

Ghosts from the past

Remembering the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia

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Cover photo: picture of skulls in the memorial stupa at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek. The picture was taken by the author in 2010.

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the main sources of income for the Cambodian government and therefore also one of the main catalysts of economic development for the country (the other main sources of income are the garment industry and international development aid) (Winter 2006: 37-39), and it contributes over 12 per cent of GDP (Ministry of Tourism 2011). Cambodia attracts an ever increasing number of tourists, with 2,399,000 tourists arriving in the country in 2010, compared to 2,046,000 in 2009 and 2,001,000 in 2008¹ (World Tourism Organization 2011: 7). However, many of these tourists only stay for a few days, and therefore only visit the main sites of the country. Cambodia's most visited sites are the temples of Angkor, located near Siem Reap, and the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes (or S-21) and the Killing Fields of Choeung EK, both located in the Phnom Penh area. These two sites do not only represent the two periods in history Cambodia is most famous for, but they also symbolize the paradoxical nature of the country. The temples of Angkor are the symbols of a glorious and grand past, while the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek and the Tuol Sleng Museum are the physical evidence of Cambodia's tragic and horrifying recent past, namely the genocide² that occurred during the Democratic Kampuchea regime (1975-1979) (Winter 2006: 37) and are thus popular sites for dark tourism³. As dark tourism sites they have provided many Cambodians with job opportunities, whether they are directly involved with the sites (as for example tour guides, guards or ticket sellers) or whether their involvement is indirect (as for example tuk-tuk drivers or hotel employees). It is thus not only a source of income for the country as a whole, but the tourists who arrive in the country also provide a livelihood to

¹ These numbers are the number of international visitors who arrive at the frontiers, excluding same-day visitors (World Tourism Organization 2011: 7).

² I am aware of the many debates surrounding the use of the word genocide for what happened during the Democratic Kampuchea regime. However, it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss this debate at length. Because most Cambodians I talked to referred to what happened as genocide and because many scholars use this term to describe the events as well, I have decided to use the term genocide for the sake of convenience.

³ Dark tourism can be defined as the '*act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre*' (Stone 2006: 146).

many Cambodians.

However, the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek and the Tuol Sleng Museum have a dual role. They are not just tourist sites, they are also memorial sites and the location of the memorial ceremonies that seek to commemorate what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime. They are sites where the history of Democratic Kampuchea is told, where people come to see what happened during this period in Cambodian history and how this influenced the country. They are places with great historical significance, places that have gained even greater importance because of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), where five Khmer Rouge leaders are currently brought to trial. Because of this role of the sites, they are also important sites of memory and of memory construction. The Cambodians employed at these sites play an important role in the process of memory construction at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek⁴, as they are the ones who convey the history of Democratic Kampuchea to tourists. These two elements combined, the people who are employed at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek and at Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes and the construction of cultural memory that takes place at these two sites, form the following research puzzle: how is memory constructed about the genocide in Cambodia during the Democratic Kampuchea regime (1975-1979) at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek and the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes, and how does this commercialized cultural memory interact with the cultural memory of Cambodians who work at the aforementioned dark tourism sites?

In this thesis it will be argued that the development of the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields has been and continues to be strongly influenced by politics. The instruments used in the process of memory construction at these sites are aimed at proclaiming a strongly political message and the memory that is constructed at the sites, both by physical instruments as by the people who work there, is therefore also highly politicized. Even the belief in spirits, prevalent in Cambodia, has become

⁴ In this thesis I will just use the term Killing Fields when referring to the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek.

politicized. Even though the people who are employed at the sites have very different experiences and attitudes regarding their work, their individual cultural memories are remarkably similar.

§1.1. Significance and objectives

Much has been written about the Cambodian genocide, including on the debate whether it should be called a genocide at all. However, most literature about the genocide in Cambodia focuses on the past. How the Khmer Rouge came to power and what life was like in Democratic Kampuchea has been researched thoroughly. Several authors have researched the Killing Fields and Tuol Sleng Museum as memorial sites and on the construction of memory of these sites.⁵ Hughes (2004) states that the sites are mainly aimed at foreign visitors, as the government wanted to legitimize the Vietnamese intervention to the international community. Ledgerwood (1997) on the contrary focuses on the message the Tuol Sleng is supposed to convey to its domestic visitors. Williams (2004), Hughes (2006), Ledgerwood (1997) and Chandler (2008) all mostly focus on the political aspect of memory construction, although, as mentioned previously, they disagree on who the preferred audience of this memory construction is. However, even while discussing the audience, they focus on who the target audience, and not on how the message is perceived by the audience itself. The only exception is Ledgerwood (1997), who briefly discusses how the political message conveyed at the Tuol Sleng Museum is perceived by Cambodians. However, she only takes into account Cambodians who have a living memory of the genocide. The political aspect of memory construction is of course important, especially since they have all shown how great the influence of the government has been on the development of both the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields. However, memory construction also takes place on other levels and politicians are not the only ones involved in the memory construction process.

This thesis looks at other actors who are involved in the memory construction process, namely the tour guides who work at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields. They have an important role,

⁵ See Wood (2006), Williams (2004), Ledgerwood (1997), Hughes (2006) and Chandler (2008).

as they are the ones who are able to convey the history of the site and of Cambodia to the visitors of the site. At the same time, they are not only constructors of memory, but they are also themselves influenced by the cultural memory that is constructed at the sites. This interaction will be the main focus of this thesis and this thesis will therefore aim to combine the politics centered approach that has been conducted by other authors and a more micro-level based approach. I will therefore look more closely at how the political narrative has influenced the two sites and the people who work there, but also how the Cambodians who are employed there, influence the political narrative. In addition, this thesis also hopes to provide insight into the cultural memory of the younger generation, which has no living memory of the Khmer Rouge regime, as many of the tour guides who work at the site today belong to this group.

Another important focus of my thesis is the cultural belief in Cambodia that the spirits of people who have not received the proper funerary rites will continue to haunt the site of their death. Several authors mentioned this cultural belief in relation to the Killing Fields and Tuol Sleng. Chandler states that many Cambodians consider the Killing Fields a dangerous place where ghosts are kept alive (2008:361), while Hughes also asserts that Cambodians believe that the Killing Fields are a dangerous place due to the presence of spirits (2006: 113). However, neither of them has actually looked at how this belief actually influences the people who visit the sites or who are employed there. The display of bones is an important feature of the Killing Fields and to a lesser degree of the Tuol Sleng Museum and is an important tool for the construction of memory. However, this has become a contested subject in Cambodian society and politics, known as the cremation debate, involving the ruling political party, the opposition and even the king (Ledgerwood 1997, Hughes 2006). It would therefore be very relevant to look at how people actually perceive and interpret the belief in spirits and how it affects them. This will not provide a solution to the dilemma of whether the remains should be cremated or not, but it might provide more insight in how Cambodians view this dilemma.

§1.2. Historical background

In order to provide a better understanding of the two memorial sites that are discussed in this thesis, a short historical background will be provided. This section will discuss the history of the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek and the current Tuol Sleng Museum. It will start with the Khmer Rouge's 'liberation' of Phnom Penh city, and will end with the Vietnamese intervention that pushed the Khmer Rouge back to the border with Thailand. This will provide the background for the third chapter of this thesis, where the development of the museum and the Killing Fields will be discussed, which started in 1979. This section will therefore be limited to the history that is relevant to both sites that are the subject of this thesis and it does not provide a comprehensive account of the 1975-1979 period.

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh after a long civil war. At first they were welcomed by the city's population, who hoped that the country would finally know peace after the civil war and the bombings conducted by the United States. However, these feelings soon changed once the people were forced to leave the city to work in the rice fields. Families were separated and privacy no longer existed. The Khmer Rouge controlled almost every aspect of life, from the clothes and hairstyles one was allowed to wear, to the work one was supposed to do and who one was allowed to marry. Soon the entire population was forced to work for the state on the rice fields to meet the quotas for rice production and on other projects designated by the government (Kiernan 2002: 164, 250).

The first phase of purges began in 1975 and lasted until September 1976. Most of the victims were civilians and officials who were associated with the former Lon Nol regime. The second wave of purges started in September 1976 and lasted until the end of the Democratic Kampuchea on January 7 1979. The main targets of these purges were people suspected of being traitors to the revolution. These included people with a background that was considered anti-revolutionary, such as intellectuals, as well as people from the Eastern zone. Also many of their own cadres were accused of betraying the revolution. The bad and deteriorating conditions in many of the provinces contributed to the

government's paranoia, as they believed that the worsening situation could be blamed on 'enemies who were burrowing from within' and thereby sabotaged the revolution (Chandler 2000). The government department that was responsible for the purges was *santebal*, which translates as security police (Chandler 2000: 3). The activities of *santebal* were mostly carried out in Tuol Sleng prison, or S-21, located in Phnom Penh. The aim of S-21 was to defend the party center and in order to carry out this task thousands of men, women and children were detained there. Most of the prisoner's were interrogated and tortured in order to obtain information and lists of associates, who would then also be arrested. Some prisoners only stayed in Tuol Sleng for a day, while higher ranking prisoners were sometimes detained for up to six months. Eventually all of them were brought to the area that is now known as the Killing Field of Choeung Ek, where they were subsequently killed.

However, from the start there were members of the Khmer Rouge who did not agree with many of the policies of the government of Democratic Kampuchea, such as the abolishing of money and markets, the evacuations of all the country's cities and the many killings that occurred, as well as its agricultural policy that caused famines and the loss of family life. These voices of dissent were particularly present in the Easter zone, near the Vietnamese border (which was also one of the reasons why many Easter zone cadres were purged). In 1978 several of Khmer Rouge soldiers fled Democratic Kampuchea and went to Vietnam to inform the Vietnamese government about the situation in DK and request the support of the Vietnamese. A united front was then formed by the Vietnamese, who recruited other discontented Khmer Rouge soldiers to fight against the Khmer Rouge in Democratic Kampuchea. On 7 January 1979, this united front reached Phnom Penh, pushing the Khmer Rouge back to the border region with Thailand (Kiernan 2002: 440-465). Democratic Kampuchea was no more, and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was then established with the support of the Vietnamese government. Many of the Khmer Rouge soldiers who had defected and joined the united front came to

occupy high positions in this new government and the PRK government could start with the process of rebuilding the country with support from the Vietnamese (Slocomb 2003).

§1.3. Methodology

All the field work for this thesis was carried out in Cambodia over a course of two months⁶ The research was carried out in two locations, the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes in Phnom Penh and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek, located approximately fifteen kilometers outside Phnom Penh. These two research locations have been chosen because they are the two most developed genocide memorials in Cambodia, as well as the two most popular among tourists. They have been developed to serve as both genocide memorials and tourist destinations and are therefore the two most relevant memorials to this research. This does not mean that there are no other genocide memorials. There are many other local memorials that can be found throughout the country. However, these do not function as tourist destinations and are often not subjected to continual development (Hughes 2006). I obtained a research permit from the Ministry of Culture in Cambodia in order to conduct research at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide crimes (see appendix). I used an introduction letter from my supervisor, Dr. Mario Fumerton, for my application for this permit.

The research puzzle itself consists of two parts. The first part of the puzzle can be summarized as: what memory is being constructed? The second part is: how does this constructed memory interact with the cultural memory of Cambodian employed at these sites? The first question needs to be answered in order to be able to answer the second question. It is necessary to know what the memory constructed at the sites entails before the interaction between this memory and the individual cultural memory can be explored further. In order to answer the research puzzle, five sub-questions were used. These provided structure while using the different data collections techniques, especially for the topic guides for the field observations and interviews. Different data collection methods were used, namely

⁶ Starting on March 4, 2011 and ending on May 4, 2011.

literature research, field observations at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with tour guides employed at both sites, as well as interviews with staff members of the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

The literature research did not only include academic literature written about cultural memory, memorials, dark tourism and Cambodia, but also newspaper articles (in particular from the Cambodia Daily) as well as websites and weblogs monitoring the ECCC trials. The newspaper articles and internet sources were often not directly relevant to this thesis; however, they did help the researcher develop a better understanding of the current issues in Cambodia and the impact of the genocide on Cambodian society today, which proved very valuable in order to prepare for the interviews and field observations. The literature research was largely conducted before the actual field work started, however, it did continue, albeit less intensively during and after the field work was completed.

Field observations at the two research locations started during the first week after my arrival in Phnom Penh. To enter both sites, I paid the required entry fees (\$2 US for both Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields) every time I visited the sites. The first field observations were conducted at Tuol Sleng Museum, both because it was nearby and because it seemed more logical, as most prisoners were first held at Tuol Sleng before they were killed at the Killing Fields. It therefore made sense to start at Tuol Sleng in order to understand my observations at the Killing Fields better. For the observations I used an observation guide, which I adjusted for every visit. These observation guides were based on literature research, my research puzzle and sub-questions, the questions I wanted to ask during my interviews and later on, on the interviews themselves. During the first stages of my field observations I only observed the sites themselves and what was displayed there, while tours (both individual tours and group tours) were later also included. A voice-recorder was always used during observations, as this was used instead of note taking. Photographs were also taken of displays, signs and of the sites in general. The individual and group tours were recorded with the use of a voice-recorder. For this, permission was always asked

from the tour guide as well as the participants. In addition, standard fees were paid for the tours⁷, which was something every person who desired a tour had to do. The field observations formed the basis for my interviews. However, field observations were also conducted after several interviews had been done, as well as after all interviews were finished, as the interviews sometimes made me look at things differently and therefore I found it very valuable to visit the sites purely for observational purposes again.

The interviews were conducted with both tour guides who were employed at the memorial sites as well as with employees at the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). The tour guides were chosen because they were the people who were employed at the sites in a meaningful way because they were the only employees at the sites who really interacted with the visitors and whose role in the construction of memory is clearly visible to the visitors. Even though there are many tour guides in Phnom Penh who provide guides tours in the entire Phnom Penh area, including both research locations, I chose to only interview tour guides who were employed by the Killing Fields and the Tuol Sleng Museum themselves. I made this decision because these guides receive training at the sites, while the other tour guides do not receive such training and I can therefore not assume that they will represent the history as presented by both research locations.

After only two weeks in Phnom Penh I decided I was ready to observe a group tour. After this group tour I asked my tour guide if I could do an interview with him. I was very surprised when he wanted to charge me \$20 US for an interview that would last for only half an hour and would not include any references to politics. I was not prepared for this reaction at all, as I had informed him about my research before the tour since I wanted to record it. I decided not to do the interview because I did not feel comfortable paying him for the interview and because I was worried that if I would pay him, I

⁷ For Tuol Sleng, this was \$6 US for an individual tour and \$2 US for a group tour. At the Killing Fields, there were no standard amounts, however, one was requested to make a donation to the guides and most guides informed me that the standard donation was about \$5 US for an individual tour. The fee for a group tour also depended on the group's size.

would have to pay all the other tour guides at the site as well. This was a very sobering experience for me, I realized that I had to present myself differently and that in the future, I had to put less emphasis on myself as a researcher and on the importance of their answers to my research. In addition, it also showed that I was not well prepared enough to start with the interviews. I also learned that because of this, it was not possible to conduct the interviews outside the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields, as people then wanted to be paid for the interviews as well. I therefore decided that I had to conduct more field observations in order to prepare myself for my interviews and in order to find out which questions I had to ask. This meant that my first month in Cambodia was largely spent on field observations and additional literature research. In addition, I interviewed three DC-Cam staff members in order to get more information about both memorials and the exhibitions that are displayed there.

During the second month of my field research I conducted six interviews with tour guides at Tuol Sleng Museum and six interviews at the Killing Fields. At the time of my arrival, there were eight tour guides at Tuol Sleng, however, by the time I left, I heard that two new guides were being trained who I had not talked to. I did talk to the remaining two guides at Tuol Sleng; however, I did not formally interview them. At that time there were six tour guides working at the Killing Fields. The interviews at both research locations were conducted at the sites themselves, after I participated in a tour (either an individual or a group tour). All interviews, including those with the DC-Cam staff members, were semi-structured. A topic guide was used during the interviews, however, the order of the questions was flexible, as well as the questions themselves. There was also room for the interviewees to add their own topics. The interviews varied in duration from 30-90 minutes and all interviews were recorded with permission from the interviewee. At the Tuol Sleng Museum I interviewed three men, ranging from 26-51 years old. I also interviewed three women, between the ages of 32 and 46. At the Killing Fields I interviewed six men (there were no female tour guides working at the Killing Fields at that time) between 28 and 53 years old.

The questions that were asked mainly dealt with people's opinions, experiences and perceptions. The most important topic that was discussed during the interviews was how people experienced their work at the sites. This dealt with many diverse issues, such as their reasons to work at the sites, how they felt about the sites themselves and their influence on the sites, as well as the influence of the sites on them and their feelings. Attention was also paid to how their own memories and beliefs influenced their work (such as their experiences during the DK period or the belief in spirits). This thesis is strictly qualitative in nature and deals with people's perceptions. Stories are therefore central to this thesis, not facts⁸.

