

Coverage of the Cambodian Civil War and Genocide: A Peace Journalism Study  
Examining Select Journalist Accounts of 1970s Cambodia

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines how four select journalists – Elizabeth Becker, Richard Dudman, Sydney Schanberg, and Jon Swain – covered the Cambodian civil war and genocide (1970-1979). Schanberg and Swain were among the few western journalists present in Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975 when the Khmer Rouge captured the city; Becker and Dudman were two of only a handful of journalists permitted entry into Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge reign. These four journalists, therefore, offer unique accounts about events occurring within the secluded country and they wrote some of the most insightful journalistic analyses on Cambodia during this period.

The four journalists' articles are examined via a directed content analysis methodology, which takes its data characterization from the bi-modal peace and war journalism frame. Peace journalism is a relatively recent stream of Peace and Conflict Studies literature that examines how conflict reporting can be presented in a broader, more "truthful" manner, to include those elements that are usually excluded in traditional war reporting (the voice of non-elites, structural violence, etc.) The articles are analysed and discussed with an eye to considering what elements of peace and war journalism are present in these four authors' writings, and why the presence (or lack of) these elements is significant to their reporting and understanding of what was occurring in Cambodia. This thesis contributes to the growing discussion on peace journalism by emphasising two understudied areas in the literature; how individual journalists fit within the peace journalism framework, and how peace journalism can be applied to situations of extreme violence, such as genocide. Numerous direct quotations from these journalists' writings are included within the body of the thesis to directly address the lack of journalist voice within the current peace journalism literature.

Key findings from this study include: The presence of a number of peace journalism tenets within the authors' articles from the 1970s; the significance of access and the importance of a journalist having a deep understanding of a region undergoing conflict; and how determined neutrality and non-partisanship does not necessarily equal accuracy in journalistic writings.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the University of Manitoba for providing me with two generous scholarships; the Graduate Scholarship and the International Graduate Student Entrance Scholarship. Without this financial support I would not have been able to move to Manitoba.

My advisor Sean Byrne, committee members Adam Muller and Andrew Woolford, and external examiner Heather Devere, thank you for all the feedback, commentary, and encouragement.

To my Winnipeg family – the extended Proctor-Johnson clan – thank you for all of the support, friendship and love you have given me over the past decade and a half. I think we all know that you were the main reason I moved to Manitoba. A special thank you to Lorelee and Howard Proctor, and Laura and Kerry Johnson who took me in and treated me like one of their own from day one.

A massive thank you to Sarah Sikorski and Daniel Spiteri for housing us as we finished our work, and to Donna McNicol and Peter Sikorski for your ongoing love and support.

My parents, Trevor and Lyn, even though you're on the other side of the world you were always prepared to listen and encourage, and without your support and love this journey may never have been completed.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to my beautiful wife Ellen Sikorski. Meeting you made this experience worth it.

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## Introduction

During the 1970s, Cambodia was one of the most wretched places on earth. A brutal civil war, fought between government forces and communist-nationalist rebels, devastated the country during the first half of the decade. The victors in the war – the Khmer Rouge – upon seizing control of Phnom Penh in April 1975, proceeded to implement one of the most severe societal transformations of the twentieth century. Over the next four years, the Khmer Rouge experiment would cost an estimated one-and-a-half to two million Khmers their lives, as well as destroying much of the social and cultural fabric of Cambodian society.<sup>1</sup> The destructive policies undertaken by the Khmer Rouge in the name of social transformation were genocidal and rank high among the worst crimes committed by a regime against its people from the last century.

Cambodia, as a neighbour to Vietnam, was considered a “sideshow” to the Vietnam war that was ongoing as the Cambodian civil war broke out and intensified.<sup>2</sup> The war in Vietnam had encouraged a number of writers to travel to Indochina to try and make a name for themselves by covering the conflict. Many of these writers went for the challenge of testing their courage in extreme situations.<sup>3</sup> A few individuals, however, focused their attention on what was happening in Cambodia, choosing to live in and report from that country. Sydney Schanberg, Elizabeth Becker, and Jon Swain would emerge as noteworthy journalists through their coverage of the Cambodian civil war and genocide.

This thesis examines how select journalists covered 1970s Cambodia using a peace journalism frame. The journalists discussed are Elizabeth Becker, Richard Dudman, Sydney

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Becker (1998); Ung (2000); Power (2002) 87-154; Ngor (2003); Mann (2005) 339-350; Kiernan (2007) 539-554; (2008a); (2008b); (2009); Chandler (2008) 255-276; Schanberg (2010) 63-111; Brinkley (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Shawcross (1987).

<sup>3</sup> Knightly (2004) 441-443.

Schanberg and Jon Swain. These journalists were chosen because they wrote several key articles that highlight what was occurring in Cambodia at certain, crucial, stages of the war and revolution. Schanberg and Swain were present in Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, when the Khmer Rouge took control of the city and expelled the population. Their reports offered the first look inside the newly formed Democratic Kampuchea. Becker and Dudman were among the only journalists permitted into the country when the Khmer Rouge were in power, and they were the only two journalists who did not write for communist publications. As such, their accounts were among the few first-hand witness records of life inside the secluded society.

### **Theoretical Lens and Significance of this Study**

This thesis examines the articles from the four journalists using a bi-modal peace and war journalism framework. Peace journalism is a relatively recent philosophical approach to conflict reporting and is part of the larger Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) literature. In its broadest sense, peace journalism promotes and encourages journalists to consider elements of conflict that often remain hidden from view, for example, by promoting the voice of non-elites, an exploration of potential peaceful outcomes, and a focus on the invisible effects of conflict such as the emotional impact on a population undergoing violence.

While peace journalism is a relatively recent stream of PACS literature, many of its concepts and ideas go back to the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Today, peace journalism scholars have codified certain categories that outline what constitutes peace journalism as opposed to what they consider more traditional war reporting.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, advocates for peace journalism have

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<sup>4</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Shinar (2009); Lynch and Galtung (2010).



attempted to create a framework for practical use by journalists who are interested in covering conflict via a deeper peace lens.<sup>6</sup> This thesis explores what elements of peace journalism were present in the articles written by select journalists who covered Cambodia in the 1970s.

The broad research question for this study is: *What elements of peace journalism were present in reporting from 1970s Cambodia?* This question is considered via two significant streams of thought: (1) What elements of peace journalism were present among the writings of *individual* journalists; and (2) what elements of peace journalism were present in articles written during an example of extreme violence.

To date, the majority of peace journalism studies focus on the media source (for example, by studying a particular newspaper) for their analysis and remove the individual journalists who wrote the articles from the discussion. This thesis specifically sets out to address this gap in the literature and allows the voice of the individual journalist to come through as much as possible, via numerous direct quotations from their works, and through the discussion of significant passages that highlight their approach to reporting conflict.

This thesis also differs from the majority of peace journalism studies by considering historical rather than contemporary articles. By focusing on historical reporting this thesis broadens the peace journalism discussion since the events of the conflict are well known to scholars and other interested parties. In other words, there is less ambiguity about what occurred in 1970s Cambodia than in the more recent conflicts that have been analysed through a similar peace journalism lens.

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005); Lynch (2007); Lynch and McGoldrick (2013); Lynch (2014); McGoldrick and Lynch (2014); Lynch (2015); Lynch, McGoldrick and Heathers (2015); Abunales (2016).

The last point of difference from other peace journalism studies is that this thesis analyses a brutal civil war and genocide – i.e. extreme forms of violence. The acute nature of the violence seen in the Cambodian example helps to draw out significant distinctions, including tensions and gaps, between the philosophy of peace journalism and the reality faced by journalists who cover examples of extreme violence, such as genocide. One of the main goals of this thesis is to explore the tensions between the philosophy and practice of covering violent conflict.

## **Outline of the Thesis**

Chapter one of this thesis offers an overview of the Cambodian civil war and genocide.

Chapter two presents the theoretical framework for this study. A bi-modal peace and war journalism frame is used for the analysis of the four journalists' articles. In particular, this chapter situates genocide and peace journalism within Peace and Conflict Studies. The latter part of this chapter discusses how some journalists who covered situations of extreme violence attempted to convey what they witnessed for their audiences back home. In this section, some of the tensions between the peace journalism philosophy and the practice of reporting extreme violence are explored.

Chapter three outlines the methodology used in this thesis. This chapter draws attention to the directed content analysis methodology and discusses its application within the study.

Chapter four is an extended context chapter that helps to explain much of the following content analysis. This chapter specifically sets out to present the voices of the journalists under discussion and offers numerous direct quotations and analysis of their written material, including their articles and later publications. The purpose of this discussion is to analyse key passages

written by the four journalists and to highlight their approach to reporting on the situation in Cambodia during the 1970s.

Chapter five is the content analysis chapter and it breaks down the articles from the four journalists to describe whether, and if so how, these authors fit into a war or peace journalism categorization. Specifically, this chapter considers and discusses what elements of peace journalism were prevalent in the writings of these authors.

Chapter six briefly discusses three elements that are hinted at through the body of this thesis, but are worthy of deeper consideration. This discussion involves an examination of how to consider refugee accounts; the issue of accessing the “other side” and the danger involved in doing so; and the use of culture as a means of causal explanation for extreme forms of violence.

## **Chapter One: The Cambodian Civil War and Genocide**

### **Introduction**

On Thursday, April 17, 1975 at approximately 6.30am,<sup>7</sup> the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh victors in the lengthy and bloody Cambodian civil war that had raged the preceding five years. Upon victory, the new rulers of what was now termed Democratic Kampuchea turned the clock back to year zero, proceeded to evacuate the cities of people, insulate the country in a cloud of secrecy, and implement an extreme form of social revolution based on a unique strain of Nationalist-Communist ideology that stressed agricultural self-reliance. What followed was massive starvation across the country, torture and execution of Cambodians for even minor crimes under the new regime, and extreme paranoia from a leadership that feared greatly internal and external enemies. This chapter offers a brief overview of the Cambodian genocide, including the key factors which played a part in the Khmer Rouge emerging victorious in the Cambodian civil war.

