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Chapter 4

Truth, Representation and the Politics of Memory after Genocide

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When Cambodians talk about Democratic Kampuchea (DK), the genocidal period of Khmer Rouge rule in Cambodia when up to 2 million of Cambodia's 8 million inhabitants perished from April 1975 to January 1979, they recall many paths of ruin, the memories breaking light into this time of shadows, when memory itself became a crime.

Chlat, a low-ranking provincial government official who was a student prior to DK, recalled one such path, the death of his brother Sruon. Sharp and pensive, Chlat was one of those people who might have gone far if the trajectory of his life had not been broken by the Khmer Rouge revolution. His smile echoed his life, struggling to blossom and always taut, trying to recoil. We spoke many times about his life, including the period when memory itself was a crime.

For, in their radical experiment in social engineering, the Khmer Rouge launched an assault on the past, seeking to obliterate everything that smacked of capitalism, 'privatism', and class oppression (Chandler 1999; Hinton 2005; Kiernan 1996). This attack ranged far and wide. Broadly, the Khmer Rouge targeted Buddhism, the family, village structure, economic activity, and public education - key socio-cultural institutions through which memory was ritually, formally, and informally transmitted. More specifically, they assaulted social memory by burning books and destroying libraries, banning popular music, movies, media, and styles, destroying temples, truncating communication, terminating traditional holidays and ritual events, separating family members, homogenizing clothing, and eliminating private property, including photos, memorabilia, and other mementos.

This onslaught on the past was dramatically expressed in the first significant act that the Khmer Rouge took upon attaining power: rustication of the entire urban population. Ordered to evacuate their homes with little notice, hundreds of thousands of people clogged the arteries leading out of Phnom Penh and the other provincial capitals. As they shuffled toward an unknown beginning, past

the pagodas, schools, cinemas, restaurants, parks, streets, and homes that landscaped their past, the urbanites discarded a trail of memories: wads of now worthless bank notes blowing in the wind, luxury sedans that had run out of fuel, food that had rotted in the blazing heat, books too heavy to carry, and, most tragically, the bodies of the old and the infirm unable to survive the journey. And still they would bear the stain of their capitalist past.

In the new revolutionary society, each person had to be reworked, like hot iron, in the flames of the revolution. The Khmer Rouge called this 'tempering' people, literally 'to harden by pounding' (*luat dam*). One urban evacuee explained that 'the dreaded phrase was *lut-dom*. *Lut* is the part of metal processing in which a rod of metal is placed in a fire until it is red-hot and pliable.' *Dom* means the hammering – when the hot metal is put on the anvil and pounded into shape, any shape desired. *Lut-dom* described the way people were expected to be molded by Angkar ('the Organization') into the pure Communists of the future (Criddle and Mam 1987:101; see also Locard 2004: 299).

Memory was to be reshaped during this process until it aligned with the Party line, which colored the past in revolutionary red. Borrowing a Maoist metaphor that resonated with Buddhist conceptions of the wheel of life and two wheels of *dhamma*, the Khmer Rouge spoke of 'the Wheel of History' (*kang bravattesas*; see Locard 2004: 211) that, powered by natural laws that had been discerned by the 'science' of Marxist-Leninism, had and continued to move Cambodia inexorably toward communism, crushing everything in its path. This vision of the past was clearly laid out in a landmark speech given by Pol Pot on 29 September 1977 to celebrate the seventeenth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). Not only did the speech announce publicly for the first time the very existence of the CPK and Pol Pot's leadership of it, but it also laid out the history of revolutionary struggle in Cambodia, which had faltered in 'slave', 'feudal', and 'feudo-capitalist' stages because of the lack of a proper 'political line' (Pol Pot 1977). This line only began to be ascertained, Pol Pot proclaimed, at the CPK's First Party Congress, held 28–30 September 1960 by 21 revolutionaries who locked themselves into a secret room in the rail yard of Phnom Penh.

Having discerned through 'scientific analysis' the key contradictions in Cambodian society (between 'the Kampuchean nation and imperialism, especially US imperialism' and between classes, especially 'the capitalists and the landlords'; see Pol Pot 1977: 25–26), the Party was able to light the flames of revolution that, 'like dry straw in the rice fields' during the hot season 'needs only a small spark to set it on fire' (Pol Pot 1977: 38). From that point on, Pol Pot stated, the fire spread throughout the country, enabling the revolutionary movement to defeat not just the Khmer Republic, but the United States as well. Just as the Party line had enabled the Khmer Rouge to win victory, so too would it lead Cambodia toward communist utopia faster than ever before.

