

BRILL'S SOUTHEAST ASIAN LIBRARY

# Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum

*A Multifaceted History of Khmer Rouge Crimes*



*Edited by*

STÉPHANIE BENZAQUEN-GAUTIER AND ANNE-LAURE PORÉE

BRILL

- 978-90-04-53689-0  
Downloaded from Brill.com 06/11/2024 08:08:51AM  
via BRILL

# Brill's Southeast Asian Library

*Edited by*

Bruce Lockhart (*National University of Singapore*)

Julian Millie (*Monash University*)

Lewis Mayo (*University of Melbourne*)

VOLUME 13

The titles published in this series are listed at [brill.com/seal](http://brill.com/seal)

# Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum

*A Multifaceted History of Khmer Rouge Crimes*

*Edited by*

Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier  
Anne-Laure Porée



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover description: Since the reintegration of Democratic Kampuchea history in textbooks, more and more young Cambodians visit Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. © T. van Tijen.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Benzaquen-Gautier, Stéphanie, editor. | Porée, Anne-Laure, editor.

Title: Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum : a multifaceted history of Khmer Rouge crimes / edited by Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier, Anne-Laure Porée.

Other titles: Multifaceted history of Khmer Rouge crimes

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2024] | Series: Brill's Southeast Asian library, 2213-0527 ; vol.13 | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2024006176 (print) | LCCN 2024006177 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004536883 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004536890 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. | Genocide--Cambodia--History--20th century. | Cambodia--History--1975-1979. | Parti communiste du Kampuchea. | Tuol Sleng (Prison : Phnom Penh, Cambodia)

Classification: LCC DS554.8 T86 2024 (print) | LCC DS554.8 (ebook) | DDC 959.604/2--dc23/eng/20240208

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024006176>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024006177>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 2213-0527

ISBN 978-90-04-53688-3 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-53689-0 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004536890

Copyright 2024 by Koninklijke Brill BV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill BV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Brill Wageningen Academic, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau and V&R unipress.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher. Requests for re-use and/or translations must be addressed to Koninklijke Brill BV via [brill.com](http://brill.com) or [copyright.com](http://copyright.com).

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

## Notes on Contributors

### *Caroline Bennett*

is a Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex, UK. Her research considers violence and politics, with specific attention to mass graves and human remains after mass violence and genocide, and the politics of death and the dead in projects of nation and state building.

ORCID: 0000-0002-3381-601X

### *Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier*

is a visual culture theorist who focuses on political violence, images, and activism in Southeast Asia. She is currently research associate at the University of Nottingham. She has conducted research as fellow at the Center for Khmer Studies (2023), the ERC project Cultures of Occupation in Twentieth Century Asia (2019–2021), and at the Forum Transregionale Studien and ICI Institute for Culture Inquiry in Berlin (2018–2019). She has contributed to essays collection, exhibition catalogues, and journals such as South East Asia Research, International Criminal Law Review, Journal of Asian Studies, and Media, Culture & Society.

ORCID: 0000-0002-8299-9836

### *Julia M. Brennan*

has worked in the field of textile conservation since 1985 and is dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage. Since 2000, she has led collections care workshops and set up conservation labs in Bhutan, Madagascar, Algeria, Indonesia, Laos and Thailand, including the preservation of victims' clothing in Cambodia and Rwanda. Providing stakeholders with sustainable skills is represented in her 2019 project and publication "Our Ancestors Knew Best" devoted to gathering traditional textile preservation methods and materials in Asia. She has a BA from Barnard College, Columbia University, and an MA in art crime from The Association for Research in Crimes Against Art.

ORCID: 0000-0002-0793-4645

### *Magali An Berthon*

is a textile historian focusing on the contemporary history of Southeast Asian dress and textiles with a specific interest in Cambodian silk weaving production, immigrant and refugee textile practices, and material cultures of conflict and colonialism. She holds a PhD in Design History from the Royal College of Art, London, UK with the thesis "Silk and Post-Conflict Cambodia: Embodied

Practices and Global and Local Dynamics of Heritage and Knowledge Transference (1991–2018).” She is currently a European Union Marie Skłodowska Curie postdoctoral fellow attached to the Center for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen.

ORCID: 0000-0003-1117-3903

*Daniel Bultmann*

As a sociologist, currently based at the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in Germany, Daniel Bultmann has been working on theories of inequality and violence, on a postcolonial critique in peace and conflict studies, on a political sociology of power elites, on digital ethnographies, and on ontologies of the body and knowledge in torture practices. Amongst others, he has written books on the history of the Khmer Rouge and theories of civil war (in German) as well as on the social structure of Cambodian armed groups and their reintegration after the war’s end.

ORCID: 0000-0001-5465-2010

*Julie Fleischman*

is Forensic Anthropologist at Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences, in Houston, Texas. She holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology, an MA in Anthropology, an MS in Forensic Science, and a BA in Anthropology. Her primary research interests involve skeletal trauma, the application of skeletal analysis to human rights, and the improvement of forensic anthropological methods. Her research in Cambodia was conducted for her doctoral dissertation. She is certified by the American Board of Forensic Anthropology. As a Forensic Anthropologist, she analyses human skeletal remains to assess age-at-death, sex, ancestry, stature, and traumatic injuries in a medico-legal context. She has published numerous articles in peer reviewed journals and edited volumes.