### **The Origins of the Civil War**

On March 18, 1970 Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the long-time, bon vivant Cambodian ruler, who was worshiped in much of the countryside as a kind of Angkorian god-king, was overthrown in a coup led by Lon Nol, Sihanouk's long-time police chief and military leader who was now prime minister, and Prince Sirik Matak, Sihanouk's cousin and rival for the throne. Sihanouk was popular because he had been the one to bring the country independence from the French in 1953, but he had alienated himself during the 1960s from both the left and right political, business, and intellectual figures in the country through various purges, nationalization

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<sup>7</sup> Schanberg (1975aah); Swain (1975h).

policies, and especially via his decision to reject United States aid and strike up a friendship with the Chinese.<sup>8</sup>

Underlying the reason for the coup, however, was his refusal to become embroiled in the neighbouring Vietnam War, and his determination to keep Cambodia neutral in the conflict. Sihanouk's policy stances in regards to the war walked a tightrope between open distrust of the United States, secret assistance to the North Vietnamese, and attempting to maintain relationships with all powers in the hope of keeping Cambodia out of the war. In walking such a delicate series of lines, Sihanouk managed to alienate all sides on the political homefront, none of whom were satisfied with the prince's attempts to create national policy that coalesced with his goal of neutrality. Moreover, the Cambodian economy began to struggle, in particular its rice exports, with taxable rice exports falling by two-thirds between 1965-1966, mainly due to the black-market trade in rice with Vietnamese communists and Saigon.<sup>9</sup>

In 1966, Sihanouk, yielding to pressure, allowed the Vietnamese communists to ship weapons to Sihanoukville, Cambodia's seaport, and truck them overland to eastern Cambodia.<sup>10</sup> Largely, this was a decision made to ensure that the Americans did not attempt to blockade the Mekong river, one of Phnom Penh's economic lifelines.<sup>11</sup> Lon Nol was placed in charge of this operation, and he skimmed off a large number of arms (apparently with Vietnamese approval for cooperation) in order to arm his soldiers in the event the communists won in Vietnam and then turned their attention to Cambodia.<sup>12</sup> This, along with Sihanouk's refusal to take American aid after 1963 and his distrust of the Americans in general, irritated the United States, which pushed hard for him to change the policy of neutrality by claiming that it was tantamount to supporting

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<sup>8</sup> Becker (1998) 9-13; 100-104; Power (2002) 90-95.

<sup>9</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 17.

<sup>10</sup> Becker (1998) 102.

<sup>11</sup> Becker (1998) 102.

<sup>12</sup> Becker (1998) 102.

the communists. The Americans, for their part, hoped that Lon Nol would be far more malleable to their designs on the region.

In 1969, Richard Nixon became the 37<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, and although he had pledged to end the war in Vietnam, he instead expanded it into Cambodia. Concerned with the North Vietnamese units who were taking refuge in eastern Cambodia, Nixon ordered a series of secret bombing campaigns in the country which would develop into an important “sideshow” for the new administration.<sup>13</sup> 3,875 sorties were flown in this secret operation codenamed Menu, with an estimated 161,000 tonnes of bombs being dropped – the civilian death toll from these B-52 raids is still unknown.<sup>14</sup> Following the March coup in 1970, which had the backing of the United States, in May, the Americans invaded Cambodia without informing the Lon Nol government,<sup>15</sup> in an “incursion” designed to wipe out the Communist sanctuaries. Some 31,000 Americans and 43,000 South Vietnamese troops crossed the border.<sup>16</sup> This was the moment that interest in Cambodia peaked for journalists who were covering the war, and led to many reporters crossing the border from Vietnam, or coming to the border from Phnom Penh, in an attempt to cover this invasion.<sup>17</sup> The communist forces would capture twenty-three journalists and only three would be seen alive again.<sup>18</sup> The danger involved for journalists attempting to cover the war would play a huge factor in the inability of western journalists to access Khmer Rouge controlled territory and examine the war from the other side.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Shawcross (1987).

<sup>14</sup> Power (2002) 91-92; Kiernan (2008a) 18.

<sup>15</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 19.

<sup>16</sup> Power (2002) 92.

<sup>17</sup> Dudman (1971); Kamm (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Dudman (1971); Kamm (1998) 57-60.

<sup>19</sup> CF. Knightly (2004) on the difficulty involved in gaining and maintaining access to the “other side” during wartime.

## **The Cambodian Communist Movement**

By 1970, the Cambodian communist movement was growing. At times heavily reliant on Vietnamese support, but fearful of their larger neighbour and historic enemy, the Cambodian communists began to gain popularity and momentum as a nationalist/communist movement among the rural population of Cambodia.<sup>20</sup> Following the 1970 invasion by United States (U.S.) and South Vietnamese forces aiming to destroy communist sanctuaries, Lon Nol reported that there was, in fact, an increase in the number of communist forces, a situation that he blamed on the “clean-up” operation of the American-South Vietnamese troops.<sup>21</sup> Sixty-five percent of the land, and thirty-five percent of the population were in the hands of the communists by 1971, with U.S. sources estimating that the insurgent movement numbered between 35,000 and 50,000 with some 10,000 soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

However, the insurgent movement within Cambodia was factionalized. According to some analyses, there were six factions within what was labeled the “Khmer Rouge” early in the war: the Stalinists (the followers of Saloth Sar); the Internationalists (the Hanoi-trained communists); the Issarakists (the Cambodian communist insurgents who did not go to Vietnam in 1954);<sup>23</sup> the Pracheachonists (the Cambodian communists who remained in 1954 and took part in the political process); the Maoists; and the Khmer Rumdoah (the followers of Sihanouk).<sup>24</sup> All of these factions had different ideas on how to go about ascending to power in Cambodia. By

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<sup>20</sup> Becker (1998).

<sup>21</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Metzl (1996) 5.

<sup>23</sup> In November, 1953, the French transferred power to Sihanouk, marking Cambodian independence. The various communist movements within the country that had fought for independence were left out of the 1954 Geneva conference that was called to put an end to the Indochina war (following the victory of the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu). With the transfer of independence to Sihanouk, the communist movement split in various ways to regroup and/or attempt to gain power through different means. For discussion, see Becker (1998) 74-79.

<sup>24</sup> Metzl (1996) 5-6. For detail see Becker (1998) 26-113.

1973, following purges of the Cambodian communists who had trained in Vietnam and those who supported Sihanouk, the Saloth Sar faction had asserted control over the movement.<sup>25</sup>

## **Saloth Sar**

Saloth Sar, the future Pol Pot, was born May 19, 1925, in northern Kompong Thom province.<sup>26</sup> His parents owned some land but were not part of the educated elite. However, they did have royal connections.<sup>27</sup> Sar spent a year in the royal monastery, followed by six at an elite Catholic school – never working in a rice field, nor knowing much of village life. In 1948, Sar won a scholarship to study radioelectricity in Paris.<sup>28</sup> Arriving in 1949, Sar was to become acquainted with other Cambodians in Paris such as Thiounn Mumm and his three brothers, who had already laid the foundations for the Cambodian Marxist Circle in Paris.<sup>29</sup>

Others with whom Saloth Sar would become friends with in Paris were the future leaders of the Khmer Rouge movement, Khieu Samphan, Son Sen, Ieng Sary, and Hou Yuon (who would become one of the movement's first victims after the seizure of power in 1975).<sup>30</sup> This cohort of young Cambodians were pioneers in travelling to France for higher education, with previous generations attending French universities in Hanoi. As Becker discusses, this group, especially the likes of Sar and Sary, who were not from a solid elite background, had a sense of being “chosen” – an outlook which they would retain throughout their rise to power and subsequent rule of the country.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Quinn (1989b) 217; Becker (1998); Metzl (1996) 6.

<sup>26</sup> Becker (1998) 51; Kiernan (2008a) 9. For detail, see Chandler (1992); Short (2005).

<sup>27</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 10.

<sup>29</sup> Becker (1998) 54-55.

<sup>30</sup> Carney (1989); Kiernan (2008a) 11.

<sup>31</sup> Becker (1998) 50-65.



In 1953, Sar returned to Cambodia to a divided movement aiming for Cambodian independence. It was a void that Prince Sihanouk would step into and proclaim himself the father of independence when it was achieved a year later at the Geneva Convention.<sup>32</sup> Over the next two decades, Sar and his comrades would slowly morph their communist ideology into a unique brand of nationalist-communism, while remaining highly secretive about their mission.<sup>33</sup> It would only be following their victory in April 1975, that Saloth Sar – who officially changed his name to Pol Pot in 1976, his *nom de guerre* – and the leadership of the movement would slowly reveal themselves to the Cambodian populace and the world as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

As the movement progressed, fear of Vietnamese dominance of the broader communist movement in SE Asia, and anxiety that they would take over Cambodia, would come to play a large role in the aspirational, and nationalistic, shift of the Khmer Rouge movement. As such, a number of purges occurred that removed those “distrustful” Khmers who had been trained by the Vietnamese during this period, which helped to eliminate elements of opposition to the Khmer Rouge movement.<sup>35</sup>

### **The American Bombing Campaign**

Through 1973, outside observers of the civil war largely lumped the Cambodian communist movement together with the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, which was considered part of a broader communist network that was not specifically Cambodian focused.<sup>36</sup> This was true both of journalist reports and official intelligence, in spite of occasional attempts by individuals to draw attention to the changing face and intensity of Khmer Rouge strategy

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<sup>32</sup> Becker (1998) 66-113.

<sup>33</sup> Becker (1998) 66-113.

<sup>34</sup> Becker (1998) 160; Chandler (1992) 7.

<sup>35</sup> For detailed discussion of this complicated history, see Becker (1998) 66-113.

<sup>36</sup> Metzl (1996) 8-9; Becker (1998); Power (2002) 95-100.

between 1970 and 1973.<sup>37</sup> During this period, the Khmer Rouge became more radical in their approach to socially transform the areas under their control by creating a conformist, Spartan, society that they would eventually try to replicate nationwide.<sup>38</sup>

In the early years of the war, the Americans continued to bomb the countryside, for the supposed purpose of destroying four Vietnamese divisions that were attacking American forces over the border.<sup>39</sup> Owen and Kiernan have demonstrated that the 1969 Nixon bombing of Cambodia was actually not the start of the bombing campaign, as generally accepted, but an escalation of an already-existing strategy of carpet bombing.<sup>40</sup> Using data released by the Clinton administration, they note that Cambodia was being bombed as early as 1965 under President Johnson. Owen and Kiernan estimate that over 2.7 million tonnes of bombs were dropped on Cambodia between 1965 and August 1973, when the U.S. placed a congressional ban on the bombing, with at least half the bombs being dropped during the intensive campaign between February and August 1973.<sup>41</sup> To put this into perspective, the Allied forces dropped just over two million tonnes of bombs during the entirety of the Second World War.<sup>42</sup> This revised bombing total is a dramatic increase from the previously accepted total of an estimated 540,000 tonnes of bombs being dropped between March 1969 and August 1973 on the country.<sup>43</sup>

This bombing campaign destroyed the Cambodian countryside, razed villages, and frayed the nerves of the Cambodian rural population who were terrified of the bombing.<sup>44</sup> It is estimated

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<sup>37</sup> Power (2002) 95-100.

<sup>38</sup> Becker (1998); Power (2002) 95-100.

<sup>39</sup> Shawcross (1987). Kiernan (2008a) 24-25.

<sup>40</sup> Owen and Kiernan (2006).

<sup>41</sup> Owen and Kiernan (2006).

