THE HAUNTING (OF THE) PAST:
URBAN TRACES IN SINGAPORE, PHNOM PENH, AND BALI



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Supervisors: Prof. dr. ir.-arch. Johan Lagae,
Prof. dr. ir. Michiel Dehaene

Master's dissertation submitted in order to obtain the academic degree of
Master of Science in de ingenieurswetenschappen: architectuur

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURE

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Anissa Boukra, 1 January, 2024

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Extended Abstract

In Aldo Rossi's '*The Architecture of the City*,' he proposes the existence of a shared essence between the human body and the city, both undergoing evolution shaped by distinct sets of experiences. And just as the body keeps the score, a city remembers through its build environment. If trauma can have a visceral effect on the human body, what is the effect of a traumatic past on the city and its people? This thesis undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the intricate intersections between colonial histories, traumatic memories, urban landscapes, and transitional justice in Singapore, Phnom Penh, and Bali, by asking the question: How does the enduring legacy of a traumatic past shape the urban landscapes, facilitate the exploitation of trauma for tourism, and hinder the pursuit of justice in Singapore, Phnom Penh, and Bali?

To answer this research question this thesis starts its analysis by examining the lasting impact of colonial interventions on demographic evolution, ethnic balance, and racial undertones. Delving into traumatic history of the Khmer Rouge genocide, the narrative unravels silenced memories rooted in fear, self-censorship, and political manipulation. It adresses the overlooked genocide of 1965 in Bali and explores the connections between war, sexual violence, and architecture, with an analysis of singaporean comfort women. This thesis examines urban spaces as palimpsests, emphasizing the erasure of visual information and the preservation of untold stories in landscapes serving as active memorials.
The exploration extends to the shaping factors of Phnom Penh's urban landscape, from the French colonial era to post-Khmer Rouge reconstruction. Delving into the notion of the tabula rasa, this thesis questions perceptions of Singapore as a homogeneous city. The exploitative link between tourism and trauma is scrutinized, unraveling Bali's transformation into a curated paradise and the complexities of thanatourism in Cambodia. The thesis concludes by delving into the transcendent nature of memory and the pursuit of transitional justice, highlighting specific initiatives in Cambodia and Bali while acknowledging societal challenges hindering progress in Singapore.

This thesis concludes by emphasizing the significance of expanding the definition of archives through artist countervoices, connecting the case studies to the theme of 'remembering of forgetting,' and advocating for alternative pathways in alignment with Toni Morrison's concept of 'rememory.'

Abstract

In '*De Architectuur van de Stad*' van Aldo Rossi wordt de existentie voorgesteld van een gedeelde essentie tussen het menselijk lichaam en de stad, waarbij beide een evolutie doorgaan die gevormd wordt door unieke ervaringen. Net zoals het menselijk lichaam sporen van trauma kan bewaren, herinnert een stad zich haar verleden via de gebouwde omgeving. Als trauma een diepgaand effect kan hebben op het menselijk lichaam, wat is dan het effect van een traumatisch verleden op de stad en haar inwoners? Deze masterproef verkent de complexe kruispunten tussen koloniale geschiedenissen, traumatische herinneringen, stedelijke landschappen en rechtvaardigheid in Singapore, Phnom Penh en Bali. De centrale vraag luidt: Hoe beïnvloedt het voortlevende verleden van een traumatische geschiedenis de stedelijke landschappen, faciliteert het de exploitatie van trauma voor toerisme en belemmert het de zoektocht naar rechtvaardigheid in Singapore, Phnom Penh en Bali?

Om deze onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden, start deze masterproef haar analyse met het onderzoeken van de langdurige impact van koloniale interventies op demografische evolutie, etnisch evenwicht en raciale ondertonen. Diep ingaand op het traumatische verleden van de genocide onder het Khmer Rouge-regime, worden verdrongen herinneringen, zelfcensuur en herinneringspolitiek ontrafeld. Daarnaast behandelt het de vergeten genocide van 1965 in Bali en verkent het de verbanden tussen oorlog, seksueel geweld en architectuur, inclusief een analyse van Singaporese comfortvrouwen. Deze masterproef beschouwt stedelijke ruimtes als palimpsesten, waarbij de uitwissing van visuele informatie en het behoud van onvertelde verhalen in landschappen die fungeren als actieve herdenkingsmonumenten worden benadrukt.

De verkenning strekt zich uit tot de vormgevende factoren van het stedelijke landschap van Phnom Penh, van het Franse koloniale tijdperk tot de post-Khmer Rouge-reconstructie. Diepgaand wordt het concept van de tabula rasa bevraagd, waarmee percepties van Singapore als een homogene stad in twijfel worden getrokken. De exploiterende link tussen toerisme en trauma wordt kritisch onderzocht, waarbij de

transformatie van Bali tot een paradijs en de complexiteiten van thanatourisme in Cambodja worden ontrafeld. De masterproef sluit af met een diepgaande verkenning van de transcendentie van herinneringen en de zoektocht naar overgangsrechtvaardigheid, waarbij specifieke initiatieven in Cambodja en Bali worden belicht, terwijl maatschappelijke uitdagingen die vooruitgang in Singapore belemmeren, worden erkend.

Deze masterproef concludeert door de nadruk te leggen op het belang van het verbreden van de definitie van het archief via de tegenstemmen van kunstenaars, het verbinden van de casestudies met het thema van 'herinneren wat vergeten is,' en het pleiten voor alternatieve wegen in lijn met het concept van 're-memory' van Toni Morrison.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The battle between humanity and power mirrors the struggle of memory against forgetting.[1] 'We forget despite our best efforts, and we also forget because powerful interests often actively suppress memory, creating what Milan Kundera calls "the desert of organized forgetting". In this desert, memory is as important as water, for memory is a strategic resource in the struggle for power.'[2] Nations cultivate and, given the opportunity, would seek to control both the preservation and the erasure of collective memory. Within the exploration of memory, forgetting, and their impact on urban landscapes, this thesis investigates the enforced forgetting of traumatic past events. Focused on Singapore, Phnom Penh, and Bali as case studies, the research seeks to unravel how this deliberate suppression haunts collective memory. The overarching question guiding this search is: To what extent does the enforced forgetting of historical traumas shape the urban fabric, facilitate the exploitation of trauma for tourism, and hinder the pursuit of justice in the cities under examination?

Singapore the city without memory. A clean slate starting with its independence in 1965. The city has forsaken its native language, opting instead for the sterile embrace of English, rendering it more appealing to a Western audience. Recollecting specific streets or names in Singapore proves challenging, perhaps due to the bewildering impact of English toponyms, or maybe it stems from an unusual sense of scale disorientation. The country, the city, the neighborhoods, the buildings—all condensed into a singular visual encounter, resembling an oversized scale model.[3]

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[1] Kundera, Asher, and Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 13.
[2] Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 10.
[3] Supersudaca, 'Supersudaca's Asia Stories (Aka at Home in the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Worlds)', 123.

Phnom Penh the wounded city, it's memories of genocide commodified by selling you the trauma of it's past. Polished skulls of thousands of unidentified victims line the windows of the memorial stupa at the Choeung Ek Killing Fields, turning human remains into decoration.[4] Meanwhile Phnom Penh's residents are being priced out of the housing market, evicted from their homes, and counted among those most at risk from the impacts of climate change.[5] Commerce over community, Phnom Penh is on its way to become the next 'Asian Miracle'.[6] As Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia confides, "There is nothing in Cambodia that is not for sale."[7]

Bali, the serene paradise, haunted by a forgotten genocide. By marketing itself as an exotic and peaceful island, Bali commodifies its non-violent image for a Western audience. However, the stark contrast lies in the brutal anti-communist killings that transpired during 1965-66. This state-sponsored massacre, shrouded in political rhetoric, has led to an enforced forgetting within both public and private memory.[8] What emerges from this deliberate act of forgetting? Luxury resorts stand tall atop mass graves, burying the painful scars of collective memory. A community anxious with suspicion, neighbors wary of neighbors, holding onto the paranoia from the hidden motives behind the 1965 killings, perpetuating the suppression of these haunting memories. Yet, with the growth of the island's popularity and its status as the most Instagrammed island in the world[9], its priority lies in being commodifiably photogenic, unforgettable while forgetting.[10]

Why focus on themes like memory and forgetting? I am a student with a particular interest in urban theory, a field that explores various aspects of cities and urban environments. My approach, therefore, extends beyond the typical confines of a theoretical thesis within this field, as I am interested in broader issues that are not limited to a single research project. By providing a comparative study of three unique places—Singapore, Phnom Penh, and Bali—I analyze the different contexts of these

[4] Sion, 'Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 8.
[5] 'Children in Cambodia at "Very High Risk" of the Impacts of the Climate Crisis - UNICEF'.
[6] Nam, 'Phnom Penh', 66.
[7] Sion, 'Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 17.
[8] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 4.
[9] 'The 50 Most Instagrammed Islands in the World | Tourlane'.
[10] Dwyer, 'Reimagining Transitional Justice in Bali'.

locations to explore broader themes related to urban theory. My goal is to gain a better understanding of how memory and forgetting relate in the context of violence. This involves an exploration of how societies grapple with remembering or suppressing memories of violent events, and how these dynamics manifest in urban space. Throughout my research I have noticed that urban theory, in its conventional form, has difficulties in addressing what seems like an absence or a void, rather than dealing with readily accessible narratives of the past.

It's methodologically more straightforward to ask people about their memories of the past than to delve into what they have consciously chosen to forget or what has been forced into silence. This methodological inclination is understandable but carries profound theoretical and ethical implications. The oversight in considering the politics of silence has resulted in a theory canon that excels in comprehending how individuals engage in the practices of history-making, memory, and commemoration. However, it lags in grasping the intricacies of forgetting and silence.[11]

This thesis explores the urban landscape's complex interplay between violence, memory, and forgetting. By providing an extensive analysis about the underexplored aspects of what individuals and communities choose to forget, or are sometimes forced to forget, I aim to offer a fresh perspective that can be applied not only to my case studies but to urban contexts worldwide.

Research Objectives

This thesis builds upon an existing extensive framework of ethnographic investigation. However, it is important to acknowledge that the study of memory and forgetting, especially in the context of their spatial dimension, will always remain incomplete. There are likely hundreds of sites in these three places that hold significance in their citizens' lives, which I will not cover. My interest in this thesis was sparked during my travels in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, this meant that at the time of my travels, I was

[11] Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali', 120.

not fully aware of the broad scope of my research, which made me oblivious to potential fieldwork opportunities. Therefore, I will not claim to have conducted research abroad but rather experienced these countries as an outsider and a tourist. Given that this thesis discusses the tourism dimension, including the commodification of trauma and Asian culture, my experiences visiting the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields in Phnom Penh, being captivated by the architecture in Singapore, and witnessing the highly commodified tourism economy in Bali played a crucial role in guiding my writing process.

My primary sources of information come from the works of researchers and artists who have dedicated their careers to studying the topics discussed in this thesis. Many of the academics and artists I will reference have a deep-rooted connection to the countries they discuss, providing insider insights that I, as an outsider, cannot access. Additionally, I have immersed myself in the testimonies of survivors, reflecting my belief in broadening the definition of what constitutes an archive.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is organized in nine chapters. After this introduction (chapter 1), chapter 2 introduces colonial history crucial for understanding further discussions. Embracing a semi-chronological structure, the analysis begins by delving into a brief colonial history, recognizing its significance within the broader historical context of these three cities. By establishing colonial history as the starting point, this thesis aims to shed light on the lasting impact of colonial interventions and establish connections to the contemporary dynamics of these places. Chapter 2 specifically focuses on Singapore's demographic evolution, tracing back to colonial-era policies that molded its ethnic balance. Examining figures such as Lim Boon Keng, who shaped Chinese identity, and evaluating their influence on Singapore’s first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew's concepts of justice and equality, the analysis unveils a colonial legacy that envisioned Singapore as ethnically segregated. This historical backdrop not only informs pre-independent struggles but also shapes Lee Kuan Yew's policies with distinct racial undertones. Chapter 2 will also navigate through Phnom Penh's historical evolution, unraveling the

threads of race, displacement, and resilience woven into the city's fabric. This chapter will explore colonial interventions, revealing the French influence on Phnom Penh's spatial and temporal transformation. This analysis spans from the colonial "gift" of history, perpetuating a sense of inferiority, to the racial implications of urban planning that endured beyond independence, ultimately impacting the post-Khmer Rouge era and the displacement around Boeung Kak Lake.

In Chapter 3, the thesis delves into the traumatic histories that shaped Phnom Penh, beginning with the 'golden age' of urban development in the post-independence era. Examining the architectural endeavors of Vann Molyvann during Prince Norodom Sihanouk's leadership reveals the complex interplay between modern design, racial influences, and economic disparities. The narrative extends to how Phnom Penh became a city of refugees, marked by the political and economic aftermath of Sihanouk's rule and the impact of the Vietnam War, setting the stage for the emergence of the Khmer Rouge. This part of chapter 3 culminates in a comprehensive exploration of the Khmer Rouge era, unraveling its totalitarian ideologies, urban transformations, and the pervasive fear instilled by the enigmatic Angkar. The second part of chapter 3 delves into the overlooked 1965-1966 genocide in Bali, exploring its erasure from global awareness. Triggered by the '30 September Movement' coup, it led to mass killings orchestrated by the New Order regime, resulting in around one million deaths. The silence surrounding these events, rooted in fear and self-censorship, is explored through personal testimonies like that of Ibu Ari. Her story highlights how trauma suppression manifests in ghostly visitations and ritual practices, emphasizing the enduring impact of silenced memories on personal and cultural legacies. The last part of Chapter 3 explores the intricate interplay between memory, politics, and physical spaces, following Pièrre Nora's framework. It discusses the transformation of Cambodian sites, such as Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, into memorials after the Vietnamese invasion in 1978. The intentional politicization of memory is illustrated by framing the Khmer Rouge as 'genocidal' and 'fascist.' The narrative then shifts to Bali, challenging the conventional image of the island as an ahistorical paradise. It highlights Bali's pre-1965 identity constructed during Dutch colonialism and emphasizes the misleading oversimplification of Balinese people as apolitical victims. This section unveils the intricate politics of memory during the 1965 killings, rooted in diverse social

conflicts manipulated into communist and anti-communist narratives. The untold stories of the "second wave" of deaths expose the traumatic reality behind Bali's unaccounted deaths, resisting attempts to erase them from memory.

Chapter 4 delves into the often-unacknowledged connection between war and sexual violence, exploring the profound impact of these traumas on the community and how this trauma translates into a spatial dimension. This chapter elaborated on how silence becomes a shield against the pain of memories and potential violence, unintentionally opening a gateway to collective recollection. Spatial elements and ensuing silence embody what Pièrre Nora describes as 'lieux de mémoire,' encapsulating the weight of painful memories. The second part of chapter 4 explores the intersection of war, rape, and architecture in Indonesia. Abidin Kusno's analysis of the aftermath of the 1998 May Riots, particularly in Glodok Jakarta, reveals the entanglement of collective memory and trauma. Seno Gumira Ajidarma's stories depict the enduring impact of gang rapes during the riots, emphasizing the struggle to reconcile with a traumatic past. This examination extends to the state's complicity in wartime sexual violence, drawing insights from feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe. In the final part of chapter 4, the focus turns to Singaporean comfort women during World War II. This part delves into the testimony of former comfort woman Kim Bok Dong, highlighting the brutal conditions she faced and the subsequent silence maintained for over six decades. The historical denial surrounding Singaporean comfort women, traced back to Lee Kuan Yew's perspective, is explored, revealing how his masculinist view perpetuated silence and impacted the collective memory. Efforts to recognize the 'dark heritage' of Singaporean comfort stations are discussed, notably, the Cairnhill Road comfort station gains historical significance, preserved due to its historical identity, though without explicit markers. The absence of markers and the diplomatic dispute over the Comfort Women Statue reveal the challenges in acknowledging uncomfortable histories. The passing of Kim Bok Dong symbolizes the enduring struggle for acknowledgment and justice, amplifying the silenced voices in Singapore's historical discourse.

Chapter 5 explores urban spaces as palimpsests, interweaving memories and traumas into the urban landscape. By drawing on Andreas Huyssen's concept of the "urban palimpsest," this chapter emphasizes how visual information is erased and how

concealed historical events contribute to a city's invisible layers marked by processes of erasure and loss. First focussing on Kuta in southern Bali, the narrative explores how a seemingly ordinary banyan tree conceals a mass grave from the 1965 anti-communist killings. Leyla Stevens' film "*Our Sea is Always Hungry*" brings forth oral histories, presenting the survivor's tale hidden in the banyan tree, emphasizing the role of local communities in memory reconstruction. This part of the chapter unravels the enduring impact of state-driven efforts to downplay the significance of missing bodies, transforming once peripheral spaces into obscured layers of history amidst rapid urban development. Countering the commodified narratives of Cambodia's official memorial sites, the second part of chapter 5 examines two 'sights unseen': the Sre Lieu mass grave, a concealed site of Khmer Rouge atrocities, and the Kampong Chhnang Airport, an abandoned project embodying contradictions in the regime's ideology. While the former reveals the banality of everyday violence and unmarked memories, the latter challenges the official narrative of Khmer Rouge self-sufficiency and exposes the regime's international connections. These landscapes, lacking official commemoration, serve as active memorials, quietly preserving the untold stories and urging for recognition beyond traditional memorials. The concluding section of Chapter 5 explores the complex dynamics of ownership, memory, and urban evolution in Phnom Penh's landscape post-Khmer Rouge era. The city's transformative phases, from uninhabited during the Khmer Rouge rule to spontaneous reoccupation post-1979, raise a crucial question: who truly owns Phnom Penh? Examining informal settlements and the fate of architectural gems like the White Building, the narrative delves into the struggles of those living on state-owned land and the impact of government policies on urban development. The poignant example of the White Building, initially a haven for artists and later demolished for a luxury complex, underscores the challenges of preserving vibrant communities in the face of urban transformation.

Chapter 6 starts with an exploration of the historical and contemporary factors shaping Phnom Penh's urban landscape. Beginning with the French colonial era's impact on canal construction, the narrative highlights the contrasting viewpoints between the French and locals, influencing present-day interactions with foreign investors. The post-Khmer Rouge socialist reconstruction period, marked by liberal reforms, leads to socio-economic disparities affecting the city's topography. The case of Boeung Kak Lake

illustrates power dynamics, where a 99-year lease agreement with a private company displaces residents and dismantles a tight-knit community. The narrative emphasizes the profound struggle for space entangled with power dynamics and profit motives. The second part of Chapter 6 explores the concept of urban tabula rasa in Phnom Penh through the lens of an urban design studio's examination of the Ta Khmau Strip. The narrative shifts from the discussion about Phnom Penh to drawing parallels with Singapore. Inspired by Rem Koolhaas's view of Singapore, the narrative questions the notion of tabula rasa, emphasizing the oversights in perceiving Singapore as a homogeneous city. It advocates for examining cities beyond their physical structures, incorporating Jonathan Raban's concept of the "soft city" to understand the intricate details of urban life. The last part of chapter 6 explores urban transformation through Singaporean poet Arthur Yap's nuanced perspective on the evolving landscape, challenging the tabula rasa concept. Drawing from Christopher Alexander's idea that cities are interconnected webs, this part discusses the replacement of Colbar, an iconic restaurant, emphasizing the complex dynamics between progress and preservation and questioning whether the essence of a place can be transplanted or signifies an irreplaceable loss in the city's evolving identity.

Chapter 7 delves into the exploitative connection between tourism and trauma. It traces the colonial history that transformed Bali from a perceived wilderness to a curated "Island Eden" for tourist consumption. This first part of chapter 7 unravels how tourism, deeply intertwined with Bali's identity, not only conceals traumatic sites of memory but also serves as a means of state control, silencing dissent and overshadowing the violent history, creating a complex interplay between the paradisiacal image and the silenced narratives of the local population. The second part of chapter 7 explores the concept of dark tourism, recounting a personal encounter in Koh Rong Sanloem and a subsequent visit to the S-21 Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields in Phnom Penh. The narrative unveils the complexities of thanatourism, emphasizing its stark departure from conventional leisure-focused tourism. It scrutinizes the commercialization of memorial sites, with a focus on the profit-driven strategies employed at Choeung Ek, revealing a troubling disconnection between the financial gains and the commemoration of the historical events. The discussion extends to Anlong Veng, delving into the symbolic burial site of Pol Pot and the evolving landscape of these sites,

now labeled as 'Historical Attractions' by Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism. The chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the potential repercussions of transforming these sites into tourist destinations and the implications for collective memory and transitional justice.

In Chapter 8, the last section preceding the conclusion, the focus turns to the transcendent nature of memory and the pursuit of transitional justice, examining specific initiatives in Cambodia and Bali. The first part of Chapter 8 continues its discussion about Anlong Veng and the establishment of the Anlong Veng Peace Center, a spatial intervention incorporating reforestation strategies and connecting memorial sites. This initiative aims to redefine the narrative surrounding Khmer Rouge perpetrators, challenging the conventional victim-perpetrator dichotomy. The narrative shift is further explored in the second part of Chapter 8, featuring Bali through the grassroots effort of the '1965 Park,' emphasizing bottom-up transitional justice and unveiling suppressed memories. This chapter concludes by acknowledging how Singapore grapples with the absence of tangible spatial interventions, particularly concerning comfort women, revealing societal challenges rooted in a patriarchal society and hindering progress toward transitional justice.

The conclusion underscores the importance of expanding the definition of archives to include marginalized voices, as demonstrated in Leyla Stevens' 'Kidung' and Anida Yoeu Ali's 'Palimpsest for Generation 1.5.' These examples challenge society's tendency to forget and offer alternative forms of remembrance. The different case studies in Bali, Singapore, Phnom Penh discussed throughout the thesis highlight the contradictory ‘remembering of forgetting’—emphasizing the persistence of memory and the need for alternative pathways, echoing Tony Morrison's concept of 'rememory.'

Chapter 2

The Colonial Legacy of Racial Segregation

Shaping Singapore: Ethnic Cleansing Agendas and Racial Ideologies

> *"When I set out, my Singapore dream was of a democratic society, keen and vibrant, a united people, who regardless of race, language and religion, and based on justice and equality, achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for the nation."*[12]
>
> \- Lee Kuan Yew, 1996

It was with this ambitious dream that Singapore's first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew shaped the collective memory of Singapore to be that of a progressive nation. The 'equality' Lee is talking about in his speech, concerns the racial 'balance' the Singaporean government keeps by intervening through its immigration policy. This 'balance' of 75% Chinese, 15% Malay, 7% Indian and 3% Other, is based on the population's colonial ratio from the 1890's. These quotas were designed to 'maintain the racial preponderance of the basic strain of our people and thereby to stabilize the ethnic composition of the population'.[13] Revisiting the developments of the 1890s will provide insight into the mindset of that era and how those policies may still impact contemporary Singapore today.

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[12] Lee Kuan Yew, Speech by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew to the Singapore Press Club on Friday, 7 June 1996 at Raffles Hotel.
[13] Senator David Reed, quoted in Frost, 'An Unsettled Majority', 3741.

