

# Articles

## The Tuol Sleng Archives and the Cambodian Genocide

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RÉSUMÉ Les objectifs de cet article sont de présenter, en premier lieu, comment les Khmers Rouges ont documenté le génocide qu'ils ont perpétré envers leurs concitoyens cambodgiens en mettant plus particulièrement l'accent sur les documents créés, utilisés et entreposés au centre de détention de Tuol Sleng ; deuxièmement, de décrire la bureaucratie créée par les Khmers Rouges pour soutenir leur travail de documentation ; troisièmement, de suggérer quelques raisons expliquant pourquoi ils ont documenté leurs activités de manière si étendue ; enfin, de présenter le processus de disposition des documents et les usages actuels des archives. L'article se termine sur une discussion de l'importance du dépôt de Tuol Sleng pour les Cambodgiens et la communauté internationale dans leur quête respective de justice.

ABSTRACT The purposes of this paper are, first of all, to describe how the Khmer Rouge documented the genocide they committed against their fellow Cambodians, with particular emphasis on the records created, used, and stored at the Tuol Sleng Incarceration Centre; secondly, to describe the bureaucracy the Khmer Rouge created that supported their documentation activities; thirdly, to suggest some reasons why they documented their activities so extensively; and finally, to describe the disposition of their records and the uses to which they are now being put. The paper concludes with a discussion of the importance of the Tuol Sleng archives to the Cambodian people's and international community's pursuit of justice.

“Be careful or your body may disappear.”

Overheard by Komphot, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge purges, as he listened at night to the sounds of the cooperative where he was forced to live and work during the Khmer Rouge occupation.<sup>1</sup>

But not the memory of your struggle or the evidence of your existence.

### *Introduction*

Archival material bears witness to history, providing the means to describe how events unfold and how routine daily existence can be transformed into a horrifying world of death and atrocity. It also provides a means to account for

the past. In minutely recording the day-to-day activities of the Khmer Rouge, the Tuol Sleng archives show a cruel regime at work. They also show the faces and detail the lives of the victims of that regime. In documenting the Khmer Rouge's cruelty and its victims' identities and fate, the archives defend against one of the most common and disturbing consequences of genocide – whereby all memory of the individuals murdered is erased – and allow Cambodia's remaining people to seek justice, mourn their dead, and participate vigilantly in their government's reconstruction.

The purposes of this paper are to describe how the Khmer Rouge documented the genocide they committed against their fellow Cambodians, with particular emphasis on the records created, used and stored at S-21, the Tuol Sleng Incarceration Centre; to suggest some reasons why they documented their activities so extensively; to describe the bureaucracy the Khmer Rouge created supporting their documentation activities; and to discuss the disposition of Tuol Sleng records and the uses to which they are now being put. The paper concludes with a discussion of the importance of these records, and how they further the most fundamental and vital archival principles – evidence and accountability – and in so doing, further the search for truth and justice for the Cambodian people and the rest of the international community.

### *A Genocidal Regime*

Accounts of the actual number of Cambodians murdered by the Khmer Rouge vary, with conservative estimates at one million and more inclusive estimates at three million. Researchers dispute the numbers, some claiming that three million includes the number of Cambodians murdered in United States bombing raids, which dropped half a million tons of bombs on Cambodia, between 1969–1973, and that, therefore, all three million deaths should not be attributed to the Khmer Rouge alone. However, a recent article in *Population Studies* supports the estimates of Ben Kiernan and others that as many as 1.7 million Cambodians were killed violently during the years 1975–1978.<sup>2</sup> Disputes about numbers should nonetheless not obscure the fact that the Khmer Rouge decimated Cambodia's population, in a country whose pre-1976 population was estimated to be only seven million. No country in modern history has suffered a loss of such a high percentage of its population.

Hurst Hannum has sought to justify bringing applications before the International Court of Justice, claiming Cambodian violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Hannun describes in detail how the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge meet the United Nations' definition of genocide.<sup>3</sup> In fact, "genocide" is a term Cambodia scholars dispute. Many early reports of the activities of the Khmer Rouge government dismissed charges of genocide, insisting that such charges were the result of anti-Communist propaganda. However, later reports – even those

made by early Khmer Rouge sympathizers such as Ben Kiernan, David Chandler, and Wilfred Burchett – confirm that the Khmer Rouge slaughtered over a million Khmer and non-Khmer Cambodians in a drive to consolidate power and “purify” their revolution.

This, surely, was genocide. Chalk and Jonassohn define genocide as “a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.”<sup>3</sup> Other scholars insist that definitions of genocide also take into account the extent to which the state permits or represses dissent and the degree to which the bureaucratic apparatus serves as an essential component of the genocidal regime. Genocide is perpetrated in order to eliminate real, potential, or imagined threats; to spread terror among real, potential, or imagined enemies; to acquire economic wealth; to implement a belief, theory, or ideology; or to achieve any combination of these ends.<sup>4</sup> Intent is part of the definition of genocide; the perpetrators plan to kill, and construct complex rationalizations for killing.

In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge refined their killing apparatus to meet their goal of perfecting the future. They looked outward at first, killing resident populations of Cham, Chinese, and Vietnamese in response to what they perceived to be external threats to the revolution and to the purification of the Khmer people. Eventually their apparatus, in the words of many Cambodia observers, devoured its own, killing the very people who had supported the revolution from its inception. This, according to Chalk and Jonassohn, is characteristic of modern genocides, in which genocide has become transfigured into a response to perceived internal threats rather than to perceived external threats or the conquest and domination of another people, not belonging to the perpetrator state.

Again, the Khmer Rouge clearly committed genocide, targetting ethnic groupings and murdering over a million persons they believed were unsupportive of their ideology – a group they defined and described clearly and deliberately, in language meant to consistently dehumanize. They defined their victims by who they were – as something other than themselves – and eradicated them.

