workers in the fields
52. Factory workers in Phnom Penh making farm tools
53. Factory workers in Phnom Penh
54. Young boy working in the factory
55. Factory in Phnom Penh
56. Technical school in Phnom Penh
57. Student at the technical high school
58. Teacher at the technical high school
59. Hospital in Phnom Penh
60. Hospital in Phnom Penh
61. Hospital in Phnom Penh
62. Revolutionary show in Phnom Penh theater
63. Revolutionary show in Phnom Penh theater
64. Revolutionary show in Phnom Penh theater
65. Textile cooperative near Phnom Penh
66. Textile workers
67. The harbor in Sihanoukville (Kampong Som)
68. Kapok for export
69. Boat construction Sihanoukville (Kampong Som)
70. Boat construction

71. Military vessel Sihanoukville
72. Fishing boats
73. Young boys on boats
74. Farm transport southeast
75. Kampot
76. A cooperative in the southeast
77. Leaders of the cooperative
78. Children at the cooperative
79. Kitchen
80. A cooperative forge
81. Children at the cooperative
82. Children and their caretaker at the cooperative
83. Child care
84. Children in southeast
85. Building a house
86. Finished house
87. School
88. Classroom
89. School
90. Vietnamese tank
91. A man presented as a refugee from Vietnam (Khmer Krom)

2.2 *A Reporter's Dangerous Guided Tour through Democratic Kampuchea* (2012): 101 photos of Elizabeth Becker, dividing into 88 color photos and 13 black-and-white photos. Becker donated digital copies to the Center for Audiovisual Resources Bophana. Twenty of these photos formed the exhibition

Series reference number EBK_IF_003219 (24 photos)

1. Official press card, Cambodia, 1973
2. The front near Sihanoukville with Lon Nol army and Betsy Kennedy of Catholic Relief Service, 1973-1974
3. The press who covered the leaders that day: Christine Spengler, French photographer, Neil Davis, a renowned war correspondent who later died covering an aborted coup in Bangkok
4. Leaders of the Khmer Republic: President Lon Nol, Armed Forces Chief Sosthenes Fernandez, Prime Minister Long Boret, Cambodia, 1973-1974
5. A group photo at Banteay Srey: Thiounn Prasith, right hand man of Ieng Sary at the Foreign Minister, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
6. People clearing the elephant grass, complex of Angkor, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
7. Central Market, Phnom Penh, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
8. Independence monument in solitude, Phnom Penh, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
9. Two Khmer Rouge cadres in front of Wat Phnom, Phnom Penh, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
10. On the eastern front near the Vietnamese border. Dudman, Becker, Commander Pin, Caldwell, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978

11. A Khmer Rouge military near the border, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
12. A young Khmer Rouge soldier near the border, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
13. Khmer Rouge soldiers near the border, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
14. Fisherman on a boat on the Mekong, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
15. A model rice field where the Khmer Rouge said they were developing a superior rice. The farmers were using insecticides on the plants, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
16. Young women hauling rice to a truck, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
17. Young women walking towards a model cooperative farm where they are threshing the rice, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
18. Two young women wearing the black pajamas that was synonymous with the Khmer Rouge rule, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
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24. Pol Pot at the interview held in the former French colonial headquarters on the riverfront. The Art Deco building is now the office of the Council for the Development of Cambodia near Wat Phnom, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978

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1. Pol Pot, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
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5. Tanks of Lon Nol army, Cambodia, 1973-1974
6. Ieng Thirith and Elizabeth Becker [+ unknown man], UN, New York, USA, October 1978
7. Ieng Sary, Thiounn Prasith, Nguyen Co Thach, UN, New York, USA, October 1978
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9. Khmer Rouge cadres, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
10. Khmer Rouge cadre showing map on a wall, Two young Khmer Rouge soldiers, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
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17. Two young women drying the rice in the sun, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
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57. Khmer Rouge soldiers (b&w), Democratic Kampuchea, 1978

58. Caricature about the American bombardment of Cambodia, “Savon pour le bain” [Khmers are in a bucket/bathtub on which it is written 'Sangerous Khmer', two westerners (politicians) dressed as nurse and doctor throw bombs into the bathwater while Uncle Sam sits on the toilet]
59. Caricature against Vietnamese soldiers [three terrifying Vietnamese soldiers, easily identifiable with their iconic hat, gun monks praying at the pagoda]
60. Two young women in model rice field, Democratic Kampuchea, 1978
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Appendix G

Commercial *Mao-Glasögon* (“Mao glasses”)

Directors: Robin Robinovitch and Filip Hammarströhe
Script: Joakim Karlsson (advertisement agency JMW)

In a style reminding of Jean-Luc Godard’s movie *La Chinoise* (1967), the commercial shows several characters dressed in Seventies-like fashion and wearing cardboard glasses that corrected their vision of Khmer Rouge images.

Text of the commercial

Are you tired of mass murder, torture, dictators who persecute, oppress and annihilate? Then you should try 1978’s major innovation—Mao spectacles.

Be like Gunnar Bergström and Jan Myrdal, visit a country called Democratic Kampuchea. A country where 1.7 million people are dying as a result of famine and torture and outright executions. All you can see is happiness, the happiness of the people, all thanks to Mao spectacles.

Look at these people, the regime has forced them to leave their homes and their jobs to work in rice paddies. No, they do not look particularly happy but with Mao spectacles they will seem happy to you! Volunteers working together on equal terms, all for the revolution.

Child labour? No, non, no! This is education. Yes, indeed the clay is easiest to shape when it is soft, as Pol Pot and the Red Khmers often say. Yes, look at the diligent small children. How happy they are to learn.

These are the spectacles that help you to correct your vision. And if you look after them carefully, they will go on working for more than thirty years!

So why wait? Be like the Swedish delegation—see what you want to see! Order your Mao spectacles today!

Debates

Two main issues were raised after the release of the commercial.

First, it mentioned Bergström and Myrdal by name. Bergström expressed his dissatisfaction with *Mao-Glasögon* (a term he himself had coined), which he thought was making fun of mass murder. Myrdal published a paper in which he strongly criticized the commercial for using emotional rhetoric instead of providing factual information or proposing a serious debate.²

Second, it used archive images that were wrongly identified. It included some footage of undernourished children, which were passed off as Khmer Rouge images whereas they had been filmed by the successor regime.

The complaint of journalist Stefan Lindgren to the Parliamentary Ombudsman raised these two issues. He asked whether an attack ad *hominem* by a state agency such as the

² Jan Myrdal, “Statsfilmen om mig är skamlig,” *Expressen*, September 6, 2009.

LHF was compatible “with current legislation and good administrative practice.” Then he questioned the agency’s treatment of historical records. In his view it failed to comply with the impartiality and objectivity required of government authorities.³

³ Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsman, “Criticism of the Living History Forum and its Exhibition *Middag med Pol Pot* [*Dinner with Pol Pot*],” (Sweden: Stockholm, November 4, 2010), 2.

Appendix H

***Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* (John Pilger and David Munro, 1979) on YouTube**

Partial list (including number of views and comments, April 19, 2016)

Full versions

User AhmekKhmer (aka The Informer): version posted on June 16, 2007 in six parts, five with a running time of nine minutes, the last with a running time of 5:56 minutes. The first part has 31,230 views and 51 comments. The second part has 19,820 views and 48 comments. The third part has 80,419 views and 55 comments. The fourth part has 29,701 views and 40 comments. The fifth part has 15,992 views and 40 comments. The sixth part has 13,675 views and 30 comments.

User Nông Nghiệp Tổng Hợp: version posted on August 12, 2013. It has 732 views and only one comment (November 2015). The quality is extremely bad, possibly because the user filmed it when it was being screened on television. The video was terminated due to copyright infringement and is no longer accessible.

User sevenearths2010: version posted on August 24, 2012. It has 24,161 views and 22 comments.

