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Chinese Cambodian Memory Work: Racial Terror and the Spaces of Haunting and Silence

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Asian American Studies

by

Angela Tea

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Chinese Cambodian Memory Work: Racial Terror and the Spaces of Haunting and Silence

by

Angela Tea

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, Chair

This thesis explores the terror and horror produced in the reification of ethnic classification and racial categorization of Chinese in Cambodia and its hauntings through memory works. This research relies on the memoirs of Luong Ung-Lai and Loung Ung and a performance piece by Jolie Chea. These cultural productions engages in the hauntings of memory and takes into consideration spaces of silence.

The thesis of Angela Tea is approved.

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns

King-kok Cheung

Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

Dedication

For my gong Peng and his (un)told stories; you will forever be in my thoughts.

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Introduction

Dr. Haing S. Ngor's legacy and death is one of the most well known and sensationalized controversies of the Cambodian community. In 1996, Dr. Haing S. Ngor was murdered in front of his home in Los Angeles' Chinatown. Ngor was known for his Academy Award role as Dith Pran in *The Killing Fields* and his 1990 foundation work to raise funding for causes in Cambodia. Upon learning of Ngor's death, journalist Dith Pran commented, "He is like a twin with me...He is like a co-messenger and right now I am alone."¹ The murder ironically marks the anniversary of Pol Pot's rise to power.² Three gang members were prosecuted; however, Ngor's family and other community members remain convinced that the murder was politically motivated and was committed by Khmer Rouge sympathizers.³ Ngor's death reifies the general public's imagination about Cambodia as a place of violence and about the community here as focused on residual homeland politics. The claim that Ngor died in connection to gang activities may point to the underlying issue of U.S. institutions' failures to serve refugee communities and provide support systems. Yet these claims about Khmer Rouge involvement also portray refugee communities to be tied to homeland politics and violence whereby the U.S. is not held accountable for its imperialist wars in Southeast Asia. Neither is it held accountable for the living conditions of Cambodian immigrants and in the ways in which they are racialized here. These imaginings do not allow us to analyze the violence both in Cambodia and in the U.S. that reify racial categories. Ngor's death and surrounding speculation of his murder fail to capture alternative imaginaries and heterogeneous narratives of Cambodia apart from this

¹ Jim Hill, "Actor Ngor found gunned down outside L.A. home," *CNN*, February 27, 1996, accessed January 14,

² Daniel Yi and Greg Krikorian, "Three Men Convicted of Killing Ngor," *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1998, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/apr/17/local/me-40165>.

³ My-Thuan Tran, "Revisiting Haing Ngor's murder: 'Killing Fields' theory won't die," *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 2010, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/21/local/la-me-ngor-murder21-2010jan21>.

mystified violence. The controversy and complexity of Ngor's death demonstrates the need to examine and perhaps disrupt the normative memorialization of U.S. national memory. Ngor was regarded as successful and able to give back to the Cambodian community, exemplary of U.S. narratives of benevolence toward refugees and the American Dream. Within these various news accounts, Ngor became a marker of the tumultuous Cambodian history, which elided his background as an educated doctor and as a biracial offspring of a Chinese father and Cambodian mother. Though this news event is prominent, it does not make known the experience of diverse groups within the Cambodian community nor does it provide the opportunity to complicate questions of how violence is associated with the category of Cambodian or Chinese Cambodian. After *The Killing Fields* release, Ngor noted: "If I die from now on, okay! This film will go on for a hundred years."⁴ Ngor's statement alludes to popular and generalized assumptions about the Cambodian experience as it becomes produced and reproduced for a larger public audience. The underlying violence of racial and ethnic categorizations of Ngor as Chinese Cambodian is glossed over and his legacy of living through the Cambodian genocide remains. Ngor's murder and similar violent events have also overshadowed the significant role of popular cultural productions and media in reproducing national narratives and narratives of Cambodians and Cambodian Americans. Popular cultural productions and creative works relating to the Cambodian genocide include critically acclaimed works such as the film *The Killing Fields* (dir. Roland Joffé, 1984) and Loung Ung's memoir *First They Killed My Father*. Though they are significant works about the community they also serve to generalize the Cambodian experience. Rather than looking at these more popular productions I examine Chinese Cambodian memory works, *The Freedom... Cage* by Luong Ung-Lai, *Lulu in the Sky: A Daughter of Cambodia Finds*

⁴ "Dr. Haing S Ngor and the Killing Fields," *BBC*, December 17, 2002, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/dna/place-lancashire/plain/A842979>.

Love, Healing, and Double Happiness by Loung Ung and “Refugee Acts: Articulating Silences Through Critical Remembering and Re-Membering” by Jolie Chea, as community tools that complicate the discussion of historical violence, as well as disrupting national narratives about what it means to be Cambodian and/or Cambodian American. These works by Chinese Cambodians points us toward a persistent haunting that leads us to revisit the historical terror that produced the racial categorizations of Cambodian or Chinese or American both in Cambodian and here in the U.S.

I argue the residual from the reifying violence that the Chinese underwent in Cambodia haunts the survivors, descendants, and the very ethnic category of Cambodian revealing it to be produced by racial terror. I situate memory work as a site of haunting, where Chinese Cambodian narratives have been subsumed under the violence of the Cambodian genocide. My goal is not to focus on ethnic identity as the primary problem, but rather engage with memory work to convey the complexities and tensions within the category of Cambodian, in addition to exploring the Chinese Cambodian experience as subsumed under a singular Cambodian experience. Through memory work, I demonstrate that Chinese Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian American identity is a site of haunting that disrupts neat categorizations and stereotypes of Chinese Americans or Cambodian Americans. I begin by thinking about Chinese Cambodian American as persons who are ethnically Chinese and grew up in Cambodia but migrated to the U.S., multiethnic children now living or born in the U.S. whose parents were Chinese and Cambodian, and those who are connected to Chinese and/or Cambodian culture and heritage living within the U.S. It is important to consider ethnic identity configurations and identity, or the sense of self, as negotiated and ambiguous for the persons involved. I use the terms Chinese Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian American not to explicitly label others or

others' works but to explore a Chinese Cambodian ontological formation. I will be specifically examining the memory work by Chinese who have lived in Cambodia under Khmer Rouge rule, and/or who now live in the U.S. Ung-Lai's and Ung's memoirs engage with racial stereotypes as a flattening history. For example, the Khmer Rouge treated and stereotyped Chinese in Cambodia as part of a commercial class whereas Chea's performance piece acts off of assumptions of the Cambodian genocide. We can also see racial and ethnic stereotypes in contrasting narratives; for instance, Chinese Americans are imagined through the model minority myth, perpetual foreignness, and connection to railroad history in comparison to Cambodian Americans who may be stereotyped as a refugee needing to be saved.⁵ It is important to note that such stereotypes have an underlying history and that violence is imposed unto the formation of ethnic identity. The category Cambodian and/or Cambodian American is most often associated with genocide and violence. Rather than equating violence with war or genocide, I want to expand the concept to include the power imbalance in place and its impact on lived experiences and their remembrance. Not only is it significant to reveal the violence in place but to construct Chinese Cambodian American as a haunted site that serves to disrupt these two narratives of Chinese American and Cambodian American.

In Chapter One, I examine Ung-Lai's *The Freedom...Cage* to argue that the terror deployed to produce the category of Chinese in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime returns as horror. The chapter points us toward the recall of terror as a form of horror haunting future generations.

⁵ This is not to discount that Chinese in the U.S. have always been viewed model minorities, see Natalia Molina's *Fit to be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

In Chapter Two, I analyze the relationships in *Lulu in the Sky* and Ung's writing as apparitional writing that unravels racial imaginings of Chinese and Cambodian. Ung's haunted writing captures her attempt for reconciliation and its failures.

Lastly in Chapter Three, I explore Chea's "Refugee Acts" and argue that Chea's spatial and corporeal performance cultivates a space of intergenerational engagement. This chapter focuses on spaces of silences, with attention to the gaps and fragments of the performance piece, and how Chea's embodiment allows for possibilities of engagement of different generations while disturbing U.S. normative notions of healing.

This project seeks to ask: How does memory work by Chinese Cambodian American writers and artists paradoxically reveal the violence that maintains such categories of Chinese, Cambodian, and/or American? Through these forms of community memory, my project shows that cultural productions as a form of memory work shows itself to be a site haunted thereby making apparent the violence, or terror, involved in racial and ethnic categorizations.

Literature Review

Race and ethnicity figure prominently in these three cultural productions. Michael Omi and Howard Winant's foundational work on racial formation in the U.S. discusses the ideology of a racial state through institutional structures, legislations, and social conditions.⁶ This neoliberal racial project is problematic in dichotomizing race in binaries such as the black-white dichotomy.⁷ Racial project refers to racial dynamics, the lived experiences of race, and materiality attached to structures of race. By racial project I mean the formation of race as a process of racialization. Asian American and Latino American groups and social political

⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 1:159.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

movements elucidate the variability in such notions of black/white dichotomies because of the ethnic diversity within each racial grouping and how it reconstructs the dominant racial ideology.⁸ Thus the implications convey the fluidity and changing nature of race rather than a fixed static condition. Though Omi and Winant discuss these notions of racial dichotomies, racialized groups are further categorized within ethnic boundaries. The neoliberal racial project of the U.S. has been extended by creating contrasting narratives within ethnic groups. For instance, Asian Americans are racialized and further ethnicized into categories of Chinese American and Cambodian American among others. Stereotypes are bound to each ethnic group in which Chinese Americans are seen as model minorities and Cambodian Americans are “othered” or are labeled as refugees. But what happens to multiethnic or multinational bodies, such as ethnic Chinese who lived through Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge and now live in settler colonial states such as Australia, Canada, and the United States? Chinese Cambodians are thus enveloped into the racial formations of the nation-states in which they reside on either end of their migration.

