

THE FORCED TRANSFER:

The Second Evacuation of People During the Khmer Rouge Regime



BY THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND FINE ARTS AND THE DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) will design, install and manage permanent exhibitions on the history of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) and develop 24 provincial museums throughout Cambodia. As part of the first step of this museum exhibitions project, DC-Cam will work with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts to create and manage five museum exhibitions in five provincial museums, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Kampong Thom, Takeo and Svay Rieng. Together with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, DC-Cam will document the stories of survivors and the histories of villages, burial sites, and prison centers across the country where mass atrocities took place. These exhibitions are an important development not only for Cambodia's struggle for reconciliation and justice today, but the education of its youth for generations to come. Ultimately this project will educate the public on Democratic Kampuchea history as well as serve as an instrument for ensuring this history is never forgotten.

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Front cover: leng Sary with a Chinese delegation inspecting the railway during
the forced transfer of people in late 1975. *Source: DC-Cam Archives*

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PREFACE



During the Democratic Kampuchea regime, our country suffered enormous cultural losses. Music, art, religion, and custom were sacrificed on the altar of a warped regime that had no regard for humanity, let alone the individual human being.

Children were taken from their parents, husbands were separated from their wives, and families were broken apart.

Cities and towns were emptied, and throughout the country, people were forced to travel, often times on foot, with nothing but the possessions they could carry. Ultimately millions of Cambodian people died during this regime.

It is in this sense, the Khmer Rouge committed both human and cultural genocide.

This exhibition on forced transfer gives us an opportunity to reflect on certain aspects of this human and cultural genocide. Reflection on the past is a crucial task for all post-conflict countries because a country that cannot face the problems of its past will never have the courage and fortitude to face the problems of the present and future.

Many of the problems that we see today are the consequences of our Nation's history, and we must not shrink in our responsibility to investigate and preserve this history for the education of our society and the next generation. But history is more than just studying past problems for present-day solutions. When we study history, we must remember that each detail and circumstance is the representation of an individual human being's experience. This perspective

carries implications not only for the individual person, but also the society at-large. The people who suffered under the cruel, ruthless grip of the Khmer Rouge regime deserve to be remembered and honored. By studying individual stories, we recognize the value of the individual human being, which is a fundamental ingredient to all human rights.

Through stories, we understand the beauty and diversity of the human spirit which shines through the most incredible hardships and the most depraved evils. A diverse society is a healthy society, which values open-mindedness, innovation, and freedom. These are difficult qualities to obtain for all societies, which is why cultural diversity is so crucial to a post-conflict society's development. Cultural diversity is a fragile characteristic that can be easily eroded by a society's ignorance of its past. Indeed, cultures can be eradicated just as easily during peacetime as during war. While looting and the illegal sale of cultural antiquities are the more flagrant examples of cultural destruction, mass ignorance and indifference can be more pernicious.

All generations bear a civic duty to preserve, protect, and restore the country's diversity of cultures through a conscientious study of culture and history. This project is one critical step forward in meeting this solemn duty.



Phoeung Sackona
Minister
Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts

17 APRIL – THE FORCED TRANSFER

By Sirik Savina

As residents of Phnom Penh, my family was forced to evacuate their home and undertake an uncertain journey to their native village in Prey Veng, a province in southeastern Cambodia. Amid fear and confusion, they joined the crowds of evacuees trudging along Monivong Boulevard toward National Road 1 in an attempt to reach their destination. Traveling on foot with their few belongings strapped to a motorbike, they slept wherever they could find a spot when night fell. My mother recalls that one evening, without realizing it, the family slept through the night atop the bodies of evacuees who had been killed in the revolution.

Instead of ending their journey in Prey Veng Province as planned, my family was redirected to Kampong Cham Province, where my mother's family lived and where my family remained throughout the Khmer Rouge regime. Labeled as 'new' people or 'April 17' people, they were assigned to live with 'base' people, those who had previously lived in zones under Khmer Rouge control and who were considered more trustworthy. My family was then relocated to a cooperative where, like many other people, they lived and ate collectively. They were assigned to work in the fields, growing rice and collecting rubber latex. My parents were placed in separate work units, while my brothers, ages four and seven, were assigned to a children's unit. Since my father had been a city resident and teacher in the previous regime, he knew very little about farming or village matters and thus his life became very difficult. He survived the regime only because of the protection he received from my mother's family, who were 'base' people. Unfortunately, other members of his extended family, who were relocated to the southwestern province of Kampot, did not survive the extreme living conditions and executions. More than thirty years have passed, but my father remains silent about what happened during those years. Although his silence precludes a discussion between him and me about life during the regime, the violence that engulfed Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge years

has had a constant impact on our family and on Cambodian society at large ever since.

The landscape of Cambodia reveals its recent history of mass violence. Cambodia endured five years of civil war from 1970 to 1975. The country then fell into the hands of Khmer Rouge revolutionaries, who ruled the country from April 17, 1975 to January 7, 1979. The Khmer Rouge officially renamed the country Democratic Kampuchea (DK) and embarked on policies and practices marked by widespread violence. Cities and towns were evacuated. The population was constantly relocated—from Phnom Penh to the provinces and from the provincial towns to cooperatives.

Before the Khmer Rouge captured the capital of Phnom Penh, the population of the city had swelled to several million, tripling its number of residents in a span of five years. This increase resulted primarily from a flood of refugees into the capital from rural provinces to escape armed conflict, aerial bombardment, and forced conscription by the Khmer Rouge. When they gained control of the country, the Khmer Rouge evacuated all cities and forced the residents to relocate to their native villages. Lost in confusion and filled with fear of the unknown, the population was evacuated in all directions—north, south, east and west—under the constant surveillance of Khmer Rouge soldiers.

The evacuation of the cities only hinted at the terror that was to eventually grip Cambodia. Over the ensuing months and years, the Khmer Rouge forced city dwellers to perform hard labor in the countryside. The population was transferred to collective cooperatives and assigned to work on massive agricultural and irrigation projects. To maintain control of the population and of production, the Khmer Rouge created security centers and labor camps throughout the country. Hospitals, schools, and temples were closed or transformed into

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Provincial Museum Exhibitions on Forced Transfer during the Khmer Rouge Period

warehouses or prisons; religious practices and money were banned; and all cultural references from the previous regime, including family life and certain languages, were disallowed. This attempt to reconstruct the country according to the ideology of the Khmer Rouge resulted in mass violence and fear, the consequences of which have lingered in Cambodia for decades.

A fundamental characteristic of the DK regime was the constant relocation of its population. People were repeatedly and forcibly moved from one place to another—from their place of birth to a different zone and from one cooperative to another. Relocations were ordered from the provinces of Kampong Cham, Takeo, Kandal, and Prey Veng to Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, and so on. In general, the movement was from the southeast to the northwest part of the country. People were transported on foot as well as by boat, truck, train, and oxcart. The evacuees were terrified, confused, and traumatized as they were starved, separated from their family members, and forced to journey into the unknown. The train journeys in particular were very traumatic. Evacuees were provided with almost nothing to eat and were separated from their family members at each train stop. The painful losses and trauma of the Cambodian citizens speak directly to the violence committed by the Khmer Rouge.

The permanent exhibitions in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts on Forced Transfers includes survivors' stories of the forced evacuations and daily living conditions during DK, as well as recollections of former Khmer Rouge soldiers who participated in the mass relocations of the population. Through striking photographs, survivors' narratives, maps and folktales, these exhibitions will provide a tranquil space for remembering, acknowledging, and honoring the suffering endured by victims and survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. The educational programs incorporated within the exhibitions will begin at the provincial museums in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey and end in Kampong Thom, Svay Rieng, and Takeo. These programs will help promote meaningful intergenerational discussion about the history

and legacy of the Khmer Rouge regime among Cambodians as well as among international visitors. The education will take place in public and private spaces, including provincial museums, schools, homes, and specific sites where the Khmer Rouge committed violent acts against their own people. We hope that these exhibitions will provide visitors with a glimpse of the trauma and fear that was omnipresent in the practices of the DK regime.

As a member of the younger generation who was born after those traumatic years, the images of the forced evacuations and the pathetic daily living conditions of my family exist only in my imagination. They are never revealed in discussions between my father and me. My father's silence explains everything and nothing at all. His reticence forces me to realize how traumatic life was during the DK regime. At the same time, it conceals details of life under the regime behind a shadow of darkness.

I sincerely hope the photographs and narratives contained in the exhibitions will inspire people to share memories and learn more about the history of the DK regime. One person's story represents only a piece of the larger puzzle, the totality of which will ultimately provide an historical record of Cambodia's past. Piecing that puzzle together is the process through which we can better understand the violence inflicted upon my family and other Cambodian families as a whole. The impact of that violence is felt by all of us on a daily basis and fuels a desire to restore humanity, dignity and honor to all survivors of the genocide perpetrated by the Democratic Kampuchea regime.

Sirik Savina

Director, Museum of Memory

The Sleuk Rith Institute – a permanent Documentation Center of Cambodia

BACKGROUND

From 1975 to 1979 over 25 per cent of Cambodia's population perished due to mass executions, famine and disease at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime, known as Democratic Kampuchea (DK).

In June 2003, the United Nations (UN) and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) signed an Agreement to try the senior leaders of Democratic Kampuchea and those most responsible for the national and international crimes committed between 17 April 1975 and 6 January 1979. Pursuant to this Agreement, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) was established within the Cambodian judicial system and officially inaugurated on 3 July 2006.

With the desire to give testimony and seek justice at the court, over 4,000 civil parties and over 6,000 complainants have stepped forward to participate at the ECCC. And yet, while the ECCC has given a voice to numerous victims, survivors and their families, there is still much to be done in terms of making the testimonies tangible for future generations.

With approximately 70 per cent of Cambodia's population born after 1979, Cambodia is at a critical point in its development as a post-conflict nation. While truth, justice and reconciliation are the critical ingredients to a post-conflict society's return to the civilized world, it is also education, memory and civil discourse that underpin the nation's future. The stories of those who survived the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge must be memorialized in public spaces beyond the court, not only for the sake of justice and reconciliation but also to facilitate the education of generations to come.

FORCED TRANSFER

Between 1970 and 1975, people fleeing the conflict between the Lon Nol regime and the Khmer Rouge forces flooded the capital of Cambodia. As a result, the population of Phnom Penh mushroomed to several million people.

