



HAL
open science

From bones-as-evidence to tutelary spirits: the status of bodies in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge genocide

Anne Yvonne Guillou

► To cite this version:

Anne Yvonne Guillou. From bones-as-evidence to tutelary spirits: the status of bodies in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge genocide. Anstett-Gessat Elisabeth; Dreyfus Jean-Marc. Human remains and mass violence: methodological approaches, Manchester University Press, pp.146-160, 2014, Human Remains and Violence, 978-0-7190-9650-1. halshs-02547713

HAL Id: halshs-02547713

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02547713>

Submitted on 20 Apr 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

From bones-as-evidence to tutelary spirits: the status of bodies in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge genocide

Anne Yvonne Guillou

Introduction

‘What is a body?’ The question asked by Stéphane Breton is one that haunts those anthropologists who have to deal with any aspect of the materiality of flesh and of its corruption.¹ On the one hand there is its materiality, through which the marks of mass violence such as that of the Khmer Rouge genocide can be read,² while on the other there is its corruption, the slow process accompanying the change in the religious status of the corpse as it moves towards different forms of existence, and all the rituals relating to this change.³ While these definitions of the body are well established within the field of anthropology, the student of genocide must also take into account an additional dimension, namely that of the specific political and legal issues raised by mass violence.

I describe in this chapter the ways in which, during my research, I have come to consider corpses of mass violence in Cambodia, and how the question of observation schedules and temporality seems to me to be fundamental to our understanding of post-genocide Cambodian society, and in particular rural Khmer society, which has been largely neglected since ethnological studies slowly started again in the 1990s.

From the suffering body to scars on the landscape: an ethnography of the traces of the genocide

When, in 2007, I began a programme of ethnographic research into the traces of the Khmer Rouge genocide in a village in western Cambodia, the ‘body’ that I imagined I would be studying would be of the sort conceptualized by medical anthropology. Healthy body, sick body, dying body: from this perspective, the body is where all disorders are visible, and where the potential reforging of the links between the individual, society and the universe is promised. It is also the site upon which the traces of structural violence and the relations of social domination are inscribed. During my previous research, I had begun to realize that certain forms of illness were thought of as being linked to the suffering endured under the revolutionary regime of the Party of Democratic Kampuchea.⁴ A particular example is the syndrome of *bak komlang*, permanently ‘broken strength’ due to excessively hard labour, leading to a state of apathy and weakness. Through these popular aetiologies, Cambodians have engaged in a sort of spontaneous political anthropology, analysing destructive events through their most visibly corporeal consequences.⁵

I had thus embarked upon the project of ‘reading’ the genocide through the traces left on bodies and psyches, as described by rural Khmers. However, two events, one occurring during a meeting in Paris, the other on a country road in Cambodia, led me to widen my perspective and ‘leave the body’ of medical anthropology. The first was a remark made to me by Anne-Christine Taylor while I was describing the craters left by American bombs along the length of the border between Cambodia and Vietnam. Why, she asked, was I limiting the scope of my enquiry to the bodily traces of the years of war and genocide, and not linking these to the traces left on the landscape? Her remark came back to me a few months later when I was driving around the Cardamom region, between Lake Tonle Sap and the forested plateau in the west of Cambodia, in search of a village to play host to my new project. The name of one sub-district, *snam preah*, grabbed my attention. *Snam preah* means ‘mark of the sacred one’ in Khmer, and usually refers to the footprints of the Buddha, whose travels, according to legend, took him through all the Theravada Buddhist societies of South-East Asia. Yet *snam* also denotes bodily scars. Since the Khmer language itself had led me in this direction, I refocused my attention away from the ‘body’ towards the landscape, and from the

landscape onto the 'traces' of many kinds left by the mass destruction of thirty years earlier.

