

# Raya Morag

The Hebrew University

ORCID 0000-0002-0015-5702

## A New Paradigm for the Genocidal Interview: The Documentary Duel and the Question of Collaboration

### Abstract:

A global boom in mainly documentary films interviewing perpetrators recognizes the current shift from the era of the witness to that of the perpetrator. Post Khmer-Rouge Cambodian cinema (1989–present) is a unique and highly important case of perpetrator cinema. It proposes for the first time in cinema direct confrontation between first-generation survivor-filmmakers and perpetrators, a new form of genocidal interview: the documentary duel. Enabled both by the intimate horror of the autogenocide and the Khmer Rouge tribunal (the ECCC), dueling with high-ranking perpetrators shifts power relations between the two. In contrast, dueling with low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators, never to be tried, does not generate this much-desired shift. Thus, Cambodian collaboration revealed through cinema stresses the immense importance of the law in promoting familial-social-cultural processes of acknowledgement of accountability. Further, Cambodian duel documentaries constitute the ethics of “moral resentment” (my term), while objecting to and disrupting the political view that reconciliation is the only legitimate response to the atrocious past.

---

**Key words:** Perpetrator Era, perpetrator cinema, Cambodian autogenocide, genocidal interview, documentary duel, moral resentment, perpetration, collaboration

---

The New Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian (mainly documentary) Perpetrator Cinema (1990s–2020s) is part of a recent global phenomenon of perpetrator cinema, an unprecedented twenty-first century boom in films that deal with genocidal or other mass-killing events by focusing on the perpetrator figure as their main protagonist or interviewee.<sup>1</sup> However, although it is part of this global phenomenon, the cinema that grew out of the Cambodian autogenocide<sup>2</sup> (1975–1979) is paradigmatic, due to the number of films produced and their novel form of addressing the perpetrator.<sup>3</sup> The notable difference between the Cambodian autogenocide – meaning that the enemy was not a foreign Other but a member of the same imagined community (sharing the same origins, ethnicity, language, and religious belief) – and the other major genocidal catastrophes of the late twentieth century (from Rwanda and Sierra Leone to former Yugoslavia) reflects on the extraordinariness of this cinema in terms of its negotiation with perpetration. For the first time in the history of post-Holocaust cinema, the duel is established: a new form of direct confrontational interview between the first- (or second) generation survivor and the perpetrator.<sup>4</sup>

The autogenocide, during which the Khmer Rouge (KR) murdered almost two million of their own people, a quarter of the population at the time, made this confrontation possible. After the fall of the regime, both high- and low-ranking perpetrators continued to live their lives alongside their former victims; past intimate violence once again turned into the daily closeness of members of the same imagined community. Undoubtedly, the establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for the Prosecution of Crimes Committed during the Period of Democratic Kampuchea<sup>5</sup> (ECCC<sup>6</sup>) then enabled thousands of witnesses and civil parties to confront the perpetrators, thus deeply affecting

<sup>1</sup> See Raya Morag (2020a).

<sup>2</sup> The term “autogenocide” was coined by Ervin Staub (1992, pp. 7, 191).

<sup>3</sup> This corpus includes films such as *Enemies of the People: A Personal Journey into the Heart of the Killing Fields* (2009, dir. Thet Sambath and Rob Lemkin); *S21: The Khmer Rouge Death Machine (S-21, la machine de mort Khmère rouge)*, 2003, dir. Rithy Panh); *Survive: In the Heart of Khmer Rouge Madness (L'important c'est de rester vivant)*, 2009, dir. Roshane Saidnattar); and *About My Father* (2010, dir. Guillaume Suon).

<sup>4</sup> A Jewish survivor–Nazi perpetrator direct encounter is unimaginable in post-Holocaust European cinema. In contrast to the Cambodian context, the basic situation could not have been realized: the wide majority of Jewish survivors did not return to their homes in Germany (or other European locations) and the option of confronting the Nazi perpetrators was unimaginable and indescribable.

<sup>5</sup> Democratic Kampuchea was the government founded when KR forces defeated the US-backed Khmer Republic of Lon Nol in 1975. It existed until 1979. See “Khmer Rouge History”, <http://www.cambodiatribunal.org/history/cambodian-history/khmer-rouge-history/>, accessed: 11/10/2022.