### ***Background***

The Khmer Rouge came to power in a country that was used to war. Cambodia’s modern history is a tale of colonialism, civil war, and international conflict. From 1863 to 1953, Cambodia was a French protectorate. In 1953, Prince Sihanouk won limited independence from France. Meanwhile, in 1949 Saloth Sar, soon to become Pol Pot, traveled to Paris, studying there until 1953, when he returned to Cambodia a communist. In 1967, a peasant uprising against rice tax sparked an armed struggle against Sihanouk. From 1967 to

1970, the Cambodian national army waged a war against Communist Party members and the Khmer Rouge. One year after the United States began its illegal and devastating bombing raids over Cambodia, Lon Nol deposed Sihanouk, who then went on to form the National United Front of Kampuchea, which joined forces with the Khmer Rouge. In 1972, Lon Nol was elected President of the Khmer Republic, accepting aid from and unreliable alliance with the United States. At the same time, the Khmer Rouge, having divided Cambodia into administrative zones, ordered the creation of agricultural cooperatives in all of these territories, although they did not yet control the entire country. (Some scholars believe the Khmer Rouge's plan to annihilate unbelievers was already evident in early plans to organize the country into cooperatives.) In 1975, after a protracted civil war, the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh and immediately ordered the evacuation of the capital. By 1976, the Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea was promulgated, and Pol Pot was installed as Prime Minister.

According to Elizabeth Becker, in 1970 Cambodia spent from twenty to twenty-five per cent of its country's budget on education in order to produce "capable informed ones" trained to lead the rest of the people. By 1976, the Khmer Rouge had abolished all infrastructure, including schools and libraries. "In the name of efficiency and increased productivity," Becker writes, "the Khmer Rouge abolished family life, individual life, the rhythms of agricultural life, and instituted a system of labor camp life throughout the entire country."<sup>5</sup> Under the Khmer Rouge, all monks were forbidden to wear robes, and thousands were murdered. Money markets, newspapers, and private property were all abolished. Cambodians were instructed to keep only one set of clothes, black pajamas, to be worn every day.

The Khmer Rouge exploited tensions that were the result of racial and ethnic divisions that existed within Cambodia. Different ethnic groups had different places within society. According to Becker, the Chinese were moneylenders and businessmen; the Vietnamese served as middlemen and in the service trades; the Cambodians were farmers, civil servants, and intellectuals; and the French were the foreign experts, chief importer-exporters, and plantation owners.<sup>6</sup> Ben Kiernan notes that the Vietnamese people occupied the bureaucratic posts open to Asians under the French colonial system.<sup>7</sup> (It was this and Cambodia's long-standing distrust of Vietnam that inspired the publication, in September 1978, of the *Livre Noir*, or *Black Book*, purportedly written by Pol Pot and justifying Cambodia's conflict with Vietnam.) The Khmer Rouge's first targets for annihilation were the non-Cambodian ethnic groups, perceived to be exploiting the masses of rural Cambodians. In 1978, a Radio Phnom Penh broadcast announced, "So far, we have attained our target: thirty Vietnamese killed for every fallen Kampuchean ... So, we could sacrifice two million Kampucheans in order to exterminate the fifty million Vietnamese – we shall still be six million."<sup>8</sup>

Milton Osborne blames the class divisions described above for fracturing Cambodian society and enhancing the influence of the Khmer Rouge.<sup>9</sup> Becker disagrees. She also disputes three commonly held reasons for the Khmer Rouge's rise to power and for the ensuing genocide: that the explanation lies in imported Maoist ideology; that responsibility for the communist victory and subsequent killing rests with the United States' war policies; that they were the result of Vietnam's drive to conquer Cambodia. She believes instead that Cambodia is a country with a violent history that in its insularity has developed an abiding fear of racial – that is Khmer – extinction and a complementary belief in racial superiority. This explains the genocide.<sup>10</sup>

It seems clear that all of the above factors may have contributed to the Khmer Rouge's rise and subsequent consolidation of government power. The Red Khmers were ambitious to embark on their revolutionary plan to transform Cambodian work, Cambodian culture, and life itself. They initiated a Maoist-influenced four-year economic plan to increase agricultural production. They evacuated cities, the residences of the elites. Urban Cambodians were marched to the country to work in the fields and produce for the state. Phnom Penh became a home to Khmer Rouge bureaucrats, and scattered factory workers. (Some factories continued to exist despite Khmer Rouge hostility toward machines, so pronounced that tractors were not allowed on rural cooperatives because people were expected to work and produce with their bare hands.) Complete control was the intention. According to two observers, the Khmer Rouge believed that the “evacuation of the unproductive, parasitical cities would eliminate potential centers of counterrevolution.”<sup>11</sup>

In fact, such was the nature of their mentality that it was not until September 1977 that the Cambodian people were told publicly that the Communist Party of Kampuchea led the Khmer Rouge and that Pol Pot was its leader. Until then, the Cambodians were made to fear Angkar, the “Organization,” an entity that was said to have “as many eyes as a pineapple and cannot make mistakes.”<sup>12</sup> David Chandler characterizes Angkar as a “shadowy, omnipotent revolutionary organization,” an all powerful body so strong that it “had taken the place of [Cambodians'] parents and had to be obeyed.”<sup>13</sup> Though the Khmer Rouge's leadership was still operating in secrecy, it was at the same time establishing a rigid administration through which it intended to oversee the work and lives of their fellow Cambodians.