In the village of Kompong Tralach,⁶ which I had selected for my study, I began, free of any preconceptions, to study what the villagers saw as being its history, based on its most important sites – all places linked to Buddhism, the monarchy or the cult of the area's tutelary 'spirits'.⁷ I had benefited in this respect from a degree of luck in my choice of village. When looking for a village willing to play host to my research, I had begun by selecting a specific area in Pursat province which possessed the macrosociological characteristics I sought.⁸ For I wanted to carry out my research in a region representative of Cambodia in terms of its inhabitants' way of life (subsistence rice farming in the rainy season; location away from the Vietnamese, Thai and Laotian borders and the specific cultural issues these raise; well established history of stable settlement, away from zones of large-scale forest clearance which also raises specific questions). It was also important that the zone in question should have suffered disproportionately under Pol Pot's regime. As the historian David Chandler has noted:

the worst conditions of all were probably in dambon [Khmer Rouge district] 2 and 6 in Pursat,⁹ where new people were made to carve villages out of malarial forest. In these zones, deaths from starvation, disease and overwork were frequent, while CPK [Communist Party of Kampuchea] cadres suffered from regional purges in 1976 and 1978. They were replaced, here and in the northwest, by cadres brought in from the Southwestern Zone, the area controlled by Ta Mok, who earned a fearful personal reputation in the DK [Democratic Kampuchea] era and after.¹⁰

Furthermore, following the rebellion by party cadres in the eastern zone in 1978, thousands of people were deported from Svay Rieng and Prey Veng to Pursat, where they were massacred. Many of them wore traditional blue Khmer scarves (*krama*), and some villagers have told me of the fear and pity that they felt on seeing these deportees who were so clearly marked out as different.¹¹

I had travelled around the region in the company of a Cambodian archaeologist friend who had introduced me to the head of the Department of Culture for Pursat, with a view to his helping me with my research. He took me to see the sanctuary of a powerful local tutelary spirit, Grandfather Khleang Mueng, the upkeep of which was his responsibility. According to the royal chronicles and stories told locally, Khleang Mueng was a sixteenth-century military leader who, faced with the Siamese armies, supposedly

committed suicide in order to pass into the kingdom of the dead and raise an army of ghosts able to put the enemy to flight. As a national hero, he is venerated not only by local villagers but also by passing travellers and the kingdom's ruling classes. The space of the village, then, is punctuated and structured by a series of sites (altars, monasteries, places with special names) which are all linked to Khleang Mueng's sanctuary and his story. In the context of my 'anthropology of traces', I have thus observed the marks of two superimposed pasts: the war between the Siamese and the Khmer in the sixteenth century, and the Khmer Rouge regime in the twentieth century, which both left behind traces of blood and tears in (virtually) the same places. These traces can be read in built structures, the discourse and stories surrounding them, and the social practices linked to them.

Much as an archaeologist would, I observed how these sites had come through the intervening time, in particular the years of the American war and the Khmer Rouge regime. For instance, a canal dug using forced labour under the Democratic Kampuchean regime 'violently' cuts through the sanctuary of Grandfather Khleang Mueng, a monumental statue of the Buddha has been hacked away at with pickaxes, great trees possessing a powerful aura have been felled. These mutilations, this violence that the villagers helped me to read in the landscape and in these important sites, are metaphors for the violence inflicted upon individuals, a violence which is more difficult to speak about not only because of the way in which Khmer society deals with the expression of painful emotion, but also because of its vision of the relationship between the living and the dead.¹² The language of places thus constituted a basis for discussions with the people of the village. It allowed me to bring out certain spatio-temporal categories generally present in Khmer thought, and understand where, within this general intellectual framework, the brutal split constituted by the Khmer Rouge regime was situated. For among these scars on the landscape were mass graves left by the Pol Potists, with their discreet presence unnoticed by the casual traveller: burial pits scattered across the countryside, punctuating the rice paddies, the stretches of bush grazed by water buffalo, and the land surrounding pagodas.

