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## 10 Murder, Museums, and Memory: Cold War Public History in Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City, and Phnom Penh

Visitors to Southeast Asia have the opportunity to see three distinct Cold War narratives. Museum exhibits in Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Penh, and Jakarta inform the public about specific acts of violence and murder during the ideological struggles of 1945 to 1989. Drawing from Paul Ricoeur and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, this chapter considers the ways in which the official voice of the state constructed Cold War narratives of violence and victimization in several Southeast Asian museums, a process of remembering, forgetting, and silencing.<sup>1</sup> While these public history institutions emphasize the violence and tragedy of the Cold War and use similar narrative structures, themes, and formats, their political perspectives are so dramatically different as to create the feeling of parallel realities.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Indonesian and Vietnamese museums can be read as ideological mirror images of each other, with the Cambodian sites seemingly above the Cold War political dichotomy. While a comparative analysis of Jakarta's Monument to the Revolutionary Heroes (Monumen Pahlawan Revolusi) complex, Ho Chi Minh City's War Remnants Museum (Bảo tàng Chứng tích chiến tranh), and Phnom Penh's Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is the focus of this chapter, I will also discuss related public

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> There is a growing body of literature that engages the Cold War from the perspective of Southeast Asia or, more generally, the Global South, see Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Frank Jacob, ed. *Peripheries of the Cold War* (Würzburg: K&N, 2015); Shelia Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitters, eds., *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Robert MacMahon, ed. *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Khatharya Um, "Exiled Memory: History, Identity, and Remembering in Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian Diaspora," *Positions: Asia Critique* 20, no. 3 (2012): 831–850; and Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

history institutions in these countries such as the Choeung Ek Genocidal [sic] Center.<sup>3</sup>

## Neighboring Countries, Alternate Realities

In comparing these public history sites, I analyze how memories of mass violence were central to state formation in both Suharto's anti-Communist New Order (1966–1998), the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1976–present), and Cambodia since the collapse of Democratic Kampuchea (1979–present).<sup>4</sup> While the Indonesian and Vietnamese museums stick to clear Cold War ideological positions, Cambodia's museum reveals a noticeable ambiguity and even confusion. The museums display telling similarities in their structure and format, including historical dioramas and collections of photographs and artifacts directly tied to acts of political violence, warfare, and genocide. They also demonstrate shrewd political choices about what to include and what to silence in the official narrative. While this comparison points out specific distinctions about the role of the military, the nature of revolution, and conceptions of gender, it argues for a central similarity in the use of a mythology of victimization in building these

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<sup>3</sup> On public history as a disruptive endeavor see James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Alfred Hurtado, "Public History and the Native America," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 40 (1990): 58–69; Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Robert H. Weyeneth, "History, He Wrote: Murder, Politics, and the Challenges of Public History in a Community with a Secret," *The Public Historian* 16 (1994): 51–73; idem, "The Risks of Professionalizing Local History: The Campaign to Suppress My Book," *Public History News* 24 (2003): 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> For foundational work on the history of memory see the special issue on "Memory and Counter-memory" edited by Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, *Representations* 26 (1989), especially Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24. Also see Mieke Bal, "Introduction," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (Hanover and London: Dartmouth College, 1999), vii–xvii; Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Karen Till, "Places of Memory," in *A Companion to Political Geography*, eds. John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gearoid O Tuathail (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 289–301; James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995): 214–239.

post-conflict nation-states.<sup>5</sup> All three sites welcome thousands of visitors in what academic scholarship has theorized as “Dark Tourism” or “Death Tourism.”<sup>6</sup> Yet the identity of these visitors is a strong point of contrast as the Cambodian and Vietnamese museums have become major international tourist attractions while the Indonesian museum is little known outside of the country and recently there was an effort to ban foreigners from entry.<sup>7</sup> In terms of domestic audiences, while all Indonesians know about the Lubang Buaya museum and may have been there on a student field trip, Vietnamese and Khmer make up a small minority of the crowds in their national museums.<sup>8</sup> My analysis of gender places stereotypical images of violence against women (the trope of women and children as the ultimate victims) in conversation with dark fantasies of women as perpetrators of savage violence and heroic images of women liberated by participation in violence.

My analysis is based upon a series of site visits between 2006 and 2018. During this period, I have seen these museums evolve during changing geopolitical contexts. My methodology adopts a classic world history approach and blends it with techniques from ethnography and public history. Comparative history is one of the standard genres in world history. From Kenneth Pomeranz’ *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* to George M. Frederickson’s *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* and *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa*, world historians have successfully used comparison to illustrate the uniqueness of

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5 John Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1994); Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

6 Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone, eds., *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2009); Brigitte Sion, ed. *Death Tourism: Disaster Sites as Recreational Landscape* (London: Seagull Books, 2014); Paul Williams, ed. *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

7 Akhmad Muawal Hasan, “Paranoia di Balik Pembatasan Akses WNA ke Museum TNI,” *Tirto.id* (February 23, 2018). Accessed February 24, 2018. <https://tirto.id/paranoia-di-balik-pembatasan-akses-wna-ke-museum-tni-cE96>

8 However, in March, 2018, there was a tent set up at Tuol Sleng to raise funds to bring Cambodian students to the museum. The volunteers noted that the cost of travel to the museum and the entry fee were prohibitive to most local youth. There is also a new “Education Room” on the third floor of Building D containing Khmer language sources for students and iPads running the “Khmer Rouge History” app.

historically specific detail while also providing insights into larger theoretical models to build a global narrative.<sup>9</sup> Cultural Anthropologist Clifford Geertz's "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" offers an ethnographic tool for historians.<sup>10</sup> Thick description allows us to describe not just historical behavior or acts but the larger cultural and political context of those acts. By using these two techniques, comparative history and thick description, I offer a model for approaching the history of the memory of mass violence in Cold War Southeast Asia in these three museums.

Museums, as a form of public history, serve as crucial sites for the articulation of memory.<sup>11</sup> In both post-war Vietnam and Suharto's Indonesia, the government prioritized the curation of museums. Indeed, for both regimes the management of recent history was essential to state legitimacy. It was in these museums that the governments educated citizens about what the regime stood for and, importantly, who the regime had defeated in the establishment of the state, characterized as a revolutionary struggle. Thick description allows us to tease out the Cold War context and form a history of this political culture. Comparative history allows us to put these two museums into conversation with each other and to draw some larger conclusions about the political culture of Cold War Southeast Asia.

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<sup>9</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); idem, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)

<sup>10</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (1973): 1–37.