### *Administration*

The Khmer Rouge organized itself into administrative units that were structured hierarchically, designed to provide its members with the means to exercise complete control over Cambodia. The administration derived its goals, though not its authority in any real sense, from the revolutionary constitution promulgated by the Khmer Rouge leadership. Hu Nim, the Cambodian Minis-

ter for Information and Propaganda announced the new constitution in a radio broadcast on 5 January 1976.<sup>14</sup> Within the document, a projected new society was described along with a new language which the Khmer Rouge introduced. New terms such as “enthusiastic collective labor,” “work as directed,” and “report on work achieved” were described. Complete change was anticipated. Included within the constitution were what one commentator termed its “most radical features: ... the [re]organization of society ... and the collectivization of what are termed ‘important means of production.’” The constitution advocated the rebuilding of Angkor and emphasized, eerily, the Cambodian people’s right to work. Not only did it describe the organization of the army, but also the obligations of a new “people’s tribunal,” which included obligatory prosecution of persons “who exhibit ‘dangerous, systematic opposition to the people’s state.’” It enumerated no rights, and as one observer has noted, contained no provisions to ensure protection of the people from themselves, a basic norm of a functioning civil society.<sup>15</sup>

The Khmer Rouge divided Cambodia into seven geographical zones governed by a Central Committee. The zones were subdivided into regions, sectors, districts, subdistricts, and cooperatives. Cadres patrolled each area. There were no laws, except what the Khmer Rouge ordered. There was no connection to the outside world: all international telephone, telegram, and cable connections were destroyed. Health care, as a matter of policy, was restricted. “All property became ‘collectively owned’; farms, factories, homes, offices, small fishing craft, tools, and cars were the property of the state. Citizens were divided into three categories: workers, peasants, and soldiers. No others existed.”<sup>16</sup> As they marched into the fields to work, the Khmer Rouge chanted slogans, and forced others to join in:

“Détruis l’ordre ancien, remplace-le par l’ordre nouveau.”  
 “Tu ne dois absolument rien cacher à l’Angkar.”  
 “Tu dois être honnête avec l’Angkar.”  
 “Tu dois te plier aux ordres de l’Angkar.”  
 “Ne nourris pas d’idées personnelles.”  
 “Il faut détruire l’ennemi visible et aussi celui qui est invisible, l’ennemi dans sa vie mentale.”  
 “Celui qui proteste est un ennemi, s’il oppose il devient un cadavre.”  
 “Il vaut mieux arrêter dix personnes à tort que d’en libérer une par erreur.”<sup>17</sup>

Destroy the old order, replace it with the new order.  
 You must hide absolutely nothing from Angkar.  
 You must be honest with Angkar.  
 You must yield yourself to Angkar’s orders.  
 Do not nurse/cherish selfish ideas.

It is necessary to destroy the visible enemy, and also the invisible enemy,  
the enemy of your mental life.  
He who protests is an enemy, if he resists he becomes a corpse.  
It is better to wrongly arrest ten people than to free one in error.  
[author translation]

From the redistribution of the population, to the changes in language and culture, to the installation of a meticulous administration with its minutely subdivided and controlled components, the Khmer Rouge prepared themselves for a bloody and thorough experiment in social engineering.

### *Tuol Sleng and Its Documents*

Into the careful administrative structure the Khmer Rouge fitted the Tuol Sleng Incarceration Center, or S-21 (for Security or Special Branch 21). Originally the Tuol Svay Prey school complex within the Tuol Sleng district of Phnom Penh, it became the headquarters for the secret police, the Santebal, of the Khmer Rouge. In it, twenty thousand people were tortured and executed. Only seven, by chance, survived.

Tuol Sleng was one of many prison and extermination centers established by the Khmer Rouge to root out counterrevolutionary activity in Cambodia. However, as yet, not much is known about the other extermination centres and their relationship to the Santebal. Ben Kiernan, Director of the Cambodian Genocide Program (CGP), reports:

The central or national Security forces in the Pol Pot period were known as Santebal, or "Security Police," whereas the Zonal and regional security forces were usually called Santesokh, or "Security." Analysis of the voluminous Santebal archives ... now at the Documentation Center of Cambodia [in Cambodia] may shed some light on the relationship between these national and zonal/regional security forces. ... There is only one rural DK [Democratic Kampuchea] prison for which archives survive that I know of. This is the Krang Ta Chan prison, the security headquarters of Tram Kak district (District 105 in Region 13 of the southwest Zone) in Takeo province. I visited the prison in 1980, and was shown the archives. I was able to copy them at the time and deposited a full set at the Tuol Sleng Museum, but they were not catalogued or apparently accessed until I found them there again in 1995. We (the Cambodian Genocide Program) scanned them in 1996 and the documents are now all accessible on our website.<sup>18</sup>

The Tuol Sleng documentation remains the most important. The evidence suggests that the surviving documents from Krang Ta Chan prison were not voluminous (as Kiernan indicates that he was able to copy them all in one visit). The evidence has not been used by Cambodians or international researchers until now. For one thing, it is not clear if all the Santebal, Tuol Sleng, and

Santesokh archives now reside at the Documentation Center of Cambodia, headed by Youk Chhang, or if some still reside at the Tuol Sleng Museum. (The Documentation Center archives are currently being used by Cambodians and international scholars to bring Khmer Rouge leaders to justice.)

Nonetheless, descriptions of documents collected in the CGP database (the documents themselves are in Khmer, which the author cannot read) suggest that the Krang Ta Chan security forces did document their activities and report on them to the Khmer Rouge's central security forces. In his book, *The Pol Pot Regime*, Kiernan, using the evidence, describes the Krang Ta Chan security forces as having kept regular hours (6:00 to 11:00 a.m., 2:00 to 6:00 p.m., and 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.) for killing.<sup>19</sup> Housed in the CGP's bibliographic database are reports from the Tram Kak District to Angkar, descriptions of interrogations and torture at Krang Ta Chan prison (where ten thousand people were murdered), and lists of names of Tram Kak residents. From many of the document descriptions, however, it is impossible to determine who wrote the document, who the document was intended for, and what its ultimate disposition was, although some Krang Ta Chan documents were sent to and housed at Tuol Sleng, suggesting that the regional prison reported to Tuol Sleng. Certainly, according to the CGP's 1998 report to the United States State Department, the Santebal archives detail "the mechanisms of political violence not only at the highest level, in the capital, but also in the Cambodian countryside ... [T]hey contain concrete proof of the nationwide scope of the genocide and its centralized organization."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, further analysis of the Krang Ta Chan documents will reveal the extent to which the Khmer Rouge documented and reported on their genocidal activities in the geographical zones. But until then, the Tuol Sleng archives will remain the most important body of documentation.

