Chapter 4

‘Dig a hole and bury the past in it’

Reconciliation and the heritage of genocide in Cambodia

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Those who have visited sites of commemoration associated with the Nazi Holocaust will be familiar with the power of those places to stimulate strong and distressing emotions. A persistent sense of the evil of the genocidal acts performed there combines with a mournfulness born of awareness of great suffering, loss and trauma. Although the interpretative and memorial strategies employed at Holocaust sites vary, there is an overwhelming sense of respectful commemoration of the victims of Nazi persecution in all cases. There is also a necessary clarity of message: one is left in no doubt about the identity of victims and perpetrators or about the extent of the evil committed. In the case of Cambodia a debate continues over the full extent of deaths as a result of the Khmer Rouge regime but credible estimates range between 1.5 and 2.5 million (Kiernan 2005).

The emotions stimulated by a visit to the last bastion of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime at Anlong Veng in northern Cambodia, and the messages conveyed at the tourist-historical sites there, on the other hand, are much less clear and much more disturbing. This lack of clarity raises a further question for Cambodian heritage tourism officials specifically, and for cultural heritage practitioners more generally: is it appropriate to commemorate or interpret contested sites of pain and shame such as Ta Mok’s compound at Anlong Veng?

There are two key problems in considering Anlong Veng from a heritage tourism perspective. The first is the site’s inadequate infrastructure. Second, and perhaps more important, is the temporal proximity of the Khmer Rouge period, and the still open wounds that afflict Cambodian society. Cambodia has yet to recover from the Khmer Rouge trauma. Because of this it is extremely difficult to interpret and promote the site in any objective, non-politicised or constructive capacity.

Put simply the violence of the recent past is still too raw and the impact of the genocide too difficult a topic to broach in terms of public commemoration. This has resulted in an amnesia about the recent past in Anlong Veng and its hinterland communities. This is unsurprising given that the region has the dubious honour of being the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge. Furthermore, the Byzantine nature of Cambodian politics means that it is intensely difficult to contextualise these sites historically and to interpret them without causing offence to powerful lobbies within the region. Ultimately we argue that the current attempts to create a

tourism industry concentrating on a heritage strategy emphasising sites associated with the Khmer Rouge have come before this place of pain and shame has been historically contextualised and the necessary process of healing has occurred.

Anlong Veng represents an interesting case study of a place of pain and shame, highlighting broad issues about the transformation of places associated with extensive violence into heritage sites. It represents a key site within a much broader landscape of violence in Cambodia, including the better known Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh and also its killing field, Choeung Ek, to the north of the city. However it is at the Anlong Veng site that one is invited to wonder what the role of heritage is in these areas. Does it exacerbate or absolve the events of the past? Or is it part of a constructive dialogue of reinterpretation of the recent past with the broader aim of reconciliation in present day Cambodia?

We first visited Anlong Veng in November 2005, arriving from Thailand through the border crossing at Sa Ngam on a drizzly, surprisingly cool day. The border crossing is a ramshackle collection of huts and small traders' stalls lining a muddy path. It has a distinct backwoods, isolated feel, understandable given it was only opened for legal transit in November 2003, and links Thailand's Sisaket province to one of the most under-developed areas in Cambodia, which was controlled until 1999 by remnants of the Khmer Rouge. The presence of sand-bagged machine gun nests on the Thai side of the border only adds to the sense of entering a wild, possibly dangerous place.

Given that the only other people crossing the border when we arrived were Cambodians in the back of pick-ups, heads swathed in *krama*, the ubiquitous scarf of Cambodian peasants, our presence caused some bemusement among the border guards, especially since we were on foot. A Cambodian border policeman offered us a lift (for a fee) to Anlong Veng, some 15km away, and since there was no other obvious means of going any further (certainly no public transport), we gratefully accepted.