<sup>42</sup> Owen and Kiernan (2006).

<sup>43</sup> E.g. Power (2002) 94.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973v); (1973w); Swain (1975h).

that at least 150,000 civilian deaths resulted from this extended bombing campaign,<sup>45</sup> and created conditions which forced large numbers of the rural population to flee to Phnom Penh, which swelled to a population of over two million people from its pre-war total of around 600,000.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, by 1973, inflation was running at 275 percent, and forty percent of roads, along with one-third of all bridges were no longer usable.<sup>47</sup> Export sales from Cambodia virtually ceased to exist.

The Cambodian rural population feared greatly these bombing attacks, and the Khmer Rouge used the damage caused by the bombs as propaganda in an effective recruitment campaign which helped swell their ranks.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, it may be that the U.S. bombing campaign was the number one reason that the Khmer Rouge were able to expand their power among the Cambodian countryside.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time that the power of the insurgents was growing, on the government side, corruption and poor leadership were eroding the façade of a government-led military capable of stopping the insurgents, despite backing from the United States.<sup>50</sup> The government troops, which included children,<sup>51</sup> often went unpaid, untrained, and served as cannon-fodder for the more disciplined insurgent force.<sup>52</sup> The generals and top staff, on the other hand, skimmed vast amounts of money supposedly for the troops via various means, including the creation of “phantom soldiers” to make their units appear numerically larger than they were.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the superstitious nature of the leadership, and Lon Nol in particular, who allocated resources towards

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<sup>45</sup> Owen and Kiernan (2006); Kiernan (2008a) 24.

<sup>46</sup> Metzl (1996) 4.

<sup>47</sup> Metzl (1996) 6.

<sup>48</sup> Power (2002) 94-95; Kiernan (2008a) 16-25. Shawcross (1987).

<sup>49</sup> Shawcross (1987). Cf. Kiernan (1985).

<sup>50</sup> By 1973, US aid accounted for 95% of the government income: Metzl (1996) 6.

<sup>51</sup> Schanberg (1972g); (1974t).

<sup>52</sup> Becker (1998) 100-160; Kamm (1998) 66-67; Power (2002) 93-94.

<sup>53</sup> Schanberg (1973k); (1974l); (1975al).

satisfying this part of his personality, perhaps most famously by having airplanes sprinkle blessed sand around Phnom Penh in 1972 to ward off the enemy, played a part in the erosion of confidence among the American military personal in the Cambodian government's fighting ability.<sup>54</sup> The corruption, poor battle strategy, and the often unnecessary sacrifice of lives, led to vast amounts of desertion and unenthusiastic fighting by those who did not flee the insurgent forces.<sup>55</sup>

In August 1973, Congress ordered the end of the U.S. bombing campaign in Cambodia, and the official American military presence withdrew from the country. Nominally, the Cambodians were left to fight the insurgent forces on their own; however, there appears to have been at least some military advising from the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh despite the congressional ban.<sup>56</sup> With the American bombing stopped, the insurgents were able to slowly strangle Phnom Penh by capturing strategic locations along the Mekong river, depriving Phnom Penh of its major supply route, and taking over the country as a whole.

As 1974 rolled into 1975, it became increasingly clear that the Khmer Rouge were going to win the war.<sup>57</sup> In January 1975, the insurgents besieged Neak Luong, a key town on the Mekong river, and began cutting off the river as a supply route to Phnom Penh.<sup>58</sup> With the apparent inevitability of the Khmer Rouge victory, the U.S. Congress asked serious questions on the wisdom of financially (and politically) supporting what had become a lost cause.<sup>59</sup> On April

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<sup>54</sup> Becker (1998) 120-129; Power (2002) 93-94.

<sup>55</sup> Becker (1998) 100-160.

<sup>56</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973o). Becker (1974g); Becker (2017).

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1975ag).

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1975e); (1975f); (1975g); (1975h); (1975o); (1975r); (1975t); (1975v); (1975w); (1975ag). Swain (1975a).

<sup>59</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1975aq).

13, 1975, the official U.S. presence withdrew from Cambodia with the evacuation of the Embassy.<sup>60</sup> Four days later, the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh.

## **The Genocide**

On April 17, 1975 the victorious Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh, signalling the end of a vicious five-year civil war with the government forces, and the beginning of one of the bloodiest social revolutions of the last century. An estimated one-and-a-half to two million people died during the Khmer Rouge reign of terror, either through murder or on account of the horrific conditions placed upon them.<sup>61</sup> On a per capita basis, the Khmer Rouge destruction of roughly a quarter of the Cambodian population within their three-year, eight-month, and twenty-day reign, makes the death toll one of the highest in recorded world history.<sup>62</sup>

When the Khmer Rouge victoriously entered Phnom Penh on that Thursday morning, there was some cautious optimism among the locals and western observers who had remained in the capital.<sup>63</sup> Largely, this was an optimism grounded in relief at the end of what had been a particularly vicious civil war, with many atrocities committed by both sides,<sup>64</sup> and a belief that, however bad the Khmer Rouge may be,<sup>65</sup> the situation in Cambodia could not be worse than it was. This initial optimism was replaced by fear as a Khmer Rouge spokesman claimed that: “We did not come here to talk. We enter Phnom Penh not for negotiation, but as conquerors.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Schanberg (1975ay). The British, along with a number of other embassies closed during March, as the inevitability of Insurgent victory became apparent. E.g. Schanberg (1975ao). Swain (1975f).

<sup>61</sup> See e.g. Becker (1998); Ung (2000); Power (2002) 87-154; Ngor (2003); Mann (2005) 339-350; Kiernan (2007) 539-554; (2008a); (2008b); (2009); Chandler (2008) 255-276; Schanberg (2010) 63-111; Brinkley (2011).

<sup>62</sup> Chandler (2008) 259.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1975aah); Swain (1975h); Ponchaud (1978) 4-7; Bizot (2003); Schanberg (2010) 74-75.

<sup>64</sup> Becker (1998) 3.

<sup>65</sup> While U.S. officials were claiming that a ‘bloodbath’ was eminent, many non-government observers who remained predicted that this was an exaggeration. Cf. e.g. Schanberg (1975az); Swain (1998) 111-112.

<sup>66</sup> Schanberg (2010) 80.

The Khmer Rouge then proceeded to forcefully evacuate the city, which had bloated to a population of over two million people,<sup>67</sup> many of whom had fled to the capital to escape the fighting, for the purpose of implementing an agricultural revolution based on self-reliance. The Khmer Rouge turned the clocks back to zero and attempted to reconstruct Cambodian society. What followed was massive starvation across the newly named Democratic Kampuchea, torture and execution, paranoia, and an isolated regime of terror which is now remembered as one of the worst crimes against humanity of the twentieth century.

This section offers a brief summary of Khmer Rouge controlled Cambodia. It merely attempts to set the scene and outline some of the key phases and events during the period, April 17, 1975-January 7, 1979.<sup>68</sup> The following chapters deal more closely with an analysis of how this period was covered in the media.

### **The Forced Evacuation of Phnom Penh**

In an attempt to transform the country immediately into an agricultural, self-reliant, paradise based on the vision of the Khmer Rouge leadership, the black pyjama clad cadres who had entered Phnom Penh in victory on April 17, 1975, ordered everyone out of the city. In the week following, the entire population of the capital was pushed into the countryside towards an uncertain fate. It was not only Phnom Penh that was forcefully evacuated – all towns and cities in Cambodia had their populations expelled into the countryside.<sup>69</sup> The western observers who

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<sup>67</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 48 notes that a census taken in February, 1975, totalled 1.8 million, and states that there is no evidence that the city's population was as high as 3 million, as claimed by Ieng Sary and accepted by many observers. Cf. Schanberg (2010) 43.

<sup>68</sup> For more detailed analysis, see especially, Kiernan (2008a). Also, Vickery (1984); Jackson (ed.) (1989); Becker (1998). For summary, see especially, Chandler (2008) 255-276.

<sup>69</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 31-64.

witnessed the evacuation of Phnom Penh, describe a scene of chaos, confusion, and occasional ruthless behavior on the part of the Khmer Rouge cadres.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps the most ruthless behavior witnessed in the initial part of the evacuation was the conduct of the cadres towards the sick and wounded who clogged up the city's hospitals and streets. According to most witnesses, these patients were forced out of the city, without mercy, to near-certain death.<sup>71</sup> One witness to the evacuation, in what he calls a "hallucinatory spectacle" describes how the sick and wounded were the first to be forcefully removed from Phnom Penh – about twenty thousand of them – before the rest of the population.<sup>72</sup>

However, Vickery has attempted to address the "shrill" descriptions of brutality against the sick and wounded, and argues that these patients were not simply pushed into the countryside to die, but that any attempts at evacuating the incapacitated was a crude but necessary attempt to cope with a hopeless situation.<sup>73</sup> In his view, the state of medical care in the last months before the end of the war was poor, with many hospitals being partly destroyed by bombing, along with there being a dearth of doctors, and an overflow of patients. For him, this indicates that "for the average person" the new regime did not necessarily mean a decline in medical care, because that standard was already so low.

Vickery's position is a hard one to maintain, especially when the descriptions of western doctors being forced at gunpoint away from their patients are taken into account.<sup>74</sup> While the Khmer Rouge ideology may have promoted a state of self-reliance, including in the medical

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<sup>70</sup> Ponchaud (1978); Swain (1998); Bizot (2003); Schanberg (2010) 42-52. Cf. Ung (2000); Ngor (2003).

<sup>71</sup> Ponchaud (1978) 6-7; Ngor (2003); Schanberg (2010) 44;

<sup>72</sup> Ponchaud (1978) 6-7: "Thousands of sick and wounded were abandoning the city. The strongest dragged pitifully along, others were carried by friends, and some were lying on beds pushed by their families with their plasma and IV bumping alongside. I shall never forget one cripple who had neither hands nor feet, writhing along the ground like a severed worm, or a weeping father carrying his ten-year-old daughter wrapped in a sheet tied around his neck like a sling, or the man with his foot dangling at the end of a leg to which it was attached by nothing but skin."

<sup>73</sup> Vickery (1984) 75-78.

<sup>74</sup> E.g. Swain (1998) 146-150; Bizot (2003).

field, an area which they were severely under-educated,<sup>75</sup> this cannot excuse the brutality of forcing people who were being helped by medical professionals into the countryside, or, in Vickery's generous interpretation, to another medical location, when assistance was immediately present.