The earliest report in the Western press of the existence of Tuol Sleng and other Cambodian prisons came from Wilfred Burchett, reporting in Britain's *Manchester Guardian*:

In this land of horrors, the only place I have found in my first three days here where reliable statistics are available is the death factory in the former Tuol Sleng High School. ... In 16 different, spacious rooms, the torturer-executioners were at work – like other [Cambodians] – for seven days a week ... Each seems to have disposed on the average of at least eight victims a day. ... A long list of guidelines personally drawn up by Pol Pot in his own handwriting stipulated that victims, once in the torture chamber, "must know they are going to die, so might as well make a full confession and get it over with quickly but they must not be killed until a full confession had been extracted."<sup>21</sup>

As is evident from Burchett's report, Tuol Sleng and its operations were governed at the highest level, overseen by Pol Pot himself, and were clearly an integral part of the Khmer Rouge administrative machine.



Many harrowing accounts of Tuol Sleng exist. Chanthou Boua, Ben Kieran, and Anthony Barnett describe in detail records they found in their article “Bureaucracy of Death.”<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Becker relied extensively on the Tuol Sleng archives for her book, *When the War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia’s Revolution and Its People* (1986). And David Hawk, in his article “Tuol Sleng Extermination Centre,”<sup>23</sup> provides detailed descriptions of the kinds of records the staff kept and the fastidious nature of the “work” they did. According to Hawk, included among the documents found in the Tuol Sleng archives were:

1. Arrest forms on individual prisoners
2. Day-by-day arrest schedules denominated by name, alias, sex, age, function, or position
3. Mug-shot arrest photographs of individual prisoners
4. Daily charts on the prison population denominated by place of arrest and occupational unit or function
5. The handwritten or dictated confessions of approximately 5,000 prisoners
6. Typed summaries of prisoners’ confessions prepared by prison officials
7. Written notes reporting the torture of prisoners
8. Photographs of tortured and executed prisoners
9. Reports on the medicine administered to prisoners wounded or ill from torture and mistreatment
10. Signed execution orders
11. Signed daily execution schedules denominated by name, alias, age, sex, position, and date of arrest
12. Elaborate diagnostic flow charts prepared by prison officials attempting to show the inter-relationship of “enemy networks” (based on information extracted from the confessions)
13. Lengthy summaries also prepared by prison officials outlining the plots against the revolution by various alleged factions

According to Hawk, “there are also photographs and biographies of the guards, interrogators and executioners, and memoranda on the duties and work schedules of the guards. There are extensive notes from the ‘work review’ sessions of the interrogators. And there is correspondence between the Tuol Sleng authorities and the highest officials of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea.”<sup>24</sup>

The arrest schedules, daily charts of the prison populations, and execution schedules show clearly that the Khmer Rouge were keeping careful track of who and how many they killed. Hurst Hannum, quoting Anthony Barnett, points out, “the logic at work in Democratic Kampuchea was that ‘people were not eliminated because they were mistakenly considered traitors, they were accused of treason because they were going to be eliminated.’”<sup>25</sup> The

Khmer Rouge believed it needed to exterminate whole categories of people who, although the Khmer Rouge had earlier announced the abolition of nationalities as a matter of policy, they instead defined according to social “functions.” Becker describes 750 executions recorded in 1976 at Tuol Sleng: 164 factory workers, 112 people from the population at large, 61 students, 35 professors, 20 doctors and nurses, 49 engineers, 55 bureaucrats of the old regime, 209 soldiers from the old regime, and 47 students and dignitaries from overseas.<sup>26</sup> By keeping detailed records, the Khmer Rouge could chart their “progress” toward a clean, pure, revolutionary state.

Hawk’s investigations revealed further information regarding the day-to-day operations at Tuol Sleng, for example that “interrogation sessions were scheduled at 6:45 in the morning, 1:45 in the afternoon, and 6:45 in the evening.”<sup>27</sup> Prisoners were photographed with their prison numbers: “The numbering system began anew every 12 hours. No. 1 was pinned on a prisoner at 1 a.m. At 12:59 p.m., the number might be 100 or 150 or 225. At 1 p.m., it was back to 1.”<sup>28</sup> The activities of interrogators and policy, practice, and problems of torture were carefully delineated in the *Interrogator’s Manual*. According to Hawk, topics described included the interrogators’ hours of work, the proper preparation of documents and reports, the correct attitude of the interrogator, the importance of maintaining secrecy, and the relations between the Communist Party, the revolution, and its “enemies.” “It is necessary to be fully aware that doing politics is most important,” the *Manual* admonishes.<sup>29</sup> All interrogation work was expected to be subordinate to the larger purpose of ensuring that the confessions that the interrogators extracted were in line with the Party’s political aims.

Altogether ten thousand prisoners’ dossiers, containing over two hundred thousand pages of documents, were uncovered at Tuol Sleng, revealing that from one thousand to fifteen hundred prisoners were held there at any one time. Old student notebooks were used to record some of the information. Prisoners were forced to write their confessions over and over again. Becker appends her book with an example, an excerpt from Bu Phat’s confession, which indicates that he was forced to write his autobiography out four separate times, detailing the situation in northeastern Cambodia before the war, describing the “moral errors” he had committed with women, and admitting to the murder of a party leader in northern Cambodia.<sup>30</sup> The confession is a painful, desperate, ultimately hopeless attempt to tell the interrogator what he wants to hear.

Such confessions were reviewed and annotated by the interrogators, and then by the commander of S-21, Comrade Duch. Duch reported directly to Son Sen, the Khmer Rouge’s Minister of Defense and member of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. Correspondence between Sen and Duch indicates Sen’s close interest in the operations at Tuol Sleng:

'Greetings to Beloved Comrade Duch'

1. It is necessary to economise on paper ...
2. As concerns the methodology for those who are important, it is necessary to:
  1. have them write,
  2. or make a tape recording and then transcribe it ...
3. In any case, each and every response must be consciously reviewed because some of their responses also attack us. Some of them attack purposefully. Some of them are afraid and just talk and talk. Therefore it is necessary to be really conscientious and really weigh things.