<sup>6</sup> The ECCC is a special Cambodian court, often called the KR Tribunal, set up in 2006 pursuant to a 2003 agreement between Cambodia and the United Nations to prosecute only high-level KR leaders of former Democratic Kampuchea. See “Introduction to the ECCC”, <https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/introduction-eccc>, accessed 11/10/2022.

the taboo-ized public sphere and supporting the only medium that can stage such a confrontation – documentary cinema.<sup>7</sup>

This paper has three aims: First, to introduce the documentary duel as a new paradigm for the genocidal interview. Second, to reflect on the representation of Cambodia's collective collaboration with the KR. Un-addressed by the ECCC, this collaboration is also under-represented in the New Post-KR Cambodian perpetrator cinema. I contend that an examination of the entire corpus suggests that it is the workings of the ECCC that enabled such unprecedented dueling with the high-ranking perpetrators. Since the ECCC did not bring low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators to trial, the various forms of cinematic dueling with both are oriented mostly towards the spectator (and not the interviewees, who, knowing they would not be tried, are indifferent to accountability and in rural Cambodia still exert power over their former victims).

Third, and consequently, this paper aims to introduce the phenomenon of "moral resentment" (my term) emanating from these circumstances. The films dealing with low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators suggest that the subject position of the collaborator is fraught with denial and ambiguous within the biological (or symbolic) post-autogenocide family. With the absence of laws to support the breaking of the taboo on discussing or acting upon the widespread collaboration of the KR period, familial-social-cultural processes of coming to terms with the past are blocked. As the comparison between the films analyzed below shows, dueling between members of a family creates intergenerational aporias not less than intergenerational transmission of the genocidal trauma. Reflecting on both as irresolvable in 2000s Cambodia, the films simultaneously propose for the spectators new ethics of moral resentment. While Shoshana Felman (2002) understands the relationship between trauma and the law as a highly unstable dynamic, stating that the Eichmann trial tried to put an end to trauma but inadvertently performed an acting-out of it, Cambodian dueling, dependent to a large extent on the ECCC's transformation of the public sphere, directs moral resentment toward both high- and low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators, as well as the films' spectators. Opposing the Western paradigm of reconciliation, moral resentment should thus be seen as both a new attitude and an active praxis.

---

<sup>7</sup> And, to a lesser extent, an imaginary staging of this encounter format in fiction cinema.

## The Documentary Duel and the High-Ranking Perpetrator

The emergence of perpetrator cinema in Cambodia is exceptional. In the absence of any supportive social-intellectual movement, and under the taboo and censorship of the post-KR period, collecting perpetrators' accounts is a process undertaken simultaneously with taking victims' testimonies and rebuilding the audiovisual archives.<sup>8</sup> Perpetrator cinema has emerged despite facing various obstructive factors, such as the blindness of the West to the KR genocide, censorship inside Cambodia on the KR period and its absence from the education curriculum from 1979 until the early 2000s, and the 35 years of UN silence on the KR genocide that further encouraged Cambodians to ignore their past. It was only when the ECCC began its work in 2006 that testimonies of survivors (as well as civil parties<sup>9</sup>) and perpetrators' accounts entered more forcefully into the public sphere. The dueling gets special resonance because of the workings of the ECCC while the perpetrators' incarceration takes place either after the duel ends (as in *Enemies of the People: A Personal Journey into the Heart of the Killing Fields* [2009, dir. Thet Sambath and Rob Lemkin]) or before it begins (as in *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* [*Duch, le maître des forges de l'enfer*; 2011, dir. Rithy Panh]).

The most conspicuous characteristic of the direct-encounter-turned-duel is its (explicit or implicit) transformation of power relations, especially in regard to high-ranking perpetrators. Although in all the documentary perpetrator films the high-ranking perpetrators do not take full accountability, through the dueling they either partially confess to their crimes and/or reveal part of the truth in regard to the KR regime. Thus, I contend, the duel shifts the twentieth-century "ordinary man" enigma and, instead, based on a lengthy interaction, enables a representation of this change-in-the-making of (post-) genocidal power relations.

Perhaps more than any other post-traumatic oeuvre in post-Holocaust world cinema, that of French-Cambodian director Rithy Panh paves the way for the cinematic representation of the perpetrator figure. Eight years after the completion of his *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Death Machine* (2003), Panh's *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* embodies the notion of "documentary dueling" to

<sup>8</sup> This work is being carried out by both the Bophana Audiovisual Center and by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). See <http://bophana.org/>; <https://dccam.org/home>, accessed: 11/10/2022.