ORCID: 0000-0003-4941-0521

*Judy Ledgerwood*

is a cultural anthropologist whose research interests include cultural change in the aftermath of violence, new patterns of gender and social relations after the Cambodian revolution and war, and the politics of memory; she conducts research in Cambodia and with Khmer communities in the U.S. She currently serves as the director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. She has conducted research in Cambodia and in the United States with Khmer Americans. She has taught at the Royal University of Fine Arts, Faculty of Archaeology in Phnom Penh; and has had senior research fellowships from the Center for Khmer Studies. She has served on the board of the National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial in Chicago.

*Hang Nisay*

is currently the director of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. He obtained his bachelor's degree in the field of Prehistory and Archaeology at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh in 2009. Hang has been working at the museum since 2010, first as a tour-guide and in the administration. In 2015, he was appointed head of Exhibition section in charge of the organization of the temporary exhibitions, and later on head of the Project and Planning section.

ORCID: 0000-0002-4362-6957

*Rachel Hughes*

is a Senior Lecturer in Geography at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She is a leading expert on public sites of memory of the Khmer Rouge regime and has published extensively in this field. Her current writing projects are focussed on the politics of judicial reparations in contemporary Cambodia, and on Cambodia-focussed transnational solidarity campaigns from the period 1979-1989.

ORCID: 0000-0002-4003-0656

*Helen Jarvis*

has worked on issues relating to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum since the mid-1990s, especially with Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Program, the ECCC and UNESCO's Memory of the World programme. Relevant publications include *Getting away with genocide? Elusive justice and the Khmer Rouge Trials* (co-author with Tom Fawthrop), Modern Genocides Cambodia database; and "Powerful remains: the continuing presence of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime in today's Cambodia", in *Human Remains and Violence*. She holds a PhD from the University of Sydney, has both Australian and Cambodian nationality and lives in Phnom Penh.

ORCID: 0000-0002-5762-8654

*Caroline D. Laurent*

completed her PhD in Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University in November of 2016. Her forthcoming monograph, entitled *The Words of Others: Remembering and Writing Genocide as an Indirect Witness*, examines literary representations, produced by indirect witnesses, of the Holocaust, the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and the Khmers Rouge's violence and genocide in Cambodia. After having taught African and comparative literature at King's College London in England and postcolonial theory at Sciences Po in France, Caroline D. Laurent is now an assistant professor of Francophone studies at the American University of Paris.

ORCID: 0000-0002-6057-0895

*Rithy Panh*

Cambodia's leading filmmaker Rithy Panh was born in Phnom Penh (Cambodia) in 1964. Many members of his family died under the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979). In 1979 he could escape in a refugee camp in Thailand. From there he went to France where he later studied cinema. He has created several documentaries dealing with the traumatic legacy of the Khmer Rouge regime. Panh is not only a film director. He is also active in collecting cinematographic archives and making this heritage accessible to the public through the Bophana Audiovisual Resources Center he co-founded in 2006, and where a new generation of cinema makers is trained. He has also published several books, amongst them *The Elimination* (in 2012, in collaboration with Christophe Bataille).

*Rafal Pankowski*

is a Professor at the Institute of Sociology of Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, Poland. He has published widely on racist, xenophobic and totalitarian movements including the books *Neo-Fascism in Western Europe: A Study in Ideology* (Polish Academy of Sciences, 1998), *Racism and Popular Culture* (Trio, 2006), and *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots* (Routledge, 2010). He is a co-founder of the Never Again Association. Pankowski was a visiting professor at the Centre for European Studies of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, and the International Buddhist Studies College of Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, Ayutthaya, Thailand.

ORCID: 0000-0002-6594-2643

*Anne-Laure Porée*

is anthropologist (EHESS, Paris). For her PhD, she conducted research on the everyday life in the Khmer Rouge prison S-21. Since January 2018 she works with a Cambodian research group at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and has assisted them for two of their publications. She has also worked as a journalist in Cambodia since 2005. She is the author of a blog dedicated to the trial of former S-21 chief Duch ([www.proceskhmersrouges.net](http://www.proceskhmersrouges.net)). She made the documentary film *The Last Refuge*, which was awarded best Southeast-Asian documentary in human rights film festivals in Myanmar and Malaysia (2013).

ORCID: 0000-0002-2080-6920

*Bridie Shepherd*

is a PhD candidate in Human Geography at The University of Melbourne. Her research focuses on the intersection of technology, politics, and culture. She is particularly interested in the ways emerging technologies are modulating affective and sensory life.

ORCID: 0000-0002-7986-5159



*Barbara Thimm*

a German museum practitioner, has worked as an advisor for Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum from 2017 to 2023. Previously, she studied cultural pedagogy, engaged in civic education, and worked in different roles within the memorial sites Buchenwald and Dachau, two major former Nazi concentration camps in Germany. A believer of memorial site Buchenwald's motto *memory needs knowledge*, her work focuses on supporting documentation and preservation of the site. She engages in developing the archive, fact-based research, exhibitions, and publications to qualify the educational programs. She is a board member of ICMEMO (ICOM).

ORCID: 0000-0003-4733-0595

*Christina Ulrich*

is a historian and has been working as a research associate at the faculty of Modern History at Marburg University until recently. Her current postdoctoral research project dealt with the question of historical narratives and victim recognition after genocidal mass crimes separately in the cases of Cambodia and Germany. The project was funded by the German Research Foundation. After she had completed her PhD with a dissertation on the reintegration of former Nazi-perpetrators into post war German society at Marburg University, she initially worked as a project manager with Diakonie-Emergency-Aid. Her research focus is on genocide and mass atrocities, transitional justice with a focus on victims and victimhood, perpetrators, war crime trials, National Socialism and Federal German society.