<sup>11</sup> The following may serve as an introduction to American discussions of memory and museums: Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Amy Henderson, *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1999); Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*. (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1996); Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); William Logan and Keir Reeves, eds., *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with "Difficult" Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000); Jill Ogline, "'Creating Dissonance for the Visitor': The Heart of the Liberty Bell Controversy," *The Public Historian* 26 (2004): 49–58; and Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

## Crocodiles in the Memory Hole

Popularly known as the Crocodile Hole or Lubang Buaya, the Jakarta site is a sprawling complex that houses the 1969 Sacred National Ideology Monument (Monumen Pancasila Sakti), the 1982 Museum Paseban, and the 1992 Museum of Communist Treachery (Museum Pengkhianatan PKI), as well as the Well of Death (Sumur Maut) and Verandah of Torture (Rumah Penyiksaan). An annex contains the Room for Relics and Other Historical Effects (Ruang Benda Bersejarah/Relik). While in 2013, a new wing was added to the main museum, there has been no content revision after the end of the Cold War and the fall of Suharto's anti-Communist New Order regime.<sup>12</sup> Despite the lack of a domestic Marxist movement and the collapse of international Communism as a global force, Lubang Buaya promotes a militant anti-Communism with violent imagery.<sup>13</sup> The museum's message has been so successful at establishing ideological hegemony that a new generation of Indonesian historians such as Yosef Djakababa have coined the term "Lubang Buaya Narrative" for this state imposed historical memory.<sup>14</sup>

The complex is located in a once obscure corner of Halim Air Force base in southern Jakarta. On the night of 30 September/1 October 1965, six of the highest ranking Indonesian generals were kidnapped and murdered as part of a failed coup d'état by a small conspiracy of renegade officers with tenuous links to the PKI.<sup>15</sup> In the chaos, one officer, General Nasution, escaped but his young daughter Ade was killed along with a lieutenant and another general's nephew. Either shot during their abduction or later at the Air Force base, the officers' bodies were buried in an abandoned well. The coup immediately failed and General Suharto (1921–2008) assumed control of central Jakarta on 1 October. In the following days, Suharto led an attack on the rebels at Halim and oversaw the exhumation the bodies of his deceased superior officers. Suharto immediately used

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**12** Pusat Sejarah TNI, *Buku Panduan: Monumen Pancasila Sakti* (Jakarta: Pusat Sejarah TNI, 2013).

**13** Margot Cohen, "Red Menace Alive and Well in Java Museums," *Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 1991.

**14** Yosef M. Djakababa, "The Construction of History under Indonesia's New Order: The Making of the Lubang Buaya Official Narrative" (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2009); Charles Sullivan, "Years of Dressing Dangerously: Women, Modernity, National Identity and Moral Crisis in Sukarno's Indonesia, 1945–1967" (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2018).

**15** John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'État in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) is the authoritative history of this night's confusing events.

the event as a pretext to attack the PKI, the largest Communist party outside of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, and assume control of Indonesia from the left-leaning populist President Sukarno. To incite popular sentiment against the Communist, the army actively spread rumors that the generals have been tortured and sexually mutilated by female PKI cadres.<sup>16</sup> In the national purge of the PKI, a legal party engaged in electoral politics possessing no paramilitary force, at least 500,000 people lost their lives.<sup>17</sup> Some estimate the figure could be twice or three times that figure and Sarwo Edhie Wibowo, the general most directly involved in the operational violence, boasted over 3,000,000 deaths. The Suharto regime also established a massive penitentiary system, including remote islands such as Pulau Buru where Tapol, an abbreviation of “tahanan politik” (political prisoners) were held for years in brutal conditions.<sup>18</sup> Those who survived and were released bore the mark of “ET” (an acronym for “Ekstapol” (former political prisoner)) on their state identification cards and faced intense social discrimination.<sup>19</sup> Even Tapol family members were subjected to various forms of persecution. Those killed included PKI cadre but also members of allied organizations such as women's groups, labor unions, and intellectual circles.<sup>20</sup> Rachmi Diyah Larasati, herself from a Javanese family of performers deemed “politically unclean” during the New Order, has shown how female artists and folk dancers were particularly vulnerable to state violence, incarceration, and surveillance.<sup>21</sup> Along with Larasati, Dutch sociologist Siskia Wieringa has persuasively demonstrated that the regime arrested, tortured, and killed, many women who belonged to progressive groups such as

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**16** Annie Pohlman, *Women, Sexual Violence and the Indonesian Killings of 1965–66* (London: Routledge, 2015), 6–8.

**17** Geoffrey B. Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) is the most recent and comprehensive history of the mass violence. *Journal of Genocide Research* 19 (2017) is a special issue devoted Indonesia with the most current research. Earlier anthologies such as Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings (1965–1966)* (Clayton: Monash University Press, 1990) and Douglas Kanmen and Katharine MacGregor, eds., *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965–1968* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012) acknowledge the incredible obstacles facing researchers.

**18** After imprisonment from 1969 to 1979, the most famous survivor of this tropical gulag went on to become Indonesia's great novelist, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. See his *The Mute's Soliloquy: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 1999).

**19** Rachmi Diyah Larasati, *The Dance that Makes You Vanish: Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 57.

**20** Carmel Budiardjo, *Surviving Indonesia's Gulag: A Western Woman Tells Her Story* (London: Cassell, 1996) is a first-hand account of how many progressives who were not associated with the PKI were dragged into years of horrific oppression.

**21** Larasati, *The Dance that Makes You Vanish*.

GERWANI yet lacked formal ties to the PKI.<sup>22</sup> Of the hundreds of thousands of slain peasants, the majority likely lacked a meaningful understanding of the PKI's ideology, let alone the larger doctrine of Marxism. Rather, most had simply responded favorably to the party's populist rural electoral appeals and its campaign to implement existing land reform laws. New research by Geoffrey Robinson and Jess Melvin reveal that the army had prepared this campaign of mass violence well before the night of September 30, 1965.<sup>23</sup> While the PKI was quickly crushed, millions of non-party members were caught up in the wave of repression that followed the purge.<sup>24</sup>

Until Suharto's overthrow in 1998, the regime continued to use anti-Communism as a central justification for authoritarian military rule. The Lubang Buaya museum complex was part of a massive propaganda machine including monuments in major cities such as Medan and Yogyakarta, naming streets after the slain generals, and the production of *Pengkhianatan G30S-PKI*, an extremely graphic three and half hour docudrama depicting the alleged coup.<sup>25</sup> Each of these various forms of media promoted the image of the PKI, especially female members, as bloodthirsty animals who tortured and sexually mutilated the generals (scholar Benedict Anderson obtained an autopsy report that showed no such sadism).<sup>26</sup> The anniversary of the coup attempt became a national holiday. There were annual state television broadcasts of *Pengkhianatan G30S-PKI* and mandatory screenings for school children in local theaters.<sup>27</sup> Military ceremonies are still held at the site every 1 October. These

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**22** Saskia Eleonora Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and "Sexual Slander and the 1965/66 Mass Killings in Indonesia: Political and Methodological Considerations," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41, no. 4 (2011): 544–565.

**23** Jess Melvin, "Mechanics of Mass Murder: A Case for Understanding the Indonesian Killings as Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 4 (2017): 487–511. Robinson, *The Killing Season*, also see Geoffrey Robinson, "Down to the Very Roots: The Indonesian Army's Role in the Mass Killings of 1965–66," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 4 (2017): 465–486.

**24** Putu Oka Sukanta, ed., *Breaking the Silence: Survivors Speak about 1965–1966 Violence in Indonesia* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2014) is a recent collection of first-hand accounts.

