

New Forms of Genocidal Documentaries: The Duel and the Quiet Interview

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Abstract: This essay aims, first, to put forth two new forms of genocidal documentaries: The Duel and the Quiet Interview (my terms). These forms emerged from two of the major non-Western catastrophes of twentieth-century Communism – the Cambodian autogenocide and the Chinese Maoist Revolution, respectively. In both the Duel and the Quiet Interview, the directors search for historical truth, which, in both societies, has been silenced, taboo-ized and censored for circa 40 years. Second, despite the obvious differences between their historical-traumatic-cultural contexts, and their addressees, I contend that both forms shed light on the failure of post-Holocaust Western paradigmatic literature – initiated most prominently by Felman and Laub (1992), Hilberg (1993), LaCapra (2001), Felman (2002) and Wieviorka (2006) – to recognize these non-Western catastrophes as an immanent part of the Age of Testimony. I further contend that both forms expand the ethical boundaries of trauma, trauma cinema studies and related fields of research. Finally, dealing with collaboration as an undertheorized subject position in the West, this essay calls for the constitution of collaboration studies alongside perpetrator studies.

Keywords: genocidal documentaries, the Duel, the Quiet Interview, post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian cinema, post-Cultural Revolution Chinese cinema, collaboration studies

Introduction

This essay aims, first, to put forth two new forms of genocidal documentaries: The Duel and the Quiet Interview (my terms). These forms emanated from two of the major non-Western catastrophes of twentieth-century Communism – the Cambodian autogenocide and the Chinese Maoist Revolution, respectively. In both the Duel and the Quiet Interview, the directors search for historical truth, which, in both societies, has been silenced, taboo-ized,

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and censored for circa forty years.¹ Second, despite the obvious differences between their historical-traumatic-cultural contexts, and their addressees, I contend that both forms shed light on the failure of post-Holocaust Western paradigmatic literature — initiated most prominently by Felman and Laub,² Hilberg,³ LaCapra,⁴ Felman,⁵ Wiewiorka,⁶ and Hartman⁷ — to recognize these non-Western catastrophes as an immanent part of the Age of Testimony.

I further contend that both forms expand the ethical boundaries of trauma, trauma-cinema studies, and related fields of research. Finally, dealing with collaboration as a subject position hardly recognized in the West, this essay calls for constitution of collaboration studies alongside perpetrator studies.

Moreover, the ethics of both forms are novel in their raising the issue of collaboration. Being conspicuously prevalent in the context of Communist regimes, as well as repressed by these regimes and cultures despite its major presence in both societies' traumatic histories, collaboration as a subject position in and of itself remains relatively undertheorized in post-Holocaust (and post-colonial) Western as well

- 1 A thorough discussion of the cultures of silence, taboo, and impunity in both contexts is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice here to say that in the Cambodian context, the first history book on the period meant to be studied in schools and universities – *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975–1979)* – was written only in 2007, breaking thirty-two years of taboo in the Cambodian historiography and education curriculum. See Kamboly Dy, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975–1979)* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, 2007). The crimes of sexual violence committed during the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime, for example, were legally recognized as crimes against humanity only in 2016, ten years after the ECCC (the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, see below) began its work; and even then, as both ECCC reports and documentary films like Lov Sophea's *Breaking the Silence – Sexual Violence under the Khmer Rouge* (2017) tell us, only the marital rapes committed during KR forced marriages are dealt with, and not those committed in detention centres and work camps. On intergenerational silence in Cambodian cinema and television see, e.g., Raya Morag, 'Gendered Genocide: New Cambodian Cinema and the Case of Forced Marriage and Rape', *Camera Obscura*, 35 (2020), 76–107.
- 2 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).
- 3 Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).
- 4 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
- 5 Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 6 Annette Wiewiorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. by J. Stark (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).
- 7 Geoffrey Hartman, 'The Humanities of Testimony: An Introduction', *Poetics Today*, 27 (2006), 249–60.

as non-Western scholarship.⁸ Thus, while there is important work in trauma studies, genocide studies, and related fields of research on the subject position of collaboration (and/or bystanding), this does not yet constitute a field of collaborator studies.

The first part of this essay will briefly introduce the paradigmatic form constituted by the New Wave of post-Khmer Rouge (KR) cinema: interviewing the perpetrator, staged as a confrontation, a duel, between the First-Generation director-survivor and the perpetrator. This will serve as a background for analysing Cambodian director and First-Generation survivor Roshane Saidnattar's *Survive: In the Heart of Khmer Rouge Madness*⁹ as a unique case of duelling. Analysing this documentary form shows that, similar to other Cambodian duel documentaries,¹⁰ confronting the high-ranking perpetrator (as well as the spectators) in *Survive* constitutes an ethics of un-forgiveness and non-reconciliation.¹¹ Subsequently, an analysis of second-generation French-Cambodian director Neary Adeline Hay's non-fiction film *Angkar* will focus on the repressed and under-theorized issue of collaboration.¹²

8 See Raya Morag, 'Post-Cultural Revolution Chinese Cinema of Betrayal: The Figure of the Collaborator and the Doubling Paradigm', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 34 (2020), 556–76.

9 *Survive: In the Heart of Khmer Rouge Madness* (L'important c'est de rester vivant), dir. by Roshane Saidnattar (Morgane Production, 2009).

10 This corpus includes films such as *Enemies of the People: A Personal Journey into the Heart of the Killing Fields*, dir. by Thet Sambath and Rob Lemkin (Old Street Films, 2009); *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Death Machine* (*S-21, la machine de mort Khmère rouge*), dir. by Rithy Panh (Arte France Cinéma, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée [CNC], and Česká Televize, 2003); *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell*, dir. by Rithy Panh (Agence Nationale de Gestion des Oeuvres Audiovisuelles (ANGO), Bophana Production, and Catherine Dussart Productions [CDP], 2011); *Red Wedding*, dir. by Lida Chan and Guillaume Suon (Bophana Production and Tipasa Productions, 2012); and *About My Father*, dir. by Guillaume Suon (Bophana Productions, 2010). The scholarship on Cambodian cinema is growing rapidly. Some recent articles relate to the encounter between perpetrators and survivors, but none of them analyse this encounter as a unique phenomenon nor relate to the entire corpus of duels. See, e.g., Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, 'The Perpetrator's mise-en-scène: Language, Body, and Memory in the Cambodian Genocide', *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, 2.1 (2018), 65–94; Didem Alkan, 'Refiguring the Perpetrator in Rithy Panh's Documentary Films: *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* and *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell*', *Continuum*, 34.2 (2020), 271–85. See also Leslie Barnes and Joseph Mai, eds., *The Cinema of Rithy Panh: Everything Has a Soul*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021).

11 See Raya Morag, *Perpetrator Cinema: Confronting Genocide in Cambodian Documentary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); and Raya Morag 'Big Perpetrator Cambodian Cinema, the Documentary Duel, and Moral Resentment', *Screen*, 62 (2021), 37–58.

12 *Angkar*, dir. by Neary Adeline Hay (The Cup of Tea Production, 2018).

The second part of the essay will analyse Chinese-French director Wang Bing's Quiet Interview in *Dead Souls*.¹³ This two-part testimonial film mainly features interviews with survivors of the re-education-through-labour-[death]-camp of Jiabiangou, commonly regarded as a horrific symbol of Maoism. My analysis will outline the ethics of The Quiet Interview as constituting an act of re-subjectivization. Subsequently, I will discuss Wang Bing's testimony-based fiction film *Le Fossé* (*The Ditch*).¹⁴ As I will show, *Le Fossé* as well as *Angkar*, can be seen as examples of how, notwithstanding the low number of documentaries engaging with collaborators, cinema can pave the way for the societal recognition of collaboration. In the conclusion I will reflect on how the study of these particular cinematic forms can contribute to bringing the topic of collaboration into the fields of trauma studies, documentary cinema studies, as well as perpetrator studies.