ORCID: 0000-0001-7545-9981

*Helen Worsnop*

Former Senior Assistant Prosecutor at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (2015–2022). Previously, she was an Associate Legal Officer in Trial Chamber II at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, where she assisted the Judges in drafting the Taylor judgment. She has taught classes in international criminal law, the law of armed conflict and international commercial litigation (private international law) for the Cambridge University LL.M programme and has lectured in human rights law at the Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia. She holds an LL.M (first class) in international law from Cambridge University.

## Polish Visitors in Tuol Sleng: the Issue of Nazi-Khmer Rouge Analogies

*Rafal Pankowski*<sup>1</sup>

In the past years, in the wake of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum's digitization program and the work of scholar Rachel Hughes, visitor books have become an increasingly important source of information and documentation about the early years of the museum. The objective of the chapter is to add to this field of study by discussing under-explored materials, namely the entries of Polish visitors. To date, these entries have not been studied, because they are mostly written in Polish and have not been translated. I have identified and copied from the archives of the museum several entries written by Polish visitors in the Tuol Sleng visitor book in the early period of the museum's existence (1979–1980).<sup>2</sup> Beside these entries, I propose to examine the content of several books and reports published in Poland and the descriptions by the authors of their visit in Tuol Sleng. This analysis will be complemented by personal communications and observations made in Cambodia and Poland. On the basis of these materials, the chapter asks the following questions: What was the psychological and ideological framework of references through which the Polish visitors perceived and interpreted the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge? How did they relate the Cambodian experience to Polish historical experiences (mainly, the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust)? To what extent did references to Polish history help construct solidarity and empathy with the victims of the Democratic Kampuchea regime? I contend that the shared experience of terror and suffering went beyond the rhetoric of political solidarity and expressed a real emotional connection on the part of the Polish authors. I will try to unpack this complex entanglement of ideology and affect in two sections: the first one focused on the entries in visitor books; the second one focused on the first-hand accounts of journalists and writers.

<sup>1</sup> Address for correspondence: rafalpankowskiz016@gmail.com.

<sup>2</sup> I thank Rachel Hughes and Helen Jarvis for their precious help.

## 1 The Polish Entries in Visitor Books

Some of the first foreign (non-Vietnamese) visitors in Tuol Sleng soon after the liberation of Phnom Penh in 1979 were Polish. Today their accounts are relatively little known internationally, even though they provide an interesting perspective on the Cambodian tragedy. They compared it explicitly with the Polish experience of the Nazi genocide during World War II. They related simultaneously to Poland and Cambodia as potentially universal points of reference on fundamental issues such as crimes against humanity, genocide, the nature of evil, the boundaries of extreme suffering, and resilience. Links between Poland and Cambodia may or may not be obvious, but both countries are bound together by their tragic experiences of totalitarianism and extreme violence.

Poland was not a Western European colonial power, and it was generally not active in the region of Southeast Asia until the second half of the 20th century.<sup>3</sup> Since the 1950s, however, Poles were more often present in the region, mainly through Poland's participation in the United Nations system and in the political-economic networks of the socialist bloc, which supported the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Early Polish visitors traveling to post-Democratic Kampuchea entered Cambodia through Vietnam. As expected, they were taken to Tuol Sleng as part of an official tour. Three of the early Polish entries in the Tuol Sleng museum visitor book were written by a group of officials, a journalist, and a group of heritage specialists.

The entry by three delegates of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Stawiariski, Poziomek, Jakubowski) on 8 May 1979 reads:

The delegates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish People's Republic visited this prison on 8 May 1979. We are appalled by the crimes committed by the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime. It reminds us of the crimes committed by Hitler's nazis in Poland during the Second World War when more than 6 million Poles were killed.

As Rachel Hughes notes, the visitor book entries can be interpreted as a form of communication between individuals as well as institutions.<sup>4</sup> The entry by

3 Yet, there had been individual Polish exiles who visited and/or played a role in the region, the Polish-British writer Joseph Conrad being one example.

4 "Cambodia's Prison (Visitor) Books: A Medium of Political Instruction," in *Tuol Sleng, a history of the Cambodian Genocide under construction*, ed. by Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier, Anne-Laure Porée, and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, *Mémoires en Jeu*, no. 6 (2018), 53–57.

the Polish ministerial delegation would fit with this observation. It was written in French only, the language which at the time largely remained the lingua franca between the Poles and the Vietnamese (and Cambodians), although Russian was sometimes used too. The Polish officials visited the newly established museum on 8 May, an anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, but it was probably just a coincidence, as in that period the Victory Day was celebrated in Poland and in the other countries of the communist bloc a day later, on 9 May. The delegates did not refer to the anniversary in their entry even though they referred to the history of World War II.

The other two entries were written, respectively, in both Polish and French versions, and in Polish only. Journalist Monika Warnenska, on 24 April 1979 (in Polish and French) writes:

Never Again must such terrible years repeat themselves for Cambodia such as the years of the Pol Pot and Ieng Sary regime, the years to which the school turned into a prison is a testimony. Pol Pot was to his own nation what Hitler had been to Europe in the years 1939–1945. I believe the time of such criminals as Pol Pot and Ieng Sary is over, forever.

The entry of the delegation of four Polish curators (heritage specialists) from Gdansk and Torun on 9 December 1980 (only in Polish) reads:

We are shaken by the tragedy of the Cambodian people which they experienced during the Pol Pot regime. Because nobody is able to understand it like the Polish nation.