**25** Katharine McGregor, *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 61–110. See also Katinka von Herren, *Contemporary Indonesian Film: Spirits of Reform and Ghosts from the Past* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), 81–103; "Blood, Guts, and Bad Acting: Inside the Indonesian B Movies of the 1980s," *Foreign Film Club, Vice Magazine* (s. 1, ep. 1). Accessed January 25, 2018. [https://video.vice.com/en\\_us/video/violent-gory-indonesian-b-movies-of-the-1980s/5a05fd517dd4263b57d6c4](https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/violent-gory-indonesian-b-movies-of-the-1980s/5a05fd517dd4263b57d6c4)

**26** Benedict Anderson, "How Did the Generals Die?" *Indonesia* 43 (1987): 109–134.

**27** Larasati, *The Dance That Makes You Vanish*, 33–35.

rituals are designed to foster a specific memory of 1965 that focuses on the alleged brutality and treachery of the PKI by fetishizing the slain generals and little Ade. Memories of the hundreds of thousands of alleged Communists murdered in revenge for the handful of dead officers have been actively silenced.

While the fall of Suharto in the 1997–1998 Southeast Asian economic crash opened up the possibility of a public discussion of the mass murders, these conversations have come in fits and starts. Such punctuated revelations have been met with powerful waves of reactionary backlash. One of the first moments was when President Gus Dur (1991–2001) called for a reexamination of the violence and a rehabilitation of the Ekstapol.<sup>28</sup> But the successors to his short-lived administration failed to follow his lead. Even President Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001–2004), Sukarno’s daughter, did little to encourage a reexamination of this history. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–2014), who happened to be General Sarwo Edhie Wibowo’s son-in-law, made it clear that he would not move forward on the issue. With the release of Joshua Oppenheimer’s 2012 film *Jagal/The Act of Killing* (“jagal” means butcher in Indonesian) and its 2014 sequel *Senyap/The Look of Silence* (“senyap” means silence in Indonesian) and the surprise election of the reformist President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo (2014–present), it seemed that there could be an open discussion of the 1965–1966 murders. Nonetheless, the Indonesian government proved reluctant to address the mass violence and even moved to hinder distribution of the films. More ominously, paramilitary organizations such as Pemuda Pancasila (Pancasila Youth) and Front Pembela Islam (the Islamic Defenders Front) have threatened those who seek justice for the victims and threatened those wishing to screen Oppenheimer’s films. Long after the end of the Cold War, the Lubang Buaya narrative’s obsession with the murdered officers and young Ade continues to silence the brutal massacre of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

One of the most disturbing elements of the Jakarta complex is the so-called Verandah of Torture. This house contains poorly made life-size mannequins of female PKI cadres, rebel soldiers, and tied up officers. The morbid tableau is splashed with blood and speakers play the disturbing soundtrack from *Pengkhianatan G30S-PKI*’s phantasmatic torture scene. Visitors must stand behind a protective rail as they peer into the house. Directly in front of the house is the Well of Death where the generals were hastily buried. The well is now reinforced in concrete and painted blood red, complete with drips to make it look like the murders just happened. The nationally known Sacred National Ideology Monument looms over the Verandah of Torture and the Well of Death.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

A massive structure, its base tells the history of independent Indonesia with an emphasis on the dangers of Communism and the ways in which Suharto restored order. Above this Borobudur like piece, stand statues of the dead generals. General Yani stands in the front and points an accusatory finger directly at the Well of Death. Foregrounding the alleged violence of the coup, this section of the Lubang Buaya complex is an open call for revenge. James Siegel's brilliant ethnography of the New Order illustrates the ways in which the regime's use of mass violence saturated many wide-ranging aspects of Indonesian culture.<sup>29</sup>

## From Crimes to Remnants

In contrast to Jakarta's decades of anti-Communist intransigence, Ho Chi Minh City's museum has gone through several revisions and name changes as it adjusted to the new geo-political realities of the post-Cold War world: Exhibition House for U.S. and Puppet Regime Crimes (Nhà trưng bày tội ác Mỹ-ngụy), 1975–1990, Exhibition House for Crimes of War and Aggression (Nhà trưng bày tội ác chiến tranh xâm lược), 1990–1995, and the War Remnants Museum, 1995–present.<sup>30</sup> Established immediately after Vietnam's three decades of warfare, including a war for national liberation against France, a civil war between the northern and southern regimes, and an insurgency against American military intervention, the museum was an important component of the Marxist party's propaganda as it solidified control over the newly unified nation.<sup>31</sup> Its original name directly accused both the Americans and the Republic of Vietnam of war crimes. The name reflects the Communist Party's suspicious attitude towards

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<sup>29</sup> James T. Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counter-Revolution Today* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Jamie Gillen, "Tourism and National Building at the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietna," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104, no. 6 (2014): 1307–1321.

<sup>31</sup> Christina Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) focuses on the memory of the war in Vietnam, while scholarship such as Julia Bleakney, *Revisiting Vietnam: Memoirs, Memorials, Museums* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and Scott Laderman, *Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides, and Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 151–182, looks at the memory of the war in the United States of America. Only Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Every Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016) takes a holistic approach by considers a variety of transnational perspectives.

the south as well as its anti-imperialist diplomacy and international posture as the heroic martyr of the global south.<sup>32</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai and Heonik Kwon have addressed the significance placed upon the politics of memory in post-war Vietnam.<sup>33</sup> With the dramatic ideological and policy changes that followed Lê Duẩn's death in 1986 (he had been General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Vietnam since 1960), the impact of the *Đổi Mới* economic reforms, and the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the Party rebranded the museum. The second name deleted references to the U.S.A and the so-called puppet regime but still stressed the war's brutality and the suffering of the Vietnamese people. By the mid-1990s, as Hanoi and the Clinton administration moved to normalize relations in 1997, a third change resulted in its current rather vague name. "War Remnants" downplays the violence of the war, fails to capture the anger of the previous two decades, and implies a move towards international and domestic reconciliation. While still very much a war museum, the Communist Party's museum officials have shown great professionalism and sophistication in their evolving interpretation and curation of artifacts on display.

If the history of the Ho Chi Minh City museum's name shows one difference with the Jakarta complex's consistency, the two institutions' ideological conflicts are even more profound. As one museum represents Southeast Asia's fiercest anti-Communist state and the other is the symbol of the most successful revolutionary war in the region, this should come as no surprise. However, the two institutions show some fascinating similarities in their collections. Both contain a combination of artifacts ranging from military hardware to personal effects, collections of photographs, and recreations with life-size mannequins and miniature dioramas of historic acts of violence. Both emphasize human physical suffering in gruesome detail. The photographs of war dead in Vietnam and the Indonesian general's decaying corpses are nothing short of nauseating. Yet, the Vietnamese museum's massive permanent collection of physical artifacts puts the paltry Indonesian displays to shame. In Jakarta, Suharto's jeep

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<sup>32</sup> See K.A. Denton, "Museums, Memorial Sites and Exhibitionary Culture in the People's Republic of China," *The China Quarterly* no. 183 (2005): 565–586, for a comparative example.

