Consuming memory, legitimising power: the interplay of government and tourist narratives at Cambodia's Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum

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Abstract: Museums play a key role in the construction and presentation of state narratives about a country's past, often with the goal of legitimising authorities' own positions of power. As major tourist attractions, they also have a role in forming tourists' narratives about their destination countries. In the case of Cambodia's Tuol Sleng museum, the former security prison of the Khmer Rouge regime, the narrative displayed was, initially, in part aimed at a foreign audience in order to win international support for the country's new government. As such, examining tourists' reactions to the museum can shed light on the ways in which tourist and state narratives intersect at memorial sites, and on how the politics of memory interacts with the phenomenon of dark tourism. I have drawn on analysis of the state narrative presented at Tuol Sleng to identify three crucial elements: shock and repulsion at the Khmer Rouge's actions, pretention of repetition of such events, and the current Cambodian government as national saviors; these elements were then contrasted with the narratives presented in blog posts by international visitors to the museum. Drawing on this and on previous research by Rachel Hughes, I suggest that the combination of the state-presented narrative and the tourists' own narratives of self-construction and of visits to the museum as a moral act gives the site a new legitimising role, in which it supports not the political power of the state but the social power of a tourist in the global South.

Introduction

The story goes that in 1979, in the wake of Vietnam's overthrow of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge regime, two photographers accompanying the invading army entered an abandoned school in the capital, Phnom Penh. Inside, they discovered several bodies showing signs of torture, along with a huge cache of signed "confessions" and photographs of victims (Hinton 2011, 67). They had stumbled across the ruins of S-21 security prison, one of the centres of the Khmer Rouge's relentless elimination of increasingly phantasmagorical political opponents, "known only as a place where people went in but never came out" (Ledgerwood 1997, 83). For the regime that followed, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), it was to serve to mute political opposition in a very different manner: through its transformation into a museum and memorial, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (TSGM), it challenged opposition not through violence but through the construction of a unifying national narrative. It has also, in recent decades, become one of Phnom Penh's most visited tourist attractions.

Collective memory has long served as a tool for the legitimation and extension of state power, and museums, especially the physical sites of trauma, can play a crucial role in this process. As

Li-Lian states, "a museum holds the right to authorship of history, and is recommended as representing the most accurate version possible of history" (Li-Lian 2001, 111), to the extent that people will question their own memories if they contradict the version of history presented by a museum. As such, "the museum... can be used by the state to narrate the official version of history, effectively moulding popular memory in its favour." (Li-Lian 2001, 120) This, in combination with Schramm's "sacralisation" of sites of violence (Schramm, 2011), not only allows the state to construct a narrative, but renders it taboo to question. Both Hinton (2011) and Ledgerwood (1997) have explored how this took place in Cambodia following the fall of the Khmer Rouge, as the new government sought to win legitimacy and excuse their own complicity in the former regime's crimes.

What stands out about TSGM, however, is that the narrative constructed here is as much for foreign as domestic consumption. Indeed, in the museum's early days, it was open only to foreign delegations and journalists (Ledgerwood 1997, 88). It retained a focus on international audiences as mass tourism to Cambodia began, and in 2009 five times more international tourists than locals passed through its gates (Isaac and Çakmak 2016, 237). This tourism falls clearly within the bounds of "dark tourism", "the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre" (Stone 2006, 145). As Light states, dark tourism "is often intimately connected to a broader politics of remembrance (Seaton 2009a) and many sites of dark tourism also have important political roles as places of collective/national memory." (Light 2017, 301).

How, then, might the dark tourist's impressions of a site such as Tuol Sleng interplay with the state's construction of national memory? I argue that a major motivation for tourist visits to historical sites, including those associated with violence or tragedy, is the search for a narrative framework through which their experience of the country – and its effects on their own self image (Noy 2004) – can be interpreted. Therefore, the interests of the state and the desires of the tourist dovetail. When this takes place in the authoritative and sacralised space of a museum-memorial, it seems likely that the visitor would serve as a fairly uncritical consumer of the state construction of events.