The names of those who wrote in the visitor books might have been forgotten now, but some were well-known in Poland at the time. For example, Monika Warnenska (1922–2010) was a Polish press correspondent fearlessly covering the war in Vietnam between 1964 and 1975. She was also a prolific novelist and author of children literature. She published several books about Cambodia including a biography of Pol Pot, released one year after the death of the former dictator.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that two out of these three entries included text in Polish rather than just French, English, or Russian, suggests that the authors first of all felt an urge to express their instinctive, emotional reaction to what they saw at Tuol Sleng and not to convey a message to the Cambodian or Vietnamese hosts or

<sup>5</sup> Monika Warnenska, *Sladami Pol Pota* (Warszawa: Swiat Ksiazki, 1999).

authorities or other international protagonists. It was obvious an entry written in Polish would not be understandable to many readers of the visitor book, but the purpose of the written comments was self-expression in the authors' own language. Thus, we may assume that the comments somewhat reflected their gut reactions rather than a pre-planned crafted diplomatic or political agenda. The purpose of such self-expression seems symbolic and perhaps self-therapeutic, the act of writing being a way of making sense of the incomprehensible, shocking reality of the visit, through some familiar words, references, and concepts.

To be sure, the rhetoric of the entries was influenced by the discourse of that time, reflecting the narrative of the Vietnamese-supported government of Cambodia. Thus, the responsibility for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge dictatorship is strongly personalized and focused on two members of its leadership. Therefore, the entries referred to the Khmer Rouge regime as the 'Pol Pot – Ieng Sary clique' in line with the then official rhetoric. Moreover, the entries reflected the contemporaneous official Polish perspective on World War II. It avoided direct references to the Holocaust (the extermination of the Jews) and focused on the martyrology of the Polish people often lumping together the Jewish and ethnic Polish victims of the Nazis. It also avoided the issue of anti-Jewish violence committed by Poles during World War II and in its aftermath.<sup>6</sup> An instance of the influence of the then predominant Polish discourse about the history of the Nazi occupation during World War II can be discerned in the delegation's depiction of six million Poles as victims of Hitler. This figure could have been interpreted as referring to the victims of Polish ethnicity. In fact, the majority of the citizens of Poland who perished at the hands of the German Nazis during the war were not ethnic Poles, but Jews. Ethnic Poles also suffered under Nazi oppression and more than two million ethnic Poles died during the war, but the Jews, not the ethnic Poles, were singled out for total extermination as a group.

In 1979, Poland commemorated the 40th anniversary of the German invasion and the beginning of World War II. In this context the visit of Pope John Paul II in Auschwitz in June 1979 added to the reminiscences of the Nazi occupation that were (and still are) so present in Poland's collective memory, culture, and identity. It is not surprising, thus, that the authors of the entries expressed their horror upon visiting S-21 by invoking Hitler and the Nazi occupation. Hitler has been a symbol of evil in contemporary culture, and Nazism

---

6 See for example Slawomir Kapralski, "Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's Memoriscapes: An Inquiry into Transcultural Amnesia", in *The Twentieth Century in European Memory. Transcultural Mediation and Reception*, ed. by Tea Sindbaek Andersen and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

has been synonymous with a genocidal killing machine. However, it seems that references to the Nazi occupation of Poland reflect something more and possibly echo self-perceptions by the Poles, over longer periods of history, of their own suffering in war and occupation. Arguably, one might find some parallels with certain types of Cambodian self-representation, and its narrative of being threatened and victimized by expansionist neighbors (Thailand and Vietnam). While the imagery of nationalism has often resulted in an obsession with the martyrdom of one's own group, the 'internationalist' or 'universalist' element of Polish national tradition has provided a potential for empathy with other victim groups and liberation movements. Throughout the 19th and 20th century the slogan of Polish independence movements was 'For your freedom and ours' and Poles could be found among participants of numerous insurrections and anti-imperialist struggles all over Europe and beyond. The words of the Polish heritage specialists from Gdansk and Torun can be interpreted in this context. To claim that "nobody is able to understand it like the Polish nation" may be seen as an arrogant and ethnocentric statement on the surface. On another level, however, it can be perceived as expressing a deeper sort of empathy with Cambodians as victims of a genocidal regime through a reference to the historical experience of Poland.

The visit of the heritage experts prompts some questions. What was the purpose of their presence in Cambodia? It is easy to understand why a journalist or a delegation from the MFA were invited in Cambodia but why heritage specialists? And why do they emphasize that they are coming from Gdansk and its nearby city, Torun? This latter question is perhaps easier to answer. At the time of their visit in Cambodia (their entries are dated 9 December 1980) Gdansk had become internationally famous as the cradle of Solidarity, a trade union and a mass social movement challenging the Soviet domination of Poland. As for the former question, I did further biographic research about the members of the delegation to uncover the purpose of their presence in Cambodia. Touch Hub studied conservation at the University of Torun in Poland in the years 1985–1992 and later became a high-level official at the Cambodian Ministry of Culture. One of his university teachers in Poland was Professor Wieslaw Domaslowski who had been to Cambodia. It turned out one of the difficult-to-read Polish signatures in the visitor book indeed belonged to him.<sup>7</sup> Domaslowski conducted restoration and research at the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh and at Angkor Wat.<sup>8</sup> His biography helps us explain his

7 Personal communication with Mr Touch Hub, Phnom Penh, July 2019.

8 Domaslowski's other Cambodian-born disciple, Dr Dolida Lim, who lives in Poland, conducted conservation work at the Tuol Sleng Museum (focusing on the preservation of paintings by a survivor, Vann Nath) in 2014.