Omi and Winant conclude by stating that noticing race is imperative to challenging the racial state. Though noticing race is an important step, it is also important to begin noticing other identity markers such as ethnic identity and its paralleling to what Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw terms as intersectionalities.⁹ Thus race, ethnicity, class, and gender are some forms of identity that need to be considered to problematize race and ethnicity for Chinese Cambodians residing in the U.S.

Earlier notions on ethnicity, ethnic identity, and the sense of self demonstrate a negotiation within the self fraught with difficulties. Ethnicity must be considered within the

⁸ Ibid., 89.

⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43 no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299.

U.S.'s framework of race and racialization. Race becomes an overarching categorization; however, ethnicity looks at this categorization further in attempts to disaggregate racial groups into ethnic groups. Antonia Darder, Rodolfo D. Torres, and ChorSwang Ngin's "Racialized Metropolis: Theorizing Asian American and Latino Identities and Ethnicities in Southern California" complicates and problematizes original notions of race and the black-white paradigm by bringing in the racialization of Asian Americans and Latino Americans. "While immigrant groups are racialized by the dominant group, they are simultaneously engaged in defining and redefining their group identity."¹⁰ Thus outsiders may categorize Asian Americans as a singular group but this notion differs from how individuals categorize and describe themselves. The authors draw from Benedict Anderson's notions of "imagined community" in the implication that the connectedness of group membership (whether from culture, national origin, or hierarchies within groups) through ethnic identity stems from racialization and conceptions of race, which propels such communities to form. Thus peoples' own understandings of race shape how they create a sense of belonging in negotiation with others' understandings of race and identity.

Darder, Torres, and Ngin differentiate between constructions of the "Other" and the Self.¹¹ The construction of the "other" displaces and excludes groups while the self is a reconstruction and can be a form of resistance to create new social frame. The notion of Chinese Cambodian or Chinese Cambodian American may be an identity that is not singularly agreed upon because most people with this history often will classify or identify themselves within the U.S. ethnic categorization of Cambodian American or Chinese American. For those living in the

¹⁰ Antonia Darder, Rodolfo D. Torres, and ChorSwang Ngin, "Racialized Metropolis: Theorizing Asian American and Latino Identities and Ethnicities in Southern California," *After Race: Racism After Multiculturalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2004), 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

U.S., Chinese Cambodian or Chinese Cambodian American becomes an identity that is not oftentimes explicitly understood.

Aihwa Ong's discussion of "self-making" among Cambodians throws some light on these negotiations, given practices of racialization by U.S. institutions. In *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* by Ong, becoming a recognized or ideal citizen means Cambodians having to participate in American values, norms, and mores, "a central dynamic in the ethical project of becoming citizens."¹² Therefore cultural practices of the family and home is subsumed or subjected to notions of U.S. practices and standards to become citizens. Ong continues to say, "The assigning of racializing labels—model minority, refugee, underclass, welfare mother is—part of the racial classificatory process that, modulated by human calculations, continues to engender ethnicized subjectivity."¹³ Ong takes notice that Cambodian refugees are classified in the black-white dichotomy paralleling experiences of African Americans and other Asian American groups.¹⁴ Notions of "subject-making" becomes intertwined with "self-making" as Ong examines the memories and stories of Cambodian refugees.¹⁵ Ideas of "self-making" and the imagined community become important for how Chinese Cambodians make sense of their cultural, ethnic, and national identities. This identity formation process of navigating between ethnic identities also becomes a disruption in and of itself to original notions of racial and ethnic classifications while carving out a new memory.

The very act of remembering disturbs more than these boundaries of Chinese American or Cambodian American or even Chinese Cambodian American because it uncovers the terror and violence behind these categories in recalled lived experiences. Chea, Ung, and Ung-Lai's

¹² Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

particular texts convey how memory works become the site of such disturbances. Sociologist Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* poses hauntings as "what shows up without leaving,"¹⁶ disturbed feelings that cannot be ignored, and "tied to historical and social effects."¹⁷ Gordon's notion on hauntings is useful in closely investigating memory works and how violence and terror return in recall. This recall in the memoirs and performance piece indicates a persistent haunting that occurs in the racial categorization of Chinese in Cambodia. Even while mainstream narratives in the U.S. associate Cambodians with violent communist excess, the racial dimension of that violence is occluded in the U.S. discourse on race, and as a result the violence reappears in the form of haunting in these works. The memory in written form or performance as a site demonstrates this residual violence. I do not investigate a new truth of being Chinese Cambodian but rather explore memory as the site of haunting in complex ways. Cathy Schlund-Vials' *War, Genocide, and Justice: Cambodian American Memory Work* concept is also informative. She closely examines Loung Ung's and Chanrithy Him's memoirs and perceives such works to exhibit forms of community memory and acts of resistance but at the same time reveals such memoirs as "conflicted monuments to a still-forming Cambodian American selfhood."¹⁸ Offered in her critique of Ung is the ethnoracial dimensions formed by U.S. race classifications. Schlund-Vials argues that although these microlevel analyses of cultural authenticity in memoirs stir up controversy surrounding credibility, cultural productions as privileged memories, they nonetheless counter national hegemonic memories and narratives of the Cambodian genocide, thus serving as a unique site for critically remembering and articulating memories. Similarly, Katharya Um's "Exiled Memory" explores the notion of post-memory and transgenerational

¹⁶ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xvi.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁸ Cathy Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice: Cambodian American Memory Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 147.

memory.¹⁹ Um's notions of how the second generation is responding to these familial histories and narratives correlate to second-generation identity making and the impact of narratives. The author comes to an ambiguous conclusion on how second generations produce identity, primarily because it sways in two directions—one of apathy and one of activism for the community. The exile and displacement of refugee families contribute to an “intergenerational disconnect” whereby future generations must make sense of the first and 1.5 generation experiences.²⁰ But I wonder in this identity-making process how these narratives of the genocide continue to haunt the second generation.

It is also important to take into consideration biological perspectives in which there have been comparisons of the trauma and memories of the Holocaust to the Cambodian genocide and its transmission onto future generations genetically. Epigenetics is argued to be a form of direct transmission of trauma onto the chromosomes due to environmental factors. Natan P.F. Kellerman's study has posed that transmission of trauma is a biological impact on offspring.²¹ But if these biological markers of trauma are transmitted, then what of biological markers of nurture and care as transmitted to future generations? By only considering a biological transmission of trauma, the stories and narratives of survivors are limited to corporeal explanations. Grace M. Cho's notions of transgenerational haunting in *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* offers a more useful way to think about transmitted trauma in Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian communities. Cho examines the Korean diaspora since the Korean War and Korean-U.S. relations by focusing on the *yanggongju*

¹⁹ Katharya Um, “Exiled Memory: History, Identity, and Remembering in Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian Diaspora,” *Positions Asia Critique: Southeast Asian American Studies a Special Issue*, vol. 20 no. 3, ed. Fiona I.B. Ngo, Mimi Thi Nguyen, and Mariam B. Lam (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 842.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 842.

²¹ Natan P.F. Kellermann, “Epigenetic transmission of Holocaust Trauma: Can nightmares be inherited?” *The Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* (2011): 1-9, accessed January 14, 2014, http://peterfelix.tripod.com/home/Epigenetic_TTT2.pdf.

figure, Korean prostitutes in camptowns near U.S. military bases located in Korea. She coins the term transgenerational haunting to demonstrate how the experiences and histories of these women and war have come to “haunt” and impact second and third generation Koreans.²² These stories are often silenced by these women or by other family members, and even if these narratives are shared there is much shame and stigma surrounding such experience. Though the *yanggongju* experiences a different type of shame and stigma, the figure of the refugee is rendered as victim and as psychologically impaired producing similar conceptions of stigma and shame. Cho’s work parallels the Cambodian refugee experience where the refugee can be seen as a figure holding these narratives of war and genocide, which haunts future generations. Chea, Ung, and Ung-Lai’s literary works demonstrate a haunting that can be found in such cultural productions.

Cultural productions then become an important site of engagement, rather than a source of revelation. Lisa Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* further examines cultural productions: “Asian American cultural forms emphasize instead that because of the complex history of racialization, sites of minority cultural production are at different distances from the canonical nationalist project of resolution.”²³ The forms, whether written or performed, are important to look at as sites of re-engagement. Lucy Mae San Pablo examines Filipino/a performing bodies during key points in U.S.-Philippine relationship in *Puro Arte* noting that the body engages within particular moments of the past and present and is “a practice that is dynamic and in the making...the production and circulation of the Filipino/a performing body is a matter of doing, a process of

²² Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1-202.

²³ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 31.

relation.”²⁴ The performing body can be seen as a form embodying both the past and present.

Lowe, as well as Schlund-Vials, explicate cultural productions and memories as complex and not seamlessly fitting within the mold of national narratives. *Immigrant Acts* therefore “attempts to locate in the works the ‘performativity’ of immigration, that is the aesthetics of disidentification and practices of resignification that the ‘outsider-within’ condition of Asian in American enables.”²⁵ She goes on to add that disidentification “expresses a space in which alienations, in the cultural, political, and economic senses, can be rearticulated in oppositional forms.”²⁶

Disidentification is not only in opposition to ideas and values of the national state but “allows for the exploration of alternative political and cultural subjectivities that emerge within continuing effects of displacement.”²⁷ Immigrant acts therefore serve to indicate the contradictions of Asians as citizens and as foreigners. “In contrast, the cultural productions emerging out of contradictions of immigrant marginality displace the fiction of reconciliation, disrupt the myth of national identity by revealing its gaps and fissures, and intervene in the narrative of national development that would illegitimately locate the ‘immigrant’ before history or exempt the ‘immigrant’ from history.”²⁸

Lowe’s analysis of cultural productions demonstrates why memory in literary texts are significant. I am looking at cultural productions because it makes present the violence, or traces thereof. In examining the memory work of Chea and memoirs of Ung and Ung-Lai, it will serve to not only remember the genocide but to disturb national histories and the boundaries of ethnic

²⁴ Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 14.

²⁵ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

labels. Historical violence in its return as haunting informs the contradictions and complexities of formulating a Chinese Cambodian identity.