The Khmer Rouge forces entered Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975 and began the first phase of what they described as an 'evacuation' but what would later come to be termed as forced transfer. During this period, Phnom Penh was emptied of all its inhabitants. Men and women of all professions, the elderly, children and monks, as well as sick people from hospitals, pregnant women, or women who had just given birth were forced to leave the city. Many people were forced to leave on foot, heading north, south, east and west along the country's national roads. They did not know where to go and most people were told to simply go back to their birthplace. People from Phnom Penh were identified as "New People" or "17 April People," while people who were deemed to be trustworthy or loyal to the regime were identified as "Base People." New People were often targeted for discrimination because of their association with an urban, Western or wealthy upbringing, regardless of whether this characteristic was actually true. Armed Khmer Rouge soldiers dressed in black or green khaki uniforms, with kramas around their necks, kept the people moving, occasionally threatening, beating or stealing from the people. People slept on roads or under trees, and many people survived on only steamed rice for their long journey. People experienced health problems such as swelling in their limbs, dehydration and exhaustion. In all, close to a million people were forced to leave the city and it is estimated that up to 3,000 people died along the way.

From around September 1975 and until 1977, large numbers of people were also moved from the central and southwest parts of the country (provinces

such as Kandal, Kampong Thom, Takeo, Kampong Speu, Kampong Chhnang and Kampong Cham) to Siem Reap and Preah Vihear. In addition people from the central and southwest parts of the country were also relocated to the Northwest Zone (Battambang, Pursat and Banteay Meanchey provinces).

Documents from the DK regime show that from 400,000 to 500,000 people were to be added to the Northwest Zone and 50,000 people were to be moved out of the East Zone (Prey Veng and Svay Rieng provinces).

Train operators saw thousands of people being sent by train through Phnom Penh to their destinations in Pursat and Battambang provinces in the Northwest Zone. People were transported using all means possible, such as train, civilian and military trucks, boat, oxcart, tractor and by foot. People were packed into crowded train carriages and were given little or nothing to drink or eat on these long train journeys to the northwest of the country. Troops and militiamen of the Khmer Rouge supervised these movements. They stood guard over people on trains, boats and oxcarts, and they oversaw the reception of people at train stops.

THE EXHIBITIONS

The forced evacuation of Phnom Penh and the subsequent forced transfer of the Cambodian population to specific zones has been the main focus of the ECCC's second case. The history of these events will also form the basis of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and DC-Cam's permanent exhibitions across five provincial museums.

Because the forced transfer of people by train touched nearly every geographic region of Cambodia, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and DC-Cam will use the train journey as a common thread throughout all five provincial museum exhibitions. The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and DC-Cam will identify and organize the narratives of survivors who disembarked at a particular train stop or district and were then forcibly moved and sent to work in cooperatives. The

exhibitions will also feature the testimonies of former Khmer Rouge soldiers who worked as train operators. As participants and witnesses to this massive relocation of people, former Khmer Rouge soldiers will provide insights into the arrival of people at train stops and their follow-on journey by oxcart, foot, or truck to cooperatives. The exhibitions will feature photographs, videos and audio interviews, as well as revolutionary songs of the period from DC-Cam's archives, as well as information about burial sites, memorials and former prisons near train stops along the railway network. Folktales will also be featured, showing how culture and storytelling endured even where forces attempted to eliminate it.

Each train stop represents a reference point in time and space for the history of these forced relocations. The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and DC-Cam will provide the public with an opportunity to explore the history of specific sites and neighbouring communities as they relate to the forced transfer of people and the history of Democratic Kampuchea at-large. The ultimate goal in this approach is to pay respect to the memory of people who died during these forced relocations as well as educate the visitor on the broader history of the community that surrounds the train stop.

The exhibitions will first be installed and inaugurated at Battambang and Banteay Meanchey museums. Both provinces were situated in what the DK designated as the Northwest Zone. These exhibitions are important because of the significant number of people that were forcibly transferred to the Northwest Zone. The exhibitions will thereafter be reproduced in the provincial museums of Kampong Thom, Svay Rieng and Takeo.

THE VISION

For the exhibitions to have real social value in Cambodian society, they must be accessible to visitors of all kinds from across the various provinces. To this end, a school program will be established by the Ministry of Culture and Fine

Arts and DC-Cam to bring students from local high schools and universities to the exhibitions. Exhibition brochures and interactive educational activities will also be designed to ensure that visitors are not merely passive recipients of 'information'; rather, they will be actively engaged in the study, reflection and memory of victims and survivors. They will have the opportunity to reflect on the stories of those who experienced this history as well as learn the wider historical context of the Democratic Kampuchea period.

While the museums will serve as a reflective space for all visitors, the exhibitions will be specifically tailored to bring dignity and honour to civil parties, victims and all survivors of the Khmer Rouge period. The ultimate goal of these exhibitions in this sense is to not only meet the objectives of justice pursuant to the mandate of the ECCC but also enhance the process of achieving justice beyond the courtroom's walls.

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Mr. Aung Phally, a 48-year old civil party who testified in May 2013 before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia spoke of how, as a child, he and his entire family were evacuated from Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975. He described the arduous 15-day journey along National Road 1 towards Prey Veng province. Upon arriving there his father was taken by Khmer Rouge forces, never to be seen again and five days later, his siblings and mother were also taken and executed. He, his grandmother and a grandchild were the sole survivors of this early phase of evacuation. They were then evacuated by boat back to Phnom Penh and forcibly transferred by train to Maung Russei district in Battambang province. The trauma of suddenly losing most members of the family and the constant movement to undisclosed destinations, as well as the living conditions exacerbated by starvation, led to the deaths of the remaining two members of Mr. Aung's family: the grandchild and grandmother. Disembarking from the train, Mr. Aung was placed in a children's unit in Maung Russei district, where he endured hard labour and suffered from severe mental trauma caused by these events. Though he is a survivor, the events of that

period have left indelible scars on his psyche.

TRAIN DRIVERS OF THE KHMER ROUGE ERA

In addition to the 'new people' who were targeted for discrimination by the Khmer Rouge, others with skills the regime deemed useful also often lost their lives. Mr. Thach Kim was a train driver who had been educated in Battambang, Kampong Thom and Phnom Penh. When the Khmer Rouge came into power in 1975, he was recruited to be a train driver for the regime and tasked with teaching other cadres how to drive trains. He was also instructed to transfer people from the city to Battambang in the Northwest Zone on the train. Thousands were moved to the Northwest Zone to work in the paddy fields and to increase rice production. He drove the train to Poipet and Svay Sisophon in this important Zone. He kept in touch with his sister by concealing letters in bags of fruit and cloth, which he tossed to her from the train when it passed her cooperative. In 1977, he was taken away by the Khmer Rouge, ostensibly to be moved to Pechnel. He wrote a letter to his wife that if he did not get in touch within 4 to 5 days, she should presume he had been executed. Other people like him who had worked at the station, railroads and as drivers, similarly disappeared. His wife and sister who survived have no idea to this day why Thach Kim was recruited and then executed by the Khmer Rouge. These are the kinds of stories that will be featured in the various exhibitions across the provincial museums.

Kumar Reachea Train Station, Takeo Province, where people were evacuated from South to North during the Khmer Rouge regime.
Photo by Seng Kunthy



AT MAUNG RUSSEI STATION: UM SOKHA'S STORY

My father's name was Um Run. In 1975, when the Khmer Rouge took control of the country, we lived together. However, in October 1975, Angkar called my father and ten other villagers to be reeducated. Three Khmer Rouge militiamen came to pick them up. Unfortunately, I don't remember their names. The arrest took place in the evening at Phlouv Tei village, Thma Kor commune, Lvea Em district, Kandal province. To this day, only Chen, the security chief, has survived the regime. My father was taken to Tonle Khnong security office. They arrested my father because he was a district chief during the Lon Nol regime. He was not able to escape while the Khmer Rouge was in power.

In 1976, my family was evacuated, along with the other villagers. It was Chen, the security chief, who called out our names. At that time, we departed by ship from Phlouv village of Thma Kor commune. Then we boarded a train at night. This took place immediately after my arrival in Phnom Penh. We reached Mong district of Battambang province at 9 a.m. There were many oxcarts waiting for us there. We were not provided with rice, but instead were given a loaf of bread to eat. We were transferred to Banaok cooperative, in a nearby forest. Angkar did not offer us enough rice, beans or corn. Living conditions were extremely difficult.

About a month later, Angkar ordered everyone to eat communally. During harvest season in the cooperative, we had enough rice to eat; however, during

transplanting season, there was little food. The worst famine was between 1976 and 1977, when people died of hunger almost every day. The Base People had to carry the dead bodies, regardless of whether it was day or night. My mother also died of hunger at that time. Anyone caught stealing what was considered to be Angkar's property would be killed. I forget the name of the cooperative chief, as these events occurred a long time ago.

The Khmer Rouge abused us because they wanted to kill us. In my opinion, the actions of the Khmer Rouge clearly demonstrated that they wanted to kill us. They provided inadequate food and killed people for even the smallest of infractions. Three years living under the Khmer Rouge regime was like living in hell.

When the Vietnamese troops liberated the country in 1979, we were able to return to our home village again. We traveled day and night along the road with large numbers of people from various other provinces. At night, the Khmer Rouge patrolled by horse in order to intimidate villagers into joining their forces to fight against the Vietnamese, who were invading the country. People tried to escape. It took us a month to reach our home village. Only those who had gold were provided with transportation by the Vietnamese troops. Those who did not have gold had to walk. Many people died along the route because there was insufficient food. People were emaciated after the Khmer Rouge regime ended.

A SURVIVOR'S STORY FROM PURSAT PROVINCE: SUON SIENG

My name is Suon Sieng. I am 70 years old and I have five siblings (1 sister and 4 brothers). I am the eldest child in the family. I was formerly a member of the navy under the Lon Nol regime.

In 1975, my younger brothers, Pen Khorn, Pen Um, and Pen Un were separated from me. The Khmer Rouge relocated them to Bakan District, Pursat Province.

In June 1975, the Khmer Rouge evacuated me to Prek Thnaot, Ta Khmao District, Kandal Province, telling me that I would only have to stay there for a short time. After one week, an elderly man named Ok, the commune chief ordered me to travel to Kampong Speu Province, along with many other people. When I reached Bek-chan Road, the Khmer Rouge changed their plan and ordered me to travel to Pursat by truck. I lived in Bakan District, Pursat Province, until the Vietnamese troops invaded the area. Fearful that the Khmer Rouge would learn that I had served in the navy during the Lon Nol regime, I collected my ID card, certificate, and other relevant documents and burned them. An elderly man named Pheng was the Bakan district chief during the Khmer Rouge regime. He may have since passed away. I do not know the names of any other high-ranking leaders.