The border crossing is at the top of the Dangrek escarpment, near the remains of a number of residences of former Khmer Rouge leaders, including Pol Pot, a military post of the area's former Khmer Rouge commander, Ta Mok, and Pol Pot's grave site itself. The road to Anlong Veng is currently under construction, and on this day was little more than a mud slide, negotiable by only the most skilled drivers in four-wheel drives; fortunately our border policeman was one of those.

Our impressions of the frontier crossing, and our perilous descent down the mountain, created a sense of anticipation that bordered on foreboding which was dramatically heightened when we stopped at Ta Mok's house on the outskirts of Anlong Veng town. Ta Mok was, during the period of Khmer Rouge control of Cambodia (the period of Democratic Kampuchea – DK), a member of the Standing Committee of the Party Central Committee and the Secretary of the southwest zone and later of the north/central zone, as well as Chief of the General Staff (Fawthrop and Jarvis 2005: 264). After the Vietnamese ousted the Khmer Rouge in 1979, Khmer Rouge forces retreated to six areas mostly bordering Thailand, from where they received Thai, Chinese and Western support to continue

Figure 4.1 The house of Ta Mok the 'Butcher', now a heritage museum in Anlong Veng. (Source: C. Long)

an insurgency that wreaked immense destruction on Cambodia until the final demise of the movement in 1999. Ta Mok, whose reputation for ruthlessness is reflected in the epithet 'The Butcher', took control of the band of mountains to the north of Siem Reap, with his headquarters at Anlong Veng. As other Khmer Rouge strongholds fell or surrendered to government forces in the 1990s,[1] the remaining Khmer Rouge leaders, including Pol Pot and Democratic Kampuchea defence minister, Son Sen, joined Ta Mok at Anlong Veng.

Here the Khmer Rouge leaders, increasingly isolated and desperate, fell on each other for one last time. Nothing if not consistent, the small band of surviving leaders embarked on a final round of violent purges in 1997: Pol Pot ordered the murder of Son Sen and his family, which in turn sparked Mok to arrest the former Brother Number One and subject him to a people's court. Duly convicted, Pol Pot was sentenced to house arrest and died the following year in a hut near today's border crossing (Short 2004: Ch. 12). His body was hastily cremated and his ashes heaped into a pile, with a scrappy corrugated iron roof to protect it from the rain, and bottles planted in the earth as a border. It is a tawdry monument to one of the greatest murderers of the twentieth century.

Ta Mok's house is the most intact and substantial of the 28 tourist-historical sites in the Anlong Veng area. In fact the house compound consists of three struc-

tures on a man-made isthmus jutting into a lake that Mok created by damming a stream. While locals point to the benefits of a fish supply created by the lake, its value to Mok as a security barrier is obvious. At the entrance to the isthmus is the Anlong Veng Tourism Office, housed in a wooden hut and infrequently open.

Our vehicle jolted to a halt in a grove of trees beside Ta Mok's house. Several young men sidled up to us, one engaging our driver while another sought four dollars from us as an entrance fee. One of the men was soon identified to us as a guide and we followed him towards the buildings. Just in front of the main house is a large open-sided shed with a concrete floor, where several people squatted in conversation, casting us frowning glances. Here, too, were two small steel cages, recognisable from news footage and photos in books as the 'tiger cages' used by the Khmer Rouge as jungle prison cells (on a subsequent visit a guide confirmed that they had been used to hold people, but only 'traitors' to the Cambodian nation).

As we entered the house a most extraordinary scene developed. A mini-van pulled up among the trees, disgorging a wedding party – bride, bridesmaid, groom, best man and groomsman – all clad in improbably impeccable white. Our guide ushered us into Ta Mok's house. The place is a rough two-storey concrete and timber structure with tiled floors and almost devoid of furniture. In fact its only decoration consisted of four naïve murals, revealing much of the essence of the Khmer Rouge's ideology. On the first floor, an end wall features a peeling mural of Angkor Wat portraying an idyllic Khmer society against the backdrop of a lurid sun-rise. Upstairs a colourful map of Cambodia painted on a wall shows the country divided into provinces; neighbouring Thailand and Laos are indicated, but southern Vietnam, what is known to the Cambodians as Kampuchea Krom and was, until the eighteenth century, part of the Cambodian kingdom, is a grey, unidentified wasteland. Flanking the map are other murals, one of a jungle scene and another of what is taken to be the nearby temple of Preah Vihear. The absence of readily-identifiable ideological symbols seems at first glance rather odd, until one remembers that, particularly in its latter days, the Khmer Rouge tried to portray itself above all else as the defender of an historic Khmer essence (hence Angkor Wat, the temple and the jungle) against the depredations of aggressive foreigners – chiefly the Vietnamese.

