Interactions with a Violent Past

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CHAPTER 1

National Memorial Sites and Personal Remembrance: Remembering the Dead of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek at the ECCC in Cambodia

Sina Emde

Not far from the center of the bustling city of Phnom Penh, a place embodies dark memories of Cambodian history: memories of terror, memories of horror, memories of death, and memories of loss. During the time of the Khmer Rouge regime, from April 1975 until January 1979, this place, once built as a high school, was converted into a prison and interrogation center, called S-21, also known as Tuol Sleng. Those who were brought to S-21 were considered enemies of the regime and/or victims of the purges of the Khmer Rouge regime. They were interrogated, tortured and, if then still alive, transported to the killing fields of Choeung Ek where they were brutally executed. More than 12,000 people were killed. Only a dozen were exempted and seven survivors escaped Tuol Sleng when the Vietnamese claimed the city on 7 January 1979 (Chandler 1999: 6; Williams 2004: 237).¹ Those who survived Tuol Sleng still suffer from their experiences while those that lost relatives at the prison are haunted by recurring thoughts about the extreme violence done to their loved ones.

There existed more than 180 so-called security centers and more than 300 documented prison killing sites during the time of the Khmer Rouge regime,² but the two sites in Phnom Penh are by far the most prominent ones. This is also due to the fact that they were made national memorial sites after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. Both sites were discovered by the
Vietnamese after they invaded Phnom Penh and the decision to turn these sites into national memorials was also made by the occupying forces. Thus the establishment of these sites is closely linked to state historiography and national narratives of the Vietnamese-backed socialist People’s Republic of Kampuchea, the official name of the state of Cambodia from 1979–89. While other mass graves and execution sites were similar in terms of the number of victims killed, it can be assumed that the location of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek in and near the capital Phnom Penh played a major role in the decision to turn these sites into memorials.³

Both sites were investigative sites of Case 001 of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) commonly known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. The tribunal was installed in 2006, almost 30 years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. The ECCC is a hybrid tribunal with both national and international elements that tries the “senior responsible leaders and those most responsible”⁴ — of Democratic Kampuchea in two cases. Case 001 was against Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch. From 1975 until January 1979, Duch was the commander of the security prison S-2. On 26 July 2010, the ECCC found him guilty of crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The tribunal sentenced Duch to 35 years of imprisonment. However, as the time Duch had spent in detention before the trial was taken into account, the time he still will have to spend in prison ended up being only 19 years, too little for many of the victims who participated in the legal proceedings of the ECCC as civil parties.⁵

Yet in this chapter, I do not primarily focus on questions of notions of justice in the tribunal proceedings, as important as they are. I rather look at the tribunal and its investigation sites of Case 001, the security prison S-21, and the related killings fields of Choeung Ek as polyphonic memoryscapes, that is, chronotopic spaces that form and are formed by different practices and forms of remembering and making meaning of the past by different, sometimes very divergent, actors such as the state, civil society and individual persons (see Basu 2007; Cole 2001; Ullberg 2010).

The installation of the ECCC has brought Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek to new public attention on an international, national, and local level. While there exists a vast body of literature not only on the political history of Cambodia and the history of the Khmer Rouge (see, among others, Chandler 1999, 2008a; Dy 2007; Kiernan 1985, 1996; Vickery 1984), but also on legal debates around the hybrid Khmer Rouge tribunal (Ciorciari 2006; Dyrchs 2008; Form 2009), scholarly work on the memorialization
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of the KR period in contemporary Cambodia in general and in the context of the tribunal specifically is rather scarce. Within this small emerging body of research, Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek as national memorial sites are prominent themes (see Hughes 2003, 2005, 2006; Ledgerwood 1997; Williams 2004). Most scholarly work considers Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek as memorial sites that serve state historiography and commercial interests of the Cambodian government where “memory and memorialization are not performed” (Sion 2011: 19, but see Hughes 2006: 112–26). As recently as 2011, Brigitte Sion stated that:

It is clear that these government-sponsored memorials serve primarily other purposes — political legitimacy, economic development, and profit making ventures. They are not directed to locals who have a personal connection to memory but to international travelers who feed the global tourism industry and the national economy. To this end, all strategies are acceptable, even if they involve commodifying skulls, capitalizing on human suffering, promoting sites associated with criminals, and ignoring religious traditions. (Sion 2011: 19)

Local remembrance, she argues, takes place in villages and pagodas on religious holidays where “[...] human dignity is respected, mourning rituals have meaning, and the spirits of the murdered can eventually find rest” (ibid.). While there can be no doubt that the government is more interested in political legitimacy and economic development than in mourning the dead, and that indeed most of local commemoration and mourning takes place in villages and pagodas, I will show in this chapter that the testimonies and agency of civil parties and witnesses of Case 001 against Duch at the ECCC and the memorial sites give new meanings to Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek and personalize national history while at the same time being framed by the political context in which they emerge. I argue that through these processes, the tribunal itself becomes a space of “emotional remembering” (White 2000) as the testimonies depict the subjective meanings those national memorial sites hold for the few remaining survivors of Tuol Sleng and the relatives of those tortured and murdered beyond the collective sufferings exhibited and narrated by the Cambodian state. In this chapter, I ask explicitly about these subjective meanings, and more specifically, how they interact with the collective memories and national histories that are inscribed in these sites and the tribunal itself. My explorations are, as I discuss in more detail below, inspired by Geoffrey White’s work (2000, 2004, 2006) that defines practices of remembering as
situated acts in contexts where the past matters” (White 2006: 330) and highlights memorial sites as spaces where personal memories and national histories intertwine.

I base my analysis not only on the video recordings and transcripts of testimonies that civil parties gave at the ECCC but also on observations and interviews I conducted at the memorial sites. However, the investigation of testimonies is pertinent to my argumentation, simply because testimonies are such a central part of the tribunal, and beyond their legal bearing, they constitute a form of witnessing and remembering. As Lawrence L. Langer so aptly highlights: “Testimony is a form of remembering. The faculty of memory functions in the present to recall a personal history vexed by traumas that thwart smooth-flowing chronicles” (Langer 1991: 2–3). Yet testimonies are only one form of remembering the dead evoked by the transitional justice process of the tribunal itself. For the Cambodians involved, they present more an exogenous than a local form of remembering and cannot fully fulfill the need of the civil parties to respect, commemorate and find justice for those who were killed at S-21 and Choeung Ek. I suggest that in order to address these felt shortcomings of the legal process, civil parties and witnesses of Case 001 turn to collective Khmer Buddhist rituals that not only link individual and collective remembrance but address the spiritual side of remembrance that is considered crucial in Khmer thought and belief for mourning and paying respects to the dead. These processes do not only reveal contemporary multiple forms and practices of remembering but display the entanglement of international, national and local ways of making meaning of a violent past in contemporary Cambodia.

