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Craig Etcheson. *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodia Genocide*. Westport: Praeger, 2005. xii + 256 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-98513-4.

Reviewed by Frederick Z. Brown (Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University)
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Wages of Horror

Craig Etcheson is well known internationally as an expert dedicated to documenting the bitter harvest of the Khmer Rouge's grip on the Cambodian people, 1975-1978, and to evaluating its enduring aftermath. His earlier book, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (1984) was a history of Cambodian communism, the spread of the Khmer Rouge after 1954, their brief but brutal rule beginning in April 1975, and their downfall with the Vietnamese invasion in December 1978. In *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide*, Etcheson remains the meticulous chronicler, but moves to a more sophisticated level of analysis by probing in depth the issues of denial, impunity, accountability, and the search for justice in an unjust world.

After the Killing Fields brings together and builds on Etcheson's previous work. While his conclusions tell us much about the particular case of Cambodia, they have a broader relevance to mass murder elsewhere in the world. Using Cambodia's microcosm, Etcheson draws troubling lessons; his judicious conclusions lend special value to the study of the global phenomenon of genocide. In the preface, Etcheson cites the first two chapters—"The Thirty Years War" and "A Desperate Time"—as material written specifically for this book. They are succinct, substantive underpinnings for the chapter that follows. "After the Peace" refers to the post-UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) period and is a revised briefing paper prepared for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) merged with papers written for conferences convened by the University of London School of Oriental and African Studies and the Free University

of Berlin. These venues, and USIP's consistent support of Etcheson, are a measure of the respect accorded his work on Cambodia. That said, readers delving into the Cambodia labyrinth for the first time might want to have more details than Etcheson provides in chapter 3 on the extraordinary effort that UNTAC mounted in Cambodia, 1991-1993. UNTAC was by far the largest and most expensive attempt at peace-making and peace-keeping undertaken up to that time, and the geostrategic atmosphere surrounding it (the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War) was unique. In addition to removing the Cambodia conflict from center stage, the UNTAC era introduced the concept of civil society and the hope for a form of pluralist governance. This reviewer would have liked more on UNTAC, its international political environment, and Cambodia as a pawn on the Great Power chessboard.[1]

Etcheson's initial chapters are hearty hors d'oeuvres for the main menu. *After the Killing Fields* picks up the story in January 1979, where analysis of the genocide really begins with the installation of a new Cambodian regime beholden to the Vietnamese and led by former Khmer Rouge cadres. Chapter 4, "Documenting Mass Murder," adapted from an earlier Etcheson work, is a detailed description of the Cambodian Genocide Program. Since he is the principal founder of the Documentation Center of Cambodia and for years has been intimately involved in its activities both at Yale and in Cambodia, this chapter is as authoritative a description as we are likely to find of an organization that has never received adequate recognition for its valuable work. The program

had its genesis in the “Cambodian Genocide Justice Act of 1994,” passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Clinton in May 1994, which in turn established the center as part of a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of State and Yale University. The chapter is a fascinating read. It tells us how ideas get translated into bureaucratic action. It details the host of sticky problems the center had to face, and still faces, in amassing the factual evidence required to build a convincing legal case against the perpetrators of the Khmer Rouge atrocities. It also suggests the Document Center of Cambodia as a model for future efforts to document the extensive social trauma resulting from gross violations of international humanitarian law. Etcheson recounts how a worthy project can become enmeshed in academic backbiting and ugly ad homonym fights. He handles this sensitive matter objectively, and stays clear of the muck. A reader of this account would be tempted to laugh were the scholarly squabbles not so petty.

This section is followed by exploring the degree to which the top leadership of the Khmer Rouge can and should be held accountable for genocide in “Centralized Terror” and “Terror in the East.” He says that new data sources of the Khmer Rouge’s internal security bureaucracy “demonstrate graphically that the senior leadership of the Communist Party of Kampuchea was in control of a nationwide coercive apparatus designed to physically eliminate all stripes of possible opposition to the policies of the party” (p. 84). A question remains, however, regarding whether or not the “span of control exercised by the Communist Party political leadership” (p. 84) was in fact strong enough to eliminate the possibility of local Khmer Rouge officials pursuing personal agendas and expanding the scope of killing once they received orders to exterminate certain categories of “enemies.” This becomes an issue particularly in the five provinces of the Eastern Zone from which Khmer Rouge commanders like Chea Sim, Heng Samrin, and Hun Sen escaped to Vietnam to avoid Pol Pot’s paranoia. After 1979, Hun Sen became foreign minister and later prime minister in the Vietnamese-sponsored People’s Republic of Kampuchea. A former Khmer Rouge regimental political commissar, he has dominated Cambodian politics since 1993, first in the Socialist Republic of Cambodia and subsequently in the Royal Government of Cambodia.