Tracing back Lee Kuan Yew's view on race leads to one influential man: that of doctor Lim Boon Keng, born in Singapore and educated in Edinburgh University. Struggling with a personal sense of inauthenticity as a Chinese man that could not speak mandarin, he returned to Singapore in 1893 with the ambition to transform and modernize his fellow chinese.[14] Lim's aim was to promote Mandarin education through new journals, associations, and schools, while also challenging local cultural customs, denouncing ancestral worship, food offerings, and traditional rituals.[15]

Lim's mission for cultural purification was accomplished through the removal of Malay influences, particularly in the education of young girls who were expected to become future mothers. He argued that the Malayan Peninsula consisted of tribes opposed to civilized society and literature, highlighting the need to safeguard Chinese culture. He even associated the decline of local-born Indians, Arabs, and Eurasians communities to the "constant influx of Malay blood," advocating for the removal of these communities from the tropics to preserve the racial integrity of the ethnic chinese.[16] According to Lim, it was Malay women who 'often returned to the barbarous ways of their people' so that 'the children imbibed with their milk the instincts of the Malay rather than those of their European fathers'.[17]

Lim's writings clearly reflect an intense commitment to ethnic cleansing and cultural preservation, through a colonial ideology. Did Lim's past efforts to reform local Chinese identities impact Singapore's later urban transformations under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew? Lee Kuan Yew was after all born into the same Chinese community that was heavily influenced by Lim's practices. In the 1950s, Lee and his colleagues, who were primarily educated in Western universities abroad, shared a similar background to Lim and his circle. Lee's administration afterall promoted English education and, from the late 1970s, launched a Mandarin language campaign, echoing Lim's vision of positioning Singapore as the bridge between Europe and Asia.[18]

[14] Chung and Douglass, *The Hard State, Soft City of Singapore*, 42.
[15] Ibid., 44.
[16] Frost, *Transcultural Diaspora*, 26.
[17] Chung and Douglass, *The Hard State, Soft City of Singapore*, 45.
[18] Ibid., 46.

How did the Chinese become the dominant ethnic majority? During the first ten years of the British occupation (1819-1928), there was a time of western expansion. Mainly Chinese investments, labor and local knowledge were essential for the newly established European colony. However, in 1928, as slump formation began to increase and living conditions began to worsen, the British authorities chose to establish migrant quotas under the new Immigration Act of that year.[19] This laid the groundwork of a racial discourse that is still in place today.

Another legacy of colonialism is the notion that the management of Singapore's diverse population demanded authoritarianism. As historian Tim Harper noted, a 'founding idea of Singapore was that the enlightened reforms necessary to elevate a civilisation and to govern a fluid migrant world did not derive from or imply political liberalism but rather necessitated strong government.'[20] As will become apparant later, this authoritarianism will emerge as the shared trait among Asia's most advanced cities, often referred to as the "Asian miracle."[21]

The difference between colonial and modern Singapore however, is that during colonial rule, the British did not aim for social integration. As is the case of many colonial cities, the British envisioned Singapore as an ethnically segregated settlement, essentially a "plural society" where various ethnic groups converged for trade but did not participate in collective thought or action.[22] This colonial legacy formed the basis of pre-independent Singapore's struggle regarding social equity and welfare, which led to Lee Kuan Yew's famous words of 'justice and equality'.[23] However, upon closer examination of Lee Kuan Yew's concept of 'justice and equality,' one discovers that his views are far from being inclusive.

It is telling that the ratio of 75% Chinese, 15% Malay, 7% Indian and 3% Other, and the upkeep of this 'balance' is what Lee Kuan Yew sees as just and equal. Why upkeep this ratio? Would real 'balance' not be an equal divide between these ethnicities? A third of

[19] Frost, 'An Unsettled Majority', 3733.
[20] Harper, 'Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity', 283.
[21] Nam, 'Phnom Penh', 66.
[22] Frost, 'An Unsettled Majority', 3735.
[23] Lee Kuan Yew, Speech by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew to the Singapore Press Club on Friday, 7 June 1996 at Raffles Hotel.

each group? These are the questions that opposing Member of Parliament Chiam See Tong asked directly at Lee Kuan Yew, and his answers were telling:

"*Let me tell you what I would think if I were an Indian. Why not 76 percent Indian, 15 percent Malay and 7 percent Chinese? That is better still. But you know this is the real world. Let us just maintain status quo. (...) You look at the educational levels of the performers. It has got to do with culture, nature and so many other factors. But year after year, this is the end result. Let's leave well alone. The formula has worked*"[24]

It is not difficult to understand the racial undertone of what Lee Kuan Yew meant when he mentioned 'culture,' 'nature,' and the 'many other factors' that influenced the economic necessity of maintaining Singapore's ethnic balance. He was even more straight forward 4 years earlier, when he debated another opposing Member of Parliament Joshua Benjamin Jeyaratman. Why had it worked, Lee Kyan Yew asked:

"*Because we have a practical people whose cultures tell them that contention for the sake of contention leads to disaster. I have said this on many a previous occasion: that had the mix in Singapore been different, had it been 75% Indian, 15% Malays and the rest Chinese, it would not have worked. Because they (the Indians) believe in contention, of opposition. But because the culture was such that the populace sought a practical way out of their difficulties, therefore it has worked.*"[25]

Later in the 1990's he told a journalist from The Straits Times:

"*At the very beginning, the Malays were not hardworking, nor were a lot of the Indians. We encouraged them to keep up. I'm not sure whether they will feel a little resentful, but I mean this is part of history. I know that it took a long time before the Malays accepted that they had to work hard because it was not in their culture. (...) I have said openly that if we were 100 percent Chinese, we would do better But we are not and never will be, so we work with what we have*"[26]

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[24] The Straits Times 'Entry of Hongkongers Won't Upset Racial Mix' (21 August 1989) quoted by Frost, 'An Unsettled Majority', 3742.
[25] Parliament of Singapore, Official Reports - Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)1 March 1985.
[26] Han, Fernandez, and Tan, *Lee Kuan Yew, the Man and His Ideas*, 181;187.

While exploring the Parliament of Singapore Archive, I was disheartened by the evident racism (and sexism) displayed by this individual, which starkly illustrated his preference toward the ethnically Chinese. It is then easy to see the similarities between Lee Kuan Yew, and Lim Boon Keng. In light of this context, upon revisiting the 'Singapore Dream' statement from the 1990s, it becomes apparent that Lee Kuan Yew's portrayal of Singapore as a 'united people, who, regardless of race, language, and religion, and built upon principles of justice and equality, achieve happiness, prosperity, and progress for the nation,'[27] stands as a powerful illustration of Singapore's deliberate manipulation of its public image and the shaping of collective memory with a political agenda in mind.

It also illustrates Lee Kuan Yew's focused and goal-oriented ambition, his drive to shape Singapore into what it has become today, and his success in presenting this meticulous image of Singapore. When discussing the erasure of Singaporean comfort women from collective memory in Chapter 5, it becomes apparent to what extent Lee Kuan Yew will go to protect this image of Singapore, hindering any progress towards transitional justice.

Phnom Penh's Landscape: Colonial Transformation leading to Urban Displacement

Once, in the heart of Phnom Penh, rested Boeung Kak Lake. It was a significant site with deep historical roots, serving as a cherished meeting point for locals over the centuries. However, today, the once serene lake has been transformed into a canvas of ambition. Four thousand households were left without a home, displaced and dispossessed. To understand the order of events leading to the loss of this cultural heritage, it is essential to revisit Phnom Penh during the era of French colonial rule.

[27] Lee Kuan Yew, Speech by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew to the Singapore Press Club on Friday, 7 June 1996 at Raffles Hotel.



Figure 1: The filling of Boeung Kak lake, 2012, photo© Nicolas Axelrod/Ruom.

The gift of history

When the French first arrived in Phnom Penh in 1860, they did not initially view it as a suitable capital. Additionally, they perceived the Kingdom of Cambodia as 'only a shadow of its former self'[28]. In response to this perception, they sought to modernize Phnom Penh's appearance. A spatial rebirth, with architecture central to the making of a "real" capital, transforming Phnom Penh from a bamboo city to a concrete one.[29]
This Cambodian rebirth also had a temporal dimension, shaped by the construction of a historical narrative based on continuity and linearity. This linearity explains why colonial scholars described Cambodian history as an arc, with its peak during the golden age of Angkor in the tenth and eleventh centuries.[30] This legacy of greatness, still forms an important element of Cambodian identity, which is apparent in the country's flag; a depiction of Angkor Wat. According to the historian David Chandler, the greatest gift the French gave to Indochina was its history.[31] This "gift" of history is a perfect example of what Gayatri Spivak has called "epistemic violence". Colonialism reshaped Cambodian culture as inferior and other, an image which is then internalized by the colonized.[32] In this manner, by portraying the Angkor Empire as an unattainable greatness, the past casts a shadow over the present.

[28] Igout and Dubuisson, *Phnom Penh Then and Now*, 6.
[29] Nam, 'Phnom Penh', 58.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Chandler, A *History of Cambodia*, 16.
[32] Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur', 253–54.

This colonial legacy, which instilled a sense of living up to the greatness of one's history, would influence not just the self-proclaimed 'golden age' of urbanism in the 1950s and 1960s but also serve as a foundational element in the Khmer Rouge's ideology in later years.

From civil engineering to social engineering

'The History of Phnom Penh is, in a sense, a history of water"[33]

- Vann Molyvann

In pre-colonial Southeast Asia, the metropolises were connected to one another and the surrounding areas through an intricate network of waterways. These water routes played a central role in shaping their relationships and connectivity. However, the arrival of colonial powers dramatically altered these fundamental orientations.[34]
In 1884, a French journalist visiting Phnom Penh remarked about the city's main road: 'Chinese, Malabars, Malay, Siamese, Annamites and Europeans live in the most object promiscuity'[35]. Social mixing had detrimental consequences for two key reasons. Firstly, both social and intimate forms of mingling eroded the racial categories that were essential for maintaining colonial control.[36] Secondly, this mingling among colonized subjects posed a challenge to the racial hierarchy that formed the backbone of the colonial economic system. This system saw the French assigning the Vietnamese to less prestigious roles while designating the Chinese for labor in rubber plantations.[37]
This colonial controle was enforced through land reclamation, and played a pivotal role in shaping racial distinctions. During the 1890s, the French excavated a triangular canal that effectively isolated the European quarter from the rest of the city. The excavated earth served a dual purpose, filling in water-soaked areas and providing the groundwork for the streets within the French quarter.[38]

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[33] Molyvann, *Modern Khmer Cities*, 104.
[34] Collins, 'Reclamation, Displacement and Resiliency in Phnom Penh', 203.
[35] Muller, *Colonial Cambodia's 'Bad Frenchmen'*, 61.
[36] Collins, 'Reclamation, Displacement and Resiliency in Phnom Penh', 203.
[37] Edwards, 'Time Travels'.
[38] Molyvann, *Modern Khmer Cities*, 47.

By the late colonial era, Phnom Penh's once fluid landscape had been organized and stabilized into a system of racially segregated districts.[39]

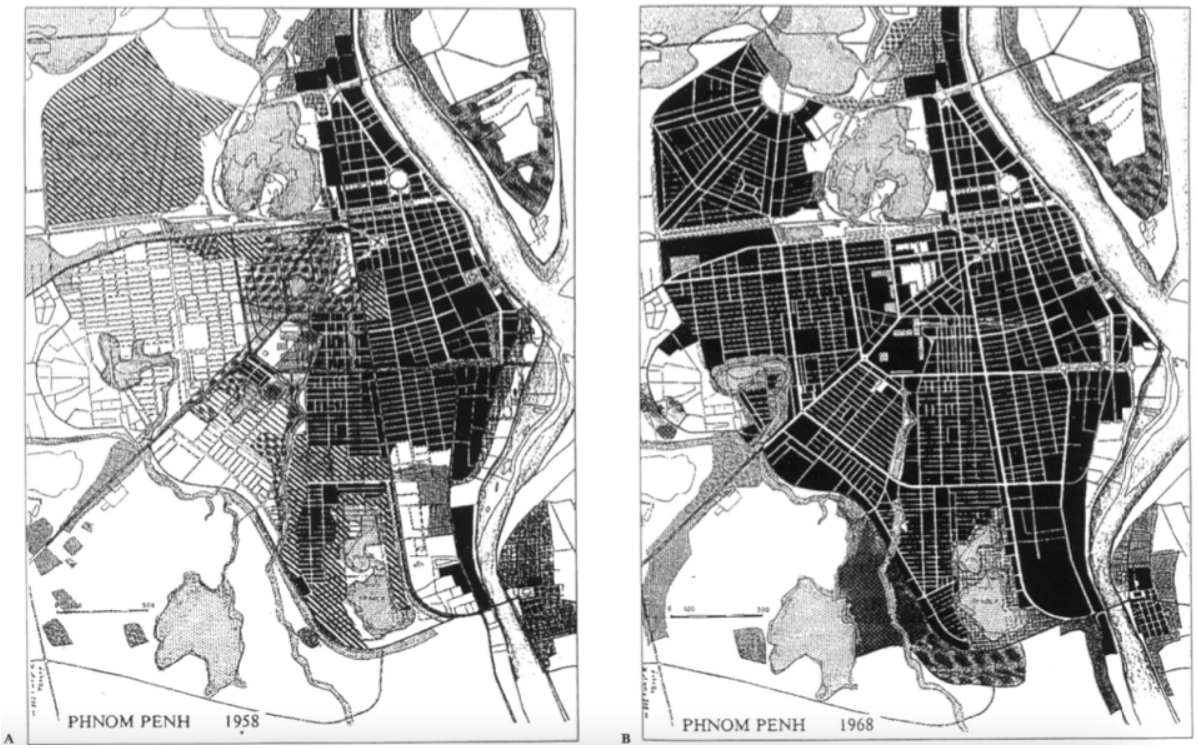


Figure 2: Phnom Penh in 1958 (A), and 1968 (B). Source: Molyvann, *Modern Khmer Cities*, 158-59.

By isolating the European district from the surrounding areas, colonial planners emphasized racial differences in the city's layout, preventing racial mixing and establishing a racial hierarchy.[40]

This colonial legacy, grounded in race-based urban planning, left a lasting impact on post-colonial development following Cambodia's independence in 1953. The era that follows saw further displacement justified in the name of progress. This period after independence witnessed a resurgence of state racism, with ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese citizens facing job restrictions within the government.[41]
Race also played a pivotal role in the post-Khmer Rouge urbanization efforts during the 1980s. Unclear ownership laws, resulting from the Khmer Rouge's abolition of property rights, led mainly to ethnic Vietnamese and Cham communities residing in squatter settlements around Boeung Kak Lake. Over time, the lake changed ownership numerous

[39] Nam, 'Phnom Penh', 57.
[40] Collins, 'Reclamation, Displacement and Resiliency in Phnom Penh', 204.
[41] Ibid., 203.

times. In February 2007, it was sold to private Cambodian developers at a fraction of its value, marking the beginning of the displacement of 4,000 families who called the area around Boeung Kak Lake their home.[42]

In chapters 5 and 6, I delve deeper into the historical intricacies that have shaped Phnom Penh's urban landscape, dissecting the threads of race, displacement, and resilience that run through the city's history.

[42] Ibid., 206.

Chapter 3

Trauma Filled History and the Politics of Memory

Trauma Filled Histories

Phnom Penh

Following independence in 1953, there emerged a 'golden age' of urban development in post-independence Phnom Penh. This particular era, spanning the 1950s and 1960s, was marked by a blend of traditional and authentic urban elements.[43] Under the leadership of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, nation-building was translated into city-building. Being a socialist Buddhist himself, Sihanouk ruled with the ambition of creating modernity while adhering to the ethics of Buddhism.[44]
During this period, Phnom Penh underwent rapid growth, with its population increasing fivefold compared to the end of the colonial era. Nevertheless, Phnom Penh's growth pointed to the ongoing unequal development in the country, as described by Kolnberger, 'the persistence of a single, progressive/privileged urban core and a lagging rural periphery.'[45] During this time, there was a surge in nationalism and the reshaping of state racism. Examining the architectural and urban planning efforts of Cambodia's renowned architect, Vann Molyvann, will provide an insight into the utilization of land acquisition as a tool for shaping the population in the post-colonial era.[46]

Having received his training in France under the modernist influence of Le Corbusier, Molyvann skillfully blended French modern design with a unique Khmer aesthetic in his architectural vision. The most captivating project for this discussion is the National

[43] Nam, 'Phnom Penh', 60.
[44] Ibid., 61.
[45] Kolnberger, 'Continuity and Change', 228.
[46] Collins, 'Reclamation, Displacement and Resiliency in Phnom Penh', 204.

Stadium Complex, accompanied by an Athletes' Village design inspired by Le Corbusier's 'Unités d'Habitation.'[47]



Figure 3: Molyvann, Olympic Village Apartments, 1963. Photo©: from personal collection of Vann Molyvann.

The National Stadium was built on the grounds of an existing Vietnamese settlement, while the Athletes' Village was established along the Bassac Riverfront.[48] Molyvann's statement is highly revealing of the influence of colonial-era racist ideas that promoted segregation and the perception of certain ethnic groups as inferior:

"At the time, the area around Kab Ko was an area of the city which often flooded. There were canals and a bridge which was called 'spean kon kat' (the mixed-blood child bridge). So the land on which we find the complex of buildings that today are known as 'buildings', as well as the land on which the National Theater stands, was all established by using silt dredged from the river to raise the whole area above the flood level."[49]

The Vietnamese settlement was forcefully moved to the urban periphery due to racial motivations disguised as progress. Unfortunately, this theme still resonates to this day.

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[47] Evans, *Agency*, 18.
[48] Collins, 'Reclamation, Displacement and Resiliency in Phnom Penh', 205.
[49] Molyvann, *Modern Khmer Cities*, 8.

Molyvann's project also underscores a transformation taking place during Sihanouk's rule. One critical aspect that remained unaddressed and eventually led to its decline was the failure to 'provide sustainable economic growth for the broader redistribution of income and wealth'.[50] During this crisis, there emerged what Kolnberger, quoting Khatri, terms 'nepotistic crony socialism,'[51] with Sihanouk granting privileges and income to his most devoted supporters. The Athletes' Village, part of Molyvann's previously mentioned project, serves as an excellent example, as it was intended to be affordable housing, only for Cambodian government employees. Sihanouk's reign was abruptly cut short, primarily due to the tumultuous impact of the Vietnam War.

City of Refugees

Although Cambodia escaped the first Indochina war (1946-1954), the Vietnam war was different. In 1963, Sihanouk severed ties with the US, worsening the political and economic crises. Following a coup d'état in 1970, Sihanouk fled the country, and Cambodia came under the temporary rule of the self-proclaimed Khmer Republic better known as the Lon Nol government, which realigned with the US.[52] Meanwhile, rural Cambodia suffered extensive damage from relentless US aerial bombardment, completely altering the landscape. Between 1971 and 1972, the US dropped over half a billion tons of bombs on the Cambodian countryside, causing widespread devastation and turning the landscape virtually upside down.[53] The implications of the Vietnam War led to a massive de-ruralization and re-urbanization, with approximately 1.5 million people relocating to Phnom Penh. The city had become a large refugee site.[54]

The United States' role and the narrative they promoted about their involvement in Cambodia will resurface as we delve into a later discussion on the politics of memory. However, for now, let's conclude on this note. In August 2007, during the 108th National

[50] Kolnberger, 'Continuity and Change', 228.
[51] Kolnberger, 2020 quoting Khatri, Tsang, and Begley, 'Cronyism' on page 228.
[52] Kolnberger, 'Continuity and Change', 229.
[53] Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 15.
[54] Kolnberger, 'Continuity and Change', 229.

Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.[55], President Bush addressed the matter with these words:

"The tragedy of Vietnam is too large to be contained in one speech. So I'm going to limit myself to one argument that has particular significance today. Then as now, people argued the real problem was America's presence and that if we would just withdraw, the killing would end. ...The world would learn just how costly these misimpressions would be. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge began a murderous rule in which hundreds of thousands of Cambodians died by starvation and torture and execution. ... Three decades later, there is a legitimate debate about how we got into the Vietnam War and how we left. There's no debate in my mind that the veterans from Vietnam deserve the high praise of the United States of America. (Applause.) Whatever your position is on that debate, one unmistakable legacy of Vietnam is that the price of America's withdrawal was paid by millions of innocent citizens whose agonies would add to our vocabulary new terms like "boat people," "re-education camps," and "killing fields.""[56]

What Bush strategically overlooks here is the way that the US military intervention, long before the Khmer Rouge came into existence, played a significant role in the unfolding events. The destabilization of Cambodian governmental power, coupled with the coup d'état and the establishment of the Lon Nol government, paved the way for the eventual ascent of the Khmer Rouge, who promised peace and stability to a war-torn country. Furthermore, when Vietnamese troops took control of Cambodia (a topic to be explored later) and put an end to the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, it was the US that still unequivocally recognized the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate government of Cambodia.[57]

These themes of manipulated collective memory and the reinterpretation of historical events to serve specific political agendas will be central to this thesis. However, before delving into these themes, it's time to thoroughly examine the intricacies of the Khmer Rouge era.

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[55] This speech can be watched in full through this link: https://www.c-span.org/video/?200620-2/veterans-foreign-wars-convention, Accessed 2 November 2023.
[56] 'Transcript of President Bush's Speech at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention'.
[57] Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice*, 11.

"I stop playing when I hear the thunder of engines in the distance. Everyone suddenly stops what they are doing to watch the trucks roar into our city. Minutes later, the mud-covered old trucks heave and bounce as they pass slowly in front of our house."[58]

"On our block, children jump up and down and wave their arms in the air to greet these strange men. Excited, I cheer and wave at the soldiers even though I don't know why."[59]

"The soldiers are everywhere. There are so many of them around, yelling into their bullhorns, no longer smiling as I saw them before. Now they shout loud, angry words at us while cradling rifles in their arms. They holler for the people to close their shops, to gather all guns and weapons, to surrender the weapons to them. They scream at families to move faster, to get out of the way, to not talk back. I bury my face into Keav's chest, my arms tight around her waist, stifling a cry."[60]

"Keav, why are the soldiers so mean to us?" I ask, clinging even more tightly to her.
"Shhh. They are called Khmer Rouge. They are the Communists."
"What is a Communist?"
"Well, it means. … It's hard to explain. Ask Pa later," she whispers.
Keav tells me the soldiers claim to love Cambodia and its people very much. I wonder then why they are this mean if they love us so much. I cheered for them earlier today, but now I am afraid of them."[61]

\- Excerpt from '*First They Killed My Father*' by Loung Ung

[58] Ung, *First They Killed My Father a Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*, 30.
[59] Ibid., 32.
[60] Ibid., 35.
[61] Ibid., 36.