Most warmest revolutionary fraternity.

5 October, 1977 Khiev [alias for Son Sen]<sup>31</sup>

From Duch, to Son Sen, to Pol Pot, the party leadership was linked through an unbroken chain of documentation and command to the activities at Tuol Sleng.

Circular No. 870 and the publication "Important Culprits," both emanating from the Kampuchean Central Committee, direct party members to be vigilant about purging dissident elements. Members were instructed to eradicate agents of the CIA, agents of the KGB, and "revisionist Vietnamese expansionists hiding in the ranks of the Khmer revolution."<sup>32</sup> Thus, at the beginning of 1977, Tuol Sleng began to imprison and execute party officials in greater numbers. Whereas in the previous year, people were imprisoned and executed for wearing glasses, making even slight mistakes in their work on the cooperatives, or laughing or crying, from 1977 until the Vietnamese invasion in 1979, people were now arrested for suspected subversion and disloyalty to the party. The Khmer Rouge had turned on themselves. Hu Nim is one example.

In 1970, Hu Nim, along with Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan, had been canonized in Cambodia as "the three people's heroes" because of their public leadership of the movement that eventually ousted Lon Nol. Hu Nim announced the new Kampuchean Constitution to the Cambodian people. But on 10 April 1977, he was arrested and made to confess to a series of crimes against the state – among them being a CIA operative – before his execution at Tuol Sleng on 6 July 1977. On 15 April 1977, Khieu Samphan broadcast, "We must wipe out the enemy in our capacity as masters of the situation, following the lines of domestic policy, foreign policy and military policy of our revolutionary organization. Everything must be done neatly and thoroughly. ... We must ... remain alert ... and continue to fight and suppress all stripes of enemy at all times."<sup>33</sup> Hu Nim's confessions were monitored at every level of the Party structure. Nim signed his confessions and affixed his thumbprint as well. The confessions offer proof, in addition to other evidence, that the Khmer Rouge were now embarked on a practice of devouring their own.

Boua, Kiernan, and Barnett describe other Tuol Sleng documentation. Their article provides a sketch map of Tuol Sleng, indicating the physical layout of the prison as well as where the prisoners, administrators, and documents were

housed. When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1979, they took the Khmer Rouge by surprise, leaving them only twenty-four hours to leave Tuol Sleng. As a result, the Khmer Rouge left their records behind. As described by Boua and colleagues, they remained essentially intact: “There are arrest books, small sheets typed out and stapled into months; day-sheets, recording the occupants by category; large sheets stapled at the top and headed Chh-mouk nak tous Komtech, literally ‘the names of prisoners crushed to bits’, followed by the date; and there are ‘confessions.’”<sup>34</sup>

According to Anthony Barnett, “the prison was basically a political one, for personnel from the regime itself. ... Many names are recorded of those who never saw Tuol Sleng, as one of the purposes of the confessions was to obtain lists of ‘traitors.’ Fantastic charts of ‘lines’ of contacts were then drawn up, in coloured inks. ... Some valuable confessions are missing. ... Others have been stolen by staff who have defected and sold them. ... But in one corner there is a neat card index – part of the ‘S21’ system for keeping tabs on its records of death.”<sup>35</sup> As the prison refined its operations, more forms were developed and more care was taken in the typing and filing of documents. As the business of Tuol Sleng became more routine and functions more defined, the resulting documentation of activities became more formal in appearance, and its retrieval and use became more standardized.

Charts showing “networks of contacts” are particularly eerie. They resemble complex genealogical trees replete with connecting branches of “traitors,” including names, functions, and whereabouts. So Nem, a confessor, is shown, for example, to be “connected” directly to nine other “traitors,” three of whom are doctors, one of whom is a teacher, and the rest are either unknown or the recording is illegible. By no more than four degrees of separation, So Nem is linked to Lon Nol, the greatest traitor of them all.<sup>36</sup>

Lists of prisoners held in custody were duplicated from a master every day<sup>37</sup> and statistics added for “arrivals,” “departures,” numbers of male and female prisoners, and so on. A section of the document entitled “Names of Prisoners Died of Sickness” indicated prisoners’ names, “revolutionary names,” positions, ethnicity, and causes of death. Documents were read, reread, stamped, annotated, and maintained by a staff of clerks. Kiernan and his research team at Yale have developed an organizational chart indicating the supervisory chain, numbers of employees and their duties at Tuol Sleng.<sup>38</sup> Although it is not complete (there were as many as two hundred staff at Tuol Sleng), the chart gives a succinct representation of who was responsible for what, indicating the high degree of organization in place.

Several of the seven survivors of Tuol Sleng and a few of their torturers have spoken publicly of their experiences, confirming not only accounts of the numbers tortured and executed but also the methods of documentation. Ung Pech, who later became the first director of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, was imprisoned and tortured until the Khmer Rouge realized that he could be

useful maintaining the electrical generating equipment. Pech confirms that at least four Americans were tortured, had confessions extracted, and were then executed at Tuol Sleng.<sup>39</sup>

Sous Thy was a clerk at Tuol Sleng, who recorded the names and stories of thousands of prisoners. His personnel file (regularly updated, as were other Tuol Sleng personnel files) contains his autobiography and notes from weekly self-criticism sessions among prison staff.<sup>40</sup>

Nhem Ein was the prison photographer. According to an account of his experiences, based on his memories, as a teenager, he was sent by the Khmer Rouge to “Shanghai, China, for training as a photographer, filmmaker and cartographer. He returned in May 1976 to be named chief photographer at Tuol Sleng, in charge of five apprentices ... Son Sen, who had overall responsibility for internal security, visited Tuol Sleng as often as once a week ... Pictures of important people – before and after execution – were sent to him and Pol Pot as proof they had been killed.”<sup>41</sup> Ein was sixteen years old, the average age for Khmer Rouge members, when he “worked” at Tuol Sleng. With his Rolleiflex 6 x 6 camera and his large format 21–inch film, he took over ten thousand pictures, “processing his film overnight to be attached to individual dossiers.”<sup>42</sup>