The intrusion of corpses into public space at a village and national level

Hundreds of dead at the village level, and hundreds of thousands at the national level, have invaded Cambodians' physical and mental space, the product of the stated wish of the Pol Pot regime to abolish the frontier between the living and the dead.¹³ The blurring of these distinctions may be placed in the more general context of Khmer Rouge agrarian totalitarian ideology, which saw rice production, the march of Cambodian history and individual destinies as a single unified whole. This can be seen, for example, in the slogans chanted during this period, such as 'die on the building site' (describing the most glorious death possible) or 'keeping you alive brings us nothing, eliminating you costs us nothing', which was a threat repeated over and over by Khmer Rouge guards. According to the socio-political groups in question,¹⁴ and according to the geostrategic developments that have occurred since the fall of the regime in 1979, different temporal perspectives coexist, turning the Khmer Rouge genocide into a question with constantly shifting boundaries in which bodies, which are ceaselessly redefined and 'renovated', occupy a central position. Human remains have thus been variously defined and treated as corpses, dead people, ghosts, ancestors, bones-as-evidence and bones-as-memorials. They have subsequently been subjected to a range of different physical, ritual, discursive and museographic treatments which have transformed and arranged them, made them 'speak' or 'keep silent'. One gets a sense of the multiplicity of these definitions and their ramifications when one spends time living in Cambodian villages, all the while listening out for the muffled echoes coming from Phnom Penh, where the Khmer Rouge Tribunal has been working since 2007, and keeping an eye on related reports in the international media.

In late 1978, Vietnamese tanks pushed back their erstwhile Khmer Rouge allies in order to put an end to escalating cross-border attacks. The surviving Cambodians, haggard and exhausted, left their collective farms and took to the roads first in search of food, then to look for their missing loved ones or their family homes. In the ensuing months, many of them would live surrounded by corpses: corpses left scattered across the fields following hastily executed massacres of the civilian population during the retreat of Khmer Rouge fighters and cadres towards the Thai border; corpses piled up outside infirmaries and political prisons; isolated corpses of individuals who had collapsed from exhaustion; the remains of

'traitors' executed by overly zealous young soldiers. The Democratic Kampuchean regime left 1.7 million dead out of a total of 7 million inhabitants, some of whom were identified and buried, most of whom were left where they lay. People have described to me the indifference they felt faced with this spectacle, used as they were to living and sleeping amid these corpses, so racked by hunger that their emotions were utterly numbed. Once the foul smell of putrefaction had subsided, the vast numbers of skulls and bones became a familiar sight for children in these areas, and these human remains continue to resurface in a macabre form of archaeology whenever a well or a ditch is dug. Glowing lights and apparitions, sometimes associated with malevolent 'spirits' known as *priey* which inhabit certain trees, were frequent in the 1980s, then became more intermittent.

As the survivors set about rebuilding their lives, whether in their own former dwellings or in those left vacant by the disappearance of their owners, they would all carry out certain rudimentary rites to allow them to cohabit with the unknown dead who surrounded them: bones would be stacked beneath large trees, cremations would be carried out. At a time when people still had no news of their own family members sent to other areas of the country, these bodies were, in this period, simply corpses from which they sought to distance themselves physically in order to help rekindle their desire to live. This comes across in countless remarks made regarding the insistence with which people spoke of clearing up and cultivating sites of massacres (often in areas of forest or bush), in an effort to transform the raw/wild/forested/uncontrolled into something cooked/domesticated/cultivated/ritualized, in line with Lévi-Straussian symbolic oppositions, which play a deep structuring role in the mental universe of the Khmer.

Bones-as-evidence: ossuaries and memorials from the 1980s to the 2000s

It was on the initiative of the new government put in place under effective Vietnamese control in 1979 that the first collective treatment of the bodies from the genocide was undertaken, its aim being to turn them into 'bones-as-evidence'. This treatment formed part of the general effort to legitimize the new government in the highly polarized international context of the Cold War and the end of the Vietnam War (1975). The invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam was

condemned by the West and by communist China (Democratic Kampuchea's principal backer), which persisted in recognizing only the coalition government in exile, of which the Khmer Rouge formed a part.¹⁵ Within the country, too, Cambodians were unsure about what to make of this foreign military presence and this regime that professed to be communist while proclaiming that Pol Pot had betrayed the revolution. Among the steps taken to convince people of the legitimacy of the country's new rulers were the trial *in absentia* of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary by a revolutionary people's court, the transformation of Tuol Sleng prison (known as S-21) into a museum, the opening to the public of Choeung Ek (a site of mass execution near Phnom Penh), the dispatching of investigators into the provinces in order to estimate the numbers who died and, lastly, the construction of memorials.¹⁶ No fewer than eighty small constructions were thus built throughout the country over the 1980s with the assistance of local authorities and villagers, who were asked to gather up the bones scattered across the countryside. Remains which had been thrown down wells, a procedure often used to dispose of bodies after executions, were not exhumed.