We noticed the wedding party entering the house where they began to pose in front of the murals for photographs. We asked the bride if we could take some photos of her too, but she turned away unsmilingly, and the party continued to ignore us. A number of men loitered apparently aimlessly about the house. They were clearly not visitors, but what exactly was their association with the site was unclear. Their presence was somewhat unsettling.

At this instant something akin to a tempest sprung up, slashing across the lake and driving sheets of rain horizontally through the open windows of the house. The bizarreness of the scene – a photo shoot of a wedding party in the former house of a man now in prison awaiting trial on charges of genocide, sullen men loitering, and an atmospheric sound and light show courtesy of the weather – provided an interpretative experience of this site of pain and shame that no museum curator could ever hope to create.

The storm quickly passed, and within minutes the grey tranquillity of this strange Cambodian day had returned.

> 'Why', we asked our guide, 'would people wish to have their wedding photos taken in such a place?'
>
> 'Because', he replied, 'they think that Ta Mok was a good man, who provided much for the local people.'
>
> 'And what', we asked, 'do you think of Ta Mok?'
>
> 'Yes, he was a good man.'
>
> 'And do you know where he is now?'
>
> 'Yes, he is in Tuol Sleng prison.'[2]

Our sense of unease was rapidly turning to a feeling of repulsion as we realised that we were surrounded by unreconstructed former Khmer Rouge cadre: had the wedding party, we wondered, so resplendent in white in an area otherwise caked in a brown layer of mud and poverty, been the children of high-ranking Khmer Rouge leaders who still live in the area?

We examined the rest of the site quickly, not daring to enter the foul-stinking rooms under the houses – were they garages or bomb shelters, as our guide suggested, or prison cells, as our driver thought? – and, the feeling of ghoulishness becoming overwhelming, decided to leave. Does Anlong Veng, we pondered as our driver cheerfully raced us towards Siem Reap, offer anything worthwhile to the visitor seeking understanding and commemoration of the Khmer Rouge genocide?

Subsequent visits to Anlong Veng produced similar experiences: the same sense of a tragic past being exploited with little thought or care, the void created by a lack of interpretation filled by uneducated former Khmer Rouge with their own highly distorted understanding of Cambodian history. The questions inevitably arise: why is Anlong Veng being developed as a tourist attraction? Does the preservation of these former Khmer Rouge sites help in the understanding and commemoration of Cambodia's traumatic history? Why do we want to preserve such sites? To prevent forgetting? To aid in reconciliation? Can sites like Anlong Veng perform the latter role? In traumatised societies what is most important – justice or reconciliation? If the latter, does the preservation of sites of trauma help in achieving reconciliation?

In the most prosaic sense, the development of Anlong Veng as a tourist-historic site is part of an attempt by the Cambodian government to reintegrate the area back into a nation finally at peace. It is part of an economic development programme that has also seen the area opened up by roads, especially the one linking the town to Cambodia's tourist epicentre at Siem Reap, the location of the Angkor World Heritage site, and the creation of a border crossing with Thailand. It is envisaged that Anlong Veng will eventually provide an overland route from Bangkok to Siem Reap: the vision of tens of thousands of tourists passing through the town on the way to Angkor must have local officials rubbing their hands and thinking of ways to get them to stop. The former Khmer Rouge sites appear to be the area's chief historical resource, but plans are also afoot for the construction of a casino.