User Sheep Wolf: version posted on June 20, 2012 in four parts, three with a running time of fifteen minutes, the last part with a running time of 7:13 minutes. The video was terminated due to copyright infringement and is no longer accessible.

Identified excerpts

User Bullfrog Films: sequence of 2:59 minutes posted on August 19, 2009. It corresponds to the beginning of *Year Zero*. It has 6,676 views and no comment (as this is written).

User dharmamarx: triptych entitled “Bombing Cambodia – Nixon, Kissinger and the Khmer Rouge” posted by on July 21, 2007. The first part corresponds to the beginning of *Year Zero*. Its running time is 1:19 minutes. It has 13,469 views and 11 comments. The second part corresponds to the next sequence of the film (archive images of the bombing of Cambodia by the U.S. Army and the top-secret files). Its running time is 3:40 minutes. It has 27,131 views and 34 comments. The third part starts with the sequence of the children hospital in Kompong Speu, followed by archive photos of Nixon and Kissinger. Its running time is 1:04 minutes. It has 9,675 views and 11 comments.

User calvinle5: excerpt posted on September 6, 2015. It shows the visit of the children hospital in Phnom Penh in the company of physicians Follezou and Vinot. Its running time is 3:10. It has 33 views and no comment.

User Huongtra8: several excerpts posted on August 27, 2015. The first excerpt (clip 4) shows the empty city. Its running time is 3:10. It has 11 views. The second excerpt (clip 6) corresponds to the interview of a female survivor and Ung Pech, with images of Tuol Sleng. Its running time is 3:10. It has 34 views and no comment. The last excerpt (clip 12) shows the convoy of Vietnamese trucks. Its running time is 3:10. It has one view and no comment.

Appendix I

Development of the art center Phare Ponleu Selpak (1995-present day)

The arts and culture department of Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS) grew progressively beyond the original Visual Arts School (1995) and Music School (1996).

The Circus School was founded in 1998. In 1999 it was granted the permission to give its first performance in front of Angkor Wat temples (as good omen). In 2000 the collective Clowns d'Ailleurs et d'Ici (CCAI), founded by Jean-Christophe Sidoit, Jules Etienne (from the French circus troupe Les Cousins Cirque), and Joseph Diacoyannis began a long-term collaboration with PPS. It helped the Circus School professionalize in terms of training, production, and touring. Among other things it created the yearly Tini Tinou circus festival (launched in 2004) and Piyop Cirk, a company of graduates of the Circus School. The building where the Circus School is currently located was built in 2003 with materials collected by CCAI, which also organized the big tent on the campus.

The Theater School and 1000hands animation studio were founded in 2007.

Sonleuk Thmey graphic design studio was founded in 2009.

The Dance School was founded in 2013.

PPS turned to community and education missions in the early 2000s as it developed further the Child Development Center founded in 1998 by offering daily cultural and educational activities to children aged three to fifteen. The plans of PPS in the field of public education became really concrete in 2003 thanks to the support of state and regional institutions: the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and its provincial department, and Battambang municipality. The public school proposes formal education from Primary to A-level grades. To fully understand what this represents for the community, one needs to know that school is not free in Cambodia. Monthly wages for teachers are only thirty to forty dollars. Families have to supplement the pay if they want the teachers to come to school since most need a second job to survive. PPS covers the teacher salary so families do not have to afford it themselves. The teaching program, however, remains under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. In 2013 PPS added a kindergarten to the public school, thereby filling a gap since there is no such thing as kindergarten in Cambodia. Children do not go to school until the age of six. Until then, they are left alone or work with their parents. The kindergarten at PPS is open to any child in Battambang (Anne-Cécile Lalande, personal communication to author, October 20, 2014).

Since 2002, PPS also runs jointly with UNICEF a Children Protection Unit. It is a residential center where children in great distress (that is, street children, victims of human trafficking) are provided with their daily needs (i.e. housing, food, health care) and psychological support. The center collaborates with the municipality of Battambang in the development of a Child Social Care System Services. Lately, PPS also added to its

mission the social reintegration of prisoners in the detention centers of Battambang province through art therapy.

According to fact sheet of Phare Ponleu Selpak for the year 2013, 357 students are enrolled today in the art programs of PPS:

- 169 at the Visual and Applied Arts School
- 110 at the Circus school
- 41 at the Music School
- 27 at the dance School
- 10 at the Theater School.

There are 744 students at the public school, 333 children at the Child Development Center, and 149 children at the kindergarten. The library has 1,370 registered students. PPS provides social services for one thousand families (two hundreds are supported, eight hundreds monitored). About ninety children currently benefit from the Child Unit Protection. The *Annual narrative report, January to December 2014* released in 2015 gives a different breakdown for the year 2014. The numbers it gives are stable: 346 students enrolled in the arts programs, 192 children at the kindergarten and 1,264 registered students and teachers at the library.

In October 2012 a new branch of PPS was created, Phare Performing Social Enterprise (PPSE), distinct from Phare Ponleu Selpak Association (PPSA). PPSE is based in Siem Reap. It has two poles of activity focused on the circus: the performance pole in a permanent complex near Angkor Wat, and the production pole in charge of organizing local and international tours for the PPS troupe. PPSE is a Cambodian private limited company, with PPSA as majority shareholder (seventy-one percent stake). The other shareholders are for thirteen percent private donors and for sixteen percent Grameen Crédit Agricole Microfinance Foundation, which supports PPSE with a current account of 150,000 Euro (information is available on Grameen Crédit Agricole's fact sheet). The social mission of PPSE (besides generating income for the social and educational activities of PPS via the circus) is to provide the PPS former students with a job allowing them to earn a living wage.

Appendix J

The arrival at S-21 and the moment of being photographed, described by survivors Vann Nath, Chum Mey and Bou Meng

I was frightened and wondered where they were taking me. Then I realized we were going into a building as we stepped up a few stairs. My feet touched a concrete floor and we were ordered to stop and sit down. I bent to sit, feeling unsure of what this place was. What were they going to do? I heard the clock strike three in the morning.

“You, guy! What’s your name? What did you do during the Sihanouk regime? The Lon Nol regime?” They’d already asked us these questions when we got off the trucks. Why were they asking us again? Every prisoner was interrogated again and then it was my turn. Afterwards, I felt someone undoing my blindfolds. At first my eyes were out of focus but then my vision cleared. In front of me was a chair with a camera set across from it.

“Go sit on that chair,” the guard said, pointing at me.

The others handcuffed to me went with me but they sat on the floor as I was photographed. The guard took a picture of the front of my face, and then the side. Another guard measured my head and then they made an ID card. After me, they photographed the other people attached to me. Then they put our blindfolds back on.

Vann Nath, *A Cambodian Prison Portrait: One Year in the Khmer Rouge’s S-21* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1998), 40.

They walked me into a room, which is now a reception room at Tuol Sleng. They shackled me, took off my blindfold and handcuffs and began to measure my height. They took a photograph and then they took off my shirt and handcuffed me again. Then they blindfolded me again and took me to a small cell and had me sit on the floor with my legs straight out. They shackled my legs and took off the handcuffs and blindfold, and I sat there on the floor and cried, wondering what I had done wrong.

Chum Mey (with Sim Sorya and Kimsroy Sokvisal), *Survivor: The Triumph of an Ordinary Man in the Khmer Rouge Genocide* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, Searching for the Truth, 2012), 33.

“Sit down!” a security guard ordered me. I searched for a chair with my hands and sat. A security cadre untied the black handkerchief from my face, but my hands were still handcuffed. I tried to look for my wife with dazed eyes. She was still blindfolded and handcuffed. I saw new guards in the room; there were a lot of materials such as a camera, a height measuring tool, documents and typing machines. A twenty-year-old cadre ordered me to walk up to the wall to measure my height. He then ordered me to sit in front of the camera. He put a number plate on my chest. It read 570. Another cadre asked me a few questions about my background and he recorded my answers on a worksheet

while security guards walked back and forth. Soon I was blindfolded again. After that I never learned what happened to my wife.

