

CHAPTER 5

CONTESTING SITES OF MEMORIAL RECONSTRUCTION AND CULTURAL AMNESIA IN PIN YATHAY'S STAY ALIVE, MY SON

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ABSTRACT

The commemorative archives of the Cambodian Genocide have been a matter of dust under the rug for ages, not deemed as something of international importance, until recent times when the “Khmer Rouge Tribunal” brought to light the perspicacity of the mass destruction and unaccounted genocide in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 under the Khmer Rouge or Pol Pot Regime. Maurice Halbwachs’ conception of the difference between lived memory and official history can be read in conjunction with Pierre Nora’s lieux de mémoire (sites of memory) which also seeks to compartmentalize a difference between memory and history (Assmann, 2008, p. 110). But, in the context of the memoir of Cambodia’s forgotten genocide and systematic memocide, the mediality of collective memory is often overlooked. The dynamic nature of a past that is reconstructed daily and urged to be forgotten by the present powers is difficult to differentiate from the present by the cognitive abilities of the brain when it encounters serially traumatising events.

Keywords: *Cambodian Genocide, Khmer Rouge Tribunal, Collective Memory, Memocide, Sites of Memory (Lieux de mémoire), Transitional Justice.*

INTRODUCTION

The simple division between Jan and Aleida Assman’s concepts of communicative and cultural memory is based on the differences between canon and archive which draws a boundary between the past and present in linear time. However, this simplistic division is rejected by Jan Vansina who suggests that we must be wary of the “how’s” and “why’s” of remembering. Even “cultural memory” that reaches back to the past only does it so far as the past can be claimed as “ours” (Assmann, 2008, p. 112). Pitted against the transmission of communicative memory which is non-institutional, cultural memory runs the risk of being egocentric. Yathay’s memoir needs to be studied in a way that beats the risk of being appropriated by

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