The scope of this research did not only have constraints due to its purely qualitative nature. As mentioned before, I did inform all interviewees of my research and I did ask them for permission to record and use the interviews and tours. However, because I did the tour first and the interview later, I did place less emphasis on myself as a researcher. I also experienced that people were more reluctant to talk about certain issues, especially if they were in any way related to politics, if I was conducting research. Since the construction of memory is a highly politicized subject, this certainly posed some difficulties, as people to discuss issues related to the current government in depth. This also meant that the interviewees were more open when I was not in the 'role' of researcher. People often spoke about the Khmer Rouge period themselves if we were having an informal conversation, however, this changed once I was in my role of researcher, as people were worried about who else might hear what they told me. The information gathered during these informal conversations will of course not be used, as the participants have not given me permission to do this. For the same reason, no real names will be used. In order not to lose the personal feel of the stories, I have given all interviewees a new name. The only exception is the interviews with DC-Cam staff members, who have given me permission to use their real

⁸ This does not mean that the stories that are being told are either true or false. The term story refers to personal experiences, perceptions and opinions, which are central to this thesis. The aim of this thesis is therefore not to generalize or to present facts.

names.

The language barrier was also a problem. Even though all the people who were interviewed spoke English, they were by no means fluent in the language. It is therefore logical to assume that could not express themselves as freely and clearly as they would have been able to do in Khmer and this has probably also limited the information they could give and the stories, opinions and feelings they could share. It is therefore also likely that the interviewees had difficulties describing their exact feelings, interpretations and perceptions and that this thesis also does not provide a complete account of those. If the research had been conducted in Khmer, this may have yielded a more complete overview of the perceptions and interpretations of the people who were interviewed.

It must also be said that I have been trained to conduct research in the field of history and that I was not familiar with the practice of research in the field of social science. This was the first time that I conducted fieldwork or that I had to conduct interview in order to collect scientific data. A large part of my field work therefore consisted of me learning how to conduct field research, and how to conduct interview in order to gather data that can be used for scientific research. Even though this has been a very valuable experience, it also means that I was not able to gather all the data that I hoped to gather, and that I found it very difficult, especially in the beginning, to interview people about subjects that they were reluctant to talk about. The short duration of my research (two months) would have placed constraints on my research in any case, as it has placed limits on the amount of people I could interview and on how many times I could conduct interviews with them. However, as I was still learning how to successfully conduct my research, this limited me even further. I am therefore not able to make statements about the aspects of memory construction that the interviewees found politically sensitive, especially those relating to the current government.

Other constraints were my age and nationality. This is especially applicable to those interviewees who were themselves survivors of the DK regime. Many of them made it clear to me that

because I am not Cambodian, I will never be able to understand what has happened. Not only because I did not experience it, but also because I am not Cambodian and therefore do not fully understand Cambodian culture. If Cambodian people cannot even understand why this has happened, then how can a foreigner even begin to comprehend it? Many of them also feel this way about young Cambodians who were born after 1979.

The claims that can be made in this thesis are therefore limited. Due to the data collection method and the limited amount of people who were interviewed, no generalizations can be made about the attitudes of Cambodians in general with regards to the construction of memory at the Killing Fields and the Tuol Sleng Museum. Broad generalizations in general are beyond the scope of this thesis, as the focus is on the variety of human experience. Also, many topics relating to the politics of the current government can often not be discussed in depth, as interviewees were often very reluctant to talk about them. In addition, the statements that they did make about these subjects need to be scrutinized carefully, as it is possible that the interviewees gave answers that were expected and desired of them, so as not to cause them problems.

§1.4. Chapter outline

Now that the subject has been properly introduced, attention can be paid to the actual research. The second chapter of this thesis will provide the theoretical framework. The two theoretical frameworks that will be used in this thesis will be introduced and previous research regarding the genocide in Cambodia will be discussed. The third chapter will focus on the construction of memory at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields. Different aspects of memory construction will be discussed, such as the development of both sites, the physical instruments used to construct memory and the role of the people employed at the sites in the memory construction process. This discussion of the construction of memory at both sites leads to the fourth chapter, where the interaction between the construction of cultural memory and the individual cultural memory of the tour guides who are employed at the sites

will be discussed. The fifth chapter will focus on the cultural belief in ghosts and their presence at the Tuol Sleng Museum and Killing Fields, in particular on people's interpretation of this belief. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the main findings of this thesis and will provide suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the introduction, the research puzzle consists of two parts. The first part deals with the construction of memory at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek, while the second part of the research puzzle is concerned with the interaction between the memory that is constructed at both sites and the memory of those Cambodians who are employed there. Questions

that arise from this research puzzle are, how is memory constructed? Who is involved in the construction of memory? How does a memory that is constructed on a macro-level interact with the memory of individuals? The construction of memory is therefore a central concept in this thesis and it thus warrants further explanation. The framework of cultural memory will be used to discuss and explain the construction of memory. This framework is relevant for two reasons. The first reason is that one of its main points is that memory is not necessarily a 'true' or 'authentic' view of the past, but that memory is the product of construction and reconstruction, and that it is thus as much a product of the present as it is of the past (Rigney 2005, Assmann 1988). The second reason is that many of the Cambodians who are employed at the sites were not yet born during the period of Democratic Kampuchea. They therefore do not have a living memory of the events that occurred at that time. An important characteristic of cultural memory however, is that a living memory of an event is not necessary in order to have a cultural memory of that event. This framework can therefore be used not only to help describe and explain the construction of memory, but also the interaction between the memory constructed at the site and the memory of the Cambodians who are employed there, both those with a living memory ,and those without.

The second theoretical framework that will be used is the cultural models framework. This framework will be used for the second part of the research puzzle, namely the part that focuses on the interaction between the two kinds of memory. Cultural models theory mainly focuses on the different ways in which people 'absorb' the same cultural models. This theory is particularly relevant to chapter five of this thesis. This chapter will deal with the way people are influenced by the belief in spirits that is common in Cambodia, in particular with the belief in the presence of the souls of the deceased at the place where they died a violent death. How does this belief influence the people who are employed at the sites? And why does this belief affect people in different ways? Cultural models theory will be used as an explanatory framework, because it leaves room for the variety of human experience.

Lastly, previous research on the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields will be discussed. The focus will be on how memory is constructed at both sites, as this is most relevant to this thesis.

§2.1. Cultural memory

In order to define cultural memory, I make use of the definitions provided by Assmann (1988) and Rigney (2005). Both distinguish between communicative and cultural memory. Communicative memory is the memory of those who have actually experienced the event that is to be remembered, and thus the living memory. Once these people have passed away, this form of memory ceases to exist. Cultural memory however, is not restricted to firsthand experience and thus survives long after the people who possessed the communicative memory have died (Assmann 1988). This means that the cultural memory of an event can still exist decades, or even centuries after the actual event has occurred, as the 'memories' of that event are 'kept alive'. Cultural memory can be perpetuated by a diverse range of things, among others narratives, myths, memorials, literature and institutions. Cultural memory is not a reflection of a 'true' or 'authentic' memory; rather, it is a reconstruction of the past that is constantly reconstructed in the light of current events. Cultural memory is thus not the product of direct experience, but of representation and it is thus not necessarily a product of the past, but also very much of the present (Rigney 2005).

In fact, Hodgkin and Radstone (2003:98) state that memory is not a direct record of events and it is characterized by the very fact that it is not identical to what actually happened. In fact, things may be remembered that never happened at all. Walker (2003) claims that this is especially the case for memories of traumatic events. She claims that the psyche is not capable of engaging or representing the traumatic event, as this is too painful and difficult. In order to cope with the memories of the traumatic event (or events), the mind will construct alternative memories, which at some points may be accurate, or may closely resemble the actual event, while at other points it may differ significantly. It may only contain elements that the person himself, or herself, experiences, but it may also incorporate stories of

others who have experienced the same or a similar event. The traumatic events are thus not only remembered, but also forgotten (Walker 2003). Her research focuses on both war trauma and sexual abuse, however, it can also be applied to the traumatic events that many people experienced in Democratic Kampuchea, and this idea is therefore particularly relevant for this thesis, which deals specifically with the memories of traumatic events.

What is of special relevance to this thesis is the link between cultural memory and memorials, as the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek are memorials that were constructed by the Cambodian government. Winter (2008: 62) argues that sites of memory, such as memorials, are not only of relevance to those who have firsthand experience with the memorialized event. On the contrary, they are important to those who are not 'survivors', who have no memories of these events out of their own lived experience. Even to those who were born generations after the concerned events. Memorials are thus places where the memories and experiences of others are remembered and where memories of the past are constructed and continually reconstructed. The memories and meanings attached to memorials are thus not static, but can change over time, as the past is reinterpreted in the light of the present (Cooke 2000: 450, Winter 2008, Rigney 2005). In addition, sites of memory also play a role in articulating and constructing national and group identities (ErlI 2008, den Boer 2008, Winter 2008, Cooke 2000, Naidu 2004). They can play a role in shaping identities, but the opposite is also true, the identity of a group or nation can play a vital role in the construction of memory at the memorial, and thus on what and who are actually remembered. This is especially relevant in the case of Cambodia, as the civil war and the cessation of the civil war have played a significant role in the construction and development of both dark tourism sites, which will be further discussed in chapter three.

It can be argued that the memorials in Cambodia have been constructed not only to commemorate the past, but also as a way to generate money and to further economic development (Winter 2006, Williams 2004). The Killing Fields of Choeung Ek and the Tuol Sleng Museum are not just

memorials where the genocide in particular and the Khmer Rouge period in general are remembered, they are also tourist attractions that are supposed to generate money. This is especially true for the Killing Fields, which have been privatized in 2005 and are now owned by the Cambodian-Japanese company JC Royal (The Japan Times Online 2006).⁹ This fact may also influence the construction and maintenance of the sites as memorials and it is therefore important that when one studies the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields as a memorial site, one also takes into account that both sites are also tourism sites that are used to earn an income, both for individuals and for the country as a whole. The fact that both sites attract many foreign visitors may have a strong influence on the sites. Ledgerwood (1997) and Hughes (2006) for example, suggest that alterations have been made to the sites to make them more accessible and attractive to foreign visitors. In this thesis, construction of memory of these sites will therefore be studied while taking into account their role as tourism sites.

§2.2. Cultural models theory

The second theoretical framework that will be used in this thesis will be cultural models theory. This theory will mostly be utilized in chapter five. It is particularly relevant because in this thesis deals with several cultural models and forms of cultural knowledge, the most obvious of them being idea that the deceased need to be given a proper burial, otherwise their spirits may continue to haunt the site of their death and cause harm to the people who go there. This is a belief that is present among many Cambodians, including those who are employed at and who visit both dark tourism sites that are discussed in this thesis. This therefore raises the question why they are willing to go there, even though they live in a culture where it is considered dangerous to visit, let alone work, at such places? I will use Hinton's (2005:24-31) interpretation of cultural models theory. He defines cultural models as "*those processually generated and recursively enacted local knowledge structures that are variably distributed and internalized by the members of a social group and that mediate their interpretation of experience in*

⁹ Author's interview on 08-04-2011, with Kok-Thay Eng, deputy director at DC-Cam.

given social contexts, albeit in potentially disparate ways” (Hinton 2005: 25). This also means that in order to understand a cultural phenomenon, one must *“examine the dialectical relationship between the intrapersonal and the extrapersonal realms”*(Hinton 2005: 2).

Cultural models therefore have two levels. The first level is that of “instituted models”, which are the conventional public forms of the models which are produced in the context of the social world. The second level is that of “ mental models” . Mental models are instituted models which have been appropriated by individuals. These individuals do not only internalize the instituted models, but also interpret these models (and can therefore alter the instituted model) through their own experience. This is also the dialectical duality of cultural models. Individuals do not only form mental models, but they also enact the instituted models. This enactment can be influenced by their own mental models, and thus lead to alterations of the conventional public forms and possibly to cultural change. In turn, through their enactment of the instituted models, their own mental models may also change over time. (Hinton 2005: 25).

The fact that cultural models are enacted by individuals also signifies that cultural models have a motivational force. They can inform an individual on how to act and speak in culturally appropriate ways and on how to react in a desirable way on new situations. However, the persuasiveness of cultural models is not the same for every individual. Many different factors can affect the motivational force of cultural models on different individuals, including expert validation, cultural authority and a person’s own experiences (Quinn and Holland 1987: 4-13). Cultural models can thus be a motivational force for people and can influence their actions, but they do not influence everyone to the same extent (Strauss 1992: 1). Whether they are compelling depends on many different factors, including whether the model is considered beneficial to the individual and his or her goals, whether the model is perceived as good and natural and also on the conditions during which the model was learned (D’Andrade 1992: 227).

Cultural models theory provides an explanatory framework for the analysis of the behavior and

choices of the Cambodians who are employed at both dark tourism sites, as it asserts that even though people of a particular social group all experience the same conventional instituted models, they are not all affected and motivated by it in the same way. People absorb and interpret these instituted models in order to form their own individual mental models. All sorts of factors may influence this interpretation of the public norm, such as education, upbringing, religion, social status, prior experience, ethnicity etc. This means that certain cultural models are more appealing to some people than they are to others. People therefore do not automatically accept instituted cultural models, but use their own personal and cultural knowledge to give meaning to their social lives. Thus, cultural models do not have the same impact on everyone (Hinton 2005: 26-31).

§2.3. Memorial sites in Cambodia

Much has been written on the genocide itself (including on the debate whether it should be called a genocide or not in the first place) and on the history of the Khmer Rouge. However, it is remarkable that only a few articles have been written on Cambodia's genocide memorials. Those authors that do write about the genocide in Cambodia mainly focus on the two that are most well known, being the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek. Only one author specifically focuses on another memorial site, namely the one in Anlong Veng (Wood 2006).

Williams (2004) focuses on the two most important memorial sites in Phnom Penh, namely the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek. He argues that both sites focus mainly on the perpetrators and are not designed to evoke sympathy for the victims. The only things that draw attention to the humanity of the victims are their pictures, which can be found in the Tuol Sleng Museum. However, both memorial sites contain hardly any objects that once belonged to the victims, such as toys, pieces of clothing or personal possessions, which would emphasize the fact that these were real people with real lives, not just victims of the regime. Both sites mainly focus on what has been erased, on the destruction, and thus more on the perpetrator instead of on the victim (Williams 2004:

244-248). According to Williams (2004: 249-252) the motive for the construction of the memorials was not to remember the victims, but to send out the message that the DK regime was a regime that committed atrocities beyond belief, atrocities that were similar to those committed by the Nazi's. To make this clear, the Vietnamese used the examples of Euro-American Holocaust memorials as inspiration for their construction of the two memorial sites near Phnom Penh.

Ledgerwood (1997: 87) largely agrees with Williams (2004). She only discusses the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes in her article, and states that this museum can be seen as the central site of memory construction with regards to the DK regime. The main reason for the construction of this museum by the Vietnamese was to provide evidence of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge, thus validating the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia as an act of liberation. However, she also states that it is arguable whether the Cambodians were really the main intended audience of the museum, as the site was first opened to international guests and many measures were taken to adapt the site to foreign preferences (such as good lighting for photographs) (Ledgerwood 1997: 89). She argues that the museum has been used by the Cambodian government to bring forth a monologic historical explanation for what occurred during the time of Democratic Kampuchea. However, she disputes the idea that this constructed memory is in contradiction with the living memory of many Cambodians. On the contrary, she states that many Cambodians consider this memory to be representative of their lives under the DK regime, or at least representative of their worst memories of this time (Ledgerwood 1997: 90-93).

Hughes' (2006) main focus is also on the two memorial sites in Phnom Penh, even though she does mention the existence of local memorials. She discusses three different aspects of the genocide memorials. The first one is their construction, especially the political dynamics that accompanied and continue to accompany the development of the memorials. Secondly, she discusses the experiences of the (independent) tourists who visit the sites. Her third and last focus is on the display of several photos from the Tuol Sleng Museum in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City (Hughes 2006). Her main

argument is that the genocide memorials in Cambodia, especially the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields, were the result of '*practices of curation, forensic preservation and narration (in published texts)*' (Hughes 2006: 6) and that the intended audience of these memorials did not consist of Cambodians, but instead of foreigners. Initially these foreigners were mostly journalists and foreign delegations, but nowadays this audience is mainly comprised of tourists (Hughes 2006: 6).