Bou Meng (with Huy Vannak). *Bou Meng, a Survivor from Khmer Rouge Prison S-21: Justice for the Future Not Just for the Victims* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, Searching for the Truth, 2010), 35.

Appendix K

List of reparations projects published in the “ECCC Reparation Program 2013-2017” released by the Victims Support Section and Civil Party Lead Co-Lawyers (2013)

Project	Estimated cost (\$)
Judicial measures	
Establishment of a National Remembrance Day	250,000
Community memorials initiative	475,000
Preservation of crime site	400,000
Testimonial therapy initiative	275,000
Self-help groups for the rehabilitation of Civil Parties	275,000
Exhibition about forced transfer	550,000
Victims register	250,000
Publication of the ECCC verdict	50,000
Inclusion of a chapter on victim participation in national history textbook	500,000
Non-judicial measures	
Gender and transitional justice project	425,000
Creation of a national reconciliation event	250,000
Tuol Sleng Stupa project	70,000
ECCC documentation center	500,000
ECCC virtual tribunal	180,000
Victims Foundation of Cambodia	2 million

Appendix L

List of the ECCC reparation projects published on April 4, 2014

Project	Organizer	Support
National Remembrance Day	Royal Government of Cambodia	
Public Memorials Initiative	NGO Kdei Karuna NGO Youth for Peace	
Monument for Khmer Rouge Victims at the Great Pagoda in Vincennes, France	International Federation for Human Rights NGO Victims of the Khmer Rouge Genocide (VGKR) NGO Memorial for Victims of the Genocide Committed by the Khmer Rouge (MVGKR)	
Testimonial Therapy for about two hundred Civil Parties	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) Stiftung Kriegstrauma-Therapie Commonwealth of Australia
Self-help Groups for Rehabilitation	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) Stiftung Kriegstrauma-Therapie Commonwealth of Australia
<i>To Those Who Are No Longer Here</i>	Séra Ing Anvaya Association Embassy of France	Embassy of France Groupe Amitié France-Cambodge
Permanent Exhibition on Forced Transfer and Tuol Po Chrey execution site	DC-Cam	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Mobile Exhibition on Forced Transfer and Tuol Po Chrey execution site	NGO Kdei Karuna NGO Youth for Peace	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) German Institute for Foreign Relations (IFA) Narrowcasters PTY Limited (Australia)

New Chapter on Forced Transfer and Tuol Po Chrey execution site in the <i>Teacher's Guidebook: The Teaching of A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)</i>	DC-Cam	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Community Peace Learning Center in Samrong Khnong village in Battambang province	NGO Youth for Peace	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
Illustrated Civil Party Storybook	Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC)	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Publication and Distribution of Case 002/01 judgment	LCL Section VSS PAS	PAS German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) American Ambassador David Scheffer
Publication of Civil Party Names on ECCC website	LCL Section VSS PAS	

Appendix M

Detailed budget of Séra's memorial project *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*

Item	Cost (\$)
Implementation study conducted by an architect office	8,000
Bronze sculpture including casting, molding, carving, patina, transportation, and sculpture's base	41,500
Engraved stele	2,000
Materials for construction work	5,000
Stone bases	20,200
Foundations	4,700
Water basin	4,900
Lightning	2,200
Three hundred square meter garden	6,000
Artist honorarium	45,000
Production and management expenses	4,000
Publication of a book in two thousand copies	5,500
Thirty minute long documentary movie	5,198
Website	3,000
Community management	3,000

Appendix N

List of rewards for the thirteen levels of pledge in the Kickstarter crowd-funding campaign for the memorial *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*

Amount of money pledged (\$)	Corresponding reward
\$10 and more	The backer gets a special personal thanks on the project's website.
\$50 and more	The backer has her name printed in the Thank You section of the commemorative special edition book <i>To Those Who Are No Longer Here: the Cambodian Genocide Tragedy Memorial</i> planned for early 2015. She receives a special personal thanks from Séra sent by postal mail.
\$80 and more	The backer receives a DVD documentary film about the creation of the memorial signed by the director and a specialized art photo signed by Séra.
\$150 and more	The backer receives a signed copy of the special edition book.
\$250 and more (limited to one hundred fifty backers)	The backer receives a signed personal dedication (drawing) and a limited edition numbered (from 1 to 150) artist copy of the commemorative publication.
\$350 and more (limited to one hundred fifty backers)	The backer receives a limited series monotype ink artwork signed and personally dedicated by Séra.
\$500 and more	The backer has her name and/or the names of loved ones "who are no longer here" engraved in both Khmer and Latin letters on the official bronze/marble stone at the actual memorial site.
\$800 and more (limited to one hundred fifty backers)	The backer is given the title "Friend of the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial." She receives an original signed and personally dedicated limited edition portfolio of all the artist's drawings and ink artworks of the memorial.
\$1,300 and more	The backer receives an original painting on small sized canvas (30 x 30cm) by Séra.

\$1,800 and more (limited to sixty backers)	The backer chooses an authentic bronze cast sculpture of one of the Memorial figures (18-25cm) [this relates to the first design of the memorial].
\$2,500 and more	The backer is given the title of “Outstanding Donor.” She gets a set of two authentic bronze cast sculptures of the memorial.
\$5,000 and more	The backer is given the title of “Donor of Exception.” She receives an original painting by Séra (100 x 100cm).
\$10,000 and more	The backer is given the title of “Honorable Patron of the Cambodian Tragedy Memorial.” She receives an original painting by Séra (150 x 150cm) and all five authentic bronze cast sculptures. She is also to spend a day alongside the artist as personal guide in Phnom Penh, followed by a VIP dinner.

Appendix O

Selected list of events organized in Cambodia and abroad in March and April 2015 for the commemoration of the fall of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975

Cambodia (Phnom Penh)

- Exhibition *Unfinished*, National Institute of Education (DC-Cam's new temporary facilities)
- Temporary exhibition, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum
- Photo exhibition *Phnom Penh 1979* along the river in front of Wat Unaloam Pagoda
- Exhibition *The 464 Urns: Nothing is Permanent*, organized by the DC-Cam at Wat Langka, with the support of the U.S. embassy, USAID, and the U.S. Seabees of NMCB 5 (Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 5)
- Lectures and presentations, Royal University of Phnom Penh

Worldwide

- Exhibition *I Want Justice: the Cambodian Genocide*, created by the DC-Cam and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC (USA)
- Exhibition *After the Killing Fields: a Forty Year Perspective of the Cambodian Genocide*, created by the Center for International Human Rights (Northwestern University Law School) and the Cambodian Association of Illinois (USA)
- Screening program of documentary movies, Rutgers University (USA), organized by the Initiative on Migration, Health and Well-Being Documentation Center and the International Working Group on Cambodia and Southeast Asia
- Commemoration day, organized by the Khmer Culture Association of the University of Massachusetts, Lowell (USA)
- Presentation of the Sleuk Rith Institute (new facilities of the DC-Cam), School for Oriental and African Studies, London (UK)
- Die Roten Khmer und die Folgen: Dokumentation als künstlerische Erinnerungsarbeit* ("Khmer Rouge and consequences: documentation as artistic remembrance"), Akademie der Künste, Berlin, organized by culture and media center Meta-House (DE)

