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1 INTRODUCTION

“He who protests is an enemy; he who opposes is a corpse”¹

On the 17th of April 1975 Khmer Rouge forces entered Phnom Penh. Young men dressed in black took over power from Lon Nol. For most of the young soldiers this was the first time in the capital of their country. Directly after the power change the Khmer Rouge started a massive deportation of people from Phnom Penh to the countryside. Within days two million residents of Phnom Penh were on the move to different rural areas in Cambodia. In less than a week the whole city was deserted.

Pol Pot, the leader of the Khmer Rouge, renamed Cambodia into Demokratik Kampuchea. This new state was based on the utopian idea of an agriculture based society. Pol Pot proclaimed “Year Zero”, the birth of classless agrarian society. All citizens were forced to work in the rice fields. Properties and land belonged now to the Khmer Rouge. Religion, education and family life were banned from everyday life. Schools were closed, books were burned and teachers were murdered. The same devastation awaited many of the temples in Cambodia. A lot of temples were burned to the ground and the Buddhist monks who were living in the monasteries were murdered.

Families were torn apart, children taken away from their parents, and husbands and wives were placed in different working camps which were most of the times days walking apart from each other. Children were thought that their parents were the enemy and that ‘Anka’ would take care of them. Anka was the new party and order at the same time. Many children were trained and forced to spy on their parents and punish them in case of trespassing the laws of the Khmer Rouge, if they for example had grown their own food for their family. For most Cambodians it was uncertain who or what Anka was. For a long time, they did not know what kind of person was behind this revolution.

¹ Henri Locard, *Pol Pot’s little Red Book: The sayings of Angkar* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai 2004) 204.

The Khmer Rouge revolution turned Cambodia into grisly killing fields. People died from malnutrition, fatigue or because they were murdered by the regime. Approximately 1.7 million Cambodians, this is one in every four, did not survive the nearly four years in which the Khmer Rouge reigned over Cambodia.²

The Khmer Rouge proved to be devastating for the country, but the way Cambodia was dragged into the Vietnam War prior to the Khmer Rouge revolution, had also been calamitous for the country and its people. The United States bombed the country side of Cambodia. An estimated half million Cambodians died over a period of five years, because of the war fought within the Cambodian border.³ The first bombs were dropped in Cambodia in 1969 and the bombings would resume until 1975. In 1973 the bombings over Cambodia intensified because the United States turned their areal force on Cambodia after they had ended the bombings over Vietnam. In the first half of 1973 alone they dropped about 230 000 tons of bombs on Cambodia.⁴ The bombings by the Americans cleared the way for the Khmer Rouge who started to recruit young girls and boys from the countryside, which was hit the hardest.

In January 1979, an end came to the brutal reign of the Khmer Rouge as Vietnamese troupes and deserted Khmer Rouge soldiers who had fled to Vietnam, entered Cambodia and took over power from Pol Pot. The Khmer Rouge retreated into the Western Cambodian jungle from where they started a civil war against government troops, until the death of Pol Pot in 1998. From that point onwards the Khmer Rouge began to fall apart. Some of the important leaders, such as Khieu Samphan, surrendered, others were arrested. The calls from Cambodians and Cambodian politicians for a tribunal in which the Khmer Rouge leaders would be tried became more loudly and with the downfall of the Khmer Rouge within reach. In July 2006, the '*Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for the Prosecution of Crimes Committed during the period of Democratic Kampuchea*', commonly known as the Cambodian Tribunal, finally opened its doors. For

² There is a debate on the number of people that died during the Khmer Rouge regime. These figures range from five thousand up to four million deaths. The number of 1,7 million is based on thorough research done by the Yale University Centre of Cambodian Genocide. The number of 1,7 million deaths is used by most of the instances dealing with the Cambodian genocide as well as the Cambodian Tribunal.

³ Estimates of the number of victims by the bombing vary widely. This number is from the book from: Seanglim Bit, *The Warrior Heritage, a psychological perspective of Cambodian trauma* (California 1991) 80.

⁴ John Tully, *A short history of Cambodia, from empire to survival* (Allen & Unwin 2005) 167.

Cambodia a new chapter in the history of the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge had begun, but this legacy of the ‘Killing Fields’ cripples Cambodia even until this day.

The aftermath of the genocide was also a new chapter in the long process of reconciliation and commemoration. The genocide is now finally on the agenda of the international community as well as it is part of discussions within Cambodia. With the start of the tribunal the attention for the cruelties committed by the Khmer Rouge is more intense than it had been in the past. The generation born after 1979 was confronted with the past of their parents, family members and country. It is their task to rebuild the country from the ashes of an age full of terror and destruction.

1.1 *Research design*

From the direct aftermath of the Cambodian genocide in 1979 until the present day the Khmer Rouge years were the topic of many different researches. Especially the last couple of years eyewitness testimonies are carefully documented by the Documentation Center of Cambodia which is of use for researchers.⁵ In this thesis I will explore one aspect of the aftermath of the genocide which has until recently not received a lot of attention, namely the remembrance culture(s) that developed after the genocide in Cambodia. The last decade memorial sites and collective remembrance is a subject that wins terrain in the historical debates and researches. This thesis will draw on the subject how the genocide is commemorated in Cambodia after 1979.

By researching different memorial sites in Cambodia I try to answer the questions above. It will give an inside in the way Cambodians and the Cambodian government (re)constructed the past. My research question is: *“What kind of influence did different groups have on the way the genocide, inflicted by the Khmer Rouge, is commemorated after the fall of Pol Pot in 1979 until the present day? What are the social and political thoughts behind memorial sites and museums?”*

⁵ This Center commonly know as DC-CAM has close contact with the Tuol Sleng Museum from which they gather a lot of information, and the work in partnership with the Yale University department of genocide studies.

In this dissertation concepts on commemoration, memorialisation and reconciliation are important. The concepts enclose the spectrum of remembrance. The dictionary defines the concept commemoration as: “To commemorate an important event or person means to remember them by means of a special action, ceremony, or specially created object.”⁶ The question raised to mind is who determines who or what is special enough to be commemorated? The concept of memorialisation is different from commemoration. “If a person or event is memorialized, something is produced that will continue to exist and remind people of them [or it]”.⁷ So within a country a lot of commemoration initiatives can exist without memorials. People then commemorate in the private sphere or at a religious institution. Reconciliation is not so much the remembrance of things that occurred but it has more to do with the process of coming to terms with the past. “Reconciliation between (two) people or countries who have quarrelled is the process of their becoming friends again”.⁸ It does not mean that the past is being ignored or forgotten in order to move forward. It means that there is a consensus about the way the past is looked upon. In chapter two the theoretical framework of this dissertation will be further examined.

In this thesis commemoration politics are examined on three different levels. The first level is the level of Cambodians as citizens of a nation, the generation that survived the genocide but also the generation born after 1979. The second level is the level of the Cambodian government and their influence on the remembrance of the genocide and the commemoration initiatives they have taken. This thesis will examine Cambodia over the course of three decades so the government has changed over the course of these years, in this way it is not a fixed group of people and institutions that are examined. The third level is the international community and their influence on the way the genocide was commemorated in Cambodia as well as in other countries. With the international community I mean the United Nations, America, Europe, China, Russia, the big power figures in the world.

⁶ Collins COBUILD English Dictionary (Glasgow 2006).

⁷ Collins COBUILD.

⁸ Collins COBUILD.

Several commemoration initiatives are researched in three different periods. These periods are respectively from 1979 until 1989/90, 1989/90 until 1998, 1998-2008. These periods all represent a different stage in the development of Cambodia. The first time-stage starts with the ‘invasion/liberation’ of the Vietnamese army into Cambodia until 1989 when Vietnam voluntarily withdrew its last occupation troops. The second time-stage starts in September 1990 when ‘The Supreme National Council’ was formed, after the last Vietnamese troops had left the country, until Pol Pot died in 1998. In this period a peace agreement is signed and free elections are organized. The third time-stage is from 1998 until 2008. After Pol Pot died the final collapse of the Khmer Rouge was a fact. One of the last strongholds of the Khmer Rouge at Anlong Veng was captured by troops of the Hun Sen government. Some of the major players of the Khmer Rouge were captured and a tribunal came within reach. These three time periods all represent different political and social goals in the reconciliation process in Cambodia, which will be further discussed in chapter three.

To research the questions above four case studies are examined. These case studies are discussed in chapter 4 to 7. The sites discussed in this dissertation are: the Tuol Sleng museum, the Choeung Ek killing fields, the Killing Caves near Battambang and the last Khmer Rouge bulwark Anlong Veng.

The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide is situated in Phnom Penh and was a former Khmer Rouge interrogation centre and prison. When the Vietnamese troops discovered the prison they were shocked by what they found; decomposing bodies, instruments used for torture and a hastily abandoned archive of the people who had been prisoners of Tuol Sleng. The museum officially opened its doors in 1980. It has become an icon of the genocide in Cambodia. The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is very important within the remembrance culture of the genocide for both inside Cambodia as well as in the rest of the world. Chapter 4 will go deeper into the politics and thoughts on the museum.

In Chapter 5 the memorial at Choeung Ek is examined. This site was from 1977 to the end of 1978 a killing site and burial ground for thousands of Cambodians who were the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime. Many of the Cambodians murdered at Choeung Ek were first held and interrogated in Tuol

Sleng, S21, in Phnom Penh. Among the thousands of victims were many children and babies. Choeung Ek is important because it is the biggest memorial site of Cambodia with a very large memorial Stupa. For a long time the Cambodian government was responsible for the maintenance until they sold the national memorial to a Japanese company in 2005.

In chapter 6 the killing caves will be discussed. These caves were used by the Khmer rouge to murder people at and throw them into the cave. Next to the cave is a former prison situated. The Killing Caves at Phnom Sampheu are interesting because there is local level memorial constructed and maintained without funds from the government. This chapter will discuss local level memorials in general and the Killing Caves in particular. Throughout Cambodia mass graves were found and it is interesting to take a close look at the commemoration initiatives of Cambodians. What are the differences between local level memorials and national memorials?

Chapter 7 goes into the ‘historical’ sites in the Anlong Veng region. This region is also very relevant for the study on remembrance cultures in Cambodia. It was home to the most notorious Khmer Rouge leader up to 1998. A big part of Anlong Veng still consists of Khmer Rouge sympathisers. The government wants to turn the town of Anlong Veng and some of its Khmer Rouge sites, such as the former house of Ta Mok and Pol Pot and the cremation site of Pol Pot into touristic attractions.

Other topics relevant in this thesis are the treatment of the remains found in numerous mass graves all over Cambodia and the role of Buddhism in the Cambodian society. How did Buddhist culture in Cambodia affect the commemoration of the genocide? It is important to understand the Buddhist traditions in Cambodia regarding the way the physical remains of dead people should be treated. Almost thirty years after the genocide Cambodians are still debating what to do with the physical remains of the victims of the genocide. Should they be cremated as the Buddhist culture in Cambodia requires or must they be preserved so that the physical evidence of the genocide is on display for whoever wants or needs to see it? And what to do with the hundreds of mass

graves and killing fields all across the country? These questions are still undecided and with the start of the tribunal the debate is more intense than ever before.

1.2 *Collective memories and memorial politics*

During the Khmer Rouge years everybody was unsure about the future. Although there were ethnic and religious groups who were targeted by Pol Pot as enemies of the revolution, such as tribal Khmers, Vietnamese and Chinese people living in Cambodia. But also Muslims and Buddhists, educated and urban Cambodians were additionally designated as enemies of the revolution. Do these ethnic and different class groups have a special place at the memorial sites, or are all Cambodians remembered in the same way regardless of the social, ethnic or religious backgrounds.

Memories are not mere reproductions of objective facts from the past as people give their own meanings to memories. This does not mean either that memories are entirely subjective. People not only remember things from the past through their own personal feelings but also through social communities. The past is shaped by different communities.⁹ Remembering and shaping the past is therefore a very important part of group- and/or nation building. What if the history of a nation is as gruesome and horrible as the history of Cambodia? How can genocide and mass killings inflicted by people of the same country be a part of history that brings people together? As in Cambodia the genocide was inflicted by fellow countrymen and not by a force that invaded the country. In the case of something as profound as genocide it is hard to erase this history from a nation's slate.

Zerubavel discusses group memories in his book *Time Maps*: "Acquiring group memories and thereby identifying with its collective past is part of the process of acquiring any social identity, and familiarizing members with the past is a major part of communities' efforts to assimilate them".¹⁰ So acquiring a group's memory can be very important for social life. Collective memories shared by families, ethnic groups and other mnemonic communities. Does the Cambodian government construct their politics of memories based on these different groups or is there no distinction made between different groups at the memorials.

⁹ E. Zerubavel, *Time maps. Collective memory and the social shape of the past* (Chicago 2003).

¹⁰ E. Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 3.

The way the past is being shaped and mould into the present is a political process. A lot of different groups use the past for purposes in the present or the future. This thesis will look into the politics behind memorial sites. During the different times stages as I mentioned before, the commemoration of the genocide was used for different purposes. The last fifteen years the tribunal played a major role in the politics surrounding the commemoration of the genocide.

With the start of the tribunal a lot of Cambodians were glad to see justice after such a long time. There are also critics who ask why a poor developing country such as Cambodia should put so much effort and money in the tribunal, instead of directly to poor Cambodians. Why concentrate on problems in the past instead of the problems of the present time and the future? Another point of critique is that a lot of Cambodians do not believe that justice will really prevail. They fear that the Khmer Rouge leaders will die before a verdict is spoken by the court of justice. Pol Pot and Ta Mok are examples that corroborate this theory, they will never be held accountable for their actions against humanity since they died.

There is also a very large group of people that stress the need of an international tribunal for the reconciliation process of the nation. It is of great importance that justice is being done and the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge are being held accountable for the crimes against humanity committed under their rule. There is no justice in a country were mass murderers can live freely without being held accountable for their deeds. It is important to let justice prevail even though it is long after the actual events, in order to heal the wounds of a nation. But even if justice is done societies do not easily forget collective violence, it always lingers under the surface, and old wounds remain open for decades. Traumas can even be passed on from one generation to the next and Cambodia has still a long road ahead to reconcile with its past.

2 HISTORIOGRAPHIC CONTEXT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEFORK

“Identities and memories are not things we think about, but things we think with”¹¹

History, memory and identity are terms that are entwined with each other. Rituals, memorials, national days of commemoration or celebration, books, studies, television, art, museums, folktales, etcetera, all articulate versions of the past and memory. Memory and the reproduction of history is a difficult process. It is not only the ability to reconstruct, and memorialize, the past but at the same time the talent to forget the past. Ernest Renan claimed that in order to have a collective memory, collective amnesia is necessary. To remember and commemorate you have to forget as well. It is impossible to commemorate everything that has happened in the past.

In this Chapter the different concepts of history and commemoration politics and different scholars that research remembrance cultures, will be discussed. The last decades a memory wave has contributed to the revival of cultural history. With the ongoing democratization process and the secularisation of the western society people became more and more aware of the different angles history can be looked upon. History can be interpreted in different ways by different mnemonic groups.

Collective memory can be conceptualized according to Wulf Kansteiner among three different types of historical factors. These historical factors interact with each other and the result is a shared collective memory. Kansteiner divides these historical factors in: “the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who, use, ignore, or transform such artefacts according to their own interests”.¹² Kansteiner is a scholar who researched the collective representations of the Holocaust and the role of the media within the creation of collective memories. He describes collective memory as following: “Collective memory is not history, though it is sometimes made from similar material. It is a collective phenomenon but it only manifests itself in the

¹¹ John R. Gillis, *Commemorations, the politics of national identity* (New Jersey 1994) page 5.

¹² Wulf Kansteiner, *Finding meaning in memory: a methodological critique of collective studies*, from the *History and Theory* (May 2002) 180.

actions and statements of individuals. It can take hold of historically and socially remote events but it often privileges the interests of the contemporary”.¹³ The remembrance politics make sure that history is used to suite the interests of the present. In this thesis commemoration politics are researched, in particular the remembrance politics in Cambodia.

Throughout the last century people became more aware of the past and the differences between the past and the present. The past became an important instrument to gain and maintain power. The past is screened, and bits and pieces are used to the satisfaction of people in power. By the same token, history is not static, it gets rewritten almost permanently and the present has influence on the past and the way it is interpreted. The past tells a story about the present and the way we interpret the past has political consequences. Disputes over the past and its meaning are basically disputes over the meaning of the present. Throughout the existence of humans the past is used for all kinds of different reasons but they were always closely linked to power and maintaining power. Renan was the first who asserted the close relation between history and nationalism in 1882. Renan described the construction of narrative about a nation as a development in which forgetting became more and more important. “To construct a narrative of the nation implies a large task of suppression and denial of incongruous or undesirable elements. The failings of memory are placed at the heart of the new nation state”.¹⁴ Abbas Vali explained it by saying: “No ideology needs history as much as nationalism”.¹⁵

With the emergence of nation states and the rise of colonialism it became more important to bind a country or an empire with one common history. Benchmarks of history were put in the spotlight. History was made more visible through memorials; it was made consumable for the common people. At the same time it was made for the civilians but not in commemoration of civilians and soldiers who had lost their lives for the nation. Memorials were used to commemorate the

¹³ Wulf Kansteiner, Finding meaning in memory: a methodological critique of collective studies, from the *History and Theory* (May 2002) 180.

¹⁴ Ernest Renan, What is a Nation (1882), in Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London Routledge 1990).

¹⁵ Abbas Vali, ‘Nationalism and Kurdish Historical Writing’ in *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 14, spring 1996, 23.

nation state and its great leaders; they were erected on different locations throughout the countries. At the end of the nineteenth century public places of commemoration were multiplying quickly. In the nineteenth century everyday life changed drastically with industrialisation and social modernization. Traditions and rituals lost their once so important meaning and in a sense people lost their stable ground, the world changed rapidly. Pierre Nora claimed that the crisis of memory is concomitant with a crisis of identity. As a reaction to this crises of identity elites started to produce all kind of memory sites and they created new invented traditions so that the bond that was lost between the people within the nation state would re-emerge.

With the memorialisation of the nation, the awareness of the distinction between actual history and memory grew. Nora was one of the first scholars that made a distinction between memory and history. “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.”¹⁶ History is a reconstruction of what no longer is; reconstructions are always problematic and incomplete as Nora claims. The ideas of Nora can be seen in a broader scientific study of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who was a student of Durkheim. They understand collective memory as collectively shared representations of the past. Halbwachs even takes it further by stating that individual memory is entirely socially determined.¹⁷

Nora divides history of memory in three different time stages, pre-modern, modern and postmodern. He focussed on monumental memory sites; he calls these sites lieux de memoire. These are various embodiments of the past, museums, archives, memorials are all exemplary lieux de mémoire. Most of the monumental memory sites owe their meaning to their intrinsic existence. This means that these monuments could be relocated without altering their meaning. The need for these lieux de memoire relies on a feeling that we are threatened, or that our nation our bond is threatened. Nora: “We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defend were not threatened, there would be no need to build them.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire* (California 1989) 8.

¹⁷ Wulf Kansteiner, Finding meaning in memory: a methodological critique of collective studies, from the *History and Theory* (May 2002) 181.

¹⁸ Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire* (California 1989) 12.

With the rise of a nation the quest for a common past became louder. National history and memory are shared by people who do not know each other, but these people do feel bonded because of the shared history of their nation. We as people are not only bound because of what we memorize but just as much by what we forget. We defend the bastions of our nation by using and erasing the past, ‘forgetting’ of the past is usually referred to as collective amnesia. When we feel threatened or mistreated, memorials are build in our own defence, to remind us of what binds us and of the strength our ancestors has shown in the past. Not every part of history is commemorated with a memorial, most parts of the past are not commemorated. To engage in the study of memory in the context of a nation you have to deal with a difficult construction between the individual and collective memory, the state and the time people are living in. These are all important for the way the past is remembered.

Since the nineteen-sixties of the twentieth century the way we look at history changed. Because of the ongoing democratisation and secularisation people became more aware of the different approaches there are to history. There was not one way to interpret the past but people became more and more aware of the different angles you could look at and the different approaches to the past.

Eviatar Zerubavel is a sociologist who approaches history and the collective memory from a sociologic point of view. The past is shaped for social reasons. Nora looks at history and collective memory at a national scale. Zerubavel looks at it from a wider spectrum, and he sees collective memory in really large things such as monuments but also in immaterial things as consumptive behaviour. Collective memory and collective identity is everywhere around us and we are part of it. We are shaped by our environment and even the things in life that we think of as normal are not so normal after all. They are culturally bound.

Zerubavel explains that the rise of cognitive science coincided with the decline of the Romantic vision of the individual thinker. Modern scholarship rejects a highly personalized view of the mind; the centre of cognitive studies today is cognitive commonality as human beings rather than our uniqueness as individual thinkers.¹⁹ He distinct three different levels of how we think, (a) as individuals, (b)

¹⁹ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes. An invitation to cognitive sociology* (Harvard 1997) 2.

as social beings, and (c) as human beings.²⁰ The second level, the level that analyses humans as social beings, is the most important one for the study in this dissertation. We tend to commemorate within groups, for example we can commemorate the people who died during the Second World War any given day of the year, but we choose to commemorate them together on the May the 4th all together. The same can be applied for the commemoration on May the 20th in Cambodia. Mnemonic communities therefore not only let us know what we should commemorate but also when we are supposed to commemorate.

Even though we tend to live and think in cognitive groups, it does not mean that we are the same and all part of the same mnemonic community. Even within societies there may be many different cognitive subcultures. The fact that the way we have organized our society and the way we remember certain events is contested even within our own society shows that different mnemonic communities can have a different outlook on events and within a community discussions about the past can get really heated. In *Time Maps* Zerubavel describes these discussions about recollections of the past *mnemonic battles*.²¹ When mnemonic traditions diminish from the societies we live in, we tend to force history back in to society. By forcing versions of history upon different groups mnemonic battles grow. Even if there is an agreement as to the course of the past there still can be fierce discussions about the righteous way to represent the past.

Maurice Halbwachs mentioned that there are as many memories as there are groups.²² There are also as many traditions and customs as there are groups. The way we live, work, love and die are all connected with the culture we live in and the traditions that we have. Gillis explains in his book: “The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity”.²³ The term ‘identity’ is an important term; people see themselves through their identity, it is a sense of the self. Individuals, subgroups, and nations all demand identity as if it were a necessity of life itself. Identity has taken on the

²⁰ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes* 5.

²¹ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps. Collective memory and the social shape of the past* (Chicago 2003).

²² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective memory* (Chicago 1992 translation).

²³ John R. Gillis, *Commemoration, the politics of national identity* (New Jersey 1994) 3.

status of a sacred object, an “ultimate concern,” worth fighting and even dying for”.²⁴ The way we see ourselves and the way others see us is culturally bound.