To investigate this further, I have first explored academic accounts of the PRK government's construction of a Cambodian national narrative, to identify its three central elements. Following an examination of the literature on dark tourism around Khmer Rouge sites, I have then collected a selection of 25 English-language travel blogs recording visits to Tuol Sleng. This follows the work of Isaac and Çakmak (2016), Benzaquen-Gautier (2020) and Buckley-Zistel and Williams (2020), who have all explored tourist accounts of the site, although without a primary focus on the interplay with the narrative presented by the government. The blogs I have explored were selected at random according to the order of their appearance on an online search; their dates of publication range across the past decade and their writers represent a variety of nationalities and genders. It is worth noting that, as some of the most prominent accounts of the museum available online, several of the blog posts referenced are the same as those analysed in Benzaquen-Gautier's work on TSGM, which was researched at around the same time. I have analysed these blogs for statements, phrases and implications suggesting rejection or acceptance of the three elements of the government narrative.

The memory providers: the PRK regime and the national narrative

In the period following the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the new government, the PRK, faced a number of challenges to their legitimacy. To begin with, they had been installed by an invading foreign power, Vietnam; while the complexity of the reactions and beliefs circulating in the wake of the Khmer Rouge's overthrow are beyond the scope of this essay, public suspicion of and hostility towards the Vietnamese was rife. In addition, the much of the international community condemned Vietnam's action and supported the Khmer Rouge as Cambodia's legitimate government. Vietnam, and Cambodia's new government, thus needed to provide a narrative justifying their presence both to delegations from the international community and to the Cambodian people. Therefore, "providing evidence to the outside world that the invasion by the Vietnamese army was indeed a liberation was the primary concern of those who designed Tuol Sleng as a museum" (Ledgerwood 1997, 87). It was Vietnam who opened the doors of TSGM to international observers, just three months after they took Phnom Penh (Isaac and Çakmak 2016, 236).

Many of the new rulers – including the current prime minister, Hun Sen, who initially served as a minister in the Vietnamese-backed government – were meanwhile tainted by association with their genocidal predecessors, having been active in the Khmer Rouge's revolution, and thus needed to ensure that blame was focused on particular perpetrators. As Benzaquen-Gautier puts it, "by making the entire population the victims of a 'fascist clique', the authorities aimed to draw a clear divide line between Democratic Kampuchea [the Khmer Rouge regime] and themselves, and foster a sense of unity and nation among Cambodians" (Benzaquen-Gautier 2020, 89). This narrative presented the Khmer Rouge leadership as the villains and the majority of the population as victims; Williams discusses the "the 'universal victimhood mnemonic'" which was designed to allow "anyone except the absolute highest leaders to claim some form of victimhood regarding the totalitarian rule of the Khmer Rouge" (Williams 2021, 2). He notes that this is partly reflected in a deliberate silence around the fact that "of the estimated 18,133 prisoners at S-21, over 60% were purged Khmer Rouge. These people were high-, mid- and also low-ranking cadres who, until their arrest, were part of the oppressive system themselves, developing or implementing the totalitarian policies of the state, propagating the ideologies that justified Khmer Rouge violence or participating actively in that violence themselves" (Williams 2021, 9).

At TSGM, the government sought to present its narrative through a process of juxtaposition, providing visitors with stark evidence of the Khmer Rouge leadership's cruelty: "in the face of the horrors of the museum the Vietnamese invasion would appear not only justified, but almost a humanitarian duty." (Isaac and Çakmak 2016, 236). The new government would then appear not as an imposed regime, but as the true revolutionaries, returning the country to its path of progress after the hijacking of the revolution by a genocidal "clique" (Hinton 2011, 70). They appear redeemed by their very will to remember.