Historical Contextualization of Chinese Cambodians

Tracing the Chinese in Cambodia to a diaspora in the U.S. shows a history of race and racial violence. I provide a historical context to show the significance of race through the engagement of different powers during wars and its aftermath. The Khmer Rouge, because of race-inflected interventions by the U.S. and Vietnam, reacted with racial violence of their own. If race acquired biological markers in the 19th century,²⁹ the Khmer Rouge seems to have pushed its identifying features to the point of disembodiment, classifying some Cambodians as ‘Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds.’³⁰

In the 1960s and 1970s, around 425,000 Chinese resided in Cambodia constituting one of the largest minority populations. By the mid-1980’s there was an estimated 61,400 Chinese Cambodians left.³¹ Bodies of work on the Cambodian American and Cambodian refugee communities rely heavily on narratives of survivors and detailed histories of the conflict between Vietnam and China leading up to the Khmer Rouge and its aftermath. Narratives range from surviving the killing fields, victims of Tuol Sleng, experiences of Year Zero, and encounters with soldiers of the Khmer Rouge in the U.S. The scholarly literature and memoirs document the persecution of Chinese people in Democratic Kampuchea but do not present the violence against them as mechanisms through which the category of Chinese was produced and reified. Instead, their persecution was subsumed under a general Cambodian experience of the genocide.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *“Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003).

³⁰ Ben Kiernan, “Myth, Nationalism, and Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research* (2010): 192.

³¹ Russell R. Ross, ed., *Cambodia: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/45.htm>.

Historians have also detailed much of the politics in Cambodia ranging from the involvement of foreign powers such as China, France, the U.S. and Vietnam, criticism on Prince Norodom Sihanouk and Pol Pot; and factual evidence of the mass killings. Through a brief historical account, I want to draw attention to race and ethnicity as important factors in the politics of the region.

Cambodia achieved its independence from France in 1953, when Prince Norodom Sihanouk ruled as a monarch. Wary of being drawn into the Cold War, in 1965 after ending relations with the U.S., Prince Norodom Sihanouk looked for assistance from the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union.³² Sihanouk was in agreement with the Chinese to allow the use of Cambodia's eastern border by the People's Army of Vietnam from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North as a base in 1968.³³ Sihanouk also allowed the port of Sihanoukville to be used by the Viet Cong (or the National Liberation Front) and North Vietnamese troops for weapon shipment.³⁴ In 1969, in a balancing act, Sihanouk restored relationship with the U.S. but also activated ties with North Vietnam; Sihanouk was performing and attempting to mediate relations between opposing political groups, frustrating general Lon Nol and those on the right as Cambodia's economy was seriously affected.³⁵ Sihanouk's rule and mediation of geopolitical relations point toward the heavy involvement of interests by China, the U.S., Vietnam, and the Soviet Union.

In 1970 while Sihanouk visited China, Europe, and Soviet Union, anti-Vietnamese protests against the North Vietnamese and the Republic of Vietnam took place in Phnom Penh. Lon Nol took advantage of Sihanouk's absence and closed the port of Sihanoukville in addition

³² Arnold Isaacs et al., *Pawns of War: Cambodia and Laos* (Natick: Boston Publishing Company, 1988), 83.

³³ Samuel Lipsman and Edward Doyle, *Fighting for Time* (Natick: Boston Publishing Company, 1983), 127.

³⁴ David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2007), 194.

³⁵ Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot came to Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 228.

to arresting those loyal to Sihanouk. In the same year, Lon Nol removed Sihanouk from leadership in a coup. Sihanouk, through Beijing Radio, called for an uprising against Lon Nol but demonstrations were suppressed by the Cambodian army. At this time, ethnic Vietnamese were targeted due to paranoia of retaliation by the People's Army of Vietnam: "Lon Nol hoped to use Vietnamese as hostages and round them up in detention camps however a massacre ensued killing 800 Vietnamese".³⁶ This instance of marking ethnic Vietnamese bodies is just one example of violence prior to 1975. I will further discuss evidence of violence and discrimination toward ethnic Vietnamese, Cham, and Chinese masked by different policies and regulations.

In March 1970, Khmer Rouge leader Nuon Chea requested North Vietnam to invade Cambodia spurring on the Cambodian Civil War.³⁷ The conflict put the Khmer Rouge, North Vietnam, and Viet Cong allies against the government forces of Cambodia, South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam), with the support of U.S. forces. During the same period of the Cambodian coup of 1970, both South Vietnam and North Vietnam fought each other on Cambodian territory while the U.S. provided aerial bombings as well as financial support to South Vietnamese troops.³⁸ U.S. military entered Cambodian territory and bombed the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1969, in Operation Menu. The U.S. bombed the eastern Cambodian countryside which ironically made conditions more conducive for the Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese troops to take over. This is significant, due to the bombing, the Khmer Rouge were able to recruit Cambodians from the countryside. By May 1970, Sihanouk showed his support of the Khmer Rouge, thereby increasing its army's ability to recruit. From 1971 North Vietnamese and the Viet

³⁶ Lipsman and Doyle, *Fighting for Time*, 144.

³⁷ Dmitry Mosyakov, "The Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists: A History of Their Relations as Told in the Soviet Archives," *MacMillan Center Genocide Studies* (New Haven: MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, 2004), 45-77.

³⁸ David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 202-204.

Cong came into conflict with the Cambodian government. While fighting ensued between these groups, Saloth Sar, also known as Pol Pot, was able to build his regime by recruiting peasants. In 1972 as the Vietnamese began to withdraw troops, Sar was able to disseminate and enforce new policies of control. While ruling over the ‘liberated’ areas, the Khmer Rouge in power tried to become self-sufficient in agricultural production.³⁹ After 1975, Sar relocated residents and populations from urban areas into the countryside all the while separating them according to their ethnicity identified by racial markers. When quotas were not met, the Khmer Rouge leadership would blame it on foreign plots employing Cambodians. Trying to quell these supposed acts of sabotage, the Khmer Rouge leadership employed terror in the form of arrests and interrogations, re-education camps, and execution of people. As a result, an estimated one million people died.⁴⁰

The start of Year Zero in 1975 gave some indication of what the new Cambodia, known as Democratic Kampuchea, would look like. The resulting genocide was due in part to the Vietnam War and its large key players such as the two Vietnams, the U.S., and China. The Khmer Rouge transformed the country by relocating people to Khmer Rouge territory and reclassifying urban dwellers into classes of “Old” or base people and “New” people. In addition, people were classified by markers of class and ethnicity. Those who were deemed to be intellectuals, upper class, and professionals were killed in successive waves. Ethnic Khmer as well as ethnic minorities such as Cham, Chinese, and Vietnamese were classified and killed in different waves of Khmer purges. For instance, in 1978 over 100,000 Khmers residing near Vietnam who were presumed to have ‘Vietnamese minds’ were killed.⁴¹ It is interesting to point out as the racial category becomes disembodied, and whereby Khmers were targeted for the

³⁹ Phillip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006), 288.

⁴⁰ “The CGP, 1994-2013,” *Cambodian Genocide Program*, Yale University, 2010, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/>.

⁴¹ Kiernan, “Myth, Nationalism, and Genocide,” 194.

presumption of having a Vietnamese mind or soul. Cambodians and ethnic minorities were thus racialized and faced extermination in categories devised by the Khmer Rouge.

Not only were people separated into groups of “Old and “New” but men and women were forced to wear black clothing, a symbol foreshadowing their new lives under the regime. Under the Khmer Rouge “the quelling of doubt and reassertion of truth took the form of terror.”⁴² Anthropologist Michael Taussig writes of the relationship between inclusion and exclusion, the parasitic notion of the victimizer’s need of the victim for truth.⁴³ The search for truth and the creation of truth by the Khmer Rouge legitimized the terror and torture of Cambodians. People were already criminalized through ethnic categorization even before being labeled as traitors to be exterminated. In Tuol Sleng (S-21), a school turned prison where numerous executions took place, even if prisoners came in believing in their innocence they were sometimes forced to admit to crimes they did not commit. S-21 was only one of many detention centers, it now stands as a well-known genocide museum and as a site of memorialization.

Terror was not solely held within these execution centers and killing field graves; it took the form of racialization and categorization. Ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cham were targeted by the Khmer Rouge due to the production of historical racialization in place, remnants of foreign and colonial powers, and relationships with other countries at the time. In Kampuchean cities, the Chinese dominated as entrepreneurs.⁴⁴ Chinese and Cambodians of Chinese descent were targeted and “were being systemically exterminated by the ‘pure’ Khmer Rouge leaders.”⁴⁵ The Khmer Rouge’s relationships with Vietnam and China complicated

⁴² Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1992), 4.

⁴³ Michael Taussig, “Culture of Terror—Space of Death. Roger Casement’s Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1984): 469.