Achieving this goal required the creation of a country filled with a new sort of revolutionary being who, after being 'tempered' by hard peasant labor, criticism

and self-criticism sessions, political meetings, and constant indoctrination, would develop a progressive political consciousness that accorded with the Party line and history. Those showing signs of being unable to rid themselves of vestiges of the 'corrupt' past - for example, as evinced by dwelling too much on one's former life, complaining about the difficult conditions of life, failing to display appropriate enthusiasm for the revolution, making mistakes in one's duties, or missing work - were sometimes said to have 'memory sickness' (*comngii satiaramma*) (see Criddle and Mam 1987: 99). If the sickness was chronic or did not heal rapidly, it was 'cured' by execution. Indeed, execution served as the most direct and thorough means of obliterating counter-revolutionary memories of the past.

Chlat smoked as he told me the stories of how his family trekked out of Phnom Penh in the blazing sun, at times moving only a meter in two hours, how the Khmer Rouge requisitioned his watch, diploma, and clothes, how his brother-in-law, a former military officer, was identified and led away, never to return, and how his grandfather died and was buried on the side of the road in a grave marked only by incense. The first time, he offered me a cigarette, which I declined. He smiled tightly and told me how he had begun smoking during DK when he was assigned to transport human excrement from the latrines so that it could be used for fertilizer. He explained, 'The smell was overwhelming and the cigarettes cut the stench. After I stopped working there, I continued to smoke because of hunger. I was never full but when I smoked my hunger would diminish.' Another time he told me that he smoked because his head was so busy. If he ruminated on some difficult matter like DK, smoking would ease his heart. As Chlat recalled these events, he would take a drag of his cigarette, embers briefly aglow like his memories, then ash.

We usually met in the evening at the home of a mutual friend, after Chlat had finished work at the provincial government office. The electricity would often fail and we would sit around a table dimly illuminated by a single candle and the lit end of his cigarette, which traced his profile and cast shadows against the walls. It was on one of these nights that he first told me of how his brother's path turned toward the Pagoda at the Hill of Men in 1977, in the midst of a major purge. Chlat's family had returned to his parents' birth village, where people knew the family's suspect urban background and that his older brother Sruon had worked in the import-export business there. Speaking in a low monotone, punctuated by long pauses and sudden taps of his cigarette against the ashtray, Chlat recalled how Sruon was taken to the Pagoda, which had been transformed into an extermination center:

First we heard that trucks had been coming to take people from neighboring cooperatives to a 'new village'. Rumors spread that the people were taken to be killed. The trucks arrived at my village without warning.

No one had been informed. People began to be taken away at noon. You could see that it was primarily 1975 people, particularly those who were lazy or unable to work hard, who were ordered to go to the new village . . . When [my elder brother] Sruon's name wasn't called out - he had been sick and unable to work much lately, so we were worried - he couldn't believe his good fortune. He kept telling me and my father, 'I'm really lucky. I must have done good deeds in the past to escape death, because those people are not going to a new place, they're going to be killed and discarded.'

Sruon's name still hadn't been called by 8:00 that evening. He had just finished saying, 'I'm out of danger. I'm not going to die', when Sieng, the village head, tapped on our door and told Sruon, 'Gather your things. The trucks are going to take you to a new village.' Sruon stopped speaking and slowly sat down on the bed, terrified, thinking about what he suspected was going to happen to his family. Finally, he said, 'So, my name is on the list too'. Someone, I suspect it might have been a distant relative of mine who spied for the Khmer Rouge, must have gotten them to replace his name with that of my brother at the last moment. Sruon instructed his wife and children to get ready to go. He told me, 'Take care of father and our siblings. As for me, don't believe that they are taking me to a new place. There isn't one. They are taking us to be killed.' Everything was still; no one spoke. All you could hear was the patter of the rain.

The people whose names were called were ordered to gather at a nearby pagoda. Sruon picked up his youngest child, protecting him from the rain and mud, and took his family there. It was getting late, so the Khmer Rouge ordered everyone to sleep in the pagoda that night. Guards prevented the people from leaving the premises. Children were crying from hunger because they weren't given food. The next day, at first light, the Khmer Rouge loaded everyone on the trucks and drove off. My brother and his entire family were executed at the Pagoda at the Hill of Men . . . A few days later, clothes were distributed to people in our village. They were the garments of the people who had been loaded into the trucks. I saw them give out my brother's clothes.