The way the past is used and represented is also culturally bound. There is also a sharp distinction between different eras. History is not static; it gets new meaning and new social and historical context over time. Jan Assmann claims that because any part of history can change its intensity, social depth and meaning, it has a very strong bias toward the present.²⁵ In a way the present is the most important factor of what is remembered from the past and how, and also what is forgotten. Over the years anti-monument movements are trying to radically turn down the memorialisation of society. These groups want to de-ritualize and de-materialize the past and the memory of the past. By doing so they claim that the past will become more part of everyday life and therefore closer to the people than it is now. They also want to de-materialize memory because it has appearances of objectivity but in fact it is not. These groups think that people have to be made aware of their own subjectivity. The present can be represented as a continuity of the past. Although the present can also be represented as a break with the past. The gap between what happened in the past and the present can be exenterated, newly formed government for example can construct a great distance between the past and the present.

Besides memorials that are erected at a prominent place in a city are the memorials that are placed at historical sites. These sites serve a purpose in the commemoration of the past. This can mean that it was a prison or a killing side or a place where people were in hiding. These places are important as heritage sites and can be used in the commemoration. In this thesis memorials at these sites like a former prison, killing fields and abandoned houses are examined. These places represent a part of the Cambodian history that is very painful. Information about this painful history is eminent at these historically loaded places. Visitors must know what they are looking at, and it is very important that the victims are commemorated with dignity and respect. This more easily said than done, it is difficult to get a balance between respect towards the victims and showing the

²⁴ John R. Gillis, *Commemoration*, 4.

²⁵ Wulf Kansteiner, Finding meaning in memory: a methodological critique of collective memory studies, from: *History and Theory* (May 2002) 182-183.

gravity and horror of what occurred. Governments all over the world struggled and still struggle to get to this balance at these heritage sites. Commemoration sites can be and are used as political instruments. Shock affects do work in the political arena.

The Holocaust was the major object of the memory boom of trauma. This memory boom did not occur directly after the Second World War, but it took until the late seventies and eighties for the victims and survivors to gain attention from both historians as the public. By making the private memories of the survivor's public the individual suffering of people was relocated into a historical and social context. Memory of trauma became a very important aspect of history. There had to be an agreed narrative about this suffering which gave meaning to the collective struggle. The focus was on the survivors; their stories represented all the victims of the Holocaust.

Discussions about how to deal with personal stories and witness accounts arose. Paula Hamilton for example argued that the memorial culture and the significance that was assigned to the recollections of the survivors was not something to be celebrated; "It raises, among other things, the problems implicit in laying claim to the status of the victim, the difficult notion of guaranteeing the truth of the witness, and the assumption that a therapeutic language, with the healing strategies it entails, can appropriately be applied to a group or a nation".²⁶ Eyewitness accounts are by no means unproblematic and have to be dealt with very carefully. It is very hard to make memorials that represent the pain and suffering of all victims, and it can be very painful for large groups of victims that are feeling left out. In the case of the Holocaust it were the gypsy and gay victims who thought that they were left out of the narrative. In Cambodia a large part of the Muslim and Vietnamese communities feel like they are not included into the official narrative of the victims.

As stated before, the past is not fixed or static; it is constantly on the move and changing and there are elements added to the wide spectre of commemoration.

Both narratives and meanings are constantly subject to change, they are

²⁶ Ed. Katharine Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone, *Memory, History, Nation, contested pasts* (New Jersey 2006) 102.

transforming at the same pace the present is. The memorialisation of society will continue to grow, it seems like we commemorate everything. Not only in public places outside of our homes but also on the internet the number of commemoration sites is growing. People commemorate more and more openly. If you lost a loved one it seems normal to make a remembrance site on the internet, where people can post notes about the person who died. Are we out of control where it comes to commemorating, and are we addicted to the pain of others? With all the images on the news and television programs that show pain of other people we are used to see pain, but it does not automatically mean that we are desensitized because of these images.

With the continuing globalization of the world we are living in a global village as Marshall McLuhan describes. We not only know a lot about the history of our ancestors but through the internet and television we are learning more about remote places in the world. The pressure to preserve, collect and maintain the past becomes bigger. In the past two decades memory politics and mnemonic groups have simultaneously become more global and more local.²⁷ Events like the years the Khmer Rouge was in power and the devastation they have left behind are now getting the attention of people from all over the world. We feel obliged to commemorate, especially where it comes to victims, but we are simply incapable to remember all these different issues of the past. This is why we need memorials and museums and other forms of reminders. People are more aware and interested in the history of other countries. At the same time people are more interested in their own family history of the history of their village, for example. History and memory are more and more personalized.

For countries like Cambodia the past is difficult to deal with. It is difficult for a divided nation to come to terms with the past in a shared version of the past. Martha Minow claims that almost all reconciliation processes have at their center the question of whether justice or truth should take precedence.²⁸ Processes of national reconciliation attempt to avoid new violence, this can lead to abuse of the truth, or that history is used in the service of forgetting. Societies do not easily

²⁷ John R. Gillis, *Commemorations, the politics of national identity* (New Jersey 1994) 14.

²⁸ David E. Lorey & William H. Beezley, *Genocide, collective violence and popular memory, the politics of remembrance in the twentieth century* (Wilmington 2002) 14.

forget massive collective violence, and the wounds that tore the country apart can remain open for many decades. The traumas are passed over from generation to generation. Suffering is not only a private experience especially where it comes to collective violence. Societies have to find ways to commemorate the horrors of the past so that the country can reconcile these horrors and move forward.

In Cambodian society monuments and memorials are, compared to the western world, a relatively new phenomenon. Cambodians are not used to commemorate in a public way. In Cambodia, family is very important and most special events are shared with family members. The commemoration of deceased loved ones is usually done within the family and not in public. Another institution that is important for Cambodians is religion. The Buddhist culture and ceremonies provides for the commemoration of people. The mnemonic communities in Cambodia are much smaller than in western countries, not only because of the reasons mentioned above. The fact that not every Cambodian has been to school or is going to school has its implications for the remembrance culture and the importance of the history of a nation as well. Education is not as obvious as it is for us. History is important for Cambodians but for a long time the genocide was not taught at schools. And although collective memory is not real history it is often made of the same material, so it is very important that the remnants of the past will be archived and preserved. As Elie Wiesel has said “To forget the dead would be killing them a second time”.²⁹

²⁹ Elie Wiesel, *The night* (Les Editions de Minuit 1958).

3 RECENT HISTORY OF CAMBODIA

3.1 *The Vietnamese Years, PRK (1979-1990)*

This Chapter will discuss the first years after the turnover of the Khmer Rouge. How did the international community respond to the Vietnamese invasion/liberation of Cambodia? What were the thoughts and the politics behind the creation of a collective memory in Cambodia as well as in the rest of the world, the first years after the PRK came in power? And how did the Cambodians respond to the memory of the DK years? How did the international community respond to the invasion of Cambodia and the news that the Khmer Rouge had left the country and its people in a devastating state?

On December 25th 1978 Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of Cambodia. This invasion followed after many attacks on the border villages in Vietnam by Khmer Rouge troops in which thousands of Vietnamese civilians were killed. A year before the invasion on the 31st of December 1977, Cambodia had broken all diplomatic relations with its neighbouring country Vietnam. Pol Pot accused Vietnam of trying to seize Cambodian territory. In fact it was Pol Pot who turned expansionist towards the southern part of Vietnam which he stated was a part of Kampuchea, Kampuchea Krom (lower Cambodia).

Within two weeks after the Vietnamese invasion into Cambodia the Pol Pot regime was toppled. The Khmer Rouge was overthrown by 150,000 Vietnamese troops and 15,000 anti-Khmer Rouge Cambodian soldiers who had fled to Vietnam during the Khmer Rouge years.³⁰ On January 8th 1979 a new Government was announced in Phnom Penh, it was named: 'The Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Council' (KPRC). Two days later the KPRC announced the establishment of the new state: 'The People's Republik of Kampuchea' (PRK).³¹ The president of the KPRC and PRK head of state was Heng Samrin, a former Khmer Rouge member who had fled to Vietnam in the beginning of 1978.

³⁰ These numbers are from the book by: Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide* (London 2004) 9.

³¹ Rachel Hughes, *Fielding genocide: post-1979 Cambodia and the geopolitics of memory* (Melbourne 2006) 13.

After Heng Samrin had fled to Vietnam he became the leader of the “Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation”.³² This organization was set up under the auspices of the Vietnamese communist leaders to free the people of Cambodia from the ‘Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique’ as they called it. When the Vietnamese and the ‘Front for National Salvation’ entered Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge turned out to be no equal opponent to them, they retreated into the Western jungles in Cambodia. The rapidity and the success of this invasion took even the Vietnamese commanders by surprise. On January the 7th 1979 Vietnamese troops entered the deserted city Phnom Penh. This date is also the official date of the liberation from the Khmer Rouge.

From the day the city of Phnom Penh was taken over by the Vietnamese soldiers are a couple of eyewitness accounts. Dr Thong Kong is one of these eyewitnesses; he remembers Phnom Penh that day as follows:

“The eerie silence of the city, broken only by the occasional buzzing of flies and mosquito’s – a Phnom Penh without people, without cars, without traffic. Only a few military trucks and jeeps with Cambodian and Vietnamese soldiers rumbled by, otherwise it was a city of ghosts.”³³

The National Bank of Cambodia had been blown up by the Khmer Rouge which was in line with their policy to abolish all money. Pieces of paper and money were blowing along the streets. Phnom Penh’s once so lively and colourful main market Psar Thmei was littered with thousands of shoes and cloths left there from the time the Khmer Rouge soldiers invaded the city in 1975. Televisions, cars, books and all other stuff left there on the streets by the approximate two million people who lived in Phnom Penh before they were forced out of the city within hours after the Khmer Rouge had taken over power. It looked like the city had frozen for four years in a state of deadlock after the takeover on the 17th of April 1975.

³² Henry Kamn, *Cambodia, report from a stricken land* (New York 1998) 149.

³³ Dr Thong Kong interview by Tom Fawthrop, January 2002. From the book by: Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide* (London 2004) 12.

A small group of Khmer Rouge top political leaders, their families, the administrative apparatus, military personnel and a small number of workers in repair shops and small factories inhabited Phnom Penh during the Khmer Rouge years. The population during these years is estimated at under 20,000 persons.³⁴ The Khmer Rouge living in Phnom Penh managed to get out of the city and fled to the Western jungles of Cambodia just before the Vietnamese troops arrived in the capital.

Although the Khmer Rouge nightmare was over for the major part of Cambodia, there were still large parts of the western districts, including the towns of Battambang, Sisophon and Poipet, which were not liberated until April 1979. The Khmer Rouge continued and even intensified the killings as the Vietnamese troops drew closer. The Khmer Rouge killed the strongest men and women before the Vietnamese took over. The Khmer Rouge wanted to be sure that these men and women would be of no use to the Vietnamese. The Khmer Rouge forced families to volunteer their strongest members, they said it was for labour but in reality these members were being executed. Historian Margaret Slocomb explains “Like roads and bridges, and a ripe harvest, human assets had to be destroyed to spite the conquerors.”³⁵

3.1.1 *National Government*

The Vietnamese installed a new government led by several former Khmer Rouge officers such as Hun Sen, who had fled to Vietnam in 1977, and Heng Samrin who had done the same in 1978. This government was working in close contact with the Vietnamese. On the 8th of January 1979 The People’s Revolutionary Council of Kampuchea announced this newly formed government. It consisted of eight men: Heng Samrin was President, Pen Sovann was Vice-President and in charge of National Defence, Hun Sen was Minister of Foreign Affairs, Keo Chenda was Minister of Information, Press and Culture, Dr. Nou Beng was minister of Health and Social Affairs, Chan Ven was Minister of Education and Mok Sakun was Minister of Economy and Living Conditions.

³⁴ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide* (London 2004) 13.

³⁵ Margaret Slocomb, *The Peoples Republic of Kampuchea, 1979-1989: the revolution after Pol Pot* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai 2003).

These men had different backgrounds; some of them had been members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea who had stayed in Hanoi after the Geneva Accords in 1954. Others were as mentioned before former members of the Khmer Rouge who had fled to Vietnam during the reign of Pol Pot, and some of them did not have any communist or revolutionary backgrounds. The eight-member People's Revolutionary Council of Kampuchea functioned as the cabinet until after the first elections of 1981.³⁶

Many Cambodians were not happy with the outcome of this board of Ministers; especially the former Khmer Rouge leaders were looked upon with Argus' eyes. The fact that some of the ministers and even the president were former high ranking officials within the Khmer Rouge was not the only problem the Cambodians had with this new government. The new government was a puppet regime of the Vietnamese; this was a concern for a lot of Cambodians. For many years people in Cambodia had been brainwashed that the Vietnamese were the enemy so there was a lot of distrust. On the other hand were most of the Cambodians glad that they were finally liberated from the Khmer Rouge. Everything was at that point better than living under the reign of the Khmer Rouge. Most people saw this new regime as an unavoidable by-product of their liberation.

The first task for the new Government was to rebuild the country and make it function again. They had to rebuild the country from the ashes and ruins left by the Khmer Rouge. The land was lacking most basic needs, such as fresh water systems, electricity, roads, money and banks for example. Schools were demolished; most of the books burned and the major part of the educated people had been murdered. Cambodia was on the brink of famine and a lot of Cambodians were dying of starvation.

3.1.2 Reactions of the international community

A large part of the international community did not recognize the People's Republic of Kampuchea because they saw it as a puppet regime of the

³⁶ Tom Fawthrop and Heleen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide? Elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 16-40.

Vietnamese. International law jurists believed that according to international law the Vietnamese ‘invasion’ of Cambodia was an infringement of international law and the principle of national sovereignty. Only eleven countries around the world recognized the PRK, and only one of these eleven countries, India, was outside of the Soviet bloc.³⁷ Therefore aid from abroad was for a long time not given. No Western government felt an urge to get humanitarian aid into Cambodia. The US – and British governments even blocked NGO attempts to get foreign aid into Phnom Penh.³⁸

Between 325, 000 and 625, 000 Cambodians died within the first year after the liberation of whom many from starvation, after living to see the end of the DK regime.³⁹ Not only the Western countries blocked aid for the Cambodians, also Vietnam and the People’s Republic of Kampuchea tried to stop all the aid sent to the refugee settlements linked with the Khmer Rouge along the border of Thailand. The Khmer Rouge had, with the help of Thailand, some major refugee camps in hands and because a large part of the foreign community did recognize the Khmer Rouge they send their aid to this Khmer Rouge bulwarks.

The United States were determined to punish and boycott the Vietnamese communists where possible. The result was that the United States did not recognize the new government in Cambodia until 1995. Other countries within the region were afraid of the domino effect. The non-communist countries making up the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) saw the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia as an aggressive hegemonic action from the Vietnamese communists who, they thought, would try to conquer more parts of Asia. Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia were in particular afraid of the Vietnamese communists.

As a result of this fear of the Vietnamese and other geopolitical reasons the Thai Government gave sanctuary to Pol Pot’s guerrillas, allowing them to operate with impunity from bases in refugee camps inside its border. This was done in full support of China and the United States.⁴⁰ The Khmer Rouge controlled different areas along the Thai border. China supplied the Khmer Rouge with arms, which

³⁷ John Tully, *A short history of Cambodia, from empire to survival* (Allen & Unwin 2005) 206.

³⁸ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide? Elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 19.

³⁹ John Tully, *A short history of Cambodia, from Empire to survival* (Singapore 2005) 201.

⁴⁰ John Tully, *A short history of Cambodia*, 206.

were delivered to them through the Thai military. The Khmer Rouge was also supplied by different nongovernmental relief organizations with food and medicines, which were provided to help the thousands of Cambodians who had flocked to the Thai border in surge for food and shelter and in the hope to get asylum in Western countries through Thailand.

For the Cambodians the implications of this state of deadlock was devastating. During the famine in 1979 which was a direct result from the Khmer Rouge years, the country was denied economic and humanitarian aid. Cambodia was one of the poorest countries in the world and it desperately needed help. The PRK was also cut off from assistance from the UN Development programme, the Asian Development Bank, the IMF and the World Bank.

Some of the criticism of the international community was based on facts. An Amnesty International report that was published in 1987 mentions show trials, political prisoners and torture. During the first three years of the regime the security was for a very large part in the hands of the Vietnamese secret police.⁴¹ So by no means this was a perfect situation in Cambodia but the people were far better off after the Vietnamese intervention than during the DK years.

3.1.3 Commemoration during the PRK period

Although the problems of the People's Republic of Kampuchea were manifold the government had the commemoration of the genocide high on their priority list. The PRK initiated six major memorial initiatives already in the early period in which the PRK was in power. The first initiative the PRK took was the investigation and renovation of the S-21 Khmer Rouge prison. The S-21 facility functioned as the main prison of the Khmer Rouge secret police, the Santebal. It was situated in the inner city of Phnom Penh, before the Khmer Rouge take over, the compound had functioned as a high school. S-21 or commonly known as Tuol Sleng was discovered soon after the Vietnamese soldiers had marched in to Phnom Penh on January the 7th 1979. The Vietnamese recognized almost immediately the importance of the site as proof of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. In the chapter 4 about Tuol Sleng will be further examined. The second initiative

⁴¹ John Tully, *A short history of Cambodia, from empire to survival* (Allen & Unwin 2005) 208.

taken by the PRK authorities in the memory of the victims of the Khmer Rouge was a trial *in absentia* of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary. After Nurnberg this was the first tribunal held. Later on in this chapter I will discuss the tribunal.

The third major commemoration initiative was the excavation of the Choeng Ek killing fields and later the construction of the memorial at the site. Almost one year after the discovery of the Tuol Sleng prison these mass graves were found in a rural area just outside of Phnom Penh. It turned out to be the burial site for thousands of Cambodians who had been incarcerated in S-21. The excavation of the human remains started almost immediately after the discovery. Even during the excavations the site was already open to visitors. Foreign officials that came to visit the government were brought to the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek. Further changes did not occur until the late PRK period. In 1988 a new memorial Stupa was inaugurated. The site became more of a place for commemoration as well as a place where information was given about the Khmer Rouge atrocities.

The fourth initiative of the PRK was the establishment of a committee that would investigate the crimes of the Khmer Rouge regime, the Research Committee into the Crimes of the Pol Pot Regime. This committee was headed by Min Kinh, who was in charge of collecting evidence for the People's Revolutionary Tribunal in 1979. The assignment given by the government was to thoroughly document the atrocities committed by the DK regime. The Research Committee interviewed survivors and eyewitnesses of the Khmer Rouge crimes; they were also present at some excavations of mass graves throughout the country between 1981 and 1983.

In 1983 the Research Committee wrote a report, in this report the Committee shows figures of the number of estimated deaths during the Khmer Rouge regime. The figures show 3,314,768 deaths on the basis of petitions signed or thumb printed by 1,166,307 people in the different villages throughout Cambodia.⁴² The number of 3,-3 million deaths during the Khmer Rouge regime was mocked at the time and blown away as Vietnamese propaganda. The latest figures are also much

⁴²The report of the Research Committee was dated 25 July 1983. Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide, elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 72-73. Rachel Hughes, *Fielding genocide: post 1979 Cambodia and the geopolitics of memory* (Melbourne 2006) 30.

lower than these estimations. Subsequent a lot of research most scholars agree that the number of victims of the DK regime is more likely to be around 1,7 million.

Soon after the establishment of the ‘Genocide Research Committee’ a fifth initiative was taken by the Government. In 1983, the Ministry of Culture and Information requested local authorities to facilitate the establishment of local level memorials.⁴³ The Ministry made clear that it was important that the remains found in the nearby mass graves were to put on display so that visitors could see the ‘evidence’ with their own eyes. Rachel Hughes describes it as: “Cambodians were asked to remember, in viewing the bones, the horrors from which they had been liberated, and the Cambodian political leaders and the fraternal socialist state they were to thank for their liberation.”⁴⁴ The first years of the PRK Buddhist elements at the memorials were not encouraged by the PRK Government. The local level memorials will be further examined in chapter 6.

The sixth initiative taken by the PRK was the introduction of an annual day of commemoration. Each year on the 20th of May the victims of the Khmer Rouge would be remembered. The name of this day was the ‘Day of Anger’. In 1983 the first commemoration day was organized. Not only at Choeung Ek were ceremonies, similar ceremonies were held throughout the country at local memorial sites. In chapter 5 I will go deeper into the commemoration day on May 20th.

For the PRK it was very important to keep the memories of the regime of Pol Pot alive to legitimate their government, the invasion of Vietnam into Cambodia and to legitimate the presence of the Vietnamese soldiers. The Vietnamese had been the enemy of the Cambodians throughout centuries. During the DK years Cambodians had been indoctrinated about the Vietnamese enemy. When the Vietnamese soldiers took over control Cambodians had mixed feelings, on the one hand they were glad that the Khmer Rouge was overthrown, but on the other hand were they afraid of what was ahead of them. A Cambodian woman told me during a conversation about these years; “The Cambodian people were drowning in the

⁴³ Rachel Hughes, *Fielding genocide: post 1979 Cambodia and the geopolitics of memory* (Melbourne 2006) 30.

⁴⁴ Rachel Hughes, *Fielding genocide*, 30.

muddy rice fields, somebody held out a hand and we took it. It did not matter at the time, who had saved us but we were saved”.⁴⁵

The years that the Vietnamese were involved in Cambodia were very expensive for the Vietnamese government. Up to 50 per cent of Vietnam’s budget was spent on the military during the occupation. The occupation was not popular in Vietnam with the Vietnamese people. Not only did it drain the country from money but it made the Vietnamese international pariahs.⁴⁶ In 1989 the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia was completed, the withdrawal had started in 1982. The PRK renamed itself in the more neutral name ‘State of Cambodia’ (SOC). KPRC renamed itself as the ‘Cambodian People’s Party’ (CPP). The CPP dropped its socialist aims and is until today one of the bigger parties in Cambodia.

Although the most important reason for the Vietnamese to invade Cambodia at the time was its own safety, because the Khmer Rouge was attacking border towns in Vietnam and was reclaiming the lower part of Vietnam, it nevertheless did liberate the Cambodian people from a horrific regime. The way the Vietnamese and the government of Cambodia were treated by the international community was not fair, especially not for the people in Cambodia. They were the ones who were victimized not only by the Khmer Rouge but also by the countries who helped the Khmer Rouge even after 1979.

3.1.4 *The People’s Revolutionary Tribunal*

On the fifteenth of August 1979 was the People’s Revolutionary Tribunal set to begin. The charges of the trial were: “To try the Pol Pot – Ieng Sary clique for the Crime of Genocide”.⁴⁷ The name of the tribunal itself is a statement. The newly formed Government was still hoping for a split within the Khmer Rouge, including defections by Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea.⁴⁸

The fact that this trial was so soon after the overthrow of Pol Pot is an indication that this tribunal was not really thoroughly organized. The whole legal

⁴⁵ I had this conversation in a bus from Phnom Penh to a border town in the western part of Cambodia, just after the commemoration day on May 20th.