The museum has thus been designed to focus on immediate, gut-wrenching detail rather than on any depth of context or explanation. It is notable that prior to the introduction of an audio guide in 2014, visitors faced an "almost total absence of information material" (Violi 2012, 47), which Hinton identifies as the memorial's "non-verbal" approach (Hinton 2011, 71). One room, for example, contains photographs of the prison's victims, but no details of their lives, the crimes of which they were accused or even their names; their only distinguishing feature is the emotions on their faces, eliciting a visceral empathetic reaction. As Williams discusses, "victims are constructed in both a personalised and simultaneously anonymised manner through the pre-

sentation of countless portrait photographs that... take on significant 'iconic power' (Carrabine 2017)" (Williams 2021, 8). Violi discusses how the photographs produce a strong emotional effect through the contrast between visitors' (and victims') knowledge of what occurred in S21 and the photographs of "faces that are apparently dispassionate, without any visible trace of emotion or feeling" (Violi 2012, 50). She also notes that the visitors view the victims from the same visual position as the perpetrators had, placing the visitors in a "fully embodied immersive experience that can be seen as a form of re-enactment of the traumatic experience itself" (Violi 2012, 51).

This is set against detailed reconstructions and graphic paintings of the conditions in the cells, and the torture devices used. As Hinton discusses, the museum is "constructed to create a sense of authenticity, as if one is getting a glimpse of the prison moments after it had ceased operation" (Hinton 2011, 71). To Violi, this is designed to underline the "inedexical" character of the site: "these places maintain a real spatial contiguity with the trauma itself; indeed, they are the very places where the traumatic events in question have occurred"; the presence of objects ensures that "through interpretation the visitor becomes aware of the indexical nature of the place and this awareness becomes part of her competence as visitor" (Violi 2012, 39). The preservation of much of the prison's original contents and design establishes a sense of urgency, as though the perpetrators may return at any moment. It also creates the "sense of authenticity" that Hinton mentions, which, as shall be discussed, is an important element of what tourists seek in their experiences.

The "non-verbal" nature of the displays is meanwhile designed to elicit a strong emotional response, but may also aim to appeal to foreigners across the language barrier. A Ministry of Culture report from the time also notes the need for bright lights "so that the foreigners can take photographs easily", and English and French speaking translators (Ledgerwood 1997, 89). Furthermore, there is evidence that the site is deliberately reminiscent of Holocaust memorial sites in Europe: the designer of the museum, Mai Lam, stated that he had conducted research in Eastern European concentration camps, taking inspiration from the Soviet narrative of socialist liberation from the Nazis (Ledgerwood 1997, 88-9). The ultimate aim seems to be to produce a sense of moral duty among international observers to prevent the return of the Khmer Rouge, even if this means supporting the Vietnamese-backed regime. As Hughes puts it,

> foreign visitors were to return to their countries of origin and tell people what had 'really' happened in Cambodia (Ledgerwood, 1997: 90) that Vietnam had 'liberated' Cambodia from its genocidal rulers, but had not 'invaded' or 'occupied' its smaller neighbour. Thus it was hoped that visitors would help to turn the tide of popular international opinion against those powerful geopolitical actors who were shunning the PRK, thus ushering in a new era of aid, assistance and international political legitimacy. (Hughes 2008, 326)

This partially underlines the need for the sense of urgency and authenticity portrayed at Tuol Sleng: when the museum was first established, "never again" was not mere rhetoric, as the Khmer Rouge were still mounting an insurgency and occupied Cambodia's seat at the UN.

However, the emotional appeal is not aimed merely at foreigners. Williams challenges the assumption that the museum was solely established for a foreign audience; although, as explored above, the goal of appealing to foreign delegations was central, Williams notes that "there was clear interest amongst the local population to visit: an estimate by TSGM puts the number of visitors to TSGM at around 324,921 Cambodian visitors in the first 2 years... the museum's

curation was clearly targeted at both domestic and international audiences" (Williams 2021, 6). Ledgerwood explores the comments left by the first Khmer visitors to the museum, identifying their similarity to state publications in three areas: statements of the will to remember, warnings against the return of the Khmer Rouge, and a sentiment he identifies as "chheu chap": "an aching or agony that seizes you physically and spiritually":

> ... partly contained within this notion is anger born of betrayal and frustration. It is the anger that the state propaganda machine focuses on in its presentation of Tuol Sleng and of the DK [Khmer Rouge] period more generally. The phrase *chheu chap* in state publications becomes a compound: *kamheng chheu chap, kamheng* meaning anger or rage. From an irresolvable grief is born a pain that results in rage. Take, for example, a quotation from a 1984 PRK publication in Khmer, which reads, *ukiev phneak po penh dov daoy kamheng chheu chap* [the pupils of our eyes are full of a rage born of agony]. (Ministry of Information and Culture 1984: 24). (Ledgerwood 1997, 91)