<sup>33</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Elsewhere, Patricia Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) and Wynn Wilcox, *Allegories of the Vietnamese Past: Unification and the Production of a Modern Historical Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 2011) address the longer history of memory in 20th century Vietnam.

and General Yani's antique American car sit outside the Museums of Communist Treachery and inside there is a display case containing a handful of quaint looking hand and machine guns. The adjacent Room for Relics and Other Historical Effects contains numerous personal possessions, including the clothes in which they were murdered but also such things as a general's fishing pole and pipe. On closer inspection many of these banal items turn out to be replicas.<sup>34</sup> Such items would be trivial if they were the originals but as replicas they border on the farcical, leading some to question the authenticity of other artifacts in the collection. Short on documentary evidence for its political mythology, the Jakarta museum uses staged photographs as part of its display. We can see this in the depiction of General Ahmad Yani's murder. Beneath a miniature diorama of a pajama clad Yani slamming his kitchen door in the rebel soldiers' faces there is photograph of his corpse being dragged across his bloody tile floor. While presented as documentary evidence of the crime, the image is a black and white still from the propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G30S-PKI* (which was shot in color in 1983). The museum's displays for the period after the coup do not discuss mass violence as an aspect of the destruction of the PKI. Rather, there are dioramas depicting the "legal" transfer of power from Sukarno to Suharto, including the controversial 11 March 1966, meeting in which Sukarno allegedly signed a decree. Known as Supersemar, an acronym for "Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret," Order of March the Eleventh, the document gave Suharto extraordinary powers to restore order during the widespread violence. Many experts speculate that the document is a forgery. Another miniature diorama has a stoic Suharto being sworn in as the new president in March, 1968. There are depictions of the arrest of PKI chief D.N. Aidit and several operations against PKI holdouts, but these are presented as heroic military events. Needless to say, there are no depictions of the summary executions, torture rooms, rapes and sexual abuse, and mass incarceration that characterized the destruction of the PKI.

In Ho Chi Minh City, the grounds of the museum are littered with tanks, aircraft, and artillery pieces from the war. Inside there is an extensive collection of firearms used in combat. The three-floor structure is home to permanent and rotating displays with hundreds of photographs of the war, many stressing the horrific violence endured by Vietnamese civilians. As in Jakarta, there are life size and miniature recreations, such as an American assault on a provincial hamlet, a South Vietnamese prison, and a village well from a civilian massacre. The model prison contains a French guillotine, torture devices, the infamous

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<sup>34</sup> Cohen, "Red Menace."

“tiger cages,” and an emancipated mannequin shackled to hard wood bed frame and showing signs of brutal mistreatment.

The majority of the museum’s displays emphasize the war’s violence by depicting the destructive collateral damage of American counter-insurgency tactics, the devastating power of American bombs, and the alleged brutality of the anti-Communist Saigon government. Many visitors describe the experience as emotionally powerful if not overwhelming. Some Americans have reacted defensively to the museum, claiming that it vilifies the American troops.<sup>35</sup> Yet there are important moments of optimism. These include a section on the international anti-war movement, the children’s peace center on the top floor called the Dove, and the museum’s logo, a white dove covering up red tipped bombs. In stark contrast to its museum’s first twenty years (and in contrast to its Jakarta analog’s stubbornness), the Ho Chi Minh City museum currently promotes reconciliation.

## Museums on the Site of Horror

In Cambodia, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center (popularly known as “the Killing Field”) have grown from sparse minimalist memorials to increasingly sophisticated museums with interpretive displays.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Lubang Buaya, both locations have an international reputation associated with the Khmer Rouge’s unspeakable acts of violence.<sup>37</sup> “Khmer Rouge” is a political epithet for the Communist Party of Kampuchea coined in the 1960s by Prince Sihanouk. After seven years of a nation-wide guerilla insurgency, this revolutionary Marxist party overthrew the U.S. backed strongman Lon Nol (1913–1985) and occupied Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975. Hardened by the rigors of tropical jungle warfare, disciplined by a brutal and secretive

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<sup>35</sup> Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam*, 168–171.

<sup>36</sup> Rachel Hughes, “Dutiful Tourism: Encountering the Cambodian Genocide,” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 49, no. 3 (2008): 318–330 and Paul Williams, “Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 234–254.

<sup>37</sup> There are a number of excellent histories of the Democratic Kampuchea, they include but are not limited to David Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Craig Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005); Alexander L. Hinton, *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); and the film *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, directed by Rithy Panh, DVD (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

political leadership known only as Angkar (“The Organization”), and traumatized by years of devastating American bombing, the zealous Khmer Rouge cadres immediately forced the evacuation of Phnom Penh, a city swollen in size due to a massive internal refugee crisis.<sup>38</sup> Claiming that American B-52s would soon bomb the city, close to two million people were marched out into the country-side with only what they could carry. After years of civil war and one of the most intense bombing campaigns in history, many hoped that peace would soon return to Cambodia. However, this was actually a carefully calculated ruse to seize and execute Lon Nol government officials, military officers, and rank and file soldiers.<sup>39</sup> The evacuation was also central to the Khmer Rouge’s anti-urban vision of an agrarian socialist utopia. Within weeks, the nation’s population was forced into collective farms. Claiming to celebrate the Khmer peasantry as “base people,” these rural revolutionaries with totalitarian aspirations condemned educated urbanites as corrupted “new people.” During the next three and a half years, over a million Cambodians would die from mistreatment, malnutrition, disease, and general economic mismanagement.

The Khmer Rouge immediately turned Phnom Penh’s Tuol Sleng high school into an infamous prison run by Santebal, the party’s security police. Known as S-21, the site was shrouded in secrecy. Classrooms were divided in to various sizes of cells or became torture rooms. Elsewhere the small S-21 staff compiled thousands of dossiers on each prisoner, including mug shots, autobiographical confessions, and interrogation notes. Party veteran Comrade Duch ran the site.<sup>40</sup> At first a prison for a few hundred Lon Nol loyalists and other alleged enemies from the civil war, Pol Pot’s increasingly paranoid inner circle began to arrest thousands of Khmer Rouge party cadre suspected of counter-revolutionary activities or sentiments.<sup>41</sup> In these purges, an estimated 14,000

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**38** Elisabeth Becker, *When the War Was over: The Voices of Cambodia’s Revolution and Its People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986); Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930–1975* (London: Verso, 1985); William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia, Revised Edition* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002).

**39** François Bizot, *The Gate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) is an eye-witness account of the occupation and evacuation of Phnom Penh. An anthropologist fluent in Khmer, Bizot was taken prisoner by the Khmer Rouge and interrogated for several months by Comrade Duch. Ironically, the former S-21 commandant argued for Bizot’s release, saving his life.

**40** Alexander Hinton, *Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

**41** David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) is the definitive history of the prison. Chandler stresses the absurd Kafkaesque nature of the charges levied against the accused.

men, women, and children, including both ethnic Khmer and several hundred foreigners were imprisoned, tortured, and interrogated before being sent to their death. Only seven inmates survived. Initially, there were regular executions at Tuol Sleng but after about a year the condemned were taken to neighboring villages where they were beaten to death and thrown into shallow graves. Almost 9,000 victims (some estimates are much higher), many from S-21, were sent to Choeng Ek, previously a Chinese cemetery and now the most famous of the so-called “killing fields.” After several years of tension between Phnom Penh and Hanoi, increasing evidence of anti-Vietnamese massacres, and quixotic Khmer Rouge cross-border raids, Vietnam invaded Cambodia on 25 December 1978, quickly chasing the Khmer Rouge out of the eastern provinces. While the massive Vietnamese army bore the brunt of the fighting, a small contingent of Khmer Rouge defectors, including Hun Sen, joined the campaign. In the ensuing political vacuum, the Vietnamese Communist Party supported and supervised the creation of a new Marxist client state.