⁴⁴ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict*, 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

Cambodia's economy, social sphere, and political climate. It is also important to note that targeting ethnic Chinese was not limited to Cambodia but also evident in Vietnam. Sino-Vietnamese relations were tense, evident in territorial disputes. The socialist Vietnamese government also exhibited a wariness of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and their political allegiance with China.⁴⁶ This purported suspicion of Chinese justified the government's discrimination against Sino-Vietnamese in Vietnam to the point of pressuring the ethnic Chinese population to leave Vietnam, resulting in the phenomenon of the Boat People in the 1980s. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge were also wary of relationships with China even though they had China's support, though not a fully committed one. Chinese Cambodians considered enemies were marked for elimination during Pol Pot's rule although there was no documented written discriminatory policy. Though ethnic minorities were targeted in Cambodia, this did not prevent the Khmer Rouge from subjecting 'native' Khmers to incarceration and extermination. Ethnic Cham, Chinese, and Vietnamese are generally mentioned when the controversial topic of extermination or the history of the genocide arises. There are some who argue that these ethnic groups were not technically targeted but rather Cambodians of an educated class were singled out. The link between class and ethnicity is apparent; for instance, a majority of Chinese in Cambodia were a part of the upper and educated class subject to discrimination. However, within a few years, the Chinese population was reduced to half its original size from 1975 to 1978, demonstrating this systematic use of terror in the Khmer Rouge's treatment of Chinese.⁴⁷ Chinese Cambodians

⁴⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁷ Ben Kiernan, "Kampuchea's Ethnic Chinese Under Pol Pot: A Case of Systematic Social Discrimination," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (1986): 18.

attempted to reach out and wrote letters to the Beijing government seeking foreign intervention and assistance; however, ethnic Chinese received little to no aid.⁴⁸

Forced assimilation was another tactic to eliminate Chinese ethnicity and culture, by separating Chinese from Khmers and limiting ethnic Chinese contact.⁴⁹ Categorizing “Old” and “New” people meant classifying the majority of Chinese into the “New” category from Khmer within the category of “Old,” whereby the “New” people were subjected to harsher working conditions and treatment compared to “Old” people. Children were separated from parents through physical separation to undermine cultural and social structures.⁵⁰ Not only this but respectful titles of elders were eliminated where children and elders were forced to address each other as “comrade.” Post-1979 discriminatory treatment toward ethnic Chinese intensified by banning cultural practices and Chinese schools. By this time the Khmer Rouge were removed by the Vietnamese, though there were insurgent activities by the Khmer Rouge; peace talks were occurring in the 1980s and re-establishment of Chinese organizations took place in 1990s. The 1991 Paris Peace Agreement ended conflicts and allowed the United Nations authority as peacekeepers; however, internal conflicts within Cambodia persisted.⁵¹

Ethnic Chinese Cambodians who were able to escape from Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 made their way to refugee camps on Thailand’s border. In some instances, Chinese Cambodians were able to flee through Vietnam by way of masking their Cambodian identity and

⁴⁸ Leo Suryadinata, “Southeast Asian policies toward the ethnic Chinese,” *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Tan Chee-Beng (New York: Routledge, 2013), 280.

⁴⁹ Sambath Chan, “Chinese in Cambodia: Identity Construction and Contestation,” (MA thesis, Concordia University, 2005) 26.

⁵⁰ Suryadinata, “Southeast Asian policies toward the ethnic Chinese,” 280.

⁵¹ Sok Udom Deth, “The Geopolitics of Cambodia During the Cold War Period,” *Explorations: A Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* University of Hawai`i, vol. 9 (2009): 51, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/10703>.

passing as Vietnamese or as ethnic Chinese from Vietnam.⁵² About 145,149 Cambodian refugees entered the U.S. seeking political asylum.⁵³ From refugee camps and through sponsorship programs, many Chinese Cambodians found their ways into Australia, Canada, France, and the U.S. From 1975 and onward, larger numbers of Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian refugees began to arrive in the U.S. but their status as Southeast Asian refugees, similar to Hmong, Laotians, and Vietnamese, set them apart from East Asians. Southeast Asian refugees migrating to the U.S. in 1975 came with limited education and little to no income. Refugees were dispersed throughout the U.S. to “minimize the negative impact of a refugee population.”⁵⁴ Cluster Projects, whereby the “U.S. federal resettlement policy allocated monies...to prevent one city or state from taking on the burden of receiving too many refugees.”⁵⁵ This project was intended to create “clusters” or groups of refugees while also funding the Mutual Assistance Association (MAAs). MAAs work as mediators between the larger community and the community they serve.⁵⁶ Within the context of the U.S., secondary migrations occur whereby refugees no longer stay with original sponsored families. The need for community, finding whereabouts of close family and friends, and other opportunities account for the development of larger Cambodian and Chinese communities found in California, Washington, and Massachusetts.⁵⁷ Secondary migration was spurred by the need for community and familial support as Cambodian refugees had difficulties

⁵² Sophal Ear, “The End/Beginning Cambodia,” (presentation at University of California, Los Angeles, November 19, 2013).

⁵³ Dori Cahn and Jay Stansell, “1970s: Escape from War and the Creation of Refugees,” *Cambodian American Experiences: Histories, Communities, Cultures and Identities*, ed. Jonathan H.X. Lee (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2010), 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵⁵ Susan Needham and Karen Quintiliani, “Cambodian American Secondary Migration and Community Growth,” *Cambodian American Experiences: Histories, Communities, Cultures and Identities*, ed. Jonathan H.X. Lee (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2010), 65.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

in navigating official government and state sanctioned systems.⁵⁸ Thus it is important to note the agency of refugees in migration and the significance of family as a source of economic and emotional support. Through the secondary migration and family networks, small businesses became steps toward strengthening community.⁵⁹

Building an ethnic niche and community was important for Cambodians and Chinese Cambodians. Aihwa Ong points out that since the 1980s, donut shops have been an ethnic niche for Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian Americans.⁶⁰ Family businesses rely on unpaid family labor and the lack of unionization. This reliance on family emphasizes the valuable role of the younger generation, especially children, because they serve as cultural brokers to assist their parents at the front of the store. Children dealt with customers by utilizing their English language skills at the work place where the mother and father are usually limited in English. First generation parents increasingly rely on their children as unpaid labor in owning and operating a small business. Concomitantly, second generation children often struggle in attempt to balance family life while managing their social lives. Young second generation children often develop a sense of resentment toward parents in having to manage these multiple roles. Though Ong touches on this notion briefly it would be interesting to develop this narrative further by exploring older second generation with this background. Though this ethnic niche may incorporate family labor, survival, and attempts to participate in U.S. business models, it is unclear how successful these small businesses are in its present state since its inception in the late 70s and early 80s.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁰ Aihwa Ong, "The Doughnut Emporium," *Cambodian American Experiences: Histories, Communities, Cultures and Identities*, ed. Jonathan H.X. Lee (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2010), 283-294.

Not only did Cambodians and Chinese Cambodians have to navigate displacement and create an ethnic economy for survival, the impact of post-9/11 policies on deportation exposes the continued purveyance of racialization and subject formation in our present and amongst the newer generation. With the signing of president Bill Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, Cambodians who have spent a majority of their life in the U.S. but did not obtain citizenship have been deported on the basis of criminal record, including petty crimes, "only to be exiled to a country whose government at one point committed one of the gravest genocides."⁶¹ Refugees, who escaped genocide from home countries and were forced to make a new living abroad, are once more displaced to their "home" country. The racialization and criminalization of marked Cambodian bodies are then deemed as "other." "Double jeopardy" makes its way into cultural works such as in the performance poetry by Anida Yoeu Ali "1700% Project: Mistaken for Muslim" and in the essay "Deporting Cambodian Refugees" by Soo Ah Kwon. Double jeopardy refers to already displaced victims, for instance Cambodian refugees in the U.S. who fled from the Khmer Rouge, who are once more displaced through repatriation under the 1996 Immigrant Responsibility Act. This second displacement is noted as ironic by Kwon because refugees who largely grew up in host lands such as the U.S. are unfamiliar with Cambodia and, once deported, are castigated as outsiders. The policies on deportation demonstrate the significant role of race and its haunting upon future generations.

This cyclical theme of displacement impels second generation Cambodian Americans to draw from their personal and family histories, reconceptualize and question how they fit in a white hegemonic America, and attempt to balance their first generation parents' identities and narratives. Some of the first and 1.5 generation now living in the U.S. survived genocide, had to

⁶¹ Soon Ah Kwon, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees," *Positions Asia Critique: Southeast Asian American Studies a Special Issue*, vol. 20 no. 3, ed. Fiona I.B. Ngo, Mimi Thi Nguyen, and Mariam B. Lam (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 751.

consider or were impelled to commit to a secondary migration, and must still continue to face the present issues and realities of sustaining their families. These generations must contend with racial categorizations and racism while living in the U.S. Writing or performing are some of the ways in which members of the 1.5 generation or second generation this history of racial and racializing violence.

Chapter One

Horror as the Return of Terror in Luong Ung-Lai's *The Freedom...Cage*

The Killing Fields (dir. Roland Joffé, 1984) and the years 1975 to 1979 constitute our popular imagination about the Cambodian genocide and experience. Popular cultural productions such as *The Killing Fields* have become a canonical tool for the general public in understanding the genocide, exodus, and elimination of an upper class and/or intellectual class. Works such as these do not explore racial dynamics to an extent that would shed light on racial terror. Michael Taussig explores Roger Casement's Putomayo report and refers to the work of Jacobo Timerman and Joseph Conrad to demonstrate the dangers and implications of aestheticizing terror. Taussig explicates that the culture of terror has become mythical. Thus if narratives or accounts do not reveal the dynamics involved to desensationalize terror, then terror and its mystery flourish. Memoirs as personal and community memory have the potential to point us towards ways to desensationalize terror. I argue that Luong Ung-Lai's account of historical violence and discrimination toward ethnic Chinese who lived in Cambodia gives us some insight into the terror used by the Khmer Rouge to produce the racial category of Chinese. But more importantly, this memoir points us toward a horror, a remainder of the terror that cannot be captured in mainstream discourse of genocide and returns as the horror, signaling a deeper disturbance.

Ung-Lai's memoir delves into her memories as Moy in Cambodia utilizing a third person perspective because it is what the author finds necessary to separate from reliving her experience, where she notes that she is not "strong enough" to write or put herself in the first person perspective.⁶² Through the eyes of Moy we are taken into the remembered experience of the first and 1.5 generation. In my reading of this work, I argue that the category of Chinese Cambodian

⁶² Luong Ung-Lai, *The Freedom...Cage* (North Charleston: CreateSpace, 1991), xi.

was not only problematically produced by way of terror during the reign of the Khmer Rouge, but the recall of terror later in memory work becomes the horror that disturbs that same racial category for these generations now residing in the U.S.