⁴⁶ John Tully, *A short history of Cambodia, from empire to survival* (Allen & Unwin 2005) 215-217.

⁴⁷ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide? Elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 41-42.

⁴⁸ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide*, 42.

system was demolished and most of the courts judges and lawyers were killed by the Khmer Rouge, out of the legally trained personnel from the pre-1975 period only seven remained after 1979.⁴⁹ Nevertheless the prosecutors did have a lot of eyewitness accounts. Fifty-four witnesses and experts were to be called to testify against Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.

Tours were organized for the people who were invited to witness the trial and members of the trial, to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Around the building there were speakers who broadcasted the proceedings in the courtroom. Nationwide people could follow the trial through *The Voice of Kampuchea* radio. The weekly newspaper *Kampuchea* devoted a full issue to transcripts and photographs also shown during the trial.

A lot of journalist, NGO's, members of foreign governments and lawyers, mostly from pro-Soviet countries, were invited to be at the hearings of the Tribunal. Vietnam and the PRK did take this trial very serious. Through this tribunal they hoped to show the world that the Khmer Rouge was guilty of genocide and that their presence was legitimate. The trial was being translated into three different languages, in French, English and Russian. Twenty-four foreign observers, including representatives of international organizations, and twenty nine journalists were invited. Most of the people who were invited were from pro-Soviet countries and not all of them showed up at the trial.

The tribunal was a so called *in absentia* trial due to the fact that Pol Pot and Ieng Sary had fled to Thailand which gave them political asylum, these men were not present at the trial. After only four days of testimonies and other evidence shown during the trial, the court came to its verdict. On the nineteenth of August Pol Pot and Ieng Sary were found guilty of the crime of genocide. They were sentenced to death and all their property was ordered to being confiscated. Nothing really changed for Pol Pot and Ieng Sary as they were in Thailand and they could count on international support from Thailand, China and the United States, they also had a major part of western Cambodia in hands and none of their property was being confiscated.

⁴⁹ These numbers are in the book of: Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide? Elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 41.

Western media and politics paid almost no attention to the trial and the genocide verdicts. Most governments dismissed the tribunal as a show trial. The tribunal was lacking on major parts, justice was not done by the tribunal but it gave the victims a chance to tell the world what had happened to the Cambodian people. These moving testimonies of the people who had lived during and survived the Khmer Rouge years deserved much more attention from the international community. The survivors did not obtain any hearing; and once again the international community looked the other way.

3.2 *Paris Peace Agreement (1991-1999)*

3.2.1 *Baby steps towards peace*

On the 23rd of October 1991 all the Cambodian factions, except for the Khmer Rouge, signed an agreement in Paris. The agreement contented free elections under supervision of the United Nations and that the path towards reconciliation of the Cambodian traumatic past would be cleared. It also meant that the different factions in Cambodia would cease fighting and the civil war would end.

In 1988 the peace process had started with several international meetings. After the meeting at the National Assembly a peace process had been launched. There was a division between the Coalition Government of Demokratik Kampuchea (CGDK) who were backed by China, ASEAN and the United States on the one hand and the Phnom Penh government led by Hun Sen and the anti-Khmer Rouge lobbyists on the other hand. The last party consisted mostly of Cambodians who had fled the country during or before the DK years.

The CGDK wanted the Khmer Rouge to be part of the solution and the peace talks. They also thought that the Khmer Rouge should be part of a new government. While the party led by Hun Sen and the anti- Khmer Rouge lobbyists saw the Khmer Rouge as the core of the problem and did not want the Khmer Rouge to be part of any solution. Hun Sen gave a press conference on December 16th 1988 in which he stated that he did not want the Khmer Rouge leaders to participate in the peace talks. The message of the Phnom Penh government was that these Khmer Rouge leaders should be tried for their crimes against the Cambodian people; they should not be part of peace negotiations.⁵⁰

In July 1989 a Peace Conference was held in Paris. Nineteen foreign ministers attended the Conference, including the six ASEAN nations plus Vietnam and Laos, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Canada, India and Zimbabwe. As well as all four Cambodian parties, the Hun Sen government and the three members of the CGDK coalition.⁵¹ Just prior to the Paris Peace Conference the Salvation Front of Cambodia and the Ministry of Information held a

⁵⁰ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide, elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 86-87.

⁵¹ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide*, 88.

International Seminar on the ‘Genocide Phenomena and the Prevention of their Return’ in Phnom Penh. The Hun Sen government was still in search of recognition. During this seminar they pleaded for an International Court of Justice, to vacate the UN seat that was at the time still taken by the Khmer Rouge, to stop the military aid to the Khmer Rouge, to oppose any power-sharing arrangement with the Khmer Rouge prior to any elections and to force the Khmer Rouge to free all of their hostages.⁵²

One of the countries that had insisted the Khmer Rouge to be present at the peace talks was Thailand. Since the invasion of the Vietnamese soldiers into Cambodia the Thai government was a trading partner of the Khmer Rouge. Not only the Thai government pleaded for the presence of the Khmer Rouge at the negotiations, the US ambassador had also stated that the Khmer Rouge should not be excluded from any future Cambodian Government.⁵³ Prince Sihanouk also kept on supporting the Khmer Rouge, because he had an alignment with the Chinese. Hun Sen stated the following in October 1989 Hun Sen about Sihanouk’s alignment with China and therefore with the Khmer Rouge:

“He is more or less a hostage to the Khmer Rouge. He has lost 19 children and grand children [during the Pol Pot regime, they were murdered by the Khmer Rouge] but at Paris he demanded the omission of the word genocide”.⁵⁴

The former King of Cambodia was caught up in the political games of the international community. He lost a lot of family members and if it was not for his friendship with high officials in China he would have been dead too. Still he insisted that the word ‘genocide’ would not be used in official documents.

Not only was the word ‘genocide’ scraped from the documents used during the peace talks, the schools also stopped teaching about the Khmer Rouge era. The

⁵² International Seminar on the Genocide Phenomena and Prevention of Their Return, Phnom Penh, July 22nd 1989, Appeal, from the book by: Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide, elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 88.

⁵³ Mary Kay Magistad, ‘Khmer Rouge are closer to new chance at power’, *Boston Globe*, April 17th 1989.

⁵⁴ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide, elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 90.

subject turned out to be too precarious. Im Sethy, who was working on the Educational Ministry, remembered that he was not allowed to use the word genocide during the time UNTAC was active in Cambodia. “An international staff member of Unicef chastised him for using the word genocide on the grounds that UN-era of peacekeeping had swept the whole subject under the carpet of reconciliation between all factions.”⁵⁵ After the election of 1993 the CPP and Funcinpec, whom had won the elections, were unable to reach an agreement on how children had to be educated on the subject. The result was that for almost a decade the whole subject was, except for two sentences in history books, completely ignored at all the primary, secondary and high schools.⁵⁶

The Paris Peace Conference was offending to a lot of Cambodians, but it paved the path for the Paris Peace Agreements in October 1991, where (except for the Khmer Rouge) the different parties in Cambodia signed a peace agreement. UNTAC would ensure that the Agreement would be implemented in Cambodia. UNTAC would confiscate caches of weapons and military supplies throughout the country, they would also supervise ceasefire. Cambodians who had fled to the border of Thailand would be repatriated, and UNTAC would organize and conduct the upcoming free and fair election.⁵⁷

A peace keeping force was installed by the UN, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Until that date UNTAC was the largest UN peacekeeping operation. It deployed 22,000 people and it cost 1.6 billion, this money almost totally went to the UN delegates who were working in the area. The mission had multiple goals such as the resettlement of 350,000 Cambodian refugees who had fled to Thailand, disarming the Khmer Rouge army and the Governmental troops and prepare for the national elections. During the elections UNTAC watched over the democratic process, supervised the transitional government until the new government was elected, helped with the rebuilding of the country and tried to clear the path for reconciliation.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide, elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 146.

⁵⁶ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide*, 146-147.

⁵⁷ Paris Peace Agreement, Paris October 23rd 1991.

⁵⁸ Karen Coates, *Cambodia now, life in the wake of war* (North Carolina 2005) 344.

Soon after the Paris Peace Agreement was signed it was clear that it would fail for a number of different reasons. From both sides of the conflict the Agreement was violated. The Phnom Penh government yielded none of its powers and the Khmer Rouge did not allow the UNTAC into their territory. The ceasefire was also violated by the Khmer Rouge, they had launched some major attacks in particular on Vietnamese settlers in Cambodia. A lot of casualties fell during these attacks, even on the site of UNTAC. Prince Sihanouk was crowned by the UN to be the President of the Supreme National Council. He was the hope of the international community and of a lot of Cambodians who thought he could be the link between the parties. But even the prince did not take the Agreement serious. He spent most of his time in a palace his friend Kim Il Sung had build for him in North Korea.

3.2.2 Elections

Two of the three major goals of the Paris Peace Agreement were not lived up to, namely: restoring and maintaining peace in Cambodia and the promotion of national reconciliation. The preparation of the upcoming elections was in an advanced stage. However, just before the elections, the Khmer Rouge announced that they would boycott the elections. This meant that the important parties during the elections were the Cambodian People's Party of Hun Sen and the Royalist party FUNCINPEC (French Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique et Cooperatif). This party was led by Sihanouks son Prince Norodom Ranriddh, and one of its main goals was to end what they called the Vietnamese occupation. The Buddhist Liberal Democratic party played a minor role in the elections.

In May 1993 the free elections under the supervision of the UN took place. A lot of Cambodians went to the ballot boxes to cast their votes. 89.6 percent of the Cambodians voting members showed up at the polls. The party of Hun Sen had done their best to intimidate the Cambodians so that they would vote for them. The outcome was different than most of the world the Cambodian population included had expected. Hun Sen's ruling Cambodian People's Party only won 38 percent of the votes. The nationalist party of Prince Norodom Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party won got 45 percent of the votes.

The Cambodian people had chosen the Royalist party of the son of Prince Sihanouk. For the Cambodians this party represented the last ‘good’ days that Cambodia had known before US bombs destroyed the countryside and the Khmer Rouge took over control. Collective memory based on stories of elderly Cambodians or based on own experience of Cambodia in peace; a country full of old traditions and strong family bounds. The Cambodians were longing back to these days, the days before the trauma. Although the FUNCINPEC party had won the elections and the People’s Party of Hun Sen lost the elections, it was Hun Sen who became the Prime Minister of Cambodia. This was a blow in the face of a lot Cambodians who had been looking forward to the elections and really wanted to believe that democracy would come to Cambodia.

The Paris Peace agreement had not brought what most people had hoped for. The fightings between the Khmer Rouge and the government troops continued, the elections were democratic but the outcome was ignored and the path to reconciliation was not cleared. There were no plans for an upcoming tribunal even worse it was a taboo to mention the genocide. It would take until the death of Pol Pot in 1998 before real talks about an international tribunal would start. Slowly the countries that had supported the Khmer Rouge regime started to feel embarrassed about it, but it was only the Thai government who openly apologized for it.

3.3 1998-2008: Rocky path towards reconciliation

On the 25th of December 1998 Nuon Chea, also known as ‘Brother Number Two’ and Khieu Samphan gave a government-organized press conference at a luxurious hotel in Phnom Penh. These two men were one of the prime suspects for the genocide tribunal. They had fled to Thailand but this time the Thai government would not give them amnesty and they handed them over to the Cambodian government. The Thai government had imposed that the two men would not be arrested after they had been repatriated to Cambodia. Instead of police custody they got police protection. At a press conference on the 29th of December 1998 Kieu Samphan urged Cambodians and foreigners to “let bygones be bygones”, he further stated that Cambodia should focus on the present and should “forget the past”. He made this comments after he had made his apologies saying he was “sorry very sorry for the suffering he had caused the Cambodian people”.⁵⁹

Nuon Chea who was also at the conference was also asked to make his apology to the Cambodian people. He said: “Actually we are very sorry not only for the lives of the people of Cambodia, but even for the lives of all the animals that suffered because of the war.”⁶⁰ Nuon Chea was referring to the civil war between the Khmer Rouge and the government troops and not to the years the Khmer Rouge was in power. He tried to give out a Buddhist message by referring to the value of live of all creatures when he mentioned the loss of animals and human lives in the same sentence. Nuon Chea was asked by a reporter if he thought the Khmer Rouge were responsible for large numbers of deaths, his reply was: “Please leave this to history. This is an old story. Please leave this to the past.”⁶¹

Earlier in April 1998 the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge had fallen. Pol Pot had died under suspicious circumstances around that time. He had spent his last years as a prisoner of Ta Mok, who was nicknamed the butcher, after he had ordered the murder of Son Sen and the major part of his family. Pol Pot had forfeited after an internal struggle among the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge.

⁵⁹ Seth Mydans, “Under prodding, two apologize for Cambodian Anguish” from: *The New York Times* (December 30th, 1998).

⁶⁰ Seth Mydans, “Under prodding, two apologize for Cambodian Anguish” from: *The New York Times* (December 30th, 1998).

⁶¹ Seth Mydans, “Under prodding, two apologize for Cambodian Anguish” from: *The New York Times* (December 30th, 1998).

With the death of Pol Pot a lot of Cambodians lost hope that the other leaders would ever face trial. These leaders were getting older and the fear of many Cambodians that these men and women would die before they were held responsible was starting to be the reality. It also fed the idea that as long as you had good connections you could get away with everything, even genocide. Mr Hammarberg an United Nations official in Cambodia said in an interview: “The major human rights problem in Cambodia, in my assessment, is impunity. People in positions of power, people with money, people with weapons---they can do whatever they want against the small people. It is like cancer in society. It makes people feel vulnerable and powerless.”⁶²

By the year 2000 the UN and the Cambodian Government were negotiating an international tribunal. Many Cambodians were relieved to hear that some of the Khmer Rouge leaders would face trial. A survey of the ‘Center for Social Development’ found that 52 percent of the survivors would be willing to come forward and testify in a trial.⁶³ It would take until 2006 before the tribunal would really start with the trials against the top Khmer Rouge leaders. The greatest fear of a lot of Cambodians is that the leaders who are being tried will die before the verdict is spoken and that these leaders will escape their punishment. This is not unrealistic given the fact that these men and women are fairly old, and some of the top leaders have already passed away.

Most of the Khmer Rouge top leaders did not feel responsible for the deaths and killings during their regime, even though the tribunal had started and the international community was acknowledging the genocide. In an interview in 2007 Nuon Chea acknowledged there were killings but he claims not to be responsible for them. He laughs about the claims of genocide. “I was aware of some killings- but how could I have controlled it? There were too many factors.”⁶⁴

The Cambodian People’s Party made an effort to get the tribunal in Cambodia. Now that the tribunal is there most Cambodians feel relieved, but at the same time

⁶² Seth Mydans, “A MILLION GHOSTS: A special report; Revenge or justice? Cambodians confront the past.” From: *The New York Times* (December 31st, 1998).

⁶³ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide? Elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 144-145.

⁶⁴ Evan Osnos, “Latest interview with Nuon Chea-Brother Number Two of the Killing Fields”, from the *The Chicago Tribune* (February 16, 2007).

anxious for what is to come. Old wounds that never really healed are wide open again. This time there is more of a chance that they will eventually heal. The discussion about the Demokratik Kampuchea is alive in Cambodia. The Cambodians have to face their past.

4 TUOL SLENG (S-21)

1. *You must answer accordingly to my questions. Do not turn them away.*
2. *Do not try to hide the facts by making pretexts of this and that. You are strictly prohibited to contest me.*
3. *Do not be a fool for you are a chap who dares to thwart the revolution.*
4. *You must immediately answer my questions without wasting time to reflect.*
5. *Do not tell me either about your immoralities or the revolution.*
6. *While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all.*
7. *Do nothing. Sit still and wait for my orders. If there is no order, keep quiet. When I ask to do something you must do it right away without protesting.*
8. *Do not make pretexts about Kampuchea Krom in order to hide your jaw of traitor.*
9. *If you do not follow all the above rules, you shall get many lashes of electric wire.*
10. *If you disobey any point of my regulations you shall get either ten lashes or five shocks of electric discharge.⁶⁵*

This Chapter seeks to investigate Tuol Sleng as a museum from 1979 shortly after the Vietnamese took over Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge until now. What were and are the politics of remembrance of the National Government of Tuol Sleng as a museum nowadays and what were the politics behind the commemoration of the genocide in the early years after 1979 and in the years the civil war between the government and the Khmer Rouge was at its peak. By analyzing numbers and figures of the visitors of the museum and interviews with survivors, employees of the museum, researchers etc, but also by looking at the way the exhibition is set up I will try to unravel the thoughts and politics behind the only museum in Cambodia which deals with the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge. What is the influence of this museum on the collective memory of the genocide in Cambodia and outside of Cambodia? The museum commemorates the victims of the genocide throughout Cambodia, but it commemorates in particular the victims of Tuol Sleng. A lot of the victims in Tuol Sleng were Khmer Rouge cadres who could not be trusted any-more according to high Khmer Rouge leaders. How does the museum deal with this fact? How is the exhibition set up and for whom?

⁶⁵ This rules and regulations are shown at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. In each cell, the regulations were posted on small pieces of black board. The prisoners were required to abide by all the regulations. To do anything even to alter their positions while trying to sleep, the inmates had to ask permission from the prison guards. The spelling and grammar are not in correct English but this is the way it is translated and on display in the Museum.

On August the 2nd, one day after the Vietnamese troops had arrived in the abandoned city of Phnom Penh, two Vietnamese photographers were drawn towards a huge building by the stench of decomposing bodies. The compound where they were drawn to was surrounded by fence topped with barbed wire. Over the gate was a red placard inscribed in yellow with a Khmer slogan: “Fortify the spirit of the revolution! Be on your guard against the strategy and tactics of the enemy so as to defend the country, the people and the Party.”⁶⁶ This was the only sign that was put on view at the gate of the compound. The compound consisted of four buildings positioned around a square space of grass. These four buildings were all three stories high and in the middle of the grass square was a smaller building of one story high.

When the Vietnamese photographers entered the compound it was not clear to them what the purpose of the building was during the Khmer Rouge years, but the small building in the middle of the compound seemed to be some kind of administration office because it was littered with documentation papers. The stench which had drawn the men to the compound came from the most southern building. It was in this building where the photographers found a horrific scene which they would immortalize with their cameras. Fourteen recently murdered men were lying in different rooms; some were still chained to the iron frames on the beds. Their throats had been slit open and the blood on the floor was still wet, which indicated that the killings had taken place not more than several days before. The walls and even the ceiling’s were covered with blood.

In the other rooms left behind stuff such as shackles, torture equipment and ammunition boxes filled with human faeces was the silent evidence of what had taken place. The Vietnamese men took photos of every room; the photos of the death bodies are still on display in the museum. Over the next days the Vietnamese discovered in nearby houses thousands of documents, mug-shot photographs and undeveloped negatives; silent remnants of the people who were imprisoned in S-21. It became clear to the Vietnamese that they had stumbled into a very important large scaled Khmer Rouge prison.

⁶⁶ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot’s secret prison* (California 1999) 2. The placard is shown in the 1981 East German documentary film *Die Angkar*. Many of the still photographs used in the film, which were found in Tuol Sleng in 1979 and 1980, have disappeared.

4.1 Security Office 21, S-21

In the early 1960's S-21 was a high school named Ponhea Yat after a semi legendary Cambodian king associated with the foundation of Phnom Penh. During the Lon Nol regime in the seventies the school was renamed into Tuol Svay Prey High School, after the district it was located in. This former Tuol Svay Prey high school had been transformed by the DK regime into its central prison and interrogation centre, known to only a few high rank Khmer Rouge leaders and the people who worked there as S-21, security office 21, or Tuol Sleng. The word Tuol Sleng has very ominous connotations in Khmer. The name was probably carefully chosen by Khmer leaders, because in Khmer language Tuol Sleng literally refers to “a poisonous hill on which those bearing guilt (or poison) [toward Angkar] were held”.⁶⁷

Kang Keck Iev alias Duch was the commandant of S21 throughout the time it was in operation. Before Duch became the commandant of the interrogation centre he was a teacher in mathematics. He proved to be a very harsh and cruel man who even scared the guards in the compound. There worked between 1500 to 1700 people in S-21 at its peak, even children were trained and put to work as guards in this torture factory.⁶⁸ The victims in the prison were taken from all parts of the country and from all ranks in the Khmer Rouge society; even high ranked Khmer Rouge officials were interrogated and tortured, before they were sentenced to death. Not only Cambodians, although they were the vast majority, but also people with other nationalities were imprisoned at Tuol Sleng. Among the prisoners were Vietnamese, Laotians, Pakistanis, British, Americans, Canadians, New Zealanders and Australians.⁶⁹ These foreigners escaped the country too late, or they were being captured in the waters surrounding Cambodia. Entire Cambodian families including children, babies and elderly were caught and brought over to Tuol Sleng.

⁶⁷ Youk Chhang, *The poisonous Hill that is Tuol Sleng*, from the webpage: www.dccam.org/tuol_sleng_prison.htm. Youk Chhang is the director of The documentation Centre of Cambodia. In connection to the word Tuol Sleng the following information also from the same article by Youk Chhang: “According to the *Khmer Buddhist Dictionary* (1967), the word *tuol* is a noun that refers to ground that is higher in level than that around it. *Sleng*, in turn, can be a noun or an adjective. As an adjective, *sleng*, means ‘supplying guilt’ (del aoy tos) or ‘bearing poison’ (del noam aoy mean toas) or ‘enemy of disease’ (del chea sat-trov ning rok). As a noun, ‘Sleng’ refers to two kinds of indigenous trees that are poisonous. The first type of tree, *sleng thom* or ‘big sleng’, has a large trunk, leaves and fruit. The second type is *sleng vour* or ‘sleng vine’, which is shaped somewhat like a vine with small fruit. Both are poisonous”.

⁶⁸ This information comes from the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.

⁶⁹ According to the Tuol Sleng Archive.

Before the prisoners were placed in the cells they were photographed and detailed biographies of their childhood up to the dates of their arrest were recorded and documented. The duration of the imprisonment varied between a couple of days or weeks up to six or seven months depending on how long it took to get their confessions on paper. After the ‘confessions’ of the prisoners were forced out and documented, in most of the cases as a result of days of torture, pain and being dehumanized by the staff of S-21, the prisoners would be taken to Choeung Ek. A guard at S-21, named Kok Sros, remembers that he had to bring prisoners from their cells to the assembly point just outside the compound. Kok Sros said in an interview:

“When the prisoners heard they were to be taken away they tried to break their locks and struggle with the guards. They would be packed into [the] trucks and taken away to the west”, in Khmer mythology this means in the direction of death.⁷⁰

Approximate fourteen thousand people; women, children, men and elderly, past through Tuol Sleng⁷¹ and went to the ‘west’. Only a handful would survive.