<sup>9</sup> The ECCC is the first court trying international mass crimes that provides an opportunity for victims to participate directly in the trial proceedings as "civil parties". See ECCC, "Who is Eligible to become a Civil Party?" <https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/victims-support/civil-party-information>, accessed: 11/10/2022.

its fullest, while implicitly staging the question of whether it might be a “civilizing” process for the (high-ranking<sup>10</sup>) perpetrator. In this corpus, however, the main protagonist is neither the perpetrator nor the survivor, but the duel itself. Accusations of dishonesty, historically one of the most frequent grounds for dueling, inform the underlying tension between the survivor-interviewer and perpetrator-interviewee. The first-generation survivor is undoubtedly aspiring, after years of effort, to extract the perpetrator’s confession. The films show, however, that after escalation of the conflict, it is ultimately the duel’s explicit or implicit transformation of power relations that is at stake, rather than the (usually failed or partial) confession. In this corpus, it is the survivor’s status and courage that, encountering deep interactional obstacles, shape the flow of the confrontation.

*Duch* is a distinctive example of perpetrator documentary, evident in the way that its director, a survivor of the Cambodian genocide, identifies his main goal: to confront the perpetrator, Kaing Guek Eve (nicknamed Duch, the former commandant<sup>11</sup> of the notorious torture and execution center Tuol Sleng, code-named S-21,<sup>12</sup> who was arrested by the ECCC in 2010).

The only interviewee in *Duch* is Duch himself. For the making of the film Panh spent hundreds of hours during the period of Duch’s arrest and trial interviewing him.<sup>13</sup> During the interviews, Panh asks Duch to read out loud from slogans of the Cambodian Communist Party, prisoners’ accounts, his own contemporary comments written on these accounts, interrogators’ reports, and rules written for the guards. He also asks him to look at photo prints taken of prisoners before their execution and at paintings of scenes of torture and suffering in execution center S-21, and to listen to video testimonies describing the atrocities carried out under his command.

Through this, Panh constitutes an epistemology of unvindictive resentment, one that demands an ethical response not only from the perpetrator but also from the spectator. Holocaust survivor and writer Jean Améry’s (1980/1966)

<sup>10</sup> Duch is not considered a Big Brother/Perpetrator. This term refers especially to Brother Numbers 1–4 (Pol Pot, “Brother Number 1”, was the KR leader, the general secretary of the party during the Cambodian genocide; Nuon Chea, “Brother Number 2”, was the chief ideologist of the KR, Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea; Ieng Sary “Brother Number 3”, was the foreign minister and deputy prime minister; Khieu Samphan, “Brother Number 4”, was Cambodia’s head of state). But, being Pol Pot’s chief executioner and the first to stand trial by the ECCC, Duch became the symbol of the high-ranking perpetrators.

<sup>11</sup> As the head of the government’s internal security branch (Santebal), Duch oversaw the Tuol Sleng (S-21) prison camp. He was convicted of crimes against humanity, murder, and torture, and on February 2, 2012, the ECCC extended his sentence to life. He died in prison on September 2, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> “The ‘S’ . . . stood for *sala*, or ‘hall’, while ‘21’ was the code number assigned to *santebal*” (Chandler, 1996: p. 3).

<sup>13</sup> See Panh and Bataille (2013).

writing on resentment raises a vital conceptualization of time, which, I suggest, is also embodied in perpetrator cinema's structuring of time-sense: "The moral person demands annulment of time – in the particular case under question, by nailing the criminal to his deed" (p. 72). According to the Amérian experience, after a short post-war period in which he felt that Holocaust victims were listened to and respected in Germany and Europe, the politics of forgetting became hegemonic to an extent that the "camp-self"/"victim-self" took over the much-desired "survivor-self." When victimhood was again repressed politically, the camp-self, feeling loneliness and social isolation, prevailed. In 1976, thirty-one years after the end of World War II, Améry writes:

What happened, happened. But *that* it happened cannot be so easily accepted. ... Nothing has healed, and what perhaps was already on the point of healing in 1964 is bursting open again as an infected wound.<sup>14</sup> (p. xxi)

At the heart of this thought, Améry is staging the political conflict between collective progress and survivors' struggles with the past, between the victims' need for recognition and (both German and European) society's political urge to promote social stability through reconciliation; and, consequently, I maintain, in line with Jacques Derrida's (2001) contention regarding politics' sabotage of pure forgiveness, their need to assure expected political transactions and financial gains.