In the first part of this chapter, I will introduce the Khmer Rouge period and the structure of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, including the system of civil parties in court. I then depict the national politics of memory in recent and present Cambodia and ask about individual and collective as well as political meanings of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek in the recent history of the country. The third part illustrates the personal meanings these sites hold for the civil parties of Case 001 through the testimonies and interactions of civil parties with the accused Duch in the court room of the ECCC. By drawing on the court proceedings, I also ask about the ways an international tribunal brings collective and individual memories into the public while at the same time falling short of civil parties’ expectations. The fourth part turns to rituals performed by survivors and relatives of victims of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek as a practice of remembering the dead. I conclude by discussing how these multiple processes at work render
the court, Tuol Sleng, and Choeung Ek to interconnected memoryscapes where emotions, personal remembrance, collective memories and state historiography interact through the agency of the actors involved.

**From Democratic Kampuchea to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)**

When the communist Khmer Rouge came to power in April 1975, their victory ended a five-year civil war that had cost at least 300,000 lives in Cambodia. The hope of the Cambodian people that the victory of the Khmer Rouge would finally bring peace and prosperity back to Cambodia was in vain. Instead, the KR launched one of the most radical social and economic revolutions of the 20th century. The state of Democratic Kampuchea, as it was named, was transformed into a communist agrarian state. All cities were evacuated, money was abolished, people were organized into collective labor units in all parts of Cambodia, and communities that were considered potential enemies of the state were dislocated from their homelands into various parts of Cambodia. Monks were defrocked, pagodas (wat) made prisons and security centers, and educated and/or urban people were denounced as enemies of the state. The Khmer Rouge categorized the entire Cambodian population into “new people” (bracheachon thmei) or “17th April people” (bracheachon brampi mesa) and “base people” (brocheachon mouladthan) or “old people” (bracheachon chas). Base people were peasants residing in those parts of Cambodia that had already been “liberated” and were strongholds of the Khmer Rouge movement during the civil war before 1975. New people were those residing in the cities, those who had undergone formal education, and those who were associated with the former Lon Nol government (Hinton 2005: 9). Often families were separated and children trained to be soldiers and guards. People worked in labor units for long hours and received very little food, often only one or two bowls of watery rice gruel (babar) a day. It is estimated that more than 1.6 million people died during the period of Democratic Kampuchea due to torture, execution, starvation and exhaustion (Kiernan 2003).

The Khmer Rouge lost power due to a Vietnamese invasion of the country in December 1978 and January 1979. Returning with the Vietnamese soldiers was the Khmer Salvation front that consisted of former Khmer Rouge who had defected to Vietnam in 1977 and 1978, among them the present Prime Minister Hun Sen. Those returning Cambodians formed the first Vietnamese-backed government of the People’s Republic of
Kampuchea that lasted in minor alterations until 1989 (Gottesman 2003). Many of these persons are still in power today, including the Prime Minister. But in some parts of the country, the Khmer Rouge was still active as late as 1998, fighting a guerrilla warfare against the successive Phnom Penh governments. In 1998, a general amnesty declared by the Prime Minister Hun Sen integrated those Khmer Rouge guerrilla forces and their leaders into the Cambodian national state and army. The so-called win-win policy of Hun Sen included the installation of prominent Khmer Rouge leaders into high positions of the Cambodian government.

The Western world, China and Thailand played a major role in keeping the Khmer Rouge movement alive through all those years. Opposing the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, they supported the resistance and guerrilla forces along the Thai Border with military and financial aid. They did not recognize the Vietnamese-backed government of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea and first gave the Cambodian seat at the United Nations to an exile government consisting of former Khmer Rouge and King Sihanouk before leaving it empty until the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) period and the official democratic elections of a new government of the Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993 (see Fawthrop and Jarvis 2004). Because of these varying interests of various powers to veil their involvement during and after the cold war, it took more than 20 years to pave the way for an international tribunal to prosecute the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge. The ECCC was finally officially established in 2006 (ibid.).

The ECCC is located in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, and may be classified “[…] as a hybrid tribunal because, in its approach to legal substance and procedure, it applies both national and international law” (Form 2009: 905). Due to the application of national law, the ECCC has special provisions for victims’ participation to file subsidiary charges as civil parties. However, their legal presentation is not regulated by the ECCC and the provision of legal assistance has been mostly done by a variety of internationally sponsored NGOs who are engaged in outreach and legal assistance programs in the context of the tribunal. Thus civil parties are more than witnesses, they are right-claimers. Case 001 included 91 civil parties’ participation of which 22 appeared for testimonies in court. Most of these civil parties had lost relatives at Tuol Sleng and are themselves survivors of the regime. Some are descendants or have returned from exile. Two civil parties, Chum Mey and Bou Meng and one witness, the late Vann Nath, were prisoners in January 1979 and could escape when the Vietnamese troops reached Phnom Penh.
Following the example of other tribunals and truth commissions in post-conflict settings, the proceedings of the court, the testimonies of witnesses and civil parties are archived and thus become historical documents that enter national historiography. In 2011, the ECCC in cooperation with the War Crimes Studies Center at the University of Berkeley and the Hoover Library and Archive, launched the Virtual Tribunal program in order to provide “a lasting legacy for the people of Cambodia that will extend beyond the court’s projected termination date of 2013. Working together with the Court, schools, universities, and NGOs, the Virtual Tribunal will be made available to Cambodians at learning centers in schools as well as in provincial information centers and memorials to Khmer Rouge victims”. Beyond the documentary records of the trial proceedings and the courtroom videos and transcripts, the Virtual Tribunal aims at including interviews with court personnel and trial participants, media coverage, educational tools and the material produced by Cambodian civil society organizations. All materials should also be archived in hard copy in Phnom Penh. The virtual documentation of the tribunal and the testimonies of civil parties and witnesses render the court a memorial site in the making. The processes at work evoke questions not only about the relationship between private and public, individual and collective memories, but also between history, memory, and emotion.