4.2 *The Museum*

After the discovery of S-21 the prison was turned into a museum, in which the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge were shown. From 1980 until this day the Tuol Sleng Museum has not majorly changed its primary exhibition. When you enter the compound you first see the small wooden building which was where the administration was located during the DK years. Today this is the place where you can buy your entrance fee and if you want you can pay to get a guide. The first building you will be leaded to by the guide is the building where the torture rooms were and where the last fourteen victims were found still chained to beds. Before

⁷⁰ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot's secret prison* (California 1999) 139-140.

⁷¹ It is difficult to give an exact number of people who died in S-21 or at Choeung Ek after incarceration at S-21, but the number of death that is established after research by different genocide studies is estimated at fourteen thousand.

this building are the graves of the fourteen prisoners that were the last to be killed. The rooms are left just the way they were found by the Vietnamese. The beds and torture equipment are still in the rooms, the blood stains on the floor, walls and even on the ceiling which is probably as high as three meters are still visible. The pictures shot by the two Vietnamese photographers who found the compound hang in every room. These pictures show the heavily mutilated bodies of the victims, the way they were left by the Khmer Rouge, and found by the Vietnamese.

From this building you go to the second one which primarily contains enhanced mug shots of the prisoners taken on arrival. In front of this building one of the torture machines is still present, a water basin to where prisoners were lowered into. In the first room of the exhibition pictures of western people who were captured at Tuol Sleng have a prominent place. The mug shots probably taken on arrival of them were never found, so there are pictures of them from before they were captured on display.

The second and third room also primarily contain mug shots. At first I felt overwhelmed by the amount of black and white pictures of people that were staring at me from every corner of the room. When I moved closer to the pictures I saw individuals; persons, terrified, bewildered, angry, and shocked. Women, children, men, some very old others very young and everything in between all caught for one second on the brink of death.

The third room shows, besides the mug shots as in the second room, also pictures of people as they were undergoing torture and post mortem shots. On one side you see the pictures of young men with bruised faces and on the other side you see the pictures of them after they had been beaten to death during the interrogation. Their faces tormented and deformed by the beatings. In these rooms are also torture machines and equipment on display. In the next room more torture machines together with paintings made by one of the seven known survivors of S-21, Van Nath, are shown. He painted the torture methods of the Khmer Rouge, and although he had not endured all the methods himself, he heard the screaming's and painted from his memory and how he thought it must have looked like. The paintings portray babies being pulled out of the arms of mothers and being shot, or people

being tortured by tarring out their finger nails and poring pure alcohol over the wounds.

The last room contains pictures of the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek during the excavation, and two maps. One of the painted maps represents the demographic scale of the exodus that followed the Khmer Rouge revolution. The other map shows aggression from the Khmer Rouge towards Vietnam during 1975-1978. In this room the infamous skull map is also on display. The map was made of bones and skulls of the Khmer Rouge victims. It represents Cambodia, the lake and rivers are coloured red, like blood. This last room is the part of the exhibition that changed the most during the three decades of the museums existence. In 2002 the skull map was dismantled after critiques from different parts in Cambodian society as well as from outside of Cambodia. The room was redecorated and there is now more space for the Buddhist culture.

I will come back later to these changes in the exhibition and the skull map in this Chapter.

4.3 Tuol Sleng and International legitimacy

Shortly after the Vietnamese discovered S-21 they knew that they had stumbled into a cruel and vicious facility which was of great importance to the Khmer Rouge. They immediately closed of the site, cleaned it up and began to examine and document the archive of Tuol Sleng. Although there were guided tours for foreign visitors, during the time S-21 was transforming into a museum, no Cambodian visitors were allowed within the walls of the compound. The Ministry of Culture, Information and Propaganda explained it through a statement that the sight was primarily intended “to show.....international guests the cruel torture committed by the traitors to the Khmer people.”⁷² In a 1980 report of the Ministry of Culture, Information and Propaganda this was underscored. In the report the Ministry underlines that the museum was “not opened to the public, but for the international guests and participants only”.⁷³

⁷² David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot's secret prison* (California 1999) 8, quoting the Ministry of Culture report.

⁷³ Judy Ledgerwood, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes, national narrative”, from the book: Edited by: David E. Lorey & William H. Beezley, *Genocide, collective violence, and popular memory*.

Within a couple of weeks the first official foreign visitors arrived at Tuol Sleng. On the 25th of January a group of journalists, all from socialist countries, were invited by the Vietnamese to visit Cambodia to celebrate the installation of the new Cambodian Government: the People's Republic of Kampuchea, PRK. On a tour through the city the journalists were also brought to Tuol Sleng. At this time Tuol Sleng was not a museum yet, but the Vietnamese recognized the political importance of the site which could be used as propaganda for the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia and as proof of cruelties committed by the Khmer Rouge. They saw Tuol Sleng as a tool to 'educate' the world of what atrocities the Khmer Rouge was capable of.

Most of the early visitors were from socialist countries, it was nevertheless important for the Vietnamese to keep these countries on their side. The communist world was split into two fractions: the Russian side and the Chinese side. The Chinese were allies of the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese stressed on every occasion they could get that it were the Chinese who supplied the Khmer Rouge with weapons. On the other side were the Russians who were allies of the Vietnamese. America was just trying to move towards the Chinese on a diplomatic level to balance their animosity towards Russia and Vietnam. Although the first visitors were from socialist countries who were not opposed to the invasion of Vietnam in to Cambodia, it was still part of a big campaign to educate the world about the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge.

A couple of weeks after the discovery of S-21 the new government appointed Mai Lam a Vietnamese colonel to transform S-21 into a museum. Mai Lam could speak, read and write in Khmer and he had an extensive experience in legal studies and museology. He was the curator of the Museum of American War Crimes in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. His first task was to gather and organize the documents found at the compound and in the nearby houses, these documents were important in the trials of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.⁷⁴

After Mai Lam and his team organized most of the documents in an archive he could focus on the transformation of S-21 in to the Cambodian Museum of

The politics of remembrance in the twentieth century (Scholarly Resources Inc. 2002) page 108. David Chandler notes that the word *participants* here may refer to the foreigners who attended genocide trials in August 1979.

⁷⁴ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot's secret prison* (California 1999) 4-5.

Genocide. There were a couple of difficulties and precare subjects Mai Lam had to deal with. His first task was to make the exhibition in such a way that it would speak to the minds of western people. The mug-shots on the walls as we have seen before were the biggest part of the museums exhibition; even today the photos are the most important component of the museum. These photos were the silent prove of the massacres in the killing fields. It gives faces to the victims who were killed by the Khmer Rouge. It personalizes the grief and pain of this genocide, which is especially important for foreign visitors.

Pictures of foreigners who were imprisoned at S-21 were put very prominently on display by Mai Lam. The fact that these pictures are so very prominently visible is important. First of all are these pictures not the mug shots taken by the Khmer Rouge on arrival but pictures of the foreigners in better times, probably because the mug shots taken on arrival are lost. Mai Lam probably chose to put these pictures so prominently on display so that the international community could see that it was not only Cambodians who were victimized by the Khmer Rouge but it was their people too. Another piece of the display was a map that was hanging next to the skull map, it depicted locations and escalations of Khmer Rouge 'acts of aggression' towards Vietnam. This map was made to make it appear that the invasion of Vietnam in to Cambodia was an act of self defence by the Vietnamese.

A couple of months after the discovery of the S-21 prison the visitors of the museum were not only from socialist countries. Western journalists came to Cambodia to draw attention in their countries of the Cambodian genocide. With succes; Cambodia and the suffering of the Cambodian people became a hot topic for a while in western countries. The Tuol Sleng Museum became important in the visualisation of the pain and suffering of the Cambodian people during the Khmer Rouge years.

The civil war between the Khmer Rouge and the government troops ended in 1999, less than a year after the death of Pol Pot. The Tuol Sleng Museum was, especially in the first two decades after 1979, important for the Cambodian government. The museum was a good propaganda tool to prove to the outside world that the ideological and political enemy of Vietnam: China was an ally of the Khmer Rouge, was behind the mass killings in Cambodia. While the United

Nations were supporting the Khmer Rouge, foreign journalists and diplomats were taking on a tour through the Tuol Sleng museum and to the killing fields of Choeng Ek. They were given printed texts that were written in commission of the PRK. These texts were written in English, French and Spanish. One of these texts proclaims:

“At least two million and perhaps three out of Kampuchea’s seven million people died. Kampuchea was drained of blood. The cities and villages were utterly devastated.... Such was the Pol Pot – Ieng Sary regime, installed with the aid of Chinese advisors and Chinese weapons. As a tool of Peking policy, Kampuchea got involved in an atrocious war against Vietnam.”⁷⁵

The number of victims proclaimed in this piece of text is probably too high⁷⁶, but it was true that the Khmer Rouge could count on support from China and that the Chinese were suppliers of weapons to the Khmer Rouge. This was already the case during and even before the Demokratik Kampuchea years but also after the invasion of the Vietnamese. The Khmer Rouge had friendship ties with the Chinese and the Chinese government did help them with providing weapons and expertise but they were not running Cambodia through the Khmer Rouge. In the first decade after Demokratik Kampuchea China was the main enemy of the Vietnamese and it was opportune to the Vietnamese government to put as much blame of the whole situation to China.

The bones found throughout Cambodia were also used as (propaganda) tools by the Vietnamese and the newly formed government as evidence of genocide and as justification of their presence in Cambodia for the international world and of the PRK’s control in the country for the Cambodians. The United States government and other anti-Vietnamese governments were sceptical about the exhibition at Tuol

⁷⁵ Rachel Hughes, “Nationalism and memory at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes, Phnom Penh, Cambodia”, from the book: Edited by Katharina Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone, *Contested pasts, the politics of memory* (London 2003) 179.

⁷⁶ The number that is now commonly used by most scholars is 1,7 million Cambodians who died during the reign of the Khmer Rouge. This means that 1 out of 4 Cambodians died between 1975 and 1979 of starvation, exhaustion or murder.

Sleng. In official reports from these countries they state that the exhibition is an exaggeration or even a fabrication of what had happened in Cambodia from 1975 until 1979. Extreme versions of this fabrication story even claimed that the Vietnamese took human remains from Vietnam to Cambodia to put it on display in the Museum and at other sites so they could blame it on the Khmer Rouge and China. The Khmer Rouge even claimed that the bones were from victims of the Vietnamese.⁷⁷

4.4 A nation's memory, Tuol Sleng and regional politics

Throughout the years the Tuol Sleng museum has been used as a political instrument. From the way the exhibition is set up to election posters in the museum. This chapter will describe the politics of memory within Cambodia with the Tuol Sleng Museum as an example. How did the Government use the Museum for political and propaganda purposes, and what were the problems facing Mai Lam while he was rebuilding the torture prison into a national museum of genocides? What measures did Mai Lam take to make this museum a national museum and not just a museum that remembered the victims of Phnom Penh or the victims that were incarcerated at the S-21 facility?

The fact that the horrors that happened in Cambodia were inflicted by Cambodians towards Cambodians made the task to build a Cambodian Genocide Museum difficult for Mai Lam. Whereas in the Museum of American War Crimes in Vietnam the exhibition is about horrors inflicted from outside, the victims and the perpetrators in Cambodia were still living side to side. In the case of the Cambodian Museum of Genocide it was much more precarious how to bring the message across, and what the message should be. Not only the fact that it were Cambodians killing Cambodians made the task of building a museum difficult but the fact that the Khmer Rouge were communists just as the Vietnamese and the new members of the government, made it even more important to handle the subject with caution.

⁷⁷ Rachel Hughes, "Nationalism and memory at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes, Phnom Penh, Cambodia", from the book: Edited by Katharina Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone, *Contested pasts, the politics of memory* (London 2003) 179.

Mai Lam had to come up with some kind of construction which would place the Khmer Rouge apart from the Communist range of thoughts. The top of the Khmer Rouge had to be placed far from the ‘normal’ Cambodians and other members of the Khmer Rouge. Mai Lam chose to portray the top of the Khmer Rouge as a group of people who totally lost their sense of compassion and were very radical, much more radical than other communistic factions. The Khmer Rouge was always referred to as the Pol Pot – Ieng sary clique in official state documents and information leaflets at the museum and later at the Choeung Ek memorial. By doing this the Khmer Rouge were being minimized down to a couple of persons. These persons could be the focus of anger for the Cambodians. Some of the members of the new government including the new premier of the country were also former Khmer Rouge cadres. The Khmer Rouge ideology was not portrayed as a bad ideology.

One of the other diversionary tactics of the Cambodian government was the comparison with the Nazis. In the 1970 and the 1980 Jews who were victimized by the Nazi’s gained a lot of attention that they had not received before. In the western world the interest for victims and their stories was growing. Following this new sentiment in Europe and America, it was tactful to use the western discourse of the Holocaust. By using a western discourse the impact of the museum was bigger on the international visitors, because it was something the western visitors could more easily relate to. It was also important that the parallel between East-European and Russian communist regimes would not be drawn. Although the Stalinist show trials and the gulag camps resemble more with the practices of the Khmer Rouge, it was safer to use the Holocaust as example. Despite the fact that Mai Lam did explicitly make the comparison between the Nazi death camps and the S-21 prison, there are scholars that argue that parallels to Nazi camps were deliberately constructed. Mai Lam confirms that he received help from eastern German specialists who memorialized Nazi camps as monuments.

The second issue Mai Lam had to deal with in this museum was the fact that it were Cambodians killing Cambodians. The strategy to minimize the responsibility of the things happened during the DK years down to a couple of people was also a tactic to distract people from the fact that it were ‘normal’ Cambodians who

committed these crimes. A lot of the killings were committed by children, who were taken by force from families to join the Khmer Rouge army or willingly placed in the army, which is something that is not discussed in the permanent exhibition of the museum. Nevertheless, the Documentation Center of Cambodia organized exhibitions in the last decade about the perpetrators which were exhibited on the second floor of the second building of the Tuol Sleng museum. The museum's permanent exhibition is almost totally about the victims. Twice a day a movie is played at the museum in which two survivors of the Tuol Sleng museum walk through the museum accompanied by a former guard. This documentary is very interesting, the questions asked by the survivors to the guard are more direct than the questions Cambodians ask in other documentaries or in real life, about the killings.

Another precarious subject Mai Lam had to deal with when he established the exhibition was about the political background of the prisoners at Tuol Sleng. A large part of the prisoners in Tuol Sleng were Khmer Rouge cadres themselves, who were taken away by the *santebal* police with their families. They had fallen out of grace by their leaders or their names were mentioned by other prisoners during interrogations. Mai Lam gave some of the high ranking Khmer Rouge leaders, who were captured and brought to Tuol Sleng, a prominent place in the exhibition. These Khmer Rouge leaders were depicted in the exhibition as true revolutionaries. The canonisation of these true revolutionaries was centred around the figure of Hu Nim, who was Minister of Information and Propaganda under the Demokratik Kampuchea regime. Hu Nim got arrested in April 1977 and was brought over to Tuol Sleng with his family. July 1977, three months after their incarceration they were executed.

Until 1999 the cell in which Hu Nim was imprisoned was singled with information signs about him, he was also singled out in the brochure of the Museum. His confessions and cell were pictured in each of the five different brochures printed between 1980 and 1999. Hu Nim had a heroic status within the exhibition. He was portrayed as a true revolutionary who had the best intentions with Cambodia and the Cambodians and who in fact was a victim of the Khmer Rouge top leaders as well. The new leaders of Cambodia had been high Khmer

Rouge officials as well. They used Hu Nim as propaganda for themselves, by turning him into a hero Hun Sen and Heng Samrin became heroes as well.

One of the icons of the Tuol Sleng Museum is a picture of a woman with her new born baby in her hands. The picture is well known all over the world and became iconic for the Cambodian genocide. The woman on the picture is Chan Kim Srung, she was the wife of Puk Suvann, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Khmer Rouge. He was also incarcerated at the prison and sentenced to death. Although the picture is well known all over the world and represents the pure evil of the Khmer Rouge most of the people do not know that the woman on the picture is the wife of one of the Ministers of the Khmer Rouge. She and her baby represent the innocence of the Cambodian people and the suffering they had to go through, but at the same time she belongs to the wrongdoers. Cambodians like herself were victimized by her husband.

The photographs of Hu Nim and other Khmer Rouge officials such as Koy Thoun and Hou Youn are still on display in the museum.⁷⁸ Since 1999 the museum changed the exhibition by removing the information signs at the cell of Hu Nim and by removing the additional information from the museum's brochure. By giving these high ranking Khmer Rouge officials such a prominent place in the museum they were made martyrs of the Cambodian people. Not the ideology of the Khmer Rouge was under attack in the museum but the way some of the leaders handled the sudden power and how they lost themselves in their own paranoia.

In July 1980 the museum opened its doors for Cambodian as well as international visitors, one of the few survivors of S-21, Ung Pech became the director of the museum.⁷⁹ Although the Museum opened its doors to everybody there were still regulations. During weekdays groups and international visitors were welcome in the Museum and only on Sunday Cambodians who were not part of a group excursion could enter the Museum. Immediately after the ban on Cambodian visitors was lifted, thousands of Cambodians came to visit the museum. Not to see what kind of horrors had taken place inside the compound, most Cambodians knew

⁷⁸ Rachel Hughes, Nationalism and memory at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from the book: edited by Katharine Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone, *Contested Pasts, the politics of memory* (London 2003) 183.

⁷⁹ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot's secret prison* (California 1999) 5, the exact date of the opening is not very clear but the museum opened its doors for Cambodians in July.

first hand to what kind of cruelty the Khmer Rouge was capable of, they came to search for relatives and beloved ones who had disappeared. Between the thousands of mug shots and documents they were seeking for information about the faith of the person they were looking. The agony of these Cambodians searching for truth must have been overwhelming. Finding information about your loved ones meant on the one hand knowledge about the faith of the person missing and on the other hand it meant that this person would never come back. The first years most visitors were Cambodians. By October 1980 over three hundred thousand Cambodians and eleven thousand foreigners, mostly from socialist countries such as Vietnam, Soviet Union, Laos, Hungary, Poland etc., had visited the museum.⁸⁰ Because Cambodians were only allowed to visit the Museum on Sunday the lines must have been hours long to get in.

As said before the exhibition at the Tuol Sleng Museum consist almost entirely of pictures of the people who were held imprisoned at Tuol Sleng. The creators and the curators of the museum wanted to show the faces of the victims and in that sense humanize the victims, at the same time protected the anonymity of the victims. It was important that the victims would remain nameless. With the opening of the museum to Cambodians it happened that people recognized their loved ones in the pictures. It did occur that the names of these victims were written above the picture, or that these relatives asked the director of the museum to write down their names at an information sign. The names that were written down by the family members were removed by the curators as soon as possible. The requests of family members to add a sign with their names is declined by the curators of the museum. The victims were kept nameless. Some of the mug shots from the Tuol Sleng museum have even been given away to an American company, instead of trying to find the family members of these victims on the picture.

In an interview with Sara Colm in 1995, Mai Lam said he wanted to give the Cambodian people a museum that would last throughout many years, a place that would prevent them from forgetting what had happened during the years in which Pol Pot was in power.

⁸⁰ According to the information given by the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, and the information found in David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot's secret prison* (California 1999) 8.

“For seven years I studied....to build up the Museum.....for the Cambodian people to help them study the war and the many aspects of war crimes.... For the regular people who cannot understand, the museum can help them. Even though they suffered from the regime, as a researcher I want them to go [to the museum]. Even though it makes them cry.... The Cambodian people who suffered the war could not understand the war - and the new generation also cannot understand.”⁸¹

This piece of the interview with Mai Lam gives some insight in his vision on the Museum, what the purpose of the Museum was. He explicitly points out that this Museum is also for the later generations of Cambodians who were born after 1979. He did not only try to design a museum that could meet up with the goals and expectations of the government for that time. Nevertheless he also tried to make a place where Cambodians in the future could be educated about the genocide so it would never be forgotten.

Mai Lam tried to explain the unexplainable. As David Chandler writes: “In a sense, Mai Lam’s effort to turn S-21 into a museum was an attempt to make its raw terror ‘bearable’ to others”.⁸² In fact this is always the case in museum that commemorate and educate about genocide or atrocities. On the one hand it is important to bring across the immense horror and on the other hand you need to make it bearable for the visitors. National museums like this that commemorate and educate about atrocities committed on a national scale are always political, they are not only about commemorating the victims. Museums like the Tuol Sleng museum are important political instruments. In the first years after the PRK government came in power the museum was used to legitimize the government.

When the civil war between the government troops and the Khmer Rouge got more intense by the mid nineties, the government used the museum to educate the Cambodians about the danger of the Khmer Rouge. The museum became more important on a national level although the international importance was still very great for the Vietnamese backed government. The government displayed from 1990

⁸¹ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot’s secret prison* (California 1999) 8-9.

⁸² David Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 44.

onwards state pamphlets in the museum. A poster in 1990 proclaimed the following: “In the past, as in the present, as in the future, Pol Pot still remains genocidal”.⁸³

The Khmer Rouge propagandized themselves as freedom fighters who were fighting against the Vietnamese occupation. A lot of Cambodians felt they were occupied by the Vietnamese. Even after the last troops had left the country the feeling among Cambodians remained that the regime was a puppet regime of the Vietnamese. The government portrayed themselves as liberators, who liberated Cambodia out of the hands of the Khmer Rouge. The pamphlets in the museum were not just used to raise a mindset with the visitors against the Khmer Rouge, they were also important to recruit young men for the army to fight against the Khmer Rouge. The pamphlets were hanged on a strategic place at the end of the exhibition. The visitors would leave the museum with the idea that the Khmer Rouge threat was not over. After seeing all these cruelties committed by the Khmer Rouge a lot of young men felt the need to join the army and fight against this treat. During the elections in 1993, the government even took it a step further by trying to put election boxes inside the museum.

4.5 *The Skull Map*

Another piece of the exhibition was a map of Cambodia made of skulls and bones which had been collected from different killing fields throughout the country. On the map the rivers and lakes were red; the wall filling map was twelve-square-meter. In an interview with Sara Colms in 1995 Mai Lam admitted he was the originator of the map of skulls. Before that interview he had never openly acknowledged it. He said that preserving the skulls was “very important for the Cambodian people – it is the proof”.⁸⁴ He further explained that he chose to make the map of skulls found across the country to enhance the feeling that this was a national museum for all Cambodians and not just for the people of Phnom Penh.

⁸³ Judy Ledgerwood, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes, national narrative”, from the book; Edited by: David E. Lorey & William H. Beezley, *Genocide, collective violence, and popular memory. The politics of remembrance in the twentieth century* (Scholarly Resources Inc. 2002) 112.