Faced with military collapse, the Khmer Rouge leadership once again evacuated Phnom Penh, ordering tens of thousands of party loyalists to flee west. The city, which had roughly 40,000 inhabitants under Khmer Rouge rule, was once again deserted. The foreign invasion force entered the city on January 7, 1979. The following day, two Vietnamese photojournalists were stunned to discover the urban torture center.<sup>42</sup> Further horrors awaited the troops who later discovered the suburban execution grounds. Both sites showed evidence of recent violence, including fresh blood on the floors of the former school buildings and a stench that lingered for months. While legitimately dismayed by the carnage of this revolution gone wrong, the Vietnamese occupiers and their Cambodian allies were quick to politicize and publicize their enemies’ crimes against humanity. The context of the international community’s condemnation the Vietnamese invasion of their neighbor and the introduction of punitive American sanctions against war-torn Vietnam made this all the more important. Led by pro-Vietnamese former Khmer Rouge, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (1979–1989) set up Tuol Sleng as a museum to document the Pol Pot regime’s horrific violence in 1980. Brigitte Sion has described Tuol Sleng as “a promotional tool for post-Khmer Rouge government.”<sup>43</sup> The Vietnamese Communist Party played a major role in the establishment first of Tuol Sleng as a “genocide museum” and then of Choeng Ek as a memorial site. Vietnamese

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42 Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 2–3.

43 Brigitte Sion, “Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia,” *Humanity* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2011).

officials sent Colonel Mai Lam, who had previously worked on Ho Chi Minh City's Exhibition House for U.S. and Puppet Regime Crimes, to oversee the project.<sup>44</sup> Working with East German advisors and visiting Holocaust museums and memorials in France, the U.S.S.R., and Soviet bloc countries, Mai Lam made several fundamental decisions that set the tone of these sites for decades. Despite the need to communicate the horror of the Khmer Rouge years, the museum organizers did not want to tarnish the image of Marxism. Gerhard Scheumann, a propaganda film maker from the German Democratic Republic, was saddened that this violence was "carried out under the hammer and sickle" and held that the Khmer Rouge had "dragged the Communist Party in the dirt."<sup>45</sup> The result was a series of aesthetic choices that linked S-21 to memories of Nazi concentration camps.<sup>46</sup> For example, there is no Marxist or socialist realist iconography so typical of revolutionary regimes. Nor are there political slogans printed on banners. Rather, the museum contains a series of bare rooms with shackles on the floor and a framed photograph of the how the room was found on 8 January 1979. The stark concrete is reminiscent of Auschwitz, the ultimate site of fascist violence. Serge Thion held that the Tuol Sleng Genocide museum invoked the "sinister charisma" of the infamous European death camp.<sup>47</sup> Thion, who had taught in the high school during more peaceful times stressed the Vietnamese and Eastern European influence, thus questioning the site's authenticity:

But the place was not as it was when Deuch had left it. Vietnamese experts had been brought in, soon after the discovery. Since 1975, these North Vietnamese experts had created throughout Vietnam several political museum. Some of them had been trained in Auschwitz, Poland. Auschwitz itself had been closed for several years, in the 50's, to allow rebuilding and redesigning. In Toul Sleng also, many things have changed over time.<sup>48</sup>

With its minimalism, Tuol Sleng looks very different from Mai Lam's Ho Chi Minh City museum or Jakarta's anti-Communist museum. The few displays,

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<sup>44</sup> David Chandler, "Tuol Sleng and S-21," *Searching for the Truth, Magazine of DC-Cam*, no. 18 (June 2001): 29.

<sup>45</sup> Cited from an interview in Maguire, *Facing Death*, 94.

<sup>46</sup> Angelina Jolie's film *First They Killed my Father* (Jolie Pas, 2017) includes traditional Marxist iconography in its depiction of the camps, including hammers and sickles and portraits of Marx and other leaders.

<sup>47</sup> Serge Thion, "Genocide as a Political Commodity," in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia*, ed. Ben Kiernan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 184.

<sup>48</sup> Serge Thion, "Meaning of a Museum," *Phnom Penh Post*, August 27, 1993.

such as piles of victim's clothing and a map of Cambodia made of human skulls and bones with the Mekong and Tonle Sap rivers painted blood red, directly resonated with Western memories of the Nazi death camps (the map of skulls has since been taken down but a large photograph of it adorns the wall of one room). Even the decision to include the contested term "genocide" in the museum's name is a political act designed to invoke fascist not Marxist mass violence.

It took about a year to set up the school-cum-torture center as a museum. As early as March, 1979, the new Democratic Republic of Kampuchea organized tours for foreigners. Reports indicate that the buildings continued to have the horrible stench of death.<sup>49</sup> While Mai Lam and his team remained in Phnom Penh until 1988, Ung Pech became the director when it opened to the local population in July, 1980. Importantly he was not only Cambodian but one of the very few survivors of the prison (that said, evidence indicates that the Vietnamese controlled the museum during this decade). Tens of thousands of Cambodians flocked to the prison in the first few weeks, and hundreds of thousands by year's end.<sup>50</sup> During the subsequent civil war, United Nations occupation, and reestablishment of an effective and independent government, the site became an internationally recognized symbol of the unfathomable violence of revolutionary excess.

For several years Tuol Sleng had relatively little in the way of documentation or displays. However, in the past fifteen years the museum has grown. In addition to the existing artifacts such as shackles and chains, cells have been reconstructed and water-boarding equipment has been put on display. The museum's iconographic symbol is the collection of photographs of the former inmates. Using colonial era French police techniques and equipment, the Khmer Rouge took thousands of mug shots of prisoners, often moments before certain torture and death.<sup>51</sup> These photographs were part of the party's surprisingly elaborate system of intelligence files found by the Vietnamese. Several rooms at Tuol Sleng are filled with these haunting images. The ground floor rooms maintain the original presentation style established by Mai Lam's team.

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<sup>49</sup> Judy Legerwood, "The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes: National Narrative." *Museum Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (1997): 82–98.

<sup>50</sup> Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Stephanie Benzaquen, "Remediating Genocidal Images into Artworks: The Case of the Tuol Sleng Mug Shots," *Rebus* 5 (2010): 1–20; Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014); Chris Riley and Douglas Niven, *The Killing Fields* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 1995).