Chlat's memory of his brother's death is chilling, more so when one considers that, throughout Cambodia, millions of people endured similar moments of death, suffering, and terror during DK. Such memories, and the powerful emotions they evoke, have proven to be a powerful dynamic in Cambodia, as different groups have rewritten the DK past to meet the needs of the present, asserting their legitimacy and moral authority in the process.

This chapter explores several dimensions of this politics of memory, particularly

that of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), the Vietnamese-backed successor of DK, which tied its legitimacy so closely to a set of discursive narratives about this violent past. In addition, we can discern another broad shift in the politics of memory in Cambodia around the time of the 1993 UN-backed elections in Cambodia. At this time, nongovernmental organizations proliferated in Cambodia and discourses of reconciliation, human rights, and justice were localized, often in Buddhist terms, in another reworking of the memory of the genocidal past. New shifts can again be discerned with the July 2006 start of a UN-backed trial of former Khmer Rouge leaders. After discussing the PRK's apparatus of truth, knowledge, power, and memory, I turn to a consideration of Buddhism, which has operated both in conjunction and disjunction with the state-level narratives, as have other local-level and international discourses.

Legitimacy and Liberation

In January 1979, when a Vietnamese-backed army invaded Cambodia, routing the Khmer Rouge, the sands of memory shifted once again. Cambodia's roads began to swell with people, some returning to lost lives and homes, others seeking new ones, still others heading toward the border and unknown places. It was a time of remembrance, as friends and family long separated came together and shared their stories of where they had been, what they had endured, and who had been lost. Then they began to rebuild their lives.

Many, like Chlat, had nothing and had to confront the immediate problem of how to survive and make a living. Eventually Chlat found a job as a teacher. At Banyan, the village located near the Pagoda at the Hill of Men in Kompong Cham that had remained empty during DK, former residents trickled back home. Amidst their greetings, they found horrific reminders of the recent past: dozens of mass graves, village wells filled with corpses, and the reek of death when the winds blew from the direction of the pagoda. They returned to what they knew best, farming the land, though now their rice fields adjoined killing fields and their plows churned the bones and clothes of the dead.

In Phnom Penh, two Vietnamese photographers who had accompanied the invading army were drawn by a stench to the grounds of Tuol Sleng (Chandler 1999: 1f.). What they found inside echoed the gruesome scenes Banyan villagers had discovered: recently executed men whose throats had been cut, some still chained to iron beds and lying in pools of blood, shackles, whips and other instruments of torture, and the prison cells of the condemned. Within days, search crews discovered an enormous cache of documentation, ranging from photographs to confessions.

In the midst of this upheaval, the newly established People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) faced numerous problems, ranging from an economy and infrastructure in shambles to potential famine (Gottesman 2003). Almost immediately, however, the new regime was beset by problems of legitimacy. The PRK government, headed by Heng Samrin, was closely linked to Vietnam, which

had supplied roughly 150,000 troops for the invasion and wielded obvious influence over the government.

While initially welcoming Vietnam's help in overthrowing the Khmer Rouge, many Cambodians remained deeply suspicious of a country frequently viewed as a historical enemy that they believed had long secretly desired to 'swallow' Cambodian land. Many also viewed the new regime with suspicion both because, like DK, it was socialist and because a number of PRK officials – including Heng Samrin and his Foreign Minister, Hun Sen, who would be Prime Minister by 1985 – were themselves former Khmer Rouge who had fled DK during purges of their factions. These suspicions were heightened by PRK propaganda, which at times eerily echoed that of the regime's socialist predecessor (Gottesman 2003: 60). Finally, the PRK government was to be increasingly threatened by new resistance groups and a resurgent Khmer Rouge army, which after arriving in tatters on the Thai border, was propped back up by foreign powers more concerned with Cold War politics than genocidal criminality.

Memory mixed with politics as the PRK regime set out to establish a narrative of the recent past that would buttress their legitimacy both domestically and abroad (Gottesman 2003; Ledgerwood 1997). Genocide stood at the center of this story. The new political narrative centered around the theme of a magnificent revolution subverted by a small group of evil doers, led by the 'Pol Pot', 'Pol Pot-Ieng Sary', or 'Pol Pot-Ieng Sary-Khieu Samphan clique' (Ledgerwood 1997: 82). Inspired by a deviant Maoist strain of socialism, the narrative went, this clique had misled or coerced lower-ranking cadre (including, by implication, PRK leaders who were former Khmer Rouge) into unwittingly participating in a misdirected campaign of genocide. As a result, most former Khmer Rouge cadres, including, by implication, PRK officials, were not ultimately responsible for the events that had transpired during DK.