Until the peace accords signed in 1991, these memorials would form the backbone of the state's memorialization effort, reaffirming, through annual ceremonies, the cruelty of the Khmer Rouge regime embodied in Pol Pot, the legitimacy of the Vietnamese intervention and the reconciliation programme, which sought to pardon defecting Khmer Rouge cadres and prevent revenge attacks by the people – a typical state programme after genocide or civil war. As well as constituting evidence, then, these human remains also functioned, on a symbolic level, as the foundations upon which the new political order of the People's Republic of Kampuchea would be built. Their significance is clear from the care taken in preparing the bones for the museum at Choeung Ek,¹⁷ and the 'loans' of human remains by sub-district authorities for large-scale regional ceremonies. An even clearer symbol of this new Cambodia built upon the bodies of its children was the immense map of the country made entirely from human skulls which was for many years mounted on a wall of the museum of the genocide at Tuol Sleng prison (known as S-21).

Following the 1991 peace accords, which were signed by all parties, including the Khmer Rouge guerrillas, still known as the Party of Democratic Kampuchea, and the placing of Cambodia under United Nations supervision, any reference to the genocide was not allowed in official documents. The state memorials fell into

disrepair. More than fifteen years later, in 2007, at the end of this ‘suspended historicity’,¹⁸ human remains once again became bones-as-evidence when teams of investigators from the Khmer Rouge Tribunal began recording afresh the sites of massacres, mass graves and political prisons, this work having been started a few years earlier by the Documentation Centre of Cambodia. In parallel with this re-discovery of the country’s ossuaries by western agencies, genocide tourism began to develop around the main sites linked to Pol Pot’s regime. In Phnom Penh today, one can hear taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers mechanically reciting a litany of sites to tourists, a list of ghastly curiosities to spice up a boat tour on the Mekong river or a visit to the ‘silk villages’. In Preah Vihear province, a few metres from the Thai border, Pol Pot’s cenotaph and a few other symbolic sites of the Khmer Rouge insurgency in the 1990s are also the object of what is – for the moment at least – a low-key effort by the Tourism Ministry to repackage them as heritage sites.

While the state memorialization project implemented in the 1980s undoubtedly had a strategic aim, this was not its only function. It also allowed the first collective funerary rites to take place, at a time when Buddhism was only just tolerated. The few monks who were allowed by the ruling party to don their habits participated in the ceremonies performed at the memorials and helped transform the anonymous bodies of the genocide into ‘spirits of the departed’. With the political liberalization at the beginning of the 1990s and the re-establishment of religious ceremonies, these departed spirits would come to an annual meeting with the living in Buddhist monasteries on the most important date in the Khmer ceremonial calendar, the Festival of the Dead.¹⁹ In relation to these funerary rites, I again followed my chosen methodology for the project by eschewing any framework based on the narrow perspective of genocide, an etic notion which does not correspond to the experiences of the villagers, and instead examined the full range of Buddhist ritual (or textual) procedures for the treatment of the dead – their categorization, their post-mortem trajectory – in order to establish where, specifically or otherwise, the victims of Pol Potism fit into them. It turns out that the treatment of the latter depends not on the specific details of their death, but on their links to the living (whether they have surviving families or remain unidentified²⁰) and on the context of the rituals, some of which are rooted in Buddhism (as it is understood and practised in Cambodia across various segments of society, at any rate) and others of which are rooted in what, for our purposes, can be called an ancestor cult.