The Documentary Duel

The New post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian documentary cinema (1990s–2020s) arose from the post-autogenocide era¹⁵ (1975–1979). As I have contended in other forums,¹⁶ it is the autogenocide, during which the KR murdered almost two million of their own people, a quarter of the population at the time, that made the Duel confrontation possible. After the fall of the regime, both high- and low-ranking perpetrators¹⁷

¹³ *Dead Souls* (*Les Âmes mortes*), dir. by Wang Bing (Les Films d'Ici, 2018).

¹⁴ *The Ditch* (*Le Fossé*, also known as *Goodbye Jiabiangou*), dir. by Wang Bing (Wil Productions, Les Films de L'Etranger, Entre Chien et Louup, 2010).

¹⁵ The term 'autogenocide' is widely discussed by Ervin Staub in *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 7, 191. The first to mention this term was probably the historian and philosopher Arnold Toynbee in 1958. My use of the term henceforth is not evaluative. Using it means addressing the *Condition Inhumane* of the extermination of the Other who, pre-Revolution, was the self. In autogenocide, those whom we wish to eliminate are not Others whose strangeness makes us wary, but those we know best: our family members and closest neighbours, as well as those who, like ourselves, belong to the same imagined community. Autogenocide, thus, is an intimate crime, inspired not by estrangement or ignorance, but by the closest possible relations and confidential knowledge. On different conceptions of autogenocide as a useful term see e.g., from Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007) to T.O. Smith 'Cambodia: Paranoia, Xenophobia, Genocide and Auto-Genocide', in *The Routledge History of Genocide*, ed. by Cathie Carmichael and Richard C. Maguire (London: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁶ See Raya Morag, *Perpetrator Cinema*.

¹⁷ Pol Pot, 'Brother Number 1', was the KR leader, general secretary of the party during the Cambodian genocide; Nuon Chea, 'Brother Number 2', was the chief ideologist of the KR, prime minister of Democratic Kampuchea; Ieng Sary, 'Brother Number 3', was the foreign minis-

continued to live their lives alongside their former victims; past intimate violence once again turned into the daily closeness of members of the same imagined community (sharing the same ancestral heritage, origins, ethnicity, language, religious belief, body politic, and fellowship).

The notable difference between the Cambodian autogenocide — meaning that the enemy was not a foreign Other but a member of the same imagined community — and the other major genocidal catastrophes of the twentieth century (from Rwanda and Sierra Leone to former Yugoslavia) reflects on the extraordinariness of this cinema both in regard to the number of films produced and their novel form of addressing the perpetrator. The documentary *Duel* is established here: a new, rare, form of direct confrontational interview between the First- (or Second-) generation survivor and the perpetrator. The uniqueness of this form becomes evident if we recall, for example, that Jewish survivor–Nazi perpetrator direct encounters are unthinkable in post-Holocaust European cinema. In contrast to the Cambodian context, the basic situation could not have been realized: the wide majority of Jewish survivors did not return to their homes in Germany (or other European locations) and the option of confronting the Nazi perpetrators was unimaginable and indescribable.

Undoubtedly, the establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for the Prosecution of Crimes Committed during the Period of Democratic Kampuchea¹⁸ (ECCC,¹⁹ also known as the KR Tribunal) enabled thousands of witnesses (as well as civil parties) to confront the KR high-ranking perpetrators, thus deeply affecting the forty years of taboo-ized public sphere and supporting the only medium that could stage such a confrontation — documentary

ter and deputy prime minister; Khieu Samphan, 'Brother Number 4', was Cambodia's head of state.

18 Democratic Kampuchea was the government founded after KR forces defeated the US-backed Khmer Republic of Lon Nol in 1975. It existed until 1979. See 'Khmer Rouge History', *Cambodia Tribunal Monitor* <<http://www.cambodiatribunal.org/history/cambodian-history/khmer-rouge-history>> [accessed: 18 December 2023]. On the history of the Cambodian genocide see, e.g., David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 4th edn (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2008).

19 The ECCC is a special Cambodian court set up in 2006 pursuant to a 2003 agreement between Cambodia and the United Nations to prosecute only high-level KR leaders of former Democratic Kampuchea. See 'Introduction to the ECCC' <<https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/introduction-eccc>> [accessed 15 June 2023]. The ECCC is the first court trying international mass crimes to provide an opportunity for victims to participate directly in the proceedings as 'civil parties'. See ECCC, 'Who is Eligible to become a Civil Party?' <<https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/victims-support/civil-party-information>> [accessed: 19 December 2023].

cinema.²⁰ It was only when the ECCC began its work in 2006 that testimonies of survivors and perpetrators' accounts entered more forcefully into the public sphere. The detailed voice of the perpetrator is mediated by this unique corpus and is heard against the proceedings of the ECCC.

The most conspicuous characteristic of the direct-encounter-turned-duel is its (explicit or implicit) transformation of power relations, especially in regard to high-ranking perpetrators. Although they do not take full responsibility in any of the documentary perpetrator films, through the duelling they either partially confess to their crimes and/or reveal part of the truth in regard to the KR regime. In addition, these films implicitly stage the question of whether duelling might be a 'civilizing' process for the (high-ranking) perpetrator.²¹

Accusations of dishonesty, historically one of the most frequent grounds for traditional duelling, inform the underlying tension between the survivor-interviewer and the perpetrator-interviewee. The First/Second-Generation survivor is undoubtedly aspiring, after years of effort, to extract the perpetrator's confession. In this corpus, however, as will be described below, it is the survivor's status and courage that, encountering deep interactional obstacles, shape the flow of the confrontation.

I suggest differentiating between two kinds of duels: the first is the duel often exemplified by a long period in which the survivor/interviewer hides his or her traumatic past in order to establish relationships with the (mostly high-ranking) perpetrators (as in *Enemies of the People: A Personal Journey into the Heart of the Killing Fields* [2009]). Thus, it inevitably seeks to engage two different addressees: the perpetrators and the spectators. The spectators, cognizant of the secret identity of the survivor/interviewer, are exposed to an abundance of information (voice-over, archival footage, editing) that stands in harsh contrast to the perpetrator's lies, and denials; their ethical participation in the duelling process is charged with the tension entailed in the concealment and the enormous difficulty faced by the post-traumatic survivor to embrace a 'neutral' position. The second is the duel that confronts the perpetrator with his crimes without hiding the interviewer's identity as survivor (as in Rithy Panh's *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* [2011]).

20 Together with, to a lesser extent, an imaginary staging of this encounter format in fiction cinema.

21 Similar to traditional duels, in which 'the point [...] was more to demonstrate one's status-group membership than to establish dominance over one's opponent.' Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 218.

Here the spectators' participation in the duelling process is charged with the tension built into the prolonged duelling: a fear of defeat.