Individual and Collective Memory, State Historiography and the ECCC

These questions about the dynamics between the individual and the social have been pertinent to interdisciplinary memory studies of the last decades that are trying to overcome longstanding dichotomies of the social sciences such as individual/society or memory/history and other paradigms that separate the realms of the psychological and the social, that is, “personal cognition and emotion from social, political and historical processes” (White 2006: 326). Early works on memory would either focus on individual memory as a field of psychology or on collective memory as a field of sociology and anthropology, in general assuming a clear dichotomy between the two. In psychology, memory refers foremost to the individual’s ability to store, retain, and recall information. In contrast, sociology and anthropology have foregrounded the collective and national construction of memory in their works of the last decades. Much of this work is still indebted to Maurice Halbwachs’ notions of collective memory as individual
memory that is always socially constituted, shared and passed on by the group the individual is embedded in (Halbwachs 1950).

While we are indeed indebted to Halbwachs’ insights on memory as collectively constituted, his emphasis on coherence and homogeneity obscures the fact that memory is often contested and discursively constructed by different actors and groups. What can and cannot be remembered or, in other words what is remembered and what is forgotten, what is narrated and what is silenced, is often dominated by state historiographies that serve varying political interests. Official histories, on the other hand, can be supported or contested by individual and collective acts of remembering. Thus, if we indeed assume that through various acts of articulation individual memories enter the collective, but that at the same time the collective frames what is publicly remembered, then we have to place more attention on the processes of how individual and collective memory are mutually constitutive (see Argenti and Schramm 2009; Cole 2001; White 2006).

In a recent article, Geoffrey White alerts us to the polysemic nature of memory that bridges the divide between the individual and the collective. He depicts four crucial aspects of memory that are in dialogue with one another: practice, emotionality, politics, and materiality. The practice of memory relates to “situated acts of memory in contexts where the past matters” (White 2006: 330). In this sense, memory is also chronotopic, linked to time and space (see Assmann 1992: 38–9; Halbwachs 1950; Nora 1989). Memory has a material and temporal side (see Basu 2007; Nora 1989) and remembers and evokes emotions. Yet, all different forms and practices of remembering interact with the politics of memory which refers to questions of power and hegemony in national and collective remembrance. National narratives and state historiography may determine what can be publicly remembered and what must be forgotten and who may be at the margins of the dominant narrative.

In socialist and post-socialist Cambodia, the state has always played a crucial role in the construction of collective memory and public commemoration of the Khmer Rouge (Chandler 2008b). Before the Paris Peace Accords, the Vietnamese-backed government saw it crucial to keep the violence and brutality of Democratic Kampuchea alive in order to legitimate itself as the guarantor for peace in the country. During the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, schoolbooks and annual public commemorations as the Day of Tying Anger (tivea chang kamhaeng) depicted and remembered the cruelty and brutality of the Khmer Rouge, often in a drastic manner (Chandler 2008b; Hinton 2008). After the Paris Peace Accords and
the 1993 elections that brought former allies of the Khmer Rouge back on the national political scene, the period vanished from schoolbooks and was reduced to one paragraph in the history book of Grade 9 (Chandler 2008b: 356). This attempt at national oblivion further strengthened with the general amnesty in 1997 that integrated remaining Khmer Rouge into the Cambodian state and army. It was in 1997 that the Prime Minister Hun Sen announced that it was time “to dig a hole and bury the past” (Chandler 2008b: 356; Fawthrop and Jarvis 2004: 135). But while the government tried to induce collective amnesia, Cambodia reemerged on the international agenda with plans for an international tribunal (Chandler 2008b: 364). It is one of the effects of the ECCC that the history of the Khmer Rouge is reappearing into the Cambodian public education and awareness mostly conducted through programs by internationally sponsored non-governmental organizations. In 2009, the Cambodian NGO DCCAM (Documentation Center of Cambodia) launched a textbook for Grades 9–12 in cooperation with the Cambodian Ministry of Education and started nationwide teacher training. Since 2006, NGOs and the ECCC itself have conducted outreach programs in all parts of Cambodia that informed about the tribunal and initiated new discussions about the KR period (see Sperfeldt 2012).

But despite the different modi of national remembrance over the last 30 years, there are certain interconnected themes that have remained consistent since the fall of the KR regime and, I suggest, frame what can be publicly remembered until today: the avoidance of the blurred boundaries between victim and perpetrator identities by emphasizing the collective suffering and the victimhood of all Cambodians and therefore the Cambodian nation, the embedding of political responsibilities for the atrocities into Cambodian notions of political hierarchy and the focus on the period of Democratic Kampuchea alone in remembering past violence. The ultimate political responsibility for the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge has always been attributed to the leading political figures of Democratic Kampuchea, and discussions of individual and collective responsibilities of all those who were KR cadres have been avoided. Cambodian official memories and state narratives of violence focus only on the period of the state of Democratic Kampuchea from April 1975 until January 1979. The collective metaphor for this period is “three years eight months and twenty days” (bei chhnam brambei khae mphei thnay) or the Pol Pot Time (samay a Pot). By focusing solely on this period of “3 years 8 months and 20 days” the memories of all other forms of violence that occurred in Cambodia from 1970 until 1998 are “forgotten” and the violence of the Khmer Rouge
period is decontextualized from the global political conflicts it was embedded in.

The tribunal does not counter these narratives. The ECCC is the result of decades-long, complex negotiations between the United Nations and the Cambodian government who all represent different political interests about what should and what should not be subject to the prosecution of the court (Whitley 2006). As a result of compromises between the diverging political agendas described above, the court also focuses solely on the crimes committed during the official time of existence of the state of Democratic Kampuchea from April 1975 until January 1979, thereby supporting the national narrative described above. Furthermore, by prosecuting only the senior responsible leaders, the tribunal again simplifies the complex shifting ambiguities and subjectivities of victim-perpetrator divisions that have occurred over 30 years of violent conflict in Cambodia. This becomes most evident in Case 001 that deals with the atrocities in the former torture center and prison S-21 and the mass execution site of Choeung Ek. In the next section, I will show how both sites are inseparable from state historiography and coexist in their materiality alongside the different modes of state narratives of the Khmer Rouge past described above. But I also suggest that they have often overlooked emotional and personal sides that are inscribed in their history.

**Individual and Collective Memory in Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek**

S-21 was officially opened as the memorial site of the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes in 1980, the mass graves of Choeung Ek opened to the public after the exhumation of the remains of nearly 9,000 victims in the early 1980s (Hughes 2006: 23–6). I argue that, like other places and sites in which the past is produced, Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek can be seen as iconic mediators, locations for the repeated production of meaning and emotion in remembering the past (White 2006; see also Young 1993). Memorial sites are places “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora 1989: 7). They are also places where the collective and the individual, the public and the personal interact (White 2000).