Améry's resentment is harbored in the victims' immense sense of betrayal. However, similar to the perpetrator films' mindset, this is not the Nietzschean (2009/1887) or the Max Schelerian (2010/1914) resentment/*ressentiment* embodying the mental attitude of the weak and powerless – the *Schlechtweggekommenen* – against their aristocratic masters. Opposing both Nietzsche's and Scheler's dominant conceptualization of resentment/*ressentiment*, Améry's innovation lies in his definition of resentment not as an unconscious uncontrollable negative impulse of human nature, but as a highly self-conscious state of personal morality. Enabling an insightful introspection into the humanness of resentment, he opposes Nietzsche for despising victims, regarding them as weak, inferior, and cowardly, but rather elevates their dignity, having been forced by circumstances beyond their control. Moreover, Améry, in an exceedingly bold move, rejects the entire psychological-moralist tradition that follows the Nietzschean premise, which became paradigmatic in Western thought, by seeing resentment as a kind of sickness that harms the "patient" while repressing its ethics.

In *Duch*, Panh uses three major strategies repetitively and alternately to modify our perception of time as it chains us to a permanent past; all three, built on

<sup>14</sup> Emphasis in the original.

editing, demonstrate the profoundly affective power of resentment during the survivor – (high-ranking) perpetrator battle. In their projection of resentment, they attempt to construct for Duch a representation of the Cambodian past as a moral time and to reverse power relations.

The first strategy is to demand that spectators remodel their conception of time by showing very short video clips or photos inserted into the interviewing process. These materials reveal Duch's responses to be lies but also, and simultaneously, incessantly "take" the spectator back to the past. Their representation lasts no more than a few seconds, thus for spectators they function as flickers of time-consciousness, marking their distinction from the conventional undemanding easiness of cinematic flashbacks. Flickering sometimes so quickly that some images seem almost ungraspable, they are nevertheless engraved on the spectators' consciousness thanks to their contrasting content and the repetition of the technique.

The second strategy is the use of the accumulation of materials on Duch's desk at the center of the *mise-en-scène*. These materials, mostly comprising written documents and still photographs taken from S-21, are orchestrated on the desk. As Duch reads them, points to his signature, looks at and reflects on them, he is returned again and again to the past. Since Duch had read these execution accounts while he was the director of S-21 and regarded them as true confessions, Panh's requirement that he re-read them becomes a form of re-enactment of Duch's deeds through the speech act. His re-reading becomes a substitute for his unperformed confession, for his obstinate refusal to acknowledge responsibility for his crimes. The re-reading is also a substitute for – and ironically at the same time refutes – Duch's lies.

Whenever Duch refrains from looking, the camera's gaze forces the audience to witness the sight of his signature, his comments in red ink, or the expressions of the doomed prisoners in their mugshots. As Panh writes in his autobiography:

Duch asks me why I'm always showing him photographs. "What's the point?" he asks, in that tone of his. I answer, "But the thing is ... they're listening to you... Bophana's<sup>15</sup> here. Taing Siv Leang too. I believe they're listening to you." (Panh and Bataille, p. 261)

The major components of Panh's ideology of resentment built through the dueling are not only the refusal of future reconciliation and the disordering of temporality as a way to bring the perpetrator back to his past deeds. Returning to the past as an act of resentment also means rupturing the moment of the ev-

<sup>15</sup> The love story between Bophana and her husband and her subversive stand against the KR and her torturers in S21 became one of Panh's major symbols.

erlasting now that it is rooted in denial. The Now in *Duch* is the time of denial realized as a continuous mindset of tactics and manipulation. After all, the “willing executioner” unfolds his denial of the past in the present; the “twilight state of knowing and not-knowing”, as Stanley Cohen (2001, p. 80) calls it, happens in the present, while blocking out the past. Rupturing the attachment between denial and the Now as its dominant temporalization therefore elevates resentment’s value and makes it more coherent than Améry (1980/1966) suggests:

Resentment blocks the exit to the genuine human dimension, the future. I know that the time-sense of the person trapped in resentment is twisted around, dis-ordered, if you wish, for it desires two impossible things: regression into the past and nullification of what happened. (p. 68)

The third strategy that transforms the perception of time for both Duch and the spectator is the present absentee Panh, whose “documentary voice” (Nichols, 2008, p. 78) is heard in every way possible except physically. Panh completely avoids a corporeal appearance before the camera, and, together with his physical “muteness”, his representation of the dead becomes more total. The interview-based encounter between Panh and Duch is built on a conjuring act, which makes the dead play the Third, meaningful Other. But the dead are more than ghost-participants; ceaselessly presented through both the accounts and the photos, they become the third participant.