SURVIVE: IN THE HEART OF KHMER ROUGE MADNESS

Roshane Saidnattar's *Survive: In the Heart of Khmer Rouge Madness* (2009) is an autobiographical film of a second-generation survivor that presents memories of her childhood during the KR regime intermingled with her lengthy interview with Khieu Samphan, 'Brother Number 4', Cambodia's head of state from 1976 until 1979 and one of the most powerful officials in Pol Pot's regime.²² The interview, in which Saidnattar hides her identity as a survivor of the autogenocide and presents herself as a journalist, took place over several days in his house near the Thai frontier, prior to Samphan's incarceration by the ECCC in 2007. Saidnattar, also the scriptwriter, is heard through the voice-over:

It took me years to get this interview. I didn't say that I lived here in the time of Democratic Kampuchea. I simply said I wanted to understand their motivations, their ideals, the reasons for their fight. He said to me, 'I am going to tell you the real story of Cambodia'. Now I had to win his trust.

Samphan did not ask her questions about her past. As the interview unfolds, Saidnattar describes the evacuation of Phnom Penh, the whereabouts of her family, the forced separation from her father, and later, at the age of seven, from her mother, and the labour camps. Cutting the flow of the interview towards the end of the film, she chooses to focus on her family and describes their escape from the last village, Rounge, to which she returns with her mother (and her daughter) for the first time after thirty years, their meeting with the 'Old People',²³ including informers, and their prayers at the temples of Angkor Wat.

²² On 7 August 2014, Samphan was convicted by the ECCC and received a life sentence for crimes against humanity during the Cambodian genocide. A trial in 2018 found him guilty of genocide. As of 2023, he is the last surviving senior member of the KR.

²³ The peasants from rural areas, considered the privileged class, were called the Old People (Base/Ancient People), pure and unstained by what the KR regarded as the corruption of capitalistic city life. This stands in contrast to the New People, sometimes termed 'April 17 people', the KR term that defined the new class that, broadly speaking, included anyone from an urban area and thus impure: the middle class, intellectuals, and artists. It also included ethnic minorities and any other social stratum defined as an enemy. Being deported from the cities to the countryside on April 17, 1975, they were made a New People.

The uniqueness of Saidnattar's duel with Samphan lies, first, in the way she deals with his various forms of denial (particularly of knowledge and responsibility ['as for the massacre of the population, I didn't know about it. I didn't see anything. I didn't pay attention'], but also moral indifference, means-end dissociation, and denial of the victims²⁴). Second, and consequently, the uniqueness lies in the multiple perspectives built into the structure of the narrative with which the spectators need to negotiate: since Saidnattar presents through reenactments the voice of the five- and seven-year-old girl that she was, it is through this perspective that she as an adult tells her story. However, there are also the perspectives of the interviewer who listens to the unprotected child inside herself; of her present self, hearing their traumatically broken narrative; of the adult who shares post-traumatic experiences with her co-survivor mother and young daughter, accompanying them to the scene of the crime, the labour camp, and the last village she lived in with her mother; and of the filmmaker, reflecting both on what she heard and came to comprehend through the memorial process. Thus, multiple voices of personal testimony/re-enactments, dreams (nightmares), returns to the scenes of crimes, three generations' post-traumatic sharing, and three generations' mother-daughter mirror-relations, remembrances through archival materials, and voice-over historical commentary provide the scaffolding along which the cinematic narrative and the duelling unfold.

After a few introductory historical scenes, Saidnattar begins to tell the spectators about the Phnom Penh evacuation and deportation of the New People to labour camps in rural Cambodia:

The first new year I remember was that of 1975. [...] My parents, my grandparents, my aunts, and my uncles. We took to the road with all the others.

Setting the personal tone endows the testimonial mode with an urgency and significance that attempts to both create an incessant conflict with the perpetrator's 'story' (which is, in fact, a failed account) and reduce the latter's significance in terms of the narrativization of the history the film aspires to portray.

Third, regardless of Samphan's incessant denials and highly disturbing evasion of past horrors, the uniqueness of the duelling lies in Saidnattar as an interviewer continuously asking him mainly ostensi-

24 See Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001), esp. 76–116.

bly innocent questions typical to low-profile investigative journalism. This gradually reveals the film's total negation of Samphan's version of history and the official discourse of denial.²⁵ For instance,

ROSHANE SAIDNATTAR: What were your daily tasks at that time? What did you do?

KHIEU SAMPHAN: My daily work [...] I didn't do much. Like when I was in the resistance. I worked in Centre 870 [...]. Secondly, I divided up items collected in Phnom Penh, like fabric, clothes, household goods, sugar, medicine, etc. There was no one left in Phnom Penh, and no more stores. Everything was abandoned. The KR stocked it all in warehouses. And my job was to manage and guard these stocks. In fact, I had subordinates to do it. I had the title of the president, but I was president of warehouse security.

Samphan relates a whitewashed description of the office for enforcing mass killing known by the code name '870', and the horror of the Phnom Penh evacuation. He speaks using the same devoid-of-emotion cold tone of voice, and so does she, presenting her questions in a neutral tone. Even when she poses more critical questions, she neither discloses her attitude nor her emotional reaction:

ROSHANE SAIDNATTAR: Do you think those who massacred the population overstepped the orders of the party leaders? You said that the hierarchy didn't order any massacres. Yet those accused of illegal sentimentality were removed. Those accused of lacking discipline were re-educated. Re-educated, under the KR between 1975 and 1979, meant killed. Were your orders overstepped? Or were they ill-interpreted?

KHIEU SAMPHAN: For me, re-educating doesn't mean killing. Re-educating means persuading someone to do the right thing, not the wrong thing. To mend their ways. I didn't know about these executions.

Addressing the spectators, following this encounter, the film constantly builds a contrast between the archival materials, which reflect the same events to which Samphan refers, and the testimony the filmmaker inserts. This refuting editing is made more complex due to the

25 Ibid., 103. Emphases in the original.

multiple perspectives that make the spectators active listeners. For instance, showing a re-enactment of a little girl collecting dung in the field, we hear the perspective of Saidnattar, the adult, reflecting on herself and then giving body and voice to herself as the little girl who was forced to be a labourer in a children's camp (and to survive alone, far from her mother who worked in a unit building a dam):

Children had to collect dung to serve as fertilizer, five kilograms a day per child. [...] When we didn't meet standards [...] [w]e were deprived of food, given even worse jobs and we had to work to the point of collapse. In the end, their favourite fertilizer was bodies.

The film cuts from first-person testimony intermingled with the commentary of the narrator, the filmmaker, to a reenactment of the first-person testimony of a little girl returning from the field. The little girl says:

Often in the evening, I returned to my hut crying because I was all covered in dung. During work, the peasant kids played at making me fall so I'd get dirty. [...] They were taught to despise us [...] children of the New People.

It then creates a contrast when, in the next scene, we hear Khieu Samphan's reflection on labour:

I only visited the work sites when I escorted King Sihanouk and the princess. [...] I knew our comrades were tired. They maintained their enthusiasm and their fervour by working to the rhythm of revolutionary songs. I thought they worked willingly.²⁶

Fourth, and most importantly, *Survive's* uniqueness in terms of the survivor-perpetrator encounter lies in the shift Saidnattar presents when she testifies in the midst of this 'neutral' interview that she is re-experiencing the genocide not only because of her internal pressure to bear witness, but because of the nightmarish presence of the perpetrator: 'Since I had arrived at his home, a flood of memories were

26 Khieu Samphan, 'Cambodia's Economy and Problems of Industrialization, in Underdevelopment in Cambodia', trans. by Laura Summers, *Indochina Chronicle* 51-52 (Berkeley, CA.: Indochina Resource Center, 1976), 1-27 <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/58800629/Underdevelopment-in-Cambodia-by-Khieu-Samphan#scribd>> [accessed 19 December 2023]

coming back to me'. The scene that embodies this turning point shows a little girl hiding in the forest and hearing someone beg a KR cadre not to kill him and a shadow theatre presenting a scene in which the cadre grabs a baby from his mother and smashes its skull against a tree.