Some western observers, detained at the French Embassy and appalled at what they had observed during the forced removal of patients from the hospital, claimed that the cadres "have not got a humanitarian thought in their heads", while another witness claimed that the exodus was, "pure and simple genocide. They will kill more people this way than if there had been hand-to-hand fighting in the city."<sup>76</sup>

It is unclear exactly why the Khmer Rouge leadership decided to evacuate the cities.<sup>77</sup> In Phnom Penh, the rationale given, in many instances, was that American B-52 bombers were about to raze the city, and that a temporary exodus would help save the city.<sup>78</sup> Some observers, sympathetic to the revolution and the Khmer Rouge, saw the evacuation of the cities "as the only way Cambodia could grow enough food to survive, break down entrenched and supposedly backward-looking social hierarchies, loyalties, and arrangements and set its Utopian strategies in motion."<sup>79</sup>

Part of the puzzle is the fact that different sections of Khmer Rouge cadres appear to have been confused themselves about the evacuation of the city. Kiernan has outlined a number of cases where the different sections of cadres gave conflicting orders to individuals on the

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<sup>75</sup> E.g. Becker (1998) 220; Ngor (2003).

<sup>76</sup> Swain (1998) 146; Schanberg (2010) 47.

<sup>77</sup> See Quinn (1989a) (1989b).

<sup>78</sup> E.g. Ponchaud (1978) 7; Quinn (1989a); 181-184; Ung (2000) 29; Power (2003) 88.

<sup>79</sup> Chandler (2008) 257. Cf. the comments in Swain (1998) 159. For a lengthy argument on how the cities were evacuated to bring the population closer to the food sources, see Hildebrand and Porter (1976). Cf. Chomsky and Herman (1977); Vickery (1984) 72-82; Herman and Chomsky (1988) 280-285.



evacuation, and appeared to be in conflict with each other.<sup>80</sup> Kiernan goes as far as suggesting that, perhaps, some Khmer Rouge were initially not even aware of the temporary evacuation order.<sup>81</sup>

Further confusing the issue is the secrecy of Pol Pot and the inner circle, and the contradictory statements made the few times the reason for evacuation were publicly addressed. In 1977, Pol Pot admitted that the evacuation of the cities was a carefully planned, premeditated action, and “was decided before victory was won, that is in February 1975.”<sup>82</sup> However, in 1978, Pot claimed that the “cities were not evacuated through a pre-established plan but were in conformity with the situation at the time” – that is, the shortage of food, and fear of an American plan to destroy their revolution and take back power.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, as Quinn notes, the inclusion of the sick and wounded in the evacuation, and the well-established checkpoints to capture any remaining Lon Nol officers, or other social classes the Khmer Rouge wanted removed from society,<sup>84</sup> seem to suggest that the evacuation was planned in advance to achieve policy goals, rather than for any immediate security concerns.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the Khmer Rouge, in June 1973, had burned rural villages and hamlets under their control in order to force the peasants into their communal agricultural system.<sup>86</sup> In this sense, the evacuation order was the realization of a nation-wide attempt at social re-formation.

While the evacuation order may have been premeditated, its implementation was initially haphazard. In some respects, this is perhaps to be expected. The Khmer Rouge leadership – *Angka*, “The Centre” – were still in the process of consolidating their power and playing their

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<sup>80</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 39-44. Cf. Vickery (1984) 72-82.

<sup>81</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 41.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Quinn (1989a) 181.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Quinn (1989a) 181.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. Becker (1998); Ung (2000) 30-32; Ngor (2003).

<sup>85</sup> Quinn (1989a) 181.

<sup>86</sup> Quinn (1989a) 181.

cards close to their chest. Hu Nim, the Information Minister, recalled that he was informed of the plan only on April 19, 1975 – two days after the evacuation had already started.<sup>87</sup> The transmission of the evacuation order took time, and it appears as though it reached different units in different versions, with some being informed that the “temporary” evacuation would be a lie, while others believed in the temporary nature of the order.<sup>88</sup> This led to varying levels of severity in the execution of the order.<sup>89</sup> For example, after describing the departure of the sick and wounded, Ponchaud comments on how he witnessed the departure of the rest of Phnom Penh. He notes that: “There was nothing very brutal about this first evacuation, a few shots in the air were enough to make up the minds of the unwilling.”<sup>90</sup>

Kiernan describes in more detail the inconsistent behavior of the Khmer Rouge during the forced evacuation.<sup>91</sup> It appears as though, in the initial stages of the evacuation, the Khmer Rouge cadres were, on the whole, not directly murderous or sadistic in a deliberate sense towards the general population writ large, but rather did not care to help the mass of people who were leaving the city, which left the young, old, and sick particularly vulnerable.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, there were many executions during the exodus, mainly of former Lon Nol officers and officials, and of those civilians who disobeyed direct orders.<sup>93</sup> Kiernan estimates the death toll from the evacuation (including the executions) of Phnom Penh at around twenty thousand.<sup>94</sup>

After being forcefully evacuated from the cities, the urban population were re-settled in rural villages, where they were labelled “new people” (*brâcheachon tmey*), “1975 people,” or

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<sup>87</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 33.

<sup>88</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 33-34.

<sup>89</sup> See Vickery (1984) 72-82.

<sup>90</sup> Ponchaud (1978) 7.

<sup>91</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 39-49.

<sup>92</sup> See Becker (1998) 170.

<sup>93</sup> Ung (2000); Ngor (2003); Schanberg (2010) 91-92.

<sup>94</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 48-49.

members of the “April 17 group” (*puok dap brampir mesa*). The rural villagers who had resided in Khmer Rouge zones during the war, were called “old people” (*brâcheachon chas*) or “base people” (*brâcheachon moulâdthan*).<sup>95</sup> The conditions these people faced varied depending on regional variations and circumstances.<sup>96</sup> Generally speaking, the regions which had been under control of the Khmer Rouge the longest were the best equipped to deal with the directives of the Centre. However, the northwest – centred on the provinces of Battambang and Pursat – was one of the most productive agricultural regions prior to the civil war, and so it was to this region that many of the “new people” were driven in late 1975/early 1976.<sup>97</sup> The demand for crop surpluses were heavier here than in other regions, and so were the sufferings that ensued.<sup>98</sup>

### **The Revolutionary Goals of the Khmer Rouge**

A month after the capture of Phnom Penh, on May 20, 1975, all military and civilian officials were summoned to a conference in the old sports centre in the northern part of the city.<sup>99</sup> The purpose of this five-day long meeting was for the Centre to distribute its political plan to those who would return to their regions and implement it. It was “the Centre’s first major attempt to run its political writ throughout Cambodia.”<sup>100</sup> As Becker notes, the organizational system of dividing the country into zones<sup>101</sup> meant that real power rested in the hands of the zone leaders, who were the source of supplies, and the voice of command and judgement for their areas.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Hinton (2005) 9.

<sup>96</sup> See Vickery (1984) 64-188; Kiernan (2008a) 216-250.

<sup>97</sup> Vickery (1984) 100-120.

<sup>98</sup> Chandler (2008) 258-9.

<sup>99</sup> On this meeting, see Kiernan (2008a) 55-59.

<sup>100</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 55.

<sup>101</sup> In the Khmer Rouge territorial administration, the country was divided into zones, which by 1975 included the Southwest Zone, the Eastern Zone, the Northeastern Zone, the Northern Zone (which was later divided with the creation of a Central Zone), the Northwestern Zone, the Western Zone, and a Special Zone around Phnom Penh. These zones were composed of several numbered “sections” or “regions”. On the administrative divisions, see e.g. Vickery (1984) 66-69; Carney (1989); Becker (1998) 173-181; Hinton (2005) 19; Kiernan (2008a).

The combination of theories about peasant revolution and the peculiarities of the Cambodian War had produced this situation of not one party but six, not one army but six, and six party secretaries, six warlords, who were used to running their own territory.<sup>103</sup>

This was to cause problems over the next three and a half years.

While there are no documents which survived this meeting (and very few members of the audience survived the regime), it appears that several major decisions were announced at this conference.<sup>104</sup> The two certain ones were that the evacuation of the cities was declared to be permanent, and money, markets, and Buddhism were now prohibited. It is also likely that there was a directive to dispatch troops to the Vietnamese border, and possibly an order to expel the entire Vietnamese population from Cambodia. While communal eating was probably foreshadowed at this meeting, it was not ordered until 1976. However, medium-level cooperatives were now formed, consisting of entire villages, which ensured that the leadership had a more centralized character.

The Khmer Rouge aimed at a “super great leap forward” into what they hoped would be an unprecedented form of socialism.<sup>105</sup> Their main focus was the increase of rice production, and the leadership created a target of increasing the average yield from one to three metric tonnes of rice per hectare, for the purpose of feeding the population, but also as a means of generating capital for their planned rapid development of industry.<sup>106</sup> The entire population was mobilized for this purpose and work forces were divided and segregated by sex and age, and moved around

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<sup>102</sup> Becker (1998) 173-181.

<sup>103</sup> Becker (1998)174.

<sup>104</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 173-181.

<sup>105</sup> Hinton (2005) 8-10.

<sup>106</sup> Hinton (2005).

the country depending on the needs and whims of the leadership.<sup>107</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Cambodians were moved around the country, especially to the northeast and northwest, which was supposed to have agricultural potential, but was also largely uninhabitable, requiring hard work to clear out the jungle.<sup>108</sup> Thousands died from malaria, overwork and starvation.<sup>109</sup>

Forced to work ten to twelve hours a day to try and achieve the production target, many of the “new people” who were less accustomed to such demanding physical labor than their rural countryfolk, succumbed to malnutrition and overwork.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, in order to meet the unrealistic expectations of the leadership, local cadres sometimes sent rice to Phnom Penh that should have been set aside to feed the people.<sup>111</sup> By 1977 and 1978, famine was widespread throughout the country, with many survivors mentioning eating very little besides thin rice gruel.<sup>112</sup> Despite the starvation, anyone caught stealing food was liable to be killed by the local cadres.<sup>113</sup>

In the process of creating this new society, the Khmer Rouge destroyed the traditional elements of peasant, rural, Cambodian society which was based on familial relationships and Buddhism.<sup>114</sup> Loyalty was to be shown to Angka and Angka alone. Pagodas were destroyed or turned into granaries, and the monks were targeted as enemies of the regime. Showing traditional signs of faith, such as shaving one’s head in gratitude, became incredibly dangerous and potentially deadly.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Kiernan (2008a).

<sup>108</sup> Hinton (2005) 9.

<sup>109</sup> Chandler (2008) 264-265.

<sup>110</sup> Chandler (2008) 264.

<sup>111</sup> Hinton (2005) 9; Chandler (2008) 264-265.

<sup>112</sup> Ngor (2003); Chandler (2008) 264.

<sup>113</sup> Schanberg (2010) 93-94.

<sup>114</sup> Becker (1998) 253-260; Hinton (2005) 9-11; Schanberg (2010) 93-95.

<sup>115</sup> Schanberg (2010) 94.