Socialist discourses remained central to this narrative, as the PRK regime could still speak of how the revolutionary movement had 'won the glorious victory of 17 April 1975, totally liberating our country' from 'the yoke of colonialism, imperialism, and feudalism' (Gottesman 2003: 7-8).¹ In a speech given just prior to the invasion, Heng Samrin described how 'the reactionary Pol Pot-Ieng Sary gang' had begun taking Cambodia down the wrong path almost immediately upon liberation through such policies as the evacuation of the cities, forced collectivization, the abolition of money, and attack on family and village life. These acts foreshadowed 'massacres, more atrocious, more barbarous, than those committed in the Middle Ages or perpetrated by the Hitlerite fascists'. The PRK regime, in turn, staked its claim to legitimacy as the true bearers of the revolutionary mantle and, crucially, as the ones who, with the help of their Vietnamese 'brothers', had liberated the people from this hell on earth. In the PRK narrative, the regime remained the people's protector, a 'back' (*khnanng*) upon which they could rely to ensure that the horrors of the DK past were not

repeated. With a growing Khmer Rouge insurgency on the border, this role was of enormous importance to the populace.

While every government defines itself in terms of an imagined past and future, new regimes, particularly ones like the PRK that ascend to power with questionable legitimacy, devote enormous effort toward asserting such visions. Their mechanisms for the production of truth are varied, ranging from the codification of law to educational instruction to the creation of memorials. By bringing a number of seemingly heterogeneous institutions together, a government is able to create a functionally over-determined 'apparatus' to further its strategic goals, such as the popular interpellation of discursive narratives that enhance the regime's legitimacy and control (Foucault 1980; Said 1979).

We can see just such a process at work during the PRK, as the government used multiple institutions, discursive structures, and symbols to assert its legitimacy. One key nexus was education. On the one hand, education served as a reminder of the brutality of the DK regime, since they had largely abandoned formal instruction and turned many schools into prisons or storage areas (Ayles 2000). While there was some primary education during DK (ibid.), the Khmer Rouge believed that the former education system corrupted the minds of the young and that the best education was political indoctrination and learning through 'struggle' on the economic 'front lines'. Thus, drawing on Maoist discourses, the Khmer Rouge proclaimed: 'The spade is your pen, the rice field your paper' and 'If you want to pass your Baccaulareate exams, you must build dams and canals' (Locard 2004: 96-7).

Teaching about the genocidal past

The devastation of the past was also marked physically, both in the deteriorated condition of the schools and materials (signifying the deterioration of Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge) and, in many cases, walls marred by bullet holes (denoting the violence of the past and danger of the present). On the other hand, education represented one of the great achievements of the PRK regime, which rapidly rebuilt the school system. In a 24 September 1979 speech commemorating the reopening of schools for the 1979-1980 year, Heng Samrin invoked these themes, stressing how under the 'barbaric genocidal regime of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique' the country's 'infrastructure in the domain of education and of teaching [has been] completely shattered', with the educated, including students and teachers, singled out for slaughter (cited in Ayles 2000: 126).

These sorts of discourses were explicitly incorporated into teaching materials. Thus, by 1983, a fourth-grade writing book included a poem entitled, 'The Suffering of the Kampuchean People in the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary Period', which was adorned with a graphic showing a couple being executed while a child watched

in horror as a man was being hanged in the background (Ministry of Education 1983). Likewise, a first-grade moral education (*selathoa*) book included lessons on how 'The [new] Revolution has given Happiness to the People' (with a graphic showing happy citizens cheering soldiers) and 'The Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique's Criminal Plan to Destroy [our] Race' (with a graphic that showed people being executed at a mass grave by cadre with studded clubs and bloody hoes) (Ministry of Education 1984). Essays were followed by questions for class discussion. The latter essay asked:

1. What types of criminal acts did the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique inflict upon the Cambodian people who were ethnic Khmer like you?
2. These despicable ones (*vea*) killed Khmer in what sorts of ways?
3. What sort of intention did these despicable ones (*vea*) have that led them to kill your fellow members of the Khmer race?