Ung-Lai grew up in Cambodia and attended the University of Massachusetts, Boston.⁶³ *The Freedom...Cage* is a fictional autobiography following Moy and her family, consisting of her mother Keem and grandpa Wong, and their lives through the Khmer Rouge's labor camps. The Lais' attempted to keep their family intact through a variety of hardships from mistreatment, the family separation, and death. I will go into a discussion of discrimination because the autobiographical account makes poignant the experiences and harsh treatment toward the Chinese residing in Cambodia. Instances of discrimination toward Chinese living in Cambodia is repeatedly pointed out by Moy demonstrating that although Chinese were a part of the economic upper and middle class they still faced and experienced discrimination. Moy takes note of the differential treatment of the Chinese as exemplified in her mother being stuck in Phnom Penh trying to get a passport:

*...To be fair, it wasn't Ma's fault, but the Cambodian government's. Every government official wanted bribes. You give them ten ning; they want twenty. You give them twenty, they want a hundred. If they don't get what they want, they just make you wait and wait until they're sure you don't have any more money to give to them, before they give you the passport. Chinese never get a fair deal in this unlucky country, Moy thought.*⁶⁴

Even in Moy's memory of these events experienced as a child, she notices the discrepancies in treatment by governmental bureaucracies. This is not the only case where the family has issues within governmental entities. "The policemen told Grandpa and Ma that Uncle had tried to become a Cambodian citizen. That was against Cambodia's law. Uncle was the first generation

⁶³ "Chinese American pens fictional memoir on life during dangerous Khmer Rouge Regime of 1970s." *PR News Channel*, July 11, 2012, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://www.prnewschannel.com/2012/07/11/chinese-american-pens-fictional-memoir-on-life-during-dangerous-khmer-rouge-regime-of-1970s/#sthash.AcLIThyq.dpuf>.

⁶⁴ Ung-Lai, *The Freedom...Cage*, 17.

to be born in Cambodia. He had to be the third generation to be accepted as a Cambodian citizen.”⁶⁵ Sociologist William E. Willmott additionally notes that jurisdiction regarding citizenship for Chinese to become Cambodian citizens varied depending upon time period. One of the first formal process of naturalization for ethnic Chinese living in Cambodia began in the 1940s; however, they could be “subject to rather heavy informal fees.”⁶⁶ Though Moy’s mother Keem notices these problems for the family and desires to move to Hong Kong, this situation poses the question of how differently or similarly would overseas Chinese from Southeast Asia be treated or accepted in Hong Kong or in mainland China.

There have been mixed accounts of treatment by the Khmer Rouge of Chinese ranging from being allowed to escape, to harsh working conditions, and to extermination because of ethnic identity. Ung-Lai recounts the experience of Moy as a child:

They kept calling her names they could think of in their language, saying terrible things to her, ‘Chinese cloth, stupid Chinese, eat up all Khmer’s rice. Go back to China! I hate Chinese cloth!’ (These hateful words were a daily insult from some of the Khmer to the Chinese people in Cambodia.) Moy kept her mouth shut. The more they told her to stop crying, the harder she cried.⁶⁷

We can see the traumatic instances experienced by a young Moy. Ung-Lai casts these experiences of discrimination and conditions of the Khmer Rouge as a “horror story,” one that acquires strong racial tones. She writes:

...no one would ever forget. It was real life, not a movie. People might not talk about it, but it would be there in their hearts and minds, reminding them what was in store for them. If Khmers killed Khmers, what would the Black Shirts do to the Chinese and the others? If the Black Shirts had no mercy on their own dark-skinned people, who spoke the same language as they did, what kind of mercy would they give to people not like them?⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., xiii.

⁶⁶ William E. Willmott, *The Chinese In Cambodia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1967), 81.

⁶⁷ Ung-Lai, *The Freedom...Cage*, 74.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 31.

The reference to horror as a genre touches on affect and the psychological. Ann Radcliffe, known for her study of Gothic literature, differentiates terror from horror as dimensions of the horror fiction, where terror is the stricken panic and fear at the precise moment it takes place, and at the opposite end horror is the reactionary feeling after the moment of terror.⁶⁹ Moy notices that the ethnic tension and discrimination had existed, whereby the terror was the infliction on actual experience and the horror is the recalling of the memory. Even prior to Moy's knowledge of the realities of animosity, her mother Keem warns and reminds her of the terror that "Black shirt hate Chinese. They want to eat our flesh!"⁷⁰ It is also important to note that Ung-Lai uses notions and characterizations of Cambodians as dark-skinned similar to Loung Ung's ethnoracial classification in her first memoir *First They Killed My Father*. Ung was previously criticized by the Khmer Institute for deploying U.S. ethnoracial categorization by portraying her Chinese mother as light-skinned, "perfectly arched eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes' tall straight Western nose; and oval face" while marking her Khmer father as dark-skinned "black curly hair, a wide nose, full lips, and a round face."⁷¹ Although ethnic minorities in Cambodia were racially targeted, these examples from Ung-Lai and Ung also demonstrate Chinese racism towards lower class Khmer because ethnic Chinese were a part of privileged middle to upper classes.

Although these encounters could be a matter of survival, Moy begins to understand that she must appease other Khmer Rouge by speaking in Khmer. In one of the working camps, Moy asks, "Buddy Big Sister, I want to go see my mother," Moy said in a small voice in Khmer. Her leader's face was hard and full of hatred."⁷² Here we can see an example of terror through forced assimilation with Moy having to conform to Khmer language as well as her lack of confidence in

⁶⁹ Anne Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *The New Monthly Magazine* (1826): 145–52.

⁷⁰ Ung-Lai, *The Freedom...Cage*, 48.

⁷¹ Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice*, 143.

⁷² Ung-Lai, *The Freedom...Cage*, 50.

Khmer; her leader eventually denies Moy's request. Not only is she denied but she is humiliated in front of others as evidenced by the laughter and teasing of the leader. As an act of resistance, Moy chooses to run away to her mother and grandfather: "When Moy was in front of the rows of sweet potatoes, she called out in Chinese. Her throat was tight, and tears were falling from her cheeks, 'Ma! Grandpa I come home!'"⁷³ Through this language switch after Moy's embarrassment with her leader, we can see the reaffirmation and comfort offered by her own family through the speaking of Chau Chow (Chaozhou), or the Teochew dialect. The terror not only existed in the labor camps but terror persisted in the form of eliminating original languages and cultural practices.

Although discrimination toward ethnic Chinese is evident, Ung-Lai also notes that the suffering for both Chinese and Cambodians are similar. Ung-Lai prefaces the memoir through Keem's dream, "I dream last night that nearly scare me to death. I see many Black Shirt come into city and town and chase people from their home' she said referring to the Khmer Rouge. 'I see hundred and thousands of people walk and walk, not know where to go.' Moy looks up as her mother's voice becomes shaky. She saw Keem's eyes widen as she recalled the nightmare."⁷⁴ The nightmare refers to the Khmer Rouge takeover while at the same time, not knowing what sorts of realities Chinese Cambodians would have to face under this regime. Moy goes on to say, "Then the real nightmare began. The Khmer Rouge began to separate people into different groups by age and sex... anyone who wanted to see their family at any other time had to ask the leader's permission. That didn't seem so bad at first, but it turned out bad for the children."⁷⁵ The reality then becomes one tied to terror as families are forcibly separated and put into work camps.

⁷³ Ibid., 51.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 49.

Through these excerpts of recalling a nightmare, we can see the evolution of Moy and Keem's accounts from terror to horror story, and from a nightmare back to a "reality."

In multiple scenes Ung-Lai notes, "Everyone—young and old; woman, man, and child—was on the road...Old and young alike—even the tiniest babies shared this first pain of exile."⁷⁶ Here the reader can see the experiences are the same for Chinese and Khmer. "Everyone did the same, rich or poor, Chinese and Khmer alike. And everyone knew then that their food and their lives would never be the same again."⁷⁷ Through the eyes of Moy, we also realize there are small moments of joy: "the Chinese or Khmer, sounded so happy talking and laughing. The Khmer would tease the Chinese to say something in Khmer. And when they didn't get it quite right, both would laugh."⁷⁸ This element of enjoying small moments becomes significant in countering the image of the Cambodian experience because it demonstrates how persons and families had to resituate themselves in their new lives.

This classification system operationalized through race where terror is reproducing and making visible the classifications of Chinese/Chinese Cambodian and then are made to be erased. The Chinese are identified, classified, and then erased, as seen in the breaking up of family structures and the erasure of family titles. The Chinese were racialized to be distinguished from Vietnamese, Khmer, and even Khmer Rouge. Family as a form of socialization allows for the transmission of traditions and culture in addition may serve as important to one's identity. For the Khmer Rouge, separating Chinese families in labor camps and erasing titles of family members severs an aspect of identity and breaks apart family as a social unit. Not only does this historical discrimination and extermination disrupt notions of what it means to be Chinese but disrupts the notions of family structure forcing the reconstitution of family through fictive kin.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 39.

When Ung-Lai's family encounters Chi Minh, he assumes the role of older brother to Moy. However, in their first encounter Keem proclaims. "You look like Black Shirt. Your skin dark like them. If you not speak Chau Chow, I say you Black Shirt."⁷⁹ One of the policies implemented by the Khmer Rouge was to remove titles of elders and replace them with "comrade" or "buddy." After getting to know the boy more, Keem called him Ming in Chinese and did not want him to continue calling the Lais "buddy," assigning him the role of older brother and adoptive son, to which Ming agrees "without a second thought."⁸⁰ In this instance, we see Keem's refusal of the Khmer Rouge's policy by keeping intact family titles and the designation of a Chinese name to Chi Minh. We can see this act of Ming becoming the adoptive son and fulfilling a shared role of male authority in the family as a form of negotiating the terror of erasure.