references through the experiences of his formative years, so typical of his generation. In 1942, at the age of 17, he had been forcefully transported to Nazi Germany as a Polish slave worker for the Nazis. His parents suffered the same fate. His brother fought and died in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Domasowski returned to Poland at the age of 22 and went on to become a UNESCO expert. Wieslaw Domasowski died in 2021 at the age of 95.<sup>9</sup>

The above mentioned eight people were not the only Polish visitors to Tuol Sleng in the early period after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime. For example, the visitor book contains an entry of 4 July 1979, co-signed by Dr Marian Malczyk, a member of a delegation of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (a pro-Soviet international youth organization), also including representatives of Mongolia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and the USSR. The entry condemns the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. It is originally written in Hungarian (translated into Russian at the bottom of the page), and it does not contain any specific reference to Poland:

On 7 April 1980 the medical delegation of World Federation of Democratic Youth was here. We saw the plenty of terrible things and we do not want this to ever happen again. We brought some assistance and we will help in the future as well to build a new Socialist Cambodia!<sup>10</sup>

The visitor book proves a valuable source of information about the early days of the museum and the relations between Poland and Cambodia at the time. However, there were several Polish visitors immediately after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, even *before* the visitor book existed (the first comments in the Tuol Sleng visitor book date back only as far as April 1979).<sup>11</sup> These are these cases I will examine in the next section.

## 2 Firsthand Accounts: the Reports and Books Written by Journalists

The accounts of the Polish authors who visited Cambodian soon after the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime are little known outside Poland.<sup>12</sup> Each of

9 Malgorzata Litwin, "Zmarl prof. Wieslaw Jerzy Domasowski."

10 Translated from Hungarian manuscript by Andras Biro-Nagy.

11 Rachel Hughes, personal communication to author, email, 24 October 2018.

12 Monika Warnenska is mentioned in a footnote in David P. Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000), 234, and references in the PhD dissertation of Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier to Wieslaw Gornicki, "Images of Khmer Rouge atrocities, 1975–2015" (Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2016), 294. There might be other references of which I am not informed.

them included descriptions of Tuol Sleng and the reactions of the authors to the site:

### 2.1 *Zbigniew Domaranczyk*

A crew of Polish television, led by reporter Zbigniew Domaranczyk (1933–2013), arrived in Phnom Penh on 5 February 1979 and visited Tuol Sleng on 6 February. The team also consisted of cameraman Andrzej Myszkowski and his soundman Jan Strojceki. Prior to Phnom Penh, Domaranczyk had visited the newly liberated east of the country, gone back to Ho Chi Minh City and flown to Phnom Penh (the precise dates of these moves are not known). According to Domaranczyk himself, it was “the first filming crew” visiting Phnom Penh after the fall of the Democratic Kampuchea regime. Subsequent claims in Polish media referring to Domaranczyk as “the first foreign journalist” entering the Cambodian capital seem to be an exaggeration based on a misunderstanding. It is generally recognized the Vietnamese military reporters Hồ Văn Tây et Đinh Phong were the first journalists on the scene. Vietnam-based correspondent of the French communist newspaper *L'Humanité* Alain Ruscio was the first Westerner. Domaranczyk says that he received “visa no. 1” from the representative of the new Cambodian government in Hanoi, while his crew members received visas no. 2 and 3.<sup>13</sup> In any case, Domaranczyk and his colleagues were indeed among the first journalists to visit Tuol Seng just one month after it ceased functioning as a Khmer Rouge extermination centre.

During my research, I managed to establish that the archive of Polish TV has three tapes with reports on Cambodia aired in 1979, dated 6 February (lasting 18 minutes), 11 March (7 minutes) and 18 March (7 minutes). So far, it has been beyond my reach as a researcher to access the footage, but I have obtained a technical summary of the visual content. The first of the tapes includes footage of “a school turned into a prison,” undoubtedly Tuol Sleng. The title of the first televised report is “Godzina zero” (“Hour zero”) – similar to the title of Domaranczyk’s subsequent book about Cambodia (“Kampucza: Godzina zero”), published in 1981 by the Publishing House of Polish Radio and Television. In his book, Domaranczyk provides the Polish reader with an overview of Cambodian history and background information on the politics of Southeast Asia. His account is also influenced by the official discourse of the socialist bloc. The Polish state media were subjected to strict political control and, in line with the Cold War geo-politics of that period, the book espouses a strongly pro-Vietnamese, anti-American and anti-Chinese point of view. However, it would be wrong to dismiss the Polish journalist as a typical communist

13 Zbigniew Domaranczyk, *Kampucza: Godzina zero* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Radia i Telewizji, 1981).



propaganda worker. Born in 1933, he graduated from the Catholic University of Lublin, which at the time was known as a unique enclave of non-communist higher education in the communist bloc. Domaranczyk was married to Ewa Berberyusz, a well-known anti-communist author, linked with the Paris-based exiled periodical *Kultura*. In the 1990s, after the collapse of the communist system in Poland, Domaranczyk served in several senior positions in the newly independent Polish media.

Domaranczyk's sympathy for the suffering people of Cambodia, based on the accounts of survivors<sup>14</sup> and personal visits to the killing sites, is also accompanied by parallels with the Polish experience of suffering under the Nazi occupation. In the first chapter of the book (entitled "Visa no. 1"), for example, the author relays his conversation with the Cambodian representative in Hanoi who was reluctant to give the Polish journalist access to the country. After one hour of fruitless conversation, the Polish journalist's female Vietnamese fixer Thu suggested: "Tell him about Poland, about the occupation". Domaranczyk took up the suggestion: "So I tell about the Hitlerite idea of liquidation of the Polish nation. When I tell him about the concentration camps, the stone face of the ambassador begins to show signs of life." The ambassador asks the journalist numerous questions about the Nazi occupation of Poland and its aftermath and notes down the answers. After three hours of the conversation, visas no.1, 2 and 3 are issued.<sup>15</sup> There is no verifying the details of that particular conversation in Hanoi, but the parallel between the Khmer Rouge and the Nazis sets the tone for the book.

