

**Cambodia, from then to now:
memory and plural identities in the aftermath of genocide
May 5th, 6th and 7th, 2011
www.curakhmer.org**

Alex Hinton:

Abstracts

The Paradox of Perpetration: Perpetrators, Prisons, and the Genocidal Process

What motivates people to participate in mass murder? This paper explores this issue in relationship to the Cambodian genocide, with a particular focus on Tuol Sleng, the central interrogation and torture facility where over 12,380 people perished. Specifically, I argue that, if we are to understand how people come to kill in such contexts, we need to shift away from reductive explanations that naturalize perpetrators (as, for example, “savages” and “sadists”) to ones that have historicized, processual, and experience-near. To this end, the paper proposes a processual framework to approach perpetrator motivation with a particular focus on Tuol Sleng and the trial of Duch, the prison's commandant.

Transitional Frictions: Reflections on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal

On July 1, 2009, civil party Bou Meng took the stand during the first case being held by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC or “Khmer Rouge Tribunal”), an international hybrid tribunal established to try the surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge. Elevated on a raised dais in front of Bou Meng sat the trial chamber, comprising three Cambodian and two international jurists. To his right sat Duch, the former commandant of S-21, the secret interrogation and torture center where Bou Meng had been imprisoned during the Khmer Rouge regime (April 17, 1975 to January 6, 1979). Over 12,283 people perished at S-21, which was at the epicenter of a campaign of mass murder and repression that resulted in the death of perhaps 1.7 million of Cambodia's 8 million inhabitants. Bou Meng was one of only a handful of survivors, a man who had only lived because he could paint portraits of Pol Pot. This paper explores Bou Meng's day at the court from the perspective of critical transitional justice studies. Specifically, I explore what the act of testifying and witnessing meant to Bou Meng, how his subject position and voice were produced in the juridical context, and what the speech acts of witnesses like Bou Meng and others at the tribunal mean in different discursive communities, ranging from international court personnel to villagers on the ground in Cambodia. I conclude by what insights gleaned from the Khmer Rouge Tribunal have to say more broadly about transitional justice, genocide prevention, and the attempt to seek redress after genocide.