The former prison S-21 site now houses the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes. The compound consists of three buildings: Block A hosts the former prison cells for senior cadres; Block B hosts photos, cloths and artifacts of former prisoners on the ground floor, former individual
prison cells on the second floor, and exhibitions about Democratic Kampuchea on the upper floor; Block C hosts the paintings of one of the survivors, the late Vann Nath.

The ground floor of Building B hosts thousands of photos of children, women and men imprisoned at Tuol Sleng and killed at the prison or at Choeung Ek. Most of these faces have no names and are thus part of the national history of the collective suffering of the victims during the time of the Khmer Rouge. Despite the fact that Tuol Sleng hosts a huge archive with the “confessions” of those interrogated and tortured, we learn nothing about the individuals imprisoned there, nor why they were brought here. The museum does not address the fact that many of those who were detained and executed were former Khmer Rouge cadres and that those victims embody the shifting boundaries between victims and perpetrators over many years of violent conflict. Instead, the past as a former perpetrator is silenced and the identity as victim emphasized. We do not know their names, their families, where they came from and why they were here. One corner also exhibits a glass box of clothes from former prisoners. The

Plate 1.1 Block A Tuol Sleng memorial site.
display of suffering focuses on the collective; there is very little of the
personal and individual. Many of these persons were killed in Choeung Ek.

The killing fields of Choeung Ek are located 15 kilometers southwest
of Phnom Penh in Dang Kao district, but fall within the jurisdiction of the
municipal authority of the city. The site was originally a Chinese grave-
yard, but from 1977 to the end of 1978, it operated as a killing site and
burial ground for thousands of victims of Pol Pot’s purges (Chandler 1999:
139–40). Choeung Ek was a national killing site and people who got exe-
cuted here came from all different parts of Cambodia. It thus came to stand
as a symbol for the Cambodian atrocities and all major commemoration
days are usually also performed at Choeung Ek. Today the site has a large
glass Memorial Stupa which was built in 1988 and filled with the bones
and skulls that were exhumed here in the early 1980s. The stupa embeds
the place into Buddhist ontology. Every wat in Cambodia has stupas that
belong to families who store the ashes of their dead relatives and ancestors
within. This highlights the importance of Buddhism even at the memorial
sites. Entering the site, one walks through a landscape where signs and
bones remind the visitor about the atrocities. Even more than in Tuol Sleng,
the dead remain anonymous. We learn no names, no individual stories; we
just walk though graves and bones and skulls. In a similar vein to Tuol
Sleng, cloths can be seen in the graves and in glass boxes next to them.

It has been pointed out by several authors that both memorial sites
were once designed in the period of the socialist People’s Republic of
Kampuchea as visible evidence for the atrocities committed by the Khmer
Rouge and therefore also served to legitimize the Vietnamese invasion in
1979 as liberation of the people of Cambodia. The exhibition of skulls and
bones served as “proof” for the atrocities and established the notion of
the collective suffering of and the need to renew the nation. Within this
narrative, the presence of the Vietnamese in Cambodia during the 1980s
was depicted as a necessity for peaceful nation-building (Hughes 2006;
Ledgerwood 1997; Williams 2004).

A closer look at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek reveals that meanings of
these sites have shifted in time and in relation to the politics of memory
of the various Cambodian governments described above. In the 1980s,
many Cambodians visited Tuol Sleng in the 1980s, albeit partly in state-
orchestrated tours (Ledgerwood 1997). More recent works have empha-
sized that the sites draw a large number of international tourists while the
local interest and significance remain low (Hughes 2006, 2008; Margolin
2007; Sion 2011). Since the tribunal started, the local meaning of Tuol
Sleng and Choeung Ek has increased significantly as, again, information
tours for Cambodians are organized by the ECCC and NGOs engaged in outreach programs.

David Chandler states that “by October 1980, over three hundred thousand Cambodians and eleven thousand foreigners had passed through the facility” (Chandler 1999: 8). There can be no doubt that many visitors were part of state-organized tours as part of the narrative of liberation and nation-building of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, but the testimonies and interviews I did with civil parties from Case 001 reveal that for Cambodians whose relatives went missing during the KR period, the sites had an individual meaning from the beginning. When word spread in 1980 that the regime had displayed thousands of photographs found in Tuol Sleng, all Cambodians who could afford it went to Tuol Sleng to see if they would recognize their loved ones (see also Chandler 2008b: 361). This was never mentioned in the official histories and documentation of Tuol Sleng, and none of these quests were documented. Even on a personal level, these experiences were not shared widely. A friend of mine, who does not want to be named, remembered in a conversation:
I was only a girl when we went to Tuol Sleng. I think it was 1981. I still remember the smell, it stank and for the entire time I had my scarf covering my face, I just could not stand the smell, it still smelled of blood and urine. We did not find a photo of my father but my mother she cried the whole time, she never talked about it afterwards. (Personal conversation, 5 January 2010)

It was only after the opening of Cambodia to international visitors after 1993 that the memorial sites became an international attraction, while the local meaning for school and public education decreased significantly due to the political period of oblivion described above. But the sites never ceased to have a personal meaning for those who lost relatives and loved ones in these places. Those who had been in exile and returned to Phnom Penh in the 1990s to look for disappeared relatives also turned to Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek. One of those personal experiences was revealed in the testimony of Martine Lefèvre in the courtroom. Lefèvre was married to Oun Ket, a Cambodian diplomat who left France for Cambodia in 1977, following the calls for Cambodians abroad to return to their homeland and help reconstruction. She never heard from her husband again. In 1980, she visited the refugee camp Khao I Dang in Thailand and finally learned that her husband died in Tuol Sleng. In 1991, Lefèvre and her children went to Cambodia to find out what had happened. In court she remembered:

Two days after we arrived, therefore, on the 18th of July 1991, we travelled; we go to S-21. And when we arrive in this place, which was formerly a high school, we are of course completely overtaken by the horror. And we begin looking through all of the photographs that are lined up by trying to find Ouk Ket’s face, and we do not find him. But I am able to recognize faces of Cambodians who were known abroad. All three of us are deeply saddened, of course, but more than that even, we are very much angered and I have a hard time telling my children to leave this place because their fists are clenched and they’re clenching their teeth before such a quantity of horror. And then the following days we go to Choeung Ek. When we arrived there, we are struck by the mausoleum where all of the skulls are piled up, and we say to ourselves that Ket’s skull is among all of these thousands of skulls, and we look at the pits, which we walk over. There are teeth coming up through the ground, leg bones, radiuses, pieces of shirts, strings, earth, were covering the people who were killed there. And we are completely repulsed. (Testimony Martine Lefèvre, 17.8.2009, Case No. 001/18-07-2007-ECCC/TC: 25)
Her daughter was deeply traumatized by the visit. Her testimony in court was highly emotional; she depicted how she fell into depression after the visit and even turned suicidal.