Wood (2006) however, has chosen a different genocide memorial / dark tourism site as his object of study: Anlong Veng. This site has only recently been brought to the attention of the government (especially because until 1998 it was inaccessible, as it was one of the last Khmer Rouge strongholds). The Cambodian government has slowly started to develop the area, which is referred to as the Anlong Veng Museum. Many visitors come here to see the cremated remains of Pol Pot, as well as his former house and the houses of several other Khmer Rouge leaders. The interesting thing about the Anlong Veng Museum is that many people in the area are former Khmer Rouge. Many of the area's inhabitants still have a favorable view of the Khmer Rouge, a view which contradicts the government's official view. The government has established training sessions for former Khmer Rouge cadre who are to work as tour guides in the area. Here they are given the official story that is to be told at the museum, clearly stating that the guides must refrain from making positive judgments about the Khmer Rouge (Wood 2006: 185).

It may also be noted that Chandler (2008) mentions that the Tuol Sleng Museum is perceived differently by Cambodians than the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek. He states that the Tuol Sleng Museum was visited by many Cambodians, especially after it had just opened. Many Cambodians went to the museum hoping to find information about missing family members, looking at all the photos hoping to find a familiar face. However, the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek make many Cambodians feel rather uneasy. In Cambodian culture, largely inspired by Buddhism, people are cremated after they die in order to give rest to their soul. The Killing Fields, with its many bodies that are still buried and the big

memorial *stupa* filled with bones of victims, is thus seen as a place where ghosts are kept alive, where souls are prevented from finding rest (Chandler 2008).

It may be concluded that previous research has been done on the memorialization of the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia. The particular focus of this research has often been the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields. These two locations are also the focus of this thesis. However, very little attention has been paid to the dual role of these sites as both memorials and tourist sites. The fact that both sites are important tourist destinations may also influence the sites themselves, and how these two roles affect each other. How does tourism affect both sites as memorials? In addition, no attention has been paid to the Cambodians who are employed at these sites. How does the constructed memory affect them and their memories, and how do they in turn affect the construction of memory at the sites?

This chapter has provided two different theoretical frameworks. The cultural models theory implies that people are differently affected by cultural models because they integrate these cultural models into their own mental models. This theory will be especially relevant in chapter five, as this chapter deals with the influence of Theravada Buddhism and the belief in spirits, both ingrained in Cambodian culture, on people's attitudes towards Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek. The other theoretical framework, cultural memory, is valuable because it emphasizes the fact that cultural memory is the product of representation and construction and thus that it is not necessarily a product of the past, but also of the future. In addition, cultural memory is not restricted to those that have first-hand experience. On the contrary, cultural memory continues to exist long after the event, sometimes even decades or centuries. In the next chapter, the framework of cultural memory will be used to further examine the construction of memory at both the Killing Fields and the Tuol Sleng Museum.

3. Construction of memory

The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek are both sites in the Phnom Penh area that serve as both memorials of the genocide that occurred in Democratic Kampuchea and as tourists attractions. This chapter will look at the construction of cultural memory at both of these sites, while taking the dual role of the sites into account. In order to look at the interaction between the constructed commercialized memory and the individual personal memory of the Cambodians who are employed at the sites, it is first necessary to look at how memory is constructed. How is memory

constructed at both dark tourism sites? How does the 'design' of both sites contribute to memory construction. Which outside influences, such as politics or religion, have influenced the construction of memory and what is the role of the Cambodians who are employed there in the memory construction process? These questions will be discussed in this chapter.

The first section will deal with the discovery and development of the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Field. This is necessary in order to provide a short historical and political background to the following sections and chapters. Section two will discuss the instruments that are used to construct a memory of the genocide at the dark tourism sites, while the third section is devoted to the role of the Cambodians who are employed at the sites.

§3.1. Development of the memorial sites

On January 8, 1979, two Vietnamese journalists who were walking around in the recently liberated Phnom Penh were drawn to what appeared to be a school. What drew them to it was the bad smell that emanated from the place, the smell of decaying bodies. Once they entered the compound, they discovered the fourteen bodies of people who had been killed a few days before. The journalists took pictures of the entire compound, including all its rooms and the fourteen bodies and informed the Vietnamese authorities, who immediately decided to investigate the site further and to cremate the bodies they had found as a sanitary measure. (Chandler 2000: 3). They soon concluded, due to the vast amount of documentary evidence that the facility had been used as a prison and interrogation center by the Khmer Rouge, where they had imprisoned, questioned and tortured thousands of Cambodian men, women and children. The site was immediately closed off and cleaned in order to prepare it for visitors. The first visitors arrived shortly after, on January 25, 1979, when journalists from several socialist countries came to visit the site. In February or March of that same year, Mai Lam was brought in from Vietnam, who had also helped create the Museum of American War Crimes in Ho Chi Minh City (Ledgerwood 1997: 88). He designed the Tuol Sleng Museum to fit the needs of both the PRK

government and that of the Cambodian people (Hughes 2006: 21). For the Cambodian people, he researched what happened in order to provide evidence of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge, so he could help the average Cambodian understand the horrors they had endured during the rule of the Khmer Rouge (Ledgerwood 1997: 89).

Memory construction accompanied the development of the Tuol Sleng Museum, so this raises the question of what memory the developers aimed to propagate. This memory was closely related to one of the biggest problems of the PRK government, namely its legitimacy. The PRK faced two main problems concerning its legitimacy. First of all, the legitimacy of the liberation of Cambodia by Vietnamese forces was contested, not only by some parts of the Cambodian society (in particular the remaining Khmer Rouge forces), but also by large parts of the international community, such as the United States, Thailand and even the United Nations. The Tuol Sleng Museum was therefore to serve as evidence for the atrocities committed during the DK period. Foreign delegations of diplomats, politicians, and journalists (and later visitors) were brought to the museum and were provided with tours in order to show them this evidence and to convince them that the invasion by the Vietnamese was a necessity in order to protect the Cambodian people, and therefore legitimate. The memories and stories that were portrayed at the museum were therefore all related to the suffering and cruelty people had endured during the Khmer Rouge regime and displayed the worst memories of the worst times under the Khmer Rouge (Ledgerwood 1997).

The second legitimacy problem the PRK had to face was the fact that the PRK was also a revolutionary government, like the government of Democratic Kampuchea had been. It was therefore necessary to differentiate between their revolution, and the revolution pursued by the Khmer Rouge, especially since the Khmer Rouge had severely damaged the Cambodian people's trust in the necessity and desirability of a socialist revolution. It was therefore important to condemn the results of the revolution conducted by the Khmer Rouge, yet at the same time it was impossible to condemn the

entire Khmer Rouge movement, not in the least because many former Khmer Rouge cadres had found their way into the PRK government. The Tuol Sleng Museum was therefore used to present a unified explanation of the events (Ledgerwood 1997: 90) and thereby it also presented a memory of the life under the Khmer Rouge and of the liberation by the Vietnamese that was beneficial to this story line. This story taught the people of Cambodia that the Khmer Rouge movement was originally an authentic communist movement that pursued a true socialist revolution. This all changed after the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. The KR movement was then hijacked by the Pol Pot- Ieng Sary- Khieu Samphan¹⁰ clique, often just referred to as Pol Pot. This clique then murdered true revolutionaries, many of whom were murdered in Tuol Sleng Prison itself and for the deaths that were caused by the agricultural policies pursued by the government at that time. This small clique of criminals was therefore responsible for the genocide, not the socialist revolution (Ledgerwood 1997: 90-91). What happened in Democratic Kampuchea was thus not the fault of socialism, on the contrary, it was more akin fascism and what happened in Cambodia at that time was likened to what happened in Nazi Germany and its concentration and destruction camps (Hughes 2006: 21). The Vietnamese and their Cambodian allies, true communist revolutionaries, had liberated Cambodia, and were now to be the leaders of a true revolutionary government (Ledgerwood 91, Chandler 2000: 9-10). This true revolution however was still threatened by the remaining Khmer Rouge forces that were still at war with the government. According to Ledgerwood, the Tuol Sleng Museum therefore fulfilled four tasks: to convey the message that this revolution was different from the revolution of the Khmer Rouge, to convey the message that the horrible deeds of the Khmer Rouge should be remembered (and the Museum serves as evidence of those deeds), to convey the message that the Khmer Rouge must never again come to power in Cambodia and that in order to prevent this, people must support the PRK government, because this

¹⁰ The name of the clique consists of the name of three important Khmer Rouge leaders, Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan. This means that the responsibility for the events in Democratic Kampuchea was personalized and placed on a very small group of people (Ledgerwood 1997: 91).

government has not only liberated them from, but also continues to protect them against the Khmer Rouge (1997: 91).

Much less has been written about the discovery and development of the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek. Hughes (2006) is the only author who discusses this site at length; most other authors focus mainly on the Tuol Sleng Museum. The site was used as a Chinese cemetery until 1977. In that year the site was converted to a killing field by the Khmer Rouge. Most of the people who were killed here were first imprisoned at Tuol Sleng (Hughes 2006:96-97). The Killing Fields of Choeung Ek were discovered almost a year after the liberation of Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese on 7 January 1979 (Hughes 2006: 97). Unlike Tuol Sleng Prison, the Killing Fields were not discovered by the Vietnamese, but by people living around the area and people who had returned to the area after the Vietnamese had entered Phnom Penh. This applies to many of the other killing fields that can be found in Cambodia as well. The documentary¹¹ shown at the museum at the Killing Fields talks about how the site was discovered by men who returned to the area and noticed the tools lying around the field, as well as the changes and the open graves. It soon became clear to Vietnamese and Cambodian investigators that the site had been used as a killing field, and many graves were exhumed in 1980 (Hughes 2006: 97). All the tour guides I spoke to at the Killing Fields claimed that 83 mass graves had been exhumed, however, Hughes states that the number of exhumed graves is 89 (2006: 97). The exhumed remains were chemically treated in order to help their preservation and placed in a wooden memorial. In 1988, the memorial stupa was built that can still be found at the site, and other developmental work was also conducted at the site, such as the placing of signs with information about the site and the people who died there (Hughes 2006: 97). Hughes mentions many of the same motivations of the PRK government to develop the Killing Fields further as the other author's have mentioned for the Tuol Sleng Museum, including instructing the nation about what happened under the Khmer Rouge, providing a narrative for

¹¹ The documentary is called 'The Road to Killing Field Choeung Ek and is shown several times an hour at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek.

Cambodians to help them understand what happened and to address the two legitimacy problems discussed above (2006:98-99).

The development of both sites after they were brought under the attention of the PRK government was therefore highly influenced by political motivations. However, these political motivations have also shifted during the years. During the early years of the PRK the main focus was on the Pol Pot- Ieng Sary- Khieu Samphan clique, as it was impossible to place the blame on the entire Khmer Rouge. This was mostly because Khmer Rouge soldiers who had defected, including leaders of the movement, were present in the new government. During the early 1990's, the KR joined the peace process and the people were asked to forgive the Khmer Rouge leaders and to move beyond the genocide. Royal pardons were given to Khmer Rouge officials who defected and they were often also welcomed in the government. During later years, official amnesties were given to Khmer Rouge soldiers, leaders and defectors, while the full responsibility for the genocide was placed on Pol Pot and a few of the highest ranking officials of the Khmer Rouge movement (Williams 2004: 249-250). This policy has continued until today. Only the highest ranking Khmer Rouge leaders are held responsible for the genocide. One sign of this is the fact that only five people were indicted by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), namely Ieng Sary, Nuon Chea, Ieng Thirith, Khieu Samphan and Kaing Guek Eav (also known as Deuch)¹² (ECCC:2011). Even though continued appeals have been made by UN prosecutors, NGO's and Cambodians to investigate and bring to justice other Khmer Rouge leaders, Prime Minister Hun Sen and his party, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) have opposed this since the start of the tribunal (Burns 2010). The Prime Minister has repeatedly warned that the investigation of new suspects could provide the spark for a new civil war (The Cambodia Daily 2009). Even though Hun Sen denies that he aims to put pressure on the courts, he has stated that he will not allow new cases to be tried (Foreign Policy 2011). It is feared that Hun Sen uses his influence over Cambodian staff at the

¹² Pol Pot has not been indicted because he died in 1998.

courts to interfere in the trials, and according to some, he has been successful, as new cases have been blocked and investigations in existing cases have been closed. Many also believe that Hun Sen aims to prevent new investigations because many of them would include members of his own government (and potentially himself). (Foreign Policy 2011, Human Rights Watch 2009, The Phnom Penh Post 2009, Cambodia Watchdog Council International 2009). It can therefore be argued that the construction of both dark tourism sites was and is strongly influenced by politics, in particular because the Cambodian government has been highly involved in their development. The next section will describe which instruments were used

§3.2. The use of physical instruments

It has been mentioned several times now that the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek are sites of memory where memory construction takes place and the previous section has discussed several of the narratives and memories that are propagated at both sites. But how is this memory constructed? Which physical instruments¹³ are used in order to convey these memories to the public? And how do these instruments convey that message? These are questions that demand an answer and this section aims to provide these answers.

§3.2.1. Tuol Sleng Museum

People paying a visit to the Tuol Sleng Museum first come across the graves of the fourteen victims who were found at the site, and are then presented with four buildings, building A, B, C and D. The exterior of the site has been thoroughly discussed by several other authors¹⁴, therefore only a short description will be provided here. Building A is the building where the fourteen bodies were found by the Vietnamese journalists. Only high ranking prisoners were held captive here. Each cell contains the bed (on which the

¹³ With the term instruments I refer to such things as the physical exterior of the sites, exhibitions, videos and photos that may be present at the site etc.

¹⁴ See for example, Williams (2004), Ledgerwood (1997), Hughes (2006).

body was found), several items, such as a bottle for urine and a box for feces, and a picture of the dead body that was found in the cell. Building B is filled with the pictures of mostly victims, but also perpetrators (many of them were also killed at the site). In addition, the history of the Khmer Rouge, starting with the Khmer Rouge's liberation of Phnom Penh is displayed in this building, mostly using pictures. Building B, C, and D all contained both small individual cells, as well as mass detention cells. The original cells, both wooden and stone and including the barb wire in front of the building, can still be found in building C. Building D is used to display more pictures of victims, as well as several instruments of torture, paintings by former Tuol Sleng prisoner Van Nath portraying torture sessions and life at the prison, a small memorial *stupa* and several maps of Cambodia.

The museum is a gloomy place. All the buildings are grey, one of the buildings is still surrounded by barb wire and blood stains can still be found on the floors and sometimes even on the walls. The pictures of the victims are the most obvious reminder of the fact that thousands of people were held at the prison. Many of these pictures are displayed in building B and D. These pictures display the faces of the prisoners, men, women and sometimes also children, shortly after their arrival at the prison. As there are very few personal items that once belonged to the victims displayed at the museum, these pictures are the only reminder of the people who were held prisoner here, or, as Williams (2004) states, these pictures are the only items that convey the humanity of the victims. There are no real reminders of their pasts and of who they were. Their fate however, is displayed much more clearly. The instruments used to torture the prisoners are prominently displayed in Building D. Paintings by the former prisoner and painter Van Nath bring home the reality of the tortures, as they display in detail how the torture methods were carried out. Special attention was also paid to torture during the tours, where the torture was described in detail, in particular the torture of women, which was 'more atrocious than that of the men'.¹⁵ Building C displays the reality of life at the prison, as this is the

¹⁵Author's interview on 8 March 2011 with Bourey, tour guide at Tuol Sleng Museum.

building where the original wooden and stone cells, as well as the barb wire covering the front of the building is still intact.

The building itself and the items that were once part of the prison are not the only instruments used to construct a memory however. A movie room is located in building D, where the short film *Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy* by Rithy Panh is shown twice a day. The film tells the story of Bophana, a young woman who was imprisoned in Tuol Sleng and was subsequently killed. It is the story of a woman who dearly loved, but was separated from, her husband, a Khmer Rouge cadre, after the Khmer Rouge came to power. They were defiant however, and continued to send each other love letters during their time apart. Once the letters had been discovered, her husband was arrested as a spy, which eventually led to the arrest and imprisonment of Bophana at Tuol Sleng. Towards the end, the movie also provides some more information about Tuol Sleng, in particular by letting two former Tuol Sleng survivors and one former employee at Tuol Sleng share their story (Panh 2004¹⁶). This movie shows a highly personal account of a woman who was imprisoned and killed by the Khmer Rouge. It therefore does not only explain more about the museum and its history, but also provides a face and context to everything visitors have seen, or will see, at the museum. Williams' (2004: 242) claim that "By detailing the KR's torture techniques, Tuol Sleng seems focused on them and not on the victims. Unlike other genocide museums, Tuol Sleng does not explicitly encourage visitors to identify with those who were persecuted" is therefore not entirely true. On the contrary, the film encourages people to identify with the woman, portraying her life story and the love she and her husband felt for each other in detail. The story of Bophana is the story of one woman who was once imprisoned in Tuol Sleng. It provides the story of her life, of who she was. After all the descriptions of torture the visitors have been given during their visit to the museum, this documentary provides a face to the victims and a story to all the pictures that are displayed at the museum. Not because all of their stories are identical to that of Bophana, but

¹⁶ The 'article' by Panh is the script of the documentary.

because the documentary serves as a reminder that the people in the pictures were real people, with real histories and families.