The writing in the book and its memory work then recall the terror and reveals how these stories take on the dimensions of horror. The terror used to produce or reproduce the racial category is relived as horror. The sense of horror prompts Ung-Lai's ironic plays on the meanings of freedom. She was subjected to terror under the Khmer Rouge, which in recall becomes an enveloping sense of horror. She constructs her mother's death as a means to escape. As Wong retells the story of Keem running away, "Moy felt as if she wanted to shout out her mother's pain. She remembered only too well why her mother had run away from home. But Moy didn't call it home. She called it a hell cell, a freedom cage."⁸¹ Ung-Lai makes apparent the cyclical experiences of trauma and violence displaced unto Keem from her abusive mother while living in China to the experiences of suffering in Cambodia. Moy notes that it is not until Ma's death that she is ultimately free from the caging violence. Ung-Lai writes in italics: "*A bird was*

⁷⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁸¹ Ibid., 55.

flying toward it. Ma is free now—free from all the injustice her own mother did to her, free from what the Cambodian people did to her, free from all the suffering, pain, and tears. She is more beautiful than the orange sun and freer than that bird.”⁸² It is not until the mother’s life ends that she is able to experience freedom. Death then becomes the resolution where Keem’s only escape is to die in order to be free from the horror as remembered terror. Ung-Lai is calling attention to the irony of freedom and what it means to be free when Cambodians and Chinese Cambodians were subjected to conditions of violence. Even for those who have survived, their memories and stories may still not be considered free. In the Author’s Note, written as a letter to the reader, Ung-Lai writes,

My mother’s and grandpa’s spirits were not happy their story was being treated as a moneymaker and without any respect for them. I think my mother’s and grandpa’s spirits wanted me to wait until I could read an understand properly and correct all the mistakes...It was not how well or how much of the story I told that was important; it was when I had had enough, and I needed to rest, breath, live, breathe, and relive again.⁸³

Ung-Lai is therefore referring to how the memories of such experience also serve as freedom but also a sense of entrapment by the return of the historical violences and trauma that live within her. The memory and lived experience of ethnic Chinese who lived in Cambodia is often subsumed under a general understanding of the Cambodian experience. Ung-Lai’s fictional autobiography serves to disrupt racial categorization of what it means to be Chinese and/or Cambodian by the horror in recalling acts of terror in the erasure of family, physical extermination, and other forms of discrimination, that reproduce racial categorization.

⁸² Ibid., 123.

⁸³ Ibid., 140.

Chapter Two

Memoir as Haunted Writing in Loung Ung's *Lulu in the Sky: A Daughter of Cambodia*

Finds Love, Healing, and Double Happiness

If Ung-Lai's *The Freedom...Cage* demonstrates the horror of racial classification, then I argue that Loung Ung's work *Lulu in the Sky: A Daughter of Cambodia Finds Love, Healing, and Double Happiness* demonstrates, through an analysis of her relationships, writing as an apparitional haunting that may undo U.S. racial categorizations in her own memory work. The memoir indicates the writing process as the very site of haunting itself, a haunted writing. Sociologist Avery Gordon explains haunting to be a disturbance and a "frightening experience" distinct from trauma.⁸⁴ As Ung attempts to reconcile her past through engaging in writing and its potentiality, she also encounters failures in resolving these hauntings. Ung's memoir questions notions of ethnic authenticity and community memory by tracing Lulu/Ung's young adult life in the U.S. as part of the 1.5 generation while negotiating between her previous life in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. Proclaimed as "part memoir and part creative non-fiction," Ung tells her story from a first person narrator, Lulu, who is attempting to establish her new life in the U.S.⁸⁵ Lulu unveils her battle with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder but at the same time attempts to find a space to heal and balance her relationships with others.

It is important to cross-examine Lulu's relationship with both Charles and Mark because it uncovers stereotypical assumptions and representations of the U.S. as benevolent savior toward refugees. Charles's statement on immigrants' accented English as unintelligent and within the same scene assumes that the U.S. government would save its citizens if they come across trouble

⁸⁴ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

⁸⁵ Loung Ung, *Lulu in the Sky: A Daughter of Cambodia finds Love, Healing and Double Happiness* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), xi.

overseas reflects similar assumptions towards refugees and political problems in what Charles deems “third world countries.” Lulu’s own realization prior to breaking up with Charles concludes with: “I understood now that with Charles, I was asking for someone to rescue me, to tell me how to live my life...I wanted to live free, to be independent, to answer no one.”⁸⁶ Charles’s characterization parallels Yen Le Espiritu’s media analysis of news reporters portraying U.S. military as “valiant rescuers” after the fall of Saigon.⁸⁷ Espiritu discusses memory surrounding the Vietnam War, the Vietnam Syndrome, and the contradictory stories surrounding Vietnamese as anti-communist model minorities. Through an analysis of media, Espiritu shows how the U.S. imaginary of its involvement in the war has shifted its memory from an unsuccessful, unpopular war to a heroic, benevolent rescuer. Lulu distinctively notes wanting freedom but without being seen as a victim needing to be saved.

However, her next relationship with Mark is no different from the relationship with Charles. For instance, when the two are having dinner, he remarks, “You’re half Chinese. Doesn’t that mean you automatically know how to use chopsticks?” This remark is met with Lulu’s sarcastic claim: “I know how to shoot an AK-47.”⁸⁸ Mark puts himself in the position of what indigenous scholar Scott Lyons would deem as “culture cop”—giving himself, whether individual, social group, or a social institution, the power to authenticate ethnic identity.⁸⁹ Mark is commenting on her ethnic Chinese identity through the use of chopsticks and disregarding her Cambodian culture. At the same time, Lulu’s remark can also be seen as her making a spectacle of her experience living under the Khmer Rouge. Rather than address his question directly, Lulu

⁸⁶ Ung, *Lulu in the Sky*, 93.

⁸⁷ Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the ‘Fall of Saigon’,” *American Quarterly*, The American Studies Association, 2006: 338.

⁸⁸ Ung, *Lulu in the Sky*, 81.

⁸⁹ Scott R. Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1-189.

ignores this comment on her ethnic identity and challenges Mark's power to authenticate her identity by offering a different marker, one marked with war. Mark's interest in Cambodia is often contrasted with Ung's struggle to reconcile her own experiences in Cambodia. Though Lulu attempts to settle with her past through the engagement of writing, she also encounters failure as her haunting cannot fully be captured or resolved.

Not only is the relationship between Mark and Lulu explored throughout the memoir, but Ung discloses her difficulties in articulating her experiences and traumas. Ung writes:

...maybe I was just vengeful, wanting the chance to come back as a ghost so I could haunt all those who had wronged me in some way. But mostly, I did not speak these thoughts to anyone. I held them in my body until the feelings built up and formed knots in my stomach and shoulder muscles, and pains in my head.⁹⁰

The passage shows Ung's difficulties in holding these feelings and thoughts while balancing the daily tasks and relationships. Although this depiction of one story is not the same for all Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian refugees, it points us toward the issue of how one heals. Ung discloses writing to be her own form of healing in addition to admitting that she "had begun the manuscript in anger, an act of revenge against Pol Pot and his soldiers, and ended up writing not a historical book on Cambodia but a memoir of my life and family...I wanted readers to be there, to feel my raw anger, my searing pain as a child."⁹¹ The writing process then becomes an alternate way to present her past experience without having to speak these historical truths. Ung notes she is not attempting to write a history, it is not the facts that are relevant, rather her lived experience and the relationship she is attempting to forge with her readers. Thus her story and articulation of her family's lived experienced cannot be told by others. This is evident during her own internal conflict in which she questions a knowledgeable speaker about the role of the U.S in Cambodia. She says of the speaker, "I wanted him to tell Cambodia's stories not as a scholar

⁹⁰ Ung, *Lulu in the Sky*, 122.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

or an intellectual, but as a father, brother, and son. I wanted him to put a human face on the war and bear witness to our lives. I wanted him to speak for me. But he was a scholar not a rescuer.”⁹² Thus Lulu admits the relevancy of her voice beginning to return while living in the U.S. and the significance of writing her own history.⁹³

Though Ung’s memory may be exemplary of one of many community memories, Ung’s first memoir *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* has previously been criticized for her ethnoracialized characterizations of Cambodians and reiteration of middle-class Chinese Cambodian background.⁹⁴ This contestation by organizations such as the Khmer Institute demonstrates the significance of authenticity as tied to a community’s memory. As Ung’s three memoirs collectively possess the phrase “A Daughter of Cambodia” in each of the descriptions, despite this claim whether from herself or even her publishing company it is important to note that memoirs such as Ung’s are important because they arguably serves as memories and lived experiences that counter the U.S.’s and Cambodia’s commemoration of the Cambodian genocide. In the prologue to *Lulu in the Sky*, Ung addresses her Cambodian and Chinese heritage in the exchange between herself and her grandmother. Additionally, Ung acknowledges the role of China whereby her brother Kim notes: “I heard that when the Angkar formed armies, there wasn’t enough money to buy guns and supplies for the soldiers. The Angkar had to borrow money from China to buy guns and weapons. Now it has to pay China back.”⁹⁵ This illustrates Ung’s understanding of the complex nation state relationships in the Khmer Rouge takeover. This is not the only time Ung mentions the role of China, as her partner

⁹² Ibid., 74.

⁹³ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁴ Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice*, 143.

⁹⁵ Ung, *Lulu in the Sky*, 19.

Mark attempts to suggest that Lulu talk to a professional about her struggles, Ung can only think of the ironic and cyclical twist of her family's migration.

I thought about how my grandparents packed up my five-year-old mother and left China to escape the emerging war there sixty-six years ago. Little did they know that they would land in Cambodia, and that years later, they would all be trapped in Cambodia's own revolution [...] when they [Khmer Rouge] took power in Cambodia, they would implement the same tactics used in China's failed Great Leap Forward program, which was blamed for thirty-eight million Chinese deaths.⁹⁶

Though Ung does address the role of China in the Khmer Rouge's takeover she also addresses her struggles living in the U.S. Ung does not linger on ethnic and racial labels of authenticity but rather how experiences of the Cambodian genocide impact the lives of Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian Americans.