In 1976, my friends, Keo (female), and Moeun (female), who had lived with me in Mok Kampol District, informed me that my three brothers – former soldiers and policemen – had been arrested and imprisoned in Tuol Sleng. I was very distressed, but could do nothing about it. At the time I did not know that Tuol Sleng was located in Phnom Penh.

In 1977, I witnessed the Khmer Rouge tying up people who were from Svay Rieng in the Eastern Zone. I witnessed this incident while I was transporting firewood to a unit which produced palm sugar. I heard the victims screaming and so I ran away, afraid that the Khmer Rouge would arrest me. The Khmer Rouge killed the people from Svay Rieng Province in Tuol Tamok Village, Bakan District. As far as I know, the Khmer Rouge arrested them either because they were soldiers, were Vietnamese, or were considered loyal to Vietnam.

During the harvest season of 1978, Khmer Rouge soldiers arrested me and accused me of being disloyal to Angkar. Then they took me to Tane security center in Bakan District. I was not interrogated. However the Khmer Rouge forced me to work tirelessly and fed me very little food. When the Vietnamese troops invaded in late 1978, I escaped from the security center.

I lost my house, cattle, and farmland when the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia. What I lost during that time is incalculable. When I was invited to Tuol Sleng by DC-Cam in 2006, I learned that it was a place where prisoners were detained. I lost my brothers there. I went to see a fortune-teller who informed me that they had all died. I want the court to prosecute the Khmer Rouge as soon as possible in order to render justice for the victims. I want to have a statue erected to honor the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime and provide a sense of relief to the survivors.

AT SISOPHON STATION: HANG POLINE'S STORY

In 1976, unknown Khmer Rouge soldiers evacuated me and fourteen of my relatives from Kien Svay district, Kandal province, to the central part of Svay Sisophon district in Banteay Meanchey province. I was first relocated to Pursat province for a short time, and then sent Svay Sisophon. Along the way, I saw Khmer Rouge soldiers stop and frisk evacuees as tens of thousands of people were relocated to other provinces. I saw the Khmer Rouge search for former Lon Nol government officials and intellectuals. They were assembled into groups and taken away.

Later, we were separated. My husband and I were sent to Preah Net Preah district, Banteay Meanchey province. My parents and seven of our relatives were sent to Phum Srok district, Banteay Meanchey province. There my husband and I, along with a hundred other evacuees, received three days of political reeducation because the Khmer Rouge categorized us as a group of intellectuals. Comrade Mong, the chief of Preah Net Preah district, and another old Khmer Rouge cadre named Comrade Trak presided over the political reeducation. Then we were assigned to do farm work and complete the work quota set by Angkar.

Again my husband and I were separated. My husband was relocated to an unknown village in Preah Net Preah district. At the same time, the Khmer Rouge loaded me onto a truck with about ten other people and sent us to a prison in the central part of Svay Sisophon. On the way, I was shackled and my hands were tied up. The other people on that truck were also tied up like me. They

said I was detained because I was an intellectual. There at the prison, I saw the Khmer Rouge mistreat other detainees. One student confronted and criticized Angkar, and he was beaten to death. I was detained there for one month and was then taken to another reeducation camp in Svay Sisophon, Serei Sophon district, Battambang province. Along with over two hundred detainees, I was assigned to grow crops, such as cabbage, Chinese broccoli and cassava, along the Sangke Lake. There I was subjected to constant hard labor, and I had to work tirelessly to please the Khmer Rouge cadres in charge.

At the reeducation camp, a former student of my father's who was a Khmer Rouge cadre there recognized me and helped prevent other cadres' mistreatment of me. Two months later, I was released and sent back to reunite with my husband in Kok Ta You village, Preah Net Preah district, Banteay Meanchey province. I was told by another Khmer Rouge cadre that if I wanted to survive, I had to work hard. And we worked very hard to please the cooperative chief there. I saw the Khmer Rouge take away a lot of people from my cooperative who never came back.

A SURVIVOR'S STORY FROM KAMPONG THOM PROVINCE: LENG YUN

EVACUATION

In 1975, my family and I were forcibly evacuated to Sa-than Lork by A Khun, male, and Leap. If we had not followed the [evacuation] orders, [they] would have starved or killed us. I do not know why they forced us to go there, but I think that [they regarded me] as the enemy. I was part of the first group of New People. Those evacuated from Phnom Penh comprised the second group of New People. The Khmer Rouge named those people the first new group and the second new group. They stated that my group was a deposited group, about to be executed. However, the second group was executed first because they were high-ranking officers, rich people, capitalists, and people who used to eat delicious food. My group was accused of being capitalists. My family, in particular, whose living conditions were better than those of others in the village, were all taken away to be executed. In Sa-than Lork, [my group] cleared the forest for a month. Then, Vong, Khun, and Leam sent me to Po Phloulk Village, Sam Proch Commune, Stong District.

STARVATION

In 1975, Vong, Khun, and Leam relocated me to Po Phloulk Village, Stong District, where they assigned me to do farming. I worked from 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. During a half-hour break, each person received a food ration of one ladle of gruel, containing only one grain of rice mixed with morning glory. At that time, I dared not challenge [the Khmer Rouge], because I was fearful of being killed. In the evening, they gave [us] one serving of rice, but no more than a spoonful. Sometimes, gruel was served to [us], but it was not enough to fill our empty stomachs. We had to mix it with water lily, morning glory, papaya root, banana stem, and chra va touk [a kind of edible herb called duck lettuce that grows in the water].

Sometimes, I stole rice bran and rice husk and pounded them for a meal. At the time, it was very delicious, but now [I] cannot eat it. Sometimes, small children stole rice but were caught and the rice was taken from them. The children then starved until the evening when they were released. Sometimes, they were beaten by Voeung and Ka-a, who were in their twenties. Chek, a female, was in charge of assigning food rations, and an elderly woman named Yan cooked the rice. Yan was cruel, however, if she was fond of someone, she allowed them to take the solid [gruel] from the bottom of the pot. My group, the deposited ones, was served only watery [gruel] to eat. During the regime, rice production was high, but they never gave us enough rice to eat. They regarded us as the enemy [because they felt we had been] rich. My parents and parents-in-law died from exhaustion and starvation. Aside from them, an elderly woman named Dek, 60, also died from starvation. In addition, my mother's elder sister named Yin died from starvation.

HUSBAND TAKEN AWAY TO BE EXECUTED

In 1975, my husband, Yip Hiep, 30, was taken away to be executed. I also witnessed my elder brothers, Yip Lep, Yip Len, and Yip Pheng, being taken away to be executed. They were arrested by Soeun, whose wife was Kha-them. Three people (unknown to me) tied up my brothers with rope and escorted them away. They accused my husband and brothers of being enemies, "the rich." My children and I dared not cry in front of others, in fear that we would also be taken away and executed. From that moment on, I have never seen my husband. They took my husband to To Pech Village, where they killed him. I dared not go near that village, because I was afraid I would also be executed. After killing my husband, they returned his krama [scarf] and sarong [long skirt]

A HISTORY OF O'DAMBANG VILLAGE IN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE: BENG

to me. Afraid, I dared not ask [them] about anything. Puy, male, probably in his thirties, informed [me] that my husband had been executed at To Pech.

KILLING

In 1975, I witnessed people, whose hands had been tied behind their backs, being escorted away to be executed. I witnessed the incident, but I dared not make any inquiries; in fact, I hid myself because I was afraid I would also be executed. Those arrested were accused of being enemies – stealing rice and fish. Among the arrested, I knew one elderly man named Chhorn, who was 50 years old and lived in Trach Chrum. He was accused of being an enemy. A Nuy escorted people to be killed at To Pech. My husband was one of those arrested.

In addition, I also witnessed coworkers being taken away to be executed. They had committed wrongdoing by breaking a plate, plow, or plowshare. One of those executed was Yen, female, 30. However, during 1977, I did not know who was taken to be executed because they took people at night. People were called [to leave] to grow potatoes. A Heap, the security policeman, came and called for the people.

PERSECUTION

Heap, the security police chief, arrested my younger brother, Seng Nun, 22, in 1977 and imprisoned him for a month at Tuol Phluong, located in Stong market. I did not know what wrongdoing he had committed. They shackled both of his legs and starved him for three or four days, but he was not beaten.

RAPE OF A 17TH APRIL WOMAN

In 1978, Chan, male, was a “low ranking” security policeman. When they called me to work there, I whispered to him that a high ranking [security officer], whose name I did not know, had raped and killed a woman in Daun Sok, known as Trapeang Daun Sok. Chan did not inform me of the name of the person who mistreated the woman, whose name was Kruy. They had accused her husband of being a captain [in the Lon Nol army].

After the country was liberated in 1975, the Khmer Rouge took full control of the country. In O'Dambang village, the villagers were evacuated to the edge of the village, near “Toul Muk O'Run” field, which is also near a lake called “Beoung Kchas.” At the time, the Khmer Rouge started to divide the population into five lines. The first line was made up of the population from the provincial city of Battambang. Lines two to five consisted of residents from O'Dambang and Beoung Kchas. The people had to live on their own, and during the evacuation, Angkar built each evacuated family a home that had a parameter of three meters by four meters.

Work was done in units. There was the adult unit that consisted of married couples and widows. The leaders of the youth unit were Mith Sok, Mith Pheap and Mith Pot. The large division leaders were Mith Vurn and Mith Phean. The remaining were smaller divisions: groups and companies. Within the groups, there was the farming unit that was controlled by Mith Pot. As for the mobile unit, they had to dig dikes, build dams and plant rice. Those who built dams and planted rice were under the control of Mith Pot and Mith Pheap.

During Democratic Kampuchea, everyone had a job to do, no matter what his or her physical conditions were. No one was left with nothing to do. If someone was found to be lazy, Angkar considered him or her to have a deviant consciousness and had a saying: “If you're kept, it's no gain; if you're pulled out, it's no loss!”

During Democratic Kampuchea, everyone was overworked, without regard for the work hours. There were no religious holidays or Sundays. At night, they attended a meeting, and they would wake up at 4 a.m. to start work again. This

had grave effects on the health of the population.