## Tuol Sleng

Tyrannical regimes are frequently remembered for the institutional, often paranoid, detention centres they create in the name of security. Oftentimes, these centres serve as a stand-in for a general understanding of what a regime is all about.<sup>116</sup> The Khmer Rouge regime is no different. The central interrogation centre, Tuol Sleng, also known as S-21, a site of torture and death, along with the nearby “killing fields” where the prisoners were buried or executed with a whack on the neck, has become a short-hand for trying to decipher the logic and reasoning behind the organizational terror bestowed on Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>117</sup>

Tuol Sleng was once a primary school, and there is some irony in the fact that Kong Kech Eav – who used the *nom de guerre* Duch – who oversaw the forced confessions, torture, and execution of those supposed enemies of the cause, was a former schoolteacher.<sup>118</sup> Tuol Sleng “became the nerve center of the system of terror.”<sup>119</sup> A suspicious leadership began to see enemies everywhere, and Pol Pot charged Duch with uncovering the subversive elements in the party and the country.<sup>120</sup> Becker notes that: “Duch and his police force took on the powers of judge, jury, and executioners. Tuol Sleng ultimately became a monster out of control.”<sup>121</sup>

Some statistics give an idea of the increasing nature of paranoia on the part of the leadership.<sup>122</sup> In 1975, 154 enemies were killed – “crushed to bits” in the terminology of the Khmer Rouge – during first six months of S-21s operation;<sup>123</sup> in 1976, this increased to 2,250;<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Becker (1998) 261.

<sup>117</sup> On S-21 see especially, Becker (1998) 261-289; Chandler (1999); Dunlop (2005) and Hinton (2016).

<sup>118</sup> Becker (1998) 261. On Duch, see especially, Dunlop (2005) and Hinton (2016).

<sup>119</sup> Becker (1998) 263. Cf. Metzl (1996).

<sup>120</sup> The Centre became suspicious of cadre and higher-level officials when reports of unsatisfactory progress in the countryside were received in early 1976. Becker (1998) 263-268;

<sup>121</sup> Becker (1998) 263.

<sup>122</sup> Chandler (1999) 35-40.

<sup>123</sup> Metzl (1996) 20.

<sup>124</sup> Metzl (1996) 40.

according to documents kept at the Centre, this further increased to 6,330 in 1977;<sup>125</sup> and Chandler estimates a total of 5,084 murders in 1978.<sup>126</sup> The number of inmates varied depending on the purges undertaken by the Centre,<sup>127</sup> and the vast majority of prisoners were young Khmer males of a rural background – the exact population that the revolution was supposed to be for.

While Tuol Sleng was at the centre of terror, more localised “killing fields” were also prevalent.<sup>128</sup> Often, these killings were haphazard, and at the discretion of the local leadership. However, purges of party ranks would account for a large number of deaths. For example, the Eastern Zone cadres were purged in 1978 on accusation of being too sympathetic to Hanoi.<sup>129</sup> By mid-April, 409 Eastern Zone cadres were detained at Tuol Sleng,<sup>130</sup> while an estimated further 100,000 people were executed during this purge.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, one-third of the population was subsequently transferred to western Cambodia, where half would die of starvation and disease.<sup>132</sup>

## **The Vietnamese Invasion**

The purge in the Eastern Zone was related to the fear of the Vietnamese. For Pol Pot, the Eastern Zone people were “Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds” and needed to be destroyed.<sup>133</sup> Tensions with Vietnam had been mounting, and 1978 saw conflict along the border.<sup>134</sup> Following the purge of the East – which had helped create a stream of Cambodian

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<sup>125</sup> Metzl (1996) 67.

<sup>126</sup> Chandler (1999) 36.

<sup>127</sup> Chandler (1999) 36 estimates that approximately 14,000 prisoners passed through Tuol Sleng between 1975 and 1979.

<sup>128</sup> Ngor (2003); Schanberg (2010) 92-100.

<sup>129</sup> Chanda (1986) 250-255; Metzl (1996) 106-107; Becker (1998) 311-314; Kiernan (2008a) 369-376; 386-411.

<sup>130</sup> Kiernan (2008a) 393. Kiernan notes that the largest number of cadres from any other zone held at Tuol Sleng was 48, from the Northwest zone.

<sup>131</sup> Metzl (1996) 106-107. Kiernan (2008a) 404 considers the figure of 100,00 “conservative” and states that the true figure is probably around 250,000 dead. Cf. Vickery (1984) 137.

<sup>132</sup> Chanda (1986) 254; Metzl (1996) 106-107.

<sup>133</sup> Chanda (1986) 254. Cf. Carney (1989).

<sup>134</sup> See Becker (1998) 314-326. Cf. Dudman (1978a).

recruits to be trained in Vietnam as the vanguard for a planned Vietnamese attack<sup>135</sup> – the Khmer Rouge prepared to defend the nation against Vietnamese aggression, both real and perceived.<sup>136</sup> Part of the plan involved gaining the sympathy of a western audience by gradually opening up the country to select, external groups, initially friendly communist delegations, such as a group of Yugoslavian journalists in March 1978, and eventually, two western journalists, Elizabeth Becker and Richard Dudman in December of that year.<sup>137</sup>

On December 25, 1978, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, and by the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, 1979, they had captured Phnom Penh.<sup>138</sup> The Vietnamese set up a puppet government – the People’s Republic of Kampuchea – centred on former Khmer Rouge who had fled during Pol Pot’s purges. What followed was another decade and a half guerrilla war, fought by factions of Khmer Rouge who had fled into the jungles, backed by the Chinese, with tacit United States’ support,<sup>139</sup> until 1991, when the Khmer Rouge were blocked from the Paris peace accords.<sup>140</sup>

In 1992, the largest ever United Nations operation was undertaken to unite Cambodia in free and fair elections, yet the country struggled to maintain peace and was beset by corruption, political murder, and poverty.<sup>141</sup> In 1997, journalist Nate Thayer tracked the reclusive Pol Pot into the jungles of Cambodia for his final interview.<sup>142</sup> Maintaining innocence until his death, Pol Pot died in 1998, helping to put an end to the Khmer Rouge power struggles, but not the struggles of the country, nor the search for justice for what had occurred during the 1970s.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Becker (1998) 316-317.

<sup>136</sup> On the historical enmity between the two nations, see Becker (1998) 327-363.

<sup>137</sup> See chapter four.

<sup>138</sup> On the invasion, see especially, Morris (1999). Cf. Bellamy (2010).

<sup>139</sup> E.g. Power (2002) 146-154.

<sup>140</sup> Kamm (1998) 157-200; Power (2002) 140-154; Brinkley (2011).

<sup>141</sup> Power (2008).

<sup>142</sup> Thayer (1998).

<sup>143</sup> E.g. Brinkley (2011); Hinton (2016).



## The Search for Justice and the Question of Genocide

In 1998, the United Nations created a “Group of Experts” to examine the evidence from Cambodia in order to determine whether an international tribunal should be established to judge the Khmer Rouge crimes.<sup>144</sup> By this stage, a full two decades after the Vietnamese invasion that ended the Khmer Rouge reign, a general scholarly consensus had emerged that the Khmer Rouge were guilty of committing genocide.<sup>145</sup> Yet, even at this late stage in proceedings, there was discomfort in some areas related to labelling what took place during the late 1970s in Cambodia as genocide. Largely, this discomfort rested on two accounts: (1) whether the killings were aimed at a political group – and thus a group excluded from the UN definition,<sup>146</sup> which defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group;”<sup>147</sup> and (2) whether there was deliberate intent on the part of the Khmer Rouge to destroy identifiable groups within the country – even if certain groups happened to suffer relatively more than others.<sup>148</sup>

The group of experts concluded in their report, published in 1999, that the Khmer Rouge should face charges for crimes against humanity and genocide.<sup>149</sup> The experts noted that the evidence from 1975-1979 fits the UN definition in regard to almost all of the acts enumerated in the 1948 convention. However, they also noted the difficulty in determining whether these acts were committed with the special intent of harm to the groups outlined.<sup>150</sup> The group would confirm that there was evidence of the requisite intent, supported by direct and indirect means.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Kiernan (2008a) xxvii-xxxi.

<sup>145</sup> Kiernan (2008a) xxvii.

<sup>146</sup> E.g. Kuper (1984) 7-8; Mann (2005) 339-350.

<sup>147</sup> Article II of UN General Assembly Resolution 260.

<sup>148</sup> E.g. Vickery (1984) 144.

<sup>149</sup> Kiernan (2008a) xxvii.

<sup>150</sup> On the issue of intent within the UN genocide definition, see Schabas (2000) and Nersessian (2010).

<sup>151</sup> Kiernan (2008a) xxvii.

In particular, the experts noted, as protected groups under the convention, the Muslim Cham population, along with the Vietnamese, and the Buddhist Monkhood, were targeted and suffered greatly at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. Indeed, some of the strongest evidence around the question of genocidal intent comes from the Khmer Rouge's intensely hostile statements and policy towards Buddhism.<sup>152</sup>

In 2007, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia commenced for the purpose of the prosecution of domestic and international crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge.<sup>153</sup> Due to tensions between the Cambodian Government and the United Nations around the feasibility of prosecuting former Khmer Rouge members for their crimes, this mixed tribunal – made up of Cambodian and international experts – took nearly a decade to get off the ground, and some thirty years after the Khmer Rouge were removed from power.<sup>154</sup> As of 2017, the courts have convicted only three men – Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, and Kaing Guek Eav (Duch) – at a cost of three hundred million dollars.<sup>155</sup> The two others who to date have faced trial, Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith (Sary's wife), died before their trials were complete.<sup>156</sup>

Bringing Khmer Rouge leaders and cadres to justice for crimes committed primarily during the 1970s has been difficult for those who seek some kind of legal recognition and justice for the extreme nature of the crimes committed.<sup>157</sup> Complicating the matter is the academic discussion around whether the events that occurred in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge period warrant the genocide label, providing an additional burden of proof for the prosecution to

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<sup>152</sup> Kiernan (2008a) xxviii.

<sup>153</sup> Whitley (2006).

<sup>154</sup> Whitley (2006).

<sup>155</sup> Hinton (2016); Mydans (2017).

<sup>156</sup> Mydans (2013); Fuller (2015).

<sup>157</sup> Brinkley (2011).

attain.<sup>158</sup> Cambodia, today, still deals with the ramifications of the violence seen in the country during the 1970s.<sup>159</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter offered a brief overview of what occurred in Cambodia during the 1970s. The violence and civil upheaval of the five-year civil war laid the course for the subsequent genocide committed by the victors – the Khmer Rouge. The crimes undertaken by the regime in the name of societal advancement can be considered among the worst of the twentieth century.

The following chapters address how the civil war and genocide were covered by four western journalists who closely followed the country at various points in the 1970s. The next chapter is theoretical, and examines how genocide and mass violence fits into the Peace and Conflict Studies discipline, before moving to discuss the philosophy of peace journalism and comparing it to some of the approaches used by journalists who have been charged with reporting on situations of mass violence.

