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Abstract

A review of:

The Killing of Cambodia: Geography, Genocide and the Unmaking of Space . By James A. Tyner. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2008. 209pp.

Keywords

Human rights, Cambodia, Genocide, Khmer Rouge, Geography

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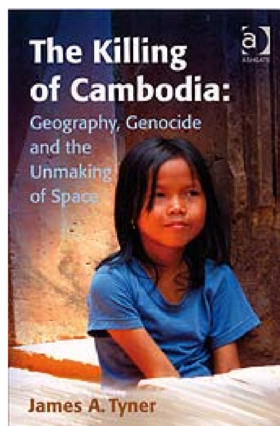

"Revolution by Eradication:" On the Khmer Rouge's Making of the Tragedy of Cambodia

By Matthew S. Weinert

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Terminologically, genocide refers to the extermination of a *gens*, a people. Since Rafael Lemkin coined the term in 1948, scholars have focused on its unfortunate instances, perpetrators, victims, causes, and the legal machinery to punish those who commit it. Given the conventional emphasis of genocide—the obliteration of a nationally, ethnically, racially, or religiously defined people—James Tyner's *The Killing of Cambodia* makes a rather striking appearance on the bookshelf, for its gaze turns toward genocide's geographic dimensions. While many book-length accounts of the genocide have been published, Tyner's is the first to explore "the geopolitical discourses, the narratives and 'spatial logics' that support, justify, and legitimate mass killings" (Tyner: 3). If geography is in part about the writing of space, then Tyner alerts us to the possibility that geography should also focus on the erasure of space. In the case of Cambodia, terracide was the complement to genocide.

To accomplish such a radical, totalizing mission, the Khmer Rouge needed an equally totalizing justification: the motivating myth of *Angkar* served as a rallying cry to make a new country, but also, poignantly, to unmake that which existed. I explore this issue in the first section. The essay then explores the terracidal acts that unmade Cambodia (all in an attempt to make Kampuchea). If these sections highlight both key moments and acts in the tragedy that was Cambodia from 1975 – 1979 and key aspects of Tyner's argument, then the third section offers a critical, if sympathetic, assessment of the book on three grounds: contribution to historical knowledge; contributions to geography; and contributions to our understanding of genocide.

The Motivating Myth of *Angkar*

The Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia from 17 April 1975 until 7 January 1979. During that time, an estimated 1.7 million people (or one quarter of the population) died, either directly through torture or outright murder at the hands of the regime, or indirectly through hard labor, malnutrition, disease, or malign neglect. And yet few people at the time knew exactly what was happening inside the country. Even Khmer Rouge leaders managed to evade identification until 1977 by referring to themselves in numeric nomenclature (e.g. Brother Number One, Brother Number Two, etc.), and shrouded the regime itself in mystery by referring to itself as *Angkar Padevoat*, or Revolutionary Organization (Chandler 1991: 2; Tyner: 141-43). The ambiguity and anonymity of *Angkar*, James Tyner maintains (Tyner: 141), supplanted the certitude of the place of Cambodia. Long interpreted as a revival of the ancient glory of the Khmer Empire (Tyner: 113), akin to Mussolini's vision of a resurrected Rome or Milosevic's "Greater Serbia," *Angkar* was rather an existential reification or idealization of unrestrained Khmer power and self-sufficiency that lacked historical antecedent.

Angkar became the rallying cry, the central organizing concept, and the justification for a new Democratic Kampuchea. "All orders and slogans, for example, were issued in the name of the *Angkar Padevoat*" (Tyner: 141). *Angkar* was

> *'the mother and father of all young children, as well as all adolescent boys and girls'. Consequently, as the 'dad-mom' of the people, Angkar was conceived as having 'true' knowledge and authority. Idealized in songs and poems, Angkar was constructed as the benefactor of the people; it cared for, and protected, its children. Thus, according to the Khmer Rouge: 'The Angkar is the soul of the revolution'; 'the Angkar is the soul of the motherland'…'The Angkar is the people's brain'…The Angkar, it was claimed, knew all, including people's inner-most thoughts and desires (italics in original, Tyner: 142f).*

Put in Foucauldian terms—which, oddly, Tyner does not do, though he quotes Foucault at length throughout the book—*Angkar* functioned as the Kampuchean panopticon. As *Angkar's* self-appointed agent, the Khmer Rouge assumed extraordinary license to care for, protect, direct, control, torture, work to death, and murder its children for the good of the nation.