⁸⁴ Judy Ledgerwood, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes, national narrative”, from the book: Edited by, David E. Lorey & William H. Beezley, *Genocide, collective violence, and popular memory. The politics of remembrance in the twentieth century* (Scholarly Resources Inc. 2002) 109.

Nevertheless, it were mostly inhabitants of Phnom Penh who came to visit Tuol Sleng in the first years after the museum was opened for Cambodians. From the start the map was subject of discussions about what to do with the remains of the victims. The controversy of the map would have its climax in 2002, when it was dismantled.

On the 23rd of February 2001, Cambodia's King Sihanouk wrote in a letter to Hun Sen a request of dismantling the map and the cremation of the remains. Not only the skulls on display in the museum of Tuol Sleng but also those on display in many other memorials throughout the country. By cremating the remains the Cambodians would "honour the dead and allow their spirits to be re-born".⁸⁵ The King not only requested the cremation but he also offered ten thousand dollars for the cremation ceremony and another ten thousand dollars to build a memorial Stupa where the ashes of the victims could be placed in. It was not the first time he proposed the cremation of the remains. Just after he had been re-crowned in 1993 he suggested in an open letter to the government that the remains should be cremated in Buddhist ceremonies, so that their spirits could rest and with the rest of these spirits the country would be at peace again.

During the time the King wrote his open letter the civil war between the Khmer Rouge who were in control in some of the western parts in Cambodia and the government was full on. The Tuol Sleng Museum was important as propaganda tool for the government. The focus on the group that was aimed at in the museum shifted from the international community to young Cambodians who could fight in the army of the government.

Eventually the map was dismantled in 2002. The remains were not cremated as suggested by King Sihanouk. After a Buddhist ceremony they were put into cabinets of glass in the museum so they are still on display. Chey Sopheara, director of the museum, explained in his speech that the "natural decay of the skulls made it clear it was time to dismantle the map" and "By removing the skulls, we want to end the fear visitors have while visiting the museum".⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Rachel Hughes, 'Nationalism and memory at Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in: Edited by Katharine Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone, *Contested Pasts, the politics of memory* (London 2003) 185.

⁸⁶ CNN world news, *Cambodia skull map dismantled*, March 10, 2002. find this article at: <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/03/10/cambodia.skulls/index.html>

The comment of Chea Sopheara to end the ‘fear’ of visitors while visiting the museum is striking; the entire exhibition is shocking and distressing. Besides it is not the task of a genocide museum to make the visitor feel comfortable. The question was more whether or not the map was of bad taste. For many visitors, Cambodian as well as international visitors, the map was a prove of the lack of respect to the people who died due to the Khmer Rouge regime and a lack of respect to the families who lost their lost ones during these years. The skulls, although removed from the map, are still on display in the glass cabins, so according to Chea Sopheara the shock effect was created because the skulls were used for the map. After the dismantling of the map the room was made more suitable for commemoration. There is a stupa in the room with a little alter where it is possible to burn incense for the victims. The skull map was replaced with a picture of the former skull map and a satellite map of Cambodia which identifies numerous locations of DK prisons and mass graves.

Youk Chhang the director of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia proclaimed in his speech at Tuol Sleng during the ceremony of the dismantling of the map, that he supported the removal of the skull map because experienced the map as “sensational propaganda”. He further stated: “Propaganda does not serve the truth. Cambodians and foreigners should be educated about the tragic past but publicity like this is not necessary. Scientific explanation does more to help people understand”.⁸⁷ Youk Chang did not think that the map made the souls of the Khmer Rouge victims restless but saw the map as a propaganda piece of the government.

4.6 *Exhibitions at the Tuol Sleng Museum*

In recent years the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) which is located in the Tuol Sleng museum organizes exhibitions on the genocide. Their main goal was always to get justice. The aim of the Documentation Center was to get the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge on trial. When the negotiations on an international tribunal failed the Documentation Center tried to keep the subject alive through different exhibitions.

⁸⁷ CNN world news, *Cambodia skull map dismantled*, March 10, 2002. find this article at: <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/03/10/cambodia.skulls/index.html>

In 2003 DC-Cam organized two special photo exhibitions at the Tuol Sleng Museum. The names of the exhibitions were ‘The victims of history: voice of the Khmer Rouge victims and perpetrators’. The photos were taken by a Cambodian photographer Heng Sinith who had suffered as so many Cambodians during the Demokratik Kampuchea years. He got the idea of the exhibition shortly after the negotiations of a tribunal to try the Khmer Rouge top leaders failed in 2002. By taking the photos and making it into an exhibition Heng Sinith wanted to keep the subject and discussion alive. Youk Chang the director of the Documentation Center Cambodia, asked Heng Sinith if he wanted to show his pictures in the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.

The first exhibition portrayed Khmer Rouge cadres then and now. The exhibition included pictures of them as Khmer Rouge soldiers and pictures of them in their everyday live now. Underneath the pictures were stories of how they became a Khmer Rouge soldier and when and what they think of the Khmer Rouge now. Most of these cadres joined the Khmer Rouge at a very young age, and some of the Khmer Rouge cadres shown at the exhibition were forced either by their parents or the whole community they were living in. The stories of the former Khmer Rouge stories are told through the perspectives of the cadres themselves and most of them portray themselves as victims in stead of perpetrators. Most of the stories of these Khmer Rouge combatants are about the fear they were living in not about the atrocities they have committed, forced or not. One of the Former Khmer Rouge soldiers Nuon Hong says the following:

“During the Demokratik Kamuchea regime, I lived in fear of being taken away at any time. Everyone felt the same. Every few days, a truckload of people was taken away without clear reasons.... fear of making mistakes, fear of being arrested, fear of being killed. Once imprisoned, the chance of being killed. Once imprisoned, the chance of survival was slim”.⁸⁸

All the other stories emphasize on the fact that they were forced to work as Khmer Rouge soldiers or guards. The issue that recurs in all the stories is the tribunal and

⁸⁸ Documentation Center Cambodia, archives.

the issue that the high Khmer Rouge leaders should be tried. Most of the interviewees claim that it is unfair that they are held responsible for deaths during the Khmer Rouge regime while they think of themselves as victims as well. It is true that most of the soldiers were very young and were forced to join the Khmer Rouge, by their parents or soldiers. Nevertheless it is a striking point of view to portray these former Khmer Rouge combats as victims, especially regard to the rest of the museum. Heng Sinith claims in an interview that he tried to make a photographic record about the lives of perpetrators. He said: “I don’t want to show the history of their murders, but their lives as spouses and villagers”.⁸⁹

The second exhibition within the other exhibition showed pictures of what Heng Sinith thought of as the real perpetrators; the top level of the Khmer Rouge. On the one hand he showed the pictures of these former Khmer Rouge soldiers and the lives they were living, these people were portrayed as victims. On the other hand he showed the top level of the Khmer Rouge, these people were the real perpetrators according to the exhibition. He corroborated the point of view the government had always taken, with regard to the question of guilt.

In 2004 the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum exhibited pictures of ten skulls which were excavated not only from the Choeung Ek killing fields but also from other mass graves in Cambodia. Originally DC-Cam wanted to exhibit the skulls and not pictures of the skulls. In a statement they declared that because of the fact that some Cambodians felt uncomfortable with the idea of boxing remains of the victims, they changed the exhibition in to a photo exhibition. According to DC-Cam some Cambodians were afraid that the spirits of the deceased people would not be able to get to the skulls when the skulls would be displayed in boxes. King Sihanouk had also expressed his discomfort with the idea of exhibiting these skulls. DC-Cam released a statement in which they declared:

[that they like the] “majority of Cambodians, believe the bones have a [more] important function in our society: they are reminders for future

⁸⁹ Documentation Center Cambodia, archives, *The photographer Sinith Heng: My heart and soul*, (Khmer Transcripts by Sann Kalyan. Translated and edited by Kok-Thay Eng 2002).

generations of our country's suffering and devastation, and will also serve as evidence of the crimes committed during the 1975-1979 Demokratik Kampuchea regime. But out of respect for the King's wishes not to have the skulls displayed, we have housed them in a separate room at Tuol Sleng..... Their final disposition will be determined once the tribunal is over..... The skulls rest on identical pedestals built from slightly overlapping slats so that air can reach the skulls, thus allowing the spirits to come and go as they wish.....”⁹⁰

Finally the exhibition was opened under the name: ‘The bones cannot find peace until the truth they hold in themselves has been revealed’. The idea behind the exhibition was to show people and in particular the Cambodians how many information can be determined from the bones of the victims. It showed the value of the bones and skulls as proof for the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Information signs next to the pictures of the skulls gave an estimation of the age and gender of the victim. It also gives some insight on what kind of injuries the person died from. Two of the victims died from blunt force trauma, four of sharp-force trauma and four because of bullets. These skulls were not randomly picked but chosen, because of the state of the skulls and of the different traumas they show.

The exhibition was not only for educational reasons on forensic science but also to let the Cambodian people hear a different voice in the debate on the cremation of the remains of the DK victims. King Sihanouk had pleaded for the cremation of the remains several times and through his open letters in newspapers he had dominated the debate. DC-Cam wanted to give their opinion on the subject; their opinion is that the bones are of great value for truth finding and as evidence in the court of justice. The name of the exhibition suggests that the spirits of the victims do not find peace if they were cremated, they find peace if the truth is revealed and the inflictors of their suffering are tried.

In 2005 the exhibition named “Stilled lives” was mounted in the Tuol Sleng museum. Again the focus was on Khmer Rouge soldiers, but this time about their

⁹⁰ Archives of the Documentation Center Cambodia.

lives before the DK years. DC-Cam tried to provide an inside look into the lives of people who were working for the Khmer Rouge, through the exhibition. The pictures and stories show the tragedy that touched every Cambodian. Not a single family was spared during the DK years. The DC-Cam writes about the exhibition:

“Ironically, we have also come to realize that the regimes leaders were not abstract monsters: they had their own families....., just like other Cambodians. But what they sought to destroy for others, they preserved for themselves..... Every Cambodian family, from that of the king to that of the poorest peasant, had had at least one member who died or simply disappeared during the Khmer Rouge’s reign of terror..... Through the photographs and the recollections of perpetrators and their families, it tells of those who brought great tragedy on us all. Their pictures and words teach us the importance of recognizing the humanity common to all of us, of the need to respect every human being’s rights regardless of their crimes....”⁹¹

The exhibition focuses on the human side of the perpetrators. The contradiction between the permanent exhibition of the Tuol Sleng museum and these temporary exhibitions of the DC-Cam could no be more apart. The Tuol Sleng museum is place drenched with horror and suffering. It is almost incomprehensible what happened there, the pain and the suffering inflicted by the Khmer Rouge. The temporary exhibitions focus on the human side of the perpetrators where the rest of the museum focuses on the inhuman side of the perpetrators. The exhibition of DC-Cam basically tells you: It was you and it was me who could have done it. Every Cambodian was a victim of these horrible years.

Youk Chang tries to decrease the hatred among Cambodians. Victims and perpetrators live side by side. It is important for the reconciliation process that the society is cleared from hate. At the same time the true victims are left out, there are no in depth exhibitions about their lives after

⁹¹ Archives of the Documentation Center Cambodia.

and before the Khmer Rouge years. They are just the victims no further explanation needed.

Over the last decades since the Vietnamese took over power in Cambodia the museum is used in different ways for different purposes. The first years it was important to let the outside world see the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime, later it became important as a propaganda tool within the civil war that was still going on in Cambodia. With the tribunal in Cambodia the treat of the Khmer Rouge is over. The museum has now more economic purpose as a touristic attraction, but also to educate the youngest generation in Cambodia about the history of their parents and grandparents.

5 CHOEUNG EK

“Better to kill an innocent by mistake than to spare an enemy by mistake”⁹²

When I visited Cambodia and the Choeung Ek Killing fields in 2003 for the first time I remember the strange feeling the site gave me. It is a thirty minute drive from the lively and vibrant city of Phnom Penh. The riksja driver brought us over a bumpy road to the outer skirts of Phnom Penh in a more rural area. The first thing I noticed when we arrived at the killing fields were the playing children at the site. It seemed like a contradiction that at a place with a history of so much pain there could be joy. We bought a ticket and wrote our names and nationality on a piece of paper and went inside. The big memorial Stupa is the eye catcher when you enter the site, from top to bottom it is filled with skulls. The skulls are all arranged on gender and age. On eye level are the women between the age of 16 and 24, on ground level are heaps of clothes from the victims.

From the big glass Stupa which is in the centre of the compound you can walk to the burial pits, which are left open after the excavations. Signs next to the pits give information about the victims found in the mass graves. As I walked around I saw two tourists taking pictures of each other next to a tree. An information sign said that small children and babies were being killed by smashing them against the tree with their heads. When I looked closer at the tree I could see a nail coming out of it and between the barks were still after all those years' pieces of bone, probably from the skulls of the children and babies. As I walked further I noticed that from the soil I was walking on pieces of bone and clothes were coming out of the ground. I tried not to step on the remains of the victims. Next to a tree was a stack of bones and teeth probably put there by people who found it on the ground and just as I tried not to step on them. What was this place? I wondered if it was a lack of money at the time that not all the bones were exhumed or was it a shock method to leave these bones sticking out of the ground and leave pieces of bones between the barks of trees ones used as killing tools? Is it more normal in South East Asia to leave a place kind of like it was? aAre we in Europe more uptight about the removal of

⁹² One of the sayings of the Khmer Rouge from the book by: Henri Locard, *Pol Pot's little Red Book: The sayings of Angkar* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai 2004) 204.

human remains? I could not stop wondering what and for whom this place was meant; a final resting place of so many Cambodians, a place where survivors and later generation Cambodians could commemorate the victims of the Khmer Rouge, a propaganda tool of the PRK or a touristic attraction.



A pile of bones and clothes sticking out of the ground at the Choeung Ek killing fields. Photo taken by the author.

This Chapter seeks to investigate the politics behind the Choeung Ek Killing Fields Memorial. The Choeung Ek Memorial is one of the six major commemoration initiatives of the PRK and later the SOC government. For whom is it build and what kind of visitors go to this memorial site? What made the Choeung Ek Killing Fields to be one of the most important memorial sites of Cambodia? What are the thoughts and symbolism behind the architecture of the main building at the site? In 2005 the Cambodian Government has sold the site to a Japanese NGO. What kind of politics lies behind the decision to commercialize Cambodian commemoration? Through interviews with Cambodians, researching documents of the PRK and the SOC, archives and news paper article's these questions will be researched.

5.1 Discovering Choeung Ek

One of the first people who discovered the killing fields at Choeung Ek after the power change was Neang Say. This Cambodian farmer discovered the mass graves when he returned to his home village were he had lived before the Khmer Rouge

came to power and forced him and his family to leave his village. He informed the Vietnamese about the mass graves and almost one year after Tuol Sleng was discovered the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek were excavated. The little hamlet of Choeng is situated about fifteen kilometres south-west of Phnom Penh in a rural area. By this time a lot of other ‘killing fields’ were already discovered throughout the country. Most of the mass graves were found and excavated by locals but the government was also in charge of some excavating teams who were helping villagers with the excavation and preservation of the remains.

One-hundred-twenty-nine mass graves were found at Choeng Ek from which eighty-six were excavated. A staggering total of eight-thousand-nine-hundred-eighty-five corpses were exhumed and the largest mass grave at the site contained four-hundred-fifty corpses.⁹³ The killing field of Choeng Ek was the biggest mass grave found at that time. Nowadays it still is one of the biggest killing field found in Cambodia. At the time the mass graves were found some of the bodies still had flesh on their bones and the bodies were in state of decomposing. The stench at the site was overwhelming according to Gregory Stanton who was among the first Westerners to see the newly opened mass graves at Choeng Ek.⁹⁴ Among the excavated human remains were a lot of bones from children who had most of the times been murdered and thrown in a separate burial pit.

Not long after the discovery of the site it became clear to the Vietnamese excavating team and researchers that Choeng Ek was the place where the prisoners of Tuol Sleng were brought to after they had been interrogated, to be killed. Without the Killing Fields in which the bodies of the prisoners were found, the statement that the prisoners of S-21 were sentenced to death would not have been as convincing as it was now. Choeng Ek became equally important as the Tuol Sleng prison in the politics of memory of the newly formed government.

Directly from the time the mass graves were found, international journalists and members of governments were brought to the site, most of the times in combination with the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide. The first years after the discovery of the Choeng Ek killing fields there were no signs at the burial pits or other information

⁹³ The numbers of the victims and graves are given by the Choeng Ek information centre.

⁹⁴ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide? Elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 71.

signs at the site. The skulls and bones of the victims that were excavated were placed in an open wooden building. The burial pits were not filled with earth but left the way they were found, so the mass graves would remain visible in the landscape. Vietnamese forensic specialists gave most of the bones and skulls a chemical treatment to preserve the remains. There were plans of turning the Choeng Ek killing fields into a museum with information site about the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge, although it would take to 1988 until these plans were being put to action.

5.1.1 *Choeng Ek during Demokratik Kampuchea*

When in 1977 the numbers of prisoners in S-21 grew rapidly, the need for a very large graveyard did too. The nearby cemetery was overloaded with bodies; the air at the S-21 prison must have been filled with the stench of decomposing bodies. Kok Sros recalled:

“Nearly all the killings took place in secret and at night. In 1976 blindfolded prisoners were clubbed to death with iron bars in the field immediately to the west of the compound. They were buried where they fell, in shallow graves that measured only 1.5 metres deep. Although the killings were never openly discussed, the smell of decomposing bodies, mingled with the stench of faeces and urine, was overwhelming”.⁹⁵

The call for a large piece of unused terrain far from S-21 grew. The solution was found in a Chinese graveyard near the hamlet of Choeng Ek some fifteen kilometres southwest of Phnom Penh. This graveyard would become the new execution ground for the prisoners of S-21.

The prisoners of the S-21 interrogation facility were brought in vans handcuffed and blindfolded to the Choeng Ek killing fields. It is hard to give an estimated number of prisoners killed every day at Choeng Ek, the numbers vary greatly between a few dozen up to three hundred killings a day.⁹⁶ Him Huy, a former guard

⁹⁵ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot's secret prison* (California 1999) 138.

⁹⁶ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 40.

at S-21, states in an interview with David Chandler about the killings at Choeng Ek:

“They were ordered to kneel down at the edge of the hole. Their hands were tied behind them. They were beaten on the neck with an iron ox-cart axle, sometimes with one blow sometimes with two.....”⁹⁷

Bullets were too expensive so people were killed by a final blow in the neck or head or by cuts to their throats. When all the prisoners had been killed a little bit of earth was thrown over them, so that the pit could be used for the next transport. Because all Cambodians had been relocated when the Khmer Rouge came to power there were not a lot of people living near the killing fields of Choeng Ek. To hide the real purpose of the Choeng Ek fields for the small amount of Cambodians left in the region loud music was being played at the compound when a new load of people from the S-21 prison arrived. This was to prevent that the killings would have been heard by other Cambodians. All over Cambodia the killings were masqueraded, although most Cambodians aware of it. Family members were taken by the Khmer Rouge never to return and some Cambodians had seen the killing fields with their own eyes.

Throughout Cambodia Khmer Rouge soldiers were killing people, from the very young to the very old, and dumping them into fields.⁹⁸ Some of the killing fields were next to the rice fields where Cambodians were forced to work. Young Khmer Rouge soldiers, some as young as ten years old, were checking if everybody was working hard. People who, according to these youngsters, were not working hard enough were picked out to be choked with plastic bags or clubbed to death in a nearby field. There was also always the fear that the Khmer Rouge were coming to pick you up in the evening or during the night, under the pretence that there was extra work that had to be done. In reality these man and women were brought to a nearby field to get killed.

⁹⁷ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot's secret prison* (California 1999)140.

⁹⁸ The name 'Killing Fields' is first mentioned in an article of David Schanberg, 'the death and life of Dith Pran', published in the *New York Times* in 1980. The name really comes in use after the film director Bruce Robinson uses these words to name his movie, which is about life and death during DK period. This movie appears in the cinemas across the world in 1984 and won several Academy awards.

At the compound of the Choeung Ek fields were a handful of people permanently working. Their job was to dig the pitches and to bury them again with dirt. There was also somebody in charge of the administration. After the people were murdered they were buried in the mass graves by Khmer Rouge soldiers. The soldiers that were working at the killing fields were being killed as well because other Khmer Rouge ‘comrades’ thought they were not trustworthy anymore. Him Huy, a guard at the S-21 prison recalled the killings as being difficult. Killing people with whom he had worked with at the Tuol Sleng prison was even more difficult for him. In an interview with David Chandler he later stated: ‘Before they died [he said] these victims “could see how sad I was”’.⁹⁹ So not only the prisoners at the S-21 prison were afraid of being killed. The guards were also very aware that they had to follow the orders of the high ranking Khmer Rouge officers or else they would have shared the same faith as their victims.

5.1.2 *Choeung Ek as a national memorial*

In 1980, almost straight after the discovery of the Choeung Ek killing fields, the mass exhumations started. With assistance of Vietnamese forensic specialist the remains of the victims were treated with special chemicals which were used to preserve the bones and skulls. The Government appointed Mai Lam to be responsible for the excavation of the remains and the memorialisation of the site. A wooden structure was build in which the excavated remains of the victims were placed; this building was open from every side. After the remains of the victims were exhumed the mass graves were left open. The burial pits were not filled with earth so that they would remain visible. Until 1988 the site would remain really sober, although there were plans for a memorial, further chemical treatment of the remains, new fencing and a building in which exhibitions could be displayed.¹⁰⁰

The Choeung Ek killing fields were named ‘a centre of typical evidence of genocide crimes’.¹⁰¹ The fact that these human remains were so openly on display

⁹⁹ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21, terror and history in Pol Pot’s secret prison* (California 1999)141.

¹⁰⁰ Edited by Susan E. Cook, *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda, new perspectives* (New Jersey 2007), from the article by: Rachel Hughes, ‘Memory and Sovereignty in Post-1979 Cambodia: Choeung Ek and local genocide memorials’, 270.

¹⁰¹ Quotation from the official Choeung Ek website: www.cekillingfield.com.

was a well thought choice. The PRK wanted to have the prove of the mass atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge out on display. The Tuol Sleng Museum and this site were evidence used by the PRK Government of atrocities committed by what they called: ‘the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique’. The PRK policy was fixed on the idea that the remains that were found throughout the country had to be displayed. Journalists, politicians and tourists were taken on tours to the killing fields of Choeung Ek after they had visited the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide. The display of these physical horrors, were used by the Vietnamese and the PRK to justify the Vietnamese invasion into Cambodia and to legitimize the new government.