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2. Véronique Decrop, founder of the art center Phare and director of the association PHARE (Marseille, France), Skype and e-mails, July-October 2015.
3. Paul Ellis, curator at Photofusion (London, UK), e-mails, June 5-12, November 29, 2013.
4. Khuon Det, founder of the art center Phare and director of PPS (Battambang, Cambodia), interview, October 20, 2014.
5. Ke Bin Soreasmey, founder and director of the association ANVAYA (Phnom Penh, Cambodia), e-mail, December 12, 2015.
6. Kor Borin, culture department, French Embassy in Cambodia (Phnom Penh, Cambodia), Skype, November 13, 2014.
7. Anne-Cécile Lalande, former intern at PPS (Battambang, Cambodia), interview, October 20, 2014.
8. Lena Lindgren, curator at Östergötlands Läns museet (Linköping, Sweden), Skype, February 27, 2015.
9. Ly Daravuth, former director of Reyum Gallery (Phnom Penh, Cambodia), interview, November 8, 2011.
10. Doug Niven, photographer (California, United States), e-mails, December 9-10, 2013, January 9-10, 2014.
11. Martin Haldane Rathie, historian (Brisbane, Australia), e-mails, March and April 2015.
12. Charlet Recors, cameraman (Paris, France), Skype, January 9, 2015.
13. Fately Sa, film archivist at DC-Cam (Phnom Penh, Cambodia), conversation, October 2014.
14. Valentin Sam, former director of communication at PPS (Battambang, Cambodia), interview, October 21, 2014.
15. Oliver Schwob, sound recordist (Paris, France), Skype, January 16, 2015.
16. Julia Stanislawska, film director (Stockholm, Sweden), phone, June 29, 2015.
17. Svay Sareth, founder of the art center Phare and artist (Siem Reap, Cambodia), phone, July 19, 2015.
18. Tor Vutha, founder of the art center Phare, director of PPS, and artist (Battambang, Cambodia), interview, October 20, 2014.
19. Stanislas Touzet, former director of communication and cultural events at Bophana Center (France), e-mail, November 11, 2014.
20. Alain Troulet, founder and director of Romcheik 5 (Battambang, Cambodia), interview, October 21, 2014.
21. Willy van Damme, guest in the People's Republic of Kampuchea in 1983 (Dendermonde, Belgium), interview, April 29, 2014.
22. Informer no. 1, guest in Democratic Kampuchea in 1978 (country information retained), phone, May 5, 2015.
23. Informer no. 2, anthropologist (Battambang, Cambodia), conversation, October 22, 2014.
23. Informer no. 3, NGO worker (Marburg, Germany), conversation, May 30, 2015.

24. Informer no. 4 (profession and country information retained), e-mails, November and December 2015.

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Beelden van Rode Khmer-gruweldaden, 1975-2015

Het visualiseren van het Pol Pot-regime in de transnationale context van herinnering

Samenvatting

De Rode Khmer, oftewel de Communistische Partij van Kampuchea, kwam aan de macht in april 1975 in de context van de Tweede Indochinese Oorlog. Door middel van extreem geweld probeerde het nieuwe regime de Cambodjaanse maatschappij radicaal te veranderen. Democratisch Kampuchea (hun nieuwe naam voor Cambodja) veranderde het hele land omvattend werkkamp om de droom van de *Angkar* (de organisatie) te vervullen. Het Rode Khmer-regime werd omvergeworpen in januari 1979 na de militaire interventie van Vietnam. De Rode Khmer liet een land achter dat in puin lag met een ernstig getraumatiseerde bevolking. Bijna twee miljoen mensen hadden hun leven verloren door hongersnood, uitputting, ziekte en moord. In de loop van de tijd werd de sociale, culturele en economische structuur van Cambodja opgebouwd en aangepast tijdens de overgang van een door de oorlog verscheurd land naar een postconflict maatschappij, van een socialistische republiek naar een constitutionele monarchie en van een door de staat gecontroleerde economie naar neoliberaal kapitalisme. De lange termijn effecten van het Rode Khmer-regime beïnvloeden Cambodja nog steeds op vele niveaus, tot op de dag van vandaag. Deze situatie bepaalt in een belangrijke mate de wijze waarop de Rode Khmer-periode in Cambodja en daarbuiten begrepen en herinnerd wordt.

In deze dissertatie wordt veertig jaar beeldvorming van de Rode Khmer-gruwelen onderzocht. Op basis van een geselecteerde verzameling van documentaire en kunstzinnige beelden wordt de verbeelding van de misdaden van het Pol Pot-regime historisch geplaatst in het veranderende herinneringslandschap binnen de socialistische, niet-socialistische, post-socialistische en post-koloniale wereld. Het onderzoek richt zich daarmee op een transnationale setting en benadrukt de interactie tussen Cambodjanen en niet-Cambodjanen in de vervaardiging en verspreiding van visueel materiaal.

De centrale vraag van de dissertatie is: *Hoe werden de Rode Khmer-wandaden gevisualiseerd in een transnationale herinneringscontext van 1975 tot 2015?* Hoewel Democratisch Kampuchea nog geen vier jaar bestond, omvat de geschiedenis van de Rode Khmer-beweging zelf meer dan een halve eeuw, vanaf de Tweede Wereldoorlog tot heden, inclusief de rechtszaak tegen de overgebleven Rode Khmer leiders die zich op het ogenblik afspeelt in Phnom Penh. Deze geschiedenis kent een verscheidenheid aan belanghebbenden uit Azië, Oceanië, Europa, Amerika, het vroegere Sovjet blok en China. Tegen deze achtergrond is de term “transnationaal” gekozen als een intermediair concept om de spanningen tussen ‘globaal’ en ‘lokaal’, ‘West’ en ‘niet-West’, en ‘centrum’ en ‘periferie’ uit te werken, en zelfs te overstijgen. Toepassing van deze term maakt het mogelijk om na te denken over de diversiteit van actoren, motivaties en relaties, verdergaand dan de gewoonlijke dichotomieën die, niet noodzakelijk, de

dynamiek van de herinneringsprocessen vastleggen. Drie subvragen zijn geformuleerd om de centrale vraag van deze dissertatie te beantwoorden:

1. Is het mogelijk om, aan de hand van beelden, de continuïteit van en de veranderingen in de groepsidentiteit van de betrokkenen bij het herinneringsproces bloot te leggen?
2. Hoe beïnvloedt het medium de manieren waarop beelden verspreid worden en de vorm waarin zij waargenomen worden?
3. Welke veranderingen drukken de beelden uit wat betreft de overgang van de Koude Oorlog naar de post Koude Oorlog periode?

In hoofdstuk 1 worden de context, de belangrijkste theoretische concepten en de gebruikte methodologieën geïntroduceerd. Als eerste wordt de transnationale configuratie van de aan de Rode Khmer gerelateerde herinnering besproken in het kader van de wisselwerking tussen juridische en academische definities van de misdaden van het Pol Pot-regime als “genocide” en de processen van veiligstelling en hergebruik van visuele bronnen. Deze dissertatie concentreert zich namelijk niet zozeer op de impasse rond de visuele representatie van genocide (*aporia*) maar op de omstandigheden waarin zulke gebeurtenissen zichtbaar gemaakt worden. In dat opzicht wordt het idee van de lange onzichtbaarheid en de plotselinge heropkomst van de Rode Khmer-wandaden in de publieke openbaarheid (veelal samengevat als de “vergeten genocide”) betwist ten faveure van een meer complex proces van visualisatie. De dissertatie plaatst daarmee de discussie binnen het terrein van de beeldcultuur met als doel een breder begrip te krijgen van de beelden van de Rode Khmer-terreur. Beeldmateriaal wordt niet alleen beschouwd als een getuigenis van vernietiging en uitroeiing, maar ook als een werkzaam middel in het opbouwen en herbouwen van gemeenschappen en het bevorderen van “nieuwe verhalen” over het verleden.