This nightmare takes place in Khieu Samphan's home where she, as his guest-and-interviewer, sleeps. The camera shows her as she awakens to an unrecognized noise and the sound of the monsoon. She is then seen on the stairs outside the house, wet from the heavy rain. The next scene is a reenactment, we see part of a line of girls planting rice during a heavy rain, eating from a bowl full with rainy water, shivering. In the next scene, the next morning, we hear her adult voice-over telling us: 'With each passing day my anxiety and fear intensified. I didn't yet tell Khieu Samphan what I had seen and heard. I survived KR massacres while he was president'.

In this kind of duelling film, the survivor/interviewer/activist/docu-historian/filmmaker's problem of integrating and communicating their own traumatic experiences under conditions in total contrast to the contentions put forward by the major scholars of the Age of Testimony (explained below) worsens through time. Since the director does not disclose to Khieu Samphan her true identity as a survivor, the spectators are watching a double Duel — one shown in the scenes of the interview and the other rendered through the editing and her voice-over, simultaneously and alternately representing her camp- and survivor-selves.²⁷ Her nightmare, grounded in the suddenness of the shift to anxiety, is the outcome of the emotional field (intertwining fear, anger, tension, hope, dread, grief) to which she was exposed during the duel. After her long duel with Samphan of the previous weeks, she became distressed by her failure to establish authority over the contested truth.

Moreover, as analysed in the above example, though the survivor-interviewers' symptoms worsen during their interviews with the perpetrators because of the latter's constant denial and lies, the inner paradox of apparently getting closer to the perpetrators — of allegedly getting to know them better while in fact this acquaintance negates itself — becomes more and more unbearable as the relationships develop. During this 'round', the Duel thus also embodies a process of what the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu famously calls 'symbolic violence', a battle over domination.

27 This distinction is made by Holocaust survivor Primo Levi in his *If This Is a Man*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (New York: Orion Press, 1959).

Under these extreme circumstances of months and years of ‘Duel rounds’, overcoming the perpetrator’s psychological reactions when interviewed — lying, self-falsification, aporias, projection of guilt, refusal to acknowledge responsibility, and adhering to past indoctrination — while the unspoken and the unspeakable are still felt by the survivor, establishes a unique social process. It leads to constituting an ethics of unforgiveness without reconciliation.

Shoshana Felman claims, ‘Holocaust survivors — cannot fulfil their task without, in turn, passing through the crisis of experiencing their boundaries, their separateness, their functionality, and indeed their sanity, at risk’.²⁸ In the Duel, this means that a shattered self in the very act of remembering faces the denial of one’s suffering, of oneself, and though the post-genocide self of the survivor motivates the entire process, no assumption of a reconstructive effect that might emerge out of the possibility of a dialogue is rendered. Though a few directors (like Rithy Panh and Teth Sambath) testify that relationships were built during the years, the two parties, in contrast to those who participate in a conventional format of interviewer and interviewee, of course do not form a testimonial alliance. As Saidnattar, as well as other post-KR directors, tells us, perpetrators not only represent the indifference of the world to genocide, but their denials are still part of this world, making the violence present. The threat that the constant denials, evasions, manipulation, and lying will cause a secondary traumatization of the survivors, although they do not expect the perpetrator to take on the role of a listener, is realized in *Survive* and in all other duelling films.

Thus, the duels in *Survive*, as well as other duelling documentaries, emphasize shifts from the perpetrator’s inhuman behaviour to the humanity of the survivor and back. As Geoffrey Hartman argues,

Every witness, [...] becomes the last — the only remaining — witness. Each account, therefore, tries to reach a [...] listener and soul mate removing the solitariness of those not listened to. The shattered or isolated self of the victim is given a chance to reenter, through the interviewing process and however provisionally, a personal bonding that is also a social bond and which is necessary for the transmission of memory.²⁹

28 Felman and Laub, xvii.

29 Hartman, 257.

I suggest that the nightmares and the voices of the dead begging to come back that Saidnattar hears stand for what Samphan does not say. Thus, combining (through the editing) Samphan's monologues-of-denial and her post-traumatic memories, her understanding of her own story and the reconstruction of her testimony is produced in relation to this high-ranking perpetrator's personality. As the narrative deepens, the beneath-the-surface encounter gains a life of its own, dissimilar to the polite and formal discourse of the interview. In this, it is the unspoken dimension of the survivor-perpetrator encounter, revealed to the survivor in a horrific painful way, that makes trauma-induced fragmented memories and psychic disruption a major means for rejecting the perpetrator and for self-healing.

This total rejection is embodied in the painful visit Saidnattar, with her mother and daughter, pays to the last village they had lived in. The camera shows the poor condition of the peasants as another indication of the failure of the Revolution. Saidnattar is whispering as if she were still in the past, afraid to be heard: 'These people were the eyes of Angkar (informers) [...] I wanted to see the man who killed my uncle [...] we were afraid of them. Him. Her. They have not changed. They are still peasants.' The last scene, inside a Buddhist temple, reflects faith, inner silence, a family bonding and Saidnattar's reconciliation-within-herself. My discussion of *Survive: In the Heart of Khmer Rouge Madness* has sought to highlight that the complex process of testimony, triggered by a survivor-perpetrator duel, constitutes an ethics of survival that first and foremost establishes the truth and the ability of the survivor-interviewer to constitute internal mirror-relations as a way for self-healing. The film concludes with credits that inform the viewers about Khieu Samphan's arrest and trial. These words further underline the undeniable attitude of non-reconciliation and unforgiveness towards the past that pervades the film.

THE DOCUMENTARY DUEL AND COLLABORATION

Under the unprecedented circumstances of the complicity of most of the Cambodian people with the Pol Pot regime (whether voluntarily when, often as young people following the KR propaganda against Vietnam, King Norodom Sihanouk's³⁰ support of the KR, and US carpet bombing during the early 1970s, they joined the movement, or involuntarily

30 In 1975, his support of the KR movement allowed his return to Cambodia as the KR figure-head head of state.

under the regime's terror and suppression), duelling in documentary cinema primarily takes place with high-ranking perpetrators. However, the cinematic corpus under discussion here entails an additional, symbolic layer of reference both to the huge number of (mostly hidden) low-ranking perpetrators and — being everywhere and nowhere — collaborators. Interviewing the Big Brothers and simultaneously reflecting on the entire community of KR cadres, this corpus touches on the all-encompassing problematic of the Cambodian post-genocide human condition — threatened by a potentially massive indictment of a huge population — which is crucial to Cambodia's psycho-social and political as well as cine-cultural and post-memorial future.

The Cambodian direct, non-archival, face-to-face confrontation with the collaborator is derived and realized through the directors' activism, which acknowledges and thus breaks the intimacy of the (horrific) neighbourhood prevalent in post-1979 rural Cambodia, where low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators live among their one-time victims. However, as the films show, breaking this intimacy does not transform the power relations between them (as it did during duels with high-ranking perpetrators), mainly because the low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators knew they would not be tried in the ECCC. This means, moreover, that the wider question of complicity in communities the KR regime ruled was considered sufficiently dealt with after the ECCC trials had come to a close. As studies of the ECCC show,³¹ it contributed to exposing the few indicted high-ranking perpetrators while normalizing the many who were not brought to trial, thus blocking the option of collective coming-to-terms with collaboration. Although Cambodian cinema does not present any master-narrative of complicity, it does deal with it through the motif of cinematic duelling and the ethics it entails.