From earth-bodies to ancestors and tutelary spirits

Among the various categories of victims produced by Democratic Kampuchea is that of the unidentified dead buried in mass graves. From the perspective of Khmer village memorialization, these burial pits are important insofar as they place corpses and landscape on a continuum. For the bodies in these mass graves, now mixed with the earth, absorbed by it, have themselves become earth.²¹ This focus on the soil, earth, landscape, all elements which are clearly central to a farming culture, led me down this route of enquiry. During this phase of my research, I deliberately ceased any type of biographical interviewing, and instead concentrated on observing rituals involving the earth and discussing them at length with the people of Kompong Tralach, both religious specialists and ordinary villagers.²² In such a context, the limits of the biographical interview become very clear.²³ Centred on one person, forcing questions and responses into the mould of concepts of individual suffering, it prevents any collective symbolization and expression of pain.²⁴

Today, the way in which people perceive these remains, which emerge from the ground from time to time, during ploughing or the digging of foundations for a house, is complex. On the one hand, they fit into the concept of the earth as being rich in 'treasures' of all kinds.²⁵ Likewise, the time spent by bodies – of any type – in the ground is considered to enrich the earth, allowing it to 'grow' and prosper.²⁶ Indeed, one village custom which has often passed unnoticed, or been misinterpreted, consists in performing, usually for people who have died 'normally', a sort of double funeral in which the dead are first buried for several years, after which their remains are exhumed and cremated. I have often heard villagers express an interpretation of this practice in which a certain Buddhist 'conformism' is detectable, insofar as cremation is considered the norm but is often deferred for reasons linked to the cost of the ceremony. A few years after burial, they say, when enough money has been saved, collective funerals shared by several families from the village are organized, during which a cremation is performed. However, my own hypothesis is that, on the contrary, far from being purely contingent on circumstances, the burial of bodies reveals a strong religious dimension. Cambodia's soil is thus made from the bodies of its children who have died throughout its history.

In something of a perversion of this concept, the Khmer Rouge claimed that these bodies served as fertilizer in the fields. And this

is precisely what was told to me by one old woman²⁷ who lived near a pond in which several dozen corpses were found, and which is now used a reservoir for the rice paddies. 'No one uses this water for cooking because it fills us with disgust, but we do eat fish from this pond.' Then she added, with a dose of peasant humour, 'The fish are nice and plump as well'.

The linking of these bodies to the earth and to specific places contributes to their integration into the category of village tutelary spirits (*neak ta*). Once again, it was by travelling through these ritual sites, in particular the site consecrated to the powerful tutelary spirit Grandfather Khleang Mueng described above, that I was able to draw parallels between the ways in which the villagers perceive certain mass graves and the land's tutelary spirit cults. Khleang Mueng is himself a former human being who died a violent death in the sixteenth century and, like him, other (although not all) tutelary spirits in the region are former human beings who died a cruel death.²⁸ Their origins vary, having their source both in ancient cults of the power of the soil and in their status as 'ancestors' who cleared the land for the village. This is why Ang Choulean speaks of them quite rightly as 'ancestor[s] blended with the soil'.²⁹

There are indeed similarities, at a village level, between the natural abodes of the land's tutelary spirits, such as groves, certain trees, termite hills or other mounds, and certain mass graves. Both are in various ways 'active' and potentially dangerous spaces, where human beings must show respect and caution. For tutelary spirits of the land are rather haughty masters of their territory, jealously guarding the space that they control and protect. Anyone who carelessly trespasses onto the territory of the tutelary spirit without first coming to pay homage to him or her, or who dares to pick fruit without permission, is supposedly punished by illness or, if they give serious offence, death. The relationship established with the tutelary spirit is a relationship of homage from the villagers. An annual ceremony is thus performed at the altars of the more important spirits, at which the local authorities, along with the villagers and monks, are all present. The rest of the time, the relations between the living and the land's tutelary spirits are based on a system of exchange in which humans ask for the help of the *neak ta* in particular circumstances (such as improving a business, make a lover come back, succeeding in an exam) and in return promise to present the spirit with offerings, which are sometimes recorded in the form of a list. When the time comes, the promise must be kept, under the threat of sanctions, which vary in severity

according to the power of the spirit (ranging from illness to death). Communication between the spirits of the land and humans is established either through a medium possessed by a spirit which speaks through his mouth, or through dreams in which the *neak ta* usually sets out specific needs or desires. These are much the same as those of the living: drink, cigarettes, food, perfume....