Yet, what the good of the nation entailed was a mystery. Aside from an omniscient, omnipresent *Angkar*, self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-referential, the Khmer Rouge failed to articulate clearly the objectives of the revolution or the contours of a new Democratic Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge was, to be sure, anti-capitalist, anti-Western, anti-colonial, anti-urban, and autarchic. But how those traits translated into generative programs remained unclear. Nuon Chea, a.k.a. Brother Number Two, who, as deputy secretary of the Community Party of Kampuchea's Central Committee, was second in command, issued a broad, inexact vision for the new state, but little else:

> *'We liberated our country on 17 April 1975…We did that for the defense of Democratic Kampuchea, for the Cambodian workers and peasants in cooperatives, for the next decade, for the next century, the next millennium, the next ten thousand years, and forever' (Tyner: 86).*

What the Khmer Rouge wanted was "instant socialism," but, according to Cambodian scholars, it did not wish to "build socialism'" through "transition phases," as post-Leninist Marxian economists theorized must happen in the event revolutions do not occur "after the final phase of capitalist evolution" (Tyner: 105). Instead, the Khmer Rouge "grossly misunderstood the idea of 'transitional phases' as 'reformist' or 'revisionist.'" Over-estimating their power, the Khmer Rouge clique believed they could "bring about a super great leap forward and achieve instant socialism" (Tyner: 105).

And so, the revolution enacted by the Khmer Rouge was a "'revolution by [and of] eradication'" (Jackson quoted in Tyner: 112). Theirs was not so much the production of new space—*Angkar* was, after all, a geographic concept, denoting both the motherland of that territory we identify on a map as Cambodia, and a particular (if sadistic and murderous) way of life—as it was the obliteration of "pre-existing histories, geographies, and societies" (Tyner: 105). It is with regards to this point that Tyner offers his succinct thesis: if noted French geographer Henri Lefebvre asserted that "a revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential" (Tyner: 85), then Tyner inverts the proposition. Before a revolution can generate a space structured by new "ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses" (Tyner: 169), it must first erase the space—which encompasses discourses, social relations, meanings, representations, geographies, usages, and material practices—from which the revolution emerged. Pithily, existing

space must first be unmade. Geographic imaginations and spatial reconstructions can only follow anti-geographies.

Terracide: The Unmaking of Space

The point may be easily grasped if we consider it from the standpoint of architecture or urban planning. Often, production of the new depends on eradication of the old, whether that old be a highway that divides neighborhoods, a poorly conceived intersection that impedes the flow of traffic, an unsightly or functionally deficient building, an historic building, or a field or forest or vacant lot. The unmaking of space in architecture and urban planning is omnipresent; destruction is masked by an elusive—yet usually welcomed and celebrated—sense of "progress" or "development." In place of the condemned, the architect or urban planner envisions a new structure born from a vision and conceptual formulation that shapes the space in which the project will be situated and, importantly, derives some of its meaning and conceptual coherence from the space it will occupy. For instance, while the jagged angles and discontinuous lines of Daniel Liebeskind's Berlin Holocaust Museum or design for the post-September 11, 2001, World Trade Center complex in New York City evoke disintegration and displacement, disfiguration and destruction, his buildings and plans simultaneously underscore human inter-connectedness by evoking, spatially and architecturally, the historically-lived experience of destruction. The soaring arches and movable louvers of Santiago Calatrava's Milwaukee Art Museum or design for New York's World Trade Center transportation hub evoke not only the presence of absence (especially with respect to the Twin Towers), but also an ineffable, insatiable yearning for freedom and an unlimited capacity for imagination, whether the imagination recalls the past or mimics the dynamic, generative power of the artist. When architectural and urban planning fail to converse with existing space in any significant sense, "disasters" result. Witness those 1970s American college campus libraries, constructed in their own vernacular and thus failing to relate in any meaningful way with their environments.