De dissertatie stelt een tweevoudige interpretatie van de relatie tussen de Rode Khmer en de beeldcultuur voor. De eerste betreft de visuele praktijken en de beelden waarmee de Rode Khmer keek naar de wereld en naar zichzelf. In tegenstelling tot de wijdverbreide opvatting dat de Angkar een antivisuele neiging had, benadrukt deze studie de notie van een georganiseerde zichtbaarheid van de Rode Khmer-leiders. Het scopisch regime van Democratisch Kampuchea wordt eerder als een creatief dan alleen maar als een destructief systeem onderzocht (Ly Boreth 2003). De structuren van de productie en distributie van visuele materialen, de esthetiek van foto's en films, en de betrokkenheid van vreemdelingen in het maken van het publieke imago van de Rode Khmer staan centraal. De tweede interpretatie betreft de bredere en heterogene verzameling van visuele representaties die de geschiedenis van Democratisch Kampuchea in het collectieve bewustzijn gebracht hebben. De dissertatie brengt de notie van georganiseerde zichtbaarheid een stap verder en beschouwt het als een actieve kracht in de vorming van het culturele geheugen. De laatste notie refereert zowel aan Jan Assmann's conceptualisatie van de dynamiek van de herinnering als aan Aleida Assmann's analyse van de canon en het archief (2008). De dissertatie focust dus op de condities waarin visueel materiaal wordt geselecteerd en gedeselecteerd, de veranderingen in de structuren van participatie in en de opkomst van nieuwe hiërarchieën van gebruik en gebruikers van de beelden. Van groot belang daarbij is voorts de rol van het paradigma van 'het recht' in

het proces en de opeenvolgende debatten over de toe-eigening en creatie van Rode Khmer-beelden in de eigentijdse kunst, de populaire cultuur, en het ramptoerisme.

Hoofdstuk 2 onderzoekt een serie foto's en films die geproduceerd werden door Westerse 'fellow-travellers' die in 1978 uitgenodigd werden om naar het Democratische Kampuchea te komen als een onderdeel van een poging van de leiders van de Rode Khmer om hun publiek imago te verbeteren. Deze beelden leveren een ingang om het scopisch regime en de zelf representatie van de Rode Khmer te bestuderen. Zij worden geanalyseerd als het resultaat van een gezamenlijk creatief proces waarin de wisselwerking van de nationale verbeeldingen van gast en gastheer tot uiting komt. Het eerste deel van dit hoofdstuk beschrijft het internationale vriendschapsnetwerk van de Rode Khmer in de zeventiger jaren en eerste PR (Public Relations) operatie in Democratisch Kampuchea met een team van Joegoslavische journalisten. Het tweede deel is gebaseerd op de literatuur over de fellow travellers in communistische landen en de beschrijvingen van bezoekers aan Cambodja. Het reconstrueert en analyseert de algemene structuur van een door de Rode Khmer begeleide tour. Het derde deel onderzoekt de foto's en films van westerse bezoekers. Het plaatst eerst deze documenten in de genealogie van het Rode Khmer propaganda materiaal en bekijkt dan in detail hoe deze beelden een ideale voorstelling van Kampuchea voor de buitenlandse consumptie genereerden. Het laatste deel bediscussieert het hergebruik van deze visuele data in de publieke sfeer in twee recente presentaties in Cambodja: de foto's van de Zweden-Kampuchea vriendschapsvereniging in het boek en de tentoonstelling *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (2008) en de foto's van de Amerikaanse journaliste Elizabeth Becker in de tentoonstelling *A Reporter's Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* (2012).

Hoofdstuk 3 behandelt de documentaire *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* die de journalist John Pilger maakte in de Volksrepubliek Kampuchea in 1979. In de context van de media oorlog tussen de twee kampen is *Year Zero* zowel een illustratie van, als een participant in de overlapping van politieke en humanitaire kwesties. Het hoofdstuk analyseert de bijdrage van Pilger's film aan de visuele canon van de Rode Khmer misdaden in de Koude Oorlog en post Koude Oorlog periode. Het eerste deel van het hoofdstuk plaatst *Year Zero* in de context van de berichtgeving uit de Volksrepubliek Kampuchea onmiddellijk na de val van het Pol Pot regime. Het vergelijkt Pilger's film met de verhalen van andere ooggetuigen die in dezelfde periode werden uitgegeven. De vergelijking levert een inzicht op in wat een bezoek aan Cambodja ingehouden zou kunnen hebben voor de gasten van de nieuwe regering wat betreft verhalen en beelden. Het tweede deel onderzoekt hoe Pilger cinematografisch de kwestie van de hongersnood in de Volksrepubliek Kampuchea weergeeft aan de hand van een serie politieke en culturele thema's. Voor dit doel werd gebruik gemaakt van de literatuur over media en humanitaire kwesties, met name de notie "emergency news" zoals gedefinieerd door de media wetenschapper Lilie Chouliaraki in *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006). Het laatste deel van het hoofdstuk behandelt het hergebruik van *Year Zero* op YouTube en bestudeert de hedendaagse receptie van deze film aan de hand van een analyse van de commentaren van gebruikers.

Hoofdstuk 4 is gewijd aan het verhaal van het kunstcentrum Phare in Battambang, Cambodja. Het bestudeert de relatie tussen getuigenis, individuele genezing en sociale heropbouw door middel van kunstzinnige praktijken. Phare was oorspronkelijk een tekenschool voor kinderen die in 1986 werd opgericht in het grens vluchtelingenkamp 'Site Two' door de Franse kunstenares Véronique Decrop. Na de repatriëring van de vluchtelingen in 1993 onder toezicht van de VN, sloot Decrop zich aan bij sommigen van haar vroegere studenten in Cambodja en overtuigde hen om een kunstcentrum te openen in Battambang voor de lokale gemeenschap. Phare (hernoemd Phare Ponleu Selpak of 'helderheid van de kunsten') is nu een belangrijk kunst instituut in Cambodja. Het hoofdstuk onderzoekt de veranderde status en receptie van de oorspronkelijke tekeningen in dat proces en de lange termijn effecten van Westerse invloeden op de kunstzinnige weergave van het verleden in het Cambodja van na de repatriatie. Na een inleiding over de omstandigheden in de vluchtelingenkampen, gaat het eerste deel over de vestiging van de tekenschool en de oprichting van de vereniging PHARE in Site Two. Het tweede deel behandelt de relatie tussen tekenen en veerkracht aan de hand van het verhaal dat naar voren komt in het promotie materiaal van PHARE. Het derde deel geeft achtergrond informatie over de repatriëring en beschrijft de oprichting van het kunst centrum in Battambang. Het vierde deel onderzoekt hoe de meningsverschillen tussen de leden over de geschiedenis en de missie van het centrum weerspiegeld worden in de oprichtingsmythen van Phare in zoverre als zij deel zijn van het openbaar discours voor verschillende soorten publiek. Het laatste deel van het hoofdstuk onderzoekt de invloed van Phare op de ontwikkeling van met name de lokale kunst scenes in Cambodja.

Hoofdstuk 5 onderzoekt het ontstaan van de iconische afbeeldingen van de Rode Khmer- gruwelen op basis van de staatsarchieven van Democratisch Kampuchea door de non-profit organisatie 'Photo Archive Group'. Deze organisatie werd midden negentiger jaren opgericht door de Amerikaanse fotografen Douglas Niven en Christopher Riley met als doel de negatieven van de foto's van de gevangenen van S-21, de beruchte Rode Khmer gevangenis, nu het Tuol Sleng genocide museum, schoon te maken en te indexeren. Als tegenprestatie voor hun diensten kregen Niven en Riley het recht om honderd negatieven af te drukken en in het buitenland ten toon te stellen. Tot op de dag van vandaag roept hun initiatief vraagstukken op over het tentoonstellen, ex-locus, van de foto's van de S-21 gevangenen en de dislocatie van Tuol Sleng's foto archief. Het project van de Photo Archive Group bevat de opkomst van een nieuwe vorm van visualisatie van de Rode Khmer misdaden. Het hoofdstuk laat zien hoe dit gebeurde en hoe deze beeldvorming in de loop van de tijd op een discursieve manier geconstrueerd werd. Het onderzoekt hoe de Westerse inmenging in het herdenken van het Democratisch Kampuchea verleden in die tijd opnieuw geformuleerd werd. Het eerste deel bespreekt het begrip copyright in de transnationale context van herinnering. Het tweede deel beschrijft de geschiedenis van de Photo Archive Group in Cambodja (1993-1995) en de eerste serie tentoonstellingen in Noord Amerika, Europa en Australië (1996-2001). Dieper wordt er ingegaan op twee cruciale momenten in die periode: de publicatie van het boek *The Killing Fields* en de tentoonstelling in het Museum of Modern Art in New York (1997). Het derde deel van het hoofdstuk kijkt terug op Cambodja en het effect van het project op Nhem En, een van de fotografen van S-21, zoals hij zichzelf opnieuw uitvindt als een beschermer van de herinnering aan het Rode Khmer regime en als een