The films dealing with low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators suggest that the subject position of the collaborator is fraught with denial and remains ambiguous within the biological (or symbolic) post-autogenocide family. With the absence of laws to support the breaking of the taboo on discussing or acting upon the widespread collaboration during the KR period, familial-social-cultural processes of coming to terms with the past are blocked. As the comparison present-

31 See, e.g., John D. Ciorciari and Anne Heindel, *Hybrid Justice: The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Alexander Laban Hinton, *Man or Monster: The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

ed here will show, duelling between members of a family creates inter-generational aporias no less than intergenerational transmission of the genocidal trauma. Reflecting on both as irresolvable in 2000s Cambodia, the films simultaneously propose new ethics for their spectators.

In contrast to Saidnattar's incessant confrontation with the high-ranking perpetrator during *Survive* (2009), two of the major films that present low-ranking ex-KR cadres involved in KR crimes (Lida Chan and Guillaume Suon's *Red Wedding* [2012] and Neary Adeline Hay's *Angkar* [(2018)]), raise the question of confronting collaborators. I will focus on Hay's second-generation documentary film *Angkar*, in which the filmmaker, who was born out of a forced marriage,³² accompanies her father, Khonsaly Hay, the only survivor of his family, to the village of Ta Saeng (in northern Cambodia), where he had been subjected to four years of forced labour. After over forty years of living in France (where the family fled after a few years in a refugee camp on the Thai border), Khonsaly Hay meets the villagers who had been his torturers, the guards, the camp's perpetrators and collaborators (who participated in criticism sessions, supervised the hard labour in the rice fields, etc.), and the collaborator-spies (*schlops*).

Angkar is the first documentary film to render through a personal story the suffering caused by low-ranking perpetrators and collaborators in rural Cambodia. Neary Hay, as Khonsaly's daughter, received the perpetrators' and collaborators' permission to film the sequences of the meetings with her father. Thus, the heart of the film is built on sheer *verité* scenes that she shot as the cinematographer, creating an unnatural, eerie 'home-movie-with-the-perpetrators/collaborators' film.³³ In contrast to the duels in the films that interview high-ranking perpetrators (like *Duch*), in this film the conversations take place in the presence of many people over food, drink, the sharing of memories, and laughter.

Following the opening scene, the film's title, *Angkar* (literally in Khmer, 'The Organization', Cambodia's Communist Party), written in huge red bold letters, appears on the entire cinematic screen. This design is pre-emptive of the film's strategy of naming the perpetrators

32 A marriage between total strangers enforced in order to increase the number of KRs as well as to control the family unit. See Morag, *Perpetrator Cinema*; Theresa de Langis, "This Is Now the Most Important Trial in the World": A New Reading of Code #6, the Rule against Immoral Offenses under the Khmer Rouge Regime, *Cambodia Law and Policy Journal*, 3 (2014): 61-78.

33 As the filmmaker told me, her father met his former acquaintances, and from time to time she joined them with a small video camera, and with no extra film crew. (Personal conversation via Skype on 17 August 2018).

and collaborators (especially those not seen in the film but known to be in the village, like the cannibals [who removed human livers and regularly drank the gallbladder bile of their victims], the cut-throat Khmer, and the executioners). In this, the film meta-reflexively declares the power of cinema in establishing a visual duel with evil. The red colour refers of course to danger; thus, together with the act of naming, it serves to break Angkar's terror, still felt in the village.

Angkar presents two non-linear parallel narratives that intertwine throughout the film: of the father, heard in the voice-over in Khmer, and of the daughter/filmmaker, heard in the voice-over in French. The double narrativization is a major strategy for the filmmaker/daughter to honourably oppose her father's reconciliation with his former oppressors, as well as strictly oppose these low-ranking perpetrators' and collaborators' refusal to be engaged with questions regarding their deeds. The Duel, in other words, is taking place through the film's cinematic language no less than through the father's encounters with his former torturers. The filmmaker's voice-over addresses the father directly: 'There was still a fearful respect when you spoke of them. As if the victim you'd been had never entirely left you'. The double-narrative structure not only presents the daughter-father and Second-First generation relationships, but, through the editing, also contrasts the perpetrators' and collaborators' reactions of evasion, lying, indifference, and denial with a woman's voice, and with her objections as revealed through her film. In this way, the film both relates to the question of complicity and constitutes non-reconciliation and un-forgiveness. Later, Khonsaly refers to one of the old women in the village as Mother and hugs her. During the regime, this woman supported him and once risked her life by giving him food (though in the end she turned him in). The spectators hear Neary's voice-over saying: '[T]he woman you called Mother, I couldn't understand. For me there were only ever victims and their executioners'.

One of the last scenes of the film presents the faces of the perpetrators and collaborators on the cinematic screen. Their roles are printed in big red Godardian-like letters over their faces while Khonsaly's voice discloses their names and roles: 'Chief of District, Ta So; Pat, Bourreau, executioner; Égorgeur, Moeung San, Throat Cutter; Ta San, Collabo, collaborator'. The spectators, who were not familiar with their names or with their specific roles until this scene, and who got to know them partially through the filmed meetings, are now confronted not only with the naming, but with their total exposure. The faces that were part

of semi-friendly conversations throughout the film now re-appear for a few seconds, flickering as if in a brief nightmare. This powerful sequence places on them the responsibility they mostly refused to accept in the conversations.

Angkar's competing voices create an irresolvable tension, but, most importantly, they emphasize the immense importance of the law in breaking what Robert Eaglestone terms (in the context of Nazism) a 'public secret':

The public secret [...] creates a passivity in the victims; [...] and worse, it makes victims complicit with their own trucidation. [...] [T]he public secret creates not a community but an 'un-community', binding people in shame and secrecy.³⁴

The perplexity of the relations between perpetration and complicity becomes part of the trauma of the autogenocide, which — as the films show — is lived as an unresolvable aporia. In a situation in which all collaborators are native, local, and intimate, an active denial of moral culpability becomes an urgent issue for mainstream society. Thus, in its representations of various forms of duelling, Cambodian cinema has paved the way for audiences to discover a new ethics, breaking the paradoxical situation of widespread violent collaboration as a 'public secret'.



FIGURE 1. Still from *Angkar*, dir. Neary Adeline Hay (2018); Image courtesy of Christophe Audegius (The Cup of Tea Productions)

³⁴ Robert Eaglestone, *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 26.

The Quiet Interview

As is well known, after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), collective memory and popular history were exploited and manipulated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to serve its propaganda and political ends. However, though major events were excluded from the official narrative, a *minjian* (counter-history) emerged as well. According to Sebastian Veg,

The memory of the Anti-Rightist Movement has long been a blind spot in Chinese debates. [...] However, the publication of Yang Xianhui's 2003 book *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* marked a turning point. Based on extensive oral history interviews, Yang's book makes a substantive connection between the Anti-Rightist Movement and the establishment of dedicated *laojiao* [...] camps such as Jiabiangou.³⁵

Jiabiangou (literally, 'wedged between ditches') camp was in operation during the Anti-Rightist Movement from October 1957 to January 1961. Being the most horrific of all the camps for 're-education-through-[forced, hard]-labour', Jiabiangou was used mostly to imprison intellectuals and former government officials who were declared 'Rightist'. Located in northwest China near the Badanjilin Desert and bound in the north by the Gobi Desert, it was well-known for its harsh natural conditions and isolation. With no deliveries of external food supplies and rations deliberately cut again and again, the result was a dreadful famine that took place during the Great Leap Forward (1958–61) and the Great Chinese Famine (1959–62).