In politics, the concept of anti-geography or the unmaking of space may seem unfamiliar. The appearances of most ideologies, institutions, political apparatuses, policies, and programs surface as renovations or emendations of existing, poorly performing programs or policies, or as additions to an existing political order to meet some newly perceived (and unmet) need. The point is that new imaginations are conceived always in conversation with an existing order, and the production of new space always occurs in tandem with the destruction of the old.

But occasionally in political life—as with some revolutions, genocides, and ethnic cleansings—we discover the unfortunate exception to Hume's observation that "'one generation does not go off the stage at once and another succeed it, as it is the case with silkworms and butterflies'" (quoted in Arendt 1994: 158). Sometimes political actors demand precisely the obliteration of a generation, a people, or a space before the production of a new one can be fully enacted. Such was the tragedy of Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge.

The Khmer Rouge's unmaking of space—might we call it *terracide*?—had some rather visceral expressions. The Khmer Rouge clique emptied the cities and forced the population into communes or work camps. The rationale: Khieu Samphan, who served as state president throughout the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror, theorized in his 1959 doctoral dissertation that "the destruction of cities would…deal an immediate blow to Cambodian involvement in the international economy which

[he] had identified as the single most obstructive barrier to an independent and self-reliant Democratic Kampuchea" (Tyner: 112, fn. 104). Not surprisingly, given such a doctrinaire view, the regime largely withdrew from inter-state relations. It declared Year Zero (a curious sort of temporal erasure), and redrew the Cambodian map to produce a new Democratic Kampuchea which disposed of regions (and hence local identities) in favor of seven geographic zones "identified by cardinal compass points" (Tyner: 124).[1] It categorized people as "old" or "new." If "old" or "base" people consisted of the "poor and lower-middle peasantry," "new people" were declared enemies of the party and the future, and thus were targeted for extermination (Tyner: 130).[2] Further, Democratic Kampuchea was transformed into a massive agriculturally-oriented, low technology work camp: large-scale irrigation projects and other "public works" were designed to remake the countryside and mobilize the population based on Lenin and Trotsky's doctrine of "war communism" (Tyner: 114-118), or what Carl Schmitt (1922) and Giorgio Agamben (1998 and 2005) would later call a perpetual "state of exception." War communism, Tyner explains,

> *emerged in Russia in response to civil war. There was, in effect, a perceived military urgency to ensure control over society and to re-establish law and order in rapidly disintegrating society…On Lenin's instructions, Trotsky developed a doctrine of labor militarization…[under which] the entire economy was nationalized near instantaneously, with both labor and capital markets abolished.*

Further,

> *'Military Labor Armies' would be put to work in industrial areas, taking control of the organization and administration of both civilian and conscripted labor…[W]orkers and peasants were expected to become soldiers, [and] soldiers were expected to become workers (Tyner: 114f).*

Khmer Rouge adaptation of the doctrine could aptly be summed up with the slogan "'One hand for production, the other for striking the enemy'" (Tyner: 115).[3] To paraphrase Agamben (1998), one might say that the Khmer Rouge produced a country of "sacred humans," all of whom possessed biological value to the regime and all of whom could easily be sacrificed by and for

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[1] Tyner includes a rather poor reproduction of a Khmer Rouge map of Democratic Kampuchea, but fails to include a map detailing the "traditional" provinces with which to compare. What could have been a useful heuristic device instead is a grave disappointment. The reader may find quality reproductions of pre-Khmer Rouge and Khmer Rouge maps in Jackson (1989: 2 and 80, respectively).