Mai Lam states in an interview that the exhibition of the human bones not only was a physical evidence for foreign visitors but was also used as evidence for the Cambodians themselves.¹⁰² It is remarkable that Mai Lam uses this argument, the Cambodians did not needed evidence one would think. The Khmer Rouge years were a nationwide ordeal that did not spare people no matter what rank or background. Mai Lam could have reflected on the still existing large group of Khmer Rouge leaders, soldiers and bystanders who lived mostly in the western part of Cambodia. Maybe he wanted to convince these people that the Khmer Rouge had been a vindictive regime who thought human live was worthless. Some farmers who were ignored and felt forgotten by the Lon Nol government were give privileges by the Khmer Rouge. They were ‘base’¹⁰³ people, and the Cambodians from the city had to listen to them. The display of human remains was a strategy to quit these former ‘base’ people from having nostalgic feelings towards the Khmer Rouge years. Not only the display of bones and skulls of victims was one of the commemoration initiatives taken by the government, an annual held commemoration day was also a very important initiative to remember the genocide. The next chapter will discuss the commemoration day.

¹⁰² Edited by Susan E. Cook, *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda, new perspectives* (New Jersey 2007), from the article by: Rachel Hughes, ‘Memory and Sovereignty in Post-1979 Cambodia: Choeung Ek and local genocide memorials’, 259.

¹⁰³ Base people were farmers who lived perfect lives according to the Khmer Rouge. They were farmers all their live and worked hard on the land. The ultimate goal of the Khmer Rouge was to transform every Cambodian into base people.

5.2 Day of Anger

‘T’veer chong komhaeng’ or in English ‘Day of Anger’ is held annually on May 20th in Cambodia. This day is a national day of commemoration; at different memorials throughout the country ceremonies are organized. During these ceremonies survivors speak about their ordeal during the Khmer Rouge years, and reenactment performances are showed. Every year young Cambodians replay the killings. The focus is not only on the victims and the survivors of the DK regime but it has a political connotation to it. Politicians speak, and bonds between countries are strengthened. Until 1998 Cambodia was entwined in a war between the government troops and the Khmer Rouge. When this war was at its peak the commemoration during May 20th became very political. May 20 was used by the PRK to put the spotlight on the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Not only the atrocities during their reign but also the atrocities during the civil war were discussed.

Different reasons are ascribed for the choosing of the date May 20th. There are people who claim that it is the birthday of Pol Pot, others mark 20 May 1975 as the beginning of the genocide programme of the Khmer Rouge. The Secretary of State for Information, Khieu Kanharith, said the following about May 20th: “Pol Pot had a meeting with all his cadre in all the provinces and he laid down his plan to start the collectivization of land on May 20, 1976.... Forced labour, communal living, it was the beginning of the purges.”¹⁰⁴ In the same article Chandler points out that in an interview an official of the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), his name is not reported, May 20 marks the infamous 1976 meeting in which the total collectivisation of the land in Cambodia was officially agreed upon.¹⁰⁵

The first ‘Day of Anger’ was held in 1984. The government gave out a circular in which instructed on how this commemoration day had to be organized by provincial, district and village authorities. In this document were also instructions about the places where commemoration ceremonies had to be held. According to the circular: “places that had witnessed killing, torture, burial or forced labor during

¹⁰⁴ Searching for the truth--Khmer version, number 12, 2000, *A magazine of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DCCam)* from the article by: Rachel Hughes, “Remembering May 20 – Day of Anger, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Searching for the truth--Khmer version, number 12, 2000, *A magazine of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DCCam)* from the article by: Rachel Hughes, “Remembering May 20 – Day of Anger, 6.

the DK period were appropriate places for the May 20 commemoration ceremonies.”¹⁰⁶ Not only different Ministries were dealing with the May 20 commemoration, different activities during the day were also coordinated by the Front for the Solidarity, Reconstruction and Defence of Kampuchea. Factories, schools, hospitals and other public facilities got instructions from the Ministry of Propaganda to make posters and placards in which Pol Pot and his regime would be condemned and extra focus was laid on the crimes against humanity during their regime. During May 20th various ceremonies were held at different local memorials. The official national ceremony was held at the Choeung Ek killing fields.

Originally the commemoration day was organized by the government, first by the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) from 1979 until 1989, and later by the State of Cambodia (SOC) from 1989 until 1991. During these years the commemoration day was a public holiday. One of the terms of the United Nations at the Paris Peace Conference was that the May 20th commemoration day was no longer officially organized by the government. Officially, the government stopped organizing the commemoration day, but there were still politicians speaking during the day. Since the first commemoration day, the ceremonies remained over all the same. However since the end of the civil war between the government and the Khmer Rouge troops the focus shifted from Pol Pot and fighting the Khmer Rouge more to reconciling with the past. The need for an international tribunal was openly discussed.

5.2.1 Rebuilding Choeung Ek

In 1987 the Ministry of Culture gave green light to implement the changes at the Choeung Ek site that were already written down on paper and planned shortly after the discovery of the site in 1980. It took some time before the government could reconstruct the site because the government did not have enough money for the reconstruction. At the time the memorial was under construction the last Vietnamese troops were leaving Cambodia.

¹⁰⁶ Instructions to organize May 20, 1990 – DC-Cam doc. No. 331.

The objective was to transform the site into an open air museum as well as a national commemoration site with a large memorial. The construction of the memorial stupa was from a political point of view a strategic move of the government. The PRK was not as uptight about Buddhist religious elements at memorials as it was before. Lim Ourk, a Cambodian architect, was asked by the government to make a couple of drawings of different memorials for the Choeung Ek killing fields. A special committee would choose from the designs he made. All his designs were inspired by the Buddhist culture and the architecture of the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh. The stupa with the most Buddhist symbolism and features was picked to be the one by a special committee. Supposedly the committee chose this design because they thought that the people who lived in the area of the memorial would like this design the best.

The rebuilding of the memorial into a stupa is interesting. During the DK years most of the monks were killed or died from exhaustion. A lot of the Buddhist temples and wats had been destroyed. In the early 1980's the PRK did not had programs to educate monks or to rebuild the wats and temples. The PRK tried to limit Buddhist influence in Cambodia. The PRK was probably still too insecure about their own position to give away some of the power to religious leaders. The former King of Cambodia Sihanouk was a religious man; he positioned himself as the patron of Buddhism. For a lot of Cambodians Sihanouk was the representation of the (good) times before the American bombings and the Khmer Rouge era. The PRK was afraid that if they would give more power to Buddhist leaders they would ultimately give more power to Sihanouk. In the first decade after the overthrow of Pol Pot the government gave away as little power as possible to other groups in the Cambodian society to secure their own position.

The revival of Buddhism started after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1988. By this time the PRK already have had several meetings with Sihanouk. The PRK tried to design a government that would include themselves, Sihanouk and the republicans. It was in their political interest to have the religious groups on their side because that would give the PRK more votes during the elections. Following what the king had done in the past, the PRK did too try to

position themselves as patrons of Buddhism.¹⁰⁷ By moving closer to Buddhism the PRK tried to gain popularity among the Cambodians with the first free elections in sight.

Although the memorial has indistinctive Buddhistic features and looks like a stupa, it still is a modern building and very different from traditional stupas. The upper part of the memorial has got typical Buddhistic elements which make it believe that it is a stupa. The roof has Buddhistic symbols and features. The lower part of the memorial does not have these religious elements, it has large windows and inside the building the skulls of the victims who were excavated at Choeung Ek are displayed. The skulls are carefully arranged on age and sex, and underneath the skulls clothing's of the victims is displayed.

This new memorial stupa at Choeung Ek is for some Cambodians quite disturbing. In the Buddhist culture stupas are used as a place in which the ashes of one person, often of a high ranking Buddhist monk, are placed. The fact that the memorial stupa at Choeung Ek is filled with so many remains is something that can not coincide with the Buddhist traditions according to a lot of Cambodian. The souls of these murdered Cambodians cannot find peace without a Buddhist cremation ceremony.¹⁰⁸ Displaying the victims of the genocide is also disturbing for personal reasons. Almost every Cambodian lost family members during the Demokratik Kampuchea years. Most of these 'lost' family members have never been found. The bones of the victims on display throughout the country could be the bones of their family members. By displaying the bones in such a manner they feel that their relatives are victimized for a second time.

At the same time there are a lot of Cambodians who think it is important for later generations and people from other countries that they can see for themselves what the Khmer Rouge was capable of. In school most children are not educated about the genocide and their traumatized parents also find it in most cases very difficult to talk about this bloody history. The result is that a whole generation does

¹⁰⁷ Rachel Hughes, *Fielding genocide: post – 1979 Cambodia and the geopolitics of memory* (May 2006, University of Melbourne) 102-103.

¹⁰⁸ In the interviews with Cambodians who were living in Phnom Penh the same issues were brought up and the general feeling is that the two things, Buddhism and the memorial in the present form can not be mixed. If the ashes get cremated it is another story.

not know about the bloody history of Cambodia. For the generations from after 1979 it is hard to believe the genocide really happened. The physical evidence can help to educate these children and young adults about the bloody history of their country.

The site did also have information signs, written both in Khmer and in English. One of the information signs draws the comparison with the holocaust. The text says: “They massacred the population with atrocity in a large scale; it was more cruel than the genocide act committed by the Hitler fascists.”¹⁰⁹ Where at Tuol Sleng the comparison between the Nazi’s and the Khmer Rouge was implicitly drawn, at Choeng Ek it was explicitly written down on an information sign. The comparison could be made for a number of reasons. To educate the American and European tourists through their own western discourse. The holocaust is one of the darkest pages in the history of the (western) world. Apart from some reprehensible opinions everybody agrees that the Nazi regime was a monstrous. The world leaders once said that the Holocaust must never happen again. From this perspective it could also be an accusation to the international community and to the UN in particular. Not only did they let the Khmer Rouge take over power in 1975 they backed the Khmer Rouge after 1979 until the late 80’s by giving them a UN seat. The international community did not recognize the government of Cambodia. The Holocaust discourse was used as a tool to underline the horrors that occurred in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge period. By drawing this comparison they tried to get serious attention and they probably hoped that the government would be taken more serious and get more support in their ongoing struggle against the Khmer Rouge.

There also could have been drawn a comparison with other genocides and massacres such as the atrocities that happened under Stalin for example, or the suffering under the rule of Mao. The PRK never made a comparison like this, it would have shaken the diplomatic relations with China and Russia. To use the Holocaust to underscore the mass killings in Cambodia is a very safe option. Germany was defeated and, except from Iran, there is not a country in the world

¹⁰⁹ Sign at the Choeng Ek Killing Fields (2003-2008)

that officially denies the Holocaust. In some countries it is even illegal to deny the Holocaust.

5.2.2 *Buddhist cremation traditions in Cambodia, and the display of human remains*

Most Cambodians are Buddhists, about 95% of the Cambodian population practices Hinayana Buddhism. This form of Buddhism does not prescribe cremation of the dead but it is common and has been a tradition for a long time in Cambodia to cremate the dead. It is believed that the cremation of the remains of the dead and the ceremonies that accompany the cremation helps to get the deceased to the afterlife and eventually to rebirth. Most Cambodians do cremate their deceased loved ones and they keep the ashes of their relatives in a stupa so their souls can be liberated for reincarnation.¹¹⁰

It is widely believed that the remains of people who died because of violence are not capable of rebirth, and that they will stay at the place they died. So because of this believe there are Cambodians who think the killing fields in general but also the killing fields of Choeung Ek are a dangerous place because it is haunted, this is one of the reasons that some Cambodians have never visited the killing fields. Other reasons are the lack of respect towards the victims that are on display. There are Cambodians who feel offended by the open display of the human remains that could be the bones of their relatives.¹¹¹

During my second visit to Cambodia in 2008 I interviewed one of the guides at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide. I will not mention her real name at her request, but I will name her Rose, a western name so no confusion can be made. She lost her entire family during the DK years. When she returned to Phnom Penh at an age of 18 she found herself to be the only one who had survived the Khmer Rouge regime. After a while she acquired a job at the Tuol Sleng prison as a guide, and she still is until now. She learned English over the years and day in day out she walks with tourists through the rooms of Tuol Sleng. She told me during my interview with her that although she managed to work at the museum for so many

¹¹⁰ Wynne Cougill, *Buddhist cremation traditions for the dead and the need to preserve forensic evidence in Cambodia*, Documentation Centre of Cambodia (Phnom Penh 2008) 2-3.

¹¹¹ Wynne Cougill, *Buddhist cremation traditions*, 2 -5.

years she has never been to the Choeung Ek killing fields. It is too confronting for her, because it could be the place where her loved ones were murdered. She managed to speak to tourists and Cambodian students about her ordeal during the Khmer Rouge years in the one of the most horrific prisons Demokratik Kampuchea had and very shocking museum, but visiting the killing fields of Choeung Ek is something she thinks will never be able to do.¹¹² I thought this was very interesting and during my research in Cambodia I asked a lot of Cambodians if they had ever visited killing fields. Most of the Cambodians I spoke with said that visiting killing fields was to confronting for them. This not only accounts for the killing fields at Choeung Ek but for killing fields throughout the country.

Another reason I heard quite some times was the fact that a lot of Cambodians, especially in Phnom Penh think of the Choeung Ek memorial as some kind of propaganda tool of the government that exists for some part of former Khmer Rouge leaders such as prime minister Hun Sen. They feel different about local level memorial sites even though in a lot of cases at these memorials there are also bones on display. It was interesting to talk with Cambodians in Phnom Penh about their thoughts on the different memorials in Cambodia, although I had the feeling that they were holding back on certain questions. Especially the questions about the controversy of the display of the human remains and their thoughts about the discussion on the cremation of the remains. Most of the Cambodians I have spoken with think it is ok if the remains of the victims are used in court as evidence. At the same time they would like it if the remains are cremated after the trials. Even large parts of the religious community in Cambodia are supporting the preservation of the remains for the same reason. There are even monks who have built local memorials with the remains of the victims on display. A good example is a local monk from Kandal province who made a memorial in 1999, at the former Sa-ang prison. At this memorial the remains of the victims are put on display. He told the staff of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia the following;

“One reason I got the idea to construct this memorial is that one member of my family was killed at Sa-ang prison. Another reason is that I observed the

¹¹² Interview with ‘Rose’ at the Tuol Sleng Museum on the 19th of May.

remains in a sad state, just sitting there exposed to the sun, wind and rain. The remains have decayed and have been eaten by cows. That inspired me to think that if the remains continued to lie in the state they were in they would certainly vanish and no evidence would be left for the younger generations to see. In addition, if Buddhist followers wanted to come to light incense and pay homage to commemorate the souls of the dead, there was not a place for them to do so. So this idea of building a memorial came to my mind..... And I am thinking of having monks stay there and for people to come and pay homage because some souls of the dead have made their parents or children dream about them, and told them that they are wandering around and have not reincarnated in another world. I want to have monks meditating there so that the souls of the dead will rest in peace.”¹¹³

Most Cambodians do not think it is really offensive that the remains of the victims are on display as long as it is in a respectful manner and with a religious monument close to the remains. For a lot of Cambodians it is also very important that the generations after them which were not born before or during these awful Khmer Rouge years, so that they can see the evidence of what happened. For a lot of parents the genocide is a difficult topic to talk about. Only recently schools are paying close attention to the subject so it was important for a lot of communities to have these memorials to speak for themselves. The same Buddhist monk says;

“The remains are a legacy for the younger generation so that they may know how vicious the Khmer Rouge regime was, because the young did not experience the regime. I experienced this regime. Some lived through this regime as children but they still do not believe; how can those who did not live through believe? What can they base belief on?”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ This interview is included in the article of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia by; Wynne Cougill, *Buddhist cremation traditions for the dead and the need to preserve forensic evidence in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh 2008) 3.

¹¹⁴ This interview is included in the article of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia by; Wynne Cougill, *Buddhist cremation traditions for the dead and the need to preserve forensic evidence in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh 2008) 4.

It is not only because people believe it is important as evidence for the tribunal or later generations but it is also in the believe system of many Cambodians that the remains of the dead can only be cremated during special cremation ceremonies and in the presence of family members. Almost none of the bones are identified so these ceremonies cannot be held according to strict Buddhist rules.

5.2.3 *Commercializing memory*

Thirty years after the Khmer Rouge forces marched into Phnom Penh the municipal authorities of Phnom Penh announced that the Choeung Ek killing fields were getting privatized. On the first of April 2005 the site was handed over to the JC Royal Company Co Ltd. The contract was signed by Governor Kep Chuktema and JC Royal representative Koji Yamamoto. The deal was made for 30 years in which JC Royal will try to ‘increase revenue for the state and develop and renovate the beauty of Choeung Ek killing fields’.¹¹⁵

This was the first time that a national memorial was sold to a foreign country. A lot of Cambodians felt betrayed by the government. They felt that their trauma was used to make profit. It seemed that the Cambodian political parties actively took distance from Cambodia’s traumatic past. It was not of use to them anymore. The Khmer Rouge was defeated, the tribunal was finally installed and the past was at that stage only of a burden for the government. The maintenance of the memorial was too expensive.

People were worried that the Japanese company would not take proper care of the memorial. According to the contract JC Royal had to pay 15,000 dollar to the local authorities of Phnom Penh, annually for the first five years. The company can rise the fees up to ten percent every five years until the end of the 30-year contract. The contract further states: “the company must be responsible for renovating and taking care of the entrance to the killing fields, construct fences, manage the garden and grow trees and flowers. A proper place needs to be prepared to respect the souls of the victims who were killed, and the company has to develop around the compound fields. -This means that the company is responsible for the roads near the

¹¹⁵ Kuch Naren, Japanese firm to manage Choeung Ek, from the *Cambodian daily* (April 4, 2005).

Choeung Ek killing fields. -JC Royal is also responsible for the preservation of the pits, where the bodies of the Khmer Rouge victims were thrown into and were later exhumed”.¹¹⁶ One of the conditions the government made was that the bones and skulls would stay where they are. Through developing the company hopes to attract more fee-paying tourists. Cambodian visitors do not have to pay a fee, so the company aims on international tourists. Instead of making this site a memorial place for Cambodians where they can grieve and pray for the people they lost during the Khmer Rouge years, the site is more and more becoming a touristic attraction.

The site’s general manager Neang Say was the one who let the news out that the government had signed a deal with a Japanese company to commercialize the Choeung Ek killing fields. He said: “I want the world to know that Cambodia has become a place where they use bones of the dead to make business.”¹¹⁷ He further said: “Those officials have no thought to offer justice for those victims who were killed in Pol Pot’s regime. But they have tried to exploit [them]. They allow foreigners to come and make a profit from dead people. It is a shameful act.”¹¹⁸

Not only Neang Sary was angered by the deal, Youk Chang the director of Cambodia’s Documentation Center wrote a letter to Prime Minister Hun Sen in which he asked him to intervene. In this open letter he wrote: “This is about the memory of a country, of a nation – and that is something important for the survivors. Memories can not be contracted, cannot be sold, cannot be purchased – and therefore it should be in the hands of Cambodian survivors to maintain the place.”¹¹⁹ He stated to a journalist: “Any contract contains benefits, and we should not benefit from the souls of those who have died. Genocide should not be commercialized. It is already bad enough to have lived through genocide.”¹²⁰

The response of the Council of Ministers of Cambodia was that Chea Vandeth, the Cabinet Chief for Prime Minister Hun Sen was the chairman of JC Royal. He would make sure that any profit made out of the revenues from the killing fields would be donated to the Sun Fund. This is an organization established by the Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2002, it supports the rebuilding of the Cambodian educational

¹¹⁶ Kuch Naren, *Japanese firm to manage Choeung Ek* from the Cambodian daily (April 4, 2005).

¹¹⁷ Time archive: Kevin Doyle / Phnom Penh, *The revenue fields* (Monday, April 11, 2005).

¹¹⁸ Kuch Naren, *Japanese firm to manage Choeung Ek* from the Cambodian daily (April 4, 2005).

¹¹⁹ BBC news archive: Guy de Launey / Phnom Penh, *Killing Fields deal sparks anger* (April 6, 2005).

¹²⁰ Time archive: Kevin Doyle / Phnom Penh, *The revenue fields* (Monday, April 11, 2005).

system. Since the killing fields were privatized a number of scholarships for underprivileged Cambodian students have been provided. Some schools in the area claim to being built by the money of the Sun Fund.

The Japanese Government distances itself from the privatization of the Choeung Ek site. The Japanese embassy in Phnom Penh gave out the following statement: “It is up to the competent Cambodian authorities to decide how the Choeung Ek genocide site should be preserved, developed and managed, taking into consideration of sensitive feelings of the Cambodian people about the site. The government of Japan is not involved in any way in the matter concerning granting of concessions related to the conservation, development and management of the Choeung Ek genocide site by the municipality of Phnom Penh to any entity or person. It has never been consulted by any organization or any person concerned in this matter.”¹²¹

Many Cambodians were angered by the privatizing of the killing fields at Choeung Ek but there were also people who were more optimistic. The head of legal reform at the nonprofit Center for Social Development in Phnom Penh, mister Lao Mong Hay saw the selling of the memorial as a chance to get a better maintained memorial. He stated: “If a private company can do it better, why not? If they can bring in international visitors and tell them something about our tragedy, all well and good, so we don’t repeat it.”¹²²

¹²¹ Puy Kea, ‘Privatized’ Killing Fields site tries to quit critics, in the *Japan Times* (January 13, 2006).

¹²² Simon Montlake, Cambodia’s killing fields get privatized, in the *Christan science monitor* (May 3, 2005).

6 KILLING CAVES, BATTAMBANG

“Spare them, no profit; remove them, no loss”¹²³

It is almost an hour driving from the sleepy city of Battambang, to the mountain of Phnom Sampeau. A Buddhist temple is situated on the top of the hill. During the Democratic Kampuchea years this temple was used as a prison. Next to the prison are some very deep holes that lead to two caves. Eye witnesses recount that the victims of the Khmer Rouge were tied together and led to the top of the mountain. After these people were interrogated they were brought to a deep shaft that led to one of the caves. Their throats were slid open and then they were thrown into the cave. Children were thrown in a cave with a narrower shaft, they died either from the fall, of starvation or from the injuries caused by the fall. More than 15,000 people are believed to have been killed at the site.¹²⁴



Additional information for visitors or as the painting explains “for foreigner”. Photo taken by the author.

¹²³ Rachel Huhges, “Memory and sovereignty in post-1979 Cambodia: Choeung Ek and local genocide memorials” from the book: Edited by Susan E. Cook, *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda, new perspectives* (New Jersey 2007) 259.

¹²⁴ According to the Burial report of the Documentation Center of Cambodia 15,700 people are believed to be killed at La-ang Kirirum (killing caves). This report is updated on February 18, 2008 by Pheng Pong-Rasy.