The entry provided unsparing answers to the six and seven year olds, describing 'the most savage acts of killing', such as when 'these despicable ones' dug 'enormous, deep ditches' into which they dumped their victims 'dead or alive' after striking them with hoes, axes and clubs. Women and children, the text notes, were not spared: 'Their intention was to kill and destroy Kampucheans so that they would be extinguished' (Ministry of Education 1984: 29). Such texts emphasize the difference of the 'Pol Pot- Ieng Sary clique', marking them as not Khmer, a dangerous enemy plotting the annihilation of the Cambodian race, and, by implication, as a deviant communist sect.

Reading through such school texts, we find most of the discursive narratives – which were supplemented by related photos and posters – central to the PRK's regime of truth: repeated descriptions of the 'savage' and 'criminal acts' committed by the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique and of the enormous suffering of the people, assertions of the 'clique's' lack of Khmerness and deviant socialism, proclamations of the everlasting friendship between Kampuchea and Vietnam, glorification of the 'great liberation' on 7 January 1979, panegyrics to the rapid progress the PRK was achieving, and tributes to the PRK army and militias that protected the people from a return of the DK past. One fourth-grade writing text that I came across, published in 1988, focused on all of these themes and more (in fact, the majority of the articles touched upon these issues), including two consecutive articles on Tuol Sleng, one ('Torture at Tuol Sleng') with a graphic of a dead prisoner shackled to an iron above a pool of blood and instruments of torture (Ministry of Education 1988: 21).

MEMORIALIZING THE GENOCIDAL PAST

Here we find one of a number of cross-linkages to other parts of the PRK apparatus of truth and memory. In contrast to the verbal focus (albeit with powerful graphics) of the school texts, PRK memorials like Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek place emphasis on nonverbal symbolism (Ledgerwood 1997; Boreth

Ly 2003).

Opened on 13 July 1980, the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes is constructed to create a sense of authenticity, as if one is getting a glimpse of the prison moments after it had ceased operation (Ledgerwood 1997; Williams 2004). This sense is most immediately and forcefully connoted by the first of four buildings a visitor encounters, where one enters the hastily killed, bloodstains faintly visible on some floors. Not leaving anything to the imagination, each room includes an enlarged photograph of the executed prisoner taken just after the Khmer Rouge had abandoned the prison. The second building contains wall after wall of mug shots, taken when prisoners arrived at Tuol Sleng. The faces in the pictures show all sorts of expressions, but all are haunting, as the visitor, who has already seen building one, knows in graphic detail what their fate was.



Figure 4.1. Tuol Sleng buildings



Figure 4.2. Photograph of executed prisoner, Tuol Sleng

In the third building, the visitor finds classrooms divided into small brick cells in which the prisoners were shackled next to a small ammunition canister into which they relieved themselves. A list of Khmer Rouge prison rules - the only written text of note in the building - states that a prisoner had to ask permission before doing so. The last building is somewhat more reminiscent of a 'traditional' museum, featuring glass cases with Khmer Rouge artifacts, ranging from devices of torture to busts of Pol Pot that were being built on the premises. This building has more written text than the other buildings, but is still visually dominated by the artifacts and pictures of Khmer Rouge atrocities painted by Vann Nath, a former prisoner. Until recently, though, perhaps the most impressive exhibit was located in the last room, a 12-square-meter map of Cambodia made out of 300 skulls, taken from provinces throughout Cambodia (Ledgerwood 1997), with waterways painted blood red.



Such skulls have become iconic of DK, serving as the focus of memorials at the 'Genocidal Center at Choeung Ek', which opened in 1980, and local memorials throughout Cambodia - including one at the site of the killing field of the Pagoda at the Hill of Men - that were constructed following a 1983 PRK directive (Hughes 2003). The skulls condense an array of referents linked to the PRK discourses of legitimacy, ranging from the death, destruction, and brutality of DK to the danger of a return of the 'Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique'. The photos at Tuol Sleng serve a similar purpose, as Cambodians know the fate of the people portrayed and can project themselves back into the DK past when they, too, suffered greatly and faced death on a daily basis. Tuol Sleng and the memorials are also evidence, proof of the 'criminal acts' that Pol Pot's group committed.