[2] According to one survivor, "'human life wasn't even worth a bullet. They [Khmer Rouge soldiers] clubbed the back of our necks and pushed us down to smother us and let us die in a deep hole of hundreds of other bodies'" (Tyner: 159). Exhumations of thousands of bodies at the killing fields at Cheung Ek, south of Phnom Penh, revealed the extent of the truth of that testimony. Babies were murdered by swinging them by their feet so their heads smashed against large bodhi and palm trees; skulls were cracked open; heads were chopped off; people were beaten with timber or sliced open by bayonets; infants were ripped apart. While working in Phnom Penh in 1993, I visited Cheung Ek. Most of the remains had by that time been exhumed, yet millions of bone fragments and torn bits of clothing not yet decomposed littered the 'killing fields,' which were now punctuated by large open pits where the bodies were once buried. Each open pit was designated with a sign in Khmer and English documenting what was found: in this pit, next to a bodhi tree, 100 infants; in that pit, 166 headless corpses; in another, 450. While taking photos, I looked down and discovered I stood on a femur. Each year, the monsoon rains displace sediment and reveal more manifestations of violence and make palpable that terrible chapter in Cambodian history. See Quinn (1989) on modes and methods of Khmer Rouge violence.

[3] For a comprehensive account of the radically transformational nature of the Khmer Rouge, see Karl Jackson (1989) on "the ideology of total revolution" and Francois Ponchaud (1989) on the radical reformulation of Khmer society.

Angkar. In this respect, Tyner might have taken the next logical step based on Agamben's analysis by arguing that Cambodia was a camp and a state of exception in and of itself. In other words, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge experienced what we might call a genocide of excess, that is, a genocide applied to an entire population, not to a subset of the whole (e.g. Jews or Armenians, Tutsis or Muslims). Thus, Cambodia as a camp and as a state of exception actually moved well beyond the doctrine of war communism. For if war communism permits some continuity with the past, then anti-geographies aim to erase the past. A logic of eradication is excessive by nature: when it comes to societies, eradication can contain no logical limit unless every last living being, every last institution, and every last vestige of human existence is destroyed.

Consequently, the Cambodia of Buddhism; the Cambodia of French colonization; the Cambodia of King Sihanouk; the Cambodia of capitalism; the Cambodia of American patronage; and the Cambodia of modernity were effectively dismantled and nearly erased. The monks and the capitalists were killed; the teachers and professors worked to death; the military liquidated; the bureaucrats purged; the ill and aged left to die; and anyone related to the condemned adjudged guilty by association (Jackson 1989: 51) unless they renounced their relations, named names, and participated in the extermination of the damned. And even then they were not safe, for war communism engendered a logic and a practice of perpetual struggle—a logic that required the continual search for enemies, and thus the perpetual making of enemies. Dialectically, that very doctrine which made the revolution so complete and so radical ultimately prevented the maturation of a Democratic Kampuchea. Indeed, one might say that Democratic Kampuchea was born rather prematurely and, like many premature infants without proper care, it died soon after its appearance.

Even years after it was forced from power by the invading Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge never abandoned its search for enemies. Though it signed the 1991 Paris Peace Accords, thereby committing itself to reaching a final political settlement, the Khmer Rouge surreptitiously packed up its offices in April 1993 before the historic May elections and abandoned Phnom Penh, convinced that the Vietnamese had infiltrated both the country and the leadership of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). This move, combined with clashes with the Cambodian military, sporadic violence against ethnic Vietnamese residents of Cambodia, and the (still unsolved) April and May 1993 murders of a UN-affiliated Japanese district electoral supervisor, his Cambodian interpreter, and a Japanese civil police officer, had the effect of heightening fears that the Khmer Rouge would stage a massive military assault to destabilize the emerging peace (Brown and Zasloff 1998: 139).