Building D also houses several exhibitions. These include two permanent exhibitions, one about the Khmer Rouge trial and one concerning the question of perpetrator responsibility and a temporary exhibition, displaying paintings by a Dutch artist. The exhibition about the Khmer Rouge trial focuses on case 001, or the trial of Duch, who was responsible for the Tuol Sleng prison. The victims or perpetrators exhibition takes a closer look at who the Khmer Rouge cadres were and why they decided to join the Khmer Rouge. It displays different signs, all with a current picture of a former Khmer Rouge cadre and information of their function in the Khmer Rouge, as well as information on when they joined and how they look back on this period in their life. This exhibition raises addresses the issue of responsibility and guilt. The exhibition gives a face and humanity to the Khmer Rouge cadres and does not only pose them as perpetrators, but also as victims.

Yet how is this all related to the narrative and memory that has been described in the first section? The first section described how the Tuol Sleng prison and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek were opened to visitors to prove and confirm the legitimacy of the intervention by the Vietnamese and the PRK government. The instruments used at the Tuol Sleng Museum are consistent with this narrative. At the museum, the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge regime are emphasized, due to the emphasis that is placed on the torture of the victims and the conditions in which the victims were held prisoner, as well as the emphasis placed on the other cruelties committed by the Khmer Rouge, such as the separation of families, the hard work in the rice fields, the evacuation of the cities and their aim to return Cambodia to 'year zero'. This is in concordance with the idea that the museum was meant to convey the message that the Vietnamese intervention was legitimate due to the atrocities that were committed by the Khmer Rouge. Despite this focus, the blame for the atrocities is not placed upon all the members of the Khmer Rouge. As has been described in the previous section, the highest ranking Khmer Rouge leaders

are the ones who are held responsible, which is also evident in the museum itself.

The issue of who should be held responsible for what happened in Democratic Kampuchea is not only raised by the displays in the museum, it was also brought up by many of the guides who were interviewed and whose tours were observed. Several of the guides voiced their disagreement with the treatment of the former Khmer Rouge officials who are currently tried before the tribunal. One of these guides is Veasna, who explained:

‘ No death sentence in Cambodia, only keep in prisoner their whole life. Even arrested, they have better life in prison. No punishment, if they sick have doctor visitation, have freedom for talking. You know, they are very old right now, but not die yet. You see how many year they stay in prison after they try. They have a short time in prison. Some Cambodian they happy with the court, some unhappy, but they cannot do anything’.¹⁷

The explanation given by many tour guides for the amnesties that were offered to former Khmer Rouge soldiers repeats the current government policy. They state that many Khmer Rouge soldiers were very young and often uneducated. According to the guides, this made it easy for the high ranking officials to brainwash and control them. The answer of one of the guides is exemplary:

‘ We can see, they are very young. Just fourteen or eighteen years old, but they are very cruel to the victims during question, because the Khmer Rouge high ranking, they get them from the poor family , and they are still young and they bring them to the jungle to brainwash. Do you know, at that time, even their family, they kill them. Yet they don’t care, they kill everybody. And some of them, they still alive, but free now, because they are protected by the government. Do

¹⁷ Author’s interview on 11 April 2011 with Veasna, tour guide at the Killing Fields.

you know, the government, they think they are too young, they don't know what they are doing.
Now they let them go free.'¹⁸

Even though all tour guides that were interviewed mentioned the young age of the soldiers as well as the notion that they were brainwashed as reasons for amnesty, not all of them seem to agree with this official line of the government. Several of them mention that the youngsters were cruel and crazy about killing and that many people still want to take revenge for what happened to them and their families. Some of the guides that were interviewed expressed the view that the measures currently taken by the government do not go far enough. The idea that Khmer Rouge soldiers wanted to kill everybody, not only mentioned in the citation above, but also in several other interviews (it was often said that the soldiers were 'crazy about killing' and would kill everyone, even their own family) is something that Ledgerwood mentions as a feature of many individual stories about the Democratic Kampuchea regime. She considers this to be a clear influence of the official story line of the PRK, as the PRK narrative also claimed that the ultimate goal of the Khmer Rouge was genocide itself, not revolution (1997: 93).

It has been described above that the Tuol Sleng Museum still contains many elements that belonged to the original prison facility. Williams states that this is a central element of the site (2004: 242). He also claims that the "maintenance of a site to communicate its cursedness or ruination is itself a sustained act of intervention". This is certainly the case for this museum, not only because it is maintained to communicate its original cursedness, but also because the museum has undergone many changes during the years. Williams' statement raises the following question: how untouched is the Tuol Sleng Museum? The site may be presented as the 'original' Tuol Sleng prison, this is certainly not the case. At least, it is not the entire Tuol Sleng prison that is currently presented to visitors. The original Tuol Sleng facility did not only encompass the four buildings, (plus several smaller buildings, such as a former kitchen, a souvenir shop and the office of the former prison staff, currently used as the office of

¹⁸ Author's interview on 20 April 2011 with Soriya, guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

the current staff), but it also contained many buildings that currently surround the museum. For example, many of the interrogations and torture sessions took place in surrounding buildings¹⁹. These buildings are not included in the current museum and are not referred to at the site, neither in the flyer that is presented at the entrance, nor on the signs or by the tour guides (although they do present this information if one asks for it). It is also unclear whether all these buildings still exist, as it has been mentioned that many of the buildings surrounding Tuol Sleng today were built after people returned to Phnom Penh in 1979. Ledgerwood states that museum was forced to sell parts of the front wall of the museum, as well as some of its buildings on the south end of the complex to private owners, because the government does not provide funds for the maintenance of the site (1997: 95).

However, although some parts of the original prison are no longer part of the museum complex, other elements of the prison have never been incorporated in the museum at all. One example is the existence of mass graves surrounding the museum. At the museum it is often repeated that the people who were held prisoner there were transported to the Killing Fields outside the city. This is not only evident from the photos that can be found there, but it is also mentioned during every tour. However, during the first year of the facility's operation, the people were actually killed at the prison itself, and were then buried in the area surrounding the prison. Once this area was 'full', they started transporting people to and killing them at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek, which was used as a killing field from 1977 onwards (Hughes 2006). Only people who died during torture were still buried around the facility. However, this is a fact that is largely bypassed at the museum. This could be due to the fact that most of these bodies have not been exhumed and that there are no plans to exhume these bodies either. The exact location of many of these graves is also unknown, and some suspect that many of the bodies are currently located underneath surrounding houses that were built after the Khmer Rouge period.

¹⁹ Except for the torture of the most important prisoners, who were housed in building A, they were interrogated in their own cells.

§3.2.2. *The Killing Fields of Choeung Ek*

While the construction of the Tuol Sleng Museum has been thoroughly discussed by several authors, this is not the case for the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek. Perhaps this is the case because the Killing Fields are exactly what the name implies, fields where killings took place. The Killing Fields of Choeung Ek is one of the many killing fields found in Cambodia. It is a place that almost resembles a park and every time I went there, I was surprised by the initial impression of tranquility and peacefulness. This feeling is brought about by its lush green grass and trees that, as well as the many chickens and dogs that roam freely around the site. The sounds of birds and cicadas, as well as the bright sun that accompanies the Cambodian climate only emphasize the feeling of peacefulness. Only when one sees the inside of the memorial *stupa*, with its approximately 8985 skulls (Hughes 2006: 97) and the holes of the excavated mass graves, as well as the pieces of bone and clothes that still remain in the ground, does one realize that this was indeed once a Killing Field, where many people found their death.

The two most *significant* sites at the Killing Fields are the memorial *stupa* one sees as one enters the area, and the exhumed graves that can be seen once one explores the site further. The memorial *stupa* was built in 1988 to house bones and skulls that had been exhumed. In the short documentary²⁰ that is shown at the small museum, it is said that the memorial was built because Buddhists believe that the bones of the deceased should be kept in a special place. This is remarkable, as it is customary for Buddhists in Cambodia to cremate their dead. This will be discussed further in chapter 5. The memorial *stupa* consists of 17 tiers, clothes of the victims are placed on the very first tier, and skulls are displayed on the next ten levels. The higher levels are filled with other bones that have been exhumed. Some of the skulls are accompanied by a sign that informs the visitor of the sex and approximate age of the victim. Before visitors enter the *stupa*, they are asked to buy flowers and incense to offer to the victims and to take off their shoes.

²⁰ This documentary is called 'The Road to Killing Field Choeung Ek', year and director unknown.

The second significant sight at the Killing Fields is the field where the killings took place and the graves that have been exhumed there. It is important to note that not all graves have been exhumed. Only 86 of the 123 graves that are said to be located at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek have been exhumed. The tour guides who I interviewed have provided different reasons for the choice not to exhume all graves. The reason that was mentioned most often is that many of the graves are supposed to be located in the lake that is present at the site. Other reasons that were mentioned were that it would be too much work to exhume all the graves, that it is not necessary because enough evidence has been collected to prove the crimes of the Khmer Rouge and that the memorial *stupa* is already full. The fact that many bones have been left in the ground (even in the graves that have been exhumed, as only the bigger bones have been removed in most graves) is quite obvious when one walks around the area, in particular during the rainy season. Because of the rain, the layer of soil covering the bones and clothes is washed away, which means that bones and clothes keep surfacing. This means that visitors often walk on the bones and clothes of the victims, which brings home the fact that this indeed a place where thousands of people were killed. Many of the graves are unmarked, and are no more than indentations in the ground. However, several graves (often referred to as the main graves), are marked. This means that they are covered by a wooden structure and are also marked with a sign, which informs the visitor of the contents of the grave. These graves, as well as the bones that can be found on the ground, the memorial *stupa* and the killing tree (it is assumed that babies were killed by hitting their heads against this tree) received the majority of the attention during the tours that I undertook. Several other sights are also signposted, such as the locations of several buildings that were destroyed after the Khmer Rouge lost power.

The small museum that can be found at the site has two exhibitions and a movie room. The movie that is shown is a documentary that talks about the history of the Khmer Rouge and the discovery and history of the Killing Fields. It is therefore informational, and in that respect it is quite different from

the movie that is shown at the Tuol Sleng Museum. The first exhibition deals with the history of the Khmer Rouge and in particular with the history of the Killing Field of Choeung Ek. It also informs the visitors about the killings that took place there by providing elaborate descriptions and by displaying the farm tools that were used for the executions. The second exhibition is concerned with the current tribunal and the cases that are tried there. Its main focus is the fact that those who were responsible for what happened in Democratic Kampuchea are currently brought to justice.

The emphasis at the Killing Fields is placed on the act of killing. Personal stories of the victims are virtually absent, the only personal objects that can be found there are pieces of clothing that can be found in the ground and in the memorial *stupa*. Elaborate descriptions of the killings were given by all the tour guides I spoke to at the site, and all of them also paid special attention to the killing tree and to the mass grave of 100 mostly naked women and children. Despite this emphasis on cruelty, there is very little attention for the victims themselves. Most of the tour guides referred to their role in society (mostly that the victims were highly educated members of society) and it is often pointed out that the victims in one particular grave (where bodies were found without a head) were most likely Khmer Rouge soldiers. The display of bones in the memorial *stupa*, and the fact that one often walks on the bones and clothes of people who were killed at the site, place even more emphasis on the cruelty of what happened there and the loss of life that has occurred.

Williams has claimed, that “the sites may be experienced as theaters of grueling spectacle rather than sanctuaries for private tribute” (2004: 242), because they mainly draw international visitors who are less likely to visit the sites to remember those who were lost or to accompany survivors (Williams 2004: 243). Even though I have argued that both sites are mainly focused on the suffering and killings that have occurred there, I still believe that this statement is not entirely fair. It is true that many visitors to the sites visit a tourist attraction, because it is the thing to do in Cambodia, just as they visit the temples of Angkor. However, this does not necessarily mean that these people do not remember those

who are lost while they pay their visit. In addition, the sites also see many Cambodians who live abroad. These people often come not only to pay their respects, but also to find out the fate of loved ones who they haven't heard since they fled the country in the 1970's. However, the sites do not only see international visitors. When the Tuol Sleng Museum was first opened, tens of thousands of Cambodians visited the museum to learn more about what happened to their missing loved ones (Ledgerwood 1997: 88). Today, many of the Cambodian visitors visit the sites during ECCC tours organized by DC-Cam. Many of these people come to pay their respects to the dead, as well as to understand more about what happened to them and their country. Until this day, it still happens that people discover that a loved one was held at the prison. This is not only evidenced by a sign in one of the exhibitions²¹, but it was also mentioned by one of the tour guides at Tuol Sleng who said:

' It is difficult in a way, you know, when you meet the survivors or the family members of those people who are on the photos. It can make tears fall down in a way. I just met a woman who pointed at the photo of her lost mother, so yeah, it is very sad. It happens sometimes, especially those who were abroad, they come back and they find family members. Emotionally it is moving you know'.²²

Even though the museum and the Killing Fields may 'just' be a tourist attraction to some, to many visitors, both Cambodian and international, a visit to the site is a very emotional and moving experience.

In this section, the instruments that are used at to construct and convey memory at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek have been discussed. It has been argued that these instruments are mainly used to illustrate the suffering of the victims and thereby the cruelty of the Khmer Rouge regime. However, only a select group of people are held responsible for this suffering. This

²¹ This sign provides further information about the ECCC tours. On it can be read that 'On the September 2006 tour, one survivor discovered that an S-21 prisoner photograph was her missing brother' (Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes).

²² Vaha, M, 27-04-2011.

is all consistent with the narrative that has been discussed in the first section of this chapter. The emphasis on suffering and death is in agreement with the story that was, and indeed still is, propagated by the government that many atrocities were committed by the Khmer Rouge and that they caused the deaths of many Cambodians, and that the intervention by Vietnam was therefore legitimate. In addition, both in the exhibitions that are present at both sites and during the guided tours it is emphasized that only few people can be held responsible for what happened in Democratic Kampuchea. These are the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime and those people are brought to justice today at the ECCC. The only exception of course is Pol Pot, who is held chiefly responsible. In many interviews, the tour guides people simply refer to Pol Pot while referring to the perpetrators of the torture and killings in Democratic Kampuchea. Ledgerwood already noted the same phenomenon in her article, where she states that instead of referring to the Pol Pot- Ieng Sary- Khieu Samphan clique, many people only refer to Pol Pot (2007: 91). Both narratives are still very commonly used today. Many people in the current government were former Khmer Rouge cadres and were either involved with the intervention by the Vietnamese, or because they defected from the Khmer Rouge government between 1979 and 1998. It can therefore be concluded that the physical instruments at both sites serve to convey the narrative that has already been described in the first section of this chapter. However, not only physical instruments are used to convey a memory. The Cambodians who are employed at both sites are also important actors in the memory construction process, and they will be the subject of the following section.

§3.3. Role of Cambodians employed at the sites

Cambodians are employed in many different functions at both sites. Most visitors will come into contact with the ticket sellers, the souvenir shop vendors, the cleaners, and the tour guides. In this case, the tour guides are the ones who have the most meaningful role in relation to the tourists, as they are the ones who are meant to share the history of the site with the visitors. Their presence at the site raises

several questions. What is the role of these Cambodian tour guides in the memory construction process and how important is their role? Also, how have they learned how to fulfill this role?

As stated before, the tour guides are the people who have the most interaction with the tourists, and whose role is the most important in the memory construction process. This is mostly due to their training. Most of the guides I interviewed at both sites informed me that they had received training in order to perform their job. The only guides who did not mention any form of training, were those who had started working there from the moment the sites had been opened or shortly thereafter. However, all of the guides who had worked at the site since its inception mentioned that they were sent to work at the site by the Ministry of Culture, and it is therefore very likely that they have received training, or at least instructions by the Ministry on how to conduct tours and what information to present to the tourists (several guides mentioned that aspiring guides, both at the Killing Fields and the museum as well as independent guides still need to follow a course at the Ministry in order to receive a permit to conduct guided tours). In addition, they also mentioned that they used their own experiences with regards to Democratic Kampuchea during their tours. The newer guides are mostly younger and have no living memory of the Khmer Rouge regime, or were probably too young at that time to have a living memory of the period. These younger guides all mentioned some form of training, however, it seems that not all received the same amount and same form of training. The one element that they all mention is that they were educated by older guides, often by joining their tours and by listening to their stories and memories. In the words of one guide: 'and before I became a tour guide, I learned with the chief of the tour. Chief of the tour guide, he train me to walk around, he train me what I talk to the visitor'.²³ However, several guides at the Killing Fields also mentioned that they have talked to a former Khmer Rouge truck driver, Him Huy, who drove the victims from the Tuol Sleng prison to the Killing Fields. Some also mentioned training sessions which were offered by the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

²³ Author's interview on 22 April 2011 with Seyha, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

Kok-Thay Eng, deputy director at the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) confirmed that DC-Cam has been involved in the training and education of the staff at both the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields.²⁴ The guides have thus received training on what to say and who to convey their story to the visitors of the sites. However, the government, in particular the Ministry of Culture, has been strongly involved in this and it can be assumed that the training will also have been influenced by the political motives mentioned in the first section of this chapter. The tour guides are also restricted in what they can say by the sites themselves. The sites already present a particular story to the visitor, and since the tours revolve around the sites themselves and what is displayed there, the guides have to present this story to the visitors.