Domaranczyk also remembers a meeting in Hanoi, before leaving for Phnom Penh, "with our Vietnamese friend, a film operator who learned his trade in Warsaw." The Vietnamese filmmaker showed Domaranczyk his own four minutes of footage of decomposing corpses found at a Phnom Penh school turned into prison. Again, there is little doubt it was S-21.<sup>16</sup> It seems likely the unnamed Vietnamese cameraman mentioned by Domaranczyk was Hồ Văn Tây. It means that Domaranczyk saw images of S-21 even before traveling to Phnom Penh. These were the images filmed by the very men who had discovered the site in January 1979.

14 He also talked with perpetrators. One of them declared openly: "I liked killing people. Especially when their hands were tied behind their back. I liked watching how they fell and convoluted in agony": *ibid.*, 49. This perpetrator had possibly been coached to say such things to foreign journalists in the context of the early post-Democratic Kampuchea reality.

15 *Ibid.*, 10–12.

16 *Ibid.*, 189–190.

## 2.2 *Wieslaw Gornicki*

Wieslaw Gornicki was another Polish journalist present in Phnom Penh together with Domaranczyk, although he did not work for television and was not a member of the Polish TV crew. Gornicki notes the precise time he entered the Cambodian territory for the first time: 4 February 1979, 5:48 in the morning.<sup>17</sup> After Domaranczyk and his colleagues from Polish TV left Phnom Penh, Gornicki stayed in the capital in the company of unnamed Bulgarian, Soviet, and East German journalists, he left Cambodia on 15 February. Upon return from Southeast Asia, Gornicki relayed his observations at a World Peace Council conference in Helsinki on 28 February 1979. During his speech he displayed a bloodied sword, Chinese-made bullets, and photos of murdered Cambodians. According to Gornicki himself, his correspondences about Cambodia were published in 33 international press titles in nine languages and almost two million copies.<sup>18</sup> Gornicki managed to publish his written account well before Domaranczyk. His “*Vietnam – Kampuchea 1979: An Eye-witness Report*” was published by the World Peace Council in Helsinki in 1979. It was also translated in German, Spanish and French. A more comprehensive volume of Gornicki’s reportage from Cambodia was published in 1980 by the prestigious State Publishing Institute (PIW) under the title “*Bambusowa klepsydra*” (“The Bamboo Hourglass” in English, although *klepsydra* in Polish also means “obituary”). Ironically, Gornicki’s name is probably better known than Domaranczyk’s, but his book about Cambodia is largely forgotten.<sup>19</sup> Several months after the publication, Gornicki – an established journalist and columnist who had resigned from the attractive post of a Polish correspondent in the US in protest at the antisemitic campaign of the communist authorities in 1968<sup>20</sup> – became a key player in Polish politics as an advisor to General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the leader of the military junta which ruled Poland during martial law and in its aftermath throughout the 1980s.<sup>21</sup> Gornicki’s political role overshadowed his legacy

17 Wieslaw Gornicki, *Bambusowa klepsydra* (Warszawa: Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980), 27.

18 *Ibid.*, 334–335.

19 A reissue as an audio book by a relatively obscure publisher in the more recent years notwithstanding: Audio Wieslaw Gornicki, *Bambusowa klepsydra*, (Agencja Artystyczna MTJ-SMPB Sp. z o.o., 2012).

20 In 1968, the communist regime conducted an anti-Jewish campaign which resulted in purges at numerous institutions and a wave of emigration of thousands of Jewish intellectuals and professionals.

21 In December 1981, Jaruzelski conducted a brutal crackdown against the Solidarity movement and imprisoned numerous opposition activists. In 1989–1990 he presided over the negotiated transfer of power to the former opposition.

as a prolific writer and he is remembered as Jaruzelski's right-hand man rather than as an early visitor to post-Pol Pot Cambodia.

Gornicki's book is bigger in volume than Domaranczyk's and it is more impressionistic (with diverse personal reflections on topics such as Asian customs, the essence of Maoism and the Western New Left, etc.), although both books are not radically different in style or content. Gornicki's account contains additional graphic detail about S-21 (Gornicki refers to it as Tourl Soay Prey), and the methods of torture and killing. The author recalled his first observation: "The floors of the classrooms were covered with pools of cherry-brown coagulated blood and shreds of hair."<sup>22</sup> He wrote "the house of torture is to become a museum of martyrdom in the future", he also noted at the time of his visit "the eastern wing of the school" was serving as a prison for the defeated Khmer Rouge.<sup>23</sup> He even witnessed a "re-education" session for the prisoners.