Soon after the 1993 elections, from which the Khmer Rouge withdrew and which had the effect of further corroding its image and erasing any residual legitimacy it managed to retain, the party lost the support of China and Thailand, and was beset by waves of defections. Yet the Khmer Roude remained undeterred, still steadfastly holding to the belief that Cambodia was beset by waves of parasitic infections by agents external (the French, Vietnamese, Americans, UN) and internal (civil servants, the military, the intelligentsia, the monks, the landowners, the shop owners, the businessmen, the city dwellers, the spectacled, the Western clothed, the sick, the English speakers, the French speakers—in fact, a never-ending list of "contaminated"). Consequently, the Khmer Rouge struggle continued, and turned inward in 1997. In one of its final convulsions, the surviving Khmer Rouge leadership, which was hiding in the jungles of northern Cambodia, put their own—Brother Number One or Pol Pot himself—on trial and sentenced him to life in prison. Fortunately

for Pol, he lived only another few months (*Ibid*: 298). After his death in April 1998, the Khmer Rouge disappeared from the radar screen of Cambodian politics (*Ibid*: 314).

Before Pol Pot died, freelance reporter Nate Thayer achieved a journalistic coup by interviewing the elusive, notorious Pol Pot in Anlong Veng, northern Cambodia on October 16, 1997—Pol's first interview since 1975. Despite his conviction by fellow revolutionaries, Pol Pot remained unrepentant.

> *When Thayer reminded the aging leader of this historic opportunity to set the record straight, Pol Pot said that his 'conscience is clear'. When Thayer continued to press him, he denied everything: 'First, I would like to tell you that I came to carry out a struggle, not to kill people. Even now, and you can look at me, am I a savage person?' When asked if he felt any remorse for the 'very serious mistakes you made while you were in power', Pol Pot continued to avoid Thayer's questions and said only that the Khmer Rouge had prevented the Vietnamese from swallowing Cambodia.*
>
> *When Thayer asked about Tuol Sleng prison, he hit a nerve. 'I was at the top. I made only big decisions on big issues', Pol Pot insisted before calling the museum 'a Vietnamese exhibition'. He even tried to cast doubt over the authenticity of the photos: 'People talk about Tuol Sleng, Tuol Sleng, Tuol Sleng, but when we look at the pictures, the pictures are the same. When I first heard about Tuol Sleng, it was on the Voice of America. I listened twice'. Pol Pot said that this was not until 1979. 'No, I never heard of it. And those two researchers, they said those skeletons, they were more than ten years old' (Maguire 2005: 137f).*

Tuol Sleng, a former French day school in south-central Phnom Penh, was converted to a torture center through which approximately 15,000 "political opponents," who in reality had been "ordinary" Khmer, passed. Only four are known to have survived. Its former chief, Kaing Guek Ek, a.k.a. Duch, bristled at Pol Pot's denial of the center's existence. In mid-June 2009, during his UN-backed trial in Phnom Penh, Duch firmly rebuked Pol Pot in what will surely be a memorable moment in the Khmer Rouge trials—perhaps the only trial given the age and illness of the four other defendants, the ballooning costs, and waning political will.[4] Duch excitedly declared, "'I could not bear what Pol Pot said so I had to show my face…For S-21 [the Khmer Rouge's designation of Tuol Sleng], I was the chairman of that office. The crimes committed at S-21 were under my responsibility'" (Mydans 2009).

The conflicting accounts—one a tale of self-righteous denial, the other a tale of self-righteous affirmation—mark the bookends of a regime that for three years, eight months, and twenty days, brutally ruled Cambodia and directly or indirectly caused the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians.

Assessment

There are at least three grounds on which to assess this work. The first concerns the book's contributions to the study of Cambodian history. For most of its pages, *The Killing of Cambodia* travels down a well-worn path paved by such noted Cambodia scholars as David Chandler, Karl Jackson,

[4] Duch, along with Khieu Samphan; Nuon Chea; Ieng Sary, the Khmer Rouge's foreign minister (an ostensibly superfluous post, as the regime isolated itself diplomatically); and Ieng's wife, Ieng Thirith, who served as the minister of social affairs, stand trial at the UN-backed Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia.