In the following, a description of one of the striking confrontation scenes will serve as an example of the strategies of resentment put forward by Panh against the “immensity and monstrosity of the natural time-sense” (Améry, 1980/1966, p. 81). As seen throughout *Duch*, in this confrontation scene as well, Duch’s desk is at the heart of the *mise-en-scène*.

[*Duch is shown sitting near the desk. Bophana’s photo is noticeable, however the desk is loaded with many piles of documents and a computer. Duch is holding a photograph of a tortured prisoner, the camera follows his gaze. In the background, a propaganda song is heard*]. Panh presents Duch’s following monologue:

DUCH. Let’s talk about hitting intelligently. Mam Nay aka Chan could beat someone while thinking about what he was doing because he was not hungry for recognition. He was a very good interrogator. He behaved according to the answer he got. He hit very hard. He would deliver a very strong blow from time to time if it was necessary. He would strike one, two, three blows [*Cut to a four-second illustration shot of a blow that lasts the time the blow itself takes. The last words of the sentence are heard as a sound bridge over the inserted shot*] and almost never reached five!



Those who hit without thinking were like Comrade Touy. He wanted the same power as Comrade Pon but he never reached Pon's level because I hadn't had much time to train him. Thus, he had only one method: torture. Biff! Boom! He controlled his blows so that the prisoner wouldn't die. He wanted to compete with Pon. *[Cut. The camera reveals an image that soon will be comprehended as video testimony, which Panh shows to Duch (and the viewers) in order to refute Duch's previous statement. Duch watches the video on his computer.]*

*[The person speaking in the video shows a still picture and, pointing to it, says:]* I met Mam Nay aka Chan in 1973 in the secret prison M13. I saw him use an AK47 to execute someone. *[The video's frame is enlarged and we see him on the entire film screen.]*

There was a place there that we called the winner's podium. When a person was tied to it, he was to be executed. Every prisoner knew what it meant (execution). On that day, the prisoners were gathered around the podium. Chan killed one of them with his rifle. Blood splattered all over the prisoners standing around, on everyone who was there. It was terrifying. He wanted to scare us with this behavior.

*[Closeup on Duch. He laughs.]*

*[On the soundtrack we hear the propaganda songs. Duch is seen sitting behind his desk. The noticeable documents are different to those shown at the beginning of the scene]*

DUCH. You can put it that way. But if you do, you will make me acknowledge lies. I will not accept this. My officers knew how to hit and all the rest. But to say that Mam Nay was the one who shot is not true. Not true. I wouldn't say Mam Nay never hit anyone. *[His last words are heard over a four-second video archive of a blw propaganda film of KR cadres walking in a line in the countryside with their weapons]*. He had beaten prisoners in the past. Sometimes he interrogated with his eyes closed. From time to time he would get up and pick up his long stick to hit with. *[Duch shows the presumed length of the stick on his stretched arm. The desk is shown from another angle with Bophana's photo once again on top of one pile of documents]*. Then he would go to sleep. *[A two-second shot (in color) is seen of a skinny tortured prisoner tied to the podium and bending his head]*. Then he would come back to interrogate the prisoner. Mr. Witness may keep talking, there's nothing I can do. There's nothing to document this. ... Mr. Witness is speaking up, but he has no documents either. So he can keep talking all he wants.

As this description shows, this typical scene, which lasts circa three and a half minutes, includes insertions of four still photographs, two "flickering"

short clips, and two archive clips presented as videos. This meticulous editing attests to Panh's commitment to a moral regression to the past, creating a resentment that "blocks the exit to the genuine human dimension, the future... for this reason the man of resentment cannot join in the unisonous peace chorus all around him, which cheerfully proposes: not backward let us look but forward, to a better, common future!" (Améry, 1980/1966, pp. 68–69). The belief in being somewhat fundamentally conditioned by the past, shared by Panh and Améry, stands in contrast to Duch's constant denials declared repetitively in this scene. His reaction to the proliferation of materials presented by Panh reveals it is rooted in a total un-acknowledgment that has characterized all the years Panh spent shooting the film. As Panh (2013) says: "Thanks to the cinema, the truth comes out: montage versus mendacity" (p. 114) and "Duch reinvents his truth in order to survive. ... I edit my film, therefore, against Duch. The only morality is the editing, the montage" (p. 186). Thus, it is obvious that Panh refrains from anchoring the confrontation in the discourse of reconciliation, forgiveness, and similitude, and that his objection to this discourse is revealed through embracing the discourse of responsibility, accountability, justice, and difference as part of the Amérian philosophy of resentment.