Although Anlong Veng is only a few hours by road from Siem Reap, its isolation from the project to rebuild the national community after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in the face of the 1978 Vietnamese invasion should not be underestimated. Together with Pailin and other Khmer Rouge holdouts until the 1990s, Anlong Veng still remains tenuously integrated into the nation. Ex-Khmer Rouge officials retain positions of authority in all former Khmer Rouge strongholds, and a large proportion of Anlong Veng's population consists of ex-Khmer Rouge cadre or soldiers. The prominent monument at the crossroads in the middle of Anlong Veng town celebrates the construction of the roads that serve to physically reintegrate the area into the nation. If the development of the town's heritage sites is intended to reintegrate it into the national historical discourse, it is far less successful.

If the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) Government in Phnom Penh hopes to reintegrate Anlong Veng into the nation, what message does it want portrayed through the area's heritage sites, and is that message being adequately conveyed? Here we must briefly touch on a debate that is of overwhelming importance to contemporary Cambodia: the debate about the correct response to the Khmer Rouge (Linton 2004). Which is more important to contemporary Cambodia – justice or reconciliation? Since its earliest days, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime, and subsequently the government of the CPP, offered the hand of reconciliation to the Khmer Rouge, which was prepared to abandon opposition to the government and renounce its involvement with Pol Pot's forces. Large numbers of low-level Khmer Rouge soldiers and cadre took up the opportunity, the desertions increasing rapidly into the 1990s as Prime Minister Hun Sen offered amnesty to remaining Khmer Rouge leaders if they brought their forces back into the national fold. Although Pol Pot himself was never offered amnesty, other extremely high-ranking Khmer Rouge leaders, including former DK Foreign Minister Ieng Sary, one-time DK Head of State, Khieu Samphan, and Brother Number Two, Nuon Chea, benefited from a policy that offered to forget their pasts if they 'sincerely reformed' and 'created feats on behalf of the Revolution' (that is, on behalf of the PRK regime) (from the decree-law establishing a 'Revolutionary People's Trial of the Genocide Crime of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary Clique', cited in Heder, 2002: 190).

On the surface the amnesty policy appears to have been very successful in breaking the back of the Khmer Rouge insurgency, and the organisation, deserted of most of its leaders and their troops, finally collapsed in 1999. Hun Sen continually points to this success to justify the policy. But considerable disquiet remains, both inside Cambodia, and particularly within the international human rights advocacy system, about the absence of any judicial accounting for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge (Linton 2004; Fawthrop and Jarvis 2005). By abandoning the Khmer Rouge in its dying days, despite decades of service to its murderous programme, leaders such as Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan managed to avoid punishment for their actions for many years. Only recently, with the arrest of Nuon Chea in September 2007, has there been any commitment to bring some leaders to trial: exactly how many will eventually face court remains to be seen. Hun Sen has argued that achieving peace and national 'reconciliation' is more

important than a strict judicial accounting and punishment for perpetrators. Just what Hun Sen means by 'reconciliation', however, is problematic. His definition appears to consist of 'integration' of the former Khmer Rouge back into the nation and the absence of armed conflict. Having achieved this reconciliation, he believes that the proper treatment of the country's traumatic history is to 'dig a hole and bury the past in it' (Linton 2004: 12). Given that Cambodia's history of genocide is most starkly manifested in the familiar images of exhumed mass graves, Hun Sen's words are insensitive at best, somewhat sinister at worst.

Heder (2004) makes a strong point about the political nature of Hun Sen's approach to integrating the Khmer Rouge. He argues that just as the models for judicial practice in Cambodia – French colonial 'justice' for Vichy collaborators after World War II, and post-Khmer Rouge Vietnamese People's Courts – were primarily concerned with the political needs of the accusers rather than achieving justice and a true accounting for the past, Hun Sen's system of 'integration' and 'reconciliation' of Khmer Rouge has been primarily about increasing the power of first the PRK regime and then the subsequent CPP government. Rather than any system of official judicial accountability, it is Hun Sen who has determined who should or should not be punished, and in the process demonstrated that the key measure of 'integration' into the nation is loyalty to the CPP regime.