Ben Kiernan, Henri Locard, and Philip Short, among others. In this respect, Tyner's is a self-professed derivative work: "My intent is not to offer any new account of Cambodian history" (Tyner: 20). But that is no matter; the reader will find Tyner at his best when he deftly synthesizes existing accounts of the genocide into a complete, comprehensive, concise, and accessible narrative that is both flawless in its exposition and sensibly direct in its coverage of sometimes complex and contradictory processes, events, and policies in Cambodian politics. While those unfamiliar or marginally familiar with Cambodian history and the rise of the Khmer Rouge will find the book useful, those versed will not.

The second basis on which one might assess the book relates to Tyner's contributions to the discipline of geography and the demonstration that geographic concepts may be useful beyond a strict disciplinary/academic context. Admittedly, I am not a geographer, nor am I familiar with the geography literature and debates, and thus am not equipped to assess the book on these grounds. But a few remarks are in order since Tyner's objective on this front is similarly derivative and modest. He seeks to explore "how certain spatial categorizations work" (Tyner: 2) and how, more importantly, "geographic imaginations constructed by state actors…justify 'genocidal' practices" (*Ibid*: 3). For the most part, Tyner accomplishes his goal, in part because he has much to draw upon: the Khmer Rouge's anti-urbanism and unprecedented step of evacuating all cities; declaration of Year Zero (temporal erasure and historical amnesia); formulation of a quasi-mystical, imprecise image of *Angkar* (creation of a Panopticon); abolition of money; self-imposed diplomatic isolation (autarchy); the re-drawing of the Cambodian map (spatial erasure); the categorization of people based on their presumed functional contribution to a Democratic Kampuchea, and their direct or indirect extermination. However, Tyner's point seems not to lie in the demonstration of the working of spatial categorizations, but rather in his aggregative assessment of such egregious practices: the Khmer Rouge "unmade" the space of Cambodia. Put differently, Tyner maintains that the Khmer Rouge's anti-geography aimed to "*deconstruct* or unmake previous spaces" before it could construct its own "communist spaces" (italics in original, Tyner: 110).

I find Tyner's choice of language problematic. Despite his overt reliance on post-structural theory, he repeatedly employs the term "deconstruction" not in its technical, post-structural sense of taking apart or disassembling into component parts, but rather as a synonym for destruction. Deconstruction is emphatically not destruction—and there is little evidence to suggest that the Khmer Rouge clique deliberately, rationally, and intellectually unpacked, say, Buddhism, to reveal its inner contradictions. Tyner alludes to instances in which we might find the sort of deconstructive engagement worthy of a post-structural interpretation of the regime. The first such instance concerns Khieu Samphan's doctoral dissertation, and its anti-capitalist, anti-urban logic. The second such instance concerns Keng Vannsak's studious efforts in Paris to "uncover the pre-Buddhist, pre-Sanskrit layers of Cambodian vocabulary and hence culture" (Tyner: 90). But these allusions occupy little space in the text (a few lines at most), and Tyner does not pursue inquiry in either case. Perhaps the actions need no further explanation. Or perhaps the Khmer Rouge simply killed Buddhists because Buddhism was "the only remaining institution that might have challenged the party" (Carney 1989: 33).

Tyner, to be sure, has an important point: transformations are as centrally about destruction and eradication as they are about new beginnings. If that is so, then perhaps by studying the destructive elements we might ascertain factors in the logic of erasure that could help us contain or prevent

future destruction. But to read "everything"—discourses, social relations, meanings, representations, geographies, usages, behaviors, and material practices—in terms of space empties the concept of content, thus making it difficult at times to apprehend how reading an event through a prism of space enhances our understanding. For instance, Tyner cites the Khmer Rouge's "'working and resting regime'" (Tyner: 138), which the clique prescribed in one of its (disastrous) "Four Year Plans." This meticulously detailed document stipulates the number of days of rest a month to which a person is entitled (three, or "one rest day in every ten"), with rest being defined as the "'tending [of] small gardens, cleaning up, hygiene, and light study of culture and politics,'" which seems contradictory since the Khmer Rouge eradicated culture and politics. The document mandates the time allotted for pregnancy and confinement: two months. But Tyner's analysis is brief: the directive "provides direct insight into the geographies imagined by the Khmer Rouge," for the regime "deliberately sought to eliminate the 'individualized' or 'personalized' attachment to place."