As testimonies in literary memoirs such as Yang Xianhui's *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* (2003), Zhang Xianliang's *Grass Soup* (1993/1995), and Gao Er Tai's *In Search of My Homeland: A Memoir of a Chinese Labor Camp* (2009)³⁶ make clear, in order to survive, prisoners ate leaves, tree bark,

35 Sebastian Veg, 'Testimony, History and Ethics: From the Memory of Jiabiangou Prison Camp to a Reappraisal of the Anti-Rightist Movement in Present-Day China', *The China Quarterly*, 218 (2014), 514. Re-education through labour (*láo dòng jiàoyang*, abbreviated *laojiao*) was a system of administrative punishment and detention established in 1955. See Hualing Fu, 'Re-Education Through Labour in Historical Perspective', *The China Quarterly*, 184 (2005), 811–30; and Sebastian Veg, *Minjian: The Rise of China's Grassroots Intellectuals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 96–101.

36 Yang Xianhui, *Jiabiangou jishi* [Chronicles of Jiabiangou] (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 2003); Xianliang Zhang, *Grass Soup*, trans. By M. Avery (Boston: Godine, 1993/1995). See also, e.g., *Half of Man is Woman*, trans. By M. Avery (New York: Norton, 1986/1988); Er Tai, Gao, *In Search of My Homeland: A Memoir of a Chinese Labor Camp* (New York: Ecco Press, 2009); and

worms and rats, human and animal waste. During the period they still had coal and could light a fire, they also ate flesh from dead inmates, who were cremated. The bodies of the dead, left unburied on the sand dunes surrounding the camp because the surviving prisoners were too weak to bury them, were thus reachable for cannibalism.

In October 1961, the government ordered the closure of Jiabiangou, as well as a cover-up. According to witnesses, not a single Rightist death either in Jiabiangou or in the Mingshui annex was recorded as being caused by starvation. As Cai writes,

This strange 'fact' was based on the 1,500 copies of the medical histories of the Rightists made by the remaining Rightists according to the instructions of the CCP [...]. The CCP regime's insistence to endorse the legitimacy of the Anti-Rightist Movement and attribute the main reason of the Great Famine to natural disasters hides the truth that the totalitarian regime and the unscrupulous dictator were the real directors of these political and social disasters.³⁷

Six films are included in Chinese-French director Wang Bing's cycle of works on the Jiabiangou re-education-through-labour-[turned-death]-camp. They represent the Maoist era from the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957) to the Great Leap Forward (1958–60), the devastating famine that followed (1959–61), till the Cultural Revolution (CR)'s extraordinary turmoil (1966–76).³⁸ The extraordinary timespan dedicated to these productions (thirteen years: 2005–18) attests to Wang's unwavering determination to reveal the historical truth. Detailing everyday

Harry Wu and Carolyn Wakeman, *Bitter Winds: A Memoir of My Years in China's Gulag* (New York: John Wiley, 1994).

37 Cai, p. 125. In addition, Yenna Wu claims, 'Based on the unofficial figures Yang obtained from the ex-inmates, we can estimate around 2500 out of 3000 inmates perished in Jiabiangou. By contrast, the official figures reported by Yang indicate that only about 1300 out of 2400 inmates died there' (Yenna Wu, 'Cultural Trauma: Construction of the Necropolitical Jiabiangou Laojiao Camp', *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 27 (2020), 29).

38 Wang's debut fiction film was *Brutality Factory* (*Baoli gangchang*, a 14m segment from Pedro Costa's *The State of the World*, [Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Kick the Machine, LX Filmes, 2007]). It re-enacts a torture scene typical to the era of the Anti-Rightist Movement. Though this very short film does not directly address Jiabiangou, it opens Wang's 'emergency' decade. Second is the nonfiction *He Fengming: A Chinese Memoir* (*Fengming*) (Wil Productions, 2007, 3h 6m), which describes He Fengming's life during the turmoil years 1957–78. The third is *Traces/The Relic* (2009; also screened in 2014 as a twenty-five-minute digital video art entitled *Yizhi*). Fourth is his fiction film, *The Ditch* (2010; 1h 52m), which dramatizes the last period of starvation in Jiabiangou. Fifth is *Dead Souls* (2018). The sixth is *Beauty Lives in Freedom* (2018, 4h 30m), a nonfiction film of an interview with Jiabiangou survivor Gao Er Tai.

life in Jiabiangou/Mingshui, the hexptych also contributes to the recent, mostly unofficial, reassessment of Maoism in and out of China.

***Dead Souls* (2018; *Les Âmes mortes*)**

Shot between 2005 and 2017 and based on 600 testimonies (presenting twenty of them in two-parts encompassing 8h 15m), *Dead Souls* is the most prominent testimonial work of the hexptych. Analysing Wang's po/ethics³⁹ in *Dead Souls*, I will reflect on the ways the interview recognizes the former Rightists' long ambiguous loss and unresolved prolonged grief, and — accordingly — constitutes the interviewees' new epistemology and radically alters current documentary spectatorship.

More than sixty years after their rehabilitation, while largely living in loneliness and isolation, devoid of a supportive social movement and a veteran community, most of the survivors interviewed, already in their late seventies and eighties, are eager to be heard.⁴⁰ Regardless of phases of state 'rehabilitation' before and after the CR, they were ostracized from society and their self-story was hardly heard until this old age. I argue that Wang's is a Quiet Interview in which he only asks a few informational questions at the beginning of the interview ('Why were you charged with being a Rightist?', 'When did you arrive in Jiabiangou?', 'How did you arrive there?'), and afterwards, if needed, only a few more (e.g., 'Can you explain how did you dig the trenches?' 'How many people survived?' 'How was your health when you came back?'). During the long hours of the interview Wang mostly listens, quietly, not reacting and not interfering, thus enhancing the interviewees' desire to talk. Most of the former inmates speak incessantly. The sheer length of the Quiet Interview functions thus as a necessary catalyst to subject formation.

I claim that a re-subjectivization process unfolds in at least two ways: first, the ex-victim's subjectivity, identity, and sense of self are reclaimed by and through his act of giving testimony that enables an acknowledgment of the gap between the false Rightist identity im-

39 I use this wording to indicate that Wang's works are based on a unique aesthetics that is both poetic and possesses a strong dedication to cinema's structuring of the anti-Maoist ethics.

40 In contrast to Yang, who, fearing censorship, published his book as a literary-fictional work, while occasionally using fictional names, Wang indicates the name, date, and age of the interviewee at the beginning of each interview.

posed on him and his true identity. The truth stands in contrast to past experience in which the Party negated his subjectivity and tabooed the events that happened in Jiabangou. The former subject of a history deprived of that history was reduced to nothing, while the past was not registered as past but suspended and finally erased. Wang's quietness allows self-inquiry into the time of the trauma to become possible and thus affirms the identity of the Jiabangou victim as a-person-who-had-a-past. The detailed testimonies the victim gives helps him reclaim this past and re-own it.