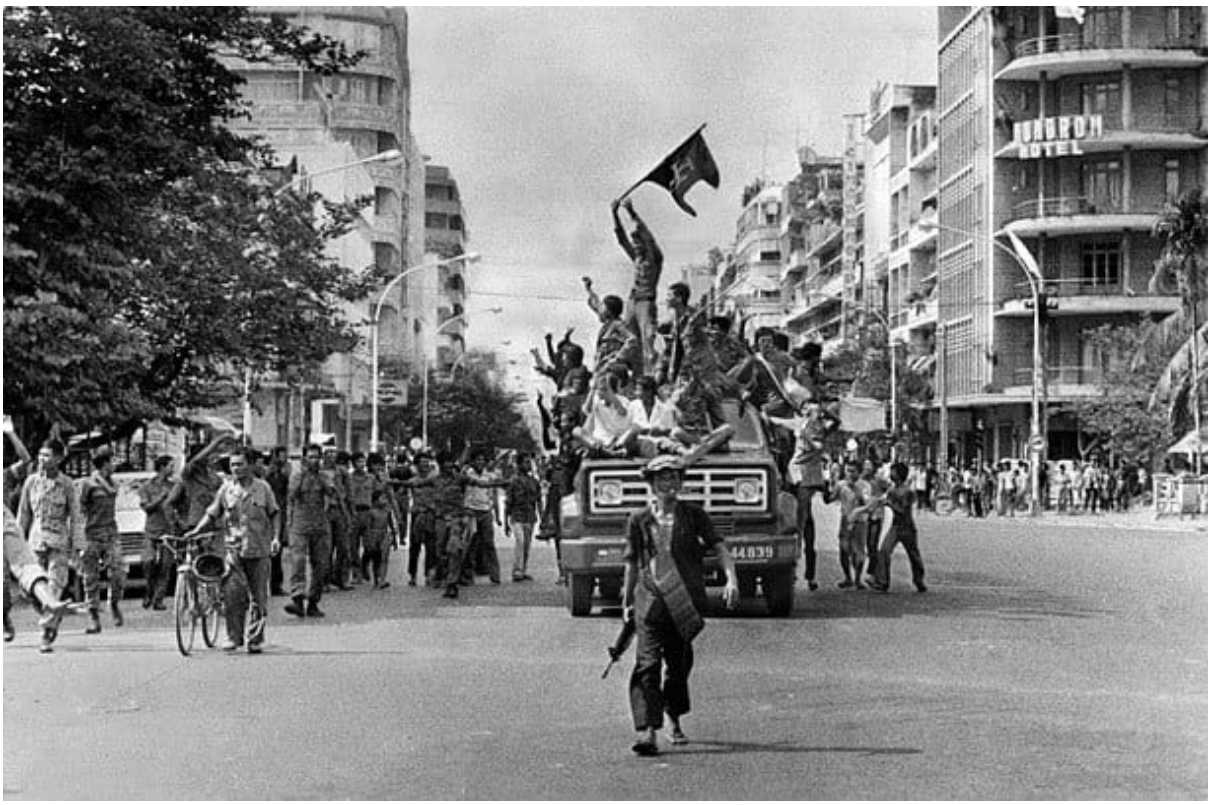


Figure 4: Khmer Rouge fighters celebrate as they enter Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975. Getty Images

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, captured Phnom Penh. The city, now sheltering almost two million people, most of whom had fled from the countryside, experienced its entire population being forcefully uprooted and compelled to leave for rural areas. The Khmer Rouge's cultural beliefs were rooted in a linear view of history, emphasizing a need to revert to a precolonial era. [62] Ironically, the concept of linear history was initially introduced during the colonial period. The Khmer Rouge has a drive towards totality—a drive to encompass everything, all differences, all others, into the same.[63] "Only the deaf, the dumb, and the mute would survive," becoming faceless components of a revolutionary society, a utopia meant to erase the unequal past and start anew from 'Year Zero.'[64] The parallel with the 'Year One' concept of the French Revolution is not lost on me.

When comparing this era with Cambodia's post-independence urban development, a clear urban shift becomes evident. Post-independence urbanism in Cambodia was a

[62] Nam, 'Phnom Penh', 61.
[63] Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 84.
[64] Ratner, *In the Shadow of the Banyan*, 277.

deliberate modernist project that aimed to express its heritage through architectural design.[65] In contrast, while the Khmer Rouge contributed significantly to Phnom Penh's decay by depopulating it, years of warfare had already inflicted substantial damage. As noted by Sophie Clément-Charpentier, the five years preceding the Khmer Rouge's arrival had severely damaged Phnom Penh's physical fabric long before the Khmer Rouge dismantled its social fabric.[66] Moreover, the Khmer Rouge employed urban elements but detached them from their original context, as seen in their conversion of a high school into the notorious S-21 prison or the repurposing of Vann Molyvann's National Stadium into an execution center for former Lon Nol officials.[67]

Kolnberger contends that, in contrast to the widely held belief, the Khmer Rouge were neither inherently anti-urban nor did they engage in what Coward describes as *urbicide*[68], which involves the deliberate destruction of buildings as a fundamental aspect of urban life. The physical infrastructure of Phnom Penh remained untouched with only two exceptions: the Catholic cathedral was destroyed as an ideological and anti-colonial statement, and the National Bank suffered unintended severe damage due to a poorly executed explosive charge.[69] Apart from these incidents, urbanity and urban life were just abruptly halted.

The evacuation of the city served not only security purposes but was also underpinned by ideological reasons. The Khmer Rouge viewed the urban population as parasites and the 'enemy of the people.' After a final “reboot”, their intention was to repopulate the towns with individuals who aligned with their ideology.[70] Metaphorically speaking, Cambodia ceased to be, giving way to Democratic Kampuchea, a 'Great Leap Forward' that rejected building upon prior foundations. It was not an attempt to revisit a golden era of Cambodian history, ‘The motivation of the Khmer Rouge leadership was not to *recreate* the indigenous spaces of the Angkorian kingdom, but instead to *create* an entirely new, modern, productive communal society.’[71]

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[65] Nam, ‘Phnom Penh’, 60.
[66] Clément-Charpentier, ‘Rebirth of a Capital Which Was Deserted: The Case of Phnom Penh’, 37.
[67] Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice*, 5.
[68] Coward, *Urbicide*, 43.
[69] Kolnberger, ‘Continuity and Change’, 229.
[70] Ibid., 230.
[71] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, ‘Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia’, 858.

Democratic Kampuchea's existence spanned just under four years. In this relatively brief timeframe, an estimated two million people died from a combination of severe starvation, diseases, torture, and execution.[72]

Throughout this period, the Khmer Rouge established the enigmatic Angkar, often referred to as 'the Organization', which exercised authority over every facet of Cambodian society. This included enforcing identical haircuts and clothing, eradicating family bonds and human emotions, and transforming the entire population into a labor force.[73] The faceless presence of this Angkar struck fear into the hearts of Khmer Rouge victims, leaving them terrified and without a clear target. The Organization communicated through its cadres, yet the identity of the Organization remained unclear, even to most cadres. To Cambodians, the Organization seemed like a form of power in its own right, detached from any specific individual.[74] This extensive nationwide panopticon of the Organization instilled pervasive fear, holding everyone under its watchful eye, ensuring compliance through the sheer dread it inspired.

The Forgotten Genocide: Bali 1965-1966

Genocide is an overwhelming, soul-shattering concept. It overwhelms us with staggering numbers and the sheer magnitude of suffering. The death of 2 million Cambodian people is a scale that's almost beyond our comprehension. It fills our minds with haunting images – the Cambodian killing fields, child soldiers as young as 7, and those haunting visuals that have become symbols of genocide, like the stacked skulls in a stupa or the bracelets honoring the murdered babies at the killing tree.

But what about the genocide that history has forced into oblivion, the one that remains obscured from our knowledge? This section of the thesis delves into the forgotten genocide of Bali during 1965-1966.

[72] Ibid.
[73] Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 84.
[74] Ibid., 89.

When I refer to the forgotten genocide, I'm speaking of its erasure from the global consciousness. However, for those who endured this tragedy, it remains vivid and ever-present in their daily lives. But it exists in the form of silence.

The political event that led to the nationwide massacres was instigated by an attempted coup by the '30 September Movement,' during which six army generals were kidnapped and killed. It was a pivotal event in the transition to the "New Order" regime, serving as a pretext to launch a pre planned attack against the communist party, *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, better known as the PKI.[75] What followed was a period of mass killings that extended for more than a year, from October 1965 through 1966. The New Order regime, under the leadership of Suharto, took power in 1966 and initiated a nationwide memory project. This project commemorated the six army officers while depicting the 30 September Movement as the "evil" communists, and portrayed the anti-communist killings and violence as a necessary means, relegating those events to the margins of Indonesia's history.[76]

These state-sponsored massacres targeted alleged communists, resulting in the deaths of approximately one million Indonesians and the deprivation of basic civil rights for hundreds of thousands more. The mass killings extended beyond the scope of individuals affiliated with the PKI, encompassing anyone perceived as a political threat. This included individuals with leftist associations, progressive women's groups like *Gerwani*, artists, intellectuals, and even ethnic Chinese communities.[77]
Yet, these events and their repercussions remained relatively unacknowledged outside the communities they had devastated, casting a long shadow of silence and injustice over the collective memory of a nation.[78]
Accounts of this violence are notably absent from tourist guidebooks. The extensive scholarly literature on Bali offers limited insight into the events, and even among the Balinese themselves, there appeared to be minimal public acknowledgment of the massacres.[79] My argument revolves around the idea that this silence doesn't solely

[75] Leksana, 'Collaboration in Mass Violence', 59.
[76] Ibid., 60.
[77] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 10.
[78] Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali', 113.
[79] Ibid.

originate from state oppression or the enduring pain of the past. Rather, it finds its roots in the fear of being tagged as a 'communist' and the dire repercussions attached to that label. Much like the Angkar during the Khmer Rouge era, this fear operated as a nationwide panopticon, scrutinizing and self-regulating every aspect of one's behavior.

Indonesian humanities scholar Ariel Heryanto highlights how the New Order's anti-communist agenda imposed a master narrative of heroic nationhood upon the silenced killings. This narrative effectively stifled potential forms of political dissent due to the severe consequences associated with being labeled a 'communist,' whether true or not. Heryanto argues that it wasn't solely those in power imposing oppressive control over silenced citizens; ordinary citizens also engaged in self-censorship and self-oppression.[80]
The scrutiny of this dominant state-constructed narrative of 1965, deeply ingrained in public memory, is precisely why personal testimonies become an essential tool to challenge the fabricated version of state history.

To illustrate this argument, I'd like to discuss Ibu Ari, a Balinese woman who lived through the 1965-66 genocide. Her story, as shared by anthropologist Leslie Dwyer, provides profound insights into how this enforced and fear-based forgetting has influenced various aspects of Balinese culture.
In this section, I aim to emphasize the disappearance of spoken language, a force so powerful that, by concealing the horrors that unfolded, it caused the oppressors to vanish into obscurity.[81] Throughout this thesis, I will delve into Ibu Ari's narrative frequently to explore a myriad of themes in depth.

In December 1965, Ibu Ari had just embarked on her life as a newlywed when a group of nationalist paramilitaries stormed her family home, abducting her husband and younger brother, never to be seen again.[82] What I aim to emphasize in this segment is the persistent silence, the reluctance to recognize what was happening. As Ibu Ari says: "*There was so much in those days that was not spoken. People used to talk about 1965 as*

[80] Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia*, 194.
[81] Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali'.
[82] Ibid., 122.

the time when you could die because of a word."[83] In Balinese culture, spoken words have long held the power to prompt actions. A curse uttered by the powerful can invoke illness, while words can bestow *taksu*, or charisma, upon inanimate objects. Nonetheless, in 1965, words assumed a new role as triggers. Merely being displeased with someone could lead to terrible actions with just a muttered word.[84]

"A 15 year old neighbour of Ibu Ari's who "talked too much' for some people's liking was corralled in a wicker cage used to transport pigs and then thrown into the river to drown. A man who witnessed his neighbour helping burn down someone's house called out in protest and the next day was dead. A woman food stall vendor whose welcoming small talk was heard as a promise saw her husband killed by her would- be suiter."[85]

And what was that all feared word? Communist. This word held so much power it became a weapon. As Ibu Ari's cousins expressed it: "*Today you call me a communist, tomorrow someone calls you a communist. Anyone could be a communist as long as someone was willing to name them as one.*"[86] Words not only gained new and dangerous implications but also became disconnected from the objects they were originally meant to signify.

The military propagandists for example, introduced "*sentimen*," an Indonesianized English term, to describe local emotional connections. People were encouraged to sever their emotional ties as a means to root out communist influence within their families.[87] The term "*jatah*," originally referring to government rations or rice and sugar, took on a darker meaning during the killings, signifying the number of individuals a paramilitary group intended to execute in a single night. A gift *from* the state to those who serve it, becomes a gift *to* the state's vision of a new order through violence.[88] as Dwyer observes: "*Even words like sibling or neighbour or friend turned slippery and treacherous, transformed into new hazards like informers, collaborators and provocateurs.*"[89]

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[83] Ibid., 124.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., 125.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

The depth of social connections, offering both comfort and communication, simultaneously paved the way for treachery and harm. The aftermath of the genocide encompassed not only the trauma of loss but also the instillment of silence. She was silenced, yet her silence spoke memory.[90]
As is widely recognized, the body keeps the score. This suppression of trauma has manifested in other ways, In the case of Ibu Ari, through the haunting of ghosts.

The severing of the bond between Ibu Ari and her younger brother triggered one of those manifestations, as Ibu Ari explains:

"We were so close, so very close. So close that when he died that afternoon, when he was killed, who knows where, nobody knew the place, that same night he came looking for me. He called out to me three times. I had already fallen asleep over there, next to that small coconut tree. Already he was looking for me.[91] *(...) Three times he came to me, coming back and forth, telling me, "Remember, remember, remember." I was so shocked. I didn't know that he was dead until the next day, when someone came to tell us he had been killed. They never told us where the place was where he had died, just that he was dead. He told me to remember."*[92]

The manifestation of Ibu Ari's brother as a ghostly presence plays a crucial role in reinforcing the importance of memory. During these ghostly visits, he emphasizes the significance of preserving their family's cultural heritage and ritual practices, even though her brother had initially questioned the importance of these Hindu rituals.[93] Despite the passage of time and the secret ceremony Ibu Ari held in an attempt to release her brother from worldly ties, he continued to return, reminding her of the value of remembering and upholding their cultural legacy.[94] This underscores the enduring influence of memory and connection that transcends the realm of the living. Ibu Ari continued to be visited by her brother until 2003, and she devoted her life to the safeguarding of ritualistic practices. However, silence persists. Even to this day, her own

[90] Ibid., 127.
[91] Ibid., 128.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 127.
[94] Ibid.

family cannot break through the door of her silence to incorporate her pain into a collective narrative of suffering, and when she speaks, they perceive signs of madness.[95]

I argue that the rituals she holds so dear have become *Lieux de Mémoire* for Ibu Ari, a term introduced by Pièrre Nora, who states that 'the most fundamental purpose of the lieu de mémoire is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death.'[96]
Because the physical location of her brother's body was never found, and she was never given the chance to give the trauma of loss a spatial dimension, she has memorialized the loss of her brother through ritual practice.

The Politics of Memory

Memory, according to Pièrre Nora, 'takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects.'[97] In other words, memory is closely tied to space. It is 'attached to "sites" that are concrete and physical —the burial places, cathedrals, battlefields, prisons that embody tangible notions of the past—as well as to "sites" that are non-material —the celebrations, spectacles and rituals that provide an aura of the past.'[98] However, memorials and monuments are political. As the works of Owen Dwyer (among others) emphasize, 'memorials and monuments are inextricably entwined in the production of the past.'[99] They are neither neutral nor static. They represent, and are represented by, political processes: a politics of memory.[100] A politics of memory highlights the fact that 'what is commemorated is not synonymous with what has happened in the past'[101].

[95] Ibid., 131.
[96] Nora, 'Between Memory and History', 19.
[97] Ibid., 9.
[98] Hoelscher and Alderman, 'Memory and Place', 349.
[99] Dwyer, 'Symbolic Accretion and Commemoration', 425.
[100] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 856.
[101] Dwyer and Alderman, 'Memorial Landscapes', 167.

Commemoration is thereby used as a means to shape, erase, or reshape an official history and collective memory. It is also employed to validate current ways of representing society and exerting political authority.[102]

Official memorials, as such, don't just attest to an objective history; rather, they serve as canvases for beliefs, presenting what some seek to embrace or project onto others through these monumental forms. Monuments are not the sole means through which the politics of memory can be imposed. State-sanctioned forgetting is equally political, often resulting from a blend of the two: the remembrance of one version of history intertwined with the erasure of another. 'Forgetting begets remembering (sometimes thought of as haunting). This is especially the case when forgetting is not accidental but deliberate, strategic, even malicious – in other words, disremembering'.[103]

This intricate relationship between memory and politics, where monuments play an active role, will be explored by delving into Cambodia and Bali. These examples will illustrate how memory, politics, and the deliberate acts of remembering and forgetting shape not only the present but also the legacy of the past.

Phnom Penh

On December 25, 1978, Vietnamese forces, numbering over 100,000 troops, swept into the heart of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Alongside them, around 20,000 Cambodians, predominantly composed of former Khmer Rouge cadres who had organized a government-in-exile, known as the National Salvation Front, participated in the offensive. This marked the culmination of years of minor conflicts and brief clashes, with Vietnam justifying its intervention as a liberation campaign, aiming to end nearly four years of devastating genocide.[104]

However, the international community viewed Vietnam's actions quite differently. Many nations, including Democratic Kampuchea itself and the United States, characterized

[102] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 856.
[103] Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 40.
[104] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 859.

Vietnam's invasion as a breach of sovereignty and a clear violation of international law. The already weakened Khmer Rouge forces were ill-prepared to withstand the overwhelming power of the Vietnamese military, and on January 7, 1978, Phnom Penh fell once again. The condemnation of the Vietnamese invasion by the US cut all the possibility of UN assistance to rebuild and for a tribunal to bring the leaders of the Khmer Rouge to justice. [105] In the wake of this military offensive, the National Salvation Front underwent a transformation, emerging as the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK).[106]

Unlike the tragic fate of Cambodia under Khmer Rouge rule, Democratic Kampuchea was not to be erased from history. Instead, it became a subject of memorialization, as an attempt to provide legitimacy to the newly formed People's Republic of Kampuchea.[107] This pivotal moment in history serves as the backdrop for the exploration into the complex politics of memory.

In an attempt to differentiate Vietnamese communism from Khmer Rouge ideology, PRK officials and their Vietnamese advisors referred to the Khmer Rouge as 'genocidal' and 'fascist,' drawing parallels with Hitler's Germany in order to undermine the Khmer Rouge's socialist claims.[108]
To facilitate this political strategy, two sites were swiftly converted into internationally recognized sites for commemorating genocide: Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, formerly known as the S-21 prison, and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields.[109] S-21 was opened to a group of journalists just two weeks after its discovery by the Vietnamese troops.[110]

In Februari 1979, the Vietnamese colonel Mai Lam, known for designing the Museum of American War Crimes in Ho Chi Minh City, arrived in Phnom Penh with the aim of transforming S-21 into a museum of genocidal crimes, drawing inspiration from

[105] Chandler, 'Cambodia Deals with Its Past', 357.
[106] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 859.
[107] Chandler, 'Cambodia Deals with Its Past', 357.
[108] Ibid., 360.
[109] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 859.
[110] Ibid., 860.

Holocaust memorials in Eastern Europe. As David Chandler explains: 'Mai Lam was eager not only to establish the links between DK and Nazi Germany but also to teach Cambodians about their recent past.'[111] In a talk with Lionel Vairon in 1995, the S-21 survivor Pha Thachan, by then a general in the Cambodian army, stated:

"Yes, what happened under Pol Pot was "Communism," but it was of a "fascist" kind, and it surpassed fascism. In fascism the Germans never killed their own people, they only killed foreigners. They killed French and Poles and so on. Pol Pot on the other hand killed his own people, three million of them. The fascists never did this."[112]

Cambodians were not, however, the primary audience in mind for S-21. For over a year, only foreigners were permitted access to the museum. A 1980 PRK Ministry of Culture, Information, and Propaganda document stated that the site was primarily intended 'to show . . . international guests the cruel torture committed by the traitors to the Khmer people.'[113] Meanwhile, Mai Lam and his associates were gradually converting the site into a museum. By July 1980, the restriction on Cambodian visitors had been lifted, leading to tens of thousands of people visiting S-21, with many of them seeking information about their missing relatives.[114]
In his pursuit of preserving the memory of S-21, Mai Lam held ambitious aspirations. He aimed to establish a museum and create an archive that force-fed a lesson about themselves, with the implication that responsibility for the DK atrocities might reach deeper than the known leaders and perpetrators.[115]

This transitional moment in history, when Cambodia shifted from the horrors of Democratic Kampuchea to a state of memorialization, unveils the intricate politics of memory at play. Delving deeper into the dark realities of S-21 and the Killing Fields, the human tragedy and the enduring power of memory will come to the forefront, revealing the lasting impact of past atrocities on Cambodian collective memory.

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[111] Chandler, 'Cambodia Deals with Its Past', 361.
[112] Hammaberg et al., 'Magazine of Documentation Center of Cambodia', 25.
[113] Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 8.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Chandler, 'Cambodia Deals with Its Past', 361.

Case study: The S-21 museum and the Killing Fields

This case study, serving as exploration of memory politics, focuses on two emblematic sites: the Tuel Sleng Genocide Museum, also known as S-21, and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields. When the first group of journalists arrived following the discovery of Tuol Sleng, they were confronted with a grim reality. As part of the conditions for their visa, they had to take a mandatory tour, making them unintentional witnesses to the haunting past within those prison walls.[116]

During this time, the PRK government viewed these international visitors as potential storytellers who could share Cambodia's tragic history with the world. The main aim was for them to return to their respective countries and reveal the harsh truth: Vietnam had "liberated" Cambodia from the clutches of a genocidal regime, without invading or occupying the country. The hope was that these visitors would influence key global figures who were still hesitant to support the PRK.[117]
While the Cambodian government continues to see Tuol Sleng as a crucial site for educating foreign visitors about the nation's painful history, there is significantly less concern among state authorities about the long-term impact of this exposure.[118]
Nowadays, the focus has shifted more towards the commercial aspects of tourism.

Upon entering Tuol Sleng, one is immediately struck by an overwhelming sense of 'authenticity'. The former high school's architecture, consisting of four three-story interconnected buildings forming a U-shape, gives off a sense of abandonment and the stopping of time. Apart from the serene central courtyard with pristine lawns and meticulously trimmed trees, the rest of the site remains exactly how it was when the Vietnamese 'liberators' found it in 1975.[119] The layers of the past become visible as one discovers the unsettling transformation of mundane elements into tools of torture and interrogation.
Classrooms turned to prisonrooms, children's climbing ropes, once used during recess, became makeshift lynching stations. A classroom desk finds new purpose in the prison's administrative operations. Even pull-up bars have been repurposed into instruments of

[116] Hughes, 'Dutiful Tourism', 326.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Jinks, *Representing Genocide*, 209.

torture. Prisoners endured hanging upside down until they lost consciousness, only to be revived by plunging their heads into filthy sewage water, allowing their tormentors to resume their relentless interrogations.

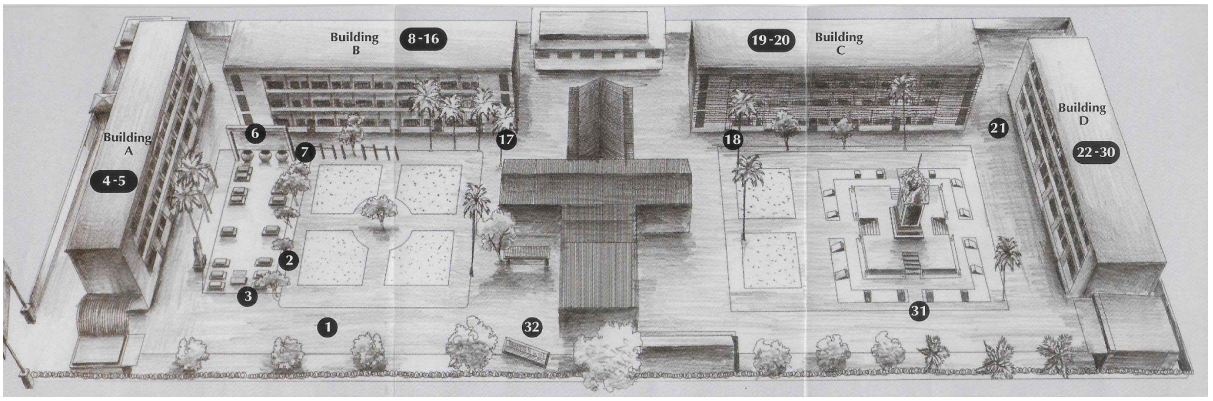


Figure 5: Brochure from the audio tour of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, obtained during the author's personal travels, 2023, Published by Narrowcasters.