However, often the tours do not only consist of information about the history of the movement and the sites. Many of the tour guides also share some of their own memories and experiences. The tour guides who have living memories of the DK period often refer to these. Many of them share stories with the visitors of the hardships they experienced. Several of the younger guides, who were either too young to fully remember the period, or who were not yet born at that time, also share personal stories. Many of these stories refer to family members who were lost during this period, or to the cruelties their parents or siblings experienced. Many of these younger guides talk more freely about these memories, perhaps because they do not feel the emotional constraint of their own traumatic memories and can therefore distance themselves further from the stories they tell. The older guides share their own memories, but when asked more questions about their experiences, they often refuse to talk about it, stating that it is still too painful or difficult. However, they did mention that many tourists ask questions about the personal experiences of the guides, and that this is very hard for them. Because of these personal experiences, the tours are able to provide a more personal interpretation of the site and can also help to make the experience more meaningful, as it adds a personal element to the tours and

²⁴Author's interview on 8 April 2011 with Kok-Thay Eng, deputy director at DC-Cam.

therefore a face to the objects in the museum. The physical objects that are displayed at the sites are thus given a context, and are no longer just objects in a museum. The stories of the tour guides remind the visitors of the fact that what is displayed at the sites happened to real people. The tour guides also fulfill a more practical role, as both the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields lack elaborate signs. There are signs present at both sites, yet they only provide a minimal amount of information about Democratic Kampuchea. The tour guides can therefore also provide a more thorough understanding of the sites, as they explain more about the history of both Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge. However, many visitors still visit the sites without the help of a tour guide, as the company of a guide is not required and their presence is not always very clearly stated. I was also informed by several tour guides at the Killing Fields that there are plans to introduce audio tours at this site and the guides were not sure whether they would still be able to work as a tour guide once the audio tours were put in use. The role of tour guides may therefore change in the future.

In this chapter the development of the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek has been discussed. It has been argued that the development of these sites has been and continues to be strongly influenced by politics. The instruments used in the process of memory construction at these sites are aimed at proclaiming a strongly political message and the memory that is constructed at the sites is therefore also highly politicized. However, not only physical instruments are used at the sites to construct and convey memory. Tour guides play an important role at the sites because they are the people who are meant to explain the site and the history associated with it to visitors. However, these guides are similarly influenced by the political message, even though the tours do offer room for a more personal interpretation of the sites. The presence of these guides and their role in the process of memory construction raises several important questions. Who are these tour guides? What are their memories about Democratic Kampuchea and how do these relate to the memories conveyed at the museum? How do they experience their work at the sites and how does this influence their work? These

questions will be discussed in the next chapter, which deals specifically with the tour guides who are employed at both sites.

4. Interaction

In this chapter the different experiences and perceptions of the guides employed at the sites will be discussed in order to explore the interaction between the commercialized constructed memory and the

individual cultural memory of the Cambodians who work at the Killing Fields and the Tuol Sleng Museum. Important questions that will be answered are: to what extent do the Cambodians employed at the sites feel that their own experiences and memories regarding the Khmer Rouge are accurately represented? What impact does working at these sites have on them? What were their motivations to work here and how do they regard their own role in the process of memory construction? It must be stated that these questions cannot be answered with a straightforward answer. That is also not the intention of this chapter, nor is it the eventual aim of this thesis. This chapter will argue that despite the fact that all these tour guides have very different experiences and attitudes regarding their work at the sites, their individual cultural memories do not differ much from one another.

§4.1. Influence of working at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields

This section will explore how the tour guides experience their work and how their work at the sites has affected them, in order to assess how the work has influenced them. Several of the guides who work at the Tuol Sleng Museum, and one guide who works at the Killing Fields, have a living memory of what happened in Democratic Kampuchea. Many of them have lost family members and have suffered at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. Most of them started working at the museum shortly after the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh and therefore also shortly after they themselves had experienced many traumatic events. Several of the guides confessed that they had found this very difficult, as their work at the museum reminded them of the many things they had endured in this period. Mei is one of these people and she explained that:

‘The first time when I’m working here, I very sad. You know, I remember of my family. When I see the picture of the children working, my memory in the Pol Pot. I was 10 years old, I working look like the picture. You know it is very sad. The first time I working here, I cry all the time when the people ask me about the story. I make the tour the first year when I see the

picture of the people, I cannot, you know, so sad. I never forgot in the KR power. Now I better, but still, I never forgot too. But I feel better than before. When I speak with the people, I cannot cry. But in my mind still, but I cannot'.²⁵

All interviewees who were themselves survivors from the Khmer Rouge regime and who worked at the sites expressed that they had found it very difficult to work there, especially in the beginning. This must have been particularly so because the events themselves had only just happened, and they had had no time to reflect on what had happened at all, let alone had been able to begin reconciling themselves with what had happened. Working at the sites was therefore very confrontational and emotional, as not only the site itself was a constant reminder of the past, but also the work they conducted there forced them to constantly retell this traumatic period in their lives. In the words of Soriya: 'in the beginning, difficult, but now OK for me. Because long time ago. But when I start working here, I cry every day. But now enough time for me to cry'.²⁶

In addition, many of them were still unsure of the fate of relatives, such as Mei, who was already quoted above. She explained that 'the first time I came here, I came to find my family. When I see the pictures of the victims, I remember all my family, but I cannot find my family in this prison'.²⁷ Many of the guides I talked to mentioned relatives whose fate was still unknown, but who had gone missing during the Khmer Rouge regime. However, since many of the people working at the sites at that time experienced the same feelings, this also meant that their work at the museum was an opportunity to share them with other people who had had similar experiences. Their work evolved around the Khmer Rouge and their crimes, and interviewees said that during and after work, they would all cry when talking about the Khmer Rouge, but they would also talk to each other about the family members they had lost and about what happened to them during the period between 1975 and early 1979.

²⁵ Author's interview on 3 May 2011 with Mei, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

²⁶ Author's interview on 20 April 2011 with Soriya, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

²⁷ Author's interview on 3 May 2011 with Mei, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum

Not only guides with a living memory of the genocide experience emotional difficulties while working at the sites. The younger guides also shared that they had found their work very emotional, particularly in the beginning. Some of them did not only find it difficult because they had to deal with such an emotional subject, but also because the subject matter they were confronted with shocked them:

‘At first I feel so shocked. Actually, I cannot speak like this. But I feel a bit trained to work with very bad history, unbelievable history that the Khmer killed their own people. So first I feel sad, so sad, and later on I feel a bit happy. Happy to share all the history in this museum, to share all the past to the visitor. I’m happy. Happy to be here. Happy to meet a lot of people, happy to share all the history to many other people. Not only foreigner, but also Khmer, everyone. Anyone, not everyone but those who are interested in it, I would try my best to explain them, to be very detailed. But we also have some visitor, not all of them, some of them, while they are walking with me, they seem not to focus on it, so I don’t know. Not only foreigner, but also Cambodian people, when walking with me I’m like a teacher to someone. And if they don’t listen to me, we have no encouragement. Those people encourage you to work, to do the tour. When sometimes with the tribunal and the people from the country come to visit the museum, and while I was doing the tour with those people and they listen to me in a big group, around 40, 50, sometimes 100 people. If they focus on what I’m saying, I’m really, really happy. I feel a bit tired, but also, I feel, I don’t know what it come from, the power, while I see the people listen to me and they seem to be mention on it, so I feel very happy. And sometimes when I first start to do the work to do the tour with those people, people from the other side, many of the people cry with me. In one building, remain only 5 or

10 people walk with me. It's different, it's hard. However, I try to do my best to explain them.

Even if they don't focus on it or something, but I try'.²⁸

The work is thus not only emotionally challenging for the guides because of their own experiences and emotions, but also because they are confronted with other people's memories and emotions on a daily basis. Both sites see many Cambodian visitors, particularly during the weekends and holidays and during the ECCC tours²⁹. When the guides conduct tours for Cambodians who also have a living memory of the Khmer Rouge regime, or for people who have lost family members during this time, they are also confronted with the emotions and stories of the people who they guide. It can be even more difficult when visitors are confronted with the pictures of their family members at the Tuol Sleng Museum: 'it's difficult in a way, you know, when you meet the survivors or the family members of those people who are on the photos, it can make tears fall down in a way. I just met a woman who pointed at the photo of her lost mother, so yeah, it's very sad'.³⁰

If one thing can be concluded about how the tour guides experience their work, it is that many of them find it emotionally difficult. However, many of them also point out that it was particularly difficult in the beginning, but that they eventually got used to it. For some guides, especially those with a living memory of Democratic Kampuchea, it took several years to be able to work at the sites without experiencing severe emotional difficulties, even though the work continues to make them sad. For many of the younger guides, it did not take as much time, perhaps because they were not confronted with their own memories. However, at the same time the sites offered an opportunity to the guides with a living memory to share their experiences with others, and to place their own experiences in the larger

²⁸ Author's interview on 22 April 2011 with Seyha, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

²⁹ ECCC tours are tours organized by DC-Cam that Cambodians to the ECCC tribunal, the Killing Fields and the Tuol Sleng Museum. The tours are designed not only to educate people about the genocide, but also to help Cambodians place their own personal stories about the genocide in the larger context of what happened (Author's interview on 8 April 2011 with Kok-Thay, deputy director at DC-Cam).

³⁰ Author's interview on 27 April 2011 with Vaha, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

historical context (as the ECCC tours aim to do today), which may have offered some form of explanation for why these things happened. Yet the question remains, why did the tour guides decide to work at these sites, if working there was such an emotional burden for them?

§4.2. Motivations

As the previous section has shown, many guides experienced emotional difficulties because of their work at the dark tourism sites, whether that is because they were forced to relive their own traumatic experiences, or because of the horrifying subject matter they have to work with every day. Even for many casual visitors, a visit to either of these sites is often an emotional experience, as one is constantly confronted with a dark side of mankind and with so much death and destruction (Hughes 2006). The questions therefore arises what motivated these guides to work at these sites. It would be too simple to state that this section provides a clear cut answer to this question, as different people were interviewed and these people all have their own reasons, or better yet, their own combination of reasons to seek employment at either the Tuol Sleng Museum or the Killing Fields. This diversity however will be explored in this section.

It was mentioned by several interviewees that the museum experienced many difficulties in finding staff, in particular staff members that were able to speak other languages, such as English. Sometimes this was said referred to directly, such as by Bourey, who said that

‘ They [other tour guides] know not much about this, and they don’t know about this.

Because you see, no one want to work in this museum. Difficulty to find a tour guide. Because it is a sad place for them. They don’t want to work. They don’t want to see, they don’t want to work. They want to work you know with the happy place’.³¹

³¹ Author’s interview on 8 March 2011, with Bourey, tour guide at Tuol Sleng.

Kok-Thay Eng, who works for DC-Cam, provided an additional explanation for the difficulties the Killing Fields and the Tuol Sleng Museum experience in finding suitable staff. He suggests that the cultural belief in Cambodia regarding wandering spirits who haunt places where a lot of killings have occurred means that very few Cambodians are willing to work at these two sites, as many violent deaths have occurred there. Visiting such a site, let alone working there on a daily basis, is said to bring bad luck. Stories of hauntings at both sites have probably confirmed people's belief that these sites are potentially dangerous places to work at.³² This subject will be further discussed in the next chapter, which deals specifically with this issue.

Several other guides referred to the museum's problems with finding suitable guides by suggesting that the reason why they were able to find employment here, was that the museum always had a shortage of guides, in particular guides who spoke English well enough to conduct guided tours. This shortage of guides, together with the difficulty of finding capable staff is also one of the most important reasons why people have found employment at both sites. Two different groups can be differentiated within this group of guides. The first group consists largely of guides who started working at the sites shortly after it was opened, or even while it was being prepared for opening. These guides were often sent to work at their respective site by the Ministry of Culture. Bourey explains his reasons for working at the Tuol Sleng Museum as follows:

'First, I don't want to work. I want to finish my study at the faculty of medicine. You know, I study, after I finish my study, I will continue my study at university of medicine. It is my favorite. But because I have no money, I need the money and I must work for the government for the salary. And then you know, they order me to work in this place. First, I want to escape from my job, I think, why I kill my future here, I don't want to kill my future here. I don't want

³² Author's interview on 8 April 2011, with Kok-Thay Eng, deputy director at DC-Cam.

to work. When I work for the salary, I just read the document [in the Tuol Sleng archives], so I interest about this. So I just work work work until right now'³³

While Soriya explains that 'before I work in the Ministry of Culture, but they send me to here. Before, I just start clean the blood on the floor, prepare the document and picture every day, so I want to change my job, because as a tour guide, I can earn some money. I have to do that'.³⁴ This immediately points to a second important motivator to work at both sites, namely money. Many guides I spoke to mentioned that unemployment is a big problem in Cambodia³⁵ and that this was the main reason why they were unable to find employment in their desired field. However, since the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields were looking for new staff, in particular English speaking staff members, they decided to find employment there, in order to be able to make a living. Seyha is one of these people who mentioned this as his main reason to work at the Tuol Sleng Museum:

' Actually, I was studying while I was in university. I took archeology. And I wanted to do the research, but I was not willing to do this too at first. But the thing different from what I want, from my goal, I want to be an archeologist. But the thing is, I got a chance to work here, and also, my family need some finance. So I have a chance to work, to earn money, so I decide to work here. It's all about the story, but archeologist study a very long history, but here, it is not too long ago, around 30 years. For me thesis, I took prehistoric memory. I took many prehistoric excavation, many times, so I have a knowledge related to those. My topic was to preserve the armed tools from the past, from the prehistoric start. But after I graduate, it's different, it's hard. Most of Cambodian people, not only me, don't achieve their goal. They want to do the job from their skill in university, but the thing is different. If they wait for the

³³ Author's interview on 8 March 2011 with Bourey, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

³⁴ Author's interview on 20 April 2011 with Soriya, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

³⁵ The World Bank mentions an unemployment rate of 1.7%³⁵ of the total work force in 2001 (World Bank Data 2011)

job with their skill, they do not have a chance to work. Too narrow market work, too narrow. Because we have many other people who got Bachelor or something who are trying to work. They have a chance to work, they do not care if relevant to their skill or not. It's just to work at first and then we can choose it later on'.³⁶

His story is exemplary for the story that was told many other tour guides. Many of them had studied at university, however, after they had finished their studies, there was no work available in the field they had been trained for. Some of them had already had other jobs, such as Raksmei, who explained that he had been an English teacher before he started working at the Killing Fields:

'Before I was a teacher of English. After that my school was bankrupt, after that I try to find another job and after that this place they need the staff to work here, that's why I apply to work here. ... And one day I want to become a guide, because I think that it was very important for me to describe everything that happened in Cambodia, especially this place to Cambodian people or foreigner, because I want to share my knowledge and the history like this with other people. And especially because I meet a lot of people and I know a lot of the country also'.³⁷

As becomes clear from this quote, and from several previous quotes, some guides have not started out at either of the sites as tour guides. Some of them started in different positions, for example as cleaners, guards, in the Tuol Sleng archives or, as Raksmei did, as ticket sellers. In fact, only a few of the guides I spoke to started out as tour guides. This is probably due to the fact that many of them are looking for a source of income and therefore do not specifically look for the job of tour guide. However, if they already spoke English, or were learning English while they were already employed at the site, they were offered the job of tour guide if there was a demand for one. However, many of the guides did express the wish to eventually find another job. This is probably due to the fact that many of them are trained to

³⁶ Author's interview on 22 April 2011 with Seyha, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

³⁷ Author's interview on 26 April 2011 with Raksmei, tour guide at the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek.

work in different work fields and/or have chosen to work at the sites because there were no other options available to them.