From the above we can broadly identify three elements of the narrative presented by the museum: the Khmer Rouge as a regime whose actions provoke emotional agony and repugnance (chheu chap), and a moral duty to prevent their return to power, by supporting the Vietnamese-backed PRK government as the national liberators. Although the imperative to present this narrative has diminished over the decades as Cambodia has stabilised and the Khmer Rouge has disintegrated, the foreign delegations and media have been replaced by a new audience, with TSGM becoming a "must-see destination" (Buckley-Zistel and Williams 2020, 1) for tourists visiting Phnom Penh.

The consumers of memory: the "dark tourist" in Phnom Penh

Scholars exploring "dark tourism", the industry around tourist sites associated with death and suffering, have identified a broad range of motivations for the "dark tourist". Among these,

> ...one motive that does appear to be more pronounced at some dark sites and attractions (particularly those associated with genocide) is a sense of duty or moral obligation (see Dalton, 2014).... Some visitors seek to 'connect' with the place they visit (Bird, 2013; Brown, 2016; Thurnell-Read, 2009), through showing empathy with victims (Brown, 2014; Chronis, 2012; Hughes, 2008; Yan et al., 2016) (Light 2017, 286).

Hughes in particular draws on TSGM to question the concept of dark tourism itself, arguing that

> Tourisms to sites of mass political violence are significantly more complex than current 'dark tourism' or '(a)moral tourism' theories suggest, in large part because such theories generalise and diminish that which they purport to explain. The decisions of contemporary visitors at Tuol Sleng are refigurings of the world from within various discourses of morality. They (re)construct moral geographies which bring events of the past into proximity, allow political concerns to travel along with them and act in ways (albeit minor) that they believe will improve the lives of those in the places they visit. Their visiting involves returning to a moral terrain in which mass political violence and its ongoing social and (geo)political effects are approached through dutiful exposure. (Hughes 2008, 328).

Hughes observes that many of her interviewees hesitated when asked their reasons for visiting the museum, suggesting that "it was impossible for interviewees to respond by stating that they had come unthinkingly or indifferently to the museum... This pause, and the normative statements that often followed it, reveal a moral imperative at work in tourists' relationship to the museum" (Hughes 2008, 323). She also notes that owing to the non-verbal nature of the exhibits, many come out without having gained much concrete knowledge on Cambodia's history, and that as a result "many visitors respond to this situation by reconceptualising their visit to Tuol Sleng in terms of a symbolic gesture. In this sense, tourism is considered as a form of second-order humanitarian work. In this way of thinking, individual tourists' actions in Cambodia are aligned with the practical and symbolic work of other international, moral travelling figures such as diplomats and peacekeepers" (Hughes 2008, 327).

Buckley-Zistel and Williams also draw on the TSGM to challenge dark tourism as an amoral or voyeuristic practise. In observing online reviews of the site, they note that "it is emphasised that the memorial sites are a 'must see' destination that visitors 'should visit'" (Buckley-Zistel and Williams 2020, 9) and argue that "dark tourism does not need to be part of an amoral engagement with the spaces of past violence but instead can be part of an ethical endeavour to understand, participate and create larger meaning" (Buckley-Zistel and Williams 2020, 13). In the case of TSGM they argue that it demonstrates the "transnationalisation of memory by which the way we remember and commemorate is increasingly turning similar on a global scale" (Buckley-Zistel and Williams 2020, 1), through shared online spaces where so-called dark tourists share their experiences and construct normative expectations to visit such sites. Moral imperatives are also among the varying motivations that Isaac and Çakmak identify among online reviewers of the site:

> One of the main motivations of Western tourists visiting the Tuol Sleng Museum is that they simply consider the museum as a "must see attraction" when they are in Phnom Penh. Another main motive is that tourists want to learn more about the Khmer history and to try to understand the tragedy that has happened. Tourists are also interested in visiting this museum in order to remember the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime and to pay their respects to the survivors and descendants. Many bloggers found important that many people visit this museum so that this tragedy will not be forgotten and it will never happen again. (Isaac and Çakmak 2016, 242)

Benzaquen-Gautier's exploration of travel blogs about TSGM, which references several of the same blogs as this study, also positions visiting the museum as an "ethical duty" in travellers' conception (Benzaquen-Gautier 2020, 86). This ties to Schramm's conception of sites of violence as sacred spaces: "to some extent, sacralization can be regarded as a means of creating extraordinary space" (Schramm 2011, 15); a visit to a site of violence thus becomes a form of secular pilgrimage.