General statements of this sort force the reader into an uncomfortable position. The reader understands that the Khmer Rouge attempted to control even the microscopic spaces that ordinary Khmer inhabited by eradicating any semblance of difference between those spaces. The reader understands the anti-Western, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-foreign invective of the Khmer Rouge. The reader understands that, from an academic standpoint, we may read into Khmer Rouge policies a concept of anti-geography hinged on annihilation. And the reader understands that Tyner's objectives are very modest: not to expose motivations for or the workings of genocide, but to "ask how spatial categorizations work" (Tyner: 2). But what exactly does a controlling idea of space and its derivatives teach us about this particular instance? Is Tyner alluding to Hannah Arendt's (1973) insights into the nature of totalitarian regimes and their attempted destruction of freedom and public space through the use of terror and the breaking of the bonds of trust between people? If so, did not Arendt, among other scholars, already teach us that terror destroys the space between human beings—the very same space upon and within which publics and politics are constructed?

Because Tyner falls short of directly communicating the import of examining the Khmer Rouge period specifically or genocide more generally through spatial lenses, the reader is left to question the relevance of such knowledge. Do I understand the Khmer Rouge genocide any better now that I have read the genocide in terms of the eradication of space? Could we not understand this particular Khmer Rouge directive on work and rest, or its policies more generally, in terms of a totalitarian exercise of the deployment of power and its reliance on terror; or as an extension of the capillaries of power even in the most private of spaces (our homes); or as a pathological frenzy of violence that we so often witness in revolutionary societies, even years beyond the initial revolution (e.g. the USSR under Stalin; China's Cultural Revolution; the UMAP camps of Cuba)? Was this directive in particular a manifestation of Foucault's biopolitics, as Tyner seems to suggest (156-67)? Do all enactments of biopolitics necessarily lead, as he asserts, to "spatial purification in the context of state-building" or the construction of a "pure society…[that] requires the eradication and elimination of essentialized Other?" (Tyner: 166f). Doesn't this conclusion misread Foucault? Can Tyner explain why biopolitics have not led to egregiously tyrannical policies in most countries, even if the biopolitical project has resulted in some rather morally questionable or reprehensible practices?

The reader very well may conclude upon finishing this book that we need to be suspicious of political platforms that pronounce radical redesigns of economy, society, and political systems—in

short, radical reconceptualizations of space—precisely because of their destructive logic. But this conclusion is specious, for it would perforce include Abraham Lincoln's abolitionist vision and Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, just as much as it would include Hitler's Aryan Nation and Pol Pot's *Angkar*. Put bluntly, Tyner does not offer an adequate answer to the indelicate "so what?" question.

So, let us take what appears to be his novel contribution to geography: the unmaking of space. On a basic level, academic work often focuses on unpacking assumptions embedded in knowledge. Perhaps Tyner fills a hole in geography debates and literature precisely by exploring the idea of the unmaking of space, and in this regard, his book very well may be an important contribution to that literature. But wouldn't geographers already understand that revolutionary acts are, like urban planning and architectural projects and all other acts of creation, at their core acts of eradication and erasures of space ultimately founded on an irremediable act of violence? Acts of creation must violate (and replace) that which precedes them. But perhaps geographers have missed that point. Even if they have not, Tyner might have been more assertive about the need to rethink how we study transformations, and why the logic of erasure ought to be paramount.