This chapter will seek to investigate local level memorials that are not funded with money from the state. How are these memorials situated and who are the victims commemorated at the sites? How are the memorials funded and what role does or did the government play in the construction and funding of the memorials? The killing caves in Battambang will be used as a case study for these local level memorials. The Documentation Center of Cambodia has so far mapped 77 memorials throughout Cambodia. It is too extensive to research all of these memorials. The killing caves are well known and it is one of the most visited memorials in Cambodia by tourists, although the numbers of the tourists that visit this site is a lot less than to the Choeung Ek killing fields.

Like the Choeung Ek killing fields and the Tuol Sleng museum I had been here previously a couple of years before. I was curious if there had been some major changes at the site. Local children work as guides, and from the money they earn they pay their school with. On my first visit our guide, a thirteen year old boy, told us that they were trying to make a better enclosure for the bones and skulls of the victims. Not only to protect them from the elements but also, to my surprise, to protect these bones from thieves. Apparently there were people who stole these bones.



The cabinet where the bones and skulls were put in just after the excavation of the cave. Photo taken by the author.

Our guide told us also that most people from the village do not actually visit the caves because it is too confronting for them. However, they do pray for the people

who were murdered in the temple next to the caves. The parents of our guide lost most of their family members during the Khmer Rouge years. Just like the woman who works as a guide in the Tuol Sleng Museum they were afraid of the pain that these places would bring back to them.

To get to the cave you have to take a hike for about forty minutes up the mountain. The path towards the cave and the inside of the cave was decorated with a long chain of pieces of clothes. Our guide told us that these clothes were from the victims and that this was a way to remember them. On my second visit I asked the, again very young, guide if these clothes belonged to the victims and he did not know anything about this. He told me that this was a Buddhist way of commemorating. The cave itself has a lot of Buddhist elements like a large statue of a Buddha who is lying down. Outside the cave is the temple and even further up the mountain is an even bigger statue of Buddha and another Wat.



The path leading to the caves. Photo taken by the author.

I could not really see major changes but one of the caves was closed down because the DC-Cam was examining the bones and skulls in this caves. There was still a lot of work that had to be done to preserve the bones in a better way. Although the changes were not really visible it was obvious that there were people working on the memorial. Like at all memorials in Cambodia there are boxes in which money can be donated for the preservation of the memorial. Across the mountain wall are the names of some of the major benefactors, among the names are a lot of western

names. At some other memorials there are even the names of political parties that have donated money, such as the CPP.

6.1 Memorial Stupa

Over the years there are stupas built to put the remains of the victims in. At first the bones were collected in a very large closet with wire netting in front of it. As you can see on the picture this did not have the outlooks of a memorial, it seemed to be a cheap solution to protect the bones and skulls from thievery. A couple of years ago a stupa has been added to the cave, it contains some of the bones that are visible behind glass. Some of the remains are still in the old closet or just on some piles in the cave. The bones that have been placed in the new stupa are chemically treated by the DC-Cam preservation team, to stop the further decay. There are also some minor other changes such as a handrail at the stairs and some information signs.



View from the inside of the 'killing' cave. Picture taken by the author.

The stupa inside the cave is not the only stupa that has been built in commemoration of the victims. Outside the cave is another stupa which is not made of glass, so the bones are not visible. The fact that the remains of the victims are not visible is more according to Buddhist traditions. There is a chance that after the tribunal the government will allow the cremation of the victims. In 2001 prime minister Hun Sen said in a statement that the government is “planning to hold a

referendum after the tribunal to decide whether to maintain the remains as monuments or take them down to cremate them”.¹²⁵ It is unlikely that all the bones of the victims will be cremated. In the contract with the terms concerning the remains in the large stupa are very clear; JC Royal is not allowed to replace the bones and the skulls of the victims for thirty years.

6.2 *Local level memorials in Cambodia*

Throughout the country Cambodians found mass graves filled with bodies of men, women and children. Some still with plastic bags over their heads others blindfolded. Hundreds of mass graves were excavated, some with the help from forensics of the government. Most of the times it were the people from the nearest village who exhumed the graves.

Although the government did not financially support local level memorials such as the memorial at the killing caves, it did gave out a circular how these local level memorials were supposed to look like. In this statement the of PRK, they declared that the remains were supposed to be put on display so the ‘evidence of the crimes committed by the Pol Pot clique’ could and would be visible for everybody to see. It was in the rural areas in Cambodia were the Khmer Rouge had started to recruit their soldiers; it was there that the ideas of the Khmer Rouge found the support of the residents. By displaying the bones the PRK propagandized themselves as the liberators. The bones were not used in commemoration of the victims but to commemorate the people who had saved the Cambodians out of the hands of the Khmer Rouge.

The government did encourage the construction of local level memorials, not only to display the horrors of the Pol Pot regime but also because the PRK wanted to introduce an annual held commemoration day, the ‘Day of Anger’ on May 20th. The ceremonies during this day were supposed to take place at different memorials throughout the country. The ceremonies at the local memorials have more Buddhist elements in it compared to the ceremonies at the Choeung Ek memorial. These ceremonies are comparable with the annual Buddhist festival of ‘Phchum Ben’, an ancient Buddhist festival to honor ancestors.

¹²⁵ Asian Human Rights News, www.ahrchk.net/news.

Throughout the country local level memorials are in dire state of need for funding so that the memorials can be properly maintained. Especially the memorials that are not in close range of touristic attractions have problems getting enough money together for the maintenance. It is tragic that the memorials build by and for Cambodians solely to remember victims are in such a state of deterioration. Although there could be another explanation for the deterioration of the memorials besides deficiency of money. Rachel Hughes asserts in her research that the lack of maintenance at a lot of the memorials in Cambodia could be due to the ancient ‘Neak Ta’ tradition.¹²⁶ This is a believe system of the spirits of the nature. Neak Ta are guardian spirits that according to this believe system inhabit the mountains, the forests, the paddy fields, trees, they live in all the elements of nature.¹²⁷ I do not think that this tradition has a major influence in the state the memorials are in. Neak Ta is mostly common in remote jungle hill tribes in the eastern part of Cambodia. Within the Neak Ta believe system it is common to make shrines but these are mostly to honor the spirits and elements of the nature. Not to honor the spirits of dead people or ancestors.

A strategy of some memorials to gain money, especially the ones close to touristic attractions such as the Ankor temple, is to concentrate more on western tourists. The information sign at the memorial near the Ankor temples for example says:

“Dear tourists the collection of bones that you see in this stupa where bones have been collected from near the field. These were from the innocent people who died at the hands of the savage Pol Pot- regime in 1975-1979. We do not have enough money to build a dignified and proper memorial to honor these innocent people. The world ones stood by and let another

¹²⁶ Rachel Hughes writes in the article: Memory and sovereignty in post-1979 Cambodia: Choeung Ek and local level genocide memorials, from the book: Susan Cook, *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda, new perspectives* (New Jersey 2007) 273.

¹²⁷ During field work in the eastern part of Cambodia I visited the shy hill tribes in Ratanakiri. Here the tradition of Neak Ta is still practiced. They took a lot of time and effort to explain Neak Ta to me. For more information read: Seanglim Bit, *The Warrior Heritage, a psychological perspective of Cambodian trauma* (California 1991) 16.

demented dictator murder 1,000,000 in four years. Now we can help provide comfort to help these dear departed souls with a donation, thank you.”¹²⁸

Because of its location this memorial attracts more tourists than most of the other memorials, although most tourists stumble at it per accident. Because the main income of these memorials is from the donations of western tourists the memorials are focusing more on this group. Although this memorial can get some money for the preservation from the site from the tourists it is not enough to properly maintain the memorial. Because of the wide spread corruption in Cambodia a lot of times money donated by tourists is taken by local cops. In Battambang I was followed all day by cops so that they could claim money at the memorials. My guide asked me to pay him in two times, ones when the cops were watching (this was the money they would claim for themselves) and ones when they were not watching. Corruption is a major problem in Cambodia and because cops get paid as little as they are they will try to get money from other sources.

6.3 The future of local level memorials

So far the Documentation Center of Cambodia has mapped 77 memorials throughout the country. This seems to be a very large number but if you compare it to the number of sites related to the genocide it is extremely low. Throughout Cambodia 348 burial sites have been found with a staggering number of 19,471 mass graves, 169 prisons have been identified and most of the times these prisons were located in wats and temples. On the website of the Ministry of Tourism are no accounts of local level memorials. The only sites that are promoted that have a direct link with the Khmer Rouge are the Tuol Sleng museum, the Choeung Ek killing fields and the Anlong Veng sites. These are the sites that are or were funded by the government, the rest of the historical sites are left unaccounted for.

In the future most memorials will disappear; the bones and skulls collected and displayed at the memorials will probably be collected by organizations such as the Documentation Center of Cambodia. There is even a chance that after the tribunal the remains will be cremated during a nationwide cremation ceremony. Although

¹²⁸ This text is from the information sign at a memorial Stupa near Siem Reap.

the bones of the victims will probably be cremated in the next decade, the memorials are still very important to educate the younger generations. Hopefully these memorials will be protected from deterioration in order that this part of Cambodian history will not be forgotten. Most of these memorials however are in a dire state. They are deteriorating rapidly and this means that in the near future these memorials will disappear.

7 ANLONG VENG

Loss of life is a simple thing in for a man of war¹²⁹

Eight hours driving by motorbike from the temples of Siem Reap you can find the remote jungle town of Anlong Veng. Until 1998 this village was the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge. The top of the Khmer Rouge had fled to the town after the downfall of the Party in 1979. In the years that followed the toppling of the regime, the Khmer Rouge would isolate the residents of the town from the rest of Cambodia until the late nineties. The school system was directed by Pol Pot and Ta Mok, the children learned skills at school that prepared them for war against the governmental troops or whatever enemy. They learned how to shoot, to lay mines and how to help supply the Khmer Rouge troops. The area around Anlong Veng was and still is the most densely mined area of Cambodia. The land was covered with landmines and although there has been extensive mine clearing projects since the governmental troops took over in Anlong Veng the place is still not safe and people still get injured by the landmines.

In 1998 Government troops attacked Anlong Veng and captured Ta Mok. Pol Pot had died just prior to that, as a prisoner of Ta Mok. In 1997 an internal struggle for the leadership within the Khmer Rouge faction in Anlong Veng had split the party in two. Pol Pot had ordered the murder of Son Sen, brother number 4, alongside thirteen members of his family members including women and children. This sparked the anger of Ta Mok who captured Pol Pot and convicted him for life in captivity. Ta Mok turned out to be the winner and Pol Pot the ultimate loser. He was kept imprisoned in a muddy field just outside the big villa of Ta Mok. Not long after the death of Pol Pot in 1998 government troops arrested Ta Mok, in 2002 he was formally charged with crimes against humanity. In 2006 he died in captivity in a hospital in Phnom Penh.

In 2001 Hun Sen declared that Anlong Veng would become a region for historical tourism. Former Khmer Rouge heritage such as the last remains of the house of Ta Mok, the cremation site of Pol Pot, carved Khmer Rouge sculptures

¹²⁹ Archives of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, *Khmer Rouge Slogans*.

and since the death of Ta Mok his tomb, are touristic attractions with which the Cambodian government tries to lure tourists to Anlong Veng.

On the website of the Ministry of Tourism the town of Anlong Veng is described as a town with major historical value, they claim: that the house of Ta Mok is a cultural site which attracts a lot of tourists.¹³⁰ They further describe the province of Oddar Meanchey in which the town of Anlong Veng is situated, as following:

“The countryside is covered by the Dangrek Mountains (or escarpment, as they are sometimes called), which was an optimal shelter for the Khmer Rouge to hide. It is a very remote province that has been a notorious place, because this is where the nastiest of the nasty Khmer Rouge made their last stand. The diabolical Pol Pot and his seemingly bloodthirsty henchmen, Nuon Chea, Ta Mok, Son Sen and Khieu Samphan holed up here for the last years of the Khmer Rouge's existence (another of the henchmen, Ieng Sary, already worked out a surrender and defection deal with the government in 1996)”.¹³¹

The words the government has chosen to describe the Khmer Rouge are very direct, and leave not a lot to the imagination. By reading the description of the heritage sites on the website of the Ministry of Tourism you get the feeling that the last thing they want to do is to turn the town into a place of pilgrimage for former Khmer Rouge cadres. The area is very poor and by creating a tourist industry the government tries to boost the economy of the region. In this chapter the question whether or not it is appropriate to make this Khmer Rouge village into a touristic place will be examined. Is the policy of never forgetting allowed without restrictions or are there certain unwritten rules that have to be followed out of respect for the victims. Is it appropriate to turn ‘perpetrator’ sites into touristic attractions? By perpetrator sites I mean sites where there is more focus on the perpetrators than on the victims.

¹³⁰ From the website of the Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia www.mot.gov.kh

¹³¹ From the website of the Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia www.mot.gov.kh

7.1 *Visiting Anlong Veng*

In this chapter the ‘historic’ sites at the Anlong Veng region are discussed. Since 2003 the government advertises this region as an attractive region to visit because of the historical attractions it contains. These attractions include the former house of Ta Mok and the cremation site of Pol Pot. The questions that can be raised to mind are the following, to what extent is it possible to exploit history and its remnants? And where does this leaves the victims of the Khmer Rouge? Who visits these sites and how are they maintained?

In 2008 I visited Anlong Veng for the first time. My guest house was in Siem Reap and from there I started my search for a translator and somebody who could bring me to Anlong Veng. It was May and the monsoon had already started in all its heaviness. Dark clouds flocked the air above Siem Reap. This made my search for somebody who was not only able but who was also willing to bring me to Anlong Veng, a lot more difficult. It took me almost a week to find somebody who wanted to bring me all the way up to the most northern part of Cambodia. Most of the Cambodians I spoke with did not want to drive for hours in these conditions or they just simply said it was impossible to get there because of the rain and the mud. The roads were in dreadful condition, even for Cambodian standards. The road to Anlong Veng can hardly be named a road: it is a muddy path through the jungle and jungle hills. It is easier to travel off the road, but this part of Cambodia is the most heavily mined area of the country.

My willing motorbike driver and translator at the same time and I, drove for hours, a couple of times we had to walk for miles because it was impossible to drive through the mud. Walking was not that much better as we sank away knee-deep in the mud. When we finally arrived in Anlong Veng we first visited the house of Ta Mok. The house was abandoned and demolished and looted, probably by governmental troops, since Ta Mok had been arrested. At some of the walls the text ‘assasin Ta Mok’ was written down probably by government soldiers. At the moment the house is in possession of the government. A former Khmer Rouge commander and personal bodyguard of Ta Mok and Pol Pot takes care of the place.

To get access to the house you have to buy a ticket at a small locket. Like at all memorials and historic sites in Cambodia it was free for Cambodians, so my translator did not have to pay for a ticket. At the time we arrived the one legged former bodyguard of Ta Mok and Pol Pot who was now guard and guide at the compound was not present. Some local men went to the city to pick up him up from somewhere in town.

It seemed that a family was living around the house because I could see a small shop run by locals with kids playing in the yard with some dogs. I waited at the shop where a young girl showed me her playing doll. The people seemed very nice, nicer than the locals who I had met on the motorbike on our way to Anlong Veng. They called me names in Khmer and I could feel my translator getting more nervous the closer he got to the town. The years of isolation and indoctrination had made the residents of the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge scared for strangers. The locals in the Oddar Meanchey province did not seem very keen to welcome me in any way. The atmosphere was very different from the rest of Cambodia I visited.

After a while the guide arrived and the tour through the house started. We started out in the main living room which had enormous wall paintings. One of the paintings portrayed the nearby temple of Preah Vihear. This temple has over the years been the centre of a major dispute between the Thai government and the Cambodian government. This dispute escalated a couple of months ago when fighting between the two armies started. Both countries claim the temple for themselves but the temple is on Cambodian territory. The painting of the temple is more related to the later political strategies of the Khmer Rouge than to the politics during the Demokratik Kampuchea years. After the takeover of the Vietnamese the Khmer Rouge were more focused on the fact that they were nationalists then that they were communists. They propagandized themselves as freedom fighters who were fighting against foreign troops who had taken over power in Cambodia instead of fighting capitalist movements. In the years that they were in power the Khmer Rouge had destroyed a lot of the countries heritage and by claiming year zero at the takeover of the country they abolished all history. By destroying a lot of the countries temples they emphasized this.

The second painting is a painting of the map of Cambodia, with the lower part of Vietnam, Kampuchea Krom, as being part of Cambodia. Not only the Khmer Rouge but also other Cambodian nationalists think the lower part of Vietnam belongs to Cambodia. The Vietnamese claimed this land in the eighteenth century, and since then it is officially part of Vietnam. Some Cambodians think the land should be reclaimed by Cambodia. The map as shown on the wall that was made and used by the Khmer Rouge represents the Khmer Rouge policy. They had invaded the lower part of Vietnam in an attempt to reclaim the land. The guide explained both paintings to me with typical Khmer Rouge rhetorics; by claiming the Vietnamese were thieves of the land of Cambodia. About the Thai government he did not say a lot, probably because they were close allies to the Khmer Rouge for a long time. Interesting is that the paintings both represent different periods of the Khmer Rouge area.



The guide and former bodyguard of Ta Mok with my translator. Photo taken by the author.

From the living room you have a view over a wasteland destroyed by bombs and other ammunitions. Within these fields Pol Pot was held imprisoned by Ta Mok, in a small wooden shed. When I asked the guide about the feud between Pol Pot and Ta Mok he denied that Pol Pot was captured. When I asked what he thought of both men he claimed that Pol Pot was a very nice man and that Ta Mok was a bit harsher. He emphasized that the party needed somebody who was harsher to keep the party function, and that Ta Mok was a good men who did a lot for the

community in Anlong Veng and Cambodia. It is awkward that this man was claiming these things and was paid by the Government at the same time. I wondered what he would think of the text on the website of the Ministry of Tourism if he knew what was written there.



The wasteland where Pol Pot was held captive. Bombs have left big craters in the field. Photo taken by the author.

I asked him what he thought of the upcoming tribunal and what he thought of the fact that Ta Mok had been arrested. My translator refused to ask these questions. He never gave me an explanation why he thought these questions were too delicate. After the conversation in the living room of this macabre house we continued the tour. Outside the house the guide showed me an old van, I wondered if this was the van in which the English mine-expert was Mr. Howes was transported to be executed in 1996. The execution was ordered by Ta Mok. After the guide had shown me the van he made me clear that the tour and interview were over and it was time for me to leave.

7.2 *Tomb of Ta Mok*

From the house of Ta Mok we left to his tomb, which was situated next to the house. The tomb looked extremely well maintained, with fresh flowers and burning incense. It was strange to see that this memorial and burial place of one of the greatest murderers of the twentieth century was so well maintained. This man who was also known as the butcher was honored even after his death.



The tomb of Ta Mok. Picture taken by the author.

When Ta Mok died on the twenty-first of July 2006 people in Anlong Veng were mourning. In other parts of Cambodia people were mourning because he would never be tried for his alleged crimes against humanity. His body was brought over from Phnom Penh to Anlong Veng where he would get his final resting place. Unlike the cremation of Pol Pot or the approximate 1.7 million of the people who died during the reign of the Khmer Rouge, he received a large cremation ceremony. Hundreds of Cambodians came to the house of Ta Mok's daughter from where he would be transported to the cremation site. People burned incense and there were Buddhist monks who were chanting prayers. The whole ceremony was Buddhist of nature; this was in sharp contrast of the former policy of the Khmer Rouge. Buddhism was prohibited during the Demokratik Kampuchea period, monks were killed and their temples and wats were destroyed. Until 1998 Buddhism was nonexistent in the Khmer Rouge enclave of Anlong Veng.

It seems like a contradiction that even though Ta Mok was known to be a very harsh man, whose nickname among his opponents and among his supporters was 'the butcher', is honored by hundreds of people during his cremation ceremony. A lot of the people who are living in the Anlong Veng region remember Ta Mok with respect, mostly because he did a lot for public infrastructure projects such as constructing bridges, roads a hospital and schools. After years of indoctrination in which Ta Mok was portrayed as the best leader they could get, the people of Anlong Veng have a hard time giving up that idea. The religious character of the

cremation ceremony of Ta Mok is not as strange if you compare it to the other Khmer Rouge leaders. Most of the former Khmer Rouge leaders turned religious after the DK years.

7.3 The cremation site of Pol Pot

Some kilometers outside of Anlong Veng in the mountains is the cremation site of Pol Pot. On your way to the last resting place of this notorious leader you can see statues of (beheaded) Khmer Rouge soldiers carved from the rocks. Next to the statues are Buddhist shrines where incense burns and where flowers can be placed as an offer to the gods. At this place the ‘normal’ Khmer Rouge soldiers who died or got injured during the fightings, are commemorated or prayed for.

A little bit more up the mountain is the site of Pol Pot. A small path leads through the bushes to the place. The Ministry of Tourism has placed a sign next to the site which states: “Pol Pot was cremated here, please help to preserve this historical site”. The site looks like a dumb although some people have tried to make the best out of it. Glass bottles and rubber tires buried half in the ground are used as demarcation. The site is protected for the rain by a metal roof. When I went there it did not seem like the site was visited on a regular basis. There was some residue of incense left in a small altar, but it appeared to me that it had been there for a long time.



The cremation site of Pol Pot. Photo taken by the author.

Pol Pot died on the fifteenth of April 1998 in captivity of the Khmer Rouge. There was no autopsy performed on the death body of Pol Pot and serious doubts linger over the cause of his death. On the 9th of April 1998 the New York Times reported

a leaked story in which was stated that there was a plan of the government troops of Cambodia to capture Pol Pot. Six days later he died.¹³² For the Khmer Rouge leaders who were still alive it was better if Pol Pot was death. With the death of Pol Pot the question of guilt could not be shifted upon the other cadres. The top level of the Khmer Rouge could now hide behind the farce that they were forced by Pol Pot and that they never new about the massive killings among the Cambodians on the countryside. Pol Pot was hastily cremated in the mountain jungle, his body was burned on trash and car tires and there was no ceremony. He died and was cremated like he had lived the last years of his life; alone and in oblivion.



Sign at the cremation site of Pol Pot. Photo taken by the author.

Near the cremation site is a marketplace, some of the stalls sell Khmer Rouge art affects, like the famous Khmer Rouge rubber sandals. There did not seem to be a lot of activity going on there. Some of the villagers and the government hope that the economy will grow because of the 'touristic sites' in their town. But with the infrastructure as it is now this will never happen, it is to difficult to even get to the place.

¹³² Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting away with genocide? Elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London 2004) 122-123.