As Ung becomes deeply entrenched with her work and activism on landmines and through research for the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA), she uncovers the haunting of her own past. She tacks up a photo of Chan Kim Srung, a prisoner who lost her life in Tuol Sleng, on her wall representative of a haunting that takes place even while engaging in activism. The photo is described thus: "Her hair was disheveled, cut short just about the nape of her neck. She wore the regime's black pajama shirt. She stared into the camera, wearing an expression of disorientation, confusion, and fear."⁹⁷ Ung interprets the woman's expression as having experienced trauma. Ung continues to ask not just Chan Kim Srung's photos, but other photos she hangs up of Khmer Rouge survivors, "*What do you want to say?*"⁹⁸ All the while as Ung researches on Cambodia's history she is also transporting herself into these stories. "Their dead eyes stared at me in fear and silence, all of them in black pajama shirts. I looked at them as I wrote; their stories lifted off the pages and came to life. I turned to the photos strewn across the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 155.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 205.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 205.

floor. And slowly, the floor seemed to cave into itself creating a big sinkhole in the middle of the room.”⁹⁹

Avery Gordon uses the term haunting and rememory as epistemological and methodological approaches. The haunting raises an apparition that makes the narrative or memory within that temporal moment. Narratives told by Cambodian refugees recreate their lived experiences as hauntings. This moment of sharing or coming across such lived experiences is the moment of the haunting, the moment the apparitional appears. This distinct narrative is a haunting that will always be there in memory for the individual. Gestural cues and facial expressions are telling of the accounts, as evidenced in Chan Kim Srung’s photo. The moment of the haunting points us toward something else that goes beyond the story. The haunting and the presence of the spectral inform us that the issues of the past have not gone away nor have they dissipated. This is evident through survivors and the embodiment of the stories where the awakening of the spectral figure becomes a lived experience for some. The physicality and incarnation of the Cambodian genocide can be also be an experience of reliving through recurring night terrors, hyper responsiveness, and suppression of memory. Though Ung demonstrates her push toward activism while working with the VVAF, she is unable to detach herself from these hauntings of the Cambodian genocide.

Ung uses these notions of hauntings and her activity in the VVAF to stress the significance of never remaining silent. Ung stresses the impact of the war and although she feels unable to verbally articulate her experiences, she uses writing to let her emotions speak. This then stresses the significance of writing, not just as a method of healing but as a way to resist silence. “My words were written in the scrawl of a young girl’s hand. But when my emotions were fully charged, I printed them in black blocky letters of different sizes and shapes. The fonts

⁹⁹ Ibid., 205.

and letters varied as I wrote about deaths, murders and suicides. My body tensed and pulsed until the stories were captured on paper. Only then was I able to let go.”¹⁰⁰ Ung’s writing process is emotionally intense as depicted by her body’s reaction to writing her stories or even of other’s stories on paper. The written words she describes is apparitional, depicting perhaps oral articulation in a written articulation to capture these experiences are differently inhabited in her body. Speaking, or oral articulation, is a struggle and she is unable to do it because it represents the corporeal, all the pain she feels which inhabit or still relate to the body. Directly speaking about her experience has been imminent struggle, so instead she resorts to writing which allows her some distance to articulate her experience. Ung’s words are described as “black blocky letters” and how her emotions are “fully charged” demonstrate the words as an apparitional haunting, one that is noncorporeal but still allows her a sense of release or to “let go.” In Ung’s own memory, she demonstrates writing as a healing process from previous experiences, reveals the haunting of the genocide, and unveils the complications of reproducing ethnic and racial categorizations. Ung’s writing process challenges Charles and Mark’s racial imagining in the U.S. through her agency to articulate her own story. Not only does her writing allow for an articulation but it also allows for her own hauntings to be made present.

As Ung utilizes writing as a way of dealing with her hauntings she also attempts to reconcile her past by visiting Cambodia. The embodiment of these lived experiences becomes part of her healing process. Lulu dreams of inhabiting the body of her dead mother and experiencing her struggles under the pressures of soldiers working in the rice fields. Lulu discloses that she had never forgiven her mother for forcing her children to leave and for not surviving. It is only when Ung returns to the family’s Cambodian homeland that she is able to dream of herself as her actual mother. Only through this re-enactment can Ung apologize to her

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 204.

mother and also forgive her young self.¹⁰¹ Through the scene of the dream, Lulu can only forgive herself through the rearticulation of her mother's experience. In addition, only after this dream does Ung feel it necessary to articulate the experiences she had been bottling up to Mark and to continue with her manuscript. Ung feels a connection and desire to resolve her past and her mother's death within the physical space of Cambodia. This scene of reconciliation through the dream unearths a disturbance and demonstrates writing, as a form, is inadequate in fully dealing with Ung's horror and hauntings. Writing itself is a part of haunting but something more is to be said about the corporeal engagement through the body and space of Cambodia. The haunted writing pushes Ung to make an extralinguistic effort, such as seen through Ung putting herself in place of her mother to embody such experience. We could say that Ung herself haunts the space occupied by her mother, or alternatively that Ung allows her mother to become apparitional through Ung's body. Either way Ung places herself in an intergenerational engagement, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 286.

Chapter Three

Embodiment of Silences as Space of Intergenerational Engagement in Jolie Chea's "Refugee Acts: Articulating Silences Through Critical Remembering and Re-Membering"

Jolie Chea's "Refugee Acts: Articulating Silences Through Critical Remembering and Re-Membering," published in the *Amerasia Journal* (2009) takes the form of a three act play rather than a memoir. Chea presents a space of potentiality more so than Ung and Ung-Lai when considering forms. Ung's and Ung-Lai's use of the memoir as their chosen form raises a specter yet these memoirs do not have a way of dealing with the gaps in their memory. Though Ung's *Lulu in the Sky* puts herself in her mother's place hence embodying the mother's ghostly presence, it comes in the form of a dream. Chea's performance is a space of haunting but is also a corporeal performance where history as haunting inhabits the physical body. Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns emphasizes the performing body as engaging in multiple temporalities of the past and present.¹⁰² Chea makes a claim on space through bodily engagement with the wounds of the past or a returning of the past. This very act of physical performance opens up a space of engagement across generations where Jolie's present experience of racism come into (sometimes silent) dialogue with her grandmother's experience of terror. Performance as a form can show how memory does not singularly fit within the literary genre of memoir or bildungsroman. Chea's work is fragmented and interspersed with historical facts, photographs, a letter and narratives demonstrating the fragmentation and dislocation of refugees as subject. This dislocation and fragmentation disrupt notions of racial and ethnic categories and classification because they open up a space of potentiality and the ability to construct memory rather than

¹⁰² Burns, *Puro Arte*, 13.

recasting narratives of normative healing conforming to hegemonic national, racial, and ethnic imaginings.

Chea's title "Refugee Acts" plays on Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* foregrounding each act as actions and situating the performing body as embodying and engaging with the past. "Refugee Acts" is comprised of pieces of Chea's life with her family, the memory and death of her grandmother, a taped interview with a Cambodian genocide survivor, a letter to a friend who is a military serviceman, and the historical construction of Cambodians as refugees. Through performance, Chea is re-centering the refugee experience through memory and de-centering imperial and colonial knowledges. The play on words in the subtitle remembering and re-remembering indicates a rupture in the process behind remembering for Cambodian and Chinese Cambodians in attempts to piece together their lived experiences and histories. Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* best demonstrates why some events are commemorated and remembered where as others are forgotten and become a part of amnesia.¹⁰³ Thus Chea is proactively committed to presenting these different fragmented memories within this singular piece showing the elliptical spaces where things have been forgotten. She does this not just as author and researcher but she does so with agency as an actor, so that her acting becomes a form of activism. Chea's play also allows us the reader and audience possibilities to re-enact and to re-create, so as to invite us to be actors in this play and allowing us agency into the realm of historical recovery through memory work.

Chea does not focus on elements of her racial or ethnic identity but how these stories are subsumed under Cambodian American narratives. Although she disperses hints of Teochew and Chinese traditions as valuable, Chea's primarily seeks to articulate and embody the memories of her grandmother's lived experiences. I argue that Chea's spaces of silences allow for

¹⁰³ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

intergenerational healing and disrupt notions of U.S. national narratives, histories, and categorizations. By spaces of silences, I am referring to narratives that do not get told whether due to silence or selective silence in addition to the fragmentations and gaps in memory. Chea disrupts racial categorizations through the very act of remembering and assembling a new kind of collective memory and history of Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian Americans.

Before delving into intergenerational spaces not of normative healing but of engagement, it is important to consider that healing and providing “healing spaces” do play a role toward supporting its community members. Normative healing consists of articulating or opening up a dialogue with an individual to uncover trauma(s). Sociologist, Sucheng Chan in *Survivors* talks about the healing process in terms of narratives and story telling. By allowing survivors to talk about their experiences it allows for a transformative process for individuals. Being able to share stories amongst survivors who faced the same experiences allows them to gain strength or sense of agency over the past. In addition, Religious Studies and Asian American Studies scholar Jonathan H.X. Lee places accountability onto the second generation, arguing that once identity has been affirmed then begins the process of historical recovery and the process of healing.¹⁰⁴ Historical recovery may come in a variety of forms such as creatively expressing works in the form of art and literary works. The process of historical recovery and healing through narratives may be especially transformative in relation to the second generation who feel disconnected from the experiences of the first and 1.5 generation. It is with time, children learn these narratives and begin to re-ascribe and reconstruct their identities and negotiate between multiple cultures and the lived experiences of the former generation. On the other hand, there are also refugees who may not be as willingly open to talk about these past experiences because these are sensitive

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan H.X. Lee, “Cambodian American Ethics of Identity Formation,” *Cambodian American Experiences: Histories, Communities, Cultures and Identities*, ed. Jonathan H.X. Lee (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2010), 352.

issues and/or proper types of Western healing services may be unavailable to them. I focus on the fragmentation and silences occurring in Chea's play with the potentialities of intergenerational spaces of engagement.