Within the first building, visitors are confronted with the grim torture chambers. Each room features a rusty metal bed and an eerie photograph on the wall, showcasing the state of the room upon its discovery—a lifeless figure lies on the bed, and bloodstains mark the floor. Moving on to the second wing, an extensive array of black-and-white photographs, reminiscent of mug shots, captures the faces of Tuel Sleng's prisoners. These snapshots chronicle the detainees before, during, and after their harrowing experiences, their expressions reflecting agony, fear, hopelessness, and raw panic. In the third wing, the former classrooms have been subdivided into tiny, isolated cells using brick walls, while the fourth wing displays images of the perpetrators and a series of poignant paintings by the survivor Vann Nath, vividly portraying scenes of torture. The sheer shock value of these exhibits is undeniable, carefully orchestrating a collection of grim artifacts and haunting visuals. When it initially served as a distinct political purpose, legitimizing the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia by depicting their forces as saviors liberating the nation from Pol Pot's nightmarish regime, it now has morphed into a chilling tourists attraction, capitalizing on the unsettling fascination with its horrors to generate significant income.[120]

[120] Sion, 'Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 4.

During my visit to Tuol Sleng, one aspect that particularly struck me was the extensive coverage of the two Australian prisoners, Ronald Dean and David Scott. In 1978, as they were sailing on their way to Thailand, their boat unintentionally entered Cambodian territorial waters, leading to their capture by the Khmer Rouge navy. Their subsequent transfer to Tuol Sleng marked them as two of the eleven Westerners who met their demise within the prison's walls. The museum provided a comprehensive account of their life stories, offering intricate details about their experiences, even delving into the mockery of their oblivious interrogators. The two Australians fabricated fictional testimonies, humorously claiming to be CIA agents working for imaginary counterparts with the names of cartoon characters. Amidst the countless Cambodian victims who perished in this prison, mostly devoid of names or personal narratives, the focused attention on these two Western prisoners appeared conspicuously deliberate. This emphasis seemed to underscore the museum's intention to emotionally resonate with its predominantly Western audience, many of whom are travelers. By highlighting the ordeals of Dean and Scott, the museum encourages its visitors to empathize with the two Australians' suffering, effectively prompting them to envision themselves in the shoes of these Western captives. As tourism reaches the masses, the globalization of memory and memorialization tends to emphasize Western emotions and curatorial practices, eroding the distinctive historical contexts of each tragedy and advancing this agenda of political memory.

Similarly, Choeung Ek, another significant site of the Khmer Rouge genocide, underwent a transformation into a tourist destination in the early 1980s, with Mai Lam contributing to this process.[121] Located approximately 15 kilometers southeast of Phnom Penh, Choeung Ek served as the primary execution site for prisoners transported from Tuol Sleng during the Khmer Rouge period. Upon its discovery by Vietnamese troops, a gruesome scene unfolded: about 9,000 bodies lay in mass graves, many of them headless, unclothed, with bound hands, and their severed heads covered by blindfolds.[122] The tour through this chilling location takes visitors on a poignant journey, passing the infamous Killing Tree, where babies were thrown against the tree to be instantly killed,

[121] Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 8.
[122] Sion, 'Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 6.

and concluding at the monumental stupa, constructed by Lim Oerk, which houses the remains of 8,000 skulls and bones.



Figure 6: Skulls of victims excavated at Choeung Ek, housed inside the Choeung Ek memorial stupa. Photo©: Damir Sagolj/Reuters

According to Rachel Hughes, a stupa is 'a sacred structure that contains the remains of the deceased – especially those of greatly revered individuals – in Buddhist cultures. The construction of stupa is a significant activity that produces merit for the living and encourages the remembrance of the dead.'[123] The stupa's collection of skulls stands as an aesthetic spectacle, immaculately presented, each one meticulously stacked above the other in this glass enclosure. Their ceaseless accumulation serves to depersonalize the victims, reducing them to lifeless statistics. This striking presentation offers a raw and unfiltered experience, provoking emotions through its immediate proximity to death and the stark objectification of human remains. The tension is palpable, stemming from the memorial site's educational mission, in stark contrast to the uncomfortable commodification of genocide.[124]

[123] Hughes, 'Memory and Sovereignty in Post-1979 Cambodia', 261.
[124] Sion, 'Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 8.

Upon the initial discovery of Choeung Ek, Cambodia was involved in a national discourse grappling with the proper course of action. A pivotal question emerged: Should the remains be preserved, cremated, or buried? Advocating for preservation, the government aimed to showcase human remains as concrete proof of the Khmer Rouge's heinous acts, positioning them as an instructive tool to educate the Cambodian population. This stance aligned with the propaganda of the era, which underscored the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge regime, ultimately reinforcing the authority of the 'clean' PRK party in the country.[125] In contrast, King Sihanouk held a different view. The King and other Buddhist leaders have shared their belief that the remains should be cremated according to tradition, followed by their placement in a national monument. This ceremonial process symbolizes rebirth, not only for the victims but also for the entire nation, by stating: *'What Buddhist man or woman accepts that, instead of incinerating their dead relatives one displays their skulls and their skeletons to please "voyeurs"?'*[126] The concept of conserving history through the preservation of human remains, intending to facilitate both education and forensic analysis to assess the progress of humanity, aligns with the narrative of Western historiographical thought.[127] According to Buddhist beliefs, people who've met sudden or violent ends need swift burials or cremations on the very spot where they died. It's a way to guide their spirits to the next life, preventing them from haunting the death site forever. But in mass murder cases, where bodies are dismembered, hard to identify, and buried in mass graves for years, it's difficult to follow this ritualistic tradition. Furthermore, only when the family handles the cremation can the deceased have hope for reincarnation.[128]

It is this shift in perception that has left Cambodians with a declining interest in visiting Choeung Ek as a memorial site. The spiritual significance of the bones has faded, now eliciting only mild curiosity from the local population. However, for tourists, the skulls continue to carry a shocking, albeit sanitized, value, a stark reminder of the transformation from human tragedy to historical artifact. This transformation from human to object, serves as a powerful testament to the evolving relationship between memory and history.

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[125] Ibid.
[126] King Sihanouk (2004) quoted in Harris, *Buddhism under Pol Pot*, 233.
[127] Ibid., 234.
[128] Sion, 'Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 14.

Contrary to common perception, Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek stand out as distinctive sites primarily focused on the ordeals of political prisoners, who, in reality, constituted a small minority, less than 1 percent, of the overall fatalities during the Democratic Kampuchean regime. Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek endure as the two predominant locations for in-country remembrance.[129] However, these sites, while symbolizing the Killing Fields era, do not encapsulate the experiences of the millions who perished due to factors like starvation, forced labor, and disease. Furthermore, in the villages where people were killed and buried on the premises, the bones retrieved from local mass graves have kept their spiritual connection. Entire communities came together to excavate and relocate these remains to nearby stupas, often located close to the village temple.[130] The memory of the genocide is carefully preserved among the local population, a quiet and traditional observance, unassuming yet deeply meaningful. In every village, within each stupa, on sacred occasions, this remembrance unfolds. Here, the sanctity of human dignity remains unblemished, and the rituals of mourning hold significant meaning, ensuring that the restless spirits of the murdered can finally find peace.

Bali

Transitioning from the troubling landscape of Cambodia, where the politics of memory lean toward the commodification of trauma, this concept of politics of memory warrants further exploration in the context of Bali – a place of serene beauty, where the paradisiacal facade often conceals the darker truths lurking underneath. While the previous exploration of the Cambodian case revealed a calculated narrative designed to both obscure the roles of former Khmer Rouge figures in contemporary politics and immortalize the Vietnamese invaders as saviors, this focus now shifts to Bali, where a different facet of the politics of memory unfolds. Here, silence is the weapon of choice, and the island's authorities diligently work to erase any trace of its genocidal past. Bali's enduring appeal as a tourist paradise remains intact, perpetuating an image of tranquility where the shadows of genocide are unwelcome. This chapter shall unearth

[129] Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice*, 34.
[130] Sion, 'Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 19.

the hidden narratives and obscured history that simmer beneath the picturesque landscapes and vibrant culture of this island paradise.

In Geoffrey Robinson's compelling work, "Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali," he not only spotlights a significant issue within crucial anthropological studies of this island but also dares to challenge the conventional portrayal of Bali as an ahistorical and apolitical paradise. Robinson's piercing critique uncovers a recurring theme in cultural studies of Bali, where political violence is often framed as mere disruptions to the idyllic traditional village life, rather than acknowledging it as a complex outcome of localized conflicts.[131] As Leyla Stevens noted: 'Master narratives of Bali as an Eden-like island have been shaped not only by scholarly discourse but formed through the island's long history as an object for the western gaze.'[132]

To paint a more comprehensive picture of this narrative, a brief exploration of the events preceding the 1965 genocide is essential. The prevailing perception of Bali as an idyllic, exotic, and politically disengaged island became deeply ingrained during the late 1920s. This period coincided with the peak of Dutch colonial authority in Bali and the revival of Balinese "tradition" became a central feature of a conservative Dutch colonial strategy of indirect governance. Within the records of Dutch colonial bureaucracy, officials began to depict the people of Bali as individuals more invested in nature, art, culture, and spirituality than in conventional "politics."[133] Even the most sophisticated anthropological inquiries of that time reinforced the idea that ideals like "balance," "harmony," "order," and "happiness" were embedded within the fabric of Balinese culture. These very ideals served as the building blocks of Bali's alluring and exotic image.[134] Pre-war ethnographic studies of Bali often overlooked the broader political landscape, notably Dutch colonial power. It seemed that "politics" could be conveniently omitted from the ethnographic canvas, suggesting an essential Balinese character that transcended history and politics.[135] This prevailing narrative is deeply ingrained in the lives of the Balinese, tightly woven into the island's economic fabric and shapes the core

[131] Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, 7–9.
[132] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 13.
[133] Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, 5–6.
[134] Ibid., 6.
[135] Ibid., 7.

of Bali's identity. The notion that Balinese people are inherently apolitical, mere victims of external forces, is a misleading oversimplification. It's as inaccurate as trying to categorize the complexities of the 1965 events into simple 'victims' and 'perpetrators.' The cultural and historical intricacies within which these events unfolded defy such straightforward distinctions. Unlike many instances of mass violence across the globe, the 1965 killings in Bali can't be reduced to clashes between two clear-cut groups – the Communists and non-Communists. A significant portion of the violence was driven by local and diverse social conflicts that transcended and shaped formal political loyalties.[136] These conflicts were then manipulated by the state, labeling them as communist and anti-communist conflicts, thus illuminating the intricate politics of memory that began to take shape.

In some instances, it's hard to attribute these deaths to your usual socio-political conflicts. Instead, the "communist" label was often slapped on victims after their death and obscured the brutal realities of these killings. Some were killed over land, inheritance, personal disputes, and even sexual jealousy, yet all these motives were later overshadowed by a sweeping state-sponsored narrative of party affiliation.[137] There are heart-wrenching accounts of Balinese individuals who, after hearing that even the people with the loosest ties to communism were being killed, begged their family to end their lives. preferring to die at the hands of someone who could safeguard their soul's reincarnation into the next life, rather than being made to “disappear” and ending up dumped in a secret mass grave.[138] Others ‘turned themselves in’ to their village temple, where customary death rites were prepared, and the community came together for the duty of killing. And here's the part that's often left untold: the "second wave" of deaths. Many, forced to kill loved ones, eventually decided to take their own lives.[139] This traumatic memory shredded the intricate web of everyday life. It's the stark reality behind Bali's unaccounted deaths, a reality that the politics of memory cannot erase.

[136] Dwyer and Santikarma, “‘When the World Turned to Chaos’”, 293.
[137] Ibid., 294.
[138] Ibid., 295.
[139] Ibid.

Chapter 4

War, Rape and Silence: Unearthing Forgotten Traumas

"Good war stories lead boys and girls to dream of being soldiers, … Children playing soldier may fantasize about glorious death, … But does anyone fantasize about being raped by marauding soldiers, which is an inevitable consequence of war? If war makes you a man, does rape make you a woman?"[140]

- *Nothing Ever Dies* by Viet Thanh Nguyen

In his book *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, Nguyen emphasises the intertwined link between war and rape. He describes it as one of the truest war stories there is. And one of the most universal 'for while not all soldiers are rapists, every army rapes.'[141]
Despite the inevitable occurrence of rape during war, it is rarely commemorated in the many sterile memorials dedicated to victorious war. Rape carries no honor for the perpetrator and no glory for the survivor, which explains the scarcity of memorials dedicated to rape victims.[142]

Ham Tran's film *Journey from the Fall*, an indie film fully funded by the Vietnamese American community, serves as an example of such true war memories and their implications. The film depicts the journey of a mother and her son as they flee Vietnam in 1975, forced to leave her husband behind and become boat people. After already having indured so much suffering, the mother gets brutally raped on the boat. Now

[140] Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 227.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

living an isolated life in an American suburb, her son accuses his mother of having forgotten his father, treating him as if he were dead, to which she responds:

"Do you know what I've been through to be with this family today? Do you think your mother is still alive? She's dead already. Dead already! I died the day they took your father. I died again out on that ocean, Lai. This person you call your mother is nothing but a corpse, living only to take care of you. But your real mother is already dead, son. I hope you know. She's dead, son."[143]

In the mother's heartfelt words, a chilling truth is laid bare: hidden beneath an outward humanity lies an unsettling inhumanity, a dormant darkness within. What has haunted these souls? Memories. What has transformed them into the living dead? Memories.

Behind closed barn doors

Returning to Ibu Ari's story in Bali, her descent into silence was not solely the result of the abduction and execution of her husband and brother. Not long after these two men were taken, another individual entered her life: Bli Made, a neighbor and village leader of the anti-communist Indonesian Nationalist Party. Rumor had it that he had been fixated on Ibu Ari for years. He demanded an unsettling "inspection" in pursuit of incriminating evidence linking the family to communist ties. This sought-after "proof" revolved around hammer and sickle tattoos, rumored to be etched by women sympathetic to the communist cause in the most intimate regions of their bodies—on their vaginas, thighs, and lower abdomens.[144]

"When he ordered Ibu Ari to climb up the ladder to her family's rice barn, followed her up, and closed the door behind them, no one, they now say, could move or speak or see anything but their feet for the hour until the door opened again. And Ibu Ari came down from the rice barn clutching her batik cloth across her breasts, she said nothing, and her family never asked. (...) "How could we speak of it? Death we could speak of; death was

[143] Tran,*Journey from the Fall*, 1:56:00.
[144] Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali', 122.

different. Even if we were afraid, death was something ordinary. But 'inspecting' women, who could speak of it? We were afraid of the words themselves.""[145]

Ibu Ari sought refuge in silence, using it as a shield against the pain of memories and the potential for more violence. However, by constructing this fortress of quiet, she unwittingly opened a gateway to recollection, a passage that transcended the confines of the closed barn door. Her own memories intermingled with those of her family and neighbors, creating a collective memory. The closed barn door and the silence that accrued in front of it, I argue, resembles what Pièrre Nora describes as '*lieux de mémoire*,' encapsulating the weight of that painful memory.

The May Riots of 1998 in Jakarta

The concept of trauma stemming from sexual violence is also explored in the works of Abidin Kusno. In his book *The Appearances of Memory: Mnemonic Practices of Architecture and Urban Form in Indonesia*, Kusno argues that the everyday build environment functions as a repository of historical recollections and becomes a catalyst to confront distressing memories. Kusno delves into the 'unmanaged anxiety of the past' present in everyday architectural surroundings that often exist beyond the realm of official monuments.[146] Chapter 4 of his book, in particular, offers valuable insights into the entanglement of war and rape, as well as the implications of the silence that often ensues. To illustrate this, Kusno discusses the aftermath of the May 1998 riots in the Chinese district of Glodok in Jakarta and the enduring trauma resulting from the gangrapes involving over 400 women that occurred during this shift in political power.[147]

The May 1998 riots in Indonesia occupy a complex space within the collective memory. They stand as a symbol of the successful overthrow of Suharto's regime and the rise of a people-led revolution. However, within this revered narrative of democratic change lies

[145] Ibid.
[146] Kusno, *The Appearances of Memory*, 3.
[147] Ibid., 101.

the shadow of the violence that unfolded, most notably in Glodok, which was a central focal point during those riots.[148]

Kusno reflects on this difficult matter by analyzing the work of Indonesian writer Seno Gumira Ajidarma, who wrote the book *Jakarta 2039*, where he explores the aftermath of this trauma through a three story structure, each told in the perspective of 3 different generations.[149]

The first story tells the tale of a young woman, who, after tracing her lineage, discovered to be born as a result of a rape that happened during the riots in May 1998. She unearthed her personal history through substantial effort, as no files or written records existed. It was the elderly residents of the city who, in the end, revealed her history to her.[150] The event remained concealed in the shadows, as those who witnessed it guarded its secrecy. No institutional memory was created to pass it on to future generations, and no memorial was erected to recall the event. There was no attempt to transform private memories into public history. The city kept the woman's secret, leaving the haunting question of whether the city itself harbored no secrets at all,[151] as Kusno explains: 'Avoiding the traumatic past by … building amnesiac architecture on the sites of violence serves to neutralize the demands of trauma both to remember and to forget.'[152]

Rape during times of conflict represents a sensitive and gendered issue. Feminist writer Susan Brownmiller's perspective contends that when a soldier commits sexual violence against a woman from the opposing side, it serves as a display of power and dominance, effectively asserting superiority over the defeated men.[153] This dynamic, particularly in the context of marriage, shatters the dignity and honor of the men on the losing side, as the raped woman's body becomes a symbolic battleground. Furthermore, Brownmiller argues that sexual violence is wielded as a means to both psychologically and physically break the enemy, serving as a stark symbol of brutality that delineates winners from

[148] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 35.
[149] Kusno, *The Appearances of Memory*, 116.
[150] Ibid., 117.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., 115.
[153] Brownmiller, 'Against Our Will', 31.

losers.[154] Consequently, women become objectified as rewarding trophies to be used by victorious soldiers.
In the second story of Seno's work, we encounter a woman at her computer, her digital diary entry commencing with:

"*Today is the birthday of my daughter. If she is still alive, she is forty years old. Where are you my child? … Forty years have passed, I have tried to forget what has happened to me but the curse keeps following me. Why do people have memory? Even forgetfulness fails to erase the fact that I was raped, tortured, humiliated, and abandoned. I really hate that I was born and I really hate that you were born. I was raped at 10 PM on 14 May 1998 in a building on fire and where the screaming of other women could be heard.*"[155]

The woman in question happens to be the mother of the main character in the first story. Just as the nation grapples with the challenge of reconciling the brutality within its history, the woman struggles to come to terms with the traumatic rape woven into her own life's narrative. However, in contrast to the nation's ability to selectively forget, she remains haunted by both the event and the child she brought into this world, a child forever intertwined with the tragedy. She has attempted every conceivable method to erase these memories, yet her dedication to forget only strengthens her resolve to remember, leaving her with a bittersweet longing to reconnect with the child who is the result of gang rape[156].

Rape also accures in an orderly manner. It is generally tolerated, and performs a strategic function. According to Catharine MacKinnon, rape is 'systematic and group-based'[157]. She suggests that rape is a deliberate tactic utilized by state-affiliated armed forces. She also emphasises that rape is not a random or isolated occurrence but a collective one. It is a recognized issue, with commanders often turning a blind eye to it in pursuit of their political goals.[158] In other words, there is a political agenda behind rape.

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[154] Ibid.
[155] Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Jakarta 2039*, back cover.
[156] Kusno, *The Appearances of Memory*, 119.
[157] MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, 22.
[158] Ibid., 25.

This collective aspect of rape is illustrated in the third story of Seno's *Jakarta* 2039. In this tale, a young girl sits next to the bed of her dying father, as the one enduring presence in his life. He asks her to stay by his side one evening, ready to share a long-kept secret. With closed eyes, she listens as he recounts the story of the May riots that occurred in their city many years ago. She hears the story of looting, of burning buildings and of the violent rapes of many young girls, each by nine to twelve men. She pictures her young father, calmly walking through the ruins until he spots a young girl crying and hiding alone at the corner of a destroyed building. Her father approaches the girl and drags her to another corner and rapes her. His actions attract a crowd of people who then repeat the violation of the girl.[159]

Hearing this story, the young girl pulls away from her father and says: "How could father do that kind of thing? Father has mommy, auntie, and now a daughter. I am also a woman, father. I Feel the suffering of that woman. Father, I am so disappointed. How did this happen?"[160] To which the father says: "I don't know. Everyone was insane. Everyone did it. We felt that we were being led. None of us know how this happened. We have never talked about it. I have never wanted to meet those men again. When we met, we have never talked about it. We do not want to remember it."[161]

These three stories represent the ways in which the identities of these women have been permanently marked by the traumatic event, which has bonded the three women in the stories to each other. As the young girl in the last storie reveals: "You have hurt me, father. That woman will never forget the event. Father will also never be able to redeem the sense of guilt. And now I have to live with this wound too, forever. If that woman had a child from the rape, she will be forty years old today. I have a sister somewhere."[162] Insinuating that the man in the third story is the rapist of the woman in the second story. Both the present and the future are perpetually haunted by a past etched not in monuments, but firmly in the collective memory of its people.

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[159] Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Jakarta* 2039, 57–60.
[160] Ibid., 69.
[161] Ibid., 70.
[162] Ibid., 72.

Kusno delves into Glodok's post-1998 trauma by examining buildings constructed within a decade of the riots. In different ways, these structures represent conflicting attempts to move beyond that dark period. For example, Glodok Plaza flaunts a futuristic, technological design, while Pasar Glodok recreates colonial-era architecture to attract tourists. This struggle between embracing Indonesia's colonial past and envisioning future possibilities sidesteps the remembrance of the recent past. As Kusno reveals, these designs effectively create a narrative that erases any acknowledgment of or accountability for the events of 1998.[163] On the flip side, undeveloped areas in Glodok provide visible reminders of the riots, where traces of burned buildings, shattered windows, and current security measures stand as symbols of lingering psychological scars. Kusno critically examines how the memorialization of collective violence and trauma is intertwined with the city's spatial layout, shedding light on the challenges in addressing traumatic pasts. A common thread can be traced from the atrocities in Bali in 1965 to the events of the May riots in Glodok. It highlights how tourist-driven economies and geographical transformations tend to sanitize spaces that hold a history of violence.[164]

Looking at this tension between war and rape through the lens of Indonesia, I asked myself the question: To what extent is the state complicit in acts of sexual violence during war?
The body of literature concerning the utilisation of rape as a tool in warfare frequently demonstrates that states operate as pragmatic entities within the context of war.
In an attempt to address this question, I delved into the topic by examining the work of feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe. In her book *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, Enloe argues that certain conditions can militarise rape.[165] The type of rape that occurred during the May riots can be categorized as systematic mass rape. Here, rape is used to humiliate and degrade women. This is a way of showing patriarchy and masculinity. Rape is used as an instrument to oppress a certain group and give the message that those men were unable to protect their women. Now, I want to explore another category, which is known as recreational rape. Recreational violence implies that if soldiers are not provided with prostitution, they will be likely to rape the local women. This logic aligns

[163] Kusno, *The Appearances of Memory*, 110.
[164] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 36.
[165] Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases.*

with the Japanese "comfort women" policy during the Second World War, where the Japanese army forced women and girls into sexual slavery, required to satisfy soldiers' sexual desires.[166] By delving into this sobering history further, the focus will now shift to the narratives of the comfort women of Singapore.