Meals were eaten in a cooperative (village), and later on, they were eaten within the units. As for youth, meals were eaten and divided between the genders. Also, the living conditions for youths were different and also divided by gender. The male youths were under the control of Ta Dul, and the females were controlled by Ta Sun. During the harvest season, three to four months later, the people could have a bowl of rice each. When it was time to plant rice, the people only had a bowl of watery rice porridge each. At the end of October, the rice porridge is very watery. In a pan of rice porridge there was sometimes corn mixed in. Sometimes they would give them some rice cake in addition. The rice cake would often get traded for banana cake or potato and was planted in “Samdech Preah Roath Pon Sampheach” field.

Under the Khmer Rouge regime, those who were accused of being traitors were taken away to an island called “Koh Chamka.” They were then put into a large container and tortured. After that, they were dumped in a well near the container that they were tortured in. Sometimes, such people were taken to Ta Rai (in Cham Nich) or were taken to Samroang Pagoda. The Old People said that the bodies that were dumped in the well, about 30 bodies, included the old and young. The bodies were found when the well was dug up again for use. As for those who died in the hospital, they were buried around the hospital's complex. There is no clear estimate on how many were buried there.

Under the Democratic Kampuchea regime, people with family and youth were separated. The children were also separated, except children under five years of age. Adults with family were divided as follows: adult males farmed and built

A STORY FROM SVAY RIENG PROVINCE: VANN SORN

shelters along the fields. Adult females harvested, worked the fields, or worked on the farms. Apart from working the fields, the males had to gather wood or transport materials. In the youth unit, female youths and male youths lived separately in a village that was controlled by Ta Dul. After the village chief, there were three other leaders who controlled the male youth: Mith Sok, Mith Pheap and Mith Pot. Mith Sok and Mith Pheap controlled the youth to build dams, dig dikes and work the fields. As for Mith Pot, he controlled the youth to work the farms. As for the female youth, they were in a different village that was under the control of Ta Sun, Ta Vun and his wife, Ly. After the village chief, Mith Neary Yan, Mith Neary Seoun and Mith Neary Roath controlled the females to build dams, dig dikes and work the fields. In addition, they also worked on the farms. Older children worked to pull grass from the fields and transport vegetation to make fertilizer. In the compost site, there were Old People who made fertilizer for use in the fields.

Under the Khmer Rouge, men and women were paired up and forced to stand in front of each other. The cooperative or the village in which the [marriage] ceremony would take place would organize the ceremony. The cooperative or the village chief would then announce the event. After the announcement, the man and the woman would approach each other and take each other's hands. Those who found their respective partners were married to each other. Sometimes the couples were not fit for each other. After they were married, each couple had to pledge their allegiance to Angkar. As for consummation after the marriage, there were people who stood outside to listen. If the couple failed to consummate their marriage, Angkar took them couple away for reeducation or executed them.

Living conditions under the Democratic Kampuchea, or the "three years, eight

months and twenty days," era was the most difficult. People worked without rest and without enough to eat. People were living in low-standard conditions that lacked sanitation. There was a lack of basic materials to use. People only had a small bag. There was no market for trading. People did not go to school (none existed) and only worked in the fields. Also, any products that were made were of low quality.

The dark times, trauma, separations, torture, starvation, and overwork caused many people to die. Many died of illness. Most important of all, the country's economy failed completely. In the end, I endured life under the regime and learned to survive until the country was liberated from the dark ages and executions motivated by revenge and discrimination.

Prior to 1975, when the Khmer Rouge controlled Phnom Penh, I was a Lon Nol soldier. I fought against Khmer Rouge soldiers in Phnom Penh and when the Khmer Rouge seized Phnom Penh in 1975, they put me in Trapeang Chreach Security Center, located in Trapeang Trach Village, Svay Tayan Commune, Kampong Ro district, Svay Rieng Province. Armed security guards of Kampong Ro District, Svay Rieng Province captured and detained me in the center. I do not know their names. Those arrested with me at that time were all Lon Nol soldiers. There were more than three hundred people in my group. There were about three or four militiamen of Thnaot Commune, Kampong Ro District, Svay Rieng Province, guarding Trapeang Trach Prison. The guards were all armed.

The Khmer Rouge ordered us to dig a canal in Svay Ta Yan Commune, in Kampong Ro District. The canal was called Bralay Srok. The Khmer Rouge made us dig four cubic meters of earth per day. If we failed to complete the assigned task, they made us finish it before allowing us to eat. The Khmer Rouge gave us three spoons of milled rice and three salt grains.

Three months later, the Khmer Rouge relocated prisoners to Wat Rumduol Security Center, located in Rumduol Commune, Svay Tiep District, Svay Rieng Province. There were four or five security guards from Kampong Ro District, guarding the center. The Khmer Rouge made me build houses at Kampong Ro's district hall. I and other prisoners could not go and visit our relatives, like other ordinary people. Those who wanted to urinate or defecate had to ask for permission from the guards. Otherwise, the guards would beat them until they passed out. During our detention in Wat Rumduol, the guards at Wat Rumduol killed my colleague, Vanna (a former Lon Nol soldier) in Russei Sang Prison,

because he escaped and visited his house.

Three or four months later, I and other prisoners were evacuated to Wat Po Thmei. When we arrived at Po Thmei Pagoda, the Khmer Rouge selected those who were physically weak and kept them there and placed people who had strength to work in other places. Po Thmei Pagoda was located in Svay Ta Yan Commune, Kampong Ro District, Svay Rieng Province. There were approximately four or five guards working at this security center. There were about a hundred prisoners in my group and another five hundred from another group.

Half a month later, the Khmer Rouge sent me to Preah Ponlea Security Center, located in Preah Ponlea Commune, Kampong Ro District, Svay Rieng Province. The chief walked prisoners out to work and the interrogator asked the prisoners questions at the worksite. The Khmer Rouge grouped high-ranking [soldiers] together in order to relocate them to Russei Kranh Prison, the big prison in Kampong Ro District. I was a corporal sergeant, and the Khmer Rouge put me in one group. The Khmer Rouge put me to work in Prey Thear Cooperative, located in Khse Ka Commune, Kampong Ro District, Svay Rieng Province. I know some former Lon Nol soldiers like me who survived the Khmer Rouge period and who now live in Svay Rieng province.

MEMORIALS, BURIALS & PRISONS IN BATI DISTRICT, TAKEO PROVINCE

WAT SOPHY (WAT KA KOH)

Wat Sophy (also called Ka Koh) was a pagoda that had been turned into a prison. Shackles, handcuffs and the remains of bone shards were taken out by villagers in 1980 and placed in a memorial when the Khmer Rouge regime was overthrown. A Buddhist monk, Keo Kosal, said that the remains they dug out from the ground around the Wat was just a fifth of the total amount of remains in the area.

The memorial is southwest of Wat Koh. Thousands of villagers and hundreds of Buddhist monks travel across the district to come to this place of worship and remembrance to pay respect to those who were executed during the Khmer Rouge period. Venerable Keo has also built a house near the site of these mass graves using the earth from the area. Digging in the area, he discovered clothes and the bone fragments and remains of what would have been legs and fingers. These were brought to the memorial. A Buddhist monk from the Wat shared that he had a dream in which a crowd of people – men, women, the elderly and children – walking towards the Wat asking for revenge.

BURIAL SITES IN BATI DISTRICT

1. Wat Sophy (Wat Ka Koh): There were about 1,000 pits and 20,000 bodies.
2. Wat Troap Kor: There were about 76 pits and 30,000-40,000 bodies.
3. Trapeang Stong and Trapeang Andaung: There were about 76 pits and 10,000 bodies.
4. Trapeang Chra Neang: There was unknown number of pit and about 100 bodies.

PRISON IN BATI DISTRICT

Wat Sophy (Wat Ka Koh)

The Buddhist Temple (Wat) Sophy, also known as Ka Koh, is located in Kandoeng Thom Village, Kandoeng Commune, Bati District in Takeo province. The Khmer Rouge converted this Buddhist temple into a security center and an execution site from 1973. The first prisoners who were arrested in this security center were base people. So Nhor, 69 years old and currently living at Kandoeng Thom Village, Kandoeng Commune, Bati District, was a former prisoner who was imprisoned in Wat Ka Koh security center in late 1973. Nhor said that the security guard accused him of insulting the Khmer Rouge and arrested him. When he was imprisoned, he witnessed prisoners chained in two rows, with each row composed of 20 to 30 prisoners.

The Khmer Rouge also evacuated all the base people who lived in the area to remote sites and forbade people from crossing the area freely. So Nhor saw prisoners died of starvation and also saw prisoners being tortured and executed.

Puth was the first head of Ka Koh security center. He ordered his staff to tell prisoners that they would be relocated to a new area. This always meant that the prisoners who had been identified for relocation were executed. Nhor recalled that all the prisoners were very frightened when they heard from the prison staff about “relocations” to a new area because they knew this meant they were destined for execution. In early 1974, So Nhor was released and allowed to return home. However, he was forced to promise comrade Puth that he would never tell anyone about the executions and torture at the security center.

After liberation day on 17 April 1975, security guards arrested people and brought them to Ka Koh security office frequently. Bun Him who was born in Chambak Commune, Bati District and currently living in the United States stated that, “In 1975, security guards killed many people in Ka Koh prison.” During that time, people whom Angkar evacuated from Phnom Penh, travelled along National Road 2 and 3 and were imprisoned in Ka Koh security center and at Wat Troab Kar. These evacuees were thrown into a pond measuring 50 meters wide, at a depth of about 4 meters and died in the pond. The pond was near the main building of Wat Ka Kah, located in an area spanning the north, east and south of the Buddhist temple. The people they killed included children, elderly people, men and women. Their corpses were then piled up. The pile was about two meters high. This started from between 18-25 April 1975.”

Bun Him reported that Uy, deputy commander of the Southwest Zone, killed the majority of these people. Between 1976 and late 1978, arrests and executions continued. Prisoners included base people and evacuees. Tim Kun and Muy Chok were base people who committed a crime and were imprisoned in the security center. They described that prisoners were killed in every direction and area surrounding the main building. Executions also took place by a pond in the northern area of Sophy Primary School. The tools used for the executions included sticks, a hoe and metal bats. Loud music was played to drown out the screams of the people. The executions took place at times in the middle of the afternoon, around 3pm.

In 1978, comrade Puth was replaced by comrade Korn, a brother of comrade Chim who worked as a District Chief. Comrade Puth was replaced because he had committed a moral offense. During Korn’s administration, all the prisoners at Ka Koh security center were taken away to be killed by security guards. Tim Kun said that when Puth was still in charge of the security center and the killing site, District Chief Chim had planned to kill all the prisoners.