The theme I aim to focus on is intergenerational engagement spaces and how they disrupt normative notions of healing. In the third scene, Chea shares in her letter to Mike and the readers her healing space as one of solitude and self-reflection. The notion of psychological and physiological healing has been a complicated process for the Cambodian community. Western notions of "healing" often involve opening up a dialogue to create resolution for the individual and/or parties involved. For example, in Eunice Wong, J. David Kinzie, and J. Mark Kinzie's study "Stress, Refugees, and Trauma" a sample of 339 Cambodian refugees from Long Beach who met criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or alcohol use disorder, found that a majority sought mental health care demonstrating a high rate of mental health service utilization.¹⁰⁵ The study also reveals that one-third of the sample utilized alternative providers such as "monk or religious person, fortune teller, traditional Asian doctor, and Kruu Khmer or traditional Cambodian healer."¹⁰⁶ As demonstrated by the study, Cambodian Americans have access to mental health facilities; however, the problem is that there continues to be cultural barriers such as communication where there seems to be a lack of practitioners that speak and write Khmer to better assist patients. It is also important to note that this Western healing system does not necessarily sync with the entire Cambodian American community where some utilize Kruu Khmer or traditional healers. Chea says in her letter to Mike, "Healing spaces. You said that in there, your spaces are with your comrades...Me? Sometimes I just...leave. Run

¹⁰⁵ Eunice Wong, J. David Kinzie, and J. Mark Kinzie, "Stress, Trauma, and Refugees," *Asian American Psychology: Current Perspectives*, ed. Nita Tewari and Alvin N. Alvarez (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 441-462.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 455.

away. Just go somewhere and be alone.”¹⁰⁷ Chea’s space for solitude conveys that healing does not necessarily always mean seeking mental health practitioners. Healing raises the question of spaces of silences and articulating silences. American Indian Studies scholar Dian Million defines normative healing as, “associated in a trauma economy as the afterward, as the culmination or satisfactory resolution of illness or for the Indigenous, a promised safety and revitalization from prior colonial violence.”¹⁰⁸ Million’s notions on healing is applicable to Cambodian American memory work as we can see that healing is characterized as the “after effect” of traumas accumulated from migration and genocide. Refugees are often characterized as needing assistance for mental health issues and PTSD. From Chea’s work we can see that healing trauma is not necessarily the penultimate answer because of trauma’s potential in opening up of engagement spaces across generations. Within the four scenes, the grandmother’s unhealed body opens up an intergenerational space that engages Chea. Million states that these healing projects known as “Indigenous healing are informed amid the political, social environments, ‘moments’ that accompany neoliberalism.”¹⁰⁹ Healing can be seen as part of a neoliberal project making it important to note that there needs to be a reconsideration of how we view healing, rather than an “after effect” or a conclusive remedy, we may need to interrogate healing and explore alternative modes of engagement. For instance as mentioned earlier for Cambodian Americans seeking alternative providers such as Kruu Khmer, traditional healers, it could serve as a possibility to address institutional problems such as language barriers.

This intergenerational space of engagement does not only refer to a physical or physiological state, healing also takes place in the form of decolonization or working toward

¹⁰⁷ Jolie Chea, “Refugee Acts: Articulating Silences Through Critical Remembering and Re-Membering,” *Amerasia Journal: Where Women Tell Stories*, vol. 35 no.1 (2009), 33.

¹⁰⁸ Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2013), 22.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

decolonization. Professor of Indigenous Education, Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that imperialism and colonialism are still prevalent in our discourse thus it is important to examine “lived experiences of imperialism” and promote decolonization.¹¹⁰ Smith reviews the different forms of imperialism and denounces notions of post-colonialism. Imperialism includes impacts such as people categorized, classified, and hierarchically grouped, and raced. Therefore Smith poses the importance for indigenous peoples to provide their accounts and to restore or heal through different systems of knowledge. Chea uses Smith’s work to denote that her rearticulation of silence is one portion of an alternative form of knowledge production rather than normatively heal. The silences in “Refugee Acts” hold potentiality, a state before words and their meanings emerge, before the recasting of trauma in narratives that facilitate normative healing. Once the trauma is open, then one can make and shift connections to imperialism or race. Chea’s own rearticulation of silence may extend Cathy Schlund-Vials’ argument that cultural productions are acts of resistance. For Cambodian refugees, certain experiences and traumas are not openly articulated, thus art and/or creativity may be a way for Cambodians to explore these memories and experiences within a differently type of space. Through this engagement, it serves to tell the stories and lived realities of Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian refugees but also serves to counter U.S. narrative of the Cambodian genocide and the country’s involvement in the Cold War and Vietnam War. Chea is pointing out to the audience important questions about what consequences of these histories for the community and larger audience.

This process when redefined as engagement with the struggles of Chinese Cambodians and Cambodians who were uprooted from their homes and cultures, is significant when we are thinking intergenerationally across the first, 1.5 and second generations. Intergenerational spaces

¹¹⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “Imperialism, History, Writing, and Theory,” *Postcolonialism: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 94.

of engagement is important to consider as a site to re-center refugee experiences. Espiritu addresses the significance of re-centering refugee experiences as a form of critical refugee studies. Rather than subjecting refugees as abject figures or promoting assimilationist narratives of success there needs to be a strong consideration of heterogeneity.¹¹¹ By taking into consideration of re-centering refugee experiences, intergenerational spaces must include the realization that first generation refugees may choose not to share these narratives to their children. As Chea shares, “This witnessing of my grandmother’s re-enactment of the war would become especially profound because she was particularly selective about who she shared this side of her with.”¹¹² This selective silence complicates understandings of healing and is noted when Chea poses the question, “How would I begin to make sense of the memories and experiences she was trying to communicate?”¹¹³ Chea attempts to understand what her grandmother is embodying, as her grandmother experiences physical, mental, and emotional challenges that are then reverberated and displaced unto a young Chea. The lack of sharing narratives or passing on stories may be intentional in shielding second generation children from the trauma the first generation experienced. Though second generation children did not have to endure the same experiences of their parents they become holders and carry the weight of responsibility of these narratives. In one scene, we see Chea yearning for a connection with her grandmother, a desired engagement between the two generations. As the two are lying down together, Chea reveals:

She’d start crying, and then she would lift up her shirt and show me the scar where the mortar hit her because her son was walking only a few yards ahead of her when he was killed, but I’m too scared to fucking look so I just curl up tight against her and squeeze my eyes shut. How many times has she tried to show me that damn scar and I still can’t look at it, but for some reason, I wanna touch it.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Yen Le Espiritu, “Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in US Scholarship,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (2006): 410-433.

¹¹² Chea, “Refugee Acts,” 24.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

The notion of wanting to touch her grandmother's scar yet also being repulsed by it illustrates Chea's desire for connection and engagement with the lived experiences of her family while also fearing it. Wanting to touch the scar, can equate to wanting to open up a connection between these generations via the wound. This implies the significance of future generations attempting to heal and being held responsible for such stories. However it is important to then take note, what are the implications of the stories that do not get told? Does healing still take place? What occurs when stories are told to the younger generation of children at a later stage in life? These questions are important because it highlights the significance of silences and how they fit within this alternative notion of engagement. Chea discusses her role as an actor engaging in activism when she admits her own refusal to stay silent.¹¹⁵ Chea says, "In the end, we must be tellers of our own stories. If this will not be allowed, then silence is honorable and silence is powerful—because silence speaks loudly through the very presence of our very bodies."¹¹⁶ Thus, the process of articulating silences for Chea is to be active or take some form of action. Chea offers a space of potentiality for engagement with the racism that she deals with and for what her grandmother experienced in the past and in the U.S. The performance aspect indicates a connection to the past as well as its hauntings. As Cambodian and Chinese Cambodian families share their stories to the second generation it may begin a step toward the process of healing for the first and 1.5 generations. However the silences, gaps, and fragments that jar and refuse normative healing can hold a potential for engagement across the generations and thus bring into view narratives of empire, and normative practices of healing that rely on hegemonic imaginings of nation, race, and ethnicity. In other words, bodily performances of silences allow them to occupy physical spaces that bring together Burns' multiple temporalities.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 42.

It is this coming together of the past and present racial terror that generations can engage with one another.

Conclusion

My research serves to shed light on the historical violence to which Chinese Cambodian Americans were subjected. By subjection, I mean the production and reproduction of the ethnic category of Chinese/Cambodian when racial terror was used in Cambodia to reify the category of Chinese. I do not aim to focus on ethnic identity as a given problem but rather to interrogate it through the memory work of Ung-Lai, Ung, and Chea's. The narratives, in the form of memoirs and performance by those who have survived the Cambodian genocide reveal the ongoing hauntings not just in their own memory but as it is passed on to future generations. The memoirs themselves capture a disturbance by way of recalled terror in the form of horror, or a haunting, thereby interrogating the category of Chinese and of Chinese Cambodian. These disturbances and hauntings reveal the historical violences at play within present racial and ethnic labeling of Cambodians in the U.S. The Chinese that had been subsumed under the Cambodian then becomes a source of the latter's haunting. Through my work, I demonstrate the heterogeneity of Chinese and Cambodian diasporas and the struggles they have faced through forced migration and living within the U.S. Thus by utilizing and framing a haunting of Chinese Cambodian American, it serves to make present dichotomous narratives and the violence stemming from categories of Chineseness and Cambodianness. The memoirs may be problematic but they convey a form of haunting upon the recall of these memories, or horrors. As shown in *The Freedom...Cage*, Ung-Lai's text conveys how terror produced the racial category of Chinese and the violence instilled in such classification. Not only this, but the memoir indicates horror in terror's recall as a form of disturbance. Next, Ung's *Lulu in the Sky* uncovers writing as apparitional, a space where Lulu can return to what happened but away from corporeal pain. The

horror from terror is linked to the haunting. Though the writing itself is a form of haunting, it cannot fully reconcile Lulu's past where she must engage in the physical space of Cambodia and the corporeal through her mother's body. Lastly, Chea shows spaces of silence as spaces of intergenerational engagement via performance of the fragments and gaps in "Refugee Acts" bringing the past into the present and present concerns into the spaces of the past's haunting. These three literary works do not attempt to reach for a reconciliation with the past but rather opens up ways to engage with history. The residual of being reified as Chinese in Cambodia, comes back to haunt the survivors, their descendants and the ethnic category of Cambodian itself—revealing it to have always been produced by racial terror.

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