Another civil party, Chum Sirath, was a student in France when the Khmer Rouge took power and did not return to Cambodia. After the fall of the regime, he tried to reconstruct the fate of his family. Like Martine Lefèvre, he returned to Cambodia only after the end of the socialist People’s Republic of Kampuchea and went to Tuol Sleng to find information about his disappeared brothers.

Regarding my younger brother, Chum Sinaret, although I have tried my best to do his research, I could not find any more information except the photo that was given to me by my friend who took it from S-21. I went to S-21 in October ’93. I saw his name on the list with no dates for the entry and the exit. … I know Narith died at Tuol Sleng because he died on the 1st of January 1977. At that time I believe Choeung Ek was not yet in existence. (Testimony Chum Sirath 20.8.2009, Case File No. 001/18-07-2007-ECCC/TC: 19 and 43)

These personal experiences have never been officially documented in the memorial sites itself. But through their inclusion in the virtual tribunal and the tribunal recordings, they now interact with the collective memoirs and state historiography of the nation. In his ethnographic explorations of the memorial site of Pearl Harbor, White (2000) demonstrates that sites of commemoration are places where, through the deployment of biographies, storytelling and narrative, personal individual memory, and national history can enter the same discursive space and polyphonic spaces of remembering emerge.15 I suggest that similar processes are at work at the tribunal where the testimonies interact with state historiography and collective memories narrated at S-21 and Choeung Ek, and new memoryscapes emerge.

But in the narratives above, it also becomes evident that these memoryscapes do not only hold memories. They hold and evoke emotions as well (see Cole 2001; White 1999, 2006). White (2006: 332) highlights the importance of the emotionality of memory next to its practices, politics and materiality: “Acts of memory and sites of memory are inevitably evocative — marked by expressions and ideologies of emotions that convey something about the salience of past events for persons recalling them. … To the general principle that memory be studied in social contexts, we may add that memory in context will always be to some degree emotional, marked by expressions of affect that signify something about the meaning and force of past events for those doing the remembering.”
In agreement with White, I suggest that the testimonies and memories that describe individual experiences at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek render the sites and the tribunal itself to emotional memoriescapes where grief, anger and frustration are expressed and evoked. This becomes even more evident in the following section where I discuss the encounters of two civil parties, Bou Meng and Chum Sirath, with the accused in the courtroom.

The Search for the Dead at the Tribunal

The testimonies and encounters with Duch are not only individual memories but quests for the truth about what has happened to loved ones lost. Civil parties who are either themselves survivors or relatives of the dead are still haunted by the question of what really happened at these sites and how and where people died. In a culture where respect and offerings to the dead are crucial for the individual’s well-being, the need to present offerings to the dead is essential for peace of mind and closure (Holt 2012; LeVine 2010; van de Put and Eisenbruch 2002).

When the civil parties testified in court and had to confront Duch, many started to ask about the remains of their relatives who disappeared and were known to have been imprisoned and interrogated at Tuol Sleng. In the following, I turn to the encounters of two civil parties with Duch: Bou Meng and Chum Sirath, both whom I interviewed after the trial. Chum Sirath lost two brothers in S-21. Bou Meng is one of the survivors of S-21 but his wife was killed after they were arrested in August 1977. When Chum Sirath recalled his visits to Tuol Sleng, as described above, in search for his dead relatives, he finally turned to Duch and said:

And what I want to know about my other two brothers and in-law, how long had they stayed in S-21, like in the case of Phung Ton? Was it seven months? Was it ten months? That’s what I want to know. I knew that he already knew my brothers … and if he wanted to apologize, that is his right. And of course, as I said, it’s not genuine. I wanted to know the circumstances of the death of my brothers. (Testimony Chum Sirath 20.8.2009, Case File No. 001/18-07-2007-ECCC/TC: 40)

After a lengthy statement by Duch that he could not know the details of all people who disappeared, the president then asked Duch to respond to Chum Sirath:
Could you please respond to his question in relation to the date, exact date, when his brothers-in-law were arrested and executed? So this is his sole purpose, to know the truth of the date, and if you can also shed light on the location where their loved one were executed then it would be grateful to them because they believe that if they can locate where the dead body of their loved one could have been buried, then they can really conduct some kind of religious ceremonies to dedicate or offer some kind of best wishes to them. (ibid. 46)

The wish to know the location of the dead victim for the purpose of conducting a religious ceremony was also expressed by Bou Meng, one of the survivors of the former Khmer Rouge Security prison S-21. Bou Meng was arrested together with his wife and then separated. He survived due to his skills as a painter, but his wife was killed (Vannak 2010). When he testified in court and was confronted with Duch, he asked him the following question:

I really want to ask the accused where was my wife killed. If I know where it is then I would go there in order to pray for her soul, and that I am now being testified before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia, only the spirit of the earth would know where the soul has gone to or where the dead bodies were buried. So only the spirits of the wind, of the water, of the earth would know. And for those who killed the people, they could tell the truth or they could lie, but only the spirits of the earth, the wind and the water know where my wife died, so that I could pray for her soul. That is all … And my question is just to tell me, just to tell me where she was killed or smashed. Then I would go to that location and just to get the soil from that location to pray for her soul because there was not her document at the S-21 Office. I used to have some documents as well, but some of the documents I have I have lost or are missing. (Testimony Bou Meng, Case File № 001/18-07-2007-ECCC/TC: 86)

The President of the ECCC then addressed Duch and asked him if he could provide information where Bou Meng’s wife was killed. Duch answered that he was not sure and continued:

It was beyond my capacity because this work was done by my subordinates, but I would like to presume that your wife might have been killed at Choeung Ek. Meanwhile, to be sure, I would like to ask you to please ask Comrade Huy who may be able to tell you further detail about the fate of your wife. Please accept my highest assurance of my regards and respects towards the soul of your wife. That’s all. (ibid.)
Bou Meng then started to cry and covered his face with his hands. The testimonies of the civil parties of the tribunal are filled with these questions and searches for dead relatives. For the civil parties of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek are thus not only part of Cambodia’s national history but hold the individual memories of those who died there. At the same time, it remains to be seen how far the individual meanings these sites hold for those looking for the remains of the dead will enter the national narrative and will be included in the documentation of the sites. The attempt to obtain individual memories and bring them into the public space in the context of the tribunal as the truth about what happened is seen by the civil parties as bringing justice to the dead and a prerequisite for personal reconciliation. However, as the questions about the fates of their loved ones can never be definitively answered, the tribunal ultimately denies individual recognition and full justice as the following excerpt from an interview with Bou Meng that I conducted together with Nou Va in February 2010 shows.