Most of the interviewees tell, in their pain, how they were falsely incriminated and labelled Rightists (sometimes just to fill the Maoist 'quota' of 'enemies' in each work unit), the shock of discovering the camouflage of 're-education', the lie of a fictitious world based on arbitrariness⁴¹ and the slow degradation of their humanity. They describe their arrival at the so-called agricultural farm and finding there were no seeds to be planted, no tools, no water for irrigation, and during winter — with the temperature between minus twenty and minus forty degrees — the earth was frozen to the depth of one meter, impossible to dig. They had no shelter and were forced to dig holes in the ground or hide in nearby caves. Later, when their food rations were reduced to 200 grams per day, they began to drink their own urine; some became cannibals.

Through his receptive quietness, the documentary director functions both as a witness to the process he initiated and as the 'supportive community' that these former inmates never had. Consequently, the second way the re-subjectivization process is realized is by enabling the testifier's self to be inserted into the larger social order from which he was ostracized through endless sessions of violent humiliation and denouncement. The re-subjectivization not only connects them to the actual social history, but also builds the broken social connection. Thus, two seemingly conflicting worlds merge during the Quiet Interview: the world of the de-humanization of the past and the world of the re-humanization of the present produced by the witnesses' words and Wang's deep, total, listening. By the end of most of the interviews, the past becomes an immanent part of the testifiers' identity-history and, as their taking an active part in their own self-transforma-

41 See Francoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière, *History Beyond Trauma: Whereof One Cannot Speak, Thereof One Cannot Stay Silent* (New York: Other Press, 2004): Kindle location 1342. I am indebted to this highly original work, which influenced this section of my essay.

tion-through-the-witnessing-process shows, this new sense of belonging and social bond becomes a kind of resuscitation.

Constituting the subjectivization that was taken from them for decades in the face of ongoing state mnemocide, the issue of Jianbiangou becomes, therefore, a major epistemological breakthrough for the witnesses. What happens to the spectators? Avoiding any sort of discernible personal intervention during the length of the interviews, as hinted at above, Wang Bing positions himself first and foremost as a listener, a kind of seer or 'knower', who (similar to the Seer's appearance in religious contexts) is not seen. He neither uses intervention techniques like commentary nor lets himself be immersed in a personal reaction to the interviewees' horrific stories; nor does he let his body language express an involuntarily emotional reaction. His unobtrusiveness is so conspicuous that the spectators, through time adjusting to the camera as a mute witness, become, like Wang himself, entangled in the art of bearing witness only through gazing at the speaker and listening. This entanglement develops as the stories rendered by the interviewees themselves become entangled: the stories stand in contrast to each other; they reflect, echo, and repeat each other; they digress, overlap, and gradually accumulate. Thus, for the spectators, bearing witness becomes a time-dependent position based on the ability of totally 'being there', undivided listening. This epistemological totality is achieved through Wang's adherence to long takes, static camera, and wide-angled perspective. The camera keeps a fixed distance from the interviewees and the shots are dictated by the absolute duration of the interviewees' talk. The interviewees are usually filmed in their homes, from the far side of the room. Capturing their mundane, cluttered environments, mostly in poor housing, defines their world at present as a very simple surface onto which to project their horrendous stories of extreme de-humanization, starvation, and death-ness.

Moreover, Wang's, as well as the spectators', ability to 'meet' the psyche of the other through the Quiet Interview is built on transcending the caesuras⁴² felt in the sudden silences of the witnesses. Traversing these gaps by accepting them as 'gaps with continuity' widens the capacity for free-flowing storytelling. Wang, in other words, mostly keeps quiet until the witness takes up his story again. Process-centred, the Quiet Interview is open and receptive to every inarticulate or inde-

42 As Bergstein claims, 'Caesura' seems to bear the meaning of a break and continuity'. Avner Bergstein, 'Transcending the Caesura: Reverie, Dreaming and Counter-Dreaming', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 94 (2013), 622.

scribable enunciation and every piece-of-memory that seems unavailable for integration by the subject (e.g., family betrayal, cannibalism).

The non-verbal testimony is embodied in the long take and the spectators' 'enclosed' focusing on the witness, unable to drift beyond the small space between the camera and the speaker. Although in Bazinian-influenced classical cinema theory this space is conceptualized as one open to the spectators' reflective mind and choice of focus, in *Dead Souls*, I suggest, it functions in a different way: the copious details heard about the atrocities convey a corporeal experience that dominates the scene to such a degree that spectators' minds, drifting to one or more of the objects in the room, seek 'refuge' in these looks, as if they take place outside of the horror's presence in the room. In fact, these looks convey less than a momentarily illusion of 'not being there' because the testimony continues hour after hour. The camera, placed in front of the speaker and hardly moving, embodies the ultimate listening, totally 'being there', as if it were a sonorous envelope. It presents the only ethical position approved by the film.

The Quiet Interview and Collaboration

The inevitable inter-relations between the testimonial non-fiction film *Dead Souls* (2018) and the testimony-based fiction film *The Ditch* (2010)⁴³ propose a unique conceptualization of the collaborator figure. The camp's starvation-dependent collaboration-producing situation, I suggest, is emphasized in *Dead Souls* by the presentation of three collaborators who survived because they worked as cooks in Jiabiangou kitchens (*The Ditch* presents the guard of a dormitory).⁴⁴ The spectators are challenged with a po/ethics gap between the films: Wang's Quiet Interview po/ethics enables them, I suggest, to comprehend two out of the three collaborator figures presented in *Dead Souls* since in this collaboration-producing situation dominated by the chaos of starvation, their subject position has undergone a shift along an axis from victims-who-became-collaborators (volunteering to work as

43 Though *The Ditch* (2010) is a fiction film, its script, written by Wang, is based on 600 Jiabiangou testimonies he, following Yang Xianhui's book *Chronicles of Jiabiangou*, accumulated.

44 In my thinking about collaboration-producing situation I am indebted to Robert J. Lifton's term 'atrocious-producing situation'. See 'Haditha: In an "atrocious-producing situation" – Who is to blame? *Editor & Publisher*, 4 June 2006. <<https://www.editorandpublisher.com/stories/haditha-in-an-atrocious-producing-situation-who-is-to-blame,80313>> [Accessed 19 December 2023].

cooks)⁴⁵ to becoming victims again (when this privilege was taken from them). This shift attests to the film's acceptance of the slippery nature of the camp's collaboration-producing situation. Moreover, the Quiet Interview reflects to the spectators, through the connections between the gradually revealed stories, the fact that all three raise the issue of cannibalism. This exacerbates the collaboration situation and its unstable nature.

In his interview, the first collaborator presented, Qi Luji (aged 83), tells two horrific stories that serve as a sort of justification for his privileged status ('Even though I was just a kitchen assistant, I had great power in that situation! An extra bowl of food could save someone's life'), as well as attest to his indifference to the fate of other prisoners. The first story is based on what he saw in the camp: 'I know that when they buried a dead person, they opened it up to take out the innards and after making a fire, they grilled them and ate them'.

As Wang just listens, Qi Luji continues by telling him (and the spectators) a second horrific story, based on a rumour he heard, about a couple with five daughters and a son, the youngest. They were starving and the father suggested killing the boy and cooking him. The eldest daughter volunteered to take the son's place because he would be the one to eventually head the family. They killed and ate her. Qi Luji ends by telling the story of his being labelled unjustly as a Rightist, his incarceration and suffering. Thus, though he takes upon himself the subject position of victim, reflecting on both his resourcefulness and the horror, the two stories leave the spectators ambiguous towards him.