The Comfort Women of Singapore

Singapore, a city once synonymous with male sexual pleasure and vice during the Japanese occupation, openly harbored a network of brothels and comfort stations. Yet, amid the broader resonance of comfort women's stories across Asia, echoing their traumatic experiences during World War II, the voices of Singapore's comfort women have remained notably absent.[167] In the face of this haunting silence, the last part of this chapter aims to unearth the intricate reasons behind their reluctance to speak and unravel the aftermath of the trauma they endured.

"*At the age of 14, when I should've been studying, I was taken away. … I'm 92 now. There is no resolution in sight. … It's so painful to talk about it. At this age, when I should be at peace, the Japanese government keeps dragging out this issue. So, whenever I have to talk about this over and over, I'm heartbroken beyond belief.*"[168]

It is with these hard hitting words, tearfully spoken, that former comfort woman Kim Bok Dong concluded her final interview, a mere three months before her passing. After upholding her silence for over six decades, her courageous decision to share her story moved many others to find the strength to come forward, shedding light on the eight years of sexual slavery she endured.

Kim Bok Dong's description of her time as a comfort woman is harrowing to hear. 'On Saturday, I would start from noon to 6pm. They stood in queues. If there is a delay the guy next in line starts banging the door. … Just one after the other. I did it so many times, I lost count. By 5pm I couldn't even get up. I couldn't walk properly. My entire

[166] Blackburn, *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory*, 1.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Kim, Life As A 'Comfort Woman': Story of Kim Bok-Dong STAY CURIOUS #9.

lower body was in pain."[169] She elaborated: 'At the end of the day the medics would come to treat the areas of our bodies that needed it."[170] Kim describes the unrelenting nature of the experience: 'On Sundays, I had to have sex from 8am to 5pm. … Because we did what we were told we weren't beaten."[171]

These conditions were confirmed by Kim Sang-hi, another former comfort woman that worked in Singapore. 'I was in Singapore until the end of the war. There was no way to escape from any of these places. In each of these places you were required to service thirty to forty soldiers a day for each girl."[172]

Kim Bok Dong was stationed at a Singaporean comfort station when Japan lost the war. Even then, Japanese soldiers tried to cover up the existence of these comfort stations by turning the women into nurses at the army hospitals.[173]

Kim Bok Dong stands as one of the most prominent Korean comfort women, and it was the feminist humanitarian perspective in Korea that played a pivotal role in shattering the prolonged silence surrounding the comfort women issue back in the 1990s.

Following this wave of acknowledgment, the stories of Malay, Indonesian, Chinese and Filipino comfort women began to emerge. [174] Yet, in stark contrast, none of the Singaporean comfort women have ever stepped forward to share their experiences, despite substantial evidence that Singaporean comfort women were indeed part of this grim sexindustry during World War II.[175] To comprehend this enduring silence, it is imperative to trace the roots of denial surrounding the existence of Singaporean comfort women, a denial that traces back to Lee Kuan Yew's refusal to acknowledge their presence.

Positioned within the heart of Singapore's urban landscape, the Cairnhill Road comfort station stands as one of the earliest establishments of its kind. However, what makes the Cairnhill Road comfort station particularly remarkable is its most renowned observer: none other than Lee Kuan Yew himself. It was when the comfort women issue came to

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[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Dolgopol and Paranjape, *Comfort Women*, 101–2.
[173] Kim, Life As A 'Comfort Woman': Story of Kim Bok-Dong STAY CURIOUS #9.
[174] Blackburn, *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory*, 7.
[175] Ibid., 3.

the forefront of public discourse in December 1991 that Lee Kuan Yew shared his recollections, providing a fascinating insight into his perspective on the legitimacy of the comfort women's claims.[176] In a speech delivered in Kyoto in 1992, Lee addressed the audience with these words:

"*I saw long queues of Japanese soldiers lining up for their turn at Cairnhill Road, … I thought then that this saved the chastity of many Singaporean girls. But I did not know that they were not voluntary prostitutes but Korean schoolgirls and young women abducted and conscripted into this service.*"[177]

Later, in his 1998 memoir, Lee revisited the issue of comfort women, providing further insights into his 1992 recollections:

"*I thought then [1942] that the Japanese army had a practical and realistic approach to such problems, … The Japanese high command recognised the sexual needs of the men and provided for them. As a consequence, rape was not frequent. In the first two weeks of the conquest, the people of Singapore had feared that the Japanese army would go on a wild spree. Although rape did occur, it was mostly in the rural areas,... I thought these comfort houses were the explanation. I did not then know that the Japanese government had kidnapped and coerced Korean, Chinese and Filipino women*" [178]

His neglect to mention Singaporean women stems from his denial that they were ever coerced into becoming comfort women. In his perspective, the comfort stations existed as a necessary evil, aimed at safeguarding the 'chastity' of Singaporean women.[179] According to anthropologist Sarah Soh, the Japanese soldiers often referred to the comfort stations as a 'public toilet', where they relieved themselves sexually. She argues that this notion of dehumanization of women is embedded in Japanese male sexual culture, and refers to it as 'masculinist sexism'.[180] It is precisely this masculinist perspective within Lee Kuan Yew's memories that dictates how Singaporean comfort

[176] Ibid., 16.
[177] The Straits Times, 'I Knew Comfort Women Existed'14 February 1992.
[178] Lee, *The Singapore Story*, 59.
[179] Blackburn, *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory*, 19.
[180] Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 39–41.

women are overlooked in the historical narrative of comfort women, prompting them to remain silent. Lee Kuan Yew's comments set the tone for the public debate. Within the oral history of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, numerous first hand witnesses recount having seen women being raped and abducted for sexual enslavement by Japanese soldiers in early 1942. Often the testimony is from a close friend, relative, or neighbor.[181] Blackburn illustrates this by providing an example from a testimony given by Tan Hoe Song, who was 14 at the beginning of the Japanese Occupation. She describes how Japanese soldiers barged into her house and the house next door. While she successfully hid, next door a 13-year-old girl was brutally gang raped by several soldiers in front of her father. According to Tan, she was taken away by the Japanese to serve as a comfort woman, never to return.[182]

Most of the time, returning after having served as a comfort woman was not a viable option, especially when the family was aware of the circumstances. These women typically chose not to disclose their experiences to their families or to refrain from returning to their homes and communities, where they would encounter scorn and humiliation.[183] Kim Bok Dong's interview reflects a similar scenario, as she recollects what happened after she got back to Korea:

"*We finally arrived in Korea. So then, I met my parents and family. … Although I was reunited with them, they had no idea what I had gone through. How could I have told them about my experiences? As a woman, I had things done to me that were unfathomable. So I couldn't say anything to anybody. They all thought I had gone to work at a factory. … I was getting older, my mother wanted to find out why I didn't want to get married. She pushed me to be honest with her, so I confessed that, given all the abuse done to my body, I didn't want to screw up another man's life. Once she found out, my mother also couldn't talk about it to anyone, and became very distressed. Eventually, she suffered a heart attack and passed away as a result.*"[184]

It is this patriarchal notion of them as 'fallen women' that ensured that these women largely remained silent. The silence of these women resonated beyond their personal

[181] Blackburn, *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory*, 33.
[182] Interview with Tan Hoe Song, elaborated on in ibid., 34.
[183] Ibid., 109.
[184] Kim, Life As A 'Comfort Woman': Story of Kim Bok-Dong STAY CURIOUS #9.

narratives, giving rise to a collective amnesia that permeated the larger collective memory. This amnesia affected not only the individual stories but also the historical recognition of comfort stations. These places, which should have been acknowledged as integral components of Singapore's 'dark heritage,' were left unrecognized. Consequently, their memory began to fade into obscurity, eventually culminating in the unfortunate consequence of these sites being forgotten. The importance of preserving these aspects of history, no matter how dark, cannot be understated, as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the past.

The 'Dark Heritage' of the Singaporean Comfort Stations

Efforts to integrate the notion of the comfort woman into Singaporean heritage were made as the locations of the former comfort stations became better known through the work of Japanese historian Hayashi Hirofumi. In his initial published study, he pinpointed six comfort stations in Singapore, all of which found mention in the 'Japanese Occupation in Singapore 1942-1945' project conducted by the Oral History Centre at the National Archives of Singapore.[185] Only one of these comfort stations has been preserved today.

Dr. Ceong Pak Yean, the owner of a Jalan Jurong Kechil shophouse, had an eye-opening moment when he learned, through Hayashi's research, that his property had once been a comfort station. In response, he shared his perspective that these buildings represented a facet of heritage, albeit a 'dark heritage' from the wartime era by stating: 'It is part of our historical heritage and we have to know that such things happened during the war.'[186] Cheong launched a campaign to seek government recognition for heritage status and, in August 2000, submitted documentation of the comfort station to the Preservation of Monuments Board.[187] Once more, in 2002, Cheong provided feedback to an Urban Redevelopment Authority committee dedicated to the preservation of buildings in the area.[188] He presented a submission that comprehensively

[185] Blackburn, *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory*, 165.
[186] The Straits Times, 'These Bukit Timah Shops Were Once a Comfort House in WWII'19 August 1995.
[187] Blackburn, *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory*, 168.
[188] Ibid.

chronicled the history of the shophouses dating back to 1936, including Hayashi's assertion that the documents he unearthed were 'the first documents that contain specific information on how a comfort station operated in Malaya.'[189] In his submission, Cheong firmly asserted that the shophouses represented a well-documented heritage of significant historical importance. In November 2002, the Urban Redevelopment Authority approved Cheong's request to preserve the Jalan Jurong Kechil shophouses, preventing any further redevelopment of the area. This decision came as a recommendation from Lily Kong, a Geography professor at the National University of Singapore and the head of the Urban Redevelopment Authority.[190] She emphasized the pivotal role played by Cheong's evidence regarding the existence of the comfort station in a statement to the Singapore press:

'It's very easy to say, "Let's conserve this and that place because of the rich history." But does anyone know what exactly the history is? Now at least we have the research material to back up our case.'[191]

Due to Cheong's unwavering commitment to this cause, Singapore achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first country to preserve a comfort station purely based on its historical identity as such.[192] Cairnhill Road's terrace houses were being preserved, not because they had been comfort stations, but rather for their architectural significance and value.[193] Surprisingly, there were no markers denoting the historical significance at any of the sites, including Jalan Jurong Kechil, despite its public recognition as a former comfort house. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that at least one of the sites was being conserved solely due to its history as a comfort station, signifying a certain level of public recognition regarding the events that took place.[194]

[189] Cheong Pak Yean quoted on 25 september 2002 in ibid., 169.
[190] Ibid.
[191] The Straits Times, 'Comfort Houses to Be Conserved', 20 November 2002.
[192] Blackburn, *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory*, 169.
[193] Ibid., 170.
[194] Ibid.

The difficult fight for recognition through Comfort Women Statue

While Singapore's comfort women remained silent, their counterparts from South Korea, who had served in Singapore under Japanese military control, chose a different path. Kim Bok Dong and the South Korean women's rights advocacy group took a keen interest in acknowledging the significant number of Korean comfort women in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation, as highlighted by Hayashi's research.[195] In 2012, plans for the first Singaporean comfort women memorial statue started to solidify. This memorial aimed to replicate the first statue of a young Korean girl seated on a chair, which had been erected by Korean women's rights activists outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul in December 2011 and had become the focal point of widespread protests and demonstrations.[196]



Figure 7: Kim Bok-dong, left, and Gil Won-ok, former wartime sex slaves, at a demonstration in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, South Korea, in 2016. Photo©Woohae Cho/Getty Images

On January 22, 2013, Korean Council activist Doseul Jeong addressed the media in Seoul, stating: 'A second girl statue will be erected in Singapore, probably in March, after consultations with authorities there. ... The statue will be built in a place where Japanese troops used to run a brothel'[197]. Ahn Seonmi also told the media that 'Kim Bok Dong regards the experience as one of her most difficult times, and hopes that the

[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Bangkok Post, 'S. Korea Activists to Put "comfort Woman" Statues in Asia', 23 January 2013.

statue is erected before she dies."[198] Another member of the Korean Council provided additional details, explaining that these statues were integral to the Butterfly Project. One of the project's objectives was to 'erect comfort women memorials throughout Asia, where Japanese military brothels existed during the Pacific War',[199] including places like China, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The transnational history of the comfort women gave birth to an enduring and unifying transnational heritage.

Unfortunately, discussions surrounding the construction of comfort women statues in Singapore, as well as the broader aspiration to establish them throughout Asia, fueled tensions between Japan and Korea, leading to diplomatic disputes.[200] While monitoring these events and the ongoing controversies regarding Japan's wartime actions, the Singapore government remained steadfast in its reluctance to entangle the nation in what was commonly referred to as the 'history wars' of Northeast Asia.[201] On January 30, 2013, the plans of Kim Bok Dong and the Korean Council to erect a comfort women statue in Singapore came to a halt when the Singapore Ministry announced that 'it would not allow such a statue to be erected in Singapore.'[202]

That same year in May 2013, the issue of the comfort women made headlines again, when the conservative mayor of Osaka Toru Hashimoto, claimed: "W*hen soldiers are risking their lives by running through storms of bullets, and you want to give these emotionally charged soldiers a rest somewhere, it's clear that you need a comfort women system.*"[203] Especially after the defeat of Singapore's decision not to erect a comfort women statue, it felt like a blow to former comfort women like Kim Bok Dong. In response to this statement, she commented: "We don't need to be trampled on again"[204] In her final interview in 2019, when questioned about her expectations from Japan and its government, Kim Bok Dong shared the following:

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[198] The Straits Times, 'Govt Says No to Statue of "Comfort Woman" Here' 1 February 2013.
[199] Kyunghyang Shinmun, 'A Comfort Women Memorial in Singapore'23 January 2013.
[200] Ushiyama, '"Comfort Women Must Fall"?', 1256.
[201] Nakano and Blackburn, 'Memory of the Japanese Occupation and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia', 34.
[202] The Straits Times, 'Govt Says No to Statue of "Comfort Woman" Here'1 February 2013.
[203] The New York Times, 'Women Forced Into WWII Brothels Served Necessary Role, Osaka Mayor Says' 14 May 2013.
[204] The New Yorker, Sorkin, 'The Mayor and the Comfort Women' 30 May 2013.

'What I want is an apology from Japan for having dragged us away, and making us suffer. I want a formal apology. They should say, "What we did was completely wrong, and we'll correct our history textbooks." And say to us, "We sincerely apologize." If they wrote that kind of formal apology, then we can forgive them. … They keep trying to make this issue go away. And we're the ones who are constantly fighting so that it doesn't happen. It's history!'[205]

As the world witnesses the passing of Kim Bok Dong without ever receiving a formal apology from Japan for the atrocities inflicted upon her, this serves as a reminder that the journey to reparation for historical wrongs is often one step forward and two steps back. The passing of Kim Bok Dong without this formal apology serves as a poignant reminder that the path to justice remains challenging, yet the voices of the silenced continue to resonate, demanding the acknowledgment they rightfully deserve.

[205] Kim, Life As A 'Comfort Woman': Story of Kim Bok-Dong STAY CURIOUS #9.

Chapter 5

Urban Spaces as Repositories of Memory and Trauma

In the context of urban spaces, memories and traumas are interwoven into the very fabric of the cityscape, resembling a palimpsest where time inscribes itself layer upon layer. This chapter builds upon the historic narratives explained in the previous chapters, and extends its focus to the broader landscape of urban memory. Urban spaces serve as silent witnesses to collective histories. Exploring the city as a repository of memories and traumas, where time leaves permanent marks, much like a palimpsest, will reveal both what's documented and what's concealed. These spaces, resonating with untold stories, become a testament to voices silenced and a profound exploration of how the past continues to shape the present.

Andreas Huyssen's scholarly contributions in the realm of history, memory, and trauma provide a crucial framework for understanding how various temporal dimensions intersect and interact within urban spaces. In his influential collection of essays, *Present Pasts: urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*, Huyssens introduces the concept of the "urban palimpsest," a powerful metaphor that unravels the layers of history and collective memory that shape a city.[206] Huyssen uses the concept of a palimpsest to explore the sense of time and history associated with a location, especially when uncovering hidden aspects of a nation's often traumatic past. Viewing a place as a palimpsest will help deal with visual information that has been intentionally erased from the landscape, creating gaps or missing elements. This relates to how historical events, due to their difficulty in being documented and represented, can become invisible, with their existence marked by processes of erasure and loss.[207]

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[206] Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 7.
[207] Huyssen, *Present Pasts*.

The Site as Palimpsest

Palimpsests in the Balinese Landscape

In the southern heart of Bali, right in the midst of Kuta's vibrant tourist scene, stands a magnificent banyan tree, boldly marking its territory between a village temple and an ordinary carpark. The site serves as a unique communal area, steadfastly challenging the unchecked expansion of luxury hotels and private villas in southern Bali. What remains unspoken, though widely acknowledged, is the mass grave from the 1965 anti-communist killings concealed beneath the road where the banyan tree peacefully stands.[208] The silent presence of mass graves from the 1965 killings in south Bali, along with their traces, function as intriguing palimpsests within the highly touristy topography of the region. This section will delve into how the remnants of 1965 persist as fragments, gaps, and notable absences in the landscape.

What makes the banyan tree's location so intriguing is its concealed secrets, rather than what it reveals. Amidst the constant flow of cars and motorbikes passing through, there's no indication of the unmarked resting place beneath the road where the tree stands. This banyan tree acts as a symbolic marker in the landscape, bearing witness to unseen and forgotten histories.[209] Examining this site with Huyssen's palimpsest concept in mind, one can perceive this urban space as a complex intertwining of various histories, narratives, and memories, all layered within its textural landscape.[210] Through the oral history approach, the compelling narrative of a man who survived the atrocities sheds crucial light on the profound significance of this tree. This story is told in Leyla Stevens' short film *Our sea is always hungry*.[211] Through the medium of a dialogue between an older and a younger woman discussing the Balinese landscape and its historical connection, Stevens implies that the oral tradition of history, even when uncertain, offers fresh avenues for remembrance. In doing so, she underscores the essential role of local communities in the reconstruction and transmission of memories of violence, while also emphasizing the role of nature and the landscape as preservers of memory.[212]

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[208] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 81.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 7.
[211] Stevens, *Our Sea Is Always Hungry*.
[212] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 82.

"I heard of one man, a rice farmer who managed to escape before they came to get him. He had a strong premonition before the militia arrived and slipped away. He found a tall tree and climbed up and up, and hid at the very top. From there he looked down and saw those men who came to march the accused villagers into an empty field, and hack them to death with machetes. Yes, some of those killed were people from his own family. For many years he never told this story to anyone"[213]



Figure 8: Stevens, Still from Leyla Stevens' video installation *Our Sea is Always Hungry*, 2019, UTS Gallery, Sydney.

This oral history uncovers that there was yet another observer of that night, apart from the man: the tree itself. While the landscape surrounding this location has transformed over the years, the tree has endured as a prominent landmark. In Bali, banyan trees hold a special significance, seen as powerful attractors of spirits and indicators of unseen activity.[214] A bit further in the short film, the two women discuss the many bodies that lie buried with this dialogue:

[213] Stevens, *Our Sea Is Always Hungry*.
[214] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 89.

"*Those missing bodies. They are everywhere on this island?*"

"*They would bury them in empty fields, in graveyards, along rivers, along coastlines. It's all unclear really, no one knows for sure.*"

"*How many were there do you think?*"

"*Hmm, how many? Some say 80,000 … some 100,000. No one knows what the right number is.*"

"*There were mass graves. Big holes were dug deep and piles of bodies were thrown in.*"

"*No, stop speaking like that, just stop there. We do not want to remember them this way, makes me uncomfortable.*"[215]

This underscores the profound intergenerational impact on the perception of the events that unfolded during the 1965 killings, revealing an enduring veil of oppressive silence that continues to envelop this critical subject.

Hidden beneath the surface of Bali's landscape are the unacknowledged mass graves that bear the scars of the 1965 abuses, manifesting as concealed voids, and silent absences within the otherwise visible topographies. These sites, charged with the weight of a painful history, exist devoid of any photographic record, official archives, or monuments that might acknowledge the horrors that transpired there. Amid the ongoing trauma experienced by the families of the victims, one poignant aspect is the unresolved status of their relatives' remains. In a majority of cases, the families were never able to recover the bodies, further deepening the anguish surrounding the events of 1965.[216]

An illustration of the lasting pain that can stem from the inability to recover the bodies of loved ones is exemplified in the experience of Ibu Ari. Two years had passed since the disappearance of her brother and husband when Ibu Ari, accompanied by a group of female relatives, sought solace from a spirit medium. She wanted answers about the

[215] Stevens, *Our Sea Is Always Hungry*.
[216] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 88.

whereabouts of their bodies. However, due to the risk of exposing any communist affiliations, she couldn't tell the truth about their deaths. The medium provided her with a location to search, but despite her relentless efforts, Ibu Ari never succeeded in locating their remains.[217] In 1968, finding no bodies to cremate, she and the other widows undertook a quiet visit to the village graveyard. On that tranquil night, they collected soil to shape it into body-like figures, gently wrapping them in white cloth. Standing before their family compound's gates, they softly called upon the spirits of their dead relatives to return and inhabit these makeshift figures, which were then cremated in secrecy.[218] Even after the cremation ceremony, she felt the weight of the departed still bearing down on her. The priests at that time had claims that true cremation focused on soul purification rather than the physical body. She now believes that the priests' statements were politically driven, part of the state's effort to downplay the significance of the missing bodies and the reality of the killings that had occurred.[219]

This story sheds light on the fact that, rather than having physical bodies to retrieve and give a proper burial, the Balinese community was left with mere descriptions of the locations where bodies were believed to be buried—places like nearby village graveyards, riverbanks, coastlines, and coconut fields.[220] These areas typically exist at the periphery of the central village structures. Most of these bodies were never unearthed, and today, they remain as literal buried history. However, these peripheral spaces have gradually vanished amidst the rapid urban development of southern Bali.[221] Empty coconut fields and coastlines, containing within it layers of history, have now evolved into villas, shopping malls, and carparks, altering the landscape like layers of a palimpsest.

[217] Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali', 123.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., 124.
[220] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 88.
[221] Ibid.

Exploring Cambodia's 'Sights Unseen'

The Sre Lieu mass grave



Figure 9: Landscape around Koh Sla Dam, Kampot Province, Cambodia, 2012, Photo©: James Tyner

60 km south of Phnom Penh, there appears to be an unremarkable section of seemingly peaceful landscape. Although its tranquil appearance conceals a history of starvation, disease and execution. This roughly 12 km wide section is all that remains of Koh Sla Dam, a place where 9000 people died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge.[222] This site bears no signs, no indication of what occurred here and no history commemorating it into national memory. It is in all ways unremarked. This is the reality of countless places in the Cambodian landscape, its historical violence inscribed in the everyday. Unlike the official commemorated sites like the Tuol Sleng Museum and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields, that have been commodified and cater to the western audience, it is these 'sights

[222] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 854.

unseen' that form a crucial part in how the Cambodian people reconcile with their tragic past.