I lost my family, my wife in Tuol Sleng. I asked Duch, but he did not release the truth. That is what I think there is no justice. Duch always escapes not to tell the truth, but I told everything in the court, it was true. I was wondering why he said he did not know, he was the prison’s chief, he managed the list of prisoners, but now he said he did not know. […] So, I want him to speak out the fact whether my wife was killed at Choeung Ek, or another place. There are four to five graves that I always come to pray for them. (Interview Bou Meng, 25 February 2010)

In the end, the dead remain in the collective realm of the former prison and mass grave. Civil parties are given no certainty about the location of the dead which leads to anger and frustration. When I asked Bou Meng in another interview about his encounter with Duch, he answered:

I asked him ‘did you arrest my wife name Ma Chhoeun?’ And where did you bring her? Then he answered it might have been his guard who took her to be killed at Choeung Ek. Until now my feeling is not fresh and not released. I am still thinking about my wife, we used to be in prison here together. Why now there is only me? (Interview Bou Meng 6 November 2010)

To respect and commemorate the dead, they have no choice but to pay their respects individually and collectively at home, in the pagodas, at the mass graves and in Tuol Sleng. In order to do so, they turn to Buddhist commemorative rituals.
Ritual Commemoration for the Dead

In the following section, I turn to Buddhist commemorative rituals of respect and merit-making. I thereby highlight the importance of often overlooked non-verbal forms and practices of remembrance and coming to terms with a violent past. When it comes to genocide and mass atrocities, the material and narrative forms of memory are often foregrounded (see, for example: Langer 1991; Nora 1989; Young 1993). This may be due to the fact that explorations of the holocaust are still dominant in the study of remembering genocide and mass violence and, therefore, Western forms of remembering dominate the scholarly field. But since anthropology has increasingly turned to memories of violence and suffering during colonialism or the slave trade, other, more embodied forms of remembering a violent past, for example, ancestor rituals and sacrifices (Cole 2001; Shaw 2002) and/or spirit possession (Lambek 2002; Stoller 1995), are emphasized. Only recently has scholarly attention shifted to ritual and performative practices in the context of memorial sites and the sacralization of landscapes of violence (Schramm 2011; White 2004). In the context of Pearl Harbor and Ground Zero, Geoffrey White (2004: 300) highlights rituals as “practices that continually (re)define the (sacred) significance of those spaces through actions that express reverence for those who died (and those who survived).”

Yet I suggest that in Cambodia there is more at stake than sacralization and reverence for the dead. By turning to Khmer Buddhist rituals, civil parties embed the tribunal proceedings into their own cultural logic and ontology, and by doing so, try to balance the felt shortcomings of the tribunal in terms of justice and consolidation. A range of scholars have emphasized the revival of Buddhism and Buddhist rituals after the Khmer Rouge period as crucial for the reconstruction of community and the remaking of moral orders (Hinton 2008; Holt 2012; Ledgerwood 2008; Kent 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011; Zucker 2006). According to these works, the practice of Buddhism and the performance of Buddhist rituals bring back lost continuity and security after past turmoil and in present uncertain times.

In concert with these arguments, I suggest that Buddhism and Khmer Buddhist ancestor rituals play a crucial role in making sense, remembering and consolidating the deaths of the Pol Pot era. I am making sense of Heonik Kwon’s (2006) fascinating study of how mass deaths of the Vietnamese war are memorialized at the sites of two massacres in Central Vietnam. Kwon emphasizes ancestor rituals as central for familial, personal and everyday remembrance as opposed to the state rituals that take place
at memorial sites for the “heroes” of battles and massacres. In this sense, he considers local ancestor rituals as an opposition to state politics and national narratives in contemporary Vietnam. Vietnamese ancestor rituals, he argues, move the realm of remembering from the nation to the world of kinship. In contrast to the state that differentiates between heroes and enemies, the world of kinship does not distinguish between victim and perpetrators in their reverence for ancestors. The situation in Cambodia differs in multiple ways. The Cambodian state never made heroes and remembered all the dead of past violence as victims precisely because they wanted to silence debates about their own and other’s involvement with leading political figures. Furthermore, Khmer Theravada Buddhist rituals differ from Confucian ancestor rites in Vietnam in several ways (see Holt 2012). But Kwon’s emphasis on the transformative and consoling power of rituals for the deaths that occurred also has significance for Cambodia.

Cambodian Buddhism is syncretic, combining classical Theravada Buddhist doctrine (dhamma) and animistic as well as Brahman beliefs and practices that stem from pre-Buddhist times (Harris 2005: 49–104). There exists a profound belief in the world of ancestors and spirits and the spiritual world is very real (van de Put and Eisenbruch 2002: 114–7). Karma and reincarnation are central beliefs that guide human behavior. It has been argued that the breakdown of ritual patterns during the time of the Khmer Rouge caused feelings of vulnerability and distress in people the more as spirits “are perceived as forces that can invade the mind and body at any time” (LeVine 2010: 13). Peg LeVine (ibid.: 14) even talks about a “spirit based anxiety” in people: “Fright was the consequence of not being able to appease spirits, maintain obligations to ancestral spirits, or protect one-self and others from possessing, wandering or vengeful spirits.”