Im Chhan survived Tuol Sleng by carving statues. After twenty-six days of torture, Duch decided Chhan could be used to sculpt busts of Pol Pot. Trained at the Cambodian Fine Arts Academy, Chhan was arrested in 1976: “When they arrest you,” he said, “there are no charges, they just say, ‘You have known modern life. You used to go to the cinema, the restaurants, the bars.’”<sup>43</sup>

Him Huoy was a Khmer Rouge soldier who was assigned to be a guard and driver at Tuol Sleng. His job was to make lists of those condemned to death, drive them to the “killing field,” and then verify that they had been executed.<sup>44</sup> His signature is on the death lists: “One by one, the prisoners sat by the well, bent their heads and were hit on the neck with an iron bar ... [T]hen a second man would kill them with a knife, and throw them into the well. I saw this with my own eyes, and I was afraid.”<sup>45</sup>

Vann Nath was tortured until it was decided that his skill as a painter could be put to use. Every day from sunrise to midnight he painted oil paintings of Pol Pot’s face. When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, Nath escaped as Tuol Sleng guards were leading the remaining prisoners into the jungle to be killed.<sup>46</sup>

The records of Tuol Sleng are vast and detailed. They prove the extent to which the Khmer Rouge leadership exerted control over the party membership and population at large. They are as horrific as they are mundane, a thorough representation of, in Hannah Arendt’s words, the banality of evil.

### ***Why Did They Document?***

The Khmer Rouge’s obsession with documentation was reflected in all of their activities. The Khmer Rouge used a wide variety of media – broadcasts, corre-

spondence, circulars, manuals, the Kampuchean Constitution, forms, lists, charts, photographs, and card files – to convey their ideology, goals, and objectives, and to further their daily work. As they looked inward to purge traitorous elements, their documentation became more thorough, more compulsive. Torture sessions extracted confessions in more numerous versions. Increasingly complex networks of associations were diagramed. More information generated by the Tuol Sleng machine was forwarded to higher-ranking party officials.

Boua and colleagues believe that the detailed confessions were needed to justify to the public the killing of popular and powerful figures.<sup>47</sup> But Chandler points out that the confessions were not public, that no prisoners went on trial, that no prison sentences were made public, and that all executions and burials occurred in secrecy.<sup>48</sup> Chandler's argument is more convincing.

The Khmer Rouge did not have a sense of "the public" and did not, therefore, seek to justify their methods to the Cambodian population. From the time of the promulgation of the constitution onward, the Khmer Rouge pursued control through massive social reorganization, work, and cultural dismemberment. Ethnic and religious groups were systematically murdered and nationalities decreed nonexistent; individual life was permanently disrupted; language was changed, and the revolutionary Marxist cant that was substituted was made to dominate public and private discourse through relentless repetition.

The pressure to document was internal. The Khmer Rouge were rewriting history, abolishing the old order, and establishing the new; doing so required not only a new language but meticulous means to record it and the events it described. The Constitution, manuals, and circulars served to standardize and disseminate the policies that guided the cadres. The forms, lists, confessions, and charts allowed the Tuol Sleng staff to prove that they were working in the interests of the revolution and keeping careful track of their various actions and activities. The documentation also provided information that traveled up the hierarchy of command to the top leadership, allowing Son Sen, Pol Pot, and others to assess the progress of their nationwide initiatives. The lists associated the names of people with their functions within the regime, and thereby provided the leadership with the means to evaluate how many persons within each category had been purged.

The Khmer Rouge were obsessed with purity. They wanted nothing to sully the work of the revolution. Obsessive documenting allowed them to reassure themselves that all measures had been taken to cleanse the country. Hannum notes that the Khmer Rouge killed to defend their ideology. He also believes that they documented what they did for the same reason. According to Hannum, "the consistency between internal memoranda and public pronouncements of the regime and what actually occurred throughout the country – the deterioration of social conditions and increased violence and death as the government consolidated its control over the provinces, the operation of exter-

mination facilities under the direct command of the highest state authorities, and the pervasive government control over work and agricultural policies – [all indicate] the deliberate character of decisions taken at the highest levels of government.”<sup>49</sup> He goes on to point out that the daily operations of lower level prisons were not as extensively documented as those of Tuol Sleng, where purged Khmer Rouge functionaries were imprisoned, but believes, nevertheless that there was a visible thread of intention binding documentation, ideology, and action together. The Khmer Rouge documented in order to codify their beliefs and enumerate and punish nonbelievers.<sup>50</sup>

Eric Markusen, in an article discussing the Cambodian genocide in terms of Robert Jay Lifton’s model of genocidal killing, contends that the development of extreme ideology is a response to a countrywide need to guard against death anxiety – to “respond to threats to symbolic immortality.”<sup>51</sup> In this view, perpetrators of mass violence see their acts as life giving. Whatever one may think of psychological explanations for historical phenomena, Markusen makes compelling points about the highly structured societies genocidal regimes develop and the language, filled with disease and dehumanizing imagery, they adopt in order to accomplish their aims. He quotes Lifton, who says, “Violence cannot be understood without including its close relationship to symbolization of immediate or ultimate vitality.”<sup>52</sup> Reminiscent of Franz Fanon’s belief in the vivifying effects of post-colonial mass killing, this analysis suggests that violent acts need the support of highly symbolic language and documentation. The Khmer Rouge documents testify to the regime’s attention to structure and symbol. The tools with which the Khmer Rouge built its killing machine, however, were also the documents that simultaneously recorded the destruction it committed.