Along these lines, (lack of) vision is a prominent metaphor in these memorials, particularly the blindfolded skull, with all of its powerful significations (see Boreth Ly 2003). Most immediately, it associates DK with a loss of memory and sensory perception. Many survivors recall DK as a time when people retreated into themselves, speaking when necessary but living in silence much of the time. Many people whispered to each other, 'Plant a kapok tree' (*dam daem kor*) a phrase that had a secondary connotation of muteness and thus also meant 'Remain mute'. Along these lines, the lack of sight is also linked to incapacitation, as people lost their freedom and agency on a daily basis. More ominously, DK was linked to incapacitation through death, both literally - the blindfolded skulls are those of dead people - and more figuratively through narratives of the disappeared and how the Khmer Rouge sometimes consumed their victim's livers, a potent act in a society where liver is linked to vitality (Hinton 2005). And then, of course, the DK regime is linked to social death and the erasure of memory.

While the victims lost their sight, the Khmer Rouge claimed to be 'all-seeing'. The DK regime was in many ways panoptic, as a network of spies kept track of what one said and did. In political tracts, the regime was described as 'all-seeing' and 'clairvoyant'. On the local level, people whispered: 'Angkar has the eyes of a pineapple.' In such ways, the theme of vision cut across PRK propaganda, suggesting the terror, incapacitation, and ignorance associated with DK.

Such sites and images interface with other dimensions of the PRK apparatus of truth and memory: holidays such as the 7 January commemoration of the 'liberation', the 20 May 'Day to Remain Tied in Hatred', PRK subsidy of publications and films about DK, the 1979 trial of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary in absentia, PRK laws on the Khmer Rouge, and so forth.

DISSONANT NARRATIVES

Despite the power of these redundant PRK narratives and institutions, such apparatuses are never monolithic. Instead, they are always challenged from outside and within because of the mismatch between the regime's more homogeneous discourse of truth and the more heterogeneous beliefs and understandings of the populace. All the propaganda in the world about the 'Friendship of Kampuchea and Vietnam', for example, could never assuage Chlat's animosity toward the Vietnamese, a sentiment shared by some Cambodians who feel that the Vietnamese look down upon Cambodians and have sought, both in the past and in the present, to seize Cambodian territory. 'I hate them', he would tell me again and again, 'I don't have words to tell you how much I hate them.' And then he would launch into a diatribe about the malicious and scheming nature of the Vietnamese. Vietnam also figured prominently for Cambodians living abroad, many of whom, while sharing the PRK's horror of DK, viewed the PRK as a front for Vietnamese control and believed Cambodia must be 'liberated' from the PRK and the Vietnamese arch-enemy with which it was allied. This sort of narrative was also central to the rhetoric of the resurgent Khmer Rouge, who attempted to rebuild their movement by lambasting the PRK's ties to Vietnam, which, it claimed, was perpetrating genocide against Cambodians and had fabricated the 'evidence' at places like Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek. Sadly, this anti-Vietnam stance played into the hands of China, Thailand, the United States and other Western powers that viewed Cambodia as a key proxy site in the global Cold War struggle. These countries not only supported the Khmer Rouge, but effectively allowed DK officials to maintain control of Cambodia's seat at the UN while ignoring the PRK's pleas for an international trial of former Khmer Rouge leaders (Amer 1990; Fawthrop and Jarvis 2004).

The Khmer Rouge, in turn, used this new-found legitimacy to make claims of its own about the past. Former Khmer Rouge leaders could be found making speeches to international audiences in which they not only denied that they had committed mass atrocities but argued that it was in fact the Vietnamese who were 'genocidal' ravagers (Ieng Thirith 1979:15). As for the PRK evidence, the Khmer Rouge dismissed it as a fabrication. A December 1994 radio broadcast stated:

Concerning those skeletons at Tuol Sleng, they are purely and simply part of the psychological war waged by Vietnam in its aggression against

Cambodia. The communist Vietnamese collected skulls and bones from graveyards all over North and South Vietnam, brought them by truck to Cambodia, and displayed them in an exhibition at Tuol Sleng as part of a psychological propaganda campaign to legalize their aggression against and occupation of Cambodia (16 December 1994).

The close link between the PRK and the Vietnamese proved to be a potent propaganda tool for the Khmer Rouge to gain recruits. It found echoes among the members of the post-DK diaspora, as Cambodians abroad asserted their identity and authenticity by inveighing against the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia.