Some mass graves, whether sites of massacres or simply wells into which corpses were thrown – including, it should be noted, corpses of Khmer Rouge cadres killed in purges – are thought by villagers to possess some of the same characteristics as the places where the tutelary spirits reside. For instance, a young teacher who took me to see a former killing field pointed out that some huge termite hills had grown up there. Now, termite hills are a symbol of the ‘earth growing’ and often indicate the presence of a chthonian spirit.³⁰ An even clearer example of this parallel between *neak ta* and the anonymous dead of the genocide was provided by a nearby site where an old well had been used as a mass grave in 1979.³¹ Two women who lived nearby dreamed of this grave. The first, younger woman had a dream in which she saw a man dressed in black, most likely a Pol Potist,³² who expressed his annoyance at the fact that, when she had come to pick fruits the day before, her foot had slipped on the edge of the well, causing a stone to fall in. The following day she atoned for the offence she had caused with an offering of incense, and was never subsequently troubled. The other woman dreamed of a winning lottery number, which she claimed had been revealed by one of the dead from this mass grave. She expressed her gratitude by building a small altar typical of the little dwellings of the *neak ta*, which are miniature versions of human houses.

However, alongside these sites considered as ‘active’, and which the villagers have integrated within their everyday existence, there are, it is important to note, other places which, although explicitly devoted to commemoration, are not assigned the same value by those living near them. One such is a memorial on the site of a former detention centre in the Samrong Knong monastery, not far from the town of Battambang; it was erected by Cambodians who fled as refugees to the United States and France.³³ This cement-built memorial contains dozens of skeletons, visible through windows, and has bas-relief sculptures showing the torture inflicted upon prisoners. A small pot of incense, clearly placed there some time ago, shows that people do not regularly leave offerings at this site. And according to those living nearby, this place is not ‘active’: no dreams, no nocturnal lights to speak of, no termite mounds,

no illnesses reported after visiting the site or such like have been reported. Placed on a concrete plinth, the bones in this memorial are not mixed with the earth, and are not at one with it. Furthermore, the dead are not completely anonymous, as French and American Cambodians have recognized members of their families among them. These bodies are not 'earth-bodies', and thus do not fit into the system of interpretation based on Khmer religious beliefs.

Lastly, it is important to point out that these dreams establishing a link between the living and the 'earth-dead' of certain mass graves left by the Khmer Rouges occurred more than ten years after the toppling of the Democratic Kampuchea regime. Indeed, in one case the woman in question had no actual personal experience of this period, as she was born in the 1980s. This form of communication, occurring within a framework structured by Khmer religious beliefs, makes it possible for subsequent generations of the living to engage in a somewhat 'on-off' relationship with these 'earth-dead', according to the memory-centred needs of survivors. Furthermore, these 'earth-dead' may express different 'points of view' over time.

Notes

- 1 S. Breton (ed.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un corps?* (Paris: Musée du Quai Branly-Flammarion, 2004).
- 2 Khmers make up around 90 per cent of the population of Cambodia, referred to as a whole as Cambodians. The 'Khmer Rouges' were communist Khmers, nicknamed thus by Sihanouk in the 1950s.
- 3 R. Hertz, 'Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort (1907)', in *Sociologie religieuse et folklore* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970 – original edition 1928), pp. 14–80.
- 4 Democratic Kampuchea was the official name of the Khmer Rouge regime.
- 5 D. Fassin, *When Bodies Remember: Experience and Politics of AIDS in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007 – original French edition 2006).
- 6 Not its real name.
- 7 The term 'spirit' is placed in inverted commas because it does not quite render the exact status of these beings.
- 8 The area between the forested plateau of the Cardamoms and Lake Tonle Sap.
- 9 My research was carried out in the former Khmer Rouge districts (*dambon*) numbers 2 and 7.
- 10 D. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 269–70.