### *The Value of the Tuol Sleng Archives*

As early as 1976, the Western press had reported on refugee accounts of mass killings in Cambodia resulting from the new regime’s assertion of political control. Nevertheless, even Osborne claimed not to have all the facts and her therefore reluctant to blame the new group in power.<sup>53</sup> When Boua and her colleagues reviewed the Tuol Sleng archives in 1980, they searched not only for evidence of the existence of a genocidal bureaucracy, but as well, for proof that there was also widespread resistance to the Khmer Rouge among other Cambodians.<sup>54</sup> Chalk warns of the problems associated with collecting evidence of genocides stating that among other factors, refugee and perpetrator accounts are not always reliable and that, in any case, data is difficult to extract.<sup>55</sup>

The questions arise: what good is the evidence from Cambodia – primary documentation originating from victims and perpetrators – if we cannot rely on it? If we do rely on it anyway, how do we know if we have discovered the

truth and are holding the right people, countries, or regimes accountable for their actions?

In 1980, Gavan McCormack in his article, "The Kampuchean Revolution 1975–1978: The Problem of Knowing the Truth," discussed in detail the problems with relying on refugee accounts and the Western press' treatment of them. In this article he claimed that the Western press continually distorts the truth about Southeast Asian politics (a just claim), and that news about Cambodia was no exception. At that time, McCormack still supported some tenets of the Kampuchean revolution (if not the murders that occurred), acknowledging that "no commentator on the history of Democratic Kampuchea denied that killings took place," but contending that the real issue was "the scale of such killings and the extent to which they stemmed from deliberate policy."<sup>56</sup> McCormack documented many past instances of unsubstantiated reporting on the wars in Southeast Asia and commented pointedly on the West's obsession with destroying Vietnam. But, for McCormack, the issue of guilt was clearly a complex question. He finally concluded:

The truth about the Kampuchean revolution is extraordinarily difficult to discover, both because of the policy of isolation and seclusion chosen by the revolutionary regime and because of the intensity of the campaign of vilification launched against it by hostile propaganda and intelligence agencies. Much evidence was manufactured and was totally unreliable. Till some time in 1978 the case against Kampuchea was of such dubious nature that many socialists and progressive people refused to give it any credence. It is likely that some fabrication/distortion of evidence is still going on, but in my view the balance of probability has now shifted heavily towards the view that the Kampuchean revolution between 1975 and the end of 1978 was a terrible travesty. The volume of corroborative detail from so many witnesses to so many different observers, some of them skilled and sceptical, has gone beyond the point where it could be dismissed as the product of the unseen hand of hostile agencies."<sup>57</sup>

Since then, the picture has become much clearer. Though scholars warn against the reliability of the evidence from revolutionary archives, no one can deny the accumulation of information. The same accounts recorded over and over again by different observers on all ends of the political spectrum become believable because, given the weight of evidence, they corroborate each other.

This still does not eliminate the problem of uncovering specific truths. There is still much conflicting evidence about who was responsible for what (for example, whether the Chief of Interrogation at Tuol Sleng was Pon [Tong Sin Hean] or Chan [Marn Nay], or both at different times). Hawk wonders what real truths and evidence the tortured Cambodians' confessions disclose. Becker notes in her appended essay on the Tuol Sleng archives that she had to check the information revealed in the confessions against many other sources



to determine what was accurate.<sup>58</sup> But broad truths are still ascertainable, and here the Cambodian records' value in establishing accountability for crimes can begin to assert itself. Given that the overwhelming volumes of recorded evidence have indisputably proved that the Khmer Rouge systematically controlled, oppressed, and destroyed their fellow Cambodians, the finer details can now be assembled and clear responsibility assigned.

Embodiment of values of authenticity, reliability, and accountability within records is largely dependent on a knowledge of context within which the records were created. The circumstances that produce records are as important as the records themselves in understanding what they say. It is impossible to comprehend the tortured Cambodians' confessions, for instance, without knowing the context from which they sprang. The *Interrogators' Manual* serves to interpret some of the unbelievable statements made in the confessions; if it is understood from the *Manual* what the torturer was trying to extract from his victim, then it is possible to understand why the victim admitted, for instance, to being both a CIA and KGB operative.<sup>59</sup> Analyzing documents in terms of their evidentiary context and origins is indispensable to ensuring that the documents are what they say they are and say what they say. Once the intrinsic truth of the documents is established, they can then be used to frame the full story and build the case.

Much work has been done to demonstrate conclusively that the Khmer Rouge are accountable for the Cambodian genocide. At the end of 1979, when S-21 was discovered, the Vietnamese, with money donated by East Germany, converted Tuol Sleng into what was termed a "Museum of Genocide." The converted prison was left as it had been found, with dried pools of blood on the floors and walls, and torturers' instruments displayed throughout. Nhem Ein's photographs hang on the walls.<sup>60</sup>

In 1980, the Tuol Sleng archives were opened to foreign scholars. There are some limits to their value. While Boua and colleagues claimed to find them essentially intact, other scholars found that the records' order had been disrupted and significant pieces were missing. Boua and her collaborators state that the records of some confessions were sold to Pol Pot's supporters.<sup>61</sup> However, the scholars who began work on the archives, along with Ung Pech, reorganized many files, labeling and numbering them to make them more accessible to other researchers.

Further steps have since been taken to enhance the records' accessibility and value. In 1994 two American photographers and members of the Photo Archive Group, Chris Riley and Douglas Niven, discovered six thousand photo negatives in a rusty file cabinet. They cleaned, processed, and catalogued them, and eventually produced a photo book, sold some of the pictures to museums and galleries, and allowed the Cambodian Genocide Program to scan the images and mount them on the Web as a part of that the program's digital photo archives.<sup>62</sup>

Issues have nevertheless arisen. While Riley and Niven provided a service by making these photographs available, the sale of some raised questions regarding the proper use of archival material. Guy Trebay, in an article for *The Village Voice* points out: “Although motivated initially by a desire to save the precious negatives from destruction, Riley’s and Niven’s ensuing decision to sell art-quality portfolios of 100 prints from the Tuol Sleng archive, and to obtain international copyright on them for their recently incorporated non-profit [sic], raises serious questions. ... The pictures from Tuol Sleng are the sole remaining evidence of 6,000 human lives. Can anyone truly own them?”<sup>63</sup> One might ask: what if a Cambodian family, who are trying to find out what happened to a missing relative, see the relative’s picture for the first time since last seeing that person alive, in an art book memorializing the unknown dead? It is one thing to get permission from a family to publish a dead relative’s photograph. It is quite another to treat the photograph as though its contents are merely symbolic and the person portrayed is anonymous and therefore divorced from the wider human contexts of grieving family and ruptured community.