The next two interviews further stress the starvation-dependent collaboration-producing situation, and structure an entangled victimhood-collaboration-victimhood trajectory. The second collaborator presented, Xing De (aged 86), begins with a cry ('What offense had I committed? [...] I ended up in jail without a clue why'), and tells about his tricks while working in the kitchens ('They made me a chef! From then on, my physical condition began to improve. I was even given the nickname *chushkaty* [...] it means 'pig' [...] because I was young and eating on the sly had made me fat') and shifts to describe life in the Mingshui annex where he lived in a hole he dug and ate from the leftovers the cadres threw to the pigs. Enduring extremely cruel and degrading conditions, Xing De tells how 'as we lacked water we drank our own urine', as well as his avoidance of cannibalism despite the 'total

⁴⁵ One of the interviewers in the film states that the only Jiabiangou survivors were chefs, carpenters, cadres, those who knew how to fix machines, and those who ran away.

chaos'. Similarly, the third collaborator presented, Pu Yanxin (aged 85), also attests that he did not die in the camp because he was a kitchen worker. Later, sleeping in caves, becoming a gravedigger because he was stronger and could push the cart and 'dump the corpses somewhere', his health deteriorated ('I wrote to my wife: "I am at the gates of hell and I am waiting for my turn"').

In contrast to *Dead Souls*, *The Ditch* uses imagery and editing as major strategies to render the collaborator figure. It does so in various ways. First, the film's inclination towards images-of-excess functions as a horrific disruption of the spectators' comprehension of this figure. The obscene images of starvation dominate spectatorship to a level of experiencing re-traumatization. In other words, this film renders the entanglement within the post-trauma-re-traumatization trap of representation as irreconcilable, with ramifications on collaboration.

Second, a few scenes in *The Ditch* portray a collaborator figure, Chen, the guard of the cave (the dormitory). Wang uses the editing of two consecutive scenes to reflect on the film's critical attitude towards Chen: in the first scene, the (static) camera focuses for a long time on a prisoner who is starving. Too weak to sit or write, lying in his cave bed, he dictates a letter for his brother to a fellow inmate. In the letter he desperately asks his brother to send him food. At the end of what turns out to be an informal will, the cut leads the spectators from this scene of terrible misery to the camp director's office. In this second, mirror-scene, the camera's (wide) angle exposes both the steaming bowl of noodles the camp director holds and the figure of Chen at the entrance to the office. Addressing Chen as 'an old friend from the Party', the camera focuses on both of them eating. The weak whispers of the dying prisoner are displaced into the sounds of swallowing the noodle soup.

The extreme contrasts between the scenes (death versus life, cave versus office, helplessness versus power, rags versus warm coats, starvation versus eating, whispers versus sighs of pleasure) are emphasized even more in the next scene of *The Ditch*, which shows Chen and another inmate removing the naked body of a dead prisoner from the cave. The dead's skeletal body, clearly reminiscent of Holocaust imagery, is shown in a relatively long take and attests to the horror of starving to death, as well as to Chen's collaboration.

The Ditch's fragmented narrative, grounded in the ethics of representing the lacunae within Jiabiangou's most conspicuous trauma — starvation — seems to enhance the unbearable requirement to look at the horrific images that, although depicted at a distance, are shown

almost graphically. The excess of the starvation images (such as eating another prisoner's vomit) haunts the spectators and turns the images to a vital, complementary, form of testimony.

Most importantly, the lack of a visual archive of Jiabiangou makes *The Ditch*'s inventive imagery a major contribution to testimony-based fiction cinema's ability to create such an archive. Under a dictatorial regime dominated by erasure of all evidence related to Jiabiangou — including the provisional cemetery, the memorial monument erected by survivors in 2005, prisoners' personal files, private images taken, and the camp landscape — the ongoing debate in Western scholarship on showing Holocaust atrocity images (regarding the numbing effect, the complex of attraction and repulsion to violence displayed, and fascination with abomination, among others) is not as yet adequate to deal with this case. I suggest that Wang's *The Ditch* mode of artistic work that blurs the distinction between non-fiction and fiction uses this blurring to justify its creation of visual (imaginary) memory that complements the oral testimonies of *Dead Souls* (2018). Thus, the spectators are compelled to view as well as to regard this as a future-oriented, reliable, archive. Confronting the documentary-based fictional figure of Chen assists them in transcending the epistemological gap between the two films.



FIGURE 2. Still from *The Ditch*, dir. Bing Wang (2010); Image courtesy of Wil Productions, used with permission.

Conclusion

At the turn of the twentieth century and the Era of the Perpetrator, two non-Western corpora, I suggest, pave the way for a new understanding of the huge difference between Western and non-Western conceptualizations of twentieth-century traumas. Both post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian (mostly documentary) cinema and post-Cultural Revolution Chinese (mostly documentary) cinema teach us that what Felman calls the 'century of traumas and (concurrently) a century of theories of trauma',⁴⁶ is but a partial model. In other words, Western understandings of trauma 'as one of the key interpretive categories of contemporary politics and culture',⁴⁷ which emanated from post-Holocaust Age of Testimony paradigmatic scholarship, focus on the trauma inflicted upon the victims (mainly the Jews) by the 'enemy from without', the Nazis, while the post-Pol Potism⁴⁸ and the post-Maoist contexts centre on the 'enemy-within'. Driven by and through the documentary impetus, the docu-activisms set against the genocidists aspire to extend the spectrum of the twentieth-century Western ideologies of mass murder to include the new post-traumatic ethics of post-utopian Communism Killer regimes⁴⁹: non-reconciliation and un-forgiveness (in the Cambodian context) and re-subjectivization (in the Chinese context).

Thus, the work of the Cambodian and the Chinese subversive political documentarists opposes the tendency to narratively integrate the traumatic event; disregards the interview 'text' as requesting particular hermeneutics, instead focusing on proposing multiple subject positions for the spectators' identification; transcends Hilberg's post-Holocaust paradigmatic triangulation (perpetrator, victim, bystander)⁵⁰ in favour of positions emanating from the Communist contexts, especial-

46 Felman, *Juridical Unconscious*, 1.

47 Wulf Kansteiner, 'Genealogy of a Category Mistake: A Critical Intellectual History of the Cultural Trauma Metaphor', *Rethinking History*, 8 (2004), 193.

48 See Ben Kiernan, 'Myth, Nationalism and Genocide', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 3 (2001), 192.

49 Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 569.

50 Many of the recent scholarly works in the West that oppose this triangulation and/or elaborate the theorization of the collaborator, do not refer to non-Western contexts, let alone to the collective traumas inflicted on the masses by the Communist Left. See, e.g., from Ehrenreich and Cole to Böhm. Robert M. Böhm, 'Judging "Privileged" Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the "Grey Zone"', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 29.3, (2015), 489-92; Peter Ehrenreich and Tim Cole, 'The Perpetrator-Bystander-Victim Constellation: Rethinking Genocidal Relationships', *Human Organization*, 64.3 (2005), 213-24.

ly that of the collaborator; confronts the problem of un-representability and the unspeakable in survivors' testimony; as well as the problem of denial and failed accountability in perpetrators in various new po/ethics, especially favouring the Caruthian audible (voice) on the invisible (wound).⁵¹

The directors' significant revelations that grew out of personal as well as collective traumas not only transcend taboo and censorship, but contest prevailing conceptions and myths on perpetrators, collaborators, and victims alike. Though it seems that there can be no connection between interviewing perpetrators and interviewing victims, both the *Duel* and the *Quiet Interview* show how the differences deepen our ethical conceptualizations and the limits of the imagined community, as well as cinematic spectatorship. In their extraordinary way, both corpora raise the option of mapping out future ethics for genocide, trauma, cinema trauma, documentary, perpetrator, and collaborator studies.

51 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

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