Muy Chok reported that whenever District Chief Chim drove his red motorbike to Ka Koh prison, people knew that both torture and executions were about to take place. A table that was used during interrogations was placed only five meters from the grave. When he conducted his interrogations, comrade Puth looked at his list of prisoners and looked at the names of those slated for execution based on a strikethrough, a red underline or the “x” marked next to the name.

Muy Chok clarified that the village or commune chief provided the names of the prisoners contained in comrade Puth’s list. It was only after this that the prisoners in the list were transferred to Ka Koh security center or Office 08. Then the list was sent to the district office for review. District Chief Chim would then review the list and decide which prisoners would be killed by striking through the name in red. After this, District Chief Chim sent the list back to Office 08. Comrade Sruo, vice-head of the security center, looked after the list and was in charge of the security guards. He executed people identified on the list. Before the prisoners were executed, their hands were tied behind their backs and they were blindfolded. They were then told to kneel down by the grave. This took place almost every day. On an average day, 50 to 100 prisoners were executed. Muy Chok concluded that between 1976 and late 1978, security guards of this prison killed 20,000 prisoners. However, prisoners identified as base people were frequently forgiven and released. Muy Chok as well as his friends were base people and therefore, were released and allowed to live.

In late 1978, the executions ceased because District Chief Chim, his vice-head and the security guards escaped to Vietnam. The remaining prisoners returned to their families or escaped when the regime collapsed in 1979.

Venerable Keo Kosal heard from his master, the late So Satt that after 1979, there was blood on the floor in front of a broken Buddha statue inside the main building of Wat Ka Koh. On the wall, there were many holes with metal chains connecting these holes. The holes have been repaired but the marks remain.

KHMER FOLKTALES

The various narratives of survivors show us that more often than not, people were taken to train stations, or were stopped as they walked along the railway tracks and coerced into boarding trains. These journeys on trains took place soon after April 1975 and continued throughout the regime's rule. People were often moved several times from 1975 to 1979. They rarely knew where they were going and why they were being taken to these destinations.

On journeys from Takeo or Svay Rieng in the southeast, or from the capital of Phnom Penh, thousands were taken to the provinces of Battambang and Banteay Meanchey in the newly designated Northwest Zone, ostensibly to "increase rice production".

It is hard to imagine what it must have been like for mothers, fathers, uncles and aunts, grandparents and children to board trains, not knowing which direction the train was going in, or what their fates would be. These people travelled with scant possessions and had little food on long journeys.

What stories did they tell on these long train journeys? How did they pass the time and alleviate their fears and apprehensions? How did they ensure their children felt safe? Khmer folktales, created and shared by communities orally over hundreds of years, were not only lessons in morality, but provided people with a way to read the stars and know their landscape and their place in the world. Here, we share two such stories, which some survivors told on train journeys, as a way to keep their children calm and as a way of reading the stars and identifying which direction the trains were traveling on.

A PANG NEANG TEY

During a ripe rice season, A Pang temporarily stayed days and nights at the rice field to look after the rice. He also brought a long-neck Chapei along—a

3-stringed wooden instrument. During the day, he looked after his rice field and in the night he sang songs and played the Chapei. When he sang every night, there was a female ghost who would come and listen to his beautiful voice. To warm herself, she would go and sit near a fire that was lit near A Pang's hut. One night, not too long after the ghost sat by the fire, A Pang saw the female ghost. He asked, "Who are you sitting by the fire?" The female ghost replied, "It's me." A Pang responded, "Could this be a ghost?" The ghost responded, "Why not a ghost!" A Pang asked her, "What's your name? What are you looking for?" The female ghost replied, "I am Tey, I came here to listen to the Chapei." A Pang said, "Come upstairs if you want to listen to the Chapei." The female ghost went to sit close to A Pang. Later on, they fell in love and stayed together as husband and wife. After harvesting season, the female ghost asked A Pang, "Now that the harvest has already passed, do you accept me as your wife? If you do not accept me, I will kill you." A Pang answered, "Okay, but we must wait until I finish bringing the rice to my home." A Pang returned to the female ghost, Tey, after he brought the rice to his home. Thereafter she introduced him to her ghost relatives and they lived together ever since.

A month passed and the ghost relatives asked A Pang if he would like to hunt with them in the forest. When they got deeper into the forest, they came upon Tratok trees, which are also called Chheu Teal trees. In the midst of these trees, there was a frog. The ghosts screamed, "Be careful! An elephant! Run!" A Pang was confused and he looked around for the elephant. After scanning the forest in front of him, he saw nothing but a small frog jumping in front of him.

He picked up the frog and put it into his knapsack. The ghosts continued to scream, "Be careful! There is a huge elephant!" Then they asked A Pang, "Did you see the elephant?" A Pang replied, "No, I did not." All of the ghosts came close to A Pang and said, "Let's go home. We cannot hunt any animals today." A Pang told them, "But I got a frog." The ghosts asked, "How did you get the

frog? Please share it with us." A Pang took the frog out of his bag and showed it to them. Suddenly, the ghosts ran away screaming, "We cannot keep Tey's husband with us! He is too strong, for he dares to hunt elephants and keep them in his bag! We must not let him stay with us. We must let him go!"

A Pang was released and he returned to his home.

In this story, the ghosts see the frog as an elephant, which illustrates the ghostly world's opposite view of reality. The story is a common tale told by elders to their children. The adults loved to tell this story to make kids laugh and get scared at the same time, but as one child survivor recalled, "When we were told this story on the train, no one laughed because we were afraid of the Khmer Rouge soldiers. They looked scarier than ghosts."

THE STAR OF CROCODILE

The Stars of Kathen

A long time ago there was a wealthy man who buried all his wealth near the mouth of a stream in front of his house. He didn't tell anyone about it, not even his wife.

When he passed away, he came in his wife's dream and told her where he had buried the treasure. He asked her to dig it up and dedicate half the amount to him through the Kathen ceremony, an annual ritual in which the laity offer clothing to Buddhist monks.

His wife didn't follow his request, thinking it was just a dream. Time passed and the man was reborn as a crocodile that lived by a religious dwelling. News of the crocodile spread quickly to all the villagers. The presence of the crocodile and the rumors in the village made the wife remember the dream in which her husband had appeared. She asked the people to help her dig up the treasure. Everyone was surprised when they found a big chest. The wife opened it and found that it was full of jewels.

The wife took a part of the wealth and spent it on the Kathen ritual, as her husband

had requested. On the day of Kathen procession, as the ceremony started, it was the crocodile that led the boat in the water. But the crocodile became exhausted. When the procession finally reached the temple, the crocodile died. To honor the crocodile, the wife and villagers designed a banner in the shape of a crocodile to be used in the ceremony.

When the crocodile passed away the goodness that he had done for the people manifested as the Big Dipper in the Northern Hemisphere, which the people call the "Crocodile Star."

In this story, a wealthy man, who wanted to help his wife, died and became reincarnated as a crocodile. As a crocodile, he helped the village, but, amidst his efforts in helping the village, he grew tired and died. Ultimately, his good deeds became memorialized in the stars. Elders would tell this story to children under the night sky to entertain them, but it is more than just a children's story. The Crocodile Star always symbolized hope and direction, guiding as much as encouraging people. As one survivor recalled, while the story consoled children (and even adults) on the train, it was not long before reality had consumed even our thoughts of imagination."



Painting of Wat Lang-Ka, Phnom Penh, Asasax Art Gallery

DEATH IN MOTION:

Forced Evacuations under Democratic Kampuchea, Prof. James A. Tyner

We know their faces: the grainy black-and-white images of prisoners detained, interrogated, and tortured at S-21; their images haunt us as we walk the grounds of the former prison—now known as the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. We think of their lives—and their deaths—as we walk silently among the graves at Choeung Ek. Tragically, the images, coupled with the memorial sites at Tuol Sleng and Choeng Ek, evoke a sense of permanence and fixity to the mass violence that gripped Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. Such portrayals belie the fluidity of genocide. For Democratic Kampuchea—the monstrous state born of the Khmer Rouge—was a place in motion, a literal embodiment of the ‘Super Great Leap Forward.’ Indeed, a common saying of the Khmer Rouge holds that “The wheel of history is inexorably turning; he who cannot keep pace with it shall be crushed.”

From April 1975 onwards, men, women, and children were physically, violently displaced. Close to two million people were forcibly evacuated from Phnom Penh. For many, this was yet another movement, for they had previously fled their villages and towns because of the slaughter of war. By truck or by train, by ox-cart or by foot, the people of Cambodia were forced from their homes, from their places of birth. Many would not survive this forced mobility, for death moved in many forms: starvation and disease, exposure and murder.

They were then forcibly transferred again—scattered with the winds—to agricultural communes and work-camps: To the provinces of Siem Reap and Preah Vihear, Battambang and Banteay Meanchey. But for the Khmer Rouge, even names could not stay put. Instead they were transformed into anonymous, name-less places that conformed to their ideology of a monotonous sameness. For between 1975 and 1979 one did not live in, say, Kandal or Kampong Thom;

instead, one worked or died in the bureaucratic spaces of Angkor: zones designated by cardinal directions or districts named by numbers. Thus it was that upwards of half a million people were sent to the Northwest. Men, women, and children cast as stones across a lake of misery, their suffering appearing as ripples that crashed against the verdant fields and forests of what-once-was Cambodia.

Railroads were a key component of Khmer Rouge practice. The forced transfer of hundreds of thousands of people both between zones and within zones—from urban to rural areas—necessitated a coordinated strategy of mass movement not unlike those utilized by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust or of the Chinese in the ‘Up to the Mountains, Down to the Countryside’ Movement. To Beng Khnar and Prey Svay, to Kok Trom and Battambang, the trains of the Khmer Rouge disgorged men, women, and children to work as forced labor at work-camps and on agricultural cooperatives.

Ranging in size from several hundred persons to several thousand, cooperatives especially were formed to ensure the discipline of Democratic Kampuchea’s population. But these too were not places of immobility, for movement was a routine feature of daily life. One moved to the rice-fields for planting; to the forests for clearing; to the reservoirs and canals for digging. In the process, the sinews of family life were sundered; husband forcibly separated from wife; parent from child; brother from sister. As recalled by one survivor, the Khmer Rouge “kept moving us, from the fields into the woods. They purposely did this to disorient us so they could have complete control.” Always moving; always trying to stay in front of the wheel of history, to not be crushed. Democratic Kampuchea was genocide in motion.