Riley’s and Niven’s productions of Ein’s photographs have been featured in museum exhibits around the United States. Artifacts of torture from Tuol Sleng are on display there at the Genocide Museum. While seeing that information is accessible is critical to making perpetrators of inhumane acts accountable, its availability can also revictimize victims. All public attempts to bring individuals or regimes to justice risk further injuring their victims. In pursuing accountability, the stakes are high, and those in control of the evidence have a special responsibility to ensure that their use of the evidence exclusively supports the victims’ pursuit of justice.

Khmer Rouge officials have both confirmed and, not surprisingly, denied the veracity of the documentation from Tuol Sleng. In an article in 1981 in the *Washington Post*, Becker describes an interview she had with Ieng Sary, the Khmer Rouge’s Foreign Minister, in which he admitted that the documents found in Tuol Sleng are authentic. He goes on to acknowledge that it was Khmer Rouge official policy to kill dissenters saying that “I knew it [Tuol Sleng] by its number: 21-S. It was headquarters of security. I didn’t know the people there were malicious. The lives of the people there were considered like packages, inhuman.”<sup>64</sup>

In 1994, however, the Khmer Rouge leadership (still actively fighting a guerilla war in Cambodia) issued a statement claiming that the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum was a hoax: “The communist Vietnamese collected skulls and bones from graveyards all over north and south Vietnam, brought them by trucks to Cambodia, and displayed them in an exhibition at Tuol Sleng as part of a psychological campaign to legalize their aggression against and occupation of Cambodia.”<sup>65</sup>

Observers have commented that the international community faces some

serious choices. Becker and others have commented on the consequences of not trying the Khmer Rouge in the International Court of Justice. The West, and the United States in particular, have been reluctant to pursue prosecution fearing that doing so would damage relations with China. The United Nations has spent \$2.8 billion trying to shore up Cambodian democracy, including funding UNTAC (the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) to develop a “human rights culture” within the country. The UN, however, has not pursued prosecution of Khmer Rouge leadership.

Meanwhile, though extensive documentation of the Cambodian genocide exists, Cambodia itself has granted amnesty to Khmer Rouge leaders. In 1991, Son Sen was given a seat on the Supreme National Council, which set policy for Cambodia prior to the general elections in 1993. “The past is history,” he said, urging all Cambodians to look to the future.<sup>66</sup> In 1994, the new coalition government cut funding to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in an attempt to close it permanently.<sup>67</sup>

The past is easier to deny or erase than preserve. The refusal of the international community to try the Khmer Rouge leadership weakens Cambodia. Becker worries that another Khmer Rouge insurgence will result in the destruction of all Tuol Sleng documentation (although many records are microfilmed and stored at Cornell University). She and others wonder how Cambodians can feel safe knowing that their former torturers are current leaders of the Khmer Rouge and that they are again saying that the Khmer Rouge is “pure and clean.”<sup>68</sup> The pressure to deny the mountains of atrocities may cause Cambodia to implode again, unless corrective action, in the form of an international tribunal, is taken.

The efforts of Cambodia scholars Ben Kiernan and David Chandler to mount the documentation from the Tuol Sleng archives on the Web are laudable. Kiernan’s Cambodian Genocide Program (CGP) web site and his Documentation Center of Cambodia web site offer the opportunity to locate missing family members and learn the details of the Cambodian genocide. The Digital Archive of Cambodian Holocaust Survivors allows family members to find each other, locate dead relatives, and in the form of testimonials, preserve memories of life under the Khmer Rouge.

The CGP’s database is extensive and continually updated. The home page provides links to bibliographic, biographic, geographic, and photographic databases, all of which document in minute detail information regarding the victims and perpetrators of the Cambodian genocide. It also provides a link to the *Cambodian Genocide Justice Act*, passed by the United States Congress in 1994, which authorizes the establishment of a State Department office “to support ... efforts to bring to justice members of the Khmer Rouge for their crimes against humanity.”<sup>69</sup> According to an article in the *Hartford Courant*, “One of the project’s [CGP’s] biggest discoveries was the secret police archives ... The day after the Web site went on-line Jan. 27 [1997], the first

prime minister of the Cambodian government called for an international criminal tribunal for the top Khmer Rouge leaders.<sup>70</sup>

The power of archives is the power to witness. In October 1997, Pol Pot denied, in his first interview in twenty years, any responsibility for the Cambodian genocide. He claimed that his “conscience was clear.”<sup>71</sup> He is wrong. The documentation from Tuol Sleng, along with documentation from other prisons, from survivors, and even from perpetrators, prove that Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge murdered over a million of their fellow Cambodians. The evidence is irrefutable. But Cambodia’s past will not rest, and its future will not be secure until the victims remembered in the documents have their day in court.

### **Conclusion**

Since the initial drafting of this paper, Pol Pot has died and the Khmer Rouge has been routed by the Cambodian Government Army. There has been an outpouring of international grief, not as a result of the death and military defeats, but because the opportunity to bring Pol Pot to justice has been lost. Other such opportunities, however, are not gone. As Youk Chhang remarks, “A lot of people think the death of Pol Pot is the end of the Khmer Rouge. ... That’s not true. Ta Mok is still at large. Nuon Chea. Khieu Samphan. We should not let them escape justice. I have 150,000 pages of high-level documents and I can get them to any lawyer in the world by E-mail within 15 minutes.”<sup>72</sup>

The Documentation Center of Cambodia, in partnership with the CGP, and other international and Cambodian scholars, activists, and survivors, continues to work toward the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute the Khmer Rouge. As one observer comments, “Until there is an international tribunal, until all those responsible for the Khmer Rouge holocaust are held accountable, the Cambodian people will have received only partial justice.”<sup>73</sup>

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