Another approach for understanding the motives of visitors can be found in Urry's conception of the "tourist gaze", which seeks, among other things, "signs" which identify and explain their destination: "when for example tourists see two people kissing in Paris what they are gazing upon is 'timeless, romantic Paris.'" (Urry 2002, 133). The collection of signs can take place both ways. I would argue that a tourist who associates Cambodia with genocide seeks signs of genocide to witness while in Cambodia; at the same time, she seeks signs and symbols through which she can form an understanding of Cambodia, of which genocide becomes one. This collection of signs can become an interpretive framework which sheds a certain light and colour, or a poignant shadow, on the tourist's experience of Cambodia: it becomes the context for her narrativisation of her

journey. As Noy has explored, particularly among backpackers (who form a large portion of visitors to Cambodia) "tourists have specific, well-stylized forms of narrating their intense travel experiences, they show that what lies at the core of the backpackers' stories, though often covert, is these youths' selves and identities" (Noy 2004, 79). This chimes with Light's argument that dark tourists "may visit places associated with death or tragedy to affirm their self-identity as educated people with a concern to learn about (and better understand) historical events (Tinson et al., 2015), or they may use their visits to affirm particular 'moral' identities as people who 'care' about tragedy and atrocity" (Light 2017, 286).

In this, the concept of authenticity plays an important role; "encounters with authenticity are means, rather than ends, in the narratives" (Noy 2004, 91). To Benzaquen-Gautier, "the desire of being touched by the Cambodian past often implies representing the visit of Khmer Rouge memorials as a transformative experience" (Benzaquen-Gautier 2020, 91). An encounter with a site of trauma associated with authenticity and indexicality (Violi 2011) can enable a narrative that allows the tourist to see herself as a witness of something profound, who enacts a moral duty and therefore is transformed into an empathetic, observant traveller – or, in Hughes's (2008) terms, a humanitarian actor themselves.

Many of the above stated motives – the sense of moral duty, the experience of emotion and authenticity, and narrative construction of identity as an educated and sympathetic witness – can be seen as elements of this. It may be that the tourist seeks to experience memory as a story, in which she can play a fleeting part, as a witness and a performer of a humanitarian duty. If this is the case, the interests of the consumer of memory here intersect neatly with the original interests of the provider.

"An absolutely necessary stop": motivations of "dark tourists" at Tuol Sleng

The motivations discussed in the blog posts I accessed, in general, reflect the previous studies discussed above: a sense of moral duty, the desire to gain insight into Cambodian history, and the assumption that bearing witness is a necessary step in preventing future atrocities. Several blogs depicted the visit as an undesirable experience, but one which they were obligated to undertake. "I didn't want to go... I knew it was going to be profoundly sad... But Keith convinced me that we should go — to fully understand Cambodia's bloody past so we can better appreciate its present." (Marisol and Keith 2013). "There is no way to sugarcoat how depressing visiting the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeung Ek Killing Fields is, but I personally find it so important to visit places like these so that we can learn from history." (Bryna, accessed 2018).

"Giving context" was regularly stated as a reason for visiting, whether in reference to the past or the present: "I was keen to see for myself the remnants of the regime and to give some context to the personal accounts I'd read."(Andrea and Mark 2012). "You cannot really understand Cambodia and its people without visiting it." ("Gonetravelling" 2016). Here, we see how the tourist image of Cambodia is still constructed very much in reference to the trauma of the Khmer Rouge years, and visitors to Tuol Sleng perceive an ethical duty to experience a secondhand fraction of that trauma, in order to "understand" the people with whom they will interact during their journey.