- 11 There is an ongoing debate between Ben Kiernan and Steven Heder over the function of these Khmer scarves: the former sees the distribution of these identifying scarves as the first phase of a plan of extermination; the latter argues that, on the contrary, the extermination was not planned, even if the end result was the same, given that the Pol Pot regime 'inspired by a modernizing ideology with genocidal potentialities, realizes those potentialities through a set of genocidal practices'. I refer to this difference of opinion because it is representative of the debates surrounding the nature of the Khmer Rouge regime, debates which have only increased in intensity with the creation in 2007 of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, in which various former leading figures from Democratic Kampuchea are standing trial. See B. Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); S. Heder, 'Racism, Marxism, labelling and genocide in Ben Kiernan's *The Pol Pot Regime*', *South East Asia Research*, 5:2 (1997), pp. 101–53.
- 12 I have examined this question in greater detail in A. Y. Guillou, 'Traces of destruction and thread of continuity in post-genocide Cambodia', in Veena Das & Clara Han (eds), *An Anthropology of Living and Dying in the Contemporary* (Berkeley: California University Press, forthcoming).
- 13 R. Rechtman, 'L'empreinte des morts: remarques sur l'intentionnalité génocidaire', in S. Phay-Vakalis (ed.), *Cambodge, l'atelier de la mémoire* (Paris: Université Paris 8/Phnom Penh, Sonleuk Tmey-Centre Bophana, 2010), pp. 133–7.
- 14 The social groups holding differing perspectives on the genocide and how to deal with it are, respectively, Cambodia's ruling party, the Cambodian diaspora, the Khmer Rouge tribunal, Buddhist religious institutions, Cambodian villagers and the minority Cham Muslim population (who hold Cambodian nationality), who are today increasingly active.
- 15 In September 1981, the Khmer Rouges, the Son Sannists (non-communist nationalists) and the Sihanoukists created a coalition opposed to the pro-Vietnamese government in Phnom Penh. This coalition was given diplomatic recognition by western countries and the United Nations until the peace accords signed between the four Cambodian factions in 1991.
- 16 On these memorials and museums, see R. Hughes, *Fielding Genocide: Post-1979 Cambodia and the Geopolitics of Memory*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne (2006); and J.-L. Margolin, 'L'Histoire brouillée: musées et mémoriaux du génocide cambodgien', *Gradhiva, Musée du Quai Branly*, 5 (2007), pp. 85–95.
- 17 Information provided by a villager from Bakan district who had taken part in the preparation of these bones in Phnom Penh.
- 18 Hughes, *Fielding Genocide*.
- 19 A. Y. Guillou, 'An alternative memory of the Khmer Rouge genocide: the dead of the mass graves and the land guardian spirits (*neak ta*)', *South East Asia Research*, 20:2 (2012), pp. 193–212.