### **The Documentary Duel and the Question of Collaboration**

In contrast to Panh's incessant confrontation with the high-ranking perpetrator during the dueling in *Duch*, two of the major films that present low-ranking ex-KR cadres that were involved in KR crimes (*Red Wedding* [2011, dir. Lida Chan and Guillaume Suon] and *Angkar* [2018, dir. Neary Adeline Hay]), raise the question of confronting the collaborators. Under the unprecedented circumstances of the complicity of most of the Cambodian people with the Pol Pot regime (whether they voluntarily joined the movement, often as young people following the KR propaganda against Vietnam, King Norodom Sihanouk's<sup>16</sup> support of the KR, and US carpet bombing during the early 1970s, or involuntarily under the regime's terror and suppression), defining the corpus of perpetrator cinema entails an additional layer of reference both to the huge number of (mostly hidden) low-ranking perpetrators and (being everywhere and nowhere) collaborators.

<sup>16</sup> A 1970 military coup initiated by the general Lon Nol ousted Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia, and paved the way for the US-backed Khmer Republic. Sihanouk fled to China and North Korea, there forming a government-in-exile and resistance movement. In 1975, his support of the KR movement allowed his return to Cambodia as the KR figurehead head of state. Although initially supportive of the KR, his relations with them declined and in 1976 he resigned and was placed under house arrest until 1979, when Vietnamese forces overthrew the KR.

The question of collective collaboration, which transcends the individual cases depicted in the films, is under-represented in the New Cambodian perpetrator cinema. This highly sensitive issue is embodied in the response to the question of French director Bruno Carette and the Cambodian-survivor co-director Sien Meta in *Bitter Khmer Rouge* (*Khmers Rouges Amers*, 2007). Reth, an ex-KR soldier, reflects on the paradoxical and pre-emptive failure of the ECCC – and, metonymically, the entire Cambodian society – to bring low-ranking perpetrators to trial: “Trying KR? But which KR for heaven’s sake? KR, but who wasn’t a KR”? Is Reth’s avoidance of the term “collaborator” a symptom of the phenomenon in question?

The Cambodian direct, non-archival, face-to-face confrontation with the perpetrator/collaborator is derived and realized through the directors’ activism, which acknowledges and thus breaks the intimacy of the (horrific) neighborhood prevalent in post-1979 rural Cambodia, where low-ranking perpetrators/collaborators, still exerting power, live among their former victims. However, as the films show, breaking this intimacy does not transform the power relations between them (as we saw during duels with high-ranking perpetrators), mainly because the low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators knew they would not be tried in the ECCC. This meant, moreover, that the wider question of complicity in the communities the KR regime ruled was considered sufficiently dealt with after the ECCC trials had come to a close. As studies of the ECCC show, it contributed to exposing the few indicted high-ranking perpetrators while normalizing the many who were not brought to trial, so blocking the option of collective coming-to-terms with collaboration. Although Cambodian cinema does not present any master narrative of complicity, it does deal with it through the cinematic dueling.

In Neary Adeline Hay’s 1.5/second-generation<sup>17</sup> documentary film *Angkar*, the filmmaker, who was born out of a forced marriage,<sup>18</sup> accompanies her father, Khonsaly Hay, the only survivor of his family, to the village of Ta Saeng (in northern Cambodia), where he had been subjected to four years of forced labor. After over forty years living in France (where the family fled after staying a few years in a refugee camp on the Thai border), Khonsaly Hay meets the villagers who had been his torturers, the guards, the camp’s perpetrators and collaborators (who participated in criticism sessions, who supervised the hard labor in the rice fields, etc.), and the collaborator-spies (*schlops*).

<sup>17</sup> See Susan Rubin Suleiman (2002, p. 283). Most of the directors whose films are mentioned here, including Panh and Hay, were child survivors. Thus, according to Suleiman’s distinction, they neither belong to the first nor to the second generation, but to the 1.5 generation.

<sup>18</sup> A marriage between total strangers enforced in order to increase the number of KR’s as well as to control the family unit. See Raya Morag (2020b).

*Angkar* is the first documentary film to render through a personal story the suffering caused by low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators in rural Cambodia. Neary Hay, as Khonsaly's daughter, received the perpetrators' permission to film the sequences of the meetings with her father. Thus, the heart of the film is built on sheer *verité* scenes that she shot as the cinematographer, creating an unnatural, eerie "home-movie-with-the-perpetrators" film.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the duels in the films that interview high-ranking perpetrators (like Duch), in this film the talks take place in the presence of many people over food, drink, the sharing of memories, and laughter.