Besides high unemployment rates, younger tour guides state several other reasons for their decision to work at the dark tourism sites. Many of them mention family members who have also found employment at the sites, most often a father or sibling, such as Veha, a young man who works at Tuol Sleng, who also mentions that this is a very common phenomenon in Cambodian culture and who alludes to the family pressure some of the younger guides who follow in their family members' footsteps have faced:

'My father was a former staff here, and it's a kind of family thing you know. The culture in Cambodia is your father works for that, so you're child is going to that place too. It's what you say, follow your father or mother's footsteps, or whatever. In fact before I work for the private sector in university, I was responsible for the new student, organizing the curriculum, but it was in Battambang province and then I move to Phnom Penh and I pass examination and work for this place. And I think I want to go somewhere else, besides this place. But I find this interesting you know, working as a tourist guide. Meeting different people from different countries, telling story of what happened in my country to the outside world, that's what I like. So I just follow my father's footstep with my sister as well. It's a family business you know. It was my mother who made me to come here anyway. I got no choice because my mother order me to do that. She's the queen of the family, so we can't reject her'.³⁸

Besides a family legacy, Veha also mentions another reason for employment at a dark tourism sites that is mentioned by many young guides: the interaction with tourists and the opportunity to meet and talk to people from different parts of the world, both to talk to them about Cambodia and its history, but

³⁸ Author's interview on 27 April 2011 with Veha, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

also the opportunity to simply talk and meet people from a different culture. In addition, several younger tour guides also said that the interaction with tourists provided them with another valuable opportunity, namely the chance to practice and improve their English, as many of them also said that they had studied English either in school or at university. Many of them find it very important to improve their English, as this is considered a very valuable skill to have, in particular because the tourism industry is often considered to be a good source of income.

However, not all motivations mentioned by the tour guides were of a material nature. It is true that having a reliable source of income is an important reason for seeking employment at the sites; however, the interviewees also commonly expressed a desire to understand their history. All of them mentioned that they did not understand why Pol Pot³⁹ had committed all these crimes. Why did he mostly target the people who were highly educated? Why did he want to bring Cambodia back to 'year zero'? But most of all, why did he kill his own people? They hoped that by they would find answers to these questions while working at the sites. That their work at the sites would provide them with a deeper understanding of not only what happened, but also why it happened, and how it was made possible that it happened in their own country. Unfortunately, they all informed me that they have not found the answers to these questions while working at the sites. All of them said that they still could not understand why this had happened in Cambodia and that the only explanation they could think of was that Pol Pot must have been crazy.

It can be concluded that the guides all of have different reasons to work at the sites. Many of them are related to such issues as poverty and unemployment. However, at the same time, all tour guides also expressed the desire to find answers. To understand how it was possible that genocide occurred in Cambodia. Why the guides decided to work at the sites and how they experience their work

³⁹The guides all referred to Pol Pot when talking about who committed the crimes. Why did Pol Pot commit the crimes? What did Pol Pot want? Pol Pot wanted to kill all the people in Cambodia, etc. This has been previously discussed in chapter three.

has thus been discussed. Yet the question remains, how do the cultural memory constructed at the site and the individual cultural memories interact? This interaction can be explored now that the attitudes of the tour guides towards their work at the site has been discussed.

§4.3. The interaction of cultural memories

At the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields work both guides who have a living memory of the genocide, and guides who do not. However, as has been discussed in the theoretical framework, cultural memory is not restricted to living memory. It can therefore be said that the guides who have not themselves experienced the Khmer Rouge regime, still have a memory of that period in Cambodian history, in the form of cultural memory. In this respect however, it is interesting to note that during the interviews it was noted several times that many younger Cambodians know very little of the genocide. Education about the genocide has been a challenging subject in Cambodian schools. During the 1980's and early 1990's, very little attention was paid to the genocide and the Khmer Rouge regime, and what was mentioned about the Khmer Rouge was strongly influenced by the continuing civil war. Children were taught that Khmer Rouge members were cruel and evil people who ate human flesh and had red eyes.⁴⁰ Chandler (2008:356) states that during the 1990's and early 2000's, there was very little information available about Democratic Kampuchea in school books, it was hardly mentioned on radio and television and that there was still no university course that studies this period in Cambodian history in detail. Therefore, the most important source of information for children and youngsters was and most likely still is their parents and family members. However, during interviews I learned that the extent to which parents inform their children about this period differs greatly. During an interview with Savina Sirik and Sayana Ser, who both work at DC-Cam, I was told that

⁴⁰ Author's interview on 8 April 2011 with Kok-Thay Eng, deputy director at DC-Cam.

‘ Our students, they didn’t know much of it. They just don’t care. They said maybe it’s a fiction or maybe it’s not true. Something like that. It’s not a deep education for them, you know, come and go. But the parents, maybe also they have too much and they don’t want to talk about it, actually. They express it during daily life, but it’s not in the way of education, like proper education’. ⁴¹

Later on in the interview it was explained more clearly what was meant by the expressions in daily life by the parents:

‘ My parents talk about it sometimes when we do something wrong and she doesn’t want us to do it. It’s kind of a preventing to do something wrong, something like that... And mostly it’s dealing with the starvation. Like when we are eating rice and wasting food, she would say, ‘ ah, during the Khmer rouge you cannot have even one grain of rice’ , it was just to scare us’ .⁴²

And:

‘ They imply it [stories about life under the Khmer Rouge], but not really talk like come and sit and tell like a story, like a bedtime story. Just infiltrate it in the daily life, talking speaking. But not really formal or anything’ .⁴³

The tour guides who were interviewed and who themselves did not have a living memory of the genocide also presented different views on how much their parents had told them. Most of them mentioned that their parents told them about what had happened to them, in particular if close family members had died during that period. Some of their parents even took them to the Killing Fields or the Tuol Sleng Museum. These guides also repeatedly mentioned that after they had started working at the dark tourism site, they had wanted to learn more about Democratic Kampuchea and that they had

⁴¹ Author’s interview on 25 April 2011 with Savina Sirik and Sayana Ser, staff members at DC-Cam.

⁴² Author’s interview on 25 April 2011 with Savina Sirik and Sayana Ser, staff members at DC-Cam.

⁴³ Author’s interview on 25 April 2011 with Savina Sirik and Sayana Ser, staff members at DC-Cam.

asked for more information from family members or from people in their village. These guides often mentioned stories and experiences of family members during their tours. However, not all tour guides gave this reaction. Some of them mentioned that their parents refused to visit the Killing Fields or the Tuol Sleng Museum and were also not very happy with the fact that their child had found employment and either of these sites. These guides also did not present experiences and stories from family members like the other tour guides did.

Many tour guides I spoke to expressed their happiness that they were able to tell people, both foreigners and Cambodians, about what happened in their country. They explained that while the work was difficult for them at first they began to realize that their work was important and that they helped to preserve what had happened in Cambodia, and that they help to make sure that people will never forget the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge. Many of them stress the importance of remembering the events, because if people do not remember, it may happen again. Even though many of them expressed their initial desire to forget what happened, many of them said that later they came to understand that this must not happen, and that it is therefore important to preserve the evidence and to tell the history of the Khmer Rouge, so the younger generation will also learn from this. They expressed the hope that this would help prevent something similar from happening again, especially since many inequalities still exist in the country. The guides therefore consider informing all Cambodians about what happened in Democratic Kampuchea as an important part of their work.

However, educating the younger generation is not the only important task the guides mentioned. Several of the older guides expressed that many people in Cambodia were very displeased with the fact that many perpetrators were able to live normal lives and that almost all former Khmer Rouge members had been given amnesty by the government. Many of the younger guides however, mentioned that they found it very important that former Khmer Rouge cadres were forgiven and that they also consider it part of the task of the site, and their work at the site, to propagate this message:

‘That’s why this history site is very important for the young generation to remember, and all the students they have been told what happened, actually they teach not to take revenge. But to find solution and to stop it from repeat again. Because if there’s no forgiven, how many more people will be executed? How many children or young people have to start over again from the beginning? Almost 4 year that Pol Pot kill all the high educated people in Cambodia and destroy all the, how do you say, resources? So the education, if there’s no education and no forgiven, it can be repeated, so that’s very important. So that’s why this evidence is so important, who it’s important to remember. That’s why every Cambodian who have experienced, they can tell how they were affected, but no one could explain well what for. Why someone educate himself can have so many people work for him with genocide? And also it has happened to own people, so this is sad for own people. That’s why some point Cambodian try to move on, some point we try to remember. Sometime we need to move on, to forgive them. Because if there is no forgiven, there’s another killing. And sometime we need to remember, we need the evidence to remember and educate the Cambodian and former soldier not to do that, not to repeat that history again’.⁴⁴

Many other guides also mentioned this. Some also mentioned that revenge on former Khmer Rouge soldiers is still a problem in Khmer Rouge society, and Bourey explained that many of these former soldiers have therefore moved to other parts of the country, where their past is not known⁴⁵ This is perfectly in line with the current government policy, and some of the interviewees also refer to this. One even said that he wishes to be like the government, in that he wants to be as forgiving and that he wants to let go of his anger. However, many of the older guides do express that they find this difficult. This also points to a possible division between older and younger guides at both sites. None of the

⁴⁴ Author’s interview on 11 April 2011 with Ratanak, tour guide at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek.

⁴⁵ Author’s interview on 8 March 2011 with Bourey, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

younger guides referred to this, however, several of the guides with a living memory of the genocide mentioned that they felt that the younger guides had no real idea of what they were talking about, because they had not experienced it themselves and therefore could not understand what the genocide had actually meant to those people who were alive at that time. Some of them even questioned the validity of such young tour guides, and said that the young guides had no idea what they were talking about.

With regards to the international tourists, many of the guides expressed that they considered it very important to inform them of what happened in Cambodia at that particular time in history. Lastly, some tour guides said that they wanted to explain more about the history of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia because many international visitors had misconceptions about what this history entails. One of them is Ratanak, who explained to me that:

‘I have also tried to meet many people who can share and talk. Because I also want to tell the international that, not all Khmer people is evil like him. Just only that group. That’s also why we sometimes find it sad story that when they talk about Khmer Rouge, it’s different from Khmer people. The Khmer is a race, the Cambodian race is Khmer, but it mean the kind of group of those killer. That’s why we call them Khmer Rouge. But some people don’t understand and sometimes they call the other people Khmer Rouge. This is how that I feel so horrible, that I also Khmer, how come this name still exists? But also I have more time here to explain that. Not all Khmer bad, just only these evil men that did this’.⁴⁶

This is something that other guides also mentioned. In addition, they hope that they can help other people understand what has happened during the reign of the Khmer Rouge, especially because they feel that foreigners can never really understand what has happened through the books that they read or

⁴⁶ Author’s interview on 11 April 2011 with Ratanak, tour guide at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek.

what they see on television. Several guides expressed the opinion that in order to really learn something about the Khmer Rouge, one must talk to Cambodians and they therefore considered it their task to inform international visitors as well as possible about Cambodian history.

While explaining the history of Democratic Kampuchea and the period afterwards, the guides all mostly follow the story that has been described in chapter three. The only addition to this narrative is the personal stories that some tour guides share with the visitors. However, these stories are also in concordance with the narrative, as they all refer to the horrible conditions people had to live in during that time. The tour guides all expressed the idea that the course of events that is being propagated at the sites is indeed in concordance with reality at that time. The individual cultural memories thus do not significantly differ from the cultural memory that is constructed at the site. This is in agreement with Ledgerwood's statement that the story that is presented at Tuol Sleng corresponds to how people remember that period, certainly with "their worst memories of the worst times" (1997: 95).

However, the cultural memory of the guides who themselves have a living memory of the events does differ on one issue, namely the issue of responsibility of the perpetrators. Many of them raise objections against the idea that only a handful of people are held responsible for the genocide. They raise the point that many perpetrators do not have to face the consequences of their cruel actions and are able to live normal lives. Some also doubt that the Khmer Rouge leaders who are brought before the tribunal are brought to justice, as even their life in prison is better than that of many ordinary Cambodians. This point is not raised by the younger guides, and it could be argued that their individual cultural memories are therefore more in agreement with the constructed cultural memory at the sites. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that they were raised with this narrative of the Khmer Rouge, as well as with this narrative about forgiveness and amnesty. In addition, since they themselves did not experience the genocide, they may also feel less of the anger, sadness and trauma that the older guides may still feel. However, one important thing has to be noted. The guides do not express a significantly

different cultural memory, and they do seem to largely agree with the story that is presented at the sites. It is not very likely that they will have a significantly different view on for example, the genocide itself, as the memories of the older guides, as well as the memories of family members relayed by the younger guides seem to largely agree with this story. However, it is difficult to assess their true feelings regarding the more politically sensitive parts of the narratives, such as perpetrator responsibility and accountability for the genocide. Many of the older guides state they are not willing to discuss politics in any way, and further questions about their attitudes towards the current government's policies regarding the tribunal or amnesties are often not answered. One guide explained her reasons for this: 'I only talk about what happened here, I don't talk about the political. Very difficult talking political in my country. So for me I don't care, they are in the government, so very difficult'.⁴⁷ Even though many of them did voice their opinion on perpetrators responsibility, it is very likely that not all has been said on this subject or on other politically sensitive subjects that came up during the tours or interviews.

This chapter has discussed several topics related to the interaction between the individual cultural memories of the tour guides and the cultural memory that is constructed at the site. It has been argued that even though the tour guides all have very different reasons to work at the sites, they still have quite similar experiences while working there. In addition, their individual cultural memories do not differ greatly from each other or from the cultural memory that is constructed at the sites. It has already been mentioned in this chapter that one of the reasons why both sites have difficulties finding staff members is the cultural belief in spirits. Both memorial sites, but in particular the Killing Fields, incorporate the bones of the deceased in their displays, while this is against traditional Cambodian funerary practices. This particular part of the construction of memory in Cambodia is therefore in contradiction with a cultural model that is prevalent in Cambodian society. In addition, it also affects the people who work and visit the sites. The next chapter will discuss these issues further.

⁴⁷ Author's interview on 20 April 2011 with Soriya, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

5. Haunting memories

Cambodia is a fairly homogenous country when it comes religion, as most people are Buddhist. The form of Buddhism that predominates in Cambodia is Theravada Buddhism, literally the Teaching of the Elders, which is prevalent in most of Southeast Asia (Prebish and Keown 2006: 145-146). However, in many Southeast Asian countries, Theravada Buddhism has long existed alongside local beliefs in spirits and animistic practices (Prebish and Keown 2006: 161). This is definitely true for Cambodia. This belief in spirits will be the focus of this chapter. It will be argued that the belief in spirits that continue to haunt the site of their death is a cultural model that is prevalent in Cambodia and that is known to all the people who were interviewed for this thesis. It is also particularly relevant to the interviewees, as they all work at sites where many people were killed. However, there exists considerable diversity in how people interpret this cultural model and in the role this model plays in their daily lives. At the same time, this cultural model is also relevant to the construction of memory at the sites, as some of the displays seem to ignore the existence and potential importance of the sites.

§5.1. The belief in spirits

In Cambodia, Buddhism exists alongside a belief in spirits, most importantly a belief in spirits of nature, or *neak ta*, and the spirits of ancestors. These spirit cults existed in Cambodia long before the arrival of Buddhism. Harris states that the *neak ta* can be divided into three categories: *neak ta* who are associated with natural phenomena, such as mountains, rivers or forests, ancestral spirits and *neak ta* that are derived from Brahmanical gods and mythical heroes. However, the world a *neak ta* is not a static place, new *neak ta* can be created, and even though many spirits of nature are associated with a

particular location, they can choose to change, or be asked to change, their 'place of residence'. *Neak ta* can be both benevolent and malevolent, and it is therefore important to appease them, as they can also bring (severe) harm to humans (2005: 53). While conducting my interviews, I realized that Cambodians hold many different opinions on what *neak ta* are. Several people explained to me that *neak ta* are very different from ancestral spirits. One interviewee explained to me what he thinks *neak ta* are:

'It is a long story. Before the Cambodian have, from the early stage, we do not have religion. We have only the belief in ghosts. And *neak ta* is because people believe in one thing. *Neak ta* can have different shape. *Neak ta* can have human shape, *neak ta* can be only the stone under the tree, *neak ta* can be other thing. Mostly in the forest or under the tree which people believe will be the most powerful. And they pray for something and they succeed for what they pray, so they believe in *neak ta*. It is not a Buddhist or Brahmanism, it was not like that, only the belief of the people, mostly in ethnic people. And nowadays, Cambodian people still believe in *neak ta*. You can see, have you ever been to Sihanoukville? In the middle of the road from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville, the bus will stop for one place. Not for the bus station, but a place where many people stop for the incense, pray, and have the water to wash their face. So that area, they believe they have the *neak ta*. The most powerful *neak ta*. And it is not called *neak ta*, *neak ta* refers to mere ghosts, we call Yeay Mao. Yeay means grandmother, Mao is her name. So we believe that to make our trip safely, we have to pray to Yeay Mao. Not to make big deal, just to stop and pray and some incense and then go. And some people, I do not know it, but I still believe in it, some people, they pass by and they say, I wait until I go back. They did not stop while they were going, they said, we stop when we go back. But they didn't reach their goal, they have an accident on their way to Sihanoukville. We believe that, that's why we pray for them. We believe in the natural power. Sometimes you

will see in the forest the small wooden structure and iron sheet and they put on it little stone, it is home for the *neak ta*'.⁴⁸

When he was asked whether ancestor spirits were also *neak ta*, he replied: 'It's different. Ancestor is different from *neak ta*'.⁴⁹ These two anecdotes are significant because mention several important beliefs about spirits. The first one being that *neak ta* can be dangerous if they are not treated well. The right ceremonies and rituals are therefore necessary in order to appease them and to pass safely through their realm. Secondly, that *neak ta* are a part of the lives of many Cambodians and that many Cambodians take the necessary precautions to appease them (another sign of this is the fact that many Cambodians wear amulets that are supposed to protect them against evil spirits).