Within the cooperatives and work-brigades, the men, women, and children who toiled under the blistering heat or torrential rain were under constant surveillance; their activities were monitored. Khmer Rouge soldiers were ever-present and ever-vigilant; they stood guard over the forced transfers; they stood guard over the co-operatives; they stood guard over the work-camps. Any movement, any wrong attitude, any thought that was ‘out of order’ or ‘out of place’ was subject to immediate and brutal punishment and immobility: detainment in one of the approximately 200 security-centers established throughout the country.

Movement was necessary; but movement was circumscribed. Workers were needed in the rice-fields; enslaved labor needed to grow the rice that was subsequently transferred, beyond the borders of Democratic Kampuchea, to China, Yugoslavia, Madagascar, and Hong Kong, leaving thousands of Cambodians malnourished and famished. Workers were needed to dig canals and erect dikes; workers needed to move water from places of surplus to places of shortage. Workers were needed to drive the trucks and pilot the boats; guide the ox-carts and run the trains; all to keep the wheels of Democratic Kampuchea turning inexorably toward its violent end.

We remember the images of those detained at Tuol Sleng; we walk the paths of the killing fields at Choeung Ek and the thousands of other mass graves that remain as fixtures of Cambodia’s landscape. But the genocide was not solid; it was fluid. For the tragedy is this: For all of the geographic movements associated with the forcible transfers, the wheels of Democratic Kampuchea were greased with the blood, the sweat, and the tears of millions of innocent

men, women, and children; their bodily fluids congealed in the mass graves that remain as solid, silent, visual evidence of the crimes against humanity committed by the Khmer Rouge.

*Professor James Tyner’s research centers on the intersection of political and population geography. His most recent work has addressed war, violence, and genocide. Prof. Tyner has a regional interest in Southeast Asia; recent travels have taken him to Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, and China. He is the author of 13 books, including *War, Violence, and Population: Making the Body Count*, which received the AAG Meridian Book Award for Outstanding Scholarly Contribution to Geography.*

HOW YOU CAN HELP TO HEAL CAMBODIAN SOCIETY

Prof. Jaya Ramji-Nogales

Senior Legal Advisor, Documentation Center of Cambodia

The Cambodian people waited for many years to see the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime held accountable for their crimes. Nearly thirty years passed between the fall of the Khmer Rouge, on January 7, 1979, and the establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, on July 3, 2006. In the meantime, the Khmer Rouge leadership grew old, and in some cases, wealthy, and the memory of this era weighed heavily on the hearts of Cambodians who had lived through it. Many did not want to discuss the terrible events that occurred under the three years, eight months, and twenty days of Khmer Rouge rule. Even schools did not teach the history of the Khmer Rouge. Younger Cambodians, born after the Khmer Rouge lost power, grew up without understanding the history of their country.

The creation of the ECCC was an important step in bringing the history of the Khmer Rouge to light. Case 001 uncovered the conditions at S-21, the Tuol Sleng prison. Case 002/01 focused on the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh and the forced transfer of Cambodians to different parts of the country. Public outreach around these cases, along with efforts to ensure that the history of the Khmer Rouge regime is taught in schools, has increased Cambodians' understanding of their country's past.

The ECCC opened its courtroom to include victims as part of the legal process. Victims told their stories before the court and asked for reparations from the Khmer Rouge regime. In total, the victims in Case 002/01 asked the court for thirteen different reparations projects. These include this exhibit as well as a National Day of Remembrance, public memorial sites in Cambodia and France, a community peace learning center, a civil party storybook, a chapter on forced transfer for Cambodian history books, therapy for victims who suffered trauma, and the publication of the court's final decision in the case as well as the names of civil parties. Each of these requests would help Cambodians to remember and heal.

Yet these are simply the first stages of a much longer process of coming to terms with Cambodia's history. Very few Cambodians were able to attend hearings at the ECCC or to understand what happened in the courtroom. The ECCC has not yet been able to find funding to pay for all of the reparations projects. The new generation of Cambodians – seventy percent of whom were born after the Khmer Rouge lost power – and their elders must now decide how to balance understanding of their tragic history with efforts to heal and move Cambodian society forward, away from the past.

Visiting these permanent exhibitions describing the Khmer Rouge era is another important step in educating the Cambodian public about the regime's crimes. Simply by taking the time to come to view these photographs and videos and hear these stories, you are helping to ensure that this history will not be forgotten. If you keep this tragic memory alive in your heart and mind, you become part of an effort to prevent these terrible crimes from being repeated on Cambodian soil. Those of you who did not live through the Khmer Rouge regime will have a better understanding of those who did, and will better be able to help with the healing process. Survivors of the Khmer Rouge era will be able to release some of the heaviest memories from their hearts, and may be able to reach out to each other, repairing the fabric of society that was so badly torn during that time.

Apart from being here today, there are many more ways that you can contribute to efforts to heal Cambodian society and move towards a brighter future.

KEEP INFORMED

This permanent exhibition focuses on just one aspect of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge: forced transfer. After visiting the exhibition, you will have a much better understanding of how and why these transfers happened and how they

impacted the Cambodian people. There are many other opportunities to learn about other crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge, and to better understand the suffering of those who lived under the regime. It is also important to understand why and how the Khmer Rouge came to power, so that Cambodians can work together to prevent another dangerous group from taking over the country. There are several websites you can visit to find more information: the Sleuk Rith Institute (www.cambodiasri.org), the Documentation Center of Cambodia (www.dccam.org), and the Cambodia Tribunal Monitor (www.cambodiatribunal.org).

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

The pain that Cambodians suffered under the Khmer Rouge is very difficult to talk about. Even if you did not live through the Khmer Rouge regime, the memories from that time have affected your life. All Cambodians have family members or friends who lived during that time who may still be suffering from their experiences. This exhibit can help you to start a conversation with them about the pain they carry in their hearts and how you can help them. It may be too hard for you to hear all of their memories, and they may need help from mental health professionals or spiritual guidance from their religious leaders. You can help them to find the strength to get the support that they need to begin the healing process.

GET INVOLVED

After seeing this exhibition, you may want to help to teach others about the history of the Khmer Rouge. There are many ways you can do this. You can share with your friends and family the information you learned today as well as the information you find in the websites listed above. You can use the textbook, "A History of Democratic Kampuchea," written by Khamboly Dy, to teach others about the Khmer Rouge era, especially if you are a school teacher. You can contact the Sleuk Rith Institute (www.cambodiasri.org) to find out how to visit and learn more about the era and volunteer to help to teach others.

REMEMBER ALL OF CAMBODIA'S HISTORICAL LEGACIES

Cambodia has a long and rich history that weaves a common thread through

Cambodian society. From the architectural beauty of Angkor Wat to graceful classical dance and energetic folk music, there are many legacies that should be celebrated. The Khmer Rouge tried to destroy these traditions and cultural riches, and their efforts to do so continue to deprive Cambodian society of its greatest treasures. You can play a role in healing the country by learning about and continuing these traditions.

TAKE HOLD OF CAMBODIA'S FUTURE

Knowledge of history helps to prevent us from repeating the mistakes of the past and to move us towards a brighter future. The future of Cambodia is in your hands – in the hands of the Cambodian people. Cambodia is now a democracy, and you should take that responsibility seriously. Learn as much as you can before voting in elections, and decide in advance what issues are important to you, and which candidates support your view on those issues. You have the right to vote and you should exercise it! The memory of those who perished under the Khmer Rouge should be your inspiration to choose leaders who will represent your interests and best serve the Cambodian people.

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MEMORIES OF FORCED TRANSFER

By Samphors Huy, Hudson McFann and Kosal Path
Rutgers International Working Group on Cambodia and Southeast Asia

On December 20, 1976, Pol Pot declared that there was a “sickness inside the Party,” traceable to “microbes” and posing a threat to the Khmer Rouge revolution’s purity. “No Ministry of Health will discover them,” he warned, insisting that it would therefore be necessary for the revolution to “expel” them.¹ The Khmer Rouge, in fact, regularly euphemized genocidal acts by invoking disease metaphors, often directed at supposedly corrupted minds.² In the words of one Khmer Rouge slogan: “You must destroy the visible enemy, and the hidden one, too—the enemy in the mind!”³ Thus, as they sought to purge traces of pre-revolutionary Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge diagnosed “memory sickness” as a grave affliction.

When Khmer Rouge revolutionaries seized Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975—claiming victory after five years of civil war with the US-backed Khmer Republic—they almost immediately began to forcibly transfer city dwellers and refugees to labor camps in the countryside. “Brothers and sisters,” they declared, “you are requested to leave Phnom Penh for three days, because Angkar must clean out enemies hiding in the houses and clear the city. And the Americans have not forgotten their defeat. Leave to avoid the American B52 bombers.”⁴ The revolutionaries insisted that because people would soon return, they should

1 David P. Chandler, Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977*, Monograph Series 33 (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), 183, 184.

2 See, for example, Alexander Laban Hinton, Purity and Contamination in the Cambodian Genocide, in *Cambodia Emerges from the Past: Eight Essays*, ed. Judy Ledgerwood (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University, 2002), 60-90.

3 Henri Locard, *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), 199.

4 Huy Vannak, *The Khmer Rouge Division 703: From Victory to Self-Destruction* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2003), 26.

not bring many belongings. Yet even these items were subject to confiscation. Both during and after the “evacuation,” the Khmer Rouge ordered people to discard evidence of Cambodia’s past. “Anyone with photos or heirlooms could be accused of memory sickness,” survivor Teeda Butt Mam explains. “Possession of family letters, such as the last note from my father, showed an unhealthy concern for the past.”⁵

In the systematic and coercive displacement of some two million people from Phnom Penh, marking the onset of what Maoist-inspired regime hailed as a Super Great Leap Forward, people had to journey long distances by train, foot, oxcart, truck, tractor and boat, regardless of their age or physical condition. Even hospitals were emptied of their patients. There is evidence that the leadership of the Communist Party of Kampuchea directly participated in decisions to forcibly relocate people en masse, and the “evacuation” of Phnom Penh, as well as the succeeding phases of forced transfer to specific zones, has been the primary focus of ECCC Case 002/01.⁶

Khmer Rouge forces implementing forced transfers provided very little or no assistance to the displaced, who were subjected to extremely inhumane conditions, including family separation, disappearances, illness, starvation, beatings, sexual violence and death. Targeting and persecution of specific groups was also common during the forced transfers. The Khmer Rouge divided the population into two classes: the New People and the Base People. The New People, or “April 17 People,” were former city dwellers and refugees, whereas the

5 Joan D. Criddle and Teeda Butt Mam, *To Destroy You is No Loss: The Odyssey of a Cambodian Family* (New York: Anchor Books, 1987), 99.

