

**Cambodia, from then to now:
memory and plural identities in the aftermath of genocide
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"When The War Was Over"

The organizing principle behind my book "When The War Was Over" was to use people's stories to illuminate aspects of Cambodia's history and carry the narrative forward towards the Khmer Rouge denouement. By using real people the reader could understand emotionally as well as intellectually how Cambodia went from peace to war to revolution to insanity. It was the only way that I believed the reader would understand that these atrocities could happen anywhere, that Cambodians were not genetically inclined to be awful, and that many peoples and countries had a role in the tragedy. I did not use a single personality to do this because I believed that would undermine my goal of getting the reader involved in the story and seeing herself or himself in the actions and decisions taken by normal Cambodians as well as their leaders. Some of these individual Cambodians I write about did have resonance beyond the book. The banker Mey Komphot inspired a song by the band Xiu Xiu which fixed on his promise to himself that "It is one thing to suffer to live, another thing to suffer only to die. I decided to give it two years. If nothing had changed, I would commit suicide." He lived and moved to Montreal! And there is Bophana, whose story in my book inspired another of your speakers - Rithy Panh - to make a film about her and to later to name the Cambodian film archives in her honor. Those are just two reasons why I believe in the power of stories.