While David Chandler acknowledges that every Cambodian over 50 is aware of the events, the selective memorialization confined to sites like the Tuel Sleng Museum and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields fails to educate the younger generation about the full extent of the genocide.[223] Focusing on these 'sites unseen' is important because 'public remembrance of atrocity is necessary as a tool for facilitating social compensation to victimized groups, moral reflection among the larger society and public education.'[224]

In 1973, Khmer Rouge cadre initiated an extensive infrastructure project in the newly liberated Kampot Province, focusing on the vicinity of Sre Lieu village. Thousands of Cambodians were forcibly relocated to engage in the construction of the Koh Sla Dam. Under deplorable conditions, marked by starvation, exposure, and disease, numerous people succumbed to the harsh circumstances.[225] The construction advanced at a slow pace. Following the fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge on April 17, 1975, supplementary work brigades were dispatched to the site, sustaining the efforts until 1977.[226] Srey Neth, a survivor, recollects her memory of her time burying bodies of her unit who died: 'I carried only the dead bodies of people in my unit. Like the others, I was forbidden by Angkar from telling others about the number of deaths. … Sometimes, they [the Khmer Rouge] woke me up in the middle of the night and ordered me to take bodies to be buried. The number of bodies I buried ranged from two to six per night.'[227] Completed in 1977, the dam and the adjacent reservoir have been in continuous use. Even in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge's downfall, inhabitants have settled in the area. A significant number of newcomers, then and now, are not aware of the tragedy linked to the dam. The mass grave site lingered unnoticed, concealed beneath the overgrowth of trees and bushes.[228] In 1998, individuals from other provinces relocated to

[223] Chandler, 'Cambodia Deals with Its Past', 365–66.
[224] Dwyer and Alderman, 'Memorial Landscapes', 172.
[225] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 863.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Rasy, 'Discovery of Sre Lieu Mass Grave'.
[228] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 864.

Koh Sla, unaware that it was once a Khmer Rouge killing field. Limited knowledge about this site was confined to a handful of locals and former members who had worked there. Soa Son, a 65-year-old, resided near the graveyard for over a decade before discovering the unsettling truth that numerous bodies lay beneath the ground. His suspicions were heightened during his stay as ghosts appeared to haunt an approximately one-hectare area around the grave. He said, 'Sometimes I heard chattering voices in the forest. Sometimes I heard the sound of a screeching ox-cart along the path in front of my house toward the forest; then the sound died down. I followed the sound of that ox-cart, but did not dare walk into the forest because I knew it was haunted by ghosts.'[229] Many of the deaths linked to this location, along with literally thousands of other sites across the country, were not characterized by 'spectacular' mass executions. Instead, these deaths exemplified the 'banality of evil,' illustrating the everydayness of violence.[230] The obliteration of both the physical and social aspects of Koh Sla serves as evidence of the ongoing struggle over memory within Cambodia. The absence of commemoration at the Koh Sla site encapsulates an unmarked memory of the day-to-day violence that prevailed during the Khmer Rouge era.[231]

Kampong Chhnang Airport

Nestled 60 km northwest of Phnom Penh, the Kampong Chhnang Airport emerges as a haunting relic of the past. This airport spanning approximately 300 hectares, reveals the remnants of an ambitious project never brought to fruition. Comprising two runways, a crumbling control tower, and an abandoned administration building, the airport stands as a testament to a bygone era.[232]

[229] Rasy, 'Discovery of Sre Lieu Mass Grave'.
[230] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 864.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.



Figure 10: Runway, Kampong Chhnang airport, 2018, Photo©: Kathmandu & Beyond



Figure 11: Terminal building, Kampong Chhnang airport, 2018, Photo©: Kathmandu & Beyond

The inception of plans for this airport dates back to late 1975, marked by substantial collaboration with Chinese advisors and engineers. Much like other initiatives under the Khmer Rouge, the construction relied on forced labor.[233] Conditions were dreadful, as Khmer Rouge officials intended workers to work themselves to death. Under Pol Pot's orders tens of thousands of Khmer Rouge soldiers from the more liberal east zone of Democratic Kampuchea were purged and sent here. They were forced into relentless labor until exhaustion, ultimately leading to death through a fatal blow to the neck with a hoe or being bulldozed into deep pits, later smoothed flat by those bulldozers.[234]

[233] Ibid.
[234] Pringle, 'Pol Pot's Abandoned Airport'.

After the departure of the remaining Khmer Rouge soldiers, who fled the site after murdering the last of their slaves, locals claim that the stench of decomposing corpses lingered in the air for a decade.[235]

What adds fascination to this site is its dual significance. Firstly, it serves as spatial evidence, that questions and refutes the long-standing myth of the Cambodian genocide—the idea that the Khmer Rouge aimed to 'turn back history' and recreate a society reminiscent of the Angkorian Empire. The lingering remains of both the dam and this airport defy the political narrative of the Khmer Rouge regime as an anti-modern, agrarian movement.[236]
Secondly, the presence of this airport challenges the narrative of the Khmer Rouge ideology, which advocated for Democratic Kampuchea to be self-reliant and self-governing, denouncing Western influences as the source of corruption and branding them as the 'enemy of the state.' However, in reality, Democratic Kampuchea fell short of achieving self-sufficiency. Throughout its existence, the government actively pursued and established several significant international connections. This included trade with Thailand, the importation of medical supplies from Hong Kong, and the acceptance of 'gifts' from abroad, such as the $12,000 worth of anti-malaria drugs sent by the American Friends Service Committee with Washington's approval via China.[237] The Airport was also built using Chinese engineers.[238]
This absence of a memorial at the site is deliberate; there is nothing elucidating why an abandoned, incomplete airport rests amidst farmland. Any commemoration of the airport would contradict the official narrative, as it would undermine the longstanding myth that the Khmer Rouge acted alone.[239]

In the continuous effort to erase or obscure the past, the memories of millions of Cambodians persist quietly, woven into the everyday fabric of these landscapes. Both the Sre Lieu mass grave site and the abandoned airport, along with countless other

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[235] Ibid.
[236] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 865.
[237] Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 145–46.
[238] Pringle, 'Pol Pot's Abandoned Airport'.
[239] Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci, 'Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 866.

locations, embody what James Tyner describes as "active memorials" — places where life and death continue to unfold.[240] Unlike the sanitized spaces of Tuol Sleng museum and Choeung Ek's increasingly commercialized killing fields, these sites stand as enduring witnesses to the profound impact of the Khmer Rouge. Sre Lieu and Kampong Chhnang airport have remained hidden in plain sight, mirroring the unnoticed yet far-reaching influence of the Khmer Rouge and the global community's unaddressed role. These landscapes tell untold stories, urging for recognition and remembrance that goes beyond traditional memorials.

Who Owns the City?

After discussing the Sre Lieu mass grave site and the Kampong Chhnang airport as traces of traumatic history on the landscape, this story continues by now focusing on the urban traces. Transitioning to the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge era, the palimpsestic narrative persists, weaving the complexities of ownership, memory, and urban evolution into the fabric of Phnom Penh's urban landscape. Unlike the customary post-war tales of rebuilding from destruction, the city stands as a testament to endurance, where its essence remains intact beneath the weight of historical imprints. Yet, analyzing these sites of hidden memorials, a profound question lingers: who truly owns the city of Phnom Penh?

In the span of just a few years, Phnom Penh transformed into a refugee camp not once, but twice. The initial transformation occurred as people sought refuge from the relentless American carpet bombing during the Vietnam War and fled the advancing Khmer Rouge forces in rural areas. Subsequently, following the fall of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, the city experienced a phase of ruralization or de-urbanization, rendering Phnom Penh nearly uninhabited.[241]
During this era of Democratic Kampuchea rule, the Khmer Rouge abolished not only money and markets, but also private land ownership and destroyed all land records between 1975 and 1979.[242]

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[240] Ibid., 868.
[241] Kolnberger, '"Voices" from the UNTAC Files', 377–78.
[242] Nam, 'Phnom Penh', 61.

However, the narrative took a turn in 1979, marked by the liberation of Phnom Penh and the end of the Khmer Rouge regime by Vietnamese troops. This pivotal moment ushered in a second phase of re-urbanization, witnessing the city's population surge from a mere few thousand in 1979 to over half a million within a decade.[243] The end of Democratic Kampuchea occurred with a significant shift in property management. The new government declared legal claims to all private property before 1979 null and void, essentially making all land and houses state property. Given that many of the property owners died during the Khmer Rouge era, numerous plots and structures were left abandoned.[244] In the aftermath, a spontaneous and unregulated wave of reoccupation unfolded as people seized the opportunity to claim vacant buildings and homes, adopting a 'first come, first served' approach, regardless of the structures' original purposes. Temples, schools and theaters turned into micro neighborhoods. 'Formerly private corridors and stairways became public streets. Architecture became urbanism.'[245]

People who arrived in Phnom Penh later and couldn't find available or affordable land had to settle for very low-cost options, often on state-owned land. These settlements are commonly referred to as informal settlements. Even families who have lived on state-owned land since 1979 or later are now classified by the government as part of informal settlements.[246] As will become apparent in more detail later on, these families face the risk of eviction or have already experienced displacement from their current homes.

The city of artists

One key example of these 'cities within the city' is the White Building, located in the heart of Phnom Penh. Constructed in the 1960s as part of Cambodia's first public housing initiative, the White Building, initially named the Municipal Apartments, aimed

[243] Kolnberger, '"Voices" from the UNTAC Files', 378.
[244] Khemro and Payne, 'Improving Tenure Security for the Urban Poor in Phnom Penh, Cambodia', 182.
[245] Supersudaca, 'Supersudaca's Asia Stories (Aka at Home in the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Worlds)', 122.
[246] Khemro and Payne, 'Improving Tenure Security for the Urban Poor in Phnom Penh, Cambodia', 182.

to provide contemporary and affordable residences for artists, civil servants, and families with low to middle incomes. This development was a component of the extensive Bassac River Front project led by architect Vann Molyvann, which also encompassed neighboring structures like the previously discussed Olympic Village Apartments and the Preah Suramarit National Theater.[247]

Following the collapse of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, where approximately 90% of artists perished during the four-year period, the subsequent Vietnamese-backed government aimed to revive Khmer culture and rejuvenate the White Building by offering affordable housing to the surviving artists. Between 1979 and 2017, a diverse and intricate community took shape, albeit against the backdrop of the building's gradual deterioration. While the occupants included artists, educators, and small businesses, the community faced scrutiny from both the government and certain media platforms, often labeled as a slum inhabited by individuals engaged in criminal activities and sex work.[248] The White Building had transformed into a dynamic, creative, and self-sufficient micro-city, hosting market stalls, restaurants, cafes, salons, entertainment venues, and a community school. It stood as an exceptional example of what an urban architectural block could embody—an infrastructure that, even unintentionally, provided residents with the freedom to continuously shape and adapt their space, fostering an organically evolving and vibrant neighborhood.[249]

[247] Lyno, 'The White Building', 155.
[248] Potter and Louth, 'THE WHITE BUILDING', 231.
[249] Lyno, 'The White Building', 155.



Figure 12: A woman sits in one of the corridors waiting to sell her goods from her shop, 2016, Photo© Exclusivepix Media

Leng Vanny, a former traditional dancer who started living in the White Building in July 1979, is one among many artists who first inhabited the building after the fall of the Khmer Rouge.

"*This place was called "Borei Selpak" (City of Artists), only artists and officers under the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts were allowed to stay here. In 1979, they were gathered because they were former students or staff of the Royal University of Fine Arts, who survived during Democratic Kampuchea. There were less than a hundred people at that time. But we kept searching for former artists anywhere in the country and invited them to move in.*"[250]

From the late 1990s onward, the White Building witnessed the emergence of two significant narratives—one rooted in cultural endeavors and the other in commercial

[250] Interview with Leng Vanny in Department of Media and Communication, Reminiscence of the White Building.

developments. By 1998, the Building was significantly rundown. The era's instability had limited cultural support, pushing many artists into poverty or prompting retirement. In 1998, Arn Chorn-Pond founded Cambodian Living Artists (CLA), introducing the Cambodian Master Performers Program to support traditional artists, establishing studios in the building that helped older artists facing financial challenges. CLA's efforts paved the way for subsequent cultural interventions within the White Building.[251]
At the same time during this period, property developers started circling the White Building like vultures, enticed by the valuable inner-city real estate within the booming Phnom Penh property market. Much of Molyvann's Bassac River Front development had already succumbed to destruction, demolition, or extensive renovations. Forced evictions in the region became commonplace. The unsettling pattern of dispossession and accumulation persisted, with residents of the White Building enduring a constant threat of eviction from their deteriorating homes.[252]

The ambiguity surrounding the future of the White Building ignited a creative revolution in 2008, giving rise to numerous art-driven movements that aimed to counter the prevailing narrative depicting the building as a crime-ridden slum. These initiatives saw members of the White Building community actively engaging in collective efforts to revitalize and reimagine a vibrant and expressive community, infusing their creative practices with a sense of urgency.[253] 'This pragmatic and artistic resistance by Building residents was a very real creative excavation of everyday life to develop alternative visions of the future of the community.'[254]

Despite the community's best efforts to preserve it, by 2017, when all other structures along the Bassac River Front had either undergone conversion or demolition, the government sold the White Building to Japanese developers. They tore down this hub of community, replacing it with a 21-story luxury complex.[255]

[251] Muong, 'At Home in the White Building'.
[252] Simone, 'The Politics of the Possible', 201.
[253] Potter and Louth, 'THE WHITE BUILDING', 232.
[254] Ibid., 233.
[255] Cazenave, 'A Home for the Ghosts', 35.

As one of the women who was forced to leave commented in the documentary about this building, *Last Night I Saw You Smiling*: 'The way we are forced to leave reminds me of the Khmer Rouge regime.'[256]

The White Building stood as a striking illustration of adaptable urban development and a city fostering creativity. In light of its recent loss, it's crucial to understand that it's not merely about the disappearance of the physical structure but, more profoundly, about the dissolution of the vibrant community it housed. Built by an architect, it started as a mere structure, yet it evolved into a lively and meaningful space through the collective efforts of its residents. This transformation should serve as a guiding principle for future city-building endeavors, emphasizing the importance of cultivating communities within architectural spaces.[257]

[256] *Last Night I Saw You Smiling*.
[257] Lyno, 'The White Building', 156.

Chapter 6

Displacement and Reappropriation

Phnom Penh

In the 1860s, well before the French arrival, the Khmer Empire settled in the rocky uplands by the river. As the French established their colonial presence in Indochina, their focus turned to canal construction in the late 19th century.[258] Their aim was to redirect river flow, making the delta's waterways more navigable for trade and military purposes. However, their efforts led to the formation of "dead points" — sandbars in the canals, restricting ship passage for months. While the French considered these obstacles a problem, locals saw them as "meeting points," facilitating trade exchanges.[259] This distinct perspective on the landscape during colonial times reverberates into the present, shaping the relationship with Phnom Penh and influencing the dynamics between foreign investors and the local population. This contrast in viewpoints sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the lasting impact of colonial perceptions on present-day interactions with the Cambodian landscape.

After the conclusion of the Khmer Rouge era, a decade of socialist urban reconstruction followed. The majority of those who had moved to Phnom Penh in the 1980s initially occupied empty houses. However, by the mid-1980s, the city had reached its capacity, and latecomers predominantly took residence on open land, such as along railroad tracks and canals.[260] It was primarily ethnic Vietnamese and ethnic Cham fisherpeople who settled along the riverfront, embarking on boats for fishing during the monsoon season.

In 1989, when the People's Republic of Kampuchea transitioned to the State of Cambodia, it ushered in a series of liberal reforms. These changes included the

[258] Biggs, *Quagmire*, xii.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Collins, 'Reclamation, Displacement and Resiliency in Phnom Penh', 206.

reintroduction of limited private property rights in urban areas and rights of possession in rural regions. In the period spanning from April 1989 to February 1992, the State of Cambodia issued 4.9 million receipts, acknowledging private property claims across both urban and rural areas.[261] The Cabinet Council of Ministers declared that any claims to land ownership before 1975 were no longer valid. They decided to grant land rights to families of cadre, staff, soldiers, and the economically disadvantaged who could prove they were peacefully living on the land when the executive order was signed. For those who didn't fall into these categories, there was an option to buy the property directly from the state.[262] During this time, marking land as state property didn't always mean it stayed open to the public. Instead, it often became the starting point for exclusive luxury projects owned by those with political influence.[263] Another common practice involved transforming water into capital, driven by various reasons. This not only expanded the city, creating new land for potential investors, but it also rendered the land useless for its inhabitants, especially considering that the lake constituted the most valuable part of the plot being fought over, as this case file of a land dispute illustrates:

"*The land in question contains a pond, the water of which is used by the people of the village communally, which is the properties' sole value to the people. To quiet the uproar of the 'sale' of this land, the pond is being surreptitiously filled in so that there is nothing left to argue about.*"[264]

The obliteration of the pond marked the annihilation of any existing claims on the surrounding land, transforming it into 'open land' ready to be divided into plots for sale. These practices set the stage for the lasting imprint of socio-economic disparities on Phnom Penh's post-socialist urban topography.[265]

[261] Document Ref: AC/ER/DJB-16.92. UNTAC Dispute Files, National Archive of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Referenced in ibid.
[262] Collins, 'Postsocialist Informality', 2370.
[263] Collins, 'Reclamation, Displacement and Resiliency in Phnom Penh', 207.
[264] File 3.057, UNTAC Dispute File, National Archive of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, referenced in ibid.
[265] Ibid.

Boeung Kak Lake

Until 2013, in the heart of Phnom Penh, there existed a lake spanning approximately one square kilometer. This lake served as a natural reservoir, allowing excess water to drain during the rainy season. In the 1960s, residents of the city utilized the area as a park. Following the Pol Pot era, the site reverted to its park status. However, a transformative shift occurred during the 1980s as communities began settling along its banks, engaging in fishing and cultivation for sustenance.[266] In 1991, squatters started pouring into the Boeung Kak Lake area, and their numbers spiked in the run-up to the 1997 elections. By the year 2000, approximately three thousand families had established residence in the area without legal authorization.[267] What distinguished this situation from a typical land grab was the distinctive factor that many of the families residing in the area had bought their properties from military and government officials who took possession of the lakefront area following the land privatization in 1989. This association with authority unveiled the complex interplay of power dynamics shaping urban settlements, providing a unique lens through which to understand these spatial transformations.[268]

The destiny of Boeung Kak Lake was sealed behind closed doors in January 2007. Without scrutinizing competing claims, the Municipality of Phnom Penh signed a 99-year lease agreement with Shukaku Inc., a private development company, for the 133-hectare lake area. This deal paved the way for luxury villas, hotels, and shopping malls, relegating Boeung Kak Lake residents to the status of illegal squatters on state land.[269]

The displacement of families residing at Boeung Kak Lake unfolded unevenly, reflecting a stark contrast in the outcomes experienced by those with advantageous connections and those without. Some families, leveraging influential ties, secured more favorable compensation deals, while others, lacking such connections, found themselves at a significant disadvantage. This disparate treatment engendered a palpable sense of mistrust within a once tightly-knit community.[270] The impact of this dismantling

[266] Kent, 'Conflict Continues', 15.
[267] Socheat, *Patterns of Squatting in Phnom Penh*, 110.
[268] Ibid., 21.
[269] Kent, 'Conflict Continues', 16.
[270] Ibid., 18.

process extended beyond interpersonal relationships, manifesting in the physical landscape. Single houses, once part of a terraced row, were systematically pitched out and reduced to rubble, serving as tangible markers of the community's upheaval. 'A visual metaphor of how the community itself was being dismantled, piece by piece.'[271]



Figure 13: Remaining terraced house, Boeung Kak Lake, 2011 Photo©: Alexandria Kent

Comparing this type of displacement with the previously mentioned eviction of the people from the White Building, one begins to observe numerous similarities. In both cases, the loss of heritage is not tied to the physical buildings; rather, it involves the dissolution of a diverse community residing within these built environments. A recurring theme between life under the Khmer Rouge and life under the current regime emerges in both instances. However, the difference lies in the fact that while Pol Pot's policies affected wealthier and educated Cambodians, the present government impacts the less privileged, who have fewer options to resist eviction, be it through legal means or otherwise.[272]

[271] Ibid.
[272] Springer, 'Violent Accumulation', 616.

This perspective is reflected in statements from Cambodian human rights advocates, including Naly Pilorge, the director of the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), who has been quoted as stating:

"Everyone claims Cambodia has come through the period of barbarism, but the sadism is still bubbling beneath the surface. Extreme violence, greed and disregard for the most basic human rights - of giving people a place to live - are still with us daily. The methods of the past are being used to dictate our future."[273]

In the urban sprawl, community vanishes, and voices are silenced within the very structures we build. Selling out to foreign investors intensifies this spatial injustice. Bulldozers don't just erase homes at places like Boeung Kak Lake; they wipe out the communal essence. The cityscape becomes a silent accomplice to profit-driven disenfranchisement, highlighting a stark reality – the struggle for space is not just physical but deeply entangled in power dynamics, profit motives, and the silencing of communities.

Tabula Rasa

What is currently happening in Phnom Penh is akin to what has already transpired in numerous other so-called 'Asian miracle' cities. Cities such as Seoul, Tokyo, Saigon, and Singapore have all experienced a distinctly Asian notion of a post-conflict tabula rasa, where the weight of history is shed, and a new modern future is built anew.

In 2012, Professor Shelby Elizabeth Doyle organized an urban design studio at Limkokwing University in Phnom Penh. The focus was on exploring the Ta Khmau Strip, a stretch of land between the wetlands and the river that connects Phnom Penh to Ta Khmau. The mapping strategies employed in this endeavor were inspired by Venturi's '*Learning from Las Vegas*.' What adds an intriguing dimension to the examination of Phnom Penh through this influential text is the Ta Khmau Strip's notorious reputation as a dirty area rife with brothels, garment factories, and squatter settlements. Through

[273] Levy and Scott-Clark, 'Country for Sale'.

the lens of '*Learning from Las Vegas*,' she tries to shift this perspective to one where all aspects of the city become subjects worthy of urban and architectural examination and attention.[274] 'Learning from popular culture does not remove the architect from his or her status in high culture. But it may alter high culture to make it more sympathetic to current needs'[275]. There were a couple of essential questions Doyle discussed in her studio: 'The discussions ranged wildly from whether Ta Khmau was a back door of Phnom Penh and whether it had any value? Did it deserve to exist in its continued condition? Why not just move the garment factories and brothels? Should the families illegally inhabiting the edge of the river be allowed to remain?'[276]

The students of this studio approached the project in a fascinating manner. While thoroughly delving into the site through the lens of '*Learning from Las Vegas*,' the Cambodian students held a firm belief that the current urban fabric held little value. They perceived it as dirty, disorganized, and provincial. Instead, their inspiration stemmed from images of cities like Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and New York. Their vision was for their city to emulate the organization, greenery, and grandeur they associated with these perceived glamorous metropolises.[277] What they wanted was a complete tabula rasa.

This notion of urban tabula rasa was first introduced to me through Rem Koolhaas' text '*Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis … or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa*'. In this text, Koolhaas describes the swift development of Singapore following its independence in 1965. He explores how Singapore's bureaucracy embraced an ambitious initiative, symbolized by the term tabula rasa. Here, tabula rasa refers to the idea of wiping the slate clean, using a cleared plan as the starting point for a completely new and historyless beginning.[278]

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[274] Doyle, 'Learning from Las Vegas, in Phnom Penh', 64.
[275] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 161.
[276] Doyle, 'Learning from Las Vegas, in Phnom Penh', 67.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Koolhaas, *Singapore Songlines*.