6 ECCC Case 002 Closing Order (September 15, 2010), paragraphs 160, 162-167.

Base People were those who remained in the countryside during the civil war. Officials from the Khmer Republic government, indigenous highlanders, Cham Muslims, ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese, as well as Buddhist monks and nuns, were among those specifically singled out for separation and harsh treatment.⁷ Survivors of the regime have suffered long-term psychological and physical trauma that continues to this day.

Following ECCC Internal Rule 23, civil parties are entitled to claim only “collective and moral reparations.”⁸ In Case 002/01, civil parties have sought the recognition of thirteen reparations projects that acknowledge the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime, and comprise a significant part of the ECCC’s legacy. Survivors’ participation in processes of justice is important to not only honor victims, but to promote community restoration and dialogue. The five permanent exhibitions on forced transfer, featuring testimonies from victims and perpetrators, as well as histories of villages, burial sites and prison centers, will contribute to the memorialization of the genocide, as well as the education of current and future

7 Khamboly Dy, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2007), 42-45.

8 Internal Rules of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (Rev. 8), as revised on August 3, 2011.

generations about what happened under the Khmer Rouge regime. In so doing, they will powerfully shine a light on Khmer Rouge atrocities through the kinds of memorial acts that, under the Khmer Rouge, were violently condemned as evidence of “sickness.”

Samphors Huy is a PhD student in Global Affairs at Rutgers University-Newark, as well as a member of DC-Cam’s Genocide Education Project. Hudson McFann is a PhD student in Geography at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. Kosal Path is an assistant professor of Political Science at Brooklyn College and was the deputy director of DC-Cam in 1997-2000. They are members of the Steering Committee of the Rutgers International Working Group on Cambodia and Southeast Asia (IC-SEA), which is part of an ongoing partnership between the Rutgers Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR) and DC-Cam.



Kumar Reachea Train Station, Takeo Province, where people were evacuated from South to North during the Khmer Rouge regime.
Photo by Seng Kunthy

PHOTOS

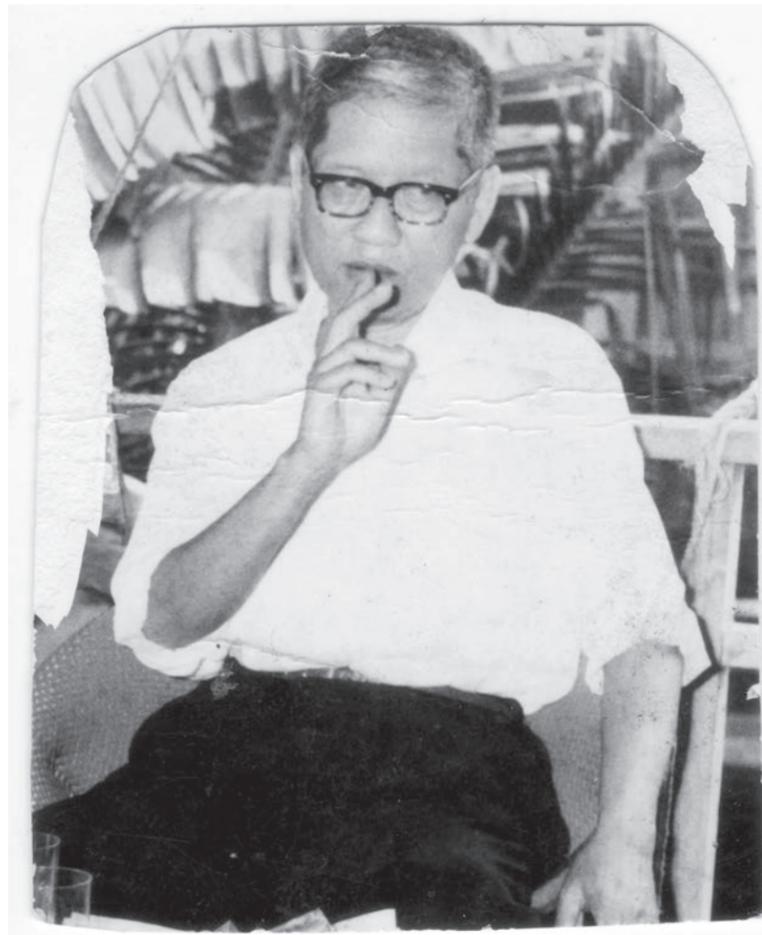
BEFORE THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME



Mok Sin Hong's mother, adult on the far right, and family



Mok Sin Hong (second person from right) during wedding



LEFT: Mok Sin Hong's father, Mok Lean RIGHT: Mok Sin Hong's cousin, Mok Sin Hong, Mok Sin Ou, and another cousin on Taul Kau's flower farm.



LEFT: A young Bun Ean with her friends, 1938, Kampong Cham Province; RIGHT: Bun Ean and Buth Choun after their wedding, 1940, at their first home in Kampong Cham Province.



LEFT: Khiev Noem, front row center, and Khiev Noeun, hand on hip; RIGHT: Kong Chamroeun with his aunts Nou Tha (seated left) and Nou Pat, and cousin (seated in front)



LEFT: Lam Som with 7 of his 13 children, Phnom Penh, 1971; RIGHT: Nine year-old Buth Chan Meready, 1959, Kampong Cham Province





LEFT: Tep Kim Try and Tep Suy Eang a month after their marriage; RIGHT: Thach Koem and Peou Phirum with their son, Battambang Province, 1973

LEFT: Tun Chhum and his family RIGHT: Mr. San Sok is a civil Party in case 002 before the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.



Wedding photograph of Youk Chhang's late sister, Keo Tithsorye (mentioned in the Foreword) and her husband Ong Sutharak, 1969. Chhang is the boy in the far left corner. The girl to the far right is his cousin, Keo Savary, who died of starvation during the Khmer Rouge period. The man in a white uniform is Chhang's neighbor, Chey En, a police commissioner in Kampong Cham province later executed by the Khmers Rouges. His wife, beside him, was also executed by DK cadres. The elderly woman behind the couple is Chhang's great grandmother, who passed away of old age. The man behind Chey En dressed in a dark gray uniform and wearing glasses is Chhang's uncle, Sakou Saphon, who was executed by the Khmer Rouge. *Source: Youk Chhang's Family Collection*

DURING THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME



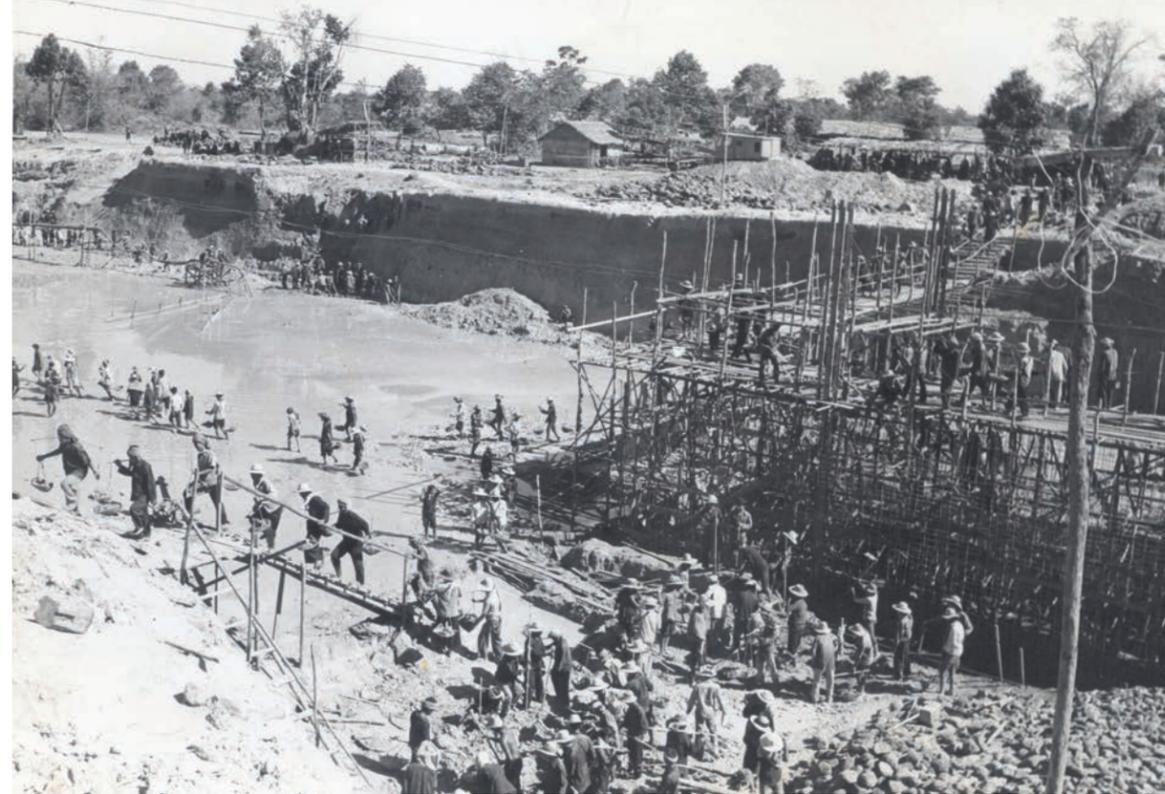
Irrigation dam construction on the road north. *Photo by Gunnar Bergstrom*



Women and men team carrying earth during the Khmer Rouge regime. This photo was taken during the visit of Khmer Rouge high-ranking cadres or what could have been a group of foreign dignitaries and their Khmer Rouge hosts. Each time visits were made, everyone was told to dress up the best way they could or sometimes they were provided clothes and Krama temporarily. When the cadres visited the site, everyone was usually told to smile for the camera and for the visiting cadres.



LEFT: Khmer Rouge leaders riding on a train; RIGHT: Young train drivers, most of whom were teenagers, took hundreds of thousands of Cambodian people from other parts of the country to the Northwest zone of Pursat and Battambang during the Khmer Rouge regime.



People working in a dam construction site in remote Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime. During the regime, people were forced to labor physically in order to build dams, canals, and farming.