One element which emerged in several blogs was a duty to educate. "We were having second thoughts about posting this. But then we realized that, although it only happened in late 1970's, many are not familiar with the history of Cambodian genocide, especially among [the] young generation."(Marisol and Keith 2013). The very existence of these texts suggests some motivation to gain and share knowledge; most of the blogs take on a journalistic tone when describing the site's context. This can represent an element of the narrative identity construction process identified by Noy (2004), and echoes Hughes's concept that, through enacting the duty to visit, the tourist constructs herself as a humanitarian (Hughes 2008). In addition, it reflects Buckley-Zistel and Williams's discussion of dark tourism as part of the transnationalisation of memory, with tourists seeking to transmit their experiences into a transnational commemorative online space (Buckley-Zistel and Williams 2020).

Visitors' narratives seek to position them as journalists or objective witnesses, undertaking an emotionally daunting "rite of passage" to gain knowledge that they have a responsibility to pass on to others, and to gain context to help to interpret later experiences of Cambodia, which they as an observer will then dutifully report back to their readers. It appears that the "tourist gaze" today is in part the gaze of a reporter; it is multiplied through writings and photographs, and aims to transmit memories across borders. Here, then, is the narrative that the dark tourist constructs: she is a humanitarian observer bearing witness, both to the events of history, and to current events viewed in their light. To what extent, however, do the memories that she transmits fit within the transcript of the museum's founders?

"I lasted only moments": chheu chap among visitors

As discussed above, the motivation for retaining the site largely intact was partially to transmit a strong emotional impact, discussed by Ledgerwood as chheu chap, the Khmer term for a physically grasping pain. This element emerges clearly in visitor accounts: "the visit was very hard to stomach. I was close to tears while I was there, and felt waves of nausea" (Bryna 2018). "I was instantly claustrophobic & in disbelief. I lasted only moments" (Paige 2015).

> I felt drained to the core, my head was throbbing and my stomach churning with the sickness I had witnessed. Laying down to relieve some of my weariness as I closed my eyes the images of skills, smashed bones and piles of bodies haunted me... For me the most shocking things I saw were the photos here. They made me feel physically sick and for Shorty it was just too much as he had to leave and sit down for a while. (Nic and Paul 2017)

Most blogs mirror the museum's aim to present a raw, uncensored version of events, mingling sensationalist language with repetition of the most brutal details. Also present is the language of moral outrage and even of dehumanisation; the Khmer Rouge are referred to repeatedly as "evil", "inhuman", "crazy", and "merciless". Benzaquen-Gautier notes this as a space of convergence between the state narrative and the tourist narrative, echoing the government's goal of placing the Khmer Rouge atrocities in the hands of a "fascist clique" rather than addressing the widespread complicity among many, including members of the new government themselves (Benzaquen-Gautier 2020, 89).

There remains an element of identity construction in tourists accounts of the emotional impact. In their accounts visitors emphasise their shock, outrage and empathy, perhaps partially in order

to demonstrate to their readers and themselves their own sensitivity. Bolin, examining tourists' responses to genocide in Rwanda, notes "two rules for emotion in the Western visitor community: first, there are certain appropriate emotions, primarily grief and sadness. Second, the appropriate intensity for these emotions is high. Failing to display the proper emotion and intensity of emotion would be evidence of the visitor's failure to be properly affected by the visit" (Bolin 2012, 203). In relation to Cambodian sites, Benzaquen-Gautier identifies such emotions as a necessary part of the transformative moral dimension of the visit:

> by warranting the authenticity of the backpacker's relation to the place (TSGM or Choeung Ek), bodily reactions can thus be deciphered as clues indicating the morality of the experience. They are not a sign of voyeurism and cheap thrill, but of empathy and solidarity. Moreover, they support a narrative of self-transformation, showing that the backpacker's worldview has been radically altered by this experience. (Benzaquen-Gautier 2020, 92).

However, the emotional impact of the site is doubtless a genuine one, and the museum succeeds in its aim of presenting the Khmer Rouge as a startlingly brutal regime. Echoing the intentions of the original planner, several blogs make explicit comparisons to Auschwitz; as Hughes noted among her interviewees, this is more related to the specific emotions sparked than through observation of any "deliberate curatorial link" (Hughes 2008, 325).