slachtoffer ervan. Het laatste deel van het hoofdstuk onderzoekt door middel van een analyse van de recente tentoonstellingen van de verzameling van de Photo Archive Group in het Verenigd Koninkrijk, Zuid-Korea en Canada (2009-2013), de relatie tussen het huidige debat over het werk van de Photo Archive Group en de eerdere controversen daarover.

Hoofdstuk 6 gaat over het herinneringsproject *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* van de Frans-Cambodjaanse kunstenaar Séra. Het was een van de voorgestelde projecten die geselecteerd werden in het kader van het “moral and collective reparations” programma van het Rode Khmer tribunaal (ECCC) in 2010. Het beeldhouwwerk, dat in Phnom Penh geplaatst zou moeten worden in april 2015 ter gelegenheid van de veertig-jarige verjaardag van de val van de stad, verwijst naar de gedwongen evacuatie van de bevolking van de stad in april 1975. In dit hoofdstuk wordt de bijdrage onderzocht van Séra’s herinneringsproject aan nieuwe visuele vormen van omgang met het verleden en eveneens aan de herformulering van de transnationale dynamiek van het herdenkingsproces. Na een introductie over de historische achtergrond van het Rode Khmer Tribunaal wordt in het eerste deel van dit hoofdstuk het systeem van collectief en moreel herstel in detail beschreven zoals het door de ECCC werd ontwikkeld in de context van Case 001 en in praktijk werd gebracht in de context van Case 002/01. Het tweede deel volgt het spoor van de ontwikkeling van Séra’s project als een vorm van openbare kunst met als focus de gebruikte strategieën om partners en fondsen te werven via sociale media. Het derde deel bespreekt aan de hand van een aantal geselecteerde voorbeelden sommige eigenschappen van de aan de Rode Khmer gerelateerde herdenkingscultuur in Cambodja. Het vierde deel analyseert het voorgestelde plan van Séra tegen deze achtergrond. Voortbouwend op de notie “social aesthetics” zoals gedefinieerd door de Holocaust wetenschapper James E. Young behandelt het de esthetiek van het project, zijn verhouding tot de lokale publieke smaak, en de manier waarop *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* naar de geschiedenis verwijst. Het wijst op de veelzijdige reorganisatie van de zichtbaarheid zoals die plaatsvindt in het voorstel van Séra, met inbegrip van de herinnering aan de gebeurtenissen van april 1975 en het verwijst naar de eigen positie van de kunstenaar, en naar het herinneringsconcept van het overgangsrecht. Aan de hand van de tentoonstelling *Unfinished*, het recentste project van deze kunstenaar in Cambodja (april 2015) onderzoekt het laatste deel van het hoofdstuk de relatie tussen de publieke ruimte en het collectieve geheugen in de context van de stedelijke ontwikkeling van Phnom Penh.

In het concluderende hoofdstuk 7 worden de processen van de transnationale herinnering aan de Rode Khmer-gruweldaden in de veertigjarige beeldvorming samengevat. Aan de ene kant zien we de vermenigvuldiging en diversificatie van de belanghebbenden, van de media en van de verhalen die aan de beelden verbonden worden. Aan de andere kant blijkt dat de herinnering gecentraliseerd en geïnstitutionaliseerd wordt door monopolies op beelden, eigendoms- en legitimeit aanspraken, en de opkomst van nieuwe participatiestructuren. Deze processen zijn beoordeeld in het licht van “sedimentation” en “trauma aesthetic.” Vanuit deze theoretische invalshoek verschijnen deze niet als tegengestelde vormen van herinnering maar eerder als twee "interactieve" kanten van dezelfde medaille. Deze wisselwerking

bepaalt de zichtbaarheid van de misdaden van het Pol Pot-regime en de complexiteit van de “Rode Khmer visuele cultuur”. Langs deze weg wordt het mogelijk om reductionistische beelden te overstijgen waardoor we een dieper inzicht kunnen krijgen in wat er gebeurde in Democratisch Kampuchea en de jaren na de ondergang van het Rode Khmer-regime. In een meer algemene zin laat deze studie zien hoe de beeldcultuur ons begrip van en de herinnering aan genocide kan beïnvloeden: zowel in het creëren van de onzichtbaarheid en niet-representativiteit van massale gruweldaden, als in de gewelddadigheid van de hedendaagse herdenkingspolitiek.

Vertaling: Fred Gales

Images of Khmer Rouge atrocities, 1975-2015: Visualizing the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime in transnational contexts of memory

Abstract

The Khmer Rouge or Communist Party of Kampuchea came to power in April 1975 in the context of the Second Indochina War. Through extreme violence the new regime implemented a radical transformation of Cambodian society. Democratic Kampuchea (as Cambodia was renamed) became a nationwide labor camp where people slaved to fulfill the vision of the *Angkar* (Organization). The Khmer Rouge were overthrown in January 1979 following Vietnam's military intervention. They left a country shattered to pieces and a population severely traumatized. Nearly two million people had lost their life due to starvation, exhaustion, disease, and killing. Over time the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Cambodia was woven anew, as the country transitioned from war-torn to post-conflict society, from socialist republic to constitutional monarchy, and from state-controlled economy to neoliberal capitalism. Still, the long-term effects of the Khmer Rouge regime keep affecting Cambodian society at many levels until today. This situation shapes to a great extent the understanding and recollection of the Democratic Kampuchea period in Cambodia and abroad. The dissertation studies forty years of visualization of Khmer Rouge atrocities. On the basis of a selected set of documentary and artistic images, it examines and historicizes "ways of seeing" the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime in a changing memory landscape engaging the socialist, non-socialist, and post-socialist worlds and different interpretations of the notion of "postcolonial." It situates the analysis in a transnational realm emphasizing the interaction of Cambodians and non-Cambodians in the production and circulation of visual material.

The central question of the dissertation is: How are Khmer Rouge atrocities visualized in transnational contexts of memory from 1975 to 2015? If the state of Democratic Kampuchea lasted less than four years, the history of the Khmer Rouge movement itself spans over more than half a century from the Second World War to the present day, as the trial of remaining Khmer Rouge leaders is currently held in Phnom Penh. This history involves a variety of stakeholders from the Asia-Pacific area, Euro-America, the former Soviet bloc, and China. Against this backdrop, the notion of "transnational" is conceived of as a mediating concept that helps work out, even transcend the tensions between 'global' and 'local', 'West' and 'non-West', 'center' and 'periphery'. Therefore, it makes it possible to reflect the diversity of actors, motivations, and relations beyond the usual dichotomies that do not necessarily capture the dynamics of memorialization. Three sub-questions are formulated in order to answer the central question:

1. To what extent do images clarify continuity and shifts in the group identities of those involved in memorializing Khmer Rouge atrocities?
2. How does the medium affect both the modalities of circulation of images and the formats of perception?
3. What changes do images articulate with regard to the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War context?