"Cities like Singapore probably represent the truly generic condition of the contemporary city: history has been almost completely blotted out, the entire territory has become artificial, the urban tissue does not endure in any kind of stability beyond a relatively short period of existence."[279]

Taking Koolhaas's view of Singapore at face value would be a mistake. Critics like John Phillips and Mark Frost have reexamined Koolhaas's text, revealing notable oversights and incorrect assumptions. Firstly, by simplifying Singapore's urban project to the actions of its regime, Koolhaas buys into the crafted mythology of Lee Kuan Yew as a mastermind with a firm grip on the city's fate—an image intentionally created to portray Singapore as a robust force against global powers.[280]
The second incorrect assumption is that Singapore's migrant people's historical authenticity, along with its colonial landscape, has been entirely erased.[281] This same view Koolhaas has of Singapore can be seen in the article written by Supersudaca "Supersudaca's Asian Stories" and how they experience the city of Singapore:

"A country, a city, a neighbourhood, a building compressed into a single visual experience. Like a big scale model. (...) Planning meets Pixar."[282]

By viewing Singapore as a city that is experiencing a perpetual state of tabula rasa, one might make the mistake of viewing Singapore as homogeneous. Although it might have been homogenized, it is far from homogeneous. Delving beneath the surface of the built environment is crucial to reveal the intricate details of urban life, helping to explain the social fabric and people's diverse perspectives on the city they inhabit.[283]

"The city as we imagine it, then, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, and nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture... For better or worse, the city invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in. You, too.

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[279] Koolhaas, Boeri, and ACTAR, *Mutations*, 280.
[280] Phillips, 'The Future of the Past: Archiving Singapore', 158.
[281] Ibid., 158–60.
[282] Supersudaca, 'Supersudaca's Asia Stories (Aka at Home in the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Worlds)', 123.
[283] Chung and Douglass, *The Hard State, Soft City of Singapore*, 14.

Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a map charted by triangulation. Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them…At moments like this, the city goes soft; it awaits the imprint of an identity."[284]

Examining Singapore through the perspective of Jonathan Raban's influential work, "Soft City," will serve as a means to challenge the viewpoints held by Koolhaas and others. The soft city Raban envisions thrives in dynamic tension with the rigid contours of the hard city. In the Singaporean context, this unyielding urban landscape seamlessly intertwines with the authoritative power vested in the government. Through legislation and urban planning, the hard city emerges as an inseparable entity, embodying formidable governmental control.[285]
It is in this understanding of Singapore that reappropriation comes to play.

Conserving Urban Memory by the Re-appropriation of the Everyday

> **there is no future in nostalgia**
>
> & certainly no nostalgia in the future of the past.
> now, the corner cigarette-seller is gone, is perhaps dead.
> no, definitely dead, he would not otherwise have gone.
> he is replaced by a stamp-machine,
> the old cook by a pressure-cooker,
> the old trishaw-rider's stand by a fire hydrant,
> the washer-woman by a spin-dryer
> & it goes on
> in various variations and permutations.
> there is no future in nostalgia.[286]
>
> \- Arthur Yap, *Commonplace*, 1977

[284] Raban, *Soft City*, 2.
[285] Chung and Douglass, *The Hard State, Soft City of Singapore*, 14.
[286] Yap and Goh, *The Collected Poems of Arthur Yap*, 158.

This poem by Singaporean poet Arthur Yap was first published in his poetry collection *Commonplace* in 1977, in the midst of Singapore's modernization and development campaign and sheds a light on an insider perspective to the experience of the changing urban landscape of Singapore. In contrast to Koolhaas, who analyzes Singapore as an outsider returning back to Singapore:
"*I turned eight in the harbor of Singapore. We did not go ashore, but I remember the smell - sweetness and rot, both onderwhelming.*
Last year I went again. The smell was gone. In fact, Singapore was gone, scraped, rebuilt. There was a completely new town there."[287]

Yap's poem is intriguing because it skillfully captures and conveys details that go beyond what is explicitly mentioned, delving into subtle nuances and unspoken aspects of urban memory. He captures the disappearance of urban elements, illustrating the arbitrary nature of displacement.[288] The stamp-machine takes over the cigarette-seller's space, not its role. Cigarette-sellers and convenience stores endure elsewhere. The poem intricately narrates urban changes and personal responses, showing how the new entity at the former cigarette-seller's spot now serves as a new meeting point, drawing in a new crowd.[289]

Drawing from Christopher Alexander's influential text 'A *City Is Not a Tree*', a resonance emerges in the exploration of intricacies within urban landscapes. Alexander, in his work, encourages a consideration of the interconnectedness of seemingly unrelated elements in a city, such as people, a street corner, a newspaper stand, and a traffic light.[290] These elements, when studied for their interactions, unveil an inherent binding force, forming units within the city. It is through the nuanced overlaps of these elements that the city takes shape, either resembling a tree or adopting a semi-lattice structure.[291] Both Yap and Alexander, each in their own way, perceive the cityscape not as isolated entities but as a complex web of relationships that shape the urban experience. The replacement of urban elements prompts a crucial reconsideration of

[287] Koolhaas, *Singapore Songlines*, 1011.
[288] Phillips, 'The Future of the Past: Archiving Singapore', 152.
[289] Ibid., 158.
[290] Alexander, A *City Is Not a Tree*, 4.
[291] Ibid., 7.

the tabula rasa concept—a realization that each transformation isn't a mere erasure but a subtle rewriting of the urban landscape.

The Replacement of Colbar

> No more Mrs Lim, no more Colbar
> This time I think they've gone too far
> No more can we all lick our lips
> No more curry, rice and chips
> How will we all survive
> Unless the Colbar's kept alive
> Nowhere to go, or so it seems
> For Grandpa's bacon eggs and beans
> What a shame to be
> Losing such as an "institution"[292]
>
> - Sally Munro, 'Ode to Colbar,' 2003

A good example of the rewriting in Singapore is the replacement of Colbar by... Colbar. The closure of the iconic Colbar restaurant in February 2003 marked the end of its 55-year legacy, making room for a new road connecting major highways. As a relic of Singapore's disappearing past, Colbar's original 1950s decor and fittings, along with the longstanding owners Mr. and Mrs. Lim, evokes a bygone era.[293]

The announcement of Colbar's demolition sparked outrage among its loyal customers, who passionately resisted the erasure of this historical building. Amidst Singapore's relentless march towards development, these patrons asserted that, despite the constant drive towards progress, this part of history cannot be forgotten.[294]
Their protests had an impact, and by July 2003, a compromise was reached. JTC Corporation, the Singaporean state-owned real estate company, agreed to conserve Colbar by carefully dismantling it piece-by-piece, and relocating it to a new spot along Whitchurch Road, just 150 meters away from its original site.[295]

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[292] Munro, 'Ode to Colbar', The Straits Times, 7 February 2003, 18.
[293] Phillips, 'The Future of the Past: Archiving Singapore', 161.
[294] Nguyen, 'Moving Our Merry Land - a Case Study of the Conservation of Colbar Eating House, Singapore', 6.
[295] Ibid.

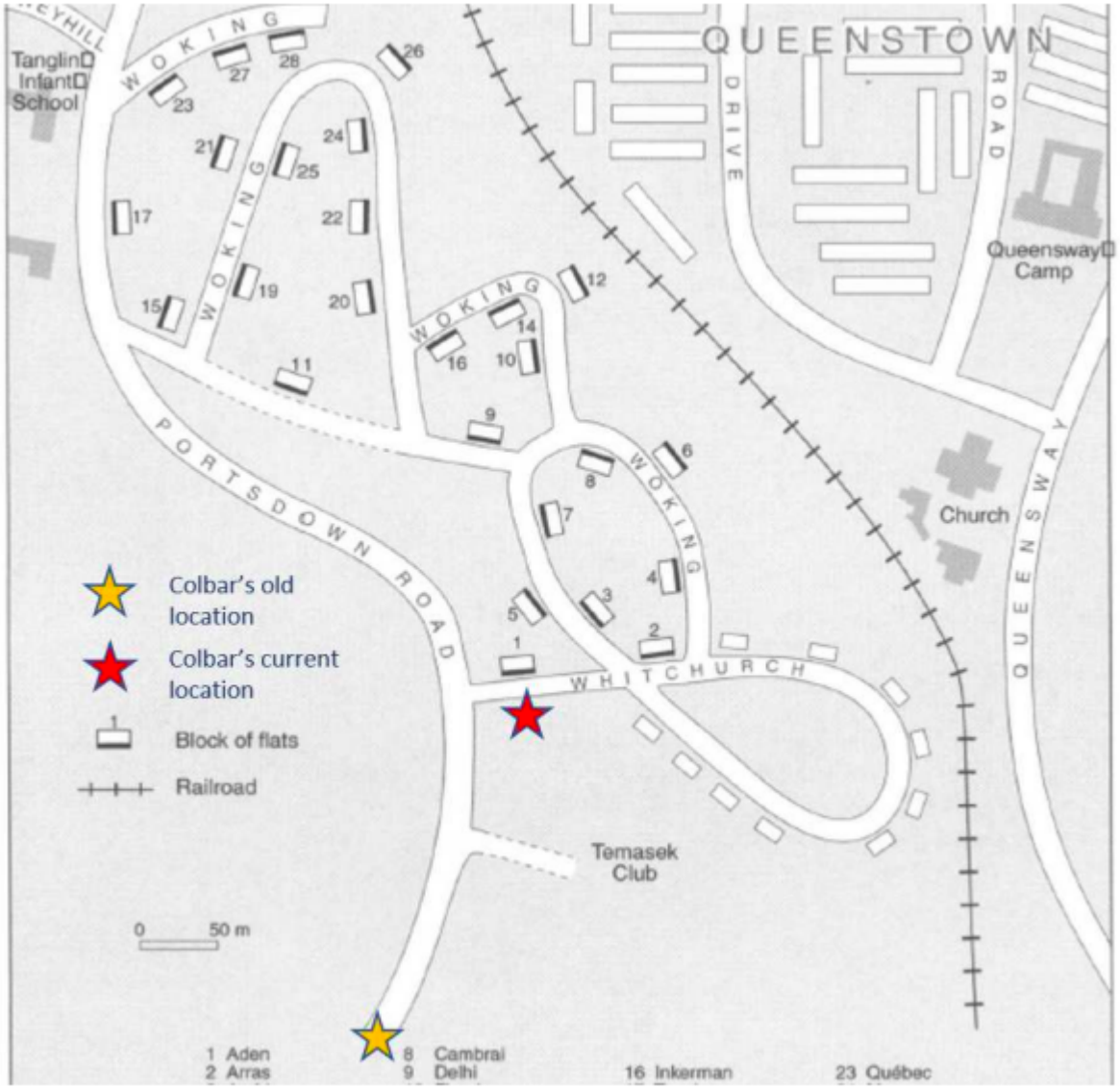


Figure 14: Map of location of the old and new Colbar, map by De Koninck, 2003[296]; annotations by Ly Nguyen, 2018[297].

What makes this case so interesting, is how the push for Colbar's conservation saw a notable participation from the expatriate community rather than the local residents. While letters to The Straits Times and expatriate forums passionately advocated for the preservation of Colbar, many Singaporeans appeared largely indifferent to its impending demolition.[298] A study of 37 articles published by The Straits Times from 2002 to 2015

[296] De Koninck, 'Wessex Estate', 439.
[297] Nguyen, 'Moving Our Merry Land - a Case Study of the Conservation of Colbar Eating House, Singapore', 5.
[298] Ibid., 15.

revealed that expatriates, particularly Westerners, held fond memories of Colbar, emphasizing its significance and unique charm.[299] This stark contrast in sentiment highlights the diverse perspectives on the cultural value of Colbar, with the expatriate community passionately championing its conservation while some locals remained pragmatic about the changing landscape in the area.

While Colbar can be seen as a success story of conserving heritage, it simultaneously raises the question of whether there hasn't been an irreplaceable quality lost with the move. As 15 out of 20 people interviewed by The Straits Times found that 'the decision to displace [Colbar will] forever alter the community's complexion'[300], and that 'the charm of their ramshackle mastering hole could not be rebuilt'[301].

The replacement of Colbar is more than just the conservation of heritage, it is a battle between progress and preservation, a testament to the resilience of historical memory against the tide of development. The conservation of Colbar, achieved through the intense efforts of its community, unveils a unique part of Singapore's urban narrative. The success of its methods is not easily replicable; much of its success can be attributed not only to its very similar place of relocation but also to retaining the same owners. Yet, as the restaurant finds a new home, the question lingers: Can the essence of a place truly be transplanted, or does the relocation signify an irreplaceable loss in the city's evolving identity?

[299] Study conducted by Ly Nguyen, elaborated on in ibid.
[300] Chang, 'JTC Ready to Relocate Bohemian Eatery Nearby' The Straits Times, 21 February 2003.
[301] Ibid. The Straits Times, 21 February 2003.

Chapter 7

Tourism and Trauma: The Exploitative Connection

Forgetting in Favour of Tourism

The image of Bali is one of paradise. Pristine beaches and turquoise waters and a people deeply immersed in their rich artistic traditions, living in symbiosis with nature. It's a place that is vibrant, sensuous, and steeped in an exotic history. Bali is a living, breathing masterpiece, not just another tropical escape. Over centuries, the West has woven this tapestry of fascination around the island, one that not only captures the attention of the west, but has subtly influenced the very thoughts of its people.

In better understanding Bali's contemporary image as a paradisiacal destination, an examination of colonial history becomes essential. During the nineteenth century, Bali was characterized as a region inhabited by supposedly “savage” natives, possessing a civilization deemed inferior to Europe and lacking in proper governance. This portrayal served a colonialist agenda, justifying European intervention.[302] The establishment of Dutch control in 1908 marked a transformative period for Bali, as the colonial power, in the process of asserting dominance, found an unexpected appreciation for Balinese culture. Bali evolved from a perceived wilderness into a living museum showcasing ancient Javanese traditions.[303]
By compelling the Balinese to conform even more strictly to their cultural identity and enforcing what the Dutch termed *rust en orde* (peace and order), they prohibited

[302] Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, 32.
[303] Ibid., 33.

'modern' movements and cracked down on opposition.[304] The Balinese were mandated to adhere strictly to traditional practices; dancing, painting, and writing had to adhere to traditional styles, leaving no room for change. The Dutch sought to forcefully traditionalize the Balinese, aiming to maintain a static, timeless Bali.[305]
The pivotal shift in perception occurred in the 1920s and 1930s when the Dutch, seeking to reframe the narrative, actively promoted Bali as a tourist destination. This deliberate reframing redirected attention towards the island's cultural richness and vibrant village life, elements previously marginalized.[306] Consequently, Bali transitioned from being perceived as a wild place of savagery to an alluring "Island Eden," illustrating the intricate interplay between colonial powers and the evolution of historical narratives.

The colonial lens through which Bali was viewed persisted into the 1930s and 40s. During this period, a global set of artists, intellectuals, and influential anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson actively contributed to the construction of highly influential images and studies of Bali.[307]
In 1954, when India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, visited Bali and called it the "morning of the world," his perspective was shaped by prior influences. Nehru had already read the stories of Bali from the 1930s, likely shaping his expectations. Guided by President Sukarno during his visit, Nehru witnessed traditional dances and explored the most picturesque corners of the island. His opinions, shaped by these experiences, unsurprisingly echoed the same view of Bali, already held by many.[308]

The colonial era's end in 1942 marked a pivotal moment in Bali, setting the scene for a societal conflict: those clinging to feudal ideals versus those embracing modernity. The Dutch nurtured an illusion of harmonious Balinese society in the 1930s, shattered by Japan's victory during its occupation. The aftermath witnessed an escalating polarization within Balinese society. The culmination of these tensions unfolded after the attempted coup in 1965, with the massacre of hundreds of thousands of

[304] Howe, *The Changing World of Bali*, 19.
[305] Ibid., 20.
[306] Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, 33.
[307] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 109.
[308] Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, 38.

Communists and ‘sympathizers’. The period from 1942 to 1965 witnessed the crystallization of notions around "culture" and "tradition" in Bali's imagery.[309]

The communist ideology, as perceived by the Indonesian National Party, not only posed a challenge to Balinese culture and tradition but also directly confronted the cherished image of Bali itself. This ideological clash extended beyond cultural elements, delving into the very essence of Bali's identity. The stakes were high, involving the "religion" and "culture" idealized by Westerners seeking to "preserve" Balinese traditions.[310] Interestingly, when Balinese individuals engaged with the concept of "culture," they unwittingly operated within the exact terms set by the colonial agenda that defined Bali. In essence, rather than the notion of traditional Bali resiliently enduring the impacts *of* tourism, it is the image of Bali as the ‘Island of the Gods’ that has been meticulously shaped *by* tourism.

In the 1970s, Bali witnessed a massive surge in tourism, becoming Indonesia's key international destination. Responding to government efforts, Balinese authorities embraced cultural tourism to cater to Western visitors. Notably, the early 1970s marked the rise of surf tourism, solidifying Bali's reputation as a paradise.[311] The early tourists played a crucial role in shaping this image, especially in the aftermath of the 1965 killings. It's important to note that 80 percent of Balinese depend on tourism for their livelihoods, making the preservation of this image directly linked to their financial well-being.[312] To maintain Bali's image of peace and harmony, acts of genocide and killings simply don't align with that narrative.

Tourism also became a means of state control, urging Balinese not to speak out against injustices or highlight histories of violence, as a passing tourist audience might be watching, ready to seek a supposedly more peaceful paradise. The industry has often tried to hide violence behind alluring images, simultaneously concealing traumatic sites of memory. In Seminyak, for example, the 5-star luxury beachfront resort Oberoi ,

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[309] Ibid., 300.
[310] Ibid., 324.
[311] Stevens, ‘Afterimages’, 110.
[312] Dwyer, ‘A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali’, 118.

admired for their lush landscapes, was recognized by the local community as covering a mass grave containing victims of the 1965 killings.[313]

"I have spoken to developers who frequently come across bodies when digging foundations for tourist hotels in Kuta and Sanur, (...) They instruct the builders to ignore the skeletons and to keep on building."[314]

Resorts often stand on mass graves due to Balinese spiritual beliefs. Balinese consider mass graves of alleged communists spiritually contaminated, making them unsuitable for habitation or cultivation. Consequently, this land is sold to non-Balinese foreign investors for tourism facilities.[315] Any attempt to investigate what lies beneath faces strong opposition from the building owners.

Locals infuse these traumatic landscapes with personal and intimate meanings, often unnoticed by outsiders. This subtle, localized activity, unfolding beneath the radar of visibility, serves as a form of resistance against overarching national narratives attempting to enforce their own version of the truth.[316] While acknowledging that memories evolve and are not resistant to change, it becomes apparent how individuals' memories can retain accounts of events that challenge the official narrative. Shielded from surveillance, these private memories create a kind of 'noise' in the face of state imposed silence.[317] Yet this resiliance remains unheard by generations of tourists exploring the beaches and hills of this paradisiacal island.
The intentional efforts by the Indonesian state to conceal the events of 1965-66, to create what can be termed as 'structures of forgetting' and to mask the voids left by these events, represent a subtle yet profound act of violence in itself.

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[313] Ibid., 119.
[314] Simanowitz, 'On Paradise Island of Bali, Unmarked Mass Graves Hide a Bloody Past' MinnPost, 26 November 2010.
[315] Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali', 141.
[316] Byrne, 'Traces of '65'.
[317] Ibid.

Dark Tourism

> 21 April 2023 4AM
> *"At 3 am I got up to get some water at the hostel bar and decided to stick around talking to some project developer that lives in Phnom Penh and the iconic Jennifer (the gay guy with the fabulous eyeliner) who works at the bar. Jennifer drunkenly told us his life story which was touching yet heartbreaking. This guy has had a tragic life, which I assume can be said about most gen x Cambodians who survived the aftermath of the genocide. He told me how his stepdad was a killer, how his mom killed his birth father, how he grew up in an orphanage, how he had to take care of himself and lived alone by the age of 10, how he protects and cares for his 2 sisters who are studying in Siem Reap, how his brother is a drug addict actively ruining his life. And most of all, how Taylor Swift's music has gotten him through some of the hardest parts of his life."*

In this excerpt from my travel journal during my stay at a beach hostel in Koh Rong Sanloem, I feel compelled to share a significant moment. It stands out as the singular occasion during my 5 month-long journey through Southeast Asia when I engaged in a genuine and heartfelt conversation with a local, transcending the transactional nature that often characterizes tourist interactions. This instance underscores the disconnect between tourists and the local population, many of whom are likely employed in the tourism sector.

The conversation unfolded late at night at the hostel's bar when Jennifer, in a somewhat drunken state, unexpectedly opened up. The familiarity stemmed from my two-week stay at the hostel, making me a recognizable and approachable face. After my stay at Koh Rong Sanloem, I traveled to Phnom Penh, where my accommodations were upgraded to an air-conditioned apartment with a panoramic view of the city's high-rise skyline, with a rooftop pool and daily housekeeping services.

Ordering a tuk tuk through an app, I made my way to the S-21 Genocide museum and the Choeung Ek Killing fields. I did nothing else. I spend no time exploring the city, or walking around discovering the food. My visit to the genocide museum occurred on Wednesday, followed by the Killing Fields on Thursday, and ending with my departure to

Kuala Lumpur on Friday. After the tours, I went back to my air-conditioned apartment, watching Netflix, taking a shower and ordering American fast food using a delivery app. Thinking about my time in Phnom Penh, I wondered why I had chosen to visit the capitol in the first place. It occurred to me that it's something many tourists feel compelled to do, as a fellow traveler told me: 'Visiting S-21 and the Killing Fields is a must when you're in Cambodia.'

