

Human Sciences Encounters in Phnom-Penh: Past Presentations:Memory, emotion and violence in the context of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (work in progress)

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Wednesday 22 June 2011

This talk discusses the first findings of my research in Cambodia that is part of a larger comparative research project exploring emotion, memory and violence in post-conflict societies. The aim of our research is twofold. Firstly, we ask if and how tribunals and/or truth commissions can initiate new or revive old forms and practices of remembering the violent past and what kind of emotions are articulated in these processes on different societal levels (national, civil society and local, collectively and individually). We also ask if and how these different levels may or may not interact and influence each other. But besides that I am also interested in local forms and practices of remembering ,b e.g. ancestor rituals, storytelling etc. and ask how these are practiced in relation to the memories of the violent past.

My research was multi-sited and focused on the court proceedings of Case 001 of the ECCC itself, former Khmer Rouge prisons and mass killing sites in the capital and Takeo province. Except for the museum Tuol Sleng, all sites have memorial stupas displaying bones and skulls of victims, who were murdered at the sites. All of these sites are investigation sites of Case 001 and Case 002 of the ECCC.

I suggest that these Cambodian memorial sites and spaces are memoryscapes where the collective and the individual, the public and the personal interact, where individual memory and national history can enter the same discursive space thereby creating polyphonic and polysemic spaces of remembering. Furthermore, these memoryscapes articulate and embody different facets of remembering: agency, politics, materiality and emotion. However, all this takes place within the context of a hegemonic national politics of memory and state historiography that aims at the construction of a nation of victims of a few “senior responsible leaders” and “forgets” the complex shifting ambiguities and subjectivities of victim-perpetrator divisions that have occurred over 30 years of violent conflict in Cambodia.