Chapter 1 introduces the contextual issues, the main theoretical concepts, and the methodologies of the dissertation. It first examines the transnational configuration of Khmer Rouge-related memory at the interplay of legal and academic definitions of the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime as "genocide" and processes of recovery and production of visual sources. The thesis shifts the discussion away from the aporia of the visual representation of genocide, focusing instead on the conditions in which such events are made visible. In that respect, it challenges the idea of longtime invisibility and sudden reappearance on the public scene of Khmer Rouge atrocities (often summarized as "the forgotten genocide") in favor of a more complex process of visualization. The dissertation situates the discussion within the realm of visual culture with the aim to open up a wider understanding of images of Khmer Rouge terror. Visual materials are considered not only as bearing witness to destruction and extermination, but also as active agents in building or rebuilding communities and promoting "new stories" of the past.

The dissertation proposes a double interpretation of the relation of Khmer Rouge and visual culture. The first interpretation concerns the visual practices and images through which the Khmer Rouge looked at the world and themselves. In contrast to the widespread assumption that the *Angkar* had an anti-visual bias, the thesis stresses the notion of organized visibility of the Khmer Rouge leaders. It looks at the scopic regime of Democratic Kampuchea as a creative rather than only a destructive system (Ly Boreth 2003). It analyzes the structures of production and distribution of visual material, the aesthetic of photos and films, and the involvement of foreigners in the making of the Khmer Rouge's public image. The second interpretation concerns the broader and heterogenous set of visual representations mediating the history of Democratic Kampuchea into collective consciousness. The dissertation takes the notion of organized visibility a step further and considers it as an active force in the formation of cultural memory. The latter notion refers to Jan Assmann's conceptualization of memory dynamics as well as Aleida Assmann's analysis of the canon and the archive (2008). The thesis, thus, focuses on the conditions in which visual materials are selected and deselected, the changes in structures of participation, and the emergence of new hierarchies of uses and users of images. It emphasizes the role of the paradigm of justice in the process and the subsequent debates arising with respect to the appropriation and creation of Khmer Rouge imagery in contexts such as contemporary art, popular culture, and dark tourism.

Chapter 2 examines a set of photos and films produced by Western fellow travelers invited to Democratic Kampuchea in 1978, as part of the Khmer Rouge leadership's effort to improve its public image. These visual records provide an entry point into the scopical regime and self-representation of the Khmer Rouge. They are analyzed as the outcome of a co-creation process materializing the interplay of the national imaginaries of guests and hosts. The first section of the chapter introduces the international friendship network of the Khmer Rouge in the seventies and retraces the first "public relations" operation conducted in Democratic Kampuchea with a team of Yugoslav journalists. The second section builds on the literature about fellow travelers in communist countries and reports of the visitors in Cambodia. It reconstructs and analyzes the general structure of the Khmer Rouge guided tour. The third section examines the photos and films of the Western visitors. It first situates these documents within a genealogy of Khmer Rouge propaganda materials, then looks closely at the way these images produce an ideal Kampuchea for outsider consumption. The last section discusses the resurfacing of these visual records in the public sphere with two recent presentations in Cambodia: the photos of the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association in the book and exhibition *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (2008) and the photos of American journalist Elizabeth Becker in the exhibition *A Reporter's Dangerous Tour in Democratic Kampuchea* (2012).

Chapter 3 looks at the documentary movie *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* made by journalist John Pilger in the People's Republic of Kampuchea in 1979. In the context of media war between the two camps in presence, *Year Zero* both illustrates and participates in the overlap of political and humanitarian issues. The chapter analyzes the contribution of Pilger's movie to the visual canon of Khmer Rouge crimes in the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. The first section situates *Year Zero* in the context of reporting from the People's Republic of Kampuchea in the immediate aftermath of the Pol Pot's regime. It compares Pilger's movie with the accounts of other eyewitnesses that were released at the same period. The comparison provides insight into what a visit in Cambodia might have entailed for the guests of the new government in terms of narratives and imagery. The second section examines how Pilger articulates cinematically the issue of starvation in the People's Republic of Kampuchea across a set of political and cultural themes. For this purpose, it draws on the literature about media and humanitarianism, especially the notion of "emergency news" coined by media scholar Lilie Chouliaraki in *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006). The last section of the chapter looks at the remediation of *Year Zero* on YouTube and studies the present-day reception of the movie through the analysis of users' comments.

Chapter 4 focuses on the story of the art center Phare in Battambang, Cambodia. It studies the relation of testimony, individual healing, and social reconstruction through artistic practices. Phare was originally a drawing school for children founded in 1986 in the border refugee camp Site Two by French artist Véronique Decrop. Following the repatriation of refugees in 1993 under UN monitoring, Decrop joined some of her former students in Cambodia and convinced them to open an art center in Battambang for the community. Phare (renamed Phare Ponleu Selpak or "brightness of the arts") is now a major artistic institution in Cambodia. The chapter explores the changing status and reception of the original drawings in such a process and the long-term effects of Western

influences on the artistic representation of the past in post-repatriation Cambodia. After introducing the context in the refugee camps, the first section retraces the establishment of the drawing school and the founding of the association PHARE at Site Two. The second section looks at the relation of drawing and resilience as a narrative conveyed in the promotional materials of PHARE. The third section provides background information about the repatriation process and retraces the establishment of the art center in Battambang. The fourth section investigates how disagreements among members over the history and mission of the center are reflected in the “founding myths” of Phare when forming a public discourse mediated to different audiences. The last section of the chapter examines the influence of Phare in the development of art scenes in Cambodia, particularly the local one.

Chapter 5 examines the formation of iconic images of Khmer Rouge atrocities on the basis of the Democratic Kampuchea state’s archives through the case of the non-profit organization Photo Archive Group. The latter was founded in the mid-nineties by American photographers Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley with the objective to clean and index the negatives of photos of inmates of S-21, the infamous Khmer Rouge prison turned into Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. In return for their services Niven and Riley were granted the right to print one hundred negatives and exhibit the photos abroad. Even today their initiative keeps crystallizing issues about the presentation ex-locus of the photos of S-21 prisoners and the dislocation of Tuol Sleng’s photographic archive. The project of the Photo Archive Group encapsulates the emergence of a new kind of visualization of Khmer Rouge crimes. The chapter proposes to clarify how this happened and was discursively constructed over the years. It explores how Western intervention in the memorialization of the Democratic Kampuchea past was articulated anew at the time. The first section discusses the notion of copyright in transnational contexts of memory. The second section retraces the history of the Photo Archive Group in Cambodia (1993-1995) and the first series of exhibitions in North America, Europe, and Australia (1996-2001). It elaborates further on two critical moments of that period: the publication of the book *The Killing Fields* and the show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1997). The third section of the chapter looks back at Cambodia and the effect of the project on Nhem En, one of the photographers at S-21, as the latter reinvents himself as both a guardian of memory and a victim of the Khmer Rouge regime. Finally, through the analysis of recent displays of the Photo Archive Group’s collection in the UK, South Korea, and Canada (2009-2013), the last section examines the relation of current debates to earlier controversies about the work of the Photo Archive Group.

Chapter 6 looks at the memorial project *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* of French-Cambodian artist Séra. It is one of the proposals selected in the framework of the “moral and collective reparations” scheme introduced by the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (ECCC) in 2010. The sculpture, which was supposed to be erected in Phnom Penh in April 2015 for the forty-year anniversary of the fall of the city, refers to the forced evacuation of the population in April 1975. The chapter explores the contribution of Séra’s memorial project to the creation of new visual forms of engagement with the past as well as its rearticulation of transnational dynamics of memorialization. After providing a historical background about the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, the first section details the

system of collective and moral reparations established by the ECCC in the context of Case 001 and how it works with respect to Case 002/01. The second section retraces the development of Séra's project as public art, with a focus on partnership and fundraising strategies through social media. The third section discusses through a set of selected examples some features of Khmer Rouge-related memorial culture in Cambodia. The fourth section analyzes the proposal of Séra against this backdrop. Building on the notion of "social aesthetics" coined by Holocaust scholar James E. Young, it looks at the aesthetic of the project, the relation with local public taste, and the historical referentiality of *To Those Who Are No Longer Here*. It points out the manifold reorganization of visibility at play in the proposal of Séra, including the recollection of April 1975 events, the artist's own positionality, and transitional justice's conception of memorialization. Elaborating on the exhibition *Unfinished*, the latest project of the artist in Cambodia (April 2015), the last section examines the relation between public space and collective memory in the context of Phnom Penh's urban development.