Cambodian people digging the dam in the suburb of Phnom Penh during the Khmer Rouge regime. All people were obliged to work during the regime. The Khmer Rouge regime compelled large portions of the population to conduct manual labor on a daily basis in order to increase the country's production of rice.



LEFT: Middle-aged men and women carrying earth during the construction of a dam during the Khmer Rouge regime. RIGHT: Men and women working at "1 January" dam near Chinith River, Kampong Thom province during the Khmer Rouge regime. This photo shows the busy labor camp under the hot sun surrounded by woods. It was taken during a high profile visit of Minister of Social Affairs Ieng Thirith.; RIGHT: Men and women working at "1 January" dam near Chinith River, Kampong Thom province during the Khmer Rouge regime. This photo shows the busy labor camp under the hot sun surrounded by woods. It was taken during the high profile visit of Minister of Social Affairs Ieng Thirith to the site.



LEFT: Children carrying farm tools in a labor camp. Children and teenagers were often assembled into units (in this case a 'teenager unit') for the purpose of labor and discipline. They were beaten and many died of starvation, illness and loneliness. Most youth who were members of these units were separated from their parents for years. Many children never saw their parents again. After 1979, there were over 200,000 orphans in Cambodia. Some of the children who survived this period, and who are now adults, have no idea what happened to their parents. RIGHT: Communal eating at the cooperative



Pol Pot with a Chinese delegation inspecting the railway during the forced transfer of people in late 1975.

AFTER THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME



One of the first markets in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed. This photo shows a market in 1980 at Koh Thom district, Kandal province, near the Vietnamese border. Money had not yet been officially issued. Therefore, people used a barter system in which they exchanged any possessions or goods they had for the food they wanted. The majority of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime were women. Since then they have been the driving force behind the rebuilding of Cambodia—economically, socially, and spiritually.



One of the first markets in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed. This photo shows a market in 1980 at Koh Thom district, Kandal province, near the Vietnamese border. Money had not yet been officially issued. Therefore, people used a barter system in which they exchanged any possessions or goods they had for the food they wanted. The majority of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime were women. Since then they have been the driving force behind the rebuilding of Cambodia—economically, socially, and spiritually.



LEFT: Clergymen and monks conducting Buddhist religious ceremony in front of the skulls of those who died during the Khmer Rouge regime. In Buddhism, it is believed that those who died violent deaths face great difficulty in becoming reborn. RIGHT: Bones and skeletons of those who died during the Khmer Rouge regime can still be found throughout the country. Very often, local authorities collected these bones and skeletons and placed them in a central location such as an abandoned school, house, or cottage. In this picture, skulls and bones were placed in a small building with unprotected care. These places serve as sacred areas in which survivors can come and honor their relatives who died during the Khmer Rouge regime.





Memorials for those who died during the Khmer Rouge. The killing took place almost everywhere in the country during the Khmer Rouge regime. After the regime collapsed, skulls and skeletons of those who were killed could be found throughout the country. Some local people exhumed these graves in order to bring the bones to a central place in which relatives could pay their respects and conduct ceremonies annually.



Khmer Rouge survivors participate in a meeting held by DC-Cam about their participation rights with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, Kampong Thom province, 2009



LEFT: Civil parties in case 002 before the Khmer Rouge Tribunal meet in Phnom Penh to select their legal representatives, 2010.; RIGHT: The courtroom of the Khmer Rouge tribunal. Designed and built out of the 'Theater Hall' of the Military Base of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, the building had never been used before it was lent to the Khmer Rouge tribunal in 2006. The facility can accommodate 550 people.

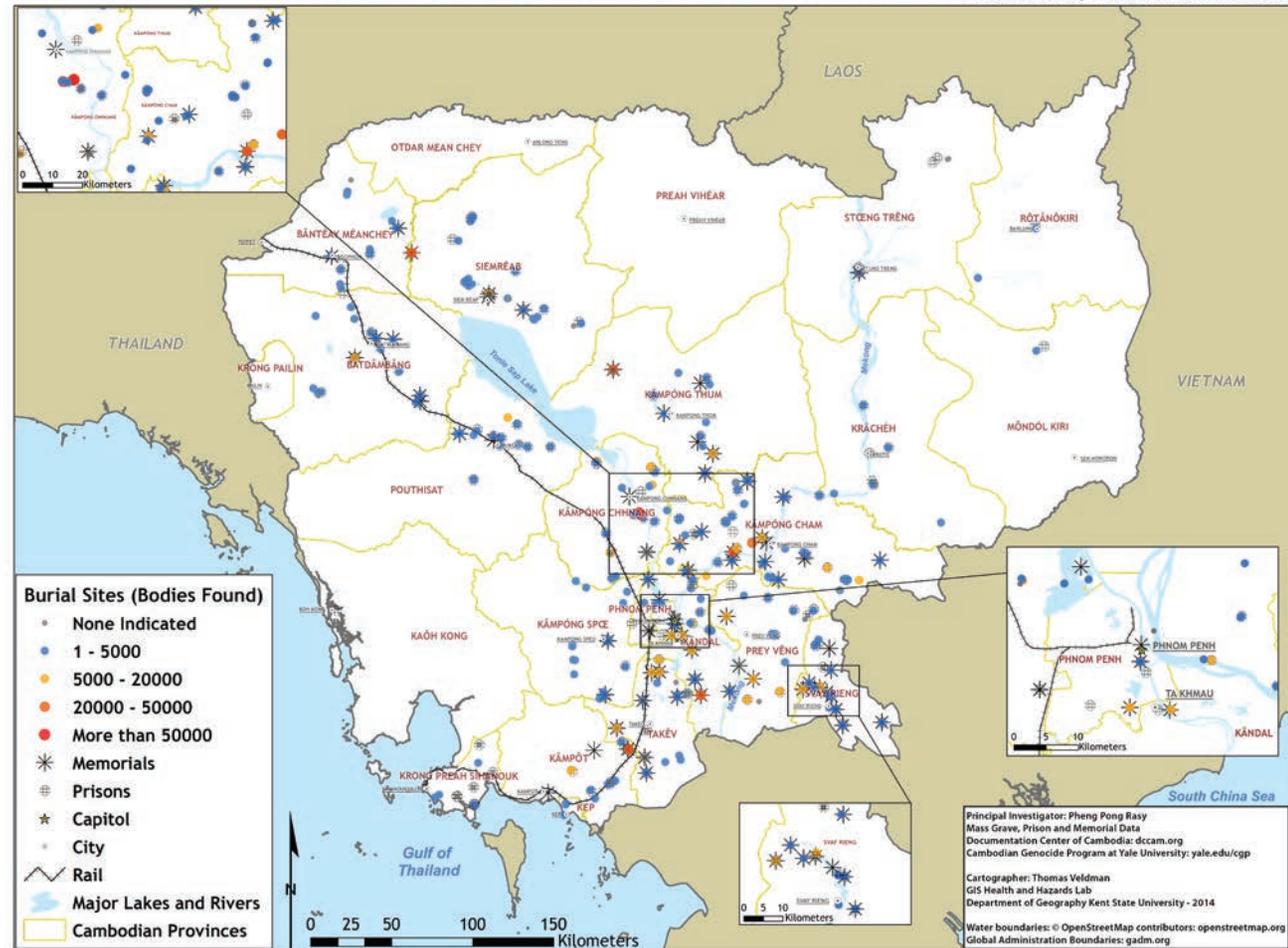


View inside the courtroom of the Khmer Rouge tribunal, staffed by the United Nations and Cambodia. Each office of the tribunal consists of the UN and Cambodian personnel with Cambodian majority.

CAN WE RECONCILE WITH THE KILLING FIELDS OF CAMBODIA?

This map provides details of known burial sites throughout Cambodia. Source: Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), which was a field office of Yale University's Cambodia Genocide Program (CGP). CGP was established by Prof. Ben Kiernan. Principal Investigator: Pheng Pong Rasy, DC-Cam; Cartographer: Tom Veldman of GIS Health and Hazards Lab, Department of Geography, Kent State University

PRESERVING THE LEGACY OF THE KILLING FIELDS: MAPPING KHMER ROUGE ERA ATROCITIES: BURIAL SITES, PRISONS AND MEMORIALS



“Although millions were killed, millions more survived to tell their story.

The perpetrators of these crimes also survived as well.”

Leng Ratanak, *Producer of A River Changes Course*



Little things matter in life. This is a photo of Phka Thnak-Tik: A flower that means little water pot. It grows out of hay that has been left on the field after the harvest season. During the KR regime, the people who worked in the fields would see these flowers and, for a time, realize that beauty can still exist in hell. One victim recalled seeing field upon field covered in these flowers when he lived in region 5. Every harvest season, the whole field would be covered with these flowers and they would bring back memories of family and home. In the depths of sadness and despair, it is the little things that can save one's soul. *Photo by Phat Piseth*



THE CROCODILE STAR

Forcibly transferred from Phnom Penh, we settled in our mother's home village in Takeo. It was 1975, and rumors circulated that we would be able to return to our home. One day, the Khmer Rouge came and told us to pack up and move. We were hopeful that our journey home had now begun.

We were put on a train. There were so many people on the train that we could not even sit. One of my sisters had a daughter (Tan Keoketana) who was only a few months old. We were all worried about what would happen next. One night, my uncle (Keo Chhoeun) looked up at the stars and he reminded us of the Crocodile Star.

The Crocodile Star is a story that we learned as kids. It is an old story about a crocodile that did good deeds and as a result was made a star in the sky. The Crocodile Star was always seen as a beacon of hope, direction, and good things. People could look to the 'Big Dipper' and find the Crocodile Star who would show them the way.

Riding in the train, in the darkness of night, my uncle looked for the Crocodile Star and pointed it out to us. He told us we were heading in the direction of Phnom Penh. We became so excited and happy because we believed we were truly heading home. Day and night we continued onward, always stopping in different places, but none of this mattered if we were going in the right direction. Suddenly, though, reality sunk in. Upon reaching Pursat, many people were removed from the train. The rest of the passengers continued onward until reaching Battambang province near the Thai border. Our journey had not ended, it had only just begun.

I often thought about the Crocodile Star. I still think about it today. For a brief period of time, the Crocodile Star gave us hope and happiness, even though, ultimately, it was all just a dream. My family became separated, and we entered a new life of starvation, hard labor, and genocide. I feel fortunate to have survived this horrific period. Many family members, including my sister's baby daughter and my uncle, did not survive. I can never look upon the Crocodile Star in the same way again.

JUSTICE, MEMORY, RECONCILIATION