In deciding how to deal with the Khmer Rouge past, the government has paid scant attention to the wishes of the Cambodian people. In an important survey of the attitudes of Cambodians to the Khmer Rouge past, the Documentary Centre of Cambodia, a non-government organisation dedicated to recording and preserving the history of the Khmer Rouge regime and to compiling information that might be used in any trials of former Khmer Rouge, found that respondents were not interested in a truth commission along the lines of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission; what they wanted was some sort of trial process, which would lead to

> a public coming to terms with the past, a symbolic formal act played out in the courtroom, where the Khmer Rouge/CPK and their philosophy will be brought into the open through trials of the leaders…It seems that the symbolism of the legal process involves the once powerful being brought down to size, underlining that an era of extraordinary cruelty and abuse of power is really over, with symbolic lessons for today's leaders…[The former Khmer Rouge leaders] would have the opportunity to confess and apologise should they so wish, but would be once and for all vanquished through a judicial process that leads to conviction and punishment.
>
> (Linton 2004: 26)

In contrast to this clear desire for a trial, the government's attitude to the Khmer Rouge has been confusing for ordinary Cambodians. On the one hand they are told that the Khmer Rouge was responsible for the most heinous crimes. On the other they are told that reconciliation with them is the price of peace, even if 'reconciliation' means digging a hole and burying the past in it. Much of the

PRK's and CPP government's focus, too, has been on portraying the Cambodians as the victims of a small, genocidal clique of leaders, thus absolving the bulk of the population, including the not-insubstantial number of ordinary Khmer Rouge cadres and soldiers, of guilt. The problematic nature of contemporary commemoration in Cambodia is illustrated by the 'Day of Hate', or 'Day to remain tied in anger', held annually on 20 May, although not formally promoted by the government since the Paris Peace Accords. It marks the day in 1973 when the Khmer Rouge adopted the policy of total agrarian collectivisation. When it was originally established, the day was used to focus the people's anger against the Khmer Rouge, who were still fighting at the time. Heder argues that the Day of Hate was less a day of culturally appropriate commemoration than an attempt by the government to reinforce the dominant narrative that the Khmer Rouge period was the result of a small group of evildoers victimising the overwhelming majority of Cambodians (Linton 2004: 63–4).

Confusion about approaches to the past is replicated in sites of remembrance in Cambodia. The major site of commemoration is Tuol Sleng, the Khmer Rouge prison and torture centre in suburban Phnom Penh, and its associated killing field at Choeung Ek, on the edge of the city. Both sites are powerfully confronting. Both were established as places of commemoration by the Vietnamese when they displaced the Khmer Rouge in 1979. One of their very clear functions was to display to a world that – except for the Soviet Union and its allies –was opposed to Vietnam's intervention the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime that the Vietnamese had brought to an end. Just as the PRK and CPP would subsequently do, the interpretation at the sites sought to blame a small group of leaders – the 'Pol Pot-Ieng Sary Clique' – for the corruption of Cambodian communism and the descent into genocidal madness.[3] In more recent years this interpretation has become more nuanced in Tuol Sleng at least, where new exhibits explore the thoughts and motivations of low-level perpetrators as well as victims. The earlier, simplistic message about the culpability of a small clique of leaders has been opened up to a degree, and the full tragedy of the Cambodian trauma has been exposed in a way that is more shocking and distressing than the propagandistic treatment that characterised the site's early interpretation, and that still characterises the interpretation at Choeung Ek.

Nevertheless, the stark brutality of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek leave the visitor in no doubt that these are sites of commemoration of the victims of a great crime. The opening up of interpretation at Tuol Sleng to an attempt to broaden the identification of perpetrators and to an exploration of their motivations does not weaken the powerful message of condemnation of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge and of sympathy for their victims. In a sense Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek continue to bear witness to the crimes of the Khmer Rouge that largely continue to go unpunished, their raw exposure of the brutality of the Cambodian communists demanding some form of accountability. In a country where the history of the Khmer Rouge period is virtually not taught in schools (see Fawthrop and Jarvis 2005: 147; and Kiernan 2004), such sites can also play an extremely important public education role.