At first glance, it didn't look like a prison at all. In the grass courtyard around thirty people sat, dressed in civilian clothes of quite decent quality, there were four relatively young women among them. Among them a young officer was walking, wearing a uniform with no distinctions. He read out in a monotonous voice some text in Khmer from a brochure he was holding in his hand, every fourth or fifth phrase contained familiar words: Pol Pot - Ieng Sary. When the reading stopped, the assembled began to clap their hands, but their faces showed no emotion whatsoever. And then it started all over again.<sup>24</sup>

He also talked with imprisoned Khmer Rouge cadre, named as Moah Khun and Sin Sieu Samoan, who admitted to him to personally killing, respectively, around 250 and up to 2000 people.<sup>25</sup>

Gornicki also described a visit to a hospital where an unnamed survivor of S-21 was being treated. Gornicki wrote: "I have never seen a man so massacred

22 Gornicki, *Bambusowa klepsydra*, 297.

23 *Ibid.*, 301. Gornicki does not specify the location, and the description seems to be at odds with the topography of Tuol Sleng. Perhaps Gornicki meant the east side of the school which could be out of the perimeter of the school.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.* They were the same men who appeared in John Pilger's documentary *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* (ITV, 1979). They did not work at S-21 itself. This points to the staged dimension of the encounters between foreign journalists and Khmer Rouge perpetrators. Gornicki mentions it was very difficult for him to obtain a permission to enter Tuol Sleng and once he was let in, he was constantly guarded by soldiers with machine guns.

even though I saw a lot during the war and the [1944] Warsaw uprising and later during the wars in Egypt and Indonesia.”<sup>26</sup> It would not come as a surprise Gornicki too invoked the wartime experiences of Nazi atrocities in Poland. When he walked inside emptied houses in Phnom Penh, he had a flashback of wartime memories of Warsaw: “In the autumn of 1942, after the liquidation of the ‘little ghetto’ in Warsaw and the destruction of the wall, in [the neighborhood of] Leszno I saw similar interiors.” At a killing site in Prey Veng, he commented that “I was looking at over fifty cubic meters of human remains. Since I saw how they removed human ashes on carriages from the burnt-out gallery of the Warsaw Great Theatre [in 1945], I’ve learnt this way of measuring humanity.”<sup>27</sup> The author’s apparent aloofness is tested when he is confronted with something he had not seen in World War II, a fully melted corpse: “For the first time in my life I saw a man in a liquid shape. Not even the Third Reich invented that.”<sup>28</sup> Writing of S-21, Gornicki also expresses a feeling of empathy with the victims: “It is enough (...) to place oneself in a position of those prisoners, to lose all faith for a moment. The faith in the whole history of mankind, in all the laws, ideas and norms.”<sup>29</sup> Similar reflections can be found in numerous writings about the Holocaust.

The general philosophical lessons of the Cambodian tragedy for the understanding of human nature are alluded to in other parts of the book, too. Gornicki states: “All the real issues of humankind are played out in Asia ( ... ) [T]he furthest Asia [is] the polygon of the fundamental concepts.”<sup>30</sup> These words are open to broad interpretations: they may refer to the ideological power struggles of the Cold War era, but they may also signify a deeper observation about the interconnectivity of humanity and the significance of its fundamental concepts such as human dignity. Gornicki also describes his disappointment at the lack of interest in his first-hand experience of Cambodia in the Western media, and more broadly at the lack of interest in the tragedies of Southeast Asia. He asks provocatively: “And besides that – who cares about it actually? Who has the time to worry about conflicts and quarrels of the so-called yellow race?”<sup>31</sup> He warns against “an insurmountable barrier of imagination, experience,

26 Ibid., 124. Gornicki served as a correspondent in Egypt and Indonesia between 1956–1960. Cf. Wiesław Gornicki, *Opowiesci zdyszane* (Warszawa: Iskry, 1971).

27 Gornicki, *Bambusowa klepsydra*, 197.

28 Ibid., 198.

29 Ibid., 298–299.

30 Ibid., 10.

31 Ibid., 20–21.

references, mutually excluding ways of thinking” and concludes: “After identifying such differences, silence is sufficient.”<sup>32</sup>

### 2.3 *Monika Warnenska*

Both Domaranczyk’s and, especially, Gornicki’s books were written in a hurry, and they contain some obvious errors. A third Polish book about Cambodian genocide appeared just a little later (submitted in 1981, printed in 1982), but its grasp of Cambodian history and culture is much stronger, indicating a deep expertise on the part of the author, the already mentioned Monika Warnenska.<sup>33</sup> “A Saved Land” (“Lad ocalony”) describes the horrendous crimes of Khmer Rouge. It stands in stark contrast to her earlier work “When Buddha reached for the gun” (“Gdy Budda siegnal po bron”) which had been published in 1977 and expressed pro- Khmer Rouge sympathies.<sup>34</sup> Of course before 1978, when the tension between Cambodia and Vietnam escalated into full-scale war, the international radical left had been broadly supportive of the Khmer Rouge as an anti-American, anti-imperialist force. Warnenska, like many others, changed her position as soon as the chasm between Moscow and Beijing within the world communist movement spectacularly impacted the Southeast Asia theater. That context made her shift more understandable to the reader and more in tune with the new ideological configuration. At the same time – it has to be said – the content of her books shows a genuine interest and sympathy with the plight of the Cambodian people.

Unsurprisingly Warnenska’s book on the Cambodian genocide is also peppered with numerous analogies and references to the suffering of Poland at the hands of the Nazis. For example, the physical remnants of S-21, including piles of hair and glasses, are likened to Auschwitz.<sup>35</sup> “A Saved Land” starts with two mottos, the first being a Khmer proverb: “If a boat passes, the river will stay.” The second one is a quote from a classic piece of Polish writing about the Holocaust, “The Medallions” published in 1946 by Zofia Nalkowska: “People dealt this fate to people”. Nalkowska was a member of the Central Committee for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland, and her epigraph was intended as a humanist warning in the spirit of ‘Never Again’.