In contrast to its Spartan beginnings, today's museum is much more robust. Perhaps the greatest innovation is the audio tour. Starting in 2015, visitors can rent a set of headphones with dozens of two to six minute audio clips that guide one through the site. There are also a series of posters presenting a very brief history of the Khmer Rouge era. Elsewhere there is a collection of paintings by Vann Nath, one of seven survivors, that depict the various torture and execution practices.<sup>52</sup> A gift shop offers a variety of books, t-shirts, and souvenirs as well as cold beverages. On the upper floors of three of the four buildings there are newer and more nuanced presentations. The third floor of Building A has a room for temporary art exhibits and room that critiques poorly informed Western leftists who supported the Khmer Rouge. In Building B there are several rooms for temporary exhibits, such as the excellent "Children of Angkar" (August 19, 2017 to August 1, 2018). In Building D, the second floor contains previous temporary exhibits and the third floor has an "Education Room" with Khmer language sources including books, posters, timelines, maps, and iPads running a Khmer Rouge history app. On this floor there is also a film room with daily screenings. Finally, visitors have the opportunity to meet S-21 survivors Bou Meng and Chhum Mey. Both of whom sit at tables with books for sale and will pose for photographs with visitors. In March, 2018, the museum had an air-conditioned room where twice a day two short videos were screened and Norng Chan Phal, a child survivor of S-21, would tell his story. When I spoke with him he said that he needed to write a book in order to support his family.

Over a dozen kilometers outside of the city, the Choeng Ek Genocidal Center has gone through a similar transformation. Initially there were only a few wooden structures to house bones and scraps of clothing discovered on the site. The intention was to preserve them as evidence against the Khmer Rouge. To mark the tenth anniversary of the Vietnamese invasion, Mai Lam and his colleagues erected a massive Buddhist stupa. The structure is not unlike the scores of memorials built throughout Vietnam in the 1980s. Inside were seventeen shelves with chemically treated bones and clothes. With the bones sorted by size and type, the lower levels contain some 5,000 skulls carefully arranged to stare back at visitors. Once the new structure was completed the former execution ground became an established memorial site. For years there was little to see and only minimal documentation to contextualize the horrifying detritus of mass murder.<sup>53</sup> Visitors freely wandered this literal killing field, walking on

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52 Vann Nath, *A Cambodian Prison Portrait* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998).

53 Louis Bickford, *Transforming a Legacy of Genocide: Pedagogy and Tourism at the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek* (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2009).

the remains of thousands of victims. During the annual monsoon rains it was not uncommon for bone fragments to appear in the mud. In 2004 several wood shelters were built over mass graves with signs stating that they contained 166 decapitated soldiers, over a hundred women and children, or 450 victims. New signs also stated that babies' heads were smashed on a certain tree. In 2011, the management expanded the informational displays and set up an audio guide with headphone rentals. While previously visitors were once free to wander the grounds and chat as they saw fit, now there is an extensive wood boardwalk, a set itinerary coordinated with the audio commentary, and numerous signs and the audio tour remind visitors to stay off the thick Cambodian mud that still holds un-exhumed remains.<sup>54</sup> Groups of travelers, dutifully listening to the audio narration, now silently walk through a numbered tour of the killing field. A ritual has developed of tying colorful woven bracelets to makeshift shrines, an invented tradition that many foreigners seem to enjoy. In a far corner of the complex there is a small three-room museum. The largest room contains posters and photographs telling the history of the Khmer Rouge and of the Choeung Ek site. There are also displays of farm tools used to execute victims, a sets of ankle shackles (some in a case but other sitting on the floor next to the case), and a male and female set of Khmer Rouge clothing, including the loose fitting black pants and shirt, red scarves, and handmaid sandals. Another room is an air condition theater with some two dozen seats that screens a 15-minute film seventeen times per day. Upon exiting the theater, the audience is guided into a small room with reproductions of Vann Nath's paintings and further poster displays on the history of the site, the Khmer Rouge, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, and Comrade Duch. Yet few visitors venture to through the foliage to the museum.

The complex's physical and emotional center point remains the stupa. The famous bone-filled structure has provoked some debate over the years. King Sihanouk himself asked “[w]hat Buddhist man or woman accepts that, instead of incinerating their dead relatives . . . one displays their skulls and their skeletons to please ‘voyeurs’?”<sup>55</sup> For many visitors staring into the empty eye sockets of hundreds of human skulls is difficult to forget. While the site instructs

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<sup>54</sup> Such signs do not exist in Bali, Indonesia, where the 80,000 victims of weeks of violence in 1966 were sometimes thrown into mass graves in what was to become prime tourist real estate, Adrian Vickers, “Where Are the Bodies: The Haunting of Indonesia,” *The Public Historian* 32, no. 1 (2010): 45–58.

<sup>55</sup> Ian Harris, *Buddhism under Pol Pot* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2007), 233.

visitors to show respect by observing silence and removing their shoes as they enter the stupa, the display invokes an undeniable morbid curiosity.

The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields are free of the heavy-handed ideology seen in Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh City. Tuol Sleng does have several signs that refer to “The Pol Pot Clique” and a few other ambiguous references, but visitors do not get a clear sense of the violence’s historical context and its relationship to the Cold War. Indeed, it is difficult to label the narrative either Communist or anti-Communist. Many visitors would be surprised to learn that the museum was created by an international team of Communists. Emotionally powerful, the sites emphasize Cambodia’s victimization. Yet the 14,000 victims of S-21 are not an accurate representation of the Khmer Rouge’s violence. The overwhelming majority of the deaths between 17 April 1975 and 7 January 1979 occurred on the regime’s utopian communal farms scattered throughout the country-side not in the all but abandoned city. While there were hundreds of thousands of summary executions and fatal tortures, the majority of the roughly 1,700,000 deaths (~20% of the population) were due to disease, malnutrition, and the gross mismanagement of essential infrastructure. The regime’s disastrous and unhinged attempt at radical rural egalitarianism was the biggest killer. Yet this is not the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum’s narrative. Furthermore, after the initial purge of Lon Nol loyalists most of those sent to S-21 were Khmer Rouge cadres, many of whom were high ranking party members. While not denying that unspeakable suffering was inflicted on these individuals, up to their arrest most had participated in the brutality of the Khmer Rouge revolution. Indeed, the surviving interrogation reports illustrate widespread confusion amongst the detainees. As in Stalin’s purges, the party was turning on itself. While David Chandler’s seminal research shows that their arrest, interrogation, and forced confessions were the product of a merciless machine obediently following the orders from a paranoid leadership, many of the faces staring out of the mugshots belonged to those who had engaged in revolutionary excesses. In many ways, the Tuol Sleng narrative of violence is ahistorical, silencing discussions of more complicated histories.

All three institutions beg a rigorous gender analysis. The Indonesian museum warns that liberated women can become dangerous, unrestrained, and violent beasts. The displays promote the lie that female PKI cadre sexually mutilated the generals with razor blades and hold up submissive Javanese mothers as the true feminine ideal.<sup>56</sup> The dead generals, especially Yani, come

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56 Wieringa, *Sexual Politics* and “Sexual Slander.”

across as virile men, embodying a masculine ideal. Conversely, the Vietnamese museum celebrates Viet Cong women as active participants in a revolutionary war of liberation. There are heroic socialist realist propaganda posters of strong women defying American bombs and photographs of diminutive peasant girls holding large Anglo-American aviators at gunpoint. Elsewhere, the “long-haired warriors” are celebrated for their role in the guerilla war.<sup>57</sup> Visitors to the War Remnants Museum may wonder if the revolution succeeded in overturning patriarchy.<sup>58</sup> The Cambodian museum presents women and children as the ultimate victims, universal martyred innocents. Some of the most striking Tuol Sleng mug shots are of young mothers holding infants, both of whom will soon be dead. Several large bulletin boards contain only images of women. However, the presentation of numerous images of women is arguably disingenuous. Despite many missing dossiers, Chandler’s research records that perhaps a little more than 6.4% of those who passed through S-21 were female.<sup>59</sup> The vast majority of Tuol Sleng’s victims were young men. While not representative of the prison’s violent history, the trope of the martyred woman has an undeniable emotional power. Choeung Ek’s emphasis on a mass grave of women and children and the smashing of babies’ heads on a tree furthers the idea of the suffering of innocents. A gendered memory of mass violence generates more sympathy and thus achieves greater political results. With the figure of women as pitiful victims, vicious killers, or brave heroines, each museum uses gendered imagery for a specific political purpose.