With the signing of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords, the morphing of the PRK into the State of Cambodia, still led by Hun Sen's CPP faction, and the eventual UN election in 1993, the CPP apparatus was severely undermined by the discursive narratives of other Cambodian factions and Khmer abroad. Opposition parties lambasted the CPP for its ties to Vietnam; the CPP, in turn, continued to assert its legitimacy in terms of liberating and continuing to protect the populace from a return of the Khmer Rouge (particularly after the Khmer Rouge dropped out of the political process). These struggles sometimes took place over the symbolic sites associated with DK. For instance, there was debate over whether or not to cremate the remains at Choeung Ek (with the CPP asserting that this evidence should be preserved and King Sihanouk, contrarily, promoting 'reconciliation' and asserting that the souls of the dead should be allowed to rest), and over the map of skulls at Tuol Sleng (which was removed in 2003). New discourses of reconciliation emerged in conjunction with the peace process, leading to some major discursive shifts. After 1993, for example, most mention of the DK period disappeared from school texts. At the same time, human rights discourses, which had been incorporated into the language of the Paris Peace Accords and new constitution and were actively promoted by UNTAC, proliferated, often mediated through Buddhist understandings (Ledgerwood and Un 2003).

BUDDHIST UNDERSTANDINGS

Buddhism has played an interesting role throughout this process. When it was resurrected, with restrictions, by the PRK, Cambodians throughout the country began rebuilding temples and reconstituting their ritual life. The PRK saw Buddhism as an institution through which party ideals could be disseminated and its destruction under the Khmer Rouge served as another useful symbol of the abuses of DK. However, Buddhism also provided a set of understandings about the events that had occurred through notions of karma, merit, and action. It also provided a way of coping with the past through meditation and concepts of forgiveness and letting go of anger.

Thus, when speaking of the villager who was responsible for sending Sruon to his death, Chlat drew upon state-level, Buddhist, and non-state-level discourses:

I continue to think of revenge. But this thought of revenge, it doesn't know how to stop. And we should not have this thought or the matter will grow and keep going on and on for a long time. We should be a person who thinks and acts in accordance with *dhamma*. [A person who seeks revenge] only creates misery for our society. It is a germ in society. But I continue to think of revenge ... The people who killed my brother, who put down his name to get into the truck, are all alive, living in my village. To this day, I still really want revenge. I keep observing them. But, I don't know what to do ... The government forbids it.

To understand Chlat's remarks, and thus to begin to understand his response to the violence of the past, one must also unpack other local idioms that structure his response – in particular, the ontological resonances that give them power and force (Hinton 2005).

Buddhist understandings are often central to such responses. Thus, Cambodians sometimes say that Khmer Rouge perpetrators will 'suffer from their *kamma*'. Many invoke a Buddhist saying: 'Do good, receive good. Do bad, receive bad.' Buddhist doctrine provides an explicit ontology that explains how violence originates in ignorance and desire. If the consequences of violence are manifest in overt signs, such actions also have long-term consequences. On the one hand, violence may lead others to seek vengeance against you. On the other hand, harming others is considered a Buddhist sin resulting in a loss of merit and, most likely, diminished status in the next life.

Moreover, becoming bound in such cycles of violence and anger upsets the equilibrium that is so crucial to well-being for Cambodians, both in terms of social relations and bodily health, the two being highly interrelated in Cambodian ethnopsychology. Emotions such as anger constitute a potential disruption of this balance, signaling a disturbance in the social fabric in which a person is embedded and producing 'felt' somatic manifestations, such as pain (*chheu*), discomfort (*min sruol khluon*), dizziness (*vil*), or heat (*kdav*), symptoms that Cambodians constantly scan (D. Hinton 2001a, 2001b). The 'choking heat' of anger, then, metaphorically references the felt 'pressure' of an animating, yet potentially disruptive psychosocial process that strongly 'moves a person's heart' to act (Khmer Dictionary 1967). Chlat's invocation of heat and anger, then, indexes a culturally meaningful state of imbalance associated with the past, one that is not just an 'inner disturbance', but is a signifier of social suffering with its political and moral implications (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997).

Besides providing an etiology of violence and its consequences, Buddhism offers a remedy for this toxic state of being – the middle path. On the local level, Cambodians are enjoined to follow five moral precepts (*sel pram*), the first of which is the injunction not to kill. Monks preach that one must learn to control and extinguish one's anger, which arises from ignorance and desire and leads to violence and suffering. In Buddhism, the mindful way of dealing with anger is to recognize its source and to let it disappear, since anger, like everything else in the

world, is impermanent. Those who continue to act in ignorance will suffer from the consequences of their actions, with their deeds following like a shadow, as one suffers through the countless cycles of birth and rebirth.