Following the opening scene, the film's title, *Angkar* (literally in Khmer, "The Organization", Cambodia's Communist Party), written in huge red bold letters, appears on the entire cinematic screen. This design is pre-emptive of the film's strategy of naming the perpetrators (especially those not seen in the film but known to be in the village, like the cannibals [who removed human livers and regularly drank the gallbladder bile of their victims], the cut-throat Khmer, and the executioners). In this, the film meta-reflexively declares cinema's powers in establishing a visual duel with Evil. The red color refers of course to danger; thus, together with the act of naming, it serves to break *Angkar's* terror, still felt in the village.

The film structures two non-linear parallel narratives that intertwine throughout the film: of the father, heard in the voice-over in Khmer, and of the daughter/filmmaker, heard in the voice-over in French. The double narrativization is a major strategy for the filmmaker/daughter to honorably oppose her father's reconciliation with his former oppressors, as well as strictly oppose these low-ranking perpetrators' and collaborators' refusal to be engaged with questions regarding their deeds. The duel, in other words, is taking place through the film's cinematic language not less than through the father's encounters with his former torturers. The filmmaker's voice-over is heard: "There was still a fearful respect when you spoke of them. As if the victim you'd been had never entirely left you". The double-narrative structure not only presents the daughter-father and second-first generation relationships, but, through the editing, also contrasts the perpetrators' and collaborators' reactions of evasion, lying, indifference, and denial with a woman's voice, and with her objections as revealed through her film. In this way, the film both relates to the question of complicity and constitutes moral resentment.

<sup>19</sup> As the filmmaker told me, her father stayed at the village, met his former acquaintances, and from time to time she joined them with a small video camera. It was just the two of them, with no extra film crew. Nothing could be planned in advance (personal conversation via Skype on August 17, 2018).

The second strategy that builds moral resentment is Hay's insertion into various scenes of very short (two-second) closeups of the faces of the perpetrators. In this way she uses the editing to stress both her perspective on her father's consciousness/memory/subconscious, still haunted by the perpetrators and collaborators, and partially obsessed with them. It is as if he is reminded of them: the taking over of his camp-self over her own postmemorial reflection. The exposure of the perpetrators' and collaborators' faces engraved on the cinematic screen stand against their un-repentant anonymity; and, most importantly, the brief closeups, bringing the past again and again through the killers' and collaborators' faces, stress her objection to reconciliation and support of Amérian moral resentment. Through these insertions she expresses her disagreement with her father's declaration to the perpetrators and collaborators that although he lived and suffered in the village, he is not interested in revenge, he believes in Dharma, and is happy to see them again. The frightening closeups, I suggest, are a form of dueling that constitutes for the spectator the obligation to not reconcile and to remember.

Later, her father refers to one of the old women in the village as Mother and hugs her. Back then she supported him and once risked herself by giving him food (though she finally turned him in). The spectators hear Neary's voice-over saying: "When you spoke about passive resistance, the woman you called Mother, I couldn't understand. For me there were only ever victims and their executioners." Then Neary Hay's voice is heard again:

One and a half to three million dead, out of a population of seven million, in three years, eight months and twenty days. Cambodians killed Cambodians. Like a man killing his brother, so that the shame of it made the whole family keeps [sic] the crime a secret. This silence, which passes on no memories, is the shame within which I grew up. The silence of a people's collective shame.

Hay's taking the spectators back to the past is unlike Panh's acts with Duch. Duch refuses to relate to the genocide and Panh's various means force him, through the duel, to do just that, while simultaneously constituting a new epistemology for the spectators. Hay's strategies of re-modeling the cinematic time through narration and editing are not oriented towards the perpetrators and collaborators, but rather towards the spectators. Using the commentary she wrote for the entire film (as the scriptwriter) and the editing, she advances the epistemology of moral resentment: In one of the last scenes of the film, over a landscape of the village at night, her father's memories are heard in the voice-over describing how he left his family during the KR-forced deportation (from the