As the conclusion of the dissertation, Chapter 7 summarizes and clarifies the different processes of transnational memorialization of Khmer Rouge atrocities that have been taking place in the visual realm over the past forty years. On the one hand, it points to the multiplication and diversification of stakeholders, media of expression, and narratives attached to images. On the other hand, it underlines the centralization and institutionalization of memory through monopolies over images, claims over ownership and legitimacy, and the establishment of new structures of participation. These processes are appraised through the prism of "sedimentation" and "trauma aesthetic." Seen in this light, they do not appear as opposite dynamics of memory but rather as two sides of a same coin shaped by ongoing interaction. This interaction organizes the visibility of the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime in multiple ways, and as such reflects the complexity of the realm of "Khmer Rouge visual culture." It also shows the long process still ahead before the latter becomes a disciplinary field providing, beyond reductionist images, a deeper understanding of what happened in Democratic Kampuchea and in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime. In a more general sense, this study shows the impact of iconic representations on our understanding and recollection of genocide: the role of visual culture itself in creating the invisibility and non-representability of mass atrocities as well as the violence of memory politics in the present.

Acknowledgments

When I embarked on the PhD, little did I know that it would be a truly life-changing experience. After graduating in La Sorbonne in 1997, I had gone for several years into a professional field, visual arts. The idea of my “going back to university” progressively took hold as I moved back from Israel to Western Europe. I wanted to combine what I had learned organizing exhibitions and projects in various locations—many of which were being marked by a history of war and oppression—with a more theoretical approach to issues of political violence, cultural memory, and historical representation. In 2009 the Center for Historical Culture at the Erasmus University Rotterdam gave me the opportunity to carry out this project. The next seven years proved an amazing journey, and I wish to thank all the people who supported me in one way or another while I accomplished it.

First and foremost I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Prof. Maria Grever, Prof. Ton Bevers, and Dr. John Kleinen. Maria accepted me as her PhD student without any hesitation when I presented her with my research proposal. She has been actively interested in my work and has always been available to me. Without her patient guidance, constructive criticism, and enthusiasm this thesis would never have been written. Ton did not hesitate either to join her in supervising my dissertation. His attentive presence, encouragements, and thoughtful consideration have been a constant source of inspiration. Knowing his expertise in cultural anthropology and Southeast Asia, I contacted John and he kindly accepted to meet me and hear about my research. Since then, he has offered me so much advice, generously sharing with me his experience and priceless insights, and keeping me motivated through the years of research and writing.

I gratefully acknowledge the funding received from the Erasmus Trustfonds. Their financial support made it possible for me to conduct field work in Cambodia in 2011 and 2014, and to present some aspects of my research in international conferences.

My deepest appreciation goes out to the research associates of the Center for Historical Culture: Dr. Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, Dr. Pieter de Bruijn, Prof. Hester Dibbits, Siri Driessen, Dr. Susan Hogervorst, Dr. Marijke Huisman, Dr. Stephan Klein, Prof. Kees Ribbens, Dr. Geerte Savenije, Laurie Slegtenhorst, Marc van Berkel, Dr. Maarten van Dijck, Pieter van den Heede, and Tina van der Vlies. Their feedback on my work—always to the point and giving me a lot of food for thought—was a tremendous help in the process and their friendliness created a welcoming and supportive atmosphere.

I am particularly grateful all the people who graciously agreed to be interviewed for my study and shared with me some of their most sensitive memories.

I would like to thank for their assistance the people at the various archives and institutions listed in the bibliography. Special thanks go out to Krisna Uk (Center for Khmer Studies in Siem Reap), Ratana Lach (Center for Audiovisual Resources Bophana in Phnom Penh), Kok-Thay Eng and Faily Sa (Documentation Center of Cambodia in Phnom Penh), and the wonderful staff of the reading room at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam where I spent so much time.

A great deal of thanks goes out to the following people:

My dearest friend Tjebbe van Tijen: Where to start? Tjebbe has helped me in so many ways that words cannot express the feelings I have for the unconditional support he gave me through all these years. His relentless patience, unflagging encouragement, and insightful, passionate (and often challenging) comments have been crucial to me at every stage of the process. I hope that this dissertation makes him proud.

Eef Vermeij: Doing research on Cambodia in the Netherlands would not be the same without Eef. For years he travels to Southeast Asia to acquire books and material for the IISG. His tireless work makes the Institute's collection a most remarkable and up-to-date one. Of course not everything is about books. His astute criticism and suggestions also helped me shape my thoughts to a great extent.

Fred Gales: His careful translation of my abstract into Dutch is obviously not the only reason why I am grateful to him. Conversations with Fred always bring lots of fresh and stimulating ideas, some of which found their way into the dissertation. My research benefited considerably from his extensive knowledge of Southeast Asia, patient listening, and sound advice.

Redas Diržys: Since the exhibition in Iasi in 2004, the work of Redas has been a constant presence in my life. The many interesting exchanges we have had over the years about it, and about political violence and the role of art, have been influential on my own inquiry. Needless to say, a big thank goes out to him for allowing me to include images of the *Pol Pot Series* in the dissertation.

Anne-Laure Porée et Vicente Sánchez-Biosca: New directions in my research about “Khmer Rouge visual culture” owe much to the input of Anne-Laure and Vicente, and to our long and invigorating discussions about Cambodia and memory politics. The “team” we form together through Skype (as we live in different areas and time zones) is for me a great source of motivation.

I am also indebted to the following people for thought-provoking conversations and inspiring suggestions: Marie Aberdam, Roel Burgler, Chhay Visoth, Binh Danh, Erin Gleeson, Philip Hesser, Dinh Q Lê, Ly Daravuth, Mao Soviet, Despina Meimaroglou, Nico Mesterham, Alice Miceli, Kate O'Hara, Rithy Panh, Philippe Peycam, Martin Haldane Rathie, Joram ten Brink, and Maarten van Dullemen.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my parents. During this long journey, they unfailingly stood by my side and let Cambodia become part of their life too. Without their love and support, no matter what path I choose, I would never have been able to see this thesis through the end.

Short biography of the author

Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier (1971) received master's and bachelor's degrees in art history from the Université La Sorbonne Paris I in 1997. She also works as curator and has organized exhibitions and projects in Israel, France, Germany, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Thailand. She is a recipient of a Leon Milman Memorial Fellowship at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC (2012), a recipient of a fellowship at the Stone Summer Theory Institute at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, Illinois (2010), and was a researcher in the Theory Department at Jan van Eyck Academie in the Netherlands (2004-2005). In 2009 she started as an external PhD student at the Center for Historical Culture of the Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication. While working on her PhD thesis, Benzaquen-Gautier has presented papers at various international conferences such as the Perpetrator Studies Network 2016 (Utrecht), the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association 2016 (Harvard University), Center for Conflict Studies and the Reconfigurations Network 2015 (Marburg), Simon Wiesenthal Conference 2014 (Vienna), 6th Southeast Asia Update 2014 (Amsterdam), New Scholars/New Research on the Holocaust 2013 (Toronto), European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity 2012 (Warsaw), European Congress of Aesthetics 2010 (Madrid).

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- “Mediums of resistance: when art historians look at the art of ghettos and camps.” In: *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945)*, edited by Julius H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen, and Gideon Botsch, 257-273. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.
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