Thus, like in Vietnam, the many deaths that occurred through violence during the Pol Pot Time are perceived as unnatural and therefore as bad deaths, and since the revival of Buddhism ancestor rituals are important and performed regularly (LeVine 2010). They are at the center of Pchum Ben, the annual festival for the dead that takes place in the tenth month of the Cambodian lunar calendar and at the Khmer New Year (Holt 2012). Two central Buddhist rituals are bon sakaул and sanghadana. Bon sakaул is an invitation of monks to come and recite by those who are conducting the ceremony. The monks receive offerings (dana) in the form of money and goods as candles, incense sticks, small towels, tea and drink beverages such as soft drinks. The goods are wrapped as readymade parcels. The participants of the ceremony earn merit (bon) which they can dedicate to
their ancestors. Sometimes *bon sakaul* is combined with *sanghadana* (food offerings). *Sanghadana* is a food-offering ceremony and is also performed to dedicate merit (*bon*) to one’s dead ancestors. Dedicating merit to oneself and to one’s dead ancestors is a crucial practice in Khmer Buddhist belief where the accumulation of merit is essential for improving one’s karma and being reborn into a better next life (Ledgerwood 2008). Merit can be earned through ordination as a monk, the adherence to the five Buddhist precepts (*sel*), which include the observance of the “holy days” (*thngai sel*) and offerings (*dana*) to the monks and the temple (ibid.: 149). Merit is transferable, that is, the living may perform “rituals and offerings to earn merit and transfer these merit to dead relatives” (Ty 2011: 212). The ceremony is led by monks and *achar* and is a syncretic practice of Buddhist and ancestor rituals. After the participants have prayed to the Buddha and asked for the *sel* (five precepts), rice and food are offered to the monks and to the ancestors. In the rituals that I observed in Takeo province, all rituals involved *sanghadana* where the offerings for the ancestors are collected on a separate plate with a banana leaf and in the end decorated with lit incense. Lit incense is part of all ancestor-dedicated and Buddhist ceremonies. While the food offerings to the monks are taken back to the pagoda, the offerings to the ancestors are thrown outside on the ground near a spirit house or even to the fields. However, all ceremonies that I observed in the capital offered no food but did a *bon sakaul* where they offered wrapped parcels containing candles, incense, towels, condensed milk and drink beverages (see above) to the monks and did not conduct any food offerings at the memorial sites. In all ceremonies, participants ask to donate the merit they gain through the performance of the ceremony to the dead ancestors. *Bon sakaul* and *sanghadana* can be done for dead individuals — that the names of the dead are read before the ceremony is performed, or for collective groups at the pagoda as it happens during Pchum Ben. The rituals can also be conducted at one’s home. However, the ceremonies can never be done alone. Monks and *achar* have to be present to conduct the ceremony.

During the annual celebrations of Pchum Ben and on Khmer New Year, rituals for the dead are also performed at Cambodian mass killing sites. The survivors of Tuol Sleng perform *bang sakaul* at the site during Pchum Ben since the opening of the memorial site (Vann Nath 1998: 107; interviews Chum Mey and Bou Meng February 2010). In contrast, several civil parties I talked to mentioned the importance of ceremonies for their relatives who died during the Khmer Rouge time but also said that mostly
these rituals are performed locally at the pagoda where the ashes of dead relatives are kept in stupas or the ancestral places in those parts of the country where the ash of family relatives is buried at special places in the village in the ground or even at home.\textsuperscript{18}

Chum Sirath who — in addition to the two brothers imprisoned at S-21 — lost 37 family members whose fates he cannot retrace and who disappeared into the many mass graves of the country, also emphasized that he conducts ceremonies for his dead relatives twice a year at Pchum Ben and at Khmer New Year. But sometimes the dead visit his dreams and whenever that occurs, he invites monks to conduct a ceremony at his home (interview Chum Sirath 1 July 2011). Bou Meng told me that every year at Pchum Ben, he tries to go to seven pagodas, to receive the precepts and donate offerings (\textit{dana}) to earn merit for his first wife who was killed in Tuol Sleng or Choeung Ek (interview with Bou Meng November 2010). Yet, there remains a sense of incompleteness precisely because there are no remains of the relatives that disappeared at the usual familial ancestral places. Thus the mass graves and execution sites become symbolic ancestral places both individually and collectively. At a former mass killing site in Takeo province where I also conducted research, people who knew that their loved ones died at that site came and conducted ceremonies, often on special days like Pchum Ben and Khmer New Year.

The interesting aspect is that in the context of the tribunal, these ritual activities also increased at Choeung Ek even if initiated by civil society. Non-governmental organizations that worked in the context of the tribunal encouraged and organized rituals in Choeung Ek. The local NGO Youth for Peace used to perform a \textit{bon sakaul} every time they conducted outreach information tours with study groups to Choeung Ek. The NGO Transcultural Psychological Organization (TPO) organized a \textit{bang sakaul} especially for the civil parties that participated in Case 001. For Bou Meng, the participation in this ceremony at Choeung Ek was an important step to address the incompleteness and frustration he felt after his encounter with Duch. (Interview Bou Meng 5 November 2010)

The day before the Duch verdict, all civil parties gathered in Tuol Sleng and conducted a \textit{bon sakaul}. For the civil parties, it was both a collective and an individual act. Collectively as it was done in the group and performed at a former execution site, individually as people dedicated merits to their loved ones who disappeared. Thus, even though the ritual is performed collectively, it personalizes and spiritualizes these national memorial sites and transcends the purely political and legal realm.
Conclusion

The testimonies and agency of civil parties of Case 001 at the ECCC personalize and emotionalize the state historiography and collective memories of the two national memorial sites of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek while at the same time are being framed by the national histories narrated. The civil parties’ testimonies give personal voices to the nameless faces and skulls exhibited. But as civil parties’ questions about the whereabouts of their loved ones remain unanswered and their demand for a memorial with the names of victims is still under negotiation, it is only through collective rituals and ceremonies that the dead can be respected and remembered and “emotional remembering” (White 2000) can be enacted. These different acts of remembering give new dimensions and new insights not only to the national memorial sites that are so often only seen as state narratives and tourist attractions but also to the ECCC itself. Through their agency of the Civil Parties, the court becomes more than a legal matter. It becomes an emotional memoryscape that reconfigures both the individual and collective memories of the Khmer Rouge period of the Cambodian nation.

Plate 1.3 *Bang sakaol* at Choeung Ek.
According to Paul Basu (2007: 233), memoryscapes are constituted through different “mnemonic worlds” that “articulate with and mediate one another,” a process he calls “mnemonic creolisation,” invoked by endogenous and exogenous factors. I suggest that this also holds true for the memoryscapes that emerge in the tribunal and at the memorial sites. It is the interplay of the international legal process that initiates the testimonies, the initiative of non-governmental organizations that takes local ritual practices to the national memorial sites and the agency of the Cambodian civil parties that constructs these memoryscapes.