Related, much existing scholarship on the Khmer Rouge emphasizes the totalizing, destructive aspects of the regime's activities. Noted Cambodia scholar Karl Jackson (1989) even labeled the revolution as one of eradication, thus making Tyner's ostensibly novel and compelling idea (indeed, the very reason I was drawn to this book) somewhat less compelling. We know that the Khmer Rouge systematically implemented a plan to kill "nearly all the officers and soldiers of the former regime;" liquidated the intelligentsia; indiscriminately exterminated anyone deemed to be opposed to the regime; destroyed every single Buddhist monastery and temple in Cambodia; murdered most of the monks; broke and "upset" family and social structures; established "'people's communes,' which were disguised concentration camps" of hard labor; "destroyed the structure of the national economy and destroyed the national culture, the educational system, and the health care system" (Judgment 1979: 523-527). Rewriting such events in geographic terminology does not change those facts, but to be fair Tyner does not propose to offer new facts. And writing about these sheer acts of violence and brutality in terms of "unmaking space" does not a deconstructive analysis make. In this regard, Tyner, as I read him, deflates the promises of his innovative approach, which brings me to a third ground for assessment: the contributions of the concept of space and its derivatives to an understanding of genocide.

Given the book's orientation—to understand "the geopolitical discourses, the narratives and 'spatial logics' that support, justify, and legitimate mass killings" (Tyner: 3)—the reader invariably searches for something to take away, a lesson that might be applied to other cases. Do genocidal terrors begin with a conception of erasure, and thus provide us with a critical cue that a genocidal orgy is about to occur? Are we to conclude that pronouncements of geographic concepts made by public figures—economic restructuring, the channeling of the labor force into large-scale agricultural and infrastructural projects, anti-urbanism, and the like—contribute to genocide and genocidal practices? Do prior ruminations of current political personages indicate potential abuses and reigns of terror? Or does a peculiar nihilistic pathos develop only during the course of action and revolutionary activity itself, as Arendt (1963: 37) has suggested? If Tyner's aim is to demonstrate "'*how* certain geographic representations underlie the production of knowledge and identify[y]…how these representations make various courses of action possible'" (italics in original, Tyner: 170), is it not unreasonable to ask *which* geographic representations and discourses very well may contribute to

genocide? One very well might come away from the book thinking that all spatial discourses contribute to genocide.

To answer those sorts of questions requires, I think, a comparative survey of genocides, and might very well prove to be a worthwhile direction which Tyner's sort of work might take. Have all or most genocides precipitated from some grand spatial reimaginations? Are we able to systematically trace such violent acts back to more theoretical ruminations? Regardless, these questions are, at least from my standpoint, reasonable ones to ask of the book, especially since the author concludes with reference to that irritatingly ignored slogan, "never again," which rings hollow in the ears of politicians and policy-makers but remains incisively resonant among genocide scholars. We therefore must ask, "what are the implications of space in the study of genocide?"

The Killing of Cambodia evades engagement with those sorts of questions. While the book is learned, comprehensive, and engaging, it is stymied by limitations, especially since the book's conclusion lacks any sort of self-assessment of its pedagogical value. Instead of grappling with the implications of space with regards to the study of genocide, instead of tying up all those loose ends which I have indicated, Tyner ends on an incongruous and unfulfilling note. Tyner adjudges Khmer Rouge atrocities to be "one of humanities worst injustices (Tyner: 171). "But," he maintains, "his [that is, Tyner's] assertion rests on equal footing as that of the Khmer Rouge. Is it possible," he muses, "to substantiate my claim while denying that of the Khmer Rouge" (ibid.)? This is deeply disturbing psychologically, intellectually, and ethically, for this kind of relativism absolves him from taking responsibility for assessing his work and fleshing out its larger implications—one of which very well might be the reorientation of studies of political transformation away from "new beginnings" and towards their very internal logic of destruction. To circumvent a "relativistic morass" or a "nihilistic state of passivity" that might precipitate from his moral equation (Ibid.: 171), Tyner implores educators to shift their focus to peace education. But if we take Tyner at his relativist face value, then his solution of peace education is as empty as claiming a moral basis for Khmer Rouge atrocities: neither, in the end, matters. Might does make right. Without any criteria to assess different moral claims, without any commitment to life, what I do for peace and justice is as valuable and pathetic as what you do for war and violence. Your claim to deny my humanity and existence is as valid as my claim to recognize yours. In the final analysis, *The Killing of Cambodia*, though derivative in some important respects, is a thought-provoking new addition to the shelf of Cambodia and genocide studies, even if its limitations sometimes outweigh its contributions.

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