These different accounts contain interesting observations about Cambodia in the post-Democratic Kampuchea period. The comparisons they make

32 Ibid., 11.

33 Monika Warnenska, *Lad ocalony* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982).

34 Monika Warnenska, *Gdy Budda siegnal po bron* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1977).

35 Monika Warnenska, *Lad ocalony* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982), 69.

between the Khmer Rouge atrocities and the crimes committed by the Nazis in Poland result in part from the Polish background of the authors and the fact they wrote for the Polish audience. However, the analogy made by these authors between fascism and the Khmer Rouge regime should not be dismissed too easily. Arguably, comparing different instances of extreme violence does not imply equating them. Indeed, if one accepts fascism can be described as an ideology of total cultural homogeneity, there are similarities with Pol Pot's vision and political practice. Fascism has been a totalitarian ideology and practice directed at eliminating social and cultural diversity.<sup>36</sup> According to Roger Griffin, it has had a crucial 'palingenetic' element (a vision of national rebirth following a total destruction of the old order).<sup>37</sup> Similar tenets could be found in Democratic Kampuchea policies: a determination to eliminate all potential dissent, foreign influences as well as ethnic and cultural minorities within the body politic of a purified Khmer race.<sup>38</sup> References to Nazi war crimes had been used by the Vietnamese and their supporters in the West (at the Russell Tribunal for example), but, remarkably, they were largely absent in the sizeable Polish literature about the 'Vietnam War'.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, they appeared frequently in the Polish reactions to the atrocities in Cambodia, as illustrated above. It seems apparent in the case of the Polish visitors to Tuol Sleng that the comparisons could not be dismissed as just an element of manipulative rhetoric. On the contrary, viewing and interpreting Cambodia through the prism of Poland's own suffering seemed to reflect a genuine sense of profound shock at the scale of the atrocities as well as a high degree of empathy with the victims of the Cambodian tragedy.

### 3 Conclusion

What the Polish visitors saw in Phnom Penh, and more particularly at S-21, was something that was met with, as Gornicki put it, "the 'insurmountable barrier of imagination.'" The entries in the visitor book and the first-hand accounts of the journalists were not free of factual mistakes and the three books analyzed in the chapter were strongly influenced by the propaganda discourses of the

36 Rafal Pankowski, *Neofaszyzm w Europie Zachodniej: Studium ideologii* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1998).

37 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

38 Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

39 An analysis of the Polish accounts of the war in Vietnam deserves a separate study, which is underway.

then Eastern bloc. Nevertheless, they clearly reflected the authors' genuine feelings of empathy with the victims, influenced by their awareness of Poland's own tragic history.

To try to communicate these feelings to others – the Polish public for a start – the visitors turned to their own experience of struggle, death, and destruction. The self-perception as a 'martyr nation' oppressed and colonized, the pervasive sense of existential threat that resulted from it, and of course the occupation and massacres of World War II formed the frame through which they formulated their encounter with Khmer Rouge atrocities. This was mostly through shared victimhood that they related the Cambodian and Polish tragedies. Many had lived through World War II as children and young adults, and one may not dismiss the idea that the visit in Tuol Sleng was experienced as something physical, visceral, possibly reactivating deeper and perhaps traumatic memories. In this sense, their reactions reflected an affect that went far beyond the ideological frame of that period.

### Bibliography

- Benzaquen-Gautier, Stéphanie. "Images of Khmer Rouge atrocities, 1975–2015." PhD dissertation, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2016.
- Chandler, David P. *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000.
- Domaranczyk, Zbigniew. *Kampucza: Godzina zero*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Radia i Telewizji, 1981.
- Fawthrop, Tom and Helen Jarvis. *Getting Away with Genocide? Elusive Justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal*. London: Pluto Press, 2004.
- Gornicki, Wiesław. *Bambusowa Klepsydra*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980.
- Gornicki, Wiesław. *Opowiesci zdyszane*. Warszawa: Iskry, 1971.
- Griffin, Roger. *The Nature of Fascism*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Hughes, Rachel. "Cambodia's Prison (Visitor) Books: A Medium of Political Instruction." In *Tuol Sleng, a history of the Cambodian Genocide under construction*, edited by Stéphanie Benzaquen, Anne-Laure Porée, and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, *Mémoires en Jeu*, no. 6 (2018).
- Kapralski, Sławomir. "Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's Memoryscapes: An Inquiry into Transcultural Amnesia." In *The Twentieth Century in European Memory. Transcultural Mediation and Reception*, edited by Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

- Litwin, Malgorzata. "Zmarl prof. Wieslaw Jerzy Domaslowski." *Torun.pl*, <https://www.torun.pl/pl/zmarl-prof-wieslaw-jerzy-domaslowski>, accessed 15 May 2021.
- Nalkowska, Zofia. *Medaliony*. Warszawa: Spoldzielnia Wydawnicza Czytelnik, 1946.
- Pankowski, Rafal. *Neofaszyzm w Europie Zachodniej: Studium ideologii*, Warszawa: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1998.
- Pilger, John. *Distant Voices*, London: Vintage, 1992.
- Warnenska, Monika. *Gdy Budda siegnal po bron*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1977.
- Warnenska, Monika. *Lad ocalony*, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982.
- Warnenska, Monika. *Sladami Pol Pota*. Warszawa: Swiat Ksiazki, 1999.
- Zechenter Katarzyna and Eugenia Prokop-Janiec. "Introduction: The Many Faces of Suffering on Polish Lands", *The Polish Review*, vol. 64, no.2, 2019.