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<sup>158</sup> Becker (2015); Dudman (2015).

<sup>159</sup> Kamm (1998); Brinkley (2011).

## Chapter Two: Peace Journalism, Genocide, and PACS

### Introduction

Peace journalism is an approach to reporting conflict which aims to expand the coverage to incorporate the many sides, voices, processes and events that occur during examples of societal tensions and violence.<sup>160</sup> Peace journalism is a philosophical approach that guides those charged with reporting conflict to look beyond a specific instance of violence and to consider a wider frame for their analysis. This includes considering peace processes that may be going on at both the elite and grassroots level, the alternative voices in conflict, solution-oriented reporting, and offering a deeper context to the events themselves.

Ultimately, peace journalism attempts to move beyond traditional war reporting and its focus on “good vs. evil”, win-loss scenarios, body counts, elites, and the push for victory, to give an expanded and more realistic account of how conflict affects the particular region in which it occurs, and importantly, the effect of potential solutions and transformation processes.<sup>161</sup>

This chapter situates genocide and peace journalism within Peace and Conflict Studies. In particular, it outlines the peace journalism approach to reporting conflict, before considering how some journalists who have covered situations of extreme violence went about their task, in order to draw comparisons and contrasts to the peace journalism philosophy. The following chapters highlight a number of those comparisons and contrasts through the works of the four journalists used in this study, and discuss the tension between the reality of covering extreme conflict and the philosophical approach peace journalism offers.

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<sup>160</sup> Cf. Strobel (1997).

<sup>161</sup> Lederach (1997); Lynch and Galtung (2010) 11-12.

## Genocide and Peace and Conflict Studies

Genocide is an understudied area within PACS literature.<sup>162</sup> Broadly, Peace and Conflict Studies attempts to examine and analyse conflict through a lens of peace – how can conflict be resolved, managed, transformed,<sup>163</sup> and expressed in such a way as to avoid direct violence and create the necessary conditions for what Galtung termed positive peace – peace as more than just the absence of war and only achievable when societal structures and conditions are built in such a way as to allow each and every person the opportunity to reach their full potential.<sup>164</sup> The goal of much PACS research is perhaps summed up by the title of Johan Galtung's 1996 book: *Peace by Peaceful Means*.<sup>165</sup>

Peace and Conflict scholars recognize that conflict is an inevitable part of the human experience, and occurs naturally due to resource scarcity and human difference.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, conflict can be constructive, and without social conflict

exploitative hierarchies would remain unchallenged; organizations would remain stagnant; relationships could not mature and develop; and the problems confronting groups, organizations, and nations could not be comprehensively considered, debated and solved.<sup>167</sup>

Destructive conflict, on the other hand, destroys, injures, and harms people, infrastructures, institutions, the environment and more.<sup>168</sup>

By its very nature, genocide is the epitome of destructive conflict. The goal of a genocide is to eliminate a group of people from society by destroying the victim groups'

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<sup>162</sup> Cormier et. al. (2011). Cf. Jones (2012).

<sup>163</sup> Lederach (1995); (2003).

<sup>164</sup> Galtung (1969); (1996); (2012); Jeong (2000); Fisk and Schellenberg (2008).

<sup>165</sup> Galtung (1996).

<sup>166</sup> Boulding (2000).

<sup>167</sup> Kriesberg and Dayton (2012) 3. Cf. Kriesberg (2009).

<sup>168</sup> Rubenstein (2003) 58.

relationships – including intergenerational relationships – culture, and in many cases their lives, in an attempt to wipe them from the past, present, and future.<sup>169</sup> In these instances of extreme destructive conflict, there is very little, if any, room for potential win-win outcomes to the violence.<sup>170</sup>

In this regard, PACS literature, at times, struggles to handle the form of genocidal violence, where a peaceful resolution, with the goal of positive societal transformation, is much more challenging than in less extreme instances of difference and conflict.<sup>171</sup> In part, the challenge arises because of the urgency of stopping the kind of violence seen in genocide situations – sustainable, forward looking, and peaceful societal transformations usually take time. During situations of genocide, the extreme nature of the violence often means that there is an intense time pressure to halt the direct violence by almost any means, *before* raising concerns around long-term, sustainable peace opportunities for the region undergoing extreme violence.<sup>172</sup>

Also, however, the difficulty is reflective of the tension within PACS between ideal and practical considerations in preventing, stopping, and transforming violent conflict. For example, Galtung's notion of positive peace has been criticized as being only attainable in a utopian society.<sup>173</sup> On the flip side, scholars and advocates who focus more closely on achieving the absence of direct violence in conflict situations – what Galtung termed negative peace – are criticized for focusing too much on physical damage rather than on

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<sup>169</sup> Card (2003).

<sup>170</sup> Fisher, Ury and Patton (2011).

<sup>171</sup> Some exceptions apply: e.g. MacGinty (2006) recognizes the complexity involved in the transformation from war to peace.

<sup>172</sup> Often, the solution to halting the immediate violence is discussed in terms of military intervention: e.g. Vulliamy (1994); Power (2002); Bellamy (2010). Contrast with Kuperman (2004).

<sup>173</sup> Fisk and Schellenberg (2008).

long-term and sustainable societal well-being, which includes a deeper examination of the hidden structures and ways of causing harm to others that lie beyond the overt.<sup>174</sup>

Situations of genocide, due to the extreme nature of the violence within society (or between societies), with the intended goal of eliminating a group of people from a particular location, have moved beyond the borders of what much PACS literature aims to address – the prevention of and/or positive transformation of conflict and violence. Genocide, as an example of violence *in extremis* lies beyond the pale in relation to potential societal transformation (at least, *peaceful* societal transformation). As such, by the time situations of genocide occur, much PACS theory has become redundant.

The vast majority of PACS literature aims to address conflict well before the level of violence seen in genocide is reached. In examining issues concerning less overt forms of violence within societies, such as, for example, potentially violent structural and cultural dynamics, the goal is to find solutions to these stress points before violence reaches its most destructive level. If we consider violence on a continuum, with genocide at the extreme end, then the goal of PACS is to find solutions and peaceful outcomes to conflict as early along the hypothetical continuum as possible, specifically in order to prevent extreme forms of violence such as genocide from developing in the first place.

Journalists have a role to play in the intervention and peacebuilding process during situations of extreme violence. However, questions remain around what exactly that role is. In situations of extreme violence and genocide, it is often too dangerous for local journalists to report directly on what is happening.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, they potentially have more pressing concerns such as the safety of their families. International journalists, while they

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<sup>174</sup> Galtung (1996); Jeong (2000).

<sup>175</sup> Becker (1974o); Keane (2006).

may not know as much about the local conditions as resident journalists, are charged with bringing situations of extreme violence to light for external audiences through publication of the events they witness in their reporting endeavors. Often, international journalists are able to travel more safely into dangerous areas on account of their different coloured skin or other identifiable difference from the targeted group population.<sup>176</sup> In this regard, international journalists are, at times, some of the few people who can shine a light into what is occurring in closed off communities, regions, and/or countries.<sup>177</sup> Once extreme violence has stopped, journalists who follow a peace journalism philosophy maintain attention on peacebuilding efforts that helps to keep the local population as a whole accountable by keeping the ongoing situation in the public record. Again, this encourages a stronger peace framework at the local level.

The impact of journalists and journalism in encouraging international grassroots activism – via protest, letters to political figures, etc. – to encourage some form of international intervention in situations of genocide or mass violence is heavily debated.<sup>178</sup> This debate is often discussed in conjunction with the so-called “CNN Effect” – how the creation of a twenty-four hour news cycle impacts and encourages ordinary people in foreign countries (especially the United States) to “do something” about the global crises seen on their televisions.<sup>179</sup> This study focuses on the front end of this question rather than on the impact of journalistic reporting, and highlights how individual journalists approached reporting on what they witnessed for this external audience. This study draws

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<sup>176</sup> Keane (2006); Doyle (2007).

<sup>177</sup> Of course, in some conflicts the opposite is true, and international journalists are targeted because of their identifiable differences. For discussion, see e.g. Arnett (1991); Keane (1996); Knightly (2004); Hilsum (2018).

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Power (2002).

<sup>179</sup> For discussion, see e.g. Strobel (1997); Hammond and Herman (2000); Robinson (2002); Spencer (2005); Knightly (2004); Carruthers (2011); De Franco (2012).



attention to the ways and means that journalists who reported on Cambodia in the 1970s attempted to engage with their international audience.

In a similar fashion to genocide being an understudied form of violence within the broader PACS literature, discussions around the media coverage of extreme violence is also under-researched. Peace journalism is a relatively recent stream of literature within the broader PACS discipline, despite key facets of the philosophy being identified in the 1960s.<sup>180</sup> While a number of recent studies have focused on conflict reporting, they focus on situations of violence that may be considered less extreme – that is, they do not focus on situations of atrocity or genocide.<sup>181</sup> Like the wider PACS literature, peace journalism struggles to consider how genocide fits within the research goals of exposing and presenting the hidden opportunities for peace within conflict and violence situations. This thesis, through analysis of articles written during the Cambodian civil war and genocide of the 1970s, attempts to address this gap in the wider literature.

## **Peace Journalism**

Underlying much of the concept of peace journalism is an article by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge that examines how four Norwegian newspapers covered The Congo and Cuba crises of July 1960, and the Cyprus crisis of March-April 1964.<sup>182</sup> While the idea of the journalist as a “gatekeeper” of information was already widely accepted by the time Galtung and Ruge published their essay,<sup>183</sup> these authors were concerned with what factors allowed some facts to pass through the gate and become news, while others are kept out of the story. Any story

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<sup>180</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965).

<sup>181</sup> E.g. Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Dente Ross (2009); Hackett and Schroeder (2009); Lynch (2009); Mandelzis and Peleg (2009); Shinar (2009); Lacasse and Forster (2012); Perez De Fransius (2014); Rodny-Gumede (2015).

<sup>182</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965). Cf. Harcup and O’Neill (2001); (2017); Joye, Heinrich, and Wöhlert (2016).

<sup>183</sup> White (1950). Cf. e.g. Herman and Chomsky (1988).

has an infinite number of potential facts that pass through some selection filter before they make the final story. Using the metaphor of an old radio dial tuning into a signal, Galtung and Ruge identified twelve factors which made an event a worthy candidate to become news.

The first eight factors dealt with “tuning factors” that allowed a particular signal (or story in the metaphor) to become strong and resonate with the intended audience.<sup>184</sup> The frequency had to be within the range of the set;<sup>185</sup> strong enough to be picked up;<sup>186</sup> unambiguous; meaningful – (able to be slotted into pre-existing narratives); and consonant with what is expected. Following these factors came a series of paradoxes: The element of surprise helps;<sup>187</sup> a signal that is already tuned in is more likely to be listened to moving forward; and the possibility of the new (a different signal is sometimes more likely to be picked up than the same-old story).