However, that said, the different mnemonic practices do not contest the contemporary collective narrative of a nation of victims that suffered under a few “senior responsible leaders.” The existing complexities of blurring and shifting boundaries between victims and perpetrators that become evident in the documents of Tuol Sleng and in some of the testimonies are not fully explored in court. The acceptance of applicants as civil parties to the court declares them victims of Democratic Kampuchea regardless of the question if they or their relatives may have joined the Khmer Rouge themselves at one stage of their lives or even may have been Khmer Rouge cadres. While the civil parties want to know the truth about what happened to their loved ones at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, their narratives give only little insights about the blurred and shifting subjectivities and ambiguities of victims and perpetrators in Democratic Kampuchea that many of those who were detained in Tuol Sleng may embody, and the rituals are performed for the dead as victims of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Notes

1. While seven survivors are known to have escaped Tuol Sleng in 1979, the exact numbers of survivors are not known. Case 001 found other survivors and just recently the Cambodian NGO DCCAM (Documentation Center of Cambodia) has stated that the actual number of survivors was much higher than estimated and may count up to 200 people (Keo 2010).
3. Other prison and killing sites such as Kraing Ta Chan in Takeo Province have a similar number of victims, but are not that well-documented and centrally located. Tuol Sleng is well-documented and the Khmer Rouge left an archive behind that allows research into the site. In addition, Tuol Sleng was the only national prison and according to Henri Locard (2011) the biggest one in terms of number of people working there and building size.
4. This is the definition as written in the law of the ECCC. Article 2 of the law reads: “Extraordinary Chambers shall be established in the existing court structure, namely the trial court and the supreme court to bring to trial senior leaders of Democratic Kampuchea and those who were most responsible for the crimes and serious violations of Cambodian laws related to crimes, international humanitarian law and custom, and international conventions recognized by Cambodia, that were committed during the period from 17 April 1975 to 6 January 1979.” (Law on the Establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers, with inclusion of amendments as promulgated on 27 Oct. 2004 (NS/RKM/1004/006), at http://www.eccc.gov.kh/sites/default/files/legal-documents/KR_Law_as_amended_27_Oct_2004_Eng.pdf [accessed 17 July 2011]).


6. The recent official commemoration of the former national “day of hate” (tivea chong kamhaeng, lit. day of tying anger) that is now called “day of remembrance” at Choeung Ek on 20 May revealed the state historiography of the Khmer Rouge period almost in an ideal-type fashion. A theater play was performed that reenacted the terror of the Khmer Rouge cadres and ended with the liberation of the Cambodian people by Vietnamese soldiers and the Khmer Salvation front. In the end, pictures of the Prime Minister Hun Sen were paraded.

7. The estimated number of deaths during Cambodia’s civil war from 1970–75 differ widely among scholars and are much less researched than the excess death toll of the Khmer Rouge period. Kiernan (2003) and Heuveline (1998) estimate the number of wartime excess deaths to 300,000.

8. Peasants who had fled from the rural areas to the cities during the civil war were also considered “new people” (Hinton 2005: 9). Kiernan (2002: 48) estimates the population of Phnom Penh to have counted almost two million in Apr. 1975. Beng Hong Socheat Khmero (2000: 11) states that the capital’s population increased from 600,000 in 1969 to 1.5 million in 1975, out of which 800,000 were refugees. Next to Phnom Penh, all major urban centers of Cambodia were evacuated, such as Battambang, Siem Reap, Kampong Cham (Kiernan 2002: 49–51). David Chandler (2008a: 256) estimates that altogether more than two million Cambodians were victims of forced evacuation from the urban areas to the countryside in Apr. 1975.

9. While all of Cambodia suffered during this period, reports of survivors have shown that conditions were harsher in those areas that were not occupied by Khmer Rouge forces before 1975 and differed for base and new people
While food was in general very little for people in the cooperatives, some of my interlocutors did eat rice twice a day while the majority reported rice gruel as the food provided. Just as the labor conditions varied in different zones, so did the food provisions. But even when rice was provided, people always would show me that it was rationed to one handful per meal. There were never more than two meals a day.

10. For a detailed exploration of the activities of civil society in the context of the tribunal, see Sperfeldt 2012.

11. Vann Nath, who painted most of the images depicting life at S-21 that are exhibited at Tuol Sleng today and who was a crucial witness in Case 001, died on 5 Sept. 2011 in Phnom Penh.


14. For a more detailed exploration of the politics of memory and the ECCC, see Emde (in preparation).

15. Paul Basu (2007), in exploring memorial sites in post-conflict Sierra Leone, also opposes the common dichotomy between memory and history and talks about memorial sites as memoryscapes where memory and history are co-incident. He asks how in these memoryscapes different “mnemonic worlds” “articulate with and mediate one another” (ibid.: 233). He calls this process “mnemonic creolisation,” a process that is invoked by “endogenous as well as exogenous factors” (ibid.). Moreover, places, objects and sites may embody multiple memories of different times, events and epochs that overlap. This process renders sites to palimpsest memoryscapes. He illustrates his example with the Cotton Tree that shadows the National Museum in the capital Freetown. This cotton tree is an important icon of Sierra Leone’s slave heritage. “The tree both acts as a witness to the violent uprooting of people from their homeland in the image of the slave market and provides a symbol of sanctuary and protection for the freed slaves on their “return to Africa” (ibid.: 235). But the mnemonic meanings of the cotton tree go back even further. Cotton trees hold a special place in local cosmologies, are considered sacred places and were used as boundary markers. In 2004, Freetown’s cotton tree together with a dove became the icon of a new 10,000 Leone note now symbolizing new national unity and peace. Thus, the different interpretations and meanings of the cotton tree overlap and sometimes overwrite each other depending on the history that is chosen to frame it.

16. The importance of rituals for the transformation of bad deaths is also emphasized for post-conflict East Timor by my colleague, Victoria Kumala Sakti (forthcoming). But while in East Timor ritual practices are also related to
negotiations of compensation between victims and perpetrators, such practices of compensation do not exist in Cambodia and the rituals in these two different societies differ as they are embedded in different religious and cultural logics.

17. I observed a number of these ceremonies in a village in Takeo province where the offerings for the ancestors were thrown either into the fields or onto the ground outside the homes where the ceremonies were performed. I also observed one ceremony at a former mass killing site near this village and here the offerings were thrown into the mass grave.

18. The practice of keeping the ashes of the deceased differs regionally within Cambodia. In Takeo province where I worked, special places (tiet) existed in the village where the ashes of the deceased were buried in the soil. This practice was completely unknown to Machhem, my research assistant who came from Pursat and had lived in Battambang for many years. In his home region, ashes were kept at the stupas at the wat.