"Never again": the prevention of the repetition of history

The message of a moral duty to prevent similar events remains evident at Tuol Sleng, echoed in a majority of the blog posts. "A necessary trauma we must endure in order to even come close to honouring the suffering of these people and in doing so vow to ensure it never happens again" (Nic and Paul 2017). "Every visitor to Cambodia should visit this place and take the message away with them that what happened here should never be allowed to happen again" (Andrea and Mark 2012). While the phrase "never again" remains a central element of discourse around genocide memorial, it also demonstrates a clear link between the urgency the museum's planners sought to impart and the reactions of today's visitors.

Here, however, we see a diversion from the state narrative; the "never again" imperative here no longer focuses on Cambodia but becomes internationalised: "people say never again about what happened with the Nazis during the second world war, but they don't realise that is already has. Here and over in Bosnia and around the world today in places like Syria and Yemen" (Nic and Paul 2017). "I think it's SO important to be aware of why and how and when this happened, so that we might be able to open our eyes to similar things happening in the future and speak up about them" (Amanda, 2016). This reflects the process observed by Buckley-Zistel and Williams in which tourists, by sharing their experiences of trauma sites in online spaces, decouple the moral implications from the physical location, creating a "transnational moral space that is detached from the actual physical tourist destinations – the memorial – and that transgresses borders" (Buckley-Zistel and Williams 2020, 1).

Here, the moral duty that the dark tourist enacts becomes clearer: her visit to the site is constructed as part of the effort to prevent its repetition in other contexts, by the consumption and transmission of memory. This is stated outright as a normative implication of tourists' experiences: "it is important for future generations to learn about this and learn from it. This is the

only thing that will prevent this from happening in the future" (Lina and David 2015). "To know and learn about these events is to better know the country and its suffering and in turn to help create a world of peace in which these things are not allowed to happen again" (Nic and Paul 2017).

"There are ears in the walls here": Vietnam and the PRK regime as national saviours?

Most blogs made little or no mention of the circumstances in which the Khmer Rouge regime ended. Those which did avoided detailed discussion of the Vietnamese role, mentioning only that the regime was toppled by an invasion: indeed, every account referred to this as an "invasion", and none as a humanitarian intervention. One mentions how Vietnamese troops "discovered the atrocities" (Kendrick 2017), of which they had not—by this account—been aware; it appears that the narrative of the Vietnamese humanitarian mission no longer emerges as an obvious subtext at the site. There is even less mention of the regime which succeeded the Khmer Rouge, aside from in one blog:

> [Our guide] pointed out that, even though Pol Pot was eventually chased from power, many Khmer Rouge soldiers and officers still hold positions in Cambodia's government today. As we entered Tuol Sleng, our guide told us that we could ask questions during the tour, but instructed us to refrain from asking anything about politics. 'There are ears in the walls here,' he said. (James, accessed 2022)

The state's narrative of national salvation may represent an example of memory which is constructed and instrumentalised when needed, and fades when no longer politically relevant; Hun Sen's government remains entrenched in power, undermining the need for legitimation through comparison.

The agency for recovery is placed instead on the Cambodian people themselves: "it made us better understand and appreciate how far along the Cambodian people have come to healing as individuals and as a nation. And we hope it continues. When we think of Cambodia, we think of its gentle people and their heartwarming smile – the symbol of their incredible resilience and their will to heal" (Marisol and Keith 2013). "Despite the tragic past and seemingly dire current conditions, I see individuals full of love and a desire to build a better Cambodia" (Kathryn 2013). One blogger relates an encounter with a child in the museum grounds: "I realized that I had actually smiled in there, not as a sign of disrespect but as a sign of happiness in seeing that right there where life had ended for many, a little girl, most likely unaware of everything, was able to play" ("Gonetravelling" 2016).