In addition to the eight ‘tuning factors’ the authors identify four other factors:<sup>188</sup> Was the news about events in elite nations; did it concern elites; can the event be seen in personal terms, through the action of specific individuals; and was it bad news or good news – (bad news making for the best stories). The more of these twelve factors were satisfied by an event, the more likely that event would pass through the gate and become news.

Importantly, while these factors are telling, Galtung and Ruge do not claim that all of them need to be acutely present for a story to become news. They note that events missing some of these factors can compensate by including a high proportion of the others, which still allows for an event to be considered newsworthy. For example, if there is a natural disaster in a

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<sup>184</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965) 65-68. Cf. Harcup and O’Neill (2001); Lynch and Galtung (2010) ix-xii.

<sup>185</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965) 66, expand with an example of how it doesn’t make sense for a newspaper to record a single instance of a soldier’s death in battle if one soldier is dying every minute – the paper would record the battle itself. Also, if it is a process, the process will not be recorded so much as some dramatic climax (e.g. the building of a dam goes unnoticed but its inauguration is well covered).

<sup>186</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965) 66, give the example of amplitude – the bigger the dam the greater the coverage of its inauguration.

<sup>187</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010) x: ‘dog bites man’ is not a story, but ‘man bites dog’ is.

<sup>188</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965) 68-70.

peripheral country, it has to be very negative (e.g. potentially killing thousands) for it to become newsworthy, while one person's death can be newsworthy if the deceased is an elite person in an elite country.<sup>189</sup>

In essence peace journalism counters the above twelve factors Galtung and Ruge identified as the main factors that lead to a story's newsworthiness. Peace journalism aims to go for the less newsworthy, cover non-elite nations and people as well as the structural causes of violence, and to focus on the positive, not simply the negative.<sup>190</sup> In this regard, peace journalism is an extension of much peace theory – all of which attempts to shift the emphasis of analysis from a narrow focus of violent events, to a broader discussion of both conflict and the potential for conflict transformation.

From Galtung and Ruge's initial implorations for journalists to counter the factors they identified, peace journalism has evolved into a philosophical framework and array of professional techniques.<sup>191</sup> In their discussion of peace journalism, Lynch and Galtung break down what they determine to be the "low road" and the "high road" of how to cover conflict.<sup>192</sup> In their view, the "low road" – the road of "violence journalism" – reports a conflict as a battle and the battle as a sports arena. In this kind of conflict coverage, the two sides are represented as fighting in a zero-sum game where one side has to win, the other lose, and there is a clear beginning and end to the struggle. The connection to sports metaphors becomes more apt when one takes note of how often conflict metaphors such as attack, outflank, warriors, and so on are applied in sports commentary.

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<sup>189</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010) xi.

<sup>190</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965) 84-85; Lynch and Galtung (2010) xii.

<sup>191</sup> Lynch and McGoldrick (2005); Lynch (2007); Lynch (2014); Lynch (2015); Abunales (2016).

<sup>192</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010).

As the authors note, in conflict, there are rarely just two sides playing one game on the same field, using the same equipment, etc.<sup>193</sup> The “low road” of reporting conflict slips easily into trivialisation, where a complex process becomes reduced to two sides fighting over one goal. Often this can lead to Manicheism, where one party is certified “good”, the other “bad”, and the only alternative to just victory is immoral defeat.<sup>194</sup> The reduction of a conflict to this simple formula potentially leads to a misrepresentation of the reality on the ground, which can have serious consequences for any designs on a peace process,<sup>195</sup> or at the very least, it can encourage a misguided spirit of activism among a far-off population who want to stop (or punish) the “bad” side.<sup>196</sup>

The “high road” for covering conflict moves beyond a narrow examination of a win-loss formula, to consider deeper causes, non-visible or structural factors, and the effect of conflict on all people involved – elite and voiceless, and is solution oriented rather than victory oriented.<sup>197</sup> Lynch and Galtung use a health-related metaphor to discuss the “high road” approach. If war is a disease then not only does a health reporter cover all the necessary details of the disease itself, but they also cover potential cures, societal/cultural factors, structural conditions that may give rise to extreme forms of the disease, and report on a deeper causal chain of what the disease is and how it reached its current mutation. Peace journalists, who follow this “high road” for reporting conflict, attempt to look beyond the immediate “battle” to inform their readers/viewers/listeners of the larger picture.

Table 1 below summarizes Galtung’s categories of peace and war journalism.

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<sup>193</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010) 6.

<sup>194</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010) 14.

<sup>195</sup> In part, this is because Manicheism encourages a “simple” solution – i.e. stop the “bad” side. More often than not attempted peace processes require much more complex thought processes and negotiations – especially when long-term, sustainable “positive” peace is the ultimate goal. E.g. Lederach (1997); Haus (2010).

<sup>196</sup> Mamdani (2007).

<sup>197</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010).

Table 1. Lynch and Galtung's War Journalism and Peace Journalism table.<sup>198</sup>

War Journalism	Peace Journalism
<b>1. Violence-victory-oriented</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus on conflict arena – 2 parties, one goal (to win); general zero-sum orientation</li> <li>- Closed space and time. Poor on context</li> <li>- Focus only on the visible effects (those killed, wounded, the material damaged)</li> <li>- Making wars opaque</li> <li>- 'us'- 'them' journalism; including dehumanisation of 'them'</li> <li>- Reactive journalism – waiting for the violence to occur before reporting</li> </ul>	<b>1. Conflict-solution-oriented</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explore conflict formation – parties, goals, issues; general win-win orientation</li> <li>- Open space and time. Rich in context (including history and culture)</li> <li>- Focus also on invisible effects (trauma, damage to structure/culture etc.)</li> <li>- Making conflicts transparent</li> <li>- Giving voice to all parties; humanize all sides</li> <li>- Proactive journalism – reporting also occurs before violence occurs</li> </ul>
<b>2. Propaganda-oriented</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expose 'their' untruths; help 'our' cover-ups and lies</li> </ul>	<b>2. Truth-oriented</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expose untruths on all sides and reveal all cover-ups</li> </ul>
<b>3. Elite-oriented</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus on 'their' violence and 'our' suffering; disproportionate attention given to able body males</li> <li>- Focus on elite peacemakers; a mouth-piece for elites</li> </ul>	<b>3. People-oriented</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus on violence by all sides and on all suffering; attention given to women, aged, children, and others</li> <li>- Focus on people peacemakers; give voice to the voiceless</li> </ul>
<b>4. Victory-oriented</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peace = victory + ceasefire</li> <li>- Conceal peace initiative before victory is at hand</li> <li>- Focus on treaty, institution, the controlled society</li> <li>- Leave for another war, return if the old flares up</li> </ul>	<b>4. Solution-oriented</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peace = non-violence + creativity</li> <li>- Highlight peace initiatives also to prevent more war</li> <li>- Focus on structure, culture, the peaceful society</li> <li>- Attention to aftermath, resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation</li> </ul>

In their 2005 study on Asian newspaper coverage of conflicts involving India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, Ting Lee and Maslog take Galtung's table and developed his typology to include thirteen coding categories typical of war journalism and thirteen typical of

<sup>198</sup> Taken from Lynch and Galtung (2010) 12-14 and adapted slightly.

peace journalism.<sup>199</sup> The first ten categories essentially derive from the table above. However, the interesting aspect of Ting Lee and Maslog's work is that they added categories that addressed the language element of journalistic reporting:

*Table 2: Ting Lee and Maslog's additional language categories.*<sup>200</sup>

<b>War Journalism Language</b>	<b>Peace Journalism Language</b>
- Uses victimizing language (e.g. destitute, devastated, defenceless, pathetic, tragic, demoralized) that tells only what has been done to people	- Avoids victimizing language, reports what has been done and could be done by people, and how they are coping
- Uses demonizing language (e.g. vicious, cruel, barbaric, inhumane, tyrant, savage, ruthless, terrorist, extremist, fanatic, fundamentalist)	- Avoids demonizing language, uses more precise descriptions, titles, or names
- Uses emotive words, like genocide, assassination, massacre, systematic (as in systematic raping or forcing people from their homes)	- Objective and moderate. Avoids emotive words. Reserves the strongest language for only the gravest situation. Does not exaggerate

Tables 1 and 2 above constitute the analytical frame of reference for this study.

What the aforementioned tables highlight are two manners in which conflict, war, or violence can be reported and described. Advocates for the peace journalism approach are quick to note that peace journalism does not mean that violence should not be reported. Instead, they argue, that while both versions can be descriptive of reality, the difference is that peace journalism attempts to take in more of that reality, by expanding the scope of its coverage, and allows the reader/viewer/listener to consider hopeful outcomes for the conflict under discussion.<sup>201</sup> Critics of the peace journalism philosophy have claimed that it moralizes or

<sup>199</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005).

<sup>200</sup> Adapted from Ting Lee and Maslog (2005) 326.

<sup>201</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010) 50-53; Lynch and McGoldrick (2013); McGoldrick and Lynch (2014); Lynch, McGoldrick and Heathers (2015).

*prescribes* the news, and therefore takes away from the journalistic ideal of objectivity, of reporting the “facts” without revealing any trace of bias or personal investment.<sup>202</sup>

In contrast, Lynch argues that the point of peace journalism is to bring to light the areas of conflict which usually remain in the dark (under what he terms “traditional war journalism”), and that if society is afforded the opportunity to see these other areas, and dislikes them, then “there is nothing more that journalism can do about it, while still remaining journalism.”<sup>203</sup> In this regard, Lynch and McGoldrick define peace journalism as taking place when: “Editors and reporters make choices – of what to report, and how to report it – which create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict.”<sup>204</sup>

This study takes the framework outlined above by Lynch and Galtung, and Ting-Lee and Maslog, based on the above tables,<sup>205</sup> as the analytical guide for the content analysis of articles written by Becker, Schanberg, Swain and Dudman. This framework is turned into a bi-modal set of categories which help guide the research by serving as solid indicators of what passages from these authors are worthy of further analysis and discussion.

*Table 3: Categories for this study*

<b>War Journalism</b>	<b>Peace Journalism</b>
<b>1A:</b> Focus mainly on visible effects of war (dead and wounded, property damage)	<b>1B:</b> Focus also on invisible effects (e.g. emotional trauma, society and culture)
<b>2A:</b> Elite oriented focus	<b>2B:</b> People oriented focus
<b>3A:</b> Focus on difference, on war/military	<b>3B:</b> Focus on agreements and solutions, peace

<sup>202</sup> E.g. Lyon (2007). Ting Lee and Maslog’s language categories, advocating for more objective and less emotive language, is one area in which advocates of a peace journalism approach to reporting conflict have tried to align a peace journalism philosophy with that of objective journalism. However, as discussed below, in extreme forms of violence, such as genocide, avoiding the use of emotive language becomes problematic in attempting to describe the violence, and potentially misrepresents the conflict on the ground.