## Contemporary Uses of Southeast Asia’s Cold War Past

2019 will mark three decades since the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Suharto’s rabidly anti-communist New Order collapsed two decades ago. The United States and Vietnam are close trading partners. Chinese and

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<sup>57</sup> *The Long Haired Warriors*, directed by Mel Halbach, (1998).

<sup>58</sup> I remember being very excited to be in Hanoi for International Women’s Day in 1997, only to discover that it had become a day to buy flowers for mothers and sweet-hearts, sort of a Marxist Valentine’s Day. In Indonesia I was equally bemused to see that by 2013 Kartini Day was an opportunity for department stores to advertise sales on kitchen equipment and washing machines.

<sup>59</sup> Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, 37, notes that the figure is likely higher than 6.4% as many wives and mothers of high ranking party members were killed without interrogation files.

Russian capital flows into Indonesia. President Hun Sen, a Khmer Rouge defector brought to power by his Vietnamese Communist patrons, has opened Cambodia to direct foreign investment from scores of international garment manufacturers. By 1999 Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia were all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Founded during the Cold War to as an alliance against regional Communism, ASEAN now promotes market integration and the free flow of capital as well as collective security. A generation after the Cold War, what is the future of these state sponsored public history sites?

Ho Chi Minh City's museum has gone through a series of important name changes. From the accusatory Exhibition House for US and Puppet Crimes, to the less specific Exhibition House for Crimes of War and Aggression, and to the neutral to the point of banal War Remnants Museum, the transformation indicates Vietnam's adept reading of the shifting currents of history. Today, from the street one can see a massive dove overcoming falling bombs and the words "peace, friendship, solidarity, cooperation, and development" in large letters. Children's art figures prominently in the museum and there is discussion of a Hiroshima style peace park. Clearly, the institution wants to be on the path towards reconciliation and learning from the past in order to promote peace.

Jakarta on the other hand remains stuck in the Cold War anti-Communism of the dead dictator.<sup>60</sup> The Lubang Buaya museums have not been renamed or rebranded. Indeed, the wing devoted to PKI Treachery opened as the Cold War was coming to an end. Clearly Suharto feared the end of the alleged Communist threat would pull the ideological rug out from underneath him. But even after Suharto's 1998 overthrow and 2008 death, similar public history institutions have opened their doors. In 2008, General Naustion's house became a public museum complete with life size mannequins showing the general's escape and the dying Ade in her mother's arms. In 2013, on the site of Suharto's birthplace, his family opened a museum dedicated to his memory. The central display is composed of floating ghost-like statues of the dead generals and the young Ade. Opposite these martyrs is a video displayed of a computer-generated anti-Communist riot. As one approaches the screen a camera captures your image and puts it into the flag-burning mob, thus inviting the visitor to take revenge for these 50-year-old murders. In the far corner of the museum compound is the Suharto family well. Also in 2013, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono

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<sup>60</sup> Ariel Heryanto, *State-Terrorism and Identity Politics in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006); idem and Sumit K. Mandal, eds., *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

oversaw the opening of a two story addition to the Museum of Communist Treachery. The new life-size displays repeat the same old Lubang Buaya narrative. The PKI remains an eternal threat in the minds of many Indonesians raised under the New Order. Along with the 1 October military ceremonies at the site of the generals' murder, mass demonstrations of anti-Communist Islamic groups and hyper-nationalist militia with ties to the mafia warn against the possible return of the atheist PKI, the ultimate personification of political and spiritual evil. President Jokowi, who rose to power as an uncorrupted outsider promising reforms, has joined the army and the mass organizations in threatening violence against anyone who dares revive the party.<sup>61</sup> Even academic conferences have faced intimidation.<sup>62</sup>

In contrast to the Indonesian museum's international obscurity, these Vietnamese and Cambodian public history institutions have received much academic attention and the War Remnants Museum, Tuol Sleng, and Choeung Ek are now established tourist attractions.<sup>63</sup> If thousands of international visitors go to the Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City museums, a foreign face is an extremely rare sight at Jakarta's Museum of Communist Treachery. Conversely, domestic visitors are the vast majority in Jakarta but in a clear minority in Ho Chi Minh City and Phnom Penh.

The War Remnants Museum is a top attraction in Ho Chi Minh City. With the booming tourist industry, the number of visitors has soared in recent years. The building and its collections are subject to active curation, with subtle revisions, additions, and removals over the years. But the museum silences many uncomfortable or politically difficult memories. Not surprisingly, the War Remnants Museum does not engage revolutionary violence committed by the Communist Party. Furthermore, the arrest, imprisonment in reeducation camps, and post-incarceration repression of hundreds of thousands of Southern Vietnamese is not part of the War Remnants narrative.<sup>64</sup> For example,

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**61** Fabian Januarius Kuwado, "Jokowi: Jangan Sampai Kekejaman PKI Terulang Lagi . . .," *Kompas.com*, October 1, 2017. Accessed October 10, 2017. <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/10/01/09403511/jokowi-jangan-sampai-kekejaman-pki-terulang-lagi>

**62** Siskia E. Wieringa, "When A History Seminar Becomes Toxic," *Inside Indonesia* 130, 2017. Accessed February 10, 2018. <http://www.insideindonesia.org/when-a-history-seminar-becomes-toxic>

**63** Lien Hoang, "'Communist' Still a Dirty Word in Indonesia," *Voice of America*, January 27, 2014. Accessed February 13, 2018. <https://www.voanews.com/a/lien-hoang-communist-still-dirty-word-in-indonesia/1838804.html>

**64** Ken MacLean, "The rehabilitation of an uncomfortable past: Everyday life in Vietnam during the subsidy period (1975–1986)," *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 3 (2008): 281–303; Hy V. Luong, *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society* (Oxford: Rowman and

the controversy surrounding the alleged massacre of thousands of civilians in Hue by People's Army of Vietnam National Liberation Front does not have a place in the museum.<sup>65</sup> The same goes for decades of criticism from international human rights organizations. Viet Thanh Nguyen, a self-identified refugee who has written academic studies on the War Remnants Museum, fictionalized the history of the reeducation camps in his Pulitzer Prize winning *The Sympathizer*.<sup>66</sup> It will be interesting to see if the novel makes it into the museum's gift shop.