As places of interpretation and commemoration of the Khmer Rouge past the sites at Anlong Veng are far more problematic. Here Hun Sen's strategy of 'reconciliation' and 'integration' plays out in an utter failure of interpretation and a complete surrender of moral responsibility for commemoration of the past to the exigencies of development and reintegration of the Anlong Veng region into the nation.

We are conscious here that our reading of the Anlong Veng sites diverges substantially from that of Timothy Dylan Wood, who has perhaps spent more time than anyone studying the Anlong Veng area. Wood believes that the Ministry of Tourism views the tourist-historical sites at Anlong Veng as a resource for economic development of the town, and the reintegration of the area's former Khmer Rouge soldiers and their families.[4] However, at the same time, he argues, the Ministry seeks to impose 'a singular, true representation of history as well as its (authentic) restoration/reconstruction' (Wood 2006: 185):

> The tourism arrangement, which involves the local elites as participants in the decision-making bodies or actively supportive on-lookers, appears as an extension of the Prime Minister's iron grasp. This material configuration becomes the basis for the implantation of a victor's history that confirms and promises the continued existence of this hierarchy. Drawing on its faith in tourist revenue as a foundation, the government demonstrates a keen ability to manage its former enemy while simultaneously (and by means of) producing a tourist area.
>
> (Wood 2006: 18)

The problem with this interpretation is the lack of evidence on the ground. The profound problem with Ta Mok's house, with Pol Pot's grave, is the lack of adequate interpretation, and the lack of control over the messages being conveyed at these sites. The visitor does not get a sense of victor's history. The guides do not stick to the official narrative and there is no alternative source of interpretation: no signage, no leaflets, no guidebook. Can anyone imagine being given a guided tour of Hitler's bunker by former SS soldiers and being told by them that Hitler was a good man because he got the trains running on time? Of course not. But that is, in effect, the closest parallel to what the visitor is expected to accept at Anlong Veng.

Anlong Veng seems to us to demonstrate, not the government's 'keen ability to manage its former enemy', as Wood claims, but the extent to which Hun Sen's CPP regime has abandoned the search for justice and truth in order to achieve its version of reconciliation and peace. Integrating Anlong Veng into the nation through tourism development, with little attempt to control the interpretation of the area's historic sites, serves Hun Sen's purpose of bringing the former Khmer Rouge back into the national fold, but without any demand that they acknowledge guilt or pay penance.

The Hun Sen regime's desire to achieve its version of reconciliation and peace is an important explanation of the disjuncture between what Wood sees as the Ministry of Tourism's desire to control the interpretation of Anlong Veng's

Figure 4.2 Pol Pot's grave. (Source: C. Long)

historic sites and the reality of their interpretation. But there are other factors in operation here too.

The failure of interpretation, as we see it, indicates the extent to which Cambodia remains, in fact, a fractured and fragmented country. Former Khmer Rouge leaders continue to exercise considerable power in a number of regions, and at all levels of government. Hun Sen's strategy of ignoring individuals' former activities with the Khmer Rouge so long as they now pledge allegiance to the CPP has encouraged this lack of accountability for past actions and the persistence of regional autonomy. While the Ministry of Tourism may have a clear sense of how it wants the Anlong Veng sites interpreted, its ability to implement its vision in a far-flung province inhabited by substantial numbers of former Khmer Rouge is obviously lacking. Lack of expertise and funding clearly also restrict the Ministry. A well-developed interpretation plan for the Anlong Veng sites would cost more money than the Ministry can afford, and, as places like Choeung Ek demonstrate, the practice of heritage interpretation remains under-developed in Cambodia. This is, of course, understandable in a country where there are far more pressing claims on the government's limited budget and on the activities of international aid agencies.