Contrary to Harris (2005: 53), Seyha differentiates between *neak ta* and ancestor spirits, stating that they are two different things. However, at the same time he does mention the story of one particular *neak ta*, Yeay Mao. When asked, he explained that Yeay Mao is a *neak ta*, but that she used to be human. It is therefore possible for human spirits to become *neak ta*. It is probable that the difference between ancestor spirits and *neak ta* of human origin is that the *neak ta* are often bound to a specific place and location, while ancestor spirits are not and that they also require different ceremonies in order to appease them. However, at the same time it would also be safe to say that for many Cambodians, the dividing line between ancestor spirits and *neak ta* is not clear, in particular because it appears that human spirits can also turn into *neak ta* over time.

However, nature spirits are not the only spirits that need to be appeased. It is a common belief in Cambodia that the spirits of the deceased can also pose a threat to the living. This is particularly the case if the person had died the 'wrong' kind of death. Anusaranasasanakiarti and Keyes mention that there are several types of death, namely ordinary death, sudden death, death in childbirth and death

⁴⁸ Interview with Seyha, Tuol Sleng Museum, 22-04-2011.

⁴⁹ Interview with Seyha, Tuol Sleng Museum, 22-04-2011.

caused by witchcraft. The souls of people who have died a sudden death are very problematic, as they will not be reborn as other souls will be. They will continue to haunt the place where they died, and they can cause harm to the people who visit these places, causing bad luck or sickness and possibly even death (1980:5). Kok-Thay Eng confirmed that this belief also exists in Cambodia when he said:

‘There is a cultural belief, the belief that when you go to a place where there was a lot of killing, a lot of death, it can bring you bad luck. It can bring you bad luck means that after you go there, you go back and you do many things and you get failure. You’re not successful, whether in your business, in your learning, or in your relationship with your spouse or with your neighbors and family members’.⁵⁰

Hughes (2006: 113) and Chandler (2008: 361) both assert that many Cambodians therefore consider a visit to the Killing Fields a dangerous undertaking, as the spirits that still reside there may cause great harm to them. They both state that the Killing Fields are considered a place where ghosts are kept alive, because of the display of the bones and the fact that the deceased have not received the proper funerary rites. Even though they only mention the Killing Fields, it seems that the same would also apply to the Tuol Sleng Museum, as many people also died a violent and sudden death at this location, and bones are also displayed here, most notably in Building D, which used to house the map of skulls, but now displays skulls in a forensic exhibition. Many guides mention the existence of ghosts at the museum, either because they experienced this themselves, or because they have heard about it from someone else. This will be discussed further in §5.3.

The idea that spirits may continue to haunt a place, as well as their potential to cause bad luck, mean that many Cambodians believe that the proper funerary rites need to be performed. In addition, the proper rituals must also be performed, even long after one’s death, in order to make sure that the

⁵⁰ Author’s interview on 8 April 2011 with Kok-Thay Eng, deputy director at DC-Cam.

spirits of the dead, in particular those of family members and ancestors, are doing well in the afterlife and are given the opportunity to be reborn. In Cambodia, it is customary to cremate the body of the dead, as was confirmed by several of the people who were interviewed.⁵¹ The funerary rites were described as follows by one interviewee:

‘I know from my ancestor and my parents and my grandparents, actually we did the cremation. When someone dies in the family, the body were taken to cremation. I also noted that after cremation the ashes and piece of bone were put in the urn and after that the urn was sent to the *stupa*. So I reckon because from this individual, the family could recognize whose bone is that?’⁵²

He also addressed why the memorial *stupa* at the Killing Fields displayed the bones, and how this was different from customary funerary rites:

‘But I think that with this so many Cambodian that nobody could recognize, that’s why they been preserve like this. And also the Cambodian government said that his is very important evidence, because at the moment the court is in process. So I hope that after the process finish, the Cambodians have more idea of what to do with this, but I’m not sure. But actually the *stupa* is a place where everybody put the bone inside. It’s just different that normally the body were cremate first and the pieces of bone were put inside, but this is the whole body in there. Actually, the rest of the body is at the top’.⁵³

This quotation raised two interesting points. The first point is that the preservation of the bodies in the memorial *stupa* is different from the customary funerary rites. In fact, many Cambodians consider this

⁵¹ However, one interviewee also mentioned that among Chinese Khmer, it was customary to bury the dead, instead of cremating them. He explained that this was customary for them because they followed a different form of Buddhism, while cremation is customary for Theravada Buddhists.

⁵² Author’s interview on 11 April 2011 with Ratanak, tour guide at the Killing Fields.

⁵³ Author’s interview on 11 April 2011 with Ratanak, tour guide at the Killing Fields.

to be a sign of disrespect towards the victims, and claim that the display of the bones and the denial of the proper funerary rites means that the souls of the victims will not be able to proceed to the afterlife and therefore also not be able to be reborn.⁵⁴ At the same time, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), Cambodia's ruling party, is in favor of preserving the bones, at least until the end of the ECCC tribunal has been concluded, as the bones are supposed to serve as evidence of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. Even the king of Cambodia, King Sihanouk, was involved, at first requesting the cremation of the remains and later withdrawing that request (Hughes 2003: 185-188, Ledgerwood 1997: 94). The guides working at the Killing Fields have differing opinions about whether or not the bones should be preserved. Several of them state that it is very important to preserve the bones, as they serve as evidence of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge that is plain for everyone to see. They expressed their concern that if the bones would be cremated, people, both foreigners and the younger generation in Cambodia, may no longer believe that the genocide actually happened. Some of them said that they believed that the spirits had already found rest due to all the prayers and offerings that were offered to them, while others stated that even though the spirits would not be able to be reborn again, it was more important that the deeds of the Khmer Rouge would not be forgotten.

The second point raised by the quotation is that the bodies at the Killing Fields (and those that were found at Tuol Sleng), have not been and in all likelihood, will not be, identified. It is not only known whose body belongs to who, but in many cases it is also unknown who was actually killed there (with the exception of those people whose pictures were found in the Tuol Sleng archives or whose names were mentioned in documents at Tuol Sleng prison). This raises the question whether it is necessary to know the identity of the deceased in order to perform the proper rituals for this person, for example during prayer or when giving offerings. However, several guides explained that this is not necessary. Although it is very important to pray for the souls of the deceased, it is not necessary to pray at the

⁵⁴ This argument is also often raised by the opposition parties in the Cambodian government.

location where they died or where their ashes have been placed. Family members can address their loved ones in prayer and while presenting offerings by mentioning their name while performing these rituals. However, in order to do this, it is important to know whether someone is alive or dead, as one cannot pray for someone if one does not know that that person has passed away. Since so many years have passed since the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, it is likely that this is not a problem, even without identification of the bodies.

§5.2. Ceremonies

Since many people died at both the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek, making offerings and praying for the dead is very important at these places. These prayers and offerings serve several purposes. They are needed in order to appease the spirits and to make sure that they will not become angry and cause harm to the living, They are also necessary in order to aid the spirits in the afterlife, to make sure that their afterlife will be pleasant and without suffering and to make sure that they will not be hungry or thirsty. Also, they can help with the process of reincarnation, as the prayers may help ensure that the soul will be reborn in a good life. Besides the offerings that are brought on a regular, in the case of the Killing Fields daily, basis, both sites are the location of annual ceremonies on important dates, mostly Buddhist holidays. The most important of these holidays are Khmer New Year, the *Phchum Ben* Festival, the monthly Buddhist fast days and the 20th of May, also known as the Day of Anger. Ceremonies during which monks bring offerings and offer prayers to the souls of the deceased are held at the Killing Fields and the museum on these days.

Phchum Ben festival, or the Festival of the Ancestors, is usually held in September/October and lasts fifteen days. It is believed that the gates of hell are opened. Therefore, spirits will be more active during that time. It is believed that these spirits are hungry, and it is therefore important that they are provided with offerings. Food and drink is brought to the monks, who serve as intermediaries between

the people and the spirits (Hughes 2006: 123-124). However, bringing offerings to the spirits during this time is different from offerings on other days. One guide explained the festival thoroughly:

‘ On *Phchum Ben* day, we believe that ghosts will be released from the hell to go to find their old family, to their relatives, to receive food. So this is why on *Phchum Ben* days, the religious ceremony, many of the people made the food, made the drink, provide the water, money or something to the monk. The same idea. For the ghosts. Normally you can see the beggar or something on the road, it was like that. The ghosts also like those. The ghosts that have no relative that make an offering to them. First you pray for your family and then for the rest you can call for the other to have the food. But in *Phchum Ben* day we believe that the ghosts could not eat the other food. Only the own family food. That’s why people take the food to the monk. At least we go to 7 pagoda on this *Phchum Ben* in September and October. It lasts 15 days. So you can go to at least 7 pagodas. Some believe the ghosts of our relative and ancestor will go and find the food in each pagoda and if they didn’t find anything. There is food, but they cannot eat the other food, beside their family’.⁵⁵

During other days, any Buddhist can give offerings and prayers to the dead, regardless whether they are family members or not. Prayers from family members are preferable though, because these prayers reach the dead faster, as do their offerings. Prayers and offerings offered by other people are less powerful, and therefore more of these are needed in order to achieve the same effect. However, during the *Phchum Ben* festival, spirits will only be able to accept the offerings and prayers of their family members. During this festival, there are also gatherings at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek, even though this is not an official *wat* or pagoda. According to Hughes “Survivors embrace Choeung Ek Memorial *Stupa* as a proxy location for the passing of merit to the spirits of their deceased or missing relatives. For

⁵⁵ Author’s interview on 22 April 2011 with Seyha, guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

such people, the true resting place of their relatives remains unknown. In this way, Choeung Ek allows for the performance of rites for spirits who lack a proper place of death” (2000: 125).

The 20th of May, or the Day of Anger, is a very different day. This day, which is now sometimes also described as a memorial day, originated as a day during which the hate towards the Khmer Rouge was kept alive. During this day, survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime would recall stories of their suffering and the figures of Pol Pot and other important Khmer Rouge leaders would be burned. The central message of these days was that the PRK, with the help of the Vietnamese, had liberated the country from the Khmer Rouge. The legitimacy of the PRK government was thus confirmed, and support for the ongoing war against the civil war was assured (Chandler 2008: 362). The Day of Anger still exists, although it is now called a Day of Remembrance (however, many of the people who were interviewed still referred to it as the Day of Anger). Today, hundreds of monks and civilians gather at the Choeung Ek Killing Field. Here, they watch students dressed in the Khmer Rouge uniform reenact the raping and killing of victims at the Killing Field (Genocide Watch 2008, cambodiatribunal.org 2011). In addition, people also bring offerings of food, which the monks then offer to the spirits, accompanied by their prayers. The Day of Anger is therefore different from other holidays during which offerings to the spirits are made, because it is not a religious holiday, even though religious ceremonies are performed. The date was chosen by the PRK regime because on May 20, 1976, the Khmer Rouge ordered the complete collectivization of Cambodian life (Chandler 2008: 362).

The Killing Fields appear to be the main site of the ceremonies, while it seems that the Tuol Sleng Museum occupies a less important role when it comes to national commemoration ceremonies. However, as the museum was also the site of many deaths, and is therefore also likely to house the spirits of those who gave suffered and died there, ceremonies are also necessary at this location. In building D, a small memorial *stupa* can be found (which does not contain bones as the memorial *stupa* at the Killing Fields). During the aforementioned holidays, ceremonies are also held at the museum,

albeit on a smaller scale. It appears that the Tuol Sleng Museum does not play a major role during the memorial services and ceremonies. This could have several reasons. An obvious reason is that the graves surrounding Tuol Sleng have not been exhumed, and the site is also not known for the bodies that were buried around the buildings. Instead, the museum is known as a prison and it is often reiterated that the prisoners were taken from Tuol Sleng prison to the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek to be killed. Many graves at the Killing Fields have been exhumed and the memorial stupa still displays the bones from these graves. The Killing Fields is therefore mostly presented as a site of death and it also has a place where people can turn to to remember the dead, namely the memorial stupa. The stupa can possibly be seen as a grave for those people who do not have a grave, or whose grave is unknown. This is emphasized by the human remains that are displayed in it. The Killing Fields would therefore be a logical place to turn to for these occasions. The museum however, is presented as the site where the victims were imprisoned and torture, before they were killed. Even though there are several skulls on display at the museum, these are not said to have been found at the museum compound. Another, more practical reason, may be the simple fact that the museum is not a convenient location for large and crowded memorial services. The ceremony on May 20 for example, is often attended by 300 to 400 monks, and also by many other people. It would be very difficult to accommodate all these people at the museum, while there is ample room for this at the Killing Fields.

§5.3. Spirits and hauntings

The importance of the ceremonies held at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields becomes clear when one looks at the stories people tell about ghosts at the sites. It has been mentioned before that it is said that many Cambodians believe in the presence of ghosts at both sites, because of the violence and killings that have occurred there. This statement has not only been made by the Cambodians who were interviewed, but many of them also told stories of their own experiences with ghosts at the sites. All but one of the guides who had started working at the museum or the Killing Fields shortly after

opening (at least during the 1980's) mentioned their own experiences. There was one female guide who was very reluctant to talk about the presence of spirits at the museum, and who said that she did not believe in such things. However, shortly after, she mentioned that during the first few years of her work at the museum, she did hear strange noises, such as the rattling of chains that may be caused by the ghosts, but still ,she did not see them.⁵⁶ Still, many of the other guides were able to tell quite elaborate stories about haunting during the early years of the museum:

'When I was cleaning, sometimes no more staff and I cleaning here, I think ghosts around me. The soul of the ghosts around me, I'm afraid, I'm very shocking. Here, before is all grass, not cleaning like this. I'm still thinking, I saw the ghost walking behind me, between me, next to me. Until now. We always two people in one cell. If we come two, three together, it's OK. If alone, we stay outside. I don't here alone. If alone, one day, my director order me to cleaning at building A. But I tell to him, I don't want, sorry sir. If you order me to cleaning alone, I get out, I afraid here. So he was with me at that building. After cleaning, we come back, all together. No danger, but we still afraid them. Like this place. We take this skull from the Killing Field to this place to this room like this picture. We want to show that everywhere Killing Field and blood is the river. All year we take skull here. When we take the room to cleaning this map, we start don't make me too afraid. Now when cleaning, I'm cleaning you are, so lucky. I'm afraid'.⁵⁷

'really, 80, 89, many ghosts. Sure. Real ghost, but you no see, only here. Victim they cry, sometime the son, daughter cry you know, my God, yeah. 80,81,82,83,84,85,86, many ghost. Sleep here, sure. You see the tree here, magic tree. They cry. The ghosts, it is true. Because Cambodia the Buddhist. It is true the ghost. After election 93, the government big sorry many

⁵⁶ Author's interview on 20 April 2011 with Soriya, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

⁵⁷ Author's interview on 25 April 2011 with Rom, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

people here. Sometime no ghost. 80, 89, 90, many ghost. After election the big government, people pray here. Big sorry, many here. The ghost they cry when Pol Pot to kill'.⁵⁸

However, many of the tour guides who work at the sites did not work there during the 1980's and early 1990's. Many of the guides who worked at the sites from the beginning have since retired or found other jobs. However, since many of the newer guides did work together with the older guides for a while, they were able to relay some of the stories of the guides who had worked at the museum during the early years:

'I have never seen or hear them here. But for the old people who were working right here, they have seen the ghost in front of them. They said in seriously. And one of the staff here, died maybe of a heart attack. At the time, the building was not to clean like this, the building was not in good condition like this. And they slept on the floor and he said it was like someone come over them and they could not move or something. And all of the staff went and ran in many direction. But we don't see anymore, it might be because we have done many offering ceremony, so it become less than before. Very scary for the staff, especially for the security, because they had to sleep here 24 hours a day in the museum and at night. And an old lady who work here, she said that sometimes while she was working in the building, she felt like someone was looking into her face. And sometimes when she look up, she saw someone without head'.⁵⁹

The story of the guard who died as a result of a haunting was mentioned by several of the guides, and also by Kok-Thay Eng. Even though the cause of death was probably a heart attack, it is believed that this heart attack was caused by the spirits at the site. Some claim that this was because of the shock and fear

⁵⁸ Author's interview on 21 April 2011 with Phirun, tour guide at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek.