- 20 I am grateful to Fabienne Luco, who made me aware of this point.
- 21 In Khmer thought, among the elements of which the human body is composed (water, wind, air, fire, earth), earth (*dey*) is associated with corpses. It is the last element that remains following death.
- 22 For example, the ceremonies for placing ritual markers in Buddhist monasteries (*banchoh seima*) are a rich source of ethnographic material regarding the element 'earth'.
- 23 I was nonetheless forced to carry out this sort of interview in some circumstances. I was, for example, more or less 'summoned' by a woman from Kompong Tralach who insisted on describing in detail what she had suffered under the Khmer Rouge regime, including the loss of her children, who one by one died of starvation. It was important for her to see her terrible, and utterly typical, account being written down in my notebook.
- 24 Psychiatrists working with Cambodian patients have also come up against the limitations of the individual interview. See G. Welsh, 'La tour de Babel: émergence d'une approche psychanalytique de groupe avec des réfugiés', *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, 75:4 (2011), pp. 1139–50.
- 25 A. Y. Guillou, 'The living archeology of a painful heritage: the first and second life of the Khmer Rouge mass graves', in Michael S. Falser & Monica Juneja (eds), 'Archaeologizing' *Heritage? Transcultural Entanglements Between Local Social Practices and Global Virtual Realities* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), pp. 259–69. The 'treasures' include Angkorean and post-Angkorean statues that pepper Cambodia's soil, Buddhist icons such as those found by Lady Penh in the foundation myth of the capital, Phnom Penh, the precious pottery buried in certain locations which, according to legend, reveals itself to human eyes in order that it might be 'borrowed'.
- 26 This expression has been identified by Fabienne Luco in his ongoing doctoral thesis in anthropology.
- 27 This old woman may have been a former Khmer Rouge low-rank cadre herself. I have not yet been able to verify this, however, because she lives in a different village from the one where I stay and where everybody knows each other.
- 28 C. Ang, *Les Êtres surnaturels dans la religion populaire khmère* (Paris: Cedoreck, 1986).
- 29 C. Ang, 'Le sol et l'ancêtre. L'amorphe et l'anthropomorphe', *Journal Asiatique*, 1:1 (1995), pp. 213–38, at p. 222.
- 30 This should be seen in parallel with the remarks made above regarding the dead making the earth 'grow'.
- 31 Guillou, 'An alternative memory'.
- 32 Khmer Rouge fighters and cadres wore black.
- 33 I am grateful to Sina Emde and Ute Luig of the Freie Universität, Berlin, for drawing my attention to this memorial.

Bibliography

- Ang, C., *Les Êtres surnaturels dans la religion populaire khmère* (Paris: Cedoreck, 1986)
- Ang, C., 'Le sol et l'ancêtre. L'amorphe et l'anthropomorphe', *Journal Asiatique*, 1:1 (1995), pp. 213–38
- Breton, S. (ed.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un corps?* (Paris: Musée du Quai Branly-Flammarion, 2004)
- Chandler, D. P., *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991)
- Fassin, D., *When Bodies Remember: Experience and Politics of AIDS in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007 – original French edition 2006)
- Guillou, A. Y., 'An alternative memory of the Khmer Rouge genocide: the dead of the mass graves and the land guardian spirits (*neak ta*)', *South East Asia Research*, 20:2 (2012), pp. 193–212
- Guillou, A. Y., 'The living archeology of a painful heritage: the first and second life of the Khmer Rouge mass graves', in M. S. Falser & M. Juneja (eds), *'Archaeologizing' Heritage? Transcultural Entanglements Between Local Social Practices and Global Virtual Realities* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), pp. 259–69
- Guillou, A. Y., 'Traces of destruction and thread of continuity in post-genocide Cambodia', in V. Das & C. Han (eds), *An Anthropology of Living and Dying in the Contemporary* (Berkeley: California University Press, forthcoming)
- Heder, S., 'Racism, Marxism, labelling and genocide in Ben Kiernan's *The Pol Pot Regime*', *South East Asia Research*, 5:2 (1997), pp. 101–53
- Hertz, R., 'Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort (1907)', in *Sociologie religieuse et folklore* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970 – original edition 1928), pp. 14–80
- Hughes, R., *Fielding Genocide: Post-1979 Cambodia and the Geopolitics of Memory*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne (2006)
- Kiernan, B., *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996)
- Margolin, J.-L., 'L'Histoire brouillée: musées et mémoriaux du génocide cambodgien', *Gradhiva, Musée du Quai Branly*, 5 (2007), pp. 85–95
- Rechtman, R., 'L'empreinte des morts: remarques sur l'intentionnalité génocidaire', in S. Phay-Vakalis (ed.), *Cambodge, l'atelier de la mémoire* (Paris: Université Paris 8/Phnom Penh, Sonleuk Tmey-Centre Bophana, 2010), pp. 133–7
- Welsh, G., 'La tour de Babel: émergence d'une approche psychanalytique de groupe avec des réfugiés', *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, 75:4 (2011), pp. 1139–50