One of the fundamental failures of interpretation practice demonstrated in Anlong Veng has to do with the lack of understanding of the difficulties associated with perpetrator sites as sites of commemoration. By 'perpetrator sites' we mean places associated purely or primarily with the perpetrators of pain and suffering – Hitler's bunker, the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky in Moscow, Stalin's dacha, Sadd-

am's palaces – rather than places associated with their victims – Auschwitz, Tuol Sleng, gulag camps, Robben Island, the Berlin Wall, to name a few. Given that all heritage practice involves the making of judgements about what is worthy of preservation and what stories are to be told through preservation, we see no difficulty in stating that if the purpose of heritage preservation in the case of places of pain and shame is to commemorate the victims, then there is little role for the preservation of perpetrator sites. Heritage preservation is not about preserving all of the past – it is about remembering aspects of the past which we believe worthy of remembrance. As controversial as it may sound, it is extremely difficult to see how the preservation of Anlong Veng's sites as *heritage sites*, particularly in their current interpretation-free state, contributes anything to the understanding of the Khmer Rouge period or to the commemoration of that period's victims.

Often it is much harder to divide victim and perpetrator sites, and in such cases the responsibility borne by those entrusted with interpretation is heavy. Even more problematic are places associated with a hated regime or a regime widely acknowledged as having perpetrated great injustices, but which are not directly implicated in painful or shameful events. Here we can think of Nazi-era buildings still standing in Berlin, or the Stalin-era skyscrapers such as the Moscow State University, replete with communist decoration, that dot Moscow's landscape, or even the Moscow Metro. Debates about the preservation of such places have raged with varying outcomes in most of the countries emerging from traumatic pasts, especially in the post-communist countries of Europe. The contenders tend to divide into two camps. Those arguing for preservation have frequently made the case that the structures, through their design and association with memories, provide an important reminder of the nature of the system and historical period from which they derive. Such structures or places serve as a safeguard against forgetting, and thus as a form of warning about the possibility of repetition, and as a means of commemoration. It is also claimed that one of the typical characteristics of the regimes of which they are symbolic was contempt for the past; thus we should not replicate the behaviour of the defeated regime by setting out to destroy all of its traces (Hoffman-Axthelm 1993; Light 2000; *Moscow Times* 2002; MacDonald 2006). On the other hand, opponents of preservation have argued that in order to move on to the future, it is necessary and right to remove the symbols of the rejected past. Each political system, it is argued, must construct a landscape that reflects its own values and aspirations.[5]

We believe that the sites at Anlong Veng fall clearly into the category of perpetrator sites but that the parameters within which we must interpret their meaning are clear and agreed by virtually all parties: their relationship to the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge. Do these sites further understanding of the Cambodian genocide or help in the commemoration of the victims? The answer, we believe, is no. There seems to be a clear understanding in other cases where commemoration of the victims of crimes of the nature and scale perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge is seen as the *raison d'être* of heritage preservation that perpetrator sites are inappropriate commemorative sites – Germany is the best example (Fulbrook 2002). The failure to recognise this in Cambodia is the result of the confused approach

to historical accountability and justice that filters from the top down (in fact, as Linton shows, many ordinary Cambodians are much less confused about the need for a proper accounting for the past than their political leaders).

The failure also derives from poorly developed understandings of heritage interpretation and preservation practice. The problem in Anlong Veng is that the imperative of economic development through tourism has led to the hasty and ill-considered incorporation of historic sites into a heritage tourism strategy which Cambodia is not professionally equipped to manage. The national government's desire to stimulate development in the Anlong Veng region and thus to reintegrate it into the nation is entirely laudable. However, the choice of tourism development as a primary strategy reveals the extent to which tourism has become embedded in international development thought as a panacea for developing countries. In fact, the reliance on tourism reflects the lack of legitimate development options open to struggling countries like Cambodia in the context of an international system strongly loaded against them, and the lack of innovative thinking and commitment to meaningful and sustainable development exhibited by political elites and international development organisations. The contrast with the treatment of Nazi-related sites in Germany demonstrates that even in the treatment of genocidal histories there are great disparities between the wealthy and the poor.