Romanticising as this may be, it remains a cornerstone of the narrative through which many tourists interpret their experience of Cambodia. It is a narrative not of rescue by state power, as the museum's designers intended, but of national healing through individual and collective agency. By presenting such a narrative, the tourist may in fact again be constructing a narrative about their own identity, positioning themselves as a humanitarian visitor with a personal understanding of, and respect for, the local population, however much their accounts may ignore the complexity of trauma and nation-building in the aftermath of atrocities. As Benzaquen-Gautier puts it, "backpackers not only see themselves as 'historical brokers' who circulate knowledge about the Cambodian genocide in broader circles. They also think about themselves as go-betweens who help disseminate the present-day plight of Cambodian people" (Benzaquen-Gautier 2020, 96). By interpreting her experiences through the signs collected at TSGM and transmitting this on, both

as a warning against future atrocities elsewhere and an attempt to educate others on Cambodia, a tourist may be able to present not just her visit to TSGM, but to the entire country, as an ethical act. As such, memory is again used for legitimation, of a very different kind of power: that of a tourist in a post-colonial Global South country.

Conclusion

Like many sites of trauma, S-21 has both become a site of government legitimation and an attraction for "dark tourists". However, as observers such as Hughes (2008) and Buckley-Zistel and Williams (2020) have noted, it challenges the concept of dark tourism as a voyeuristic activity, with visits to the museum instead positioned as a moral duty, especially given its initial development for the purpose of demonstrating to foreign delegations the cruelty of the Khmer Rouge regime. In order to do so, the museum's designers presented the space as undisturbed as possible, with photographs of the victims displayed in juxtaposition with cells and torture implements, while offering little verbal information. As Hughes notes, this lack of information turns the experience of visiting the museum less into an educational process and more into a symbolic one (Hughes 2008), tying into Schramm's conception of sites of violence as "sacralised" (Schramm 2011), with the visit taking on the nature of a secular pilgrimage, underlined by its authenticity and indexicality (Violi 2012). Through what Urry calls "the tourist gaze" (Urry 2002), the tourist undertaking this pilgrimage collects signs that will help her to construct a narrative around her visit to the country, and around its effects on her own identity (Noy 2004), constructing herself as, in Hughes's terms, a form of humanitarian actor (Hughes 2008, 327). It could be expected, then, that the tourist would embrace the narrative presented at the museum as part of her own framework on her experience in Cambodia.

However, this does not mean that the accounts of visitors dovetail with the government narrative. The government's narrative can be presented roughly in three parts: the Khmer Rouge's atrocities as productive of horror and repugnance, or chheu chap (Ledgerwood 1997, 91), the moral duty to prevent their repetition, and the Vietnamese-backed PRK government's role as national saviours. The first is clearly echoed in visitors' accounts, with many discussing the intense emotional and even physical effects of the museum. Similarly, discourse in visitors' accounts echoes the necessity of preventing the repetition of such events; however, this becomes detached from the Cambodian context, with reference instead to other international events, in a process of what Buckley-Zistel and Williams refer to as "transnationalisation of memory" (Buckley-Zistel and Williams 2020).

The third element of the government's narrative, its own role as national saviours, is meanwhile replaced with a broader narrative that places agency for national healing on the Cambodian population themselves. This may partially be because of a diminished need for such a narrative now that Cambodia's current government is entrenched in power; however, it may also reflect tourists' narrative construction of themselves as sympathetic and respectful guests. If the tourist seeks to collect "signs", and to form these signs into a narrative framework through which she can interpret her experiences and transmit them to others, she then juxtaposes the signs collected at the museum with the signs experienced in Cambodia at large, constructing these into a more optimistic narrative of national recovery from tragedy, which she, constructed in her narrative as a humanitarian visitor, can support.

In this, as others have argued, TSGM presents a strong example of dark tourism cast in terms not of voyeurism but of ethical duty. It can be argued that there is an element of a critical approach, and even of resistance to authority, in tourists' rejection of the government's use of traumatic memory to legitimise its own position. However, it could also be noted that the narratives constructed by tourists play a role in legitimising their own activities in the country, and glossing over the more exploitative sides of tourism in Cambodia. In this, we see memory used now not to legitimise government power but, instead, to legitimise tourist consumption of the country. It is also worth noting the scale to which Cambodia has changed since the 1970s, and the possibility that the interpretive framework of genocide and national healing that some tourists construct around their experiences of the country may be increasingly detached from the realities and concerns of a new generation of Cambodians.

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Notes

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