The kind of tourism I participated in during my travels is what A. V. Seaton defines as thanatourism; 'traveling to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death.'[318] Thanatourism or dark tourism, a niche within the tourism industry primarily focused on leisure and escapism, deviates from the usual goal of marketing attractions for pleasurable experiences. Instead, it aims to navigate the delicate balance between presenting a memorial's serious purpose and promoting it as an intriguing destination that recounts a nation's challenging history.[319] The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Killing fields, in particular, are excellent examples of the struggle to find this balance.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, the primary objective of both memorial sites is to draw in tourists rather than serve as educational tools for Cambodians about their own history. The financial aspirations, aimed at increasing tourist numbers and generating additional revenue beyond entrance fees, are detailed in the strategic plan outlined in the Management Policy for the Choeung Ek Genocide Center,;

"*the progressive enhancement of the facilities so as to increase income by providing resting chairs, a coffee shop, a restaurant, a souvenir and bookshop and toilets; the development of a calender of special events, information projects, lectures that will eventually attract 1000 visitors per day.*"[320]

The official document notably lacks emphasis on the concepts of remembrance or memory. Similarly, Cambodian nationals seem to receive minimal attention compared to the priority given to international tourists. This circumstance could be linked to the 2005 acquisition of Choeung Ek Killing Fields by the Japanese corporation, JC Royal,

[318] Seaton, 'Guided by the Dark', 240.
[319] Sion, 'Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia', 6.
[320] Management Policy for Choeung Ek Genocide Center (2009), quoted in ibid., 7 .

which secured a thirty-year lease from the Cambodian government to manage the site. Their goal is to: 'increase revenue for the state and develop and renovate the beauty of Choeung Ek killing fields.'[321] By paying the municipality of Phnom Penh $15,000 a year, JC Royal can pocket the remaining revenue. This agreement sparked significant controversy due to the lack of opacity surrounding the profits derived from Choeung Ek.[322] The only discernible fact is that the proceeds generated from these tourist attractions do not benefit either the survivors or the relatives of the victims.
This morbid commercialization was confirmed by former Choeung Ek site manager Neang Say when he declared that: "*Cambodia has become a place where they use the bones of the dead to make business*"[323]

Anlong Veng

Anlong Veng stands out as the Khmer Rouge's final stronghold. After the Democratic Kampuchea regime, a protracted civil-guerrilla conflict unfolded over two decades. The Khmer Rouge faced opposition first from the People's Republic of Kampuchea in 1979, followed by the State of Cambodia in 1989, and eventually the Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993. This ongoing struggle culminated with the capture of the last Khmer Rouge military leader, Ta Mok (better known as 'The Butcher'), in 1999, right in Anlong Veng.[324]

By the roadside that guides the way to the Thai border crossing, a blue sign announces "Pol Pot Cremation." In a modest and desolate dirt lot, what's left of Pol Pot occupies a neglected tomb beneath a rusty tin roof, sheltering a low, rectangular mound of earth. This is the final resting place of someone who personified inhumanity, 'an idealist who learned his ideas about taking Cambodia to Year Zero in Paris, City of Light.'[325]

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[321] Doyle, 'The Revenue Fields' Time Magazine, 4 November 2005 .
[322] Naren, 'Choeung Ek Signed Over to Japanese Firm' The Cambodia Daily, 22 April 2005.
[323] Doyle, 'The Revenue Fields' Time Magazine, 4 November 2005.
[324] Mayer, 'ICOA1550: Connecting the Past to the Future: A Vision for Reconciliation in Anlong Veng, Cambodia', 2.
[325] Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 298.



Figure 15: Pol Pot tomb, near Anlong Veng, Cambodia, 2023, Photo©: Gareth Johnson

After Pol Pot's death, his body and belongings were taken to Anlong Veng, and were placed on a pyre to burn, supposedly in line with Buddhist principles. The foundation of the pyre consisted of eight tires, with Pol Pot's mattress placed atop them. His wicker chair was then inverted and positioned over his coffin, accompanied by additional tires.[326] The irony is hard to miss when you think about the harsh treatment Buddhists endured during the Democratic Kampuchea regime.

[326] Mydans, 'At Cremation Of Pol Pot, No Tears Shed' The New York Times, 19 April 1998.



Figure 16: Pol Pot's cremation, 18 April 1998. Photo©: The Thai Military

Comparing the 1998 cremation with the present grave reveals a significant difference. In 1998, the cremation occurred in a jungle, whereas now his grave is situated next to a crucial road leading to the Thai border, bordering a massive casino and next to a hotel.[327]

In the present day, the landscape bears additional layers of significance, as these sites of memory are being labeled as 'Historical Attractions' by Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism.[328] This move hasn't escaped scrutiny, raising question whether it's a strategic play to boost development and usher in collective amnesia through this form of dark tourism. Another perspective is offered by Keir Reeves, who warns about the unpredictable ways these sites might shape memory, potentially becoming pawns in revisionist narratives centered on national defense and patriotism. He gives the example

[327] Ibid. The New York Times, 19 April 1998.
[328] Cooke, Hodgkinson, and Manning, 'Changing the Story', 1228.

of the 'house museum' for Ta Mok, where he discovered that the guides at the house were former child soldiers of the Khmer Rouge.[329] Interpreting this site of memory through Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* raises a fundamental question: if these sites of memory exist to aid visitors in recalling the past, whom do they truly benefit, and what is the intended remembrance? While Reeves contends that some historical places might be better left forgotten than designated as sites of memory,[330] I argue that a site of memory can experience a transcendence of memory. This transcendence, I argue, can serve as a pathway towards a form of transitional justice.

[329] Reeves, 'Sites of Memory', 75.
[330] Ibid., 76.

Chapter 8

Transcendence of Memory: in search of Transitional Justice

Anlong Veng's peace center

With the fall of Anlong Veng, signifying the end of the civil war, peace returned to Cambodia. It became crucial to successfully integrate former Khmer Rouge members into present-day Cambodia. Prime Minister Hun Sen's call to 'dig a hole and bury the past' is a testament to the state-enforced forgetting that has taken place since then.[331] By employing a politics of memory, the Cambodian state aimed to vilify the Khmer Rouge as a unified entity. This approach serves to absolve former lower-level Khmer Rouge members of responsibility and blame for the crimes of Democratic Kampuchea, placing the sole blame on Khmer Rouge leaders.[332]

The impact of Khmer Rouge rule lingers significantly in Cambodia. On one axis, one encounters horizontal challenges— lingering tensions and stigmas among the complex relationship between victims and perpetrators. On another axis, the challenges are vertical—stretched across generations, as the younger Cambodian population often grapples with skepticism regarding the historical narrative of Khmer Rouge events handed down by their elders.[333]

Now, four decades since the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia has witnessed the coming of age of its first 'post-memory' generation, those inheriting their understanding of the past from their parents' stories. While survivors emphasize the importance of acknowledging their experiences for meaningful reconciliation, younger individuals

[331] Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 356.
[332] Williams, 'Remembering and Silencing Complexity in Post-Genocide Memorialisation', 7.
[333] Cooke, Hodgkinson, and Manning, 'Changing the Story', 1227.

often question the idea of 'Khmer killing Khmer'.[334] This intricate interplay across generations paints a vivid picture of Cambodia's politics of memory and reconciliation. It represents a complex interplay of intergenerational dynamics, where the search for clarity converges with a collective effort to understand a haunting past.

Within the framework of Cambodia's transitional justice and genocide education endeavors, the Anlong Veng Peace Tours have surfaced as a crucial initiative. With a broader objective of fostering post-conflict reconciliation and the development of intergenerational memory, this undertaking centers on empowering young Cambodians to create films that delve into the intricate aspects of genocide and conflict experiences. Operating within this context, the Anlong Veng Peace Tours specifically delve into narratives from stigmatized Khmer Rouge areas, emphasizing the concept of 'complex' victimhood in Cambodia.[335]

An example of a spatial intervention for reconciliation, the Documentation Center of Cambodia repurposed the residence once used by Pol Pot and other high-ranking Khmer Rouge leaders. This transformation has given birth to the Anlong Veng Peace Center, following the philosophy of "heal the landscape, heal the society."[336] This method combines a plan for large-scale infrastructure and development with a reforestation strategy.
Within the framework of this remembrance master plan, a system of '*golden threads*' has been implemented as a landscape intervention. Drawing inspiration from Buddhist ceremonies, these threads symbolize linear reforestation integrated with earthworks and waterways.[337]

[334] Manning, *Transitional Justice and Memory in Cambodia*, 125.
[335] Bernath, '"Complex Political Victims" in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity'.
[336] 'Anlong Veng Master Plan – DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA'.
[337] Ibid.

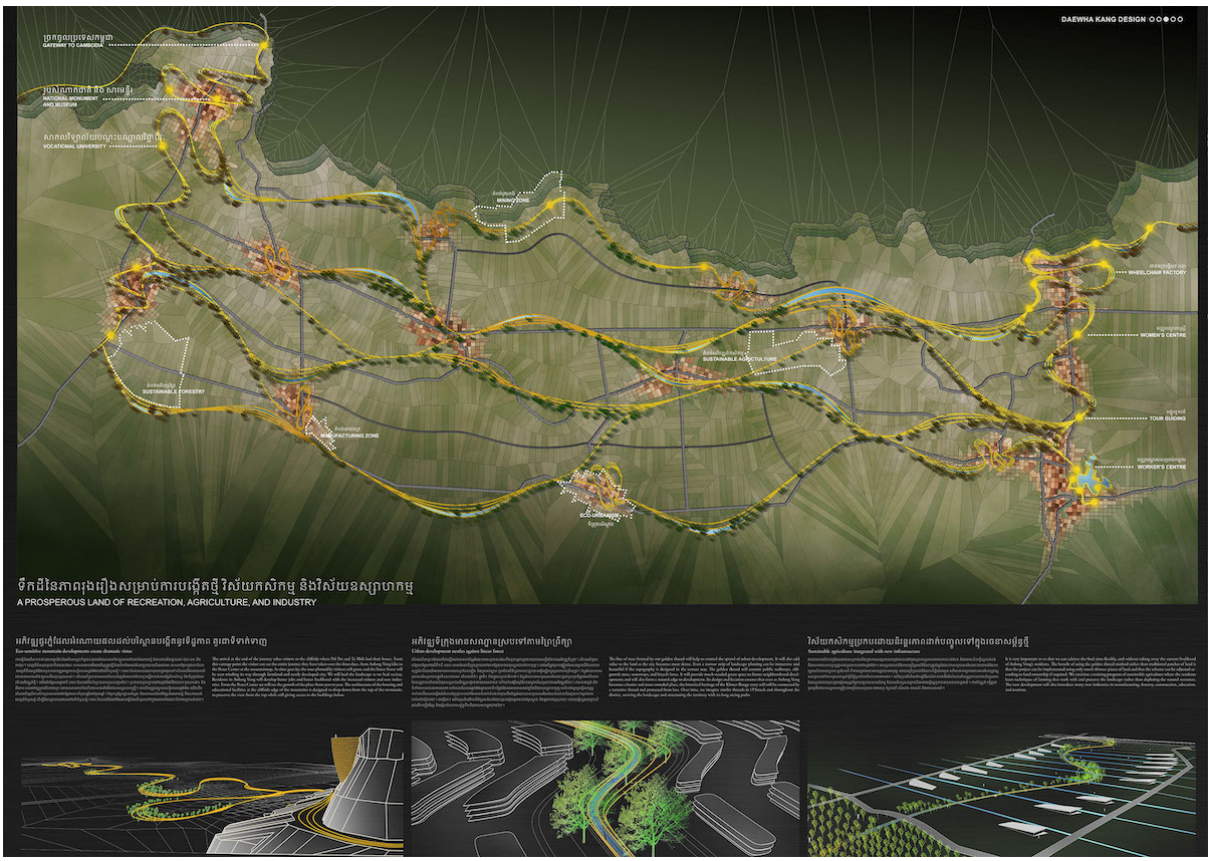


Figure 17: DaeWha Kang Design, Anlong Veng Master Plan, 2017, Documentation Center of Cambodia

This multifaceted approach aims to address soil degradation and establish reference points for parks, green corridors, recreational spaces, and public facilities. By incorporating nature into the intervention strategy, the project not only rationalizes the changes in the area but also links various memorial sites, creating a cohesive narrative along the path.[338]

The narrative of this memorial site significantly diverges from that of sites like the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum or the Choeung Ek Killing Fields. Instead of emphasizing the struggles of the genocide victims, the current focus shifts towards the perpetrators and the challenging conditions they endured during 25 years of exile. The conventional narrative that paints perpetrators as inherently bad and irrational, contrasting with innocent and weak victims, undergoes a reframing process to comprehend the perpetrator's role within its contextual framework. Additionally, personal life stories

[338] Ferwerda, 'Memory as a Stage', 47.

that deviate from the overarching victim-perpetrator narrative transcend the simplistic dichotomy of good and bad.[339]

Architecture plays a crucial role in conveying this narrative. Contemporary memorial architecture typically adheres to a uniform external ideology: remember the past and prevent its repetition.[340] However, even this seemingly simple idea can stir debate. When framing historical violence with the intention to heal and educate, the narrative gap between perpetrators and victims presents a convenient and comforting story. This narrative tends to reinforce a normative perspective, suggesting that violence occurs to us at the hands of monsters, rather than acknowledging the potential involvement of people like us.[341] At the Tuol Sleng Genocide museum for example, the external ideology of 'never again' portrayed the Khmer Rouge leaders as monsters, stripping them from their humanity. The paradox of this ideology is that it mirrors the same binary logic used to justify the Khmer Rouge genocide in the first place. To avoid repeating these attrocities, we need to see the humanity of the 'monsters' and the inhumanity of the 'victims'. The representation of the good and bad dichotomy in architecture might be fueling additional violence. It is essential for architectural endeavors to steer clear of absolutism when mediating collective memory.[342]

The "1965 Park"

The challenge of identifying and acknowledging the flawed dichotomy of perpetrator and victim is also applicable to the context of Bali. For many balinese, violence is seen as external to their own cultural identity. Violence is a tragedy that 'happened' to Bali. To move towards transitional justice, there's a need to reconsider the narrative that portrays Bali solely as a victim of external forces.[343] This involves acknowledging the existence of perpetrators within local communities and internally reassessing the prevailing image of Bali as a peaceful island.

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[339] Ibid., 48.
[340] Frayne, 'To See Others in Ourselves', 839.
[341] Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 90.
[342] Frayne, 'To See Others in Ourselves', 841.
[343] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 15.

In the effort to acknowledge the civilian casualties of the 1965 killings and promote transitional justice, a grassroots initiative known as the '1965 Park' stands out. This modest memorial, a small square featuring stones and grass, is nestled in the courtyard of an extended family home and was crafted by a group of Balinese youth in 2005.[344] Consisting of a small area of lawn, and surrounded by a low wall of concrete inset with stones that form the numbers '1965, 1965, 1965', the park is an illustration of bottom-up transitional justice.[345]
During its early years, the park brought together young individuals from families on both sides of the tragic events—perpetrators and victims alike. The park was conceived as a space where people could freely share their stories—a catalyst fostering understanding across differences and a venue for unveiling memories of harm and betrayal, long suppressed by decades of censorship and fear.[346]

The emergence of the 1965 Park sparked intricate questions about memory, trauma and representation, leading to notable grassroots divisions along various axes. One significant division occurred along the generational axis. Those who had experienced the violence first hand often hesitated to delve into the details of their experiences, causing frustration among the younger generation, who antagonized the elders by accusing them of speaking of 1965 as '"their history" as well as their elders', despite the fact that most of them had been born after the violence'.[347] Differences also emerged along a gendered axis. Certain female survivors, especially those who had experienced sexual assaults, had deeply personal stories that they found challenging to share or preferred to keep private. Unfortunately, these women did not always receive the understanding and respect they rightfully deserved. As Dwyer notes: " women who showed ambivalence about openly sharing their memories were cast by the younger people as ignorant of politics or trapped by a misplaced maternal protectiveness inherent to a feminine self".[348]

[344] Dwyer, 'Reimagining Transitional Justice in Bali'.
[345] Dwyer, 'Building a Monument: Intimate Politics of "Reconciliation" in Post-1965 Bali', 234.
[346] Dwyer, 'Reimagining Transitional Justice in Bali'.
[347] Dwyer, 'Building a Monument: Intimate Politics of "Reconciliation" in Post-1965 Bali', 235.
[348] Ibid., 238.

The young activists didn't realize that the survivors weren't just staying silent, oppressed by power and waiting to speak out. For a long time, they used Balinese concepts of karmic justice to talk quietly about the wrongs committed by the killers, or like Ibu Ari, attempted to connect with those who had been executed, through ritual practices.[349] Women had shared their stories of suffering in hushed tones during their daily routines, while men subtly alluded to the repercussions of their violent actions during the late-night wakes for the village's dead.[350] Yet this process of remembering, deeply intertwined with otherworldly beliefs, often faced skepticism from young activists who viewed religious and ritual discourse as outdated, politically defeatist, or a tool manipulated by the state to control Balinese personal perspectives. For these activists, such cultural traditionalism seemed apolitical and was perceived as a means to preserve social order and promote Bali as a marketable destination for foreign tourists.[351] As an older woman, Gung Biang Putu commented on the project, 'If you want to do this, go ahead, but don't say that it's for me. I don't need a park, or photographs, or speeches to remember. Whether I want to or not, I remember every day.'[352]
The park's creators struggled to accept that certain stories held by these women were too painful to share, and these women found it challenging to express their silence when they felt there was no language in which to speak.

In contrast to the spatial interventions dedicated to this memory work in Cambodia and Bali, the case of Singapore, particularly concerning the comfort women, remains marked by a notable absence. Despite the initial ambition to erect a comfort women statue, as discussed in Chapter 4, this endeavor never materialized. The silence enveloping the commemoration of the Singaporean comfort women is emblematic of a broader societal issue rooted in patriarchy. The stigmatization of sexual assault victims as 'fallen women' perpetuates a culture of silence around these heinous acts, hindering efforts to acknowledge and remember the pain endured by those who suffered.[353] The ongoing struggle for recognition and remembrance persists due to the absence of tangible spatial interventions, hindering progress toward any form of transitional

[349] Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali'.
[350] Dwyer, 'Building a Monument: Intimate Politics of "Reconciliation" in Post-1965 Bali', 237.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Quoted in ibid., 238.
[353] Blackburn, *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory*, 137.

justice. This highlights the intricate challenges involved in navigating cultural and political landscapes when addressing memory—an endeavor that is far from a straightforward goal. The complexities of these negotiations become apparent, suggesting that moving beyond memory to a state termed "peace" may not always be inherently desirable.[354] Memory, in this context, becomes a vital ethical foundation for shaping one's identity, connecting with the everyday social world and its inhabitants. However, this process does not occur in a linear, representational narrative. Despite the lack of a dedicated spatial landscape commemorating Singapore's wartime experiences, memory finds expression in the social landscape, subject to strategies of temporary concealment that rarely reach closure or a unified sense of justice.

[354] Dwyer, 'Building a Monument: Intimate Politics of "Reconciliation" in Post-1965 Bali', 242.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

I wrote this thesis between October 2023 and December 2023. I would spend all day at my desk writing about genocide, and then turn on the news and be a witness to one happening right now as well. These parallels made the writing of this thesis a very emotional process. The ideology surrounding the mass violence happening to the palestinian people is one that relies on a kind of blindness. When the ability to distinguish atrocity from justice is disoriented, and ties into the definition of who is part of a community and who is beyond it. It is naive to think that architects and urban planners are not part of these divisive and dehumanizing ideologies. We say that we design spaces for communities, cities and people. Yet, within our cities, and communities, we have violent ideologies of division, mass atrocity and genocide. Such realities filter into architecture and the spaces we encounter.

This analysis highlights the importance of ensuring that the atrocities are not forgotten. To achieve this, there is a pressing need to broaden the definition of what qualifies as an archive. Way to often important voices are left out of the narrative, voices like those of Ibu Ari when it comes to the 1965 genocide in Bali, the voices of the people experiencing displacement at Boeung Kak Lake and the White Building in Phnom Penh, the voices of the former comfort women in Singapore that do not feel safe to speak out. According to Leslie Dwyer, many researchers studying violence have struggled with a significant challenge. The idea that terror, with its inherent complexity, may not be adequately conveyed or comprehended through the constraints of language.[355] This is why fighting

[355] Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali', 134.

the rigid definition of what defines an archive is so important. Oral history, especially the ones by marginalized people, that grapple with their trauma through the realm of ghost stories, their rituals and superstitions should not be dismissed by academics viewing these practices through a western lens. The translation that gets lost through the use of language, might be found in art, cinema, architecture, dance and so on.

As previously explored in Chapter 5 regarding Leyla Stevens' art installation '*Our Sea Is Always Hungry*,' I now turn my attention briefly to another notable work of hers— the video installation titled '*Kidung*.' Upon receiving the video of this artwork, my initial viewing left me in a state of confusion. The video art installation captures the performance artist and poet Cok Sawitri engaging in a ceremonial style of Balinese chanting. Absent of subtitles, the meaning of the woman's song eluded me at first. It then dawned on me that understanding the words was not necessary to feel the depth of emotion conveyed. She transcends just memorializing the site; her chanting gives a voice to the unseen and unheard, the missing dead that lay beneath.[356]



Figure 18: Stevens, Still from Leyla Stevens' video installation *Kidung*, 2019, UTS Gallery, Sydney.

[356] Stevens, 'Afterimages', 99.

These acts of remembrance and honoring the missing dead can be perceived as an act of tending to marginalized memories. By expressing the 1965 trauma through a lullaby, a tune typically associated with children, it becomes a touching way to retell history for the younger generation. 'Kidung' as a video installation quietly and powerfully establishes itself as a lasting monument to this site of memory.[357]

A second example of an alternative way of remembrance can be found in the art installation '*Palimpsest for Generation 1.5*' by artist Anida Yoeu Ali. This installation features Ali, dressed in a white dress, with her face turning to a wall. The artist's hair is pinned upward, and her back is bare and exposed. As the artist describes:

" *[The installation] includes inscriptions written onto my back along with the gesture of washing them away. Text pulled from my family's memories and histories related to Cambodia are inscribed in ink on my back. As a result of the act, ink and water drip onto my back and stain the dress. When the gestures end and the body leaves the installation, detached roots, a disembodied dress, and faint traces of a performed history remain.*"[358]



Figure 19: Anida Yoeu Ali, "Palimpsest for Generation 1.5", Performance and installation, 2009, Betty Rymer Gallery.

[357] Ibid., 102.
[358] Ali, 'Palimpsest for Generation 1.5'.

This example of *embodied* memory work sees the body, like a palimpsest, become a canvas upon which intergenerational grievances are inscribed and then erased. 'Palimpsest for Generation 1.5' delves into the struggle of the children of the Killing Fields to grasp the complexities of the Cambodian refugee experience.[359] As the artist notes: 'When the gestures end and the body leaves the installation, detached roots, a disembodied dress, and faint traces of a performed history remain.'[360] The reference to a disembodied dress, along with allusions to faint traces and performed histories, evokes a connection to another, to me rather influential memory-oriented work, Tony Morrison's novel *Beloved.*

Both Ali and Morrison concentrate their storytelling attention on the faint traces of history and memory. As Sethe tells her daughter Denver in the novel:

"*I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world.*"[361]

Sethe's exploration of "rememory" delves into a complex space, transcending the conventional boundaries of time and space. Brenda Marshall aptly describes it as a "present absence, a remembered absence, not a void."[362] In declaring that a house endures even in its physical absence, Sethe introduces the idea of a permanent dimension to memory, resilient against the forces of erasure.[363] Memories are no longer strictly confined to individuals but are being articulated or expressed collectively, through shared experiences, narratives, and cultural expressions. As Marshall explains, "rememory" as a process 'not only calls upon a history, a past that is known to a particular people, it also contains an acknowledgement of its own imaginative role in re-reading, remembering (or putting back together) the collective memory.'[364]

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[359] Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice*, 192.
[360] Ali, 'Palimpsest for Generation 1.5'.
[361] Morrison, *Beloved*, 43.
[362] Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern*, 191.
[363] Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice*, 193.
[364] Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern*, 191.

Crucial to these moments of recollection is their occurrence within the context of unresolved traumas, highlighting how acts of remembering take place alongside and within the ongoing process of coming to terms with these traumatic experiences.

In the cases of "Park 1965" in Bali, the movement advocating for the comfort woman statue in Singapore, and the artistic expressions in Stevens' and Ali's works, a paradox emerges — a profound remembering of the forgetting. Here, the past is not merely recalled; it is actively dug up from the depths of historical neglect. These powerful examples stand as monuments to the persistence of memory, challenging the currents of collective amnesia. In their artistic endeavors, these creators become keepers of the silenced, breathing life into the overlooked narratives of trauma. They illuminate not only the atrocities of the past but also the societal inclination to ignore or forget them. Morrison's use of 'rememory' then points to alternative pathways for navigating unresolved trauma in the absence of state-sanctioned justice, ushering in the rise of a discourse rooted in the power of testimony.

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