If Buddhism provides a sort of ontological justice for victims, it also suggests that their suffering is a cosmic consequence of their own (or the Cambodian collective's) bad actions in the past (see Haing Ngor 1987: 157, 312). Some viewed what was going on as the fulfillment of Buddhist millenarian prophecies, such as the well-known Buddhist predictions (*Put Tumneay*). Many of these foretold a time when demons or members of the lowest rungs of Khmer society would take over and invert the social order, leading to an assault on Buddhism and widespread famine and death (see Ledgerwood 1990; Smith 1989). In fact, a popular DK metaphor for the need to remain silent, 'plant a kapok tree', seems to have been taken from just such a prophecy, as Pin Yathay explains:

Puth was a nineteenth-century sage who prophesied that the country would undergo a total reversal of traditional values, that the houses and the streets would be emptied, that the illiterate would condemn the educated, that infidels - *thmils* - would hold absolute power and persecute the priests. But people would be saved if they planted a kapok tree - *kor*, in Cambodian. *Kor* also means 'mute'. The usual interpretation of this enigmatic message was that only the deaf-mutes would be saved during this period of calamity. Remain deaf and mute. Therein, I now realized, lay the means of survival. Pretend to be deaf and dumb! Say nothing, hear nothing, understand nothing! (Pin Yathay 1996: 63)

On a cosmological level, such prophecies played upon Khmer understandings of purity and contamination, which are in part structured in terms of the opposition between the Buddha and demons, dhamma and adhamma, order and disorder, coherence and fragmentation (Hinton 2002; see also Kapferer 1988).

To fully understand the politics of memory in Cambodia, then, we must look not just at the larger state-level discursive structures, but at their points of articulation with and divergence from more local-level discourses and counter-discourses. In many instances, there is convergence. But, there are also important points of divergence, such as more local-level Buddhist discourses during the PRK.

This reemergence was signified dramatically by Maha Ghosananda's Peace Marches in the early 1990s, which symbolically asserted the revival of the *sangha* and *dhamma* (for example, by planting trees and through the composition of the march itself), the importance of cleansing Cambodia and oneself of anger (for example, by sprinkling holy water on the crowds), and the need to make peace symbolized by the path of the march, which connected different parts of the country, including past and present war zones (see Skidmore 1997).

More recently, these Buddhist discourses have come into tension with the

global human rights discourses that are associated with another mode of remembering the past: holding a tribunal. While Buddhism promotes mindful understanding of the past, which is one Buddhist argument for holding the tribunal, it also asserts the importance of letting go of the past and freeing oneself of anger and attachment. Depending on how they are invoked, these notions may clash with assertions that the trial will enable Cambodians to attain 'justice', to finally be able to 'heal themselves', and to impose the 'rule of law'. Such discourses are linked to Western juridical models, Christian notions of forgiveness, and assumptions about the universality of psychodynamic process.

THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN THE PRESENT

This story is being written today as Cambodia continues to struggle with the complexities of the past as a tribunal gets underway. Is this the appropriate way, at this point in Cambodian history, to deal with the past? Should the tribunal be supplemented by modalities of justice and remembering, such as a truth commission or Buddhist rituals? Or, should people just let go of their anger, forget about the past, and move on?

As I think about such questions, I wonder how people like Chlat might reply. I wish I could ask him. The last time I saw Chlat, in the summer of 2003, he was emaciated and had been sick for some time. He explained with a thin smile that he had a parasite that was resistant to medication, emphasizing the point by clenching an open hand to demonstrate how the parasite closed up whenever he took medicine. We talked for a while about his past before having dinner with a mutual friend and his son. About a year later, I received a message from that friend saying that Chlat was in the hospital on the brink of death. He had been diagnosed with AIDS – the disease that was perhaps the most devastating legacy of Cambodia's reengagement with the Western world. Chlat died a few days later.

I think that Chlat would have wanted a tribunal, though I have no doubt that he would have been critical of the corruption of the Cambodian judiciary, the hypocrisy of the international community, and failure of the process to reach people like the cadre who sent his brother to his death at the Pagoda at the Hill of Men. I picture the answers he might have given in that darkness, face silhouetted by billows of smoke and the embers of his cigarette aglow like his memories, then ash.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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NOTE

The following quotations from Heng Samrin's speech are cited in Gottesman (2003: 7–8).