7.4 Commercializing 'predator' sites?

The question that can be raised regarding the heritage sites in Anlong Veng is whether or not it is appropriate to turn these sites of pain and above all shame into a touristic attraction. By advertising Anlong Veng as a town with a lot of historical heritage sites the Cambodian government tries to get tourists to come to the remote town. The muddy road that leads to Anlong Veng is a big obstacle to get there, it is virtually impossible to get to the town and to some of the sites. The infrastructure does not allow tourism especially not on the scale the Cambodian government tries to enhance or claim it to be. At the site of the Ministry of Tourism it is claimed that the city already has got a lot of tourists visiting the region every year. The town does not look like it is overrun by tourists. Although the house of Ta Mok is regularly visited by Cambodian sympathizers of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Another more important problem with creating Anlong Veng into a touristic attraction is the painful history of the town and its residents. It is important to preserve historical sites even if it are places of shame such as the sites at Anlong Veng, but the preservation must take place under very strict rules. These places must never become a place of worship or a place of pilgrimage. In principle the keynote must always be on the victims, definitely not on the perpetrators and their perspectives or at least not solely. The sites must be informative about the history and why the site is preserved. All of these things are not remarked at these so called heritage sites. At the moment the sites are visited by Khmer Rouge sympathizers and former members of the party. They see these places almost as holy sites, which they visit on their wedding day or other important events in their lives, some of these visitors even claim that it will bring them fortune and good luck.¹³³

The information at the heritage sites at Anlong Veng are totally based on the perspectives and often wrong presumptions of former Khmer Rouge members. There is a lack of information at the sites and the one person that can give you a little bit of information, if you come with a translator, is a former Khmer Rouge

¹³³ Colin Long and Keir Reeves witnessed a wedding party at the house of Ta Mok during their research at the house. Colin and Keir Reeves, "Dig a hole and bury the past in it, reconciliation and the heritage of genocide in Cambodia", from the book by: edited by William Logan and Keir Reeves, *Places of Pain and Shame, dealing with difficult heritage* (Routledge 2009) 70-72. The story of good luck and fortune I based on my own interviews with people in Anlong Veng as well as on the interviews done by Colin Long and Keir Reeves.

soldier and bodyguard of the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge. This man has a one-sided view on the Khmer Rouge policy. In an interview he stated that he thought Ta Mok was held imprisoned in Tuol Sleng after his arrest.¹³⁴

A very important element that must never be absent at sites that deal with these difficult heritages, are explicit signs which explain the history of the site and what it represents. This is an element that is completely not existent at the sites in Anlong Veng. You can interpretate the site as you like. The fact that the guides that are available at the places are former Khmer Rouge cadres who have a totally different perspective on the history of Cambodia than most other people is extremely painful for most Cambodians who were victimized by the Khmer Rouge. To use the parallel of the Holocaust the government tried to draw at the Choeung Ek memorial: imagine that a former SS-er gives you a tour through the bunkers of Hitler and claiming that Hitler was a very nice guy! This is what basically happens at the sites in Anlong Veng.

I don't think sites that deal with difficult heritage should be demolished or made inaccessible for visitors. Although it is very important that there is historically accurate information available at the sites about the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Education is a very important element. The people who live in Anlong Veng, especially the younger generation should learn about the years in which the Khmer Rouge were in power and the years that followed the toppling.

The way these sites are now open for public is shameful and disrespectful to the victims of the Khmer Rouge. A first major step in to the right direction would be explicit and clear cut information at the sites; through information signs, books and leaflets. The wounds of Cambodia are still wide open and need to heal before these sites can be relevant and helpful to get a complete historic overview. At this moment it does more damage than good in the healing process and the process of reconciliation.

¹³⁴ Colin Long and Keir Reeves witnessed a wedding party at the house of Ta Mok during their research at the house. Colin and Keir Reeves, "Dig a hole and bury the past in it, reconciliation and the heritage of genocide in Cambodia", from the book by: edited by William Logan and Keir Reeves, *Places of Pain and Shame, dealing with difficult heritage* (Routledge 2009) 72.

8 CONCLUSION

Memory is not a mere reproduction of historical facts. It is subjective and therefore not innocent. In this thesis the politics of memory in post-1979 Cambodia was researched. I examined how mnemonic socialization developed over the years in Cambodia after the overthrow of Pol Pot. To acquire a social identity you have to acquire the groups memories, its collective past has to become your own. For a very large part mnemonic socialization of a country takes place in museums, memorials and historical sites. Education is also very important in shaping a collective past and creating and sustaining a collective memory.

In order to map the collective memory of Cambodia I did research on several cases: the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes, the Choeung Ek killing fields, the Killing Caves at Phnom Sampaeu and the historical sites at Anlong Veng. These sites were relevant because they reflect from different perspectives how the genocide is remembered and commemorated, and who initiated the remembrance at the site.

Several mnemonic groups can have different recollections of the same event. Within a country different ways of looking at historical events can exist. These different outlooks on historical events do not have to cause trouble between different mnemonic groups but sometimes it does invoke heated discussions and arguments. Zerubavel describes these collisions of recollections as mnemonic battles. Arguments between different mnemonic groups can lead to real battles among different groups, even within a society. Therefore it is very important to include the different mnemonic groups within the creation of a collective and shared representation of the past, but there will always be groups who feel neglected or have a total different view on the past.

In Cambodia, there are different views on the genocide and its aftermath. It is difficult for Cambodians to regain trust in the government. Some Cambodians even distrust the current government, because it consists of former Khmer Rouge members. Prime-minister Hun Sen is a former Khmer Rouge member. Besides the

Cambodians who are still reluctant to trust the government, there are people who still support the Khmer Rouge and do not believe that the Khmer Rouge committed atrocities, let alone genocide. In their minds this government consists of traitors. The international community did not recognize the PRK as the new Cambodian government; as a result the UN and major countries like America backed the Khmer Rouge for a long time. This demeanor of the international community had consequences on the way memorials and museums were set up. The younger generations in Cambodia from after 1979, do not know a lot about the Khmer Rouge years and the killings. For many Cambodians the past was too painful to talk about, and the attention given in the schools to the genocide was minimal. The result is that the younger generations are oblivious to what happened approximate three decades ago. With the start of the tribunal this painful part of the Cambodian history is more in the open. This means that the younger generations are being confronted with this bloody past of their country and parents. For these young Cambodians it is really hard to comprehend what has happened. Fortunately more and more attention is drawn on the subject by schools and the government to educate these children about the genocide.

Over the decades the politics of memory changed along with the goals the government tried to achieve. The results of the different case studies discussed in this thesis show that the commemoration sites were used by the government for different political reasons. During three decades the focus shifted from legitimization of the invasion and the new government, to a propaganda tool in the battle against the Khmer Rouge, and finally as a tool to raise awareness and to stress the importance of an international tribunal. Obviously these focuses were not as clear cut as stated above, but within these decades there were three main goals to achieve and the past was used to stress the importance of the goals.

8.1 Politics of memory

In the first two chapters a framework of the Cambodian politics is drawn. The in 1979 newly formed People's Republik of Kampuchea started with the politics of memory directly after they came to power. Commemoration initiatives were developed over the next five years. Among these initiatives were the establishment

of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, the introduction of an annual held commemoration day ('Day of Anger') and the construction of a national memorial at the Choeung Ek killing fields.

The first priority of the Vietnamese was to legitimize their invasion into Cambodia. The emphasis was based on the threat the Khmer Rouge was to the Vietnamese. They legitimized their presence in Cambodia at first by stressing that the invasion was based on self-defense. As soon as the Vietnamese discovered evidence of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge and became aware of the scale of the atrocities, they claimed a more heroic role for themselves. The Vietnamese were accused of aggressive territorial behavior and it was important to reposition themselves as liberators not as the aggressor.

Shortly after the invasion of the Vietnamese, a new government was formed and installed. This newly formed government had to legitimize themselves as well. The government consisted of some high ranked former Khmer Rouge officials who had fled to Vietnam. It was important for these political leaders such as Hun Sen and Heng Samrin that the focus would be on the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge and not on the Khmer Rouge as party itself and its ideology. The government narrowed the responsibility of what had happened down to Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, by persistently referring to the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary-clique when they spoke of the people who were responsible for the genocide. The ideology of the party was never brought up or questioned. By doing this some people of the new government who had been members of the Khmer Rouge did not have to explain their past and they could not be held accountable for the atrocities committed by their former party.

Through different commemoration initiatives the government tried to create a collective memory which was most in favor of themselves, some parts of the past were enhanced where others were left out. For example, the PRK invented the tradition of the commemoration of the genocide by introducing the 'Day of Anger'. They also had a strong grip on what and how the genocide was supposed to be commemorated. These sets of measures were important for the PRK to maintain a grip on their power.

The attitude of the international community towards the government of Cambodia, especially in the first decade, has proven to be an important factor in the

creation of remembrance cultures in Cambodia. By pushing the new government in a corner and treating them as pariahs they were forced to defend themselves. By backing the Khmer Rouge and supplying them with goods, political power, and even weapons, the Cambodian government had to put a lot of energy and money in the civil war against the Khmer Rouge.

8.2 Memorials and the reconciliation process

To get an understanding of how the genocide is commemorated in Cambodian society it is important to research memorial sites, both national level as well as local level sites. Chapters three, four, five and six of this dissertation described different historical and commemoration sites in relation to the reconciliation of the genocide.

Memorialization is not simply the creation of monuments or museums, it is a long process through layers of society. The past is socially constructed through museums and monuments. Memorials, museums and national commemoration days represent public statements about how we should look at the past and about what has happened in the past. It is a public statement on how we in the present should acknowledge the past; who should we remember and who should be forgotten, what events were marking points in history and what events were marginal, basically what was big enough to be called history.

With the development of a memorial it is important that the victims are allowed to have a voice and that they are listened to. Scholars have emphasized that the participation of members of a society in the creation of a memorial can help to achieve acknowledgement, end impunity and to rebuild a country.¹³⁵

Heritage sites like the Choeung Ek killing fields can be of help for Cambodians in their reconciliation process. It is a place where they can mourn and remember their lost ones. It gives the survivors of the genocide the feeling that their ordeal will not be forgotten, and that it is important to remember so that it will not happen again. On the other hand can memorial sites like Choeung Ek invoke a feeling that their pain and grieve is exploited in favor the sake of tourism.

¹³⁵ Documentation Center of Cambodia.

The commemoration sites in Cambodia, at least the ones build by the authorities, were not build for the Cambodian people. In the first decade after the Khmer Rouge was overthrown, sites as the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Choeung Ek killing fields were used as political instruments and propaganda, especially to educate the international community about the genocide. The Tuol Sleng Museum was curated by the Vietnamese general Mai Lam. Later on with the booming of the tourism in Cambodia the sites became touristic attractions. The sites were treated and reconstructed as economic venues. This became even more apparent with the selling of the Choeung Ek national memorial to a Japanese company and the exploitation of the ‘historical’ Khmer Rouge sites in the Anlong Veng region.

Chapter three of this dissertation discussed the Tuol Sleng museum. This museum is a good example of what is remembered and most of all what is not. Over the years the museum became an icon of the suffering of the Cambodian people, even though most of the Cambodians died in the fields and were never incarcerated or interrogated at a facility such as the S-21 prison. In fact a majority of the Cambodians who were imprisoned at the facility were Khmer Rouge cadres themselves. In the first decade after the opening of the museum one of the high ranking Khmer Rouge officers even got a heroic status attributed to his figure post-mortem. Iconisation can be a misrepresentation of the reality. Another good example of iconisation is the “Arbeit macht frei” sign at the gate of Auschwitz. For a lot of people this sign is an icon of the Holocaust and the murdering of Jewish people in Auschwitz. In fact the Jewish people were not brought to this part of Auschwitz; the sign was seen by political prisoners, mostly Polish and Russian men. Auschwitz Birkenau was the part where Jewish people from all over Europe were brought to. This example shows how persistent and misrepresenting icons can be.

One of the most famous icons of the Tuol Sleng museum is the picture of a young woman with her newborn child. This picture is known all over the world and is a depiction of how cruel and harsh the Khmer Rouge was. They were even capable of imprisoning and murdering a mother with her child. For a lot of visitors this picture is the most shocking one of the exhibition. What a lot of people do not

know is that this woman is the wife of the Minister of Foreign affairs of the Khmer Rouge who could not count on the benevolence of the party any more. The innocence that the woman is portraying is in a sense false, they were not as innocent as they portray to be. This does not mean that the fact they were murdered was not an example of extreme cruelty and paranoia, because it was. It means that a lot of the people who see the picture do not know the facts, and in a lot of cases the icons are in fact something else than what they represent.

When the S-21 prison was rebuild into a museum it was not build for the Cambodian people but for international guests of the government. Later on the museum was used as a political instrument and a campaign tool during the elections, or to get more people to enlist for the army. By hanging political pamphlets in the museum and the give out of forms to enlist for the governmental armies shows that the museum was used for political reasons and propaganda in the present instead for the reconciliation of the past.

In Chapter four the politics behind the national memorial at Choeung Ek are discussed. The first years after the discovery of the Choeung Ek killing fields it served as a completion of the Tuol Sleng museum. Official foreign guests of the government were brought to both places. In 1988 the Choeung Ek memorial was rebuild and a large memorial Stupa was constructed. The government wanted the Choeung Ek memorial to be of great importance during the annually held commemoration day. This commemoration day was important for the government to strengthen bonds with other countries. In the first decade these bonds were mostly tight between socialist countries. From the nineties onwards the United Nations and America were also represented at the ceremonies during the Day of Anger.

The burial pits around the memorial stupa at Choeung Ek were left the way they were found, they were not refilled with dirt. Most remains of the victims have been excavated but there are still a remarkable amount of bones and clothes sticking out from the ground. This invoked the shock effect at the killing fields. The Choeung Ek killing fields are in this sense *milieux de memoire* and the memorial stupa is a *lieux de memoire* as Nora has called it in his essays and books. The same goes up

for the killing caves at Battambang. It is not unusual that memorials are built at sights with historical relevance such as at prisons or places where victims were dumped. Monuments by contrast have usually well considered locations, mostly in cities.

In 2005 the killing fields of Choeung Ek was sold to a Japanese Non-Governmental organization. This was appalling to a lot of Cambodians. The fact that the government sold the national memorial of Cambodia is an acknowledgement that historical as well as commemorative sites are, especially, in the last decade seen as economic places. Now that international tourism is rising over the last decade these historical sites can make more profit. At the same time the maintenance on these memorials are becoming more expensive. The killing fields are now one of the major touristic attractions in Cambodia and the place is mostly visited by foreign tourists. For a lot of Cambodians the killing fields are too intense. If the memorial would be placed somewhere else and not at the actual killing fields it would be more likely that Cambodians would come to pay their respect to the victims. The Choeung Ek killing fields are now basically a touristic attraction and part of the education of children, instead of a place where people can mourn their loved ones.

Chapter five deals with the politics and commemoration at local level memorials. In 1983 the government gave out a circular on the preservation and development of victim memorials throughout the country. In this circular the government explained how these memorials were supposed to look. It was stressed that the physical evidence of the genocide should be visible to visitors. It was prohibited to burn the remains of the victims.

The government did try to help some communities with the excavations of some mass graves the first years after the take over, by sending excavation teams, but in most cases this was a local engagement. The circular of the government was the biggest involvement of the government in the preservation of the sites. Throughout the country memorials were established with the help of donations of some wealthy Cambodians or foreign philanthropic institutions. Prior to and after the 1993

elections it was common that political parties also donated money, at a lot of memorials big signs are placed with the names of beneficiaries.

The local level memorials have more Buddhist elements to them. Buddhism in Cambodia has the most followers in rural areas. Another reason is that the PRK tried to suppress Buddhism because they felt the religion was a threat to their power. Sihanouk established himself as a patron of Buddhism. The PRK was afraid that by giving away power to Buddhism they would ultimately lose power to the former king. Another element was the fact that in Buddhist traditions it is common to cremate the remains of a deceased person. The Cambodian government wanted to keep the evidence of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Nowadays Cambodians have more or less resigned with the idea that the bones of the will not be cremated as long as the international tribunal is still in process. In the last decade Buddhist elements are added to most memorials, including the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Choeung Ek killing fields.

In Chapter six of this thesis the Anlong Veng region and its historical sites are researched. This last commemoration initiative of the government is probably the most disturbing one. Until 1998 Anlong Veng was the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge. Since 2004 Khmer Rouge sites at the region are chosen by the government to be of historical value. The government is advertising the house of Ta Mok and Pol Pot as touristic attractions. It is an economic strategy to get some money to the poor region of Anlong Veng by luring tourists with these predator sites. For the victims it is highly offensive and appalling. Just as a lot of Cambodians thought it was very disrespectful of the government that they sold the Choeung Ek killing fields to a Japanese non-profit organization.

The fact that sites such as the former house of Ta Mok and the cremation site of Pol Pot are now functioning as attractions is at itself inexpedient. What makes it more disturbing is the lack of information about the sites and the Khmer Rouge era. The only information you can get at the sites is a disturbed version of the Cambodian history and the role of the leaders of the Khmer Rouge in the mass killings. It is also distressing that the government uses these historical sites as economic profitable places. The memory and the trauma of this nation is used as a source of income and sold without any regard to the victims. A lot of Cambodians

are angry and upset with the way the government has treated their trauma. As Seanglim Bit has explained it: “Memorials to those killed by the Khmer Rouge have been erected but their function seems to be more politically motivated to rally support for the current regime than to facilitate a healing process.”¹³⁶

8.3 *Remembering the ‘killing fields’*

At first the memorials were erected for strictly political reasons to gain and to keep power, later these sites were used as a way to put pressure on the international community to help with the establishment of an international tribunal, and since tourists are flocking to Cambodia the sites became interesting as profit making touristic attractions.

The fact that history is used by the government is not typical for the Cambodian politics. History is used for all different kind of purposes by all different kinds of people. A collective past is of great importance for a nation. It binds and connects, although this binding is artificial. History is used to enhance the feeling of union between people within a nation or group. A common background and traditions are constructed to give a sense of a joined past. In the process some parts of history are magnified and made very important where other facts are left out.

Memorials can be of great importance for the reconciliation process of Cambodians who lived under the reign of the Khmer Rouge and lost family members. There is a highly nostalgic element to lieux de memoire such as museums, archives, memorials and historic sites. But is this also the case for a memorial that represents the pain and suffering of the victims? Do historical places that deal with a painful and shameful past have a nostalgic nature to it? I think they can. These places represent so much pain and trauma it is sometimes hardly bearable especially not for victims, but it can create a nostalgic feeling from the time before the pain. In that sense is it correct to say history is always nostalgic? I don’t think so either. For the people who survived and lived through the horrible years in which the Khmer Rouge was in power the memorials are bittersweet, on the one hand they represent wrongdoing and on the other hand it creates a nostalgic feeling to the times before the genocide. These memorials represent a major

¹³⁶ Seanglim Bit, *The Warrior heritage, a Cambodian perspective of Cambodian trauma* (California 1991).

watershed between the times before, during and after the genocide. For Cambodians from later generations or tourists the memorial just represent the wrongdoing, there are no nostalgic feelings among people from ‘outside’.

The Choeung Ek memorial is not sufficient for the Cambodian people in their reconciliation process. The place is too poignant and a lot of Cambodians feel that the victims are not commemorated in a respectful way, because they are on display in the large memorial Stupa. The fact that the burial pits are still visible is too gripping for most Cambodians. Exhibition pieces such as the Skull map which was on display in the Tuol Sleng museum until 2002 show how little emphatic the curators and the government were toward the actual victims and the surviving relatives of the victims.

Local level memorials were more important for the reconciliation process of Cambodians than the national level memorials have been. Even though the remains of the victims are also on display at these memorials. It is important for people with such traumatic pasts that they have a voice in the process of memorialisation. Most of the local level memorials are situated at or near Buddhist temples; this makes the place more approachable for Cambodians.

In the first two decades the exhibitions and memorials were based on the idea that as much evidence as possible of the genocide should be on display and the bigger the shock effect the better. It was important that the international community could see the devastation and horror the Khmer Rouge had left the country in. And that it was basically inevitable to invade the country. For the Cambodians who had survived the Khmer Rouge years the display of the remains of the victims was too confronting, according to some Cambodians it showed the lack of respect the government had for the Cambodian people.

The fact that the memorial is now sold to a Japanese company was appalling to most Cambodians, and the memorial is now more then ever seen as a touristic attraction rather than a serious place for Cambodians to commemorate their loved ones. The number of Cambodians that visit the memorial is growing now that the tribunal has commenced. The number of Cambodians that have not experienced the Khmer Rouge period is also growing. For the generations that were born after 1979 the Choeung Ek killing fields is an important place. Where the memorial failed to

be a place of commemoration for the people who survived the genocide it could become an educational place for the younger generations. Just as it was an educational place for the thousands of tourists who came to visit the memorial. Memory will outlive the survivor if it can be transmitted to the next generations. It is very important that this transmission is done with a great deal of respect and as close to the truth as possible.

In this way the new generations can live without the traumatic legacy of their country weighing down on their shoulders.



Young girl in Phnom Penh on the motorbike. Photo taken by the author.

8.4 Further research

This research could be investigated from a much broader spectrum. It is interesting to compare the case of Cambodia with for example the genocide in Indonesia. Under the rule of Suharto more than a million communists, socialists, abangan (Islamic peasants) and Chinese Indonesians were killed by the Indonesian Army in 1965-66. Whereas the Cambodian genocide was openly remembered and commemorated after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the genocide in Indonesia was covered up by the Suharto government. The Indonesian regime was in fact a military regime. This regime, which was named the New Order, stayed in power and until 1998 but even after the fall of this regime the killings were not investigated. The people who were murdered in 1965-66 were portrayed as traitors and backwards people, who were a threat to society. The representations of the 1965 coup within the Indonesian society were controlled by the regime. Katharine E. McGregor researched the construction of Indonesia past, she explains in her book: “The images projected of communists, and communist women in particular, were representations of everything the New Order regime presented itself as rejecting”.¹³⁷ The so called enemies of the regime were first killed and later demeaned in museums and monuments.

The way the genocide in Indonesia is treated by the government is very different then the way Cambodian government has treated their bloody history. These two far ends of the spectrum of commemorating national and collective traumas can have interesting results. The narration of the genocide in Indonesia was given a totally different twist then the narration in Cambodian. The similarity between the two countries is that either way history was used to validate political power.

The construction of the official history and the way it was constructed is very interesting to research and to compare it with the case study of Indonesia. There are also other countries that can be compared with Cambodia. In regard to education about the genocide it is interesting to look at the way this is done in South Africa. The government of Cambodia is now developing new history books with special attention for the Khmer Rouge years. South Africa has already gone through this process.

¹³⁷ Katharine E. McGregor, *History in uniform. Military ideology and the construction of Indonesia's past* (Leiden 2007) 221.

Memorialisation and commemorations are concepts that can be researched all over the world. It seems to be in human nature to commemorate but the how and what we commemorate can change over time. We have to be aware of the fact that the past gets rewritten in some cases to validate power.

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