Etcheson assesses several theories regarding the scope and sources of violence in Svay Rieng province during 1975-1978, and implications for the current government of Cambodia whose ruling Cambodian People’s Party seems imbued with the violent tendencies of the

former era.[2] He follows this in “Digging in the Killing Fields,” by getting down to the mapping of mass graves throughout Cambodia. It is a grisly tale of exhumations, skull-counting, and forensic analyses buttressed by interviews with the families of the unfortunate victims of Khmer Rouge terror. The Documentation Center of Cambodia is the prime mover—better, the guts—of this essential activity. Much work remains to be done. Preah Vihear province has yet to be investigated, and work in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri provinces is in the early stages. In many other provinces digging goes on and the subsequent forensic and identification of victims is far from complete.

Moving on, Etcheson confronts the basic question: Will anyone ever be brought to account for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge? If not, why? Cambodia provides an encyclopedia of attempts to achieve accountability, and, similarly, a litany of causes for the persistence of impunity. Etcheson cites twelve reasons why efforts to achieve accountability over the past 25 years have had little appreciable impact on the persistence of impunity for the senior Khmer Rouge leaders, who today live in peace and relative prosperity in their villas near Paillin along the Cambodian border with Thailand: disputes over the legitimacy of various Cambodian regimes, irregularities in the various legal proceedings, lack of institutionalized international accountability mechanisms, failure to obtain physical custody of the accused, failure to secure statutory jurisdiction over the accused, capricious selection of persons to be prosecuted, considerations of “national reconciliation,” financial corruption, superpower politics, regional politics, domestic politics, and a general lack of political will (pp. 137-138).

Chapter 9, “The Politics of Genocide Justice,” addresses the political aspects associated with the Cambodian tribunal, beginning with the inherent reality that the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) must admit. The CPP traces its roots to the same 1951 conference that the Khmer Rouge have cited as their own origin. Most senior CPP personnel started their professional lives as cadres of the Khmer Rouge. Today in power, they adhere ruthlessly to Leninist practices despite the Cambodian constitution’s commitment to “the principles of liberal democracy and pluralism.”[3] Etcheson discusses the attitudes of the Royalists (FUNCINPEC, the National Unified Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia, whose leader, Ranariddh, doubts the ability of any court to achieve justice); of the Sam Rainsy Party (whose leader cannot return to Cambodia for fear of incarceration); and of other players (such as former King

Sihanouk, who has conflicted feelings about bringing the Khmer Rouge kingpins to trial). Most interesting is Etcheson's assessment of the diverse roles of the international actors in the years of negotiations leading up to the convening of the tribunal in 2006. China's hands are far from clean given its blatant support for Democratic Kampuchea in the period under the tribunal's purview (1975-1978) and, of course, later when Khmer Rouge fighters carried the major load in the anti-Vietnamese resistance, 1979-1989. The United States is in favor of an international tribunal yet will not give financial support because of concerns over possible manipulation by Hun Sen—and indeed could be embarrassed if and when the Khmer Rouge defendants testify.[4] Other major international parties—Japan, France, several of the ASEAN countries, the European Union—while generally supportive of the tribunal, have reservations regarding its composition, procedures, and venue. Etcheson gives due credit to the United Nations in its persistent pursuit of justice for the victims of the Cambodian genocide, regardless of what could be a less than satisfactory eventual verdict.

In his final chapter, "Challenging the Culture of Impunity," Etcheson offers a comparative assessment of other approaches to impunity found in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, and the International Criminal Court at The Hague. He concludes that while "civilization has thus far not yet managed to devise anything approaching 'perfect' justice when dealing with

crimes of the magnitude of genocide," the effort to create a genocide tribunal is a "necessary step for Cambodians and their children to begin to move beyond the culture of impunity" (pp. 190).

After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide is a thorough insider's description of the Documentation Center of Cambodia's valuable work. More importantly, the book probes the culture of impunity and enhances our understanding of this extraordinarily complex issue. It is a major contribution to genocide studies, as well as an eloquent tribute to the Cambodians who suffered under the Khmer Rouge.

Notes

[1]. Two books from Etcheson's selected bibliography give extended accounts of UNTAC: MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, *Cambodia Confronts the Peacemakers, 1979-1995* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

[2]. Posited by genocide scholars like Ben Kiernan and Henri Locard.

[3]. Chapter I, Article 1, The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, 1993.

[4]. See Nathaniel Myers, "Justice Past Due in Cambodia", *Washington Post* (December 24, 2005), p. A17.

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