cities to rural Cambodia) and after just five days in the jungle was caught by the soldiers of Angkar: “They took us to a village in the middle of the jungle. The village was called Ta Saeng. That day I was confronted by...”; with a series of cuts, the next shots present the faces of the perpetrators and collaborators on the cinematic screen. Their roles are printed with big red letters over their faces while her father’s voice discloses their names and roles: “Chief of District, Ta So; Pat, Bourreau, executioner; Égorgeur, Moeung San, Throat Cutter; Ta San, Collabo, collaborator”. The spectators, who were not familiar with their names or with their specific roles until this scene, and who got to know them partially through the filmed meetings, are now confronted not only with the naming, but with their total exposure. The faces that were part of semi-friendly talks or appear for a few seconds, flickering as a brief nightmare, are bestowed through this noticeable infographic with the responsibility they mostly refused to accept. This intertwining of the father’s narration and the daughter’s cinematic language, thus, gives extra weight to her “tagging” of the perpetrators and collaborators as such.

### Coda

*Angkar’s* competing voices create irresolvable tension, but, most importantly, they emphasize the immense importance of the law in breaking what Robert Eaglestone (2017) terms (in the context of Nazism) a “public secret”:

The public secret is not just about what is known or occulted. It has active, shaping effects...in its universal acceptance, it creates a passivity in the victims; it deforms the lives of all caught in it; it covers up knowledge by “hiding in plain sight”; it deforms creativity; and worse, it makes victims complicit with their own trucidation. The consequences of these deformations are severe. Unlike a shared collective memory, for example, the public secret creates not a community but an “un-community”, binding people in shame and secrecy. (p. 26)

In the documentary film *Red Wedding (Noces Rouges)*, co-directed by second-generation female director Lida Chan and male director Guillaume Suon, the protagonist, Sochan, is a former victim of forced marriage and rape. Afraid and ashamed to talk about this trauma, Sochan kept silent for thirty years till the ECCC was formed. Though Sochan directly confronts several of the low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators who forced her into marriage and supervised her marital and gang rapes, she can hardly constitute a dueling with her sister-in-law, who was a KR cadre and assisted in Sochan’s forced marriage. Although this docu-activist film follows Sochan as a civil party bringing her complaints against the KR leadership to the ECCC, especially against female perpetrators and col-

laborators, the perpetrators and collaborators still exert power in the village and inside the family,<sup>20</sup> maintaining the paradoxical situation of widespread violent collaboration as a “public secret”.

The perplexity of the relations between perpetration and complicity becomes part of the trauma of the autogenocide, which – as the films show – is lived as an unresolvable aporia. In a situation in which all collaborators are native, local, and intimate, an active denial of moral culpability becomes an urgent issue for mainstream society. Thus, in its representations of moral resentment through various forms of dueling, Cambodian cinema has paved the way for audiences to discover a new ethics, one that emanates from the exceptionality of the autogenocide and the political-social-psychological and cultural situation in identity-torn Cambodia in the post-autogenocide age.

### **Bibliography:**

Améry, J. (1980). *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. S. Rosenfeld and S. P. Rosenfeld. Reprint, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966.

Chandler, D. P. (1996). Songs at the Edge of the Forest: Perceptions of Order in Three Cambodian Texts, in: *Facing the Cambodian Past: Selected Essays, 1971–1994*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.

Cohen, S. (2001). *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Derrida, J. (2001). On Forgiveness, in: *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. M. Dooley and M. Hughes. New York: Routledge.

Eaglestone, R. (2017) *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Felman, S. (2002). *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Trauma in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Morag, R. (2020a). *Perpetrator Cinema. Confronting Genocide in Cambodian Documentary*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Morag, R. (2020b) *Gendered Genocide: New Cambodian Cinema and the Case of Forced Marriage and Rape*, “Camera Obscura”, Vol. 103, No. 35.1.

Nichols, B. (2008). *Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject*, “Critical Inquiry”, Vol. 35, No. 1.

---

<sup>20</sup>See Morag (2020b).

Nietzsche, F. W. (2009). *On the Genealogy of Morals*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. trans. D. Smith. New York: Oxford University Press, 1886.

Panh, R. and Bataille, C. (2013). *The Elimination: A Survivor of the Khmer Rouge Confronts His Past and the Commandant of the Killing Fields*, trans. J. Cullen. New York: Other Press.

Scheler, M. (2010). *Ressentiment*, trans. L. B. Coser and W. W. Holdheim. Reprint, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1914.

Staub, E. (1992). *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Suleiman, S. R. (2002). *The 1.5 Generation: Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust*, "American Imago", Vol. 59, No. 3.

**Acknowledgment:** This research was supported by THE ISRAEL SCIENCE FOUNDATION grant no. 467/13. I am truly grateful to the ISF for this funding.