The Anlong Veng sites raise some difficult questions about the purpose and nature of heritage interpretation and preservation. Contemporary interpretation practice, at least in the West, has tended towards the opening up of meanings, the rejection of didacticism and the promotion of multiple stories and self-discovery. But how appropriate is this approach in cases involving places of pain and shame?

Wood seems to fall into the relativist trap with his concern for the voices of Anlong Veng locals to be heard in the interpretation of the Khmer Rouge sites:

> The Anlong Veng museum project provides a glimpse into the logic underlying aspects of government development initiatives. First, the processes by which the government and its various affiliates have amassed data and pursued representations (by tour guides) demonstrates the fixing of a particular narrative, operating as 'truth' and achieved at the expense of the perspectives and participation of locals who were actively involved with the ousted forces of Democratic Kampuchea.
>
> (Wood 2006: 190)

The involvement of locals in development projects is quite appropriate in normal circumstances, as most international aid agencies now recognise. But this politically correct approach to development practice is simply inappropriate in the interpretation of the Anlong Veng sites. Why should interpretation take into account local perspectives if locals believe that Ta Mok and Pol Pot were good men? Do former Khmer Rouge have the right to have their understanding of history seriously considered in interpreting the Cambodian past? How are the

Figure 4.3 Khmer Rouge figures sculpted out of rock on the road descending from the Dangrek Escarpment near Anlong Veng. (Source: C. Long)

perspectives of former Khmer Rouge to be weighed against the perspectives of other Cambodians who suffered because of the actions not only of the Khmer Rouge leaders, but also of Anlong Veng locals who followed those leaders?

In the end we are forced to contemplate the questions that we raised early in this chapter: why do we want to preserve such sites? To prevent forgetting? To aid in reconciliation? Can sites like Anlong Veng perform the latter role? In traumatised societies what is most important – justice or reconciliation? If the latter, does the preservation of sites of trauma help in achieving reconciliation? Does the preservation of these former Khmer Rouge sites help in the understanding and commemoration of Cambodia's traumatic history?

Our conclusion, which does not come easily to us as heritage professionals committed to our field and to the power of heritage as a force for remembrance, is that preservation of the Anlong Veng sites does little or nothing to further understanding or commemoration of Cambodia's tragic and painful past. To wipe them from the heritage and tourism map would not be to encourage a culture of forgetting. Tuol Sleng and other such sites, together with the everyday reality of Cambodian trauma and, hopefully, the trials of the remaining leaders, ensure that the Khmer Rouge period will not be forgotten. Forgetting Anlong Veng's Khmer Rouge sites, though, will contribute to a culture of true reconciliation by ensuring that the message about the Khmer Rouge period is clear and untram-

melled by moral and historical relativism, by emphasising above all else the voices of the victims and silencing the perpetrators once and for all.

Notes

1 The central government's strategy of offering amnesty to Khmer Rouge leaders who surrendered and offered their forces up for integration back into mainstream Cambodian society was very successful in splitting the movement and hastening its demise; the legality and morality of the amnesties is another question altogether. For an extensive discussion of the strategy and associated legal and moral issues, see Linton 2004.
2 In fact Ta Mok died in captivity just seven months after this visit, apparently from a stroke.
3 Signage at the Choeung Ek site still speaks in propagandistic tones about the 'Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique'.
4 Wood (2006: 183) reports that the area was once home to 16,000 Khmer Rouge troops and their families.
5 Two interesting examples of sites that have provoked debates of this kind are the Moscow Hotel in the Russian capital and the Palast der Republik, the former Parliament of the GDR in Berlin. In both instances, preservation advocates lost. In the German case, the plan is to reconstruct the Berliner Stadtschloss, which was demolished to make way for the Palast.

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