In contrast, the Museum of PKI Treachery lies in relative obscurity, ignored by scholars and tourists. Despite Indonesia's massive tourist trade and despite its close proximity to Tama Mini-Indonesia, another Suharto era project, a foreign visitor to Lubang Buaya is a rarity, provoking much interest from other visitors and the bored staff.<sup>67</sup> On a 2012 visit, I found the building to be dilapidated and subject serious mold problems. By 2014 these problems had been cleaned up but other sections were showing neglect. In November, 2017, I was surprised to be denied entry to the Lubang Buaya complex. The soldiers at the gate informed me that all foreigners would need a special "security clearance" to enter. After numerous phone calls, emails, and visits to various government offices, I gave up the fruitless attempt to secure permission. It was only when the foreigner ban made international news that it was modified to apply only to "researchers." By February, 2018, foreign tourists could once again visit the museum.<sup>68</sup> How the guards will determine who is doing research and who is sight-seeing remains unclear. Regardless, the incident revealed the sensitivity surrounding Suharto's New Order propaganda in contemporary Indonesia.<sup>69</sup>

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Littlefield Publishers, 2003); and Edward P. Metzner, ed. *Reeducation in Postwar Vietnam: Personal Postscripts to Peace* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> Douglas Pike, *The Viet Cong Strategy of Terror* (Washington D.C.: Indochina Archive, 1970) and James H. Willbanks, "Tet – What Really Happened at Hue," *Historynet*, January 25, 2011. Accessed November 30, 2017. <http://www.historynet.com/tet-what-really-happened-at-hue.htm>

<sup>66</sup> Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of Taman Mini-Indonesia's Suharto era political sub-text see John Pemberton, *On the Subject of 'Java'* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>68</sup> Moses Ompusunggu, "Foreign researchers' access to TNI museums restricted," *The Jakarta Post*, February 9, 2018. Accessed February 10, 2018. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/02/09/foreign-researchers-access-to-tni-museums-restricted-.html>

<sup>69</sup> Ariel Heryanto, ed., *Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics*. (New York: Routledge, 2008); idem, *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014).

Despite two decades of democracy, Reformasi Indonesia has yet to replace the Lubang Buaya narrative.

In Phnom Penh, Prime Minister Hun Sen continues to use the Tuol Sleng narrative to reinforce his almost absolute power. Having joined the Khmer Rouge after the Lon Nol coup in 1970, he fought in the revolution, losing an eye on the battlefield before becoming a Battalion Commander in the Eastern Region. When faced with the party's internal purge, he and a number of his men fled Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea for Vietnam in 1977. After the Vietnamese Communist Party vetted and groomed Hun Sen for a leadership position, he led the small Cambodian contingent during the devastating Vietnamese invasion. Under Vietnamese patronage he became the new People's Republic of Kampuchea's Foreign Minister in 1979 and Prime Minister in 1985. The country's de facto leader during much of the brutal Cambodia-Vietnamese War (1977–1991), Hun Sen remained in power through the United Nations occupation (UNTAC, 1992–1993) and into the current constitutional monarchy.<sup>70</sup> While originally in a position of regional leadership in the Khmer Rouge, Hun Sen was in the inner circle of the Vietnamese sponsored Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party. Initially a Marxist-Leninist organization, in the 1980s the party steadily moderated its position on Communist principles such as collectivization. In 1991, Hun Sen oversaw the renaming of the organization as the Cambodian People's Party and the rejection of Marxist-Leninism. Hun Sen shed Communist ideology and embraced authoritarian developmental strategies similar to Suharto's New Order. As the longest serving prime minister in history, he has faced numerous accusations of human rights violations and widespread corruption.<sup>71</sup> When his party lost the 1993 elections, the seven eastern provinces under his control threatened to secede until he was appointed Co-Prime Minister along with the victor, Prince Norodom Ranariddh. Four years later Hun Sen ousted the prince in a bloody coup. In 2014 military police fired on opposition demonstrators, killing four. In the summer of 2016, Kem Ley, a political commentator who had just founded a new political party, was gunned down while getting his morning coffee at a Phnom

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<sup>70</sup> Steve Herder and Judy Legerwood, eds., *Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia: Democratic Transition under United Nations Peace-Keeping* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 3–49; and Benny Widyono, *Dancing in the Shadows: Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and the United Nations in Cambodia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

<sup>71</sup> Amnesty International, *Kampuchea: Political Imprisonment and Torture* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1987); and Anonymous, "Cambodia is Said to Torture Prisoners," *The Boston Globe*, June 4, 1987.

Penh gas station.<sup>72</sup> 2017 saw the silencing of *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Asia* broadcasts and the shutdown of the *Cambodia Daily* newspaper. With opposition leader Sam Rainsy in exile and Kem Shokha and scores of other activists under arrest, their party was outlawed in November, 2017.<sup>73</sup> In addition to silencing discussions of contemporary violence, Hun Sen's propaganda machine has offered up a version of history firmly entrenched in the Tuol Sleng narrative's historical ambiguity. "Marching Towards National Salvation," a 90-minute hagiography screened on national television and released on several social media platforms in 2018, presents the argument that Hun Sen was the savior of Cambodia from the inexplicable evils of Pol Pot's clique.<sup>74</sup> The film glosses off his Khmer Rouge background, stresses his unflinching patriotism, and repeats his numerous personal sacrifices for the nation. Unsurprisingly, there is no discussion of violence since 1979.<sup>75</sup>

As in Jakarta's Lubang Buaya narrative, the Phnom Penh's Tuol Sleng narrative's careful curation of the past is an essential tactic for regime's stability. Ho Chi Minh City's museum stands in sharp contrast. Under Hanoi's guidance, the Vietnamese museum displays greater nuance and offers a greater variety of perspectives than the intransigent Indonesian anti-Communism or the ambiguous Cambodian a-historicism. Perhaps this can be explained by the Vietnamese Communist Party's political confidence vis-à-vis Indonesia's fragile democracy and Cambodia's growing authoritarianism. Or perhaps it can be explained as a silencing of unwelcome memories and histories of mass violence.

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72 Julia Wallace, "Cambodian Opposition Figure's Killing Recalls Darker Times," *The New York Times*, July 16, 2016.

73 Ben Paviour, "Cambodian Treason Case Highlights Cold War Rivalries," *The Diplomat*, November 27, 2017. Accessed February 13, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/cambodian-treason-case-highlights-cold-war-rivalries/>

74 Commission of History Research and Press Quick Reaction Unit of the Office of the Council of Ministers, "Marching Towards National Salvation" (YouTube video, filmed 2017, 1:34:11), posted January, 2018. Accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oj3dAlpf7ls>

75 The film's reception has ranged from praise by the Vietnamese state, "Marching towards national salvation – A valuable and factual documentary," *People's Army Newspaper* (January 10, 2018), accessed January 29, 2018, <http://en.qndd.vn/culture-sports/culture/marching-towards-national-salvation-a-valuable-and-factual-documentary-488732>, to criticism as misleading historical revisionism, Erin Handley and Niem Chheng, "Analysis: In new propaganda documentary, Hun Sen attempts to 'rewrite history'", *The Phnom Penh Post* (January 5, 2018) and Alex Willemyns "Cambodia and China: Rewriting (and Repeating) History," *The Diplomat* (January 15, 2018), accessed January 20, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/cambodia-and-china-rewriting-and-repeating-history/>

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