⁵⁹ Author's interview on 22 April 2011 with Seyha, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

the guard experienced, while another interviewee claimed that the spirit had sat on him so the guard could no longer breathe.

'Some still say the ghosts still haunt here at night time, but I've never seen the ghosts. You know in Buddhism we believe in ghosts, in the spirit, whatever. But for me, I don't care. I don't believe much in that. The older guides they told me so. At night time they had to sleep in here for guarding the place, they saw some soul flying around, or they heard. But for me, no, not anything'.⁶⁰

'Before, but now it is OK. You know, in the end 1980, at midnight a voice of the baby or a voice of the people they scream, like we hungry or need help, something like that. But now we don't hear anything. Because I told you, they pray many time, like holy. Because at the time, no someone pray. No someone to pray all of them. But now they pray many time, like I told you, three or four time per year, so don't hear anything'.⁶¹

Another tour guide told a story he had heard from a visitor of the Killing Fields:

'There are some people who believe that this is a really horrible place and also important. Because if some people talk about the spirit, people believe in that. Actually, two weeks ago, I'm not sure that he tell me that, the truth or not, but he was a visitor who came here many years ago. He was Indonesian, and he come with a son and a wife and he said that this is the first time for his son to travel abroad. And he said that before he married, he come with the team, he didn't tell me what kind of a team, he come with a team with his friend. And he was a leader of the team and his friend visit at the site. And nobody knew about that, one of his friend took some teeth from here, take some teeth from here and nobody knew. Teeth from

⁶⁰ Author's interview on 27 April 2011 with Vaha, tour guide at the Tuol Sleng Museum.

⁶¹ Author's interview on 11 April 2011 with Veasna, tour guide at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek.

here, because when it rains some teeth come out, so he took some teeth from here. And you know what happened? When they go back to the hotel, something bad happened. You know what he told me? He had seen the blood stain on the floor. And he just wonders why is the blood here? This is a hotel, why is there blood in that? It seem like somebody die here. And suddenly, one of his friend, the man who stole the teeth, he's become unconscious, and also like he don't know anything, and then, he could speak Cambodian, and then he could speak Cambodia and a man tried to ask the receptionist, the other Cambodian, come and translate what he talking, why he could speak Cambodian. And after that he said that bring me back. The man, maybe the spirit get inside him and he say that, bring me back. And he just wondered, why bring me back? And after that he take his wallet, all his thing, and then he found the tooth, and then he realized that because he took this from here. And in the nighttime, he come directly from the hotel to here, and he just leave it somewhere, because before there is no fence yet, and he just pray, sorry, because my friend didn't know, so many bad sorry, and then the phone call from the hotel said, he's OK now. I myself surprised that he told me this story, and he just only Indonesian visitor, not even Cambodian. Actually, I have heard something from the old people, but not with my real eye. So when he told me, it was like those people were right. But this is only what I've been told by the Indonesian guy. I'm not sure'.⁶²

These are only a few examples of the stories that people told about haunting at both sites. It is remarkable that none of the newer guides reported that they had had experience with ghosts. None, except Veasna, who told me that:

⁶² Author's interview on 11 April 2011 with Ratanak, tour guide at the Killing Fields.

‘I’m not sure. Like I told you, sometimes you hear the baby cry, a voice of the victim, ‘ please help me I’m very hungry, pray to me’ or something like that. Sometimes we hear a chain. But we don’t see anything’.⁶³

It must be noted that he does use the plural in the latter part of the quote. This seems to contradict the previous quotes, because the other guides mostly said that they have had no encounters with spirits in recent years (or not at all). However, it is possible that these other people also heard the sounds, but did not associate them with ghosts. This seems likely, as he states that he was the person who heard the voices or the crying of babies, but that others also heard the chains. It is therefore possible that the other people associate the sounds of the chains with something else, for example the wind.

An important question is raised by the fact that almost none of the younger guides have personal experiences with ghosts, while most of the guides who have worked at the sites since the early stages do have these experiences. Why is this? One answer could be that the younger generation does not believe in spirits as strongly as the older generation does. However, many of these younger guides do state that they believe that the older guides have actually had such experiences, and many of them also said that as Buddhists and Cambodians, they do believe in the existence of spirits. So this is not an altogether satisfying explanation. In the citations above it can be read that many of the tour guides mention that the spirits were very active during the 1980’s and early 1990’s, however, after that this ceased. The explanation many of them provide is the fact that many religious ceremonies have been held at the sites, and that many people prayed for the souls of the deceased, and continue to pay merit in the form of incense, flowers, food and drinks at the sites. Many of the guides assert that this had made it possible for the spirits to find peace and to be reborn again. They are therefore no longer haunting the site of their death.

It must be said that during the interviews, I was told that many Cambodians feel differently, and

⁶³ Author’s interview on 11 April 2011 with Veasna, tour guide at the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek.

that many still hold the belief that the fact that the people who are buried at the Killing Fields, or whose bodies are displayed in the *stupa* means that the souls of these people cannot be reborn, despite all the ceremonies that have been held there. Many Cambodians therefore find a visit to either of these sites a potentially dangerous undertaking. At the same time, many Cambodians do visit these sites, whether independently or in groups. During my interview with Savina Sirik and Sayana Ser I was told that many Cambodians are actually eager to visit the sites and that they do not worry about the harm that spirits may cause them. However, Kok-Thay Eng, who also works at DC-Cam stated the opposite, that there are still people who consider the sites dangerous places and who still fear that a visit to either the museum or the Killing Fields may bring them bad luck. It probably depends on whether one thinks if the souls of the victims are capable of finding peace and/or being reborn with the help of the necessary religious ceremonies, or whether one believes that these souls will continue to haunt their place of death because they have not been given a proper funeral. The people who decide to work at or visit either of these dark tourism sites are in probably more likely to believe the first, while those who refuse to work or visit the sites are more likely to believe the latter. One tour guide at the Killing Fields also hinted at this, when he explained that there are two visions with regards to the bones and spirits of the deceased, that of the government, and that of the opposition. The view of the government was described as the view that the proper ceremonies have been conducted in order to allow the souls to be reborn and that the bones will have to be preserved as evidence, while the view of the opposition is that the remains will have to be cremated, otherwise the souls will not be able to be reborn and will be forever held at their place of death. These differing opinions are thus not only personal, they are also highly political.

This chapter has discussed the belief in spirits in Cambodian society and in particular its influence on the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields and the people who work there. Even though this cultural model was known to all the people who were interviewed, they still interpreted it differently and it had different meanings in their daily lives. Some people commented that it affected their work, for example

because they were afraid to work alone, while others did not believe in the presence of spirits at the sites at all. This cultural model also has a significant place in the construction of memory. The display of bones at both sites, but particularly at the Killing Fields seems to contradict the cultural model. The dead are usually cremated in Cambodia, and cremation is considered important to ensure a good afterlife for the deceased. It can therefore be said that there is a division in among Cambodians. Some people believe that the souls of the victims have moved on to the afterlife and can still be reborn because the proper ceremonies have been conducted. This is also the stance of the CPP, the ruling party of Cambodia. Other people believe that the souls of the victims continue to haunt the sites, as they cannot be reborn because they have not been granted a proper funeral. This is also the stance of the Cambodian opposition. These are two versions of the same cultural model. It can be said that the last version the most in agreement with the 'original' while the version ascribed to the current government has been adjusted to current realities. The government has adjusted the cultural model in such a way that it does not ignore people's beliefs regarding spirits, yet it provides a different way of dealing with the possible presence of spirits. A way that is more beneficial to their own political agenda and that they believe will not only benefit the victims, but also the younger generation in Cambodia. However, those who disagree with their interpretation of the model claim that those in favor of the preservation of the bones are putting their own interests before the interests of the souls of the victims. This cultural model and the different ways in which people incorporate it into their lives and frame of reference is thus not only a cultural matter, but has also become of the political agenda in the country.

6. Conclusion and discussion

The genocide that occurred in Cambodia while the Khmer Rouge was in power is still alive in many people's memories. The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek are the country's most important memorial sites that are related to this period in Cambodian history. They are therefore important sites of memory construction regarding the Khmer Rouge regime. These sites and the process of memory construction that takes place at these sites were the main focus of this thesis. The main questions that this thesis has aimed to answer was: how is memory constructed about the genocide in Cambodia during the Democratic Kampuchea regime (1975-1979) at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek and the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes, and how does this commercialized cultural memory interact with the cultural memory of Cambodians who work at the aforementioned dark tourism sites?

The first part of the research puzzle pertains to the actual process of memory construction. In

order to construct a memory of the Khmer Rouge, many different tools are used at the sites to convey a certain memory. This memory also contains a strong political message, as the process of memory construction at both sites was strongly influenced by the Cambodian government. Both sites were opened to visitors shortly after the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia. Both sites were supposed to convey the message the Khmer Rouge regime was a genocidal regime. The Vietnamese intervention was therefore necessary in order to save the lives of Cambodian people and thus legitimate. The suffering of the people in Democratic Kampuchea therefore had to be emphasized, and this was and is also done at the museum and the Killing Fields. The suffering and death of the victims are the key focus of the sites and this is emphasized by both the physical objects that are displayed and by the tour guides during their tours.

However, at the same time the new government also faced a dilemma. Many former members of the Khmer Rouge had either joined the Vietnamese before or during the intervention, or defected from the Khmer Rouge in later years. Many of these former cadres became members of the new government. The PRK could therefore not condemn the entire Khmer Rouge movement, as it would thereby also condemn some of its own supporters and members. Yet at the same time the PRK was still fighting a civil war against the Khmer Rouge forces who had retreated to the border with Thailand. It was therefore important that the Khmer Rouge was still perceived as an enemy by the Cambodian people so they would still support the PRK in the war. The PRK government therefore held only a select group of Khmer Rouge leaders responsible. Other members of the movement were not held responsible for the genocide, as they were assumed to have been brainwashed. Even though the civil war has now ceased, there are still only a few people who are held responsible for the genocide, as evidenced by the ECCC, where only five Khmer Rouge leaders are brought to trial. It is likely that the presence of many former Khmer Rouge members in the current government is part of the reason why further investigations regarding who was responsible for the genocide are blocked. This is also an important

message that is conveyed at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields. Attention is paid to the ECCC at both sites and during tours it is brought forward that those who were responsible for the genocide are now brought to justice. At the same time, it is stated that the Khmer Rouge cadres who committed the killings and tortures were very young and were therefore easily brainwashed and can thus not be held accountable for their actions.

The memory that is constructed at the sites are in concordance with this political message. The emphasis is on suffering, on death and torture. This also means that the displays at the sites are often very impersonal, yet the presence of the tour guides adds a more personal note to a visit to the sites. Tour guides play in an important role at the sites because they are the people who are meant to explain the site and the history associated with it to visitors. Although these guides are similarly influenced by the political message, they do offer a more personal interpretation of the narrative that is presented by sharing their own stories and experiences.

However, not all tour guides who work at the sites have a living memory of life in Democratic Kampuchea. Their cultural memory is thus not based on personal experience with the events, but on what they have learned about it from other sources, such as in school, from their parents, older siblings, family members, on television or radio etc. As the genocide has never been the subject of in-depth discussion in Cambodian schools, parents and family members are an important source of information about the genocide. However, the extent to which parents told their children about the genocide differed greatly among the interviewees. Yet despite the differences in how the cultural memory was acquired, it is remarkable that the individual cultural memories do not differ greatly from one another, or from the cultural memory that is propagated at the sites where they are employed.

The interviewees also had similar perceptions regarding the on the presence of spirits at Tuol Sleng and the Killing Fields, even though they did have widely differing experiences pertaining to this subject. In Cambodia, the belief is prevalent that if a person dies, especially if one dies a violent death,

his or her body must be cremated and the proper ceremonies must be performed in order for that person to be able to have a good life in the hereafter and so that he or she can be reborn. If these proper funerary rites are not performed, their soul will continue to haunt the site of their death and can cause harm to those people who go there. The fact that the human remains that were found in the mass graves at the Killing Fields are displayed in the memorial *stupa*, and the forensic exhibition in the Tuol Sleng Museum, is in obvious contrast with this cultural model of the proper funerary rites and the consequences if these are not observed. Many of the tour guides expressed a belief in spirits, and many of them also stated that they believed that ghosts had once been present at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields. Some of them cited their own personal experiences with ghosts at the sites, while others cited experiences they had heard from others. However, almost all of them asserted that this was a thing of the past. They state that the proper ceremonies have been offered at both sites, so that the spirits were appeased and the souls of the victims could be reborn.

At the same time there exists a division in Cambodian society regarding this subject. Many interviewees, as well Chandler (2008) and Hughes (2006) mentioned that many Cambodians still regard the Killing Fields as a dangerous site, as the souls of the victims continue to haunt the site and can bring bad luck to the visitors. This has also become a subject of political contention, as the ruling party, the CPP, argues that the proper ceremonies have been performed and the souls of the victims can therefore be reborn, while the opposition argues that in order to allow the souls to be reborn, the remains have to be cremated. It can thus be said that there are two versions of the same cultural model. It can be argued that the version that is presented by the government and the tour guides is a slight adaptation of the cultural model that enables them to maintain their own beliefs regarding the existence of spirits, yet also enables them to integrate this belief in their daily (working) lives and their political agenda.

It must also be said that the cultural memory that is propagated at the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Killing Fields is not static. As has been argued in this thesis, both sites and the memory that is

constructed there are strongly influenced by politics. However, political situations are prone to change, as are memories. Memory is not a static phenomenon; on the contrary, it is dynamic. Cultural memory is not a true reflection of what has happened; it is a representation of the past that is not necessarily based on the actual events. It is constantly constructed and reconstructed and the past is constantly reinterpreted in the present. It is therefore likely that the memory that is currently conveyed at both sites will change over the years. There has already been a discussion regarding the display of human remains at both sites, and it is sometimes said that the remains of the victims may be cremated after the ECCC trials have been concluded. This may have a strong influence on the sites themselves, particularly on the Killing Fields, as the display of bones is a key characteristic of this site. The conclusion of the ECCC trials may thus also influence the construction of memory, as with their conclusion, the need for evidence in the form of human remains may no longer exist. However, it remains to be seen whether this is truly the case. The privatization of the Killing Fields in 2005 could also prove interesting, as the Killing Fields are now no longer under government control (even though the government is currently still influential at the site). It would be interesting to see how the site develops in the hands of a private owner and what this means for the memory that is constructed and presented at the site. However, the construction of memory can be influenced by many different factors, and it is therefore not possible to make statements about what the cultural memory regarding the genocide will entail in several years time.

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the interaction between two different versions of cultural memory of the same period in history. However, due to time constraints and a language barrier, the group of people that was interviewed was limited, and only the tour guides at both sites were interviewed, as they spoke English and were the most directly involved in the process of memory construction. However, it would also be relevant to research how the memory that is constructed at the sites is perceived by Cambodians in general and how it influences them. As the Killing Fields of Choeung

Ek and the Tuol Sleng Museum are the most important and central memorial sites in Cambodia, it seems that it is relevant that the rest of the Cambodian population also feels that their memories are accurately represented and that the displays in the memorial are in concurrence with their views of how the victims should be remembered. Another suggestion for further research would be the influence of the privatization on the Killing Fields. It seems that the Killing Fields are about to undergo significant changes and it would be interesting to see whether the privatization will also influence the construction of memory and whether the influence of the government and its narrative will diminish in the future.

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4. Interview with Rom on 25 April 2011. Tour guide. She has a living memory of the genocide.
5. Interview with Veha on 27 April 2011. Tour guide. He has no living memory of the genocide.
6. Interview with Mei on 3 May 2011. Tour guide. She has a living memory of the genocide.

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1. Interview with Veasna on 11 April 2011. Tour guide. He has no living memory of the genocide.
2. Interview with Ratanak on 11 April 2011. Tour guide. He has no living memory of the genocide.
3. Interview with Sophal on 21 April 2011. Tour guide. He has no living memory of the genocide.
4. Interview with Phirun on 21 April 2011. Tour guide. He has a living memory of the genocide.
5. Interview with Sokthem on 26 April 2011. Tour guide. He has no living memory of the genocide.
6. Interview with Raksmei on 26 April 2011. Tour guide. He has no living memory of the genocide.

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1. Interview with Kok-Thay Eng, deputy director at DC-Cam, on 8 April 2011.
2. Interview with Savina Sirik and Sayana Ser, staff members at DC-Cam on 25 April 2011.

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