<sup>203</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010) 51. Interestingly, both Lynch and Galtung have been accused of drifting too far into the realm of advocacy on particular issues. See Kempf (2016).

<sup>204</sup> Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) 5. Cf. McGoldrick and Lynch (2014); Lynch, McGoldrick and Heathers (2015).

<sup>205</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Lynch and Galtung (2010). Compare with Shinar (2009).

options	options
<b>4A:</b> Emphasis on the here and now, shallow background for explanation of conflict	<b>4B:</b> Offers deep background for explanation of conflict
<b>5A:</b> One or two parties emphasised	<b>5B:</b> Multi-party emphasis
<b>6A:</b> Partisan journalism	<b>6B:</b> Neutral journalism (doesn't take sides)
<b>7A:</b> Zero –sum, victory-defeat orientation (the “sports reporting” approach)	<b>7B:</b> Win-win, solution orientation (the “health reporting” approach)
<b>Language Indicators</b>	<b>Language Indicators</b>
<b>8A:</b> Good/bad dichotomy	<b>8B:</b> Absence of labels
<b>9A:</b> Victimizing language	<b>9B:</b> Absence of victimizing language
<b>10A:</b> Demonizing language	<b>10B:</b> Absence of demonizing language
<b>11A:</b> Emotive language	<b>11B:</b> Absence of emotive language

In using a content analysis methodology this thesis follows the majority of other studies on peace journalism.<sup>206</sup> The justification for using a bi-modal frame for analysis is that it offers clear elements that represent accepted features of peace and war journalism. The individual contrasting elements within the frame are used to draw out specific passages from within the articles to highlight these particular features of peace and war journalism. This particular bi-modal frame offers a solid reference point which allows the researcher to remain consistent in selecting the passages pulled from the writings for deeper examination. By the same token, the bi-modal analytical frame gives the researcher solid areas for comparison and contrast when the writings of the journalists are examined in detail. The writings of the journalists are more complex than a simple either/or frame can do justice, and show much more fluidity within them than what the above dichotomous tables would suggest. However, a bi-modal analytical frame actually helps to explore and discuss this deeper nuance by offering a solid reference point for contrast and comparison.

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<sup>206</sup> E.g. Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Dente Ross (2009); Hackett and Schroeder (2009); Lynch (2009); Mandelzis and Peleg (2009); Shinar (2009); Lacasse and Forster (2012); Perez De Fransius (2014); Rodny-Gumede (2015).



Despite claims by advocates of peace journalism that analysis of this kind is not dichotomous,<sup>207</sup> the majority of studies that examine conflict reporting within a similar peace journalism framework tend to present a dichotomy between war and peace elements to define the articles under consideration as being either “peace journalism” or “war journalism.”<sup>208</sup> Naturally, this leads easily into the reader considering the study in either/or terms (or worse, in terms of “good” and “bad” – peace journalism traits being “good”).<sup>209</sup> This is a significant weakness within peace journalism studies.

This study, while recognising that it too is using the bi-modal framework, attempts to avoid a strictly either/or analysis as much as possible by qualifying the level of war and peace journalism within an article, and taking into consideration whether an article is “strongly”, “slightly” or “50/50” on the war or peace journalism side of the ledger. In other words, the key area for discussion within this thesis is not to consider whether the total number of articles fall more into the peace or war journalism side of the equation, but to examine what elements of peace journalism were present (or not) within the writings of select journalists from the 1970s and to discuss why this is significant.

Moreover, where this study differs from much of the peace journalism literature is that it attempts to use the framework to examine a historical case study. This allows for a deeper examination of the material since the journalists analysed here have written memoirs and later works in which they reflect and discuss their reporting on the Cambodian civil war and genocide, including their approaches and difficulties. This study differs too in regard to its focus on individual journalists, not newspapers. This potentially allows for a deeper examination of how a

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<sup>207</sup> E.g. Lynch and Galtung (2010).

<sup>208</sup> E.g. Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Hackett and Schroeder (2009); Lynch (2009); Shinar (2009); Lynch and Galtung (2010); McGoldrick and Lynch (2014).

<sup>209</sup> This is particularly evidenced in Lynch and Galtung (2010) with their notion of the “low road” and the “high road.”

journalist evolves their reporting as their understanding of the complexity in violent conflict deepens.

One aspect of the above framework that bears further discussion is Ting Lee and Maslog's assertion that the use of emotive words (in their consideration, words like genocide, assassination, massacre, systematic) fall into the war journalism side of the equation.<sup>210</sup> On the one hand, their point rests on the idea that journalists should not exaggerate the situation, and should maintain some kind of objective, non-emotional, approach to their reporting. On the other hand, this raises a serious question in relation to journalistic reporting of extreme violence: at what point should a journalist use emotive language to describe what they are witnessing (if, indeed, the word genocide (and massacre, etc.) can be considered an emotive word, and not strictly a descriptor of the reality on the ground).<sup>211</sup> Theoretically, one can be emotive and still accurate in their reporting – they are not mutually exclusive positions. What follows is a brief discussion of how some journalists have addressed their use of emotive language in reporting on situations of extreme violence.

### **“Shock” Journalism and Genocide Reporting**

Advocates of the peace journalism approach have undertaken studies to examine whether the general reader/viewer/listener is more interested in the broader perspective journalism which the peace journalism approach offers, opposed to what these advocates consider more traditional, narrower, war reporting.<sup>212</sup> These studies conclude that the general news consumer finds the

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<sup>210</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005).

<sup>211</sup> Gutman and Rieff (1999).

<sup>212</sup> McGoldrick (2009); Lynch and McGoldrick (2013). McGoldrick and Lynch (2014); Lynch, McGoldrick and Heathers (2015).

broader peace journalism approach much more interesting. If this is the case, then why has the peace journalism approach struggled to become fully incorporated within media outlets?

The struggle for consumer attention has led to a number of different strategies by journalists in their attempts to convey information to their audience.<sup>213</sup> One strategy relevant to this study is the use by some journalists of “shock” journalism to try and highlight a particular conflict or humanitarian issue in order to force consumer focus on a particular episode of violence.<sup>214</sup> “Shock” journalism involves presenting graphic descriptions of the violence (and/or in some cases, pictures of mutilated bodies, dead children, etc.) to convey the horror in order to “shock” the reader into paying attention.

While the effectiveness of “shock” journalism is debatable,<sup>215</sup> there is no doubt that, as an attention-seeking tactic, this approach forces a particular issue into a wider discussion – even if it does so for the wrong reasons.<sup>216</sup> The line between journalism and advocacy is a fine one, and has been crossed by even those proponents of peace journalism who claim that advocacy should be left to the peace activists, not journalists.<sup>217</sup>

The question here is: How should a journalist attempt to bring a particular conflict to light for their intended audience?<sup>218</sup> This is an especially important question given the fact that there is an over-saturated news market and any number of conflicts and crises around the world potentially require the readers’ attention.

Nicholas Kristof, the *New York Times* op-ed writer, who focuses on many humanitarian issues around the world, has attempted to cut through the humanitarian journalism morass by

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<sup>213</sup> This is true not just of individual journalists, but of editors and newspapers as a whole, all of whom are looking to have consumers read their articles over those of their journalistic rivals.

<sup>214</sup> Kristof (2009a).

<sup>215</sup> Borer (2012).

<sup>216</sup> Mamdani (2007); Borer (2012).

<sup>217</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010) 52. Cf. Kempf (2016). For a historical analysis see Knightly (2004).

<sup>218</sup> Gutman and Rieff (1999).

shocking his audience with graphic images and descriptions of what particular human rights violations look like.<sup>219</sup> In a 2009 article un-ironically titled ‘Nicholas Kristof’s Advice for Saving the World’, Kristof suggests that humanitarian journalists should borrow techniques from marketing to try and connect their stories to the reader.<sup>220</sup> Kristof goes into detail about his methodology in reporting humanitarian issues, and highlights several points which he considers to be the keys in making an audience care: a focus on individuals, not groups; the main character of the story has to be female; and, perhaps most interestingly, the need to emphasize hopefulness – if there is no potential for hope at the end of the story, the reader is inclined to think “why bother.”<sup>221</sup>

In focusing on individuals, Kristof is heavily influenced by the work of the behavioural psychologist Paul Slovic, who undertook a number of experiments to try and discover why those of us in the west are often prepared to help an individual but not a group of people suffering.<sup>222</sup>

In his experiments, Slovic discovered that the human capacity for compassion may break down with as few as two people.<sup>223</sup> An individual represents a complete psychological unit that we can tangibly recognise as a person to be saved. As soon as multiple individuals enter the equation, we become psychologically desensitized, making it harder to comprehend the importance of saving one life amongst the larger problem – thus we will not value the difference between saving, for example, eighty-seven lives or eighty-eight.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> E.g. Kristof (2005); (2009b); (2010); (2011).

<sup>220</sup> Kristof (2009a). For criticism of Kristof’s approach see e.g. Borer (2012).

<sup>221</sup> Kristof (2009a).

<sup>222</sup> Slovic (2007). See also, Fetherstonhaugh, Slovic, Johnson, and Friedrich (1997); Slovic, Finucane, Peters, and MacGregor (2004).

<sup>223</sup> Slovic (2007) 88-90.

<sup>224</sup> In Slovic’s experiments, the researchers discovered that the proportion of lives saved matters more than the number when people evaluate interventions. In one experiment, college students more strongly supported an aircraft safety measure that was designed to save 98% of 150 lives at risk than a measure expected to save 150 lives. As Slovic notes: “Saving 150 lives is diffusely good, and therefore somewhat hard to evaluate, whereas saving

While Kristof believes that he has found the formula for making his audience care about particular issues, his work has been criticized on a number of fronts. Borer, for example, believes that journalists such as Kristof who use “shock tactics” actually undermine their causes because it furthers the “othering” of those who suffer the kinds of violations that Kristof writes about.<sup>225</sup> Because for most of Kristof’s audience horrific things like the hacking off of limbs, female genital mutilation, child slavery, etc., happen “over-there,” and not in their own backyard, his audience cannot comprehend that kind of suffering, and the graphic descriptions of human beings who are “no longer intact” makes it harder for his readers to recognise the victims as fellow human beings.<sup>226</sup> Instead of cutting through the morass to force his readers to care, Kristof may, in fact, be distancing his audience from the victims he attempts to draw attention to.

Kristof has also been heavily criticized for his reporting on the Darfur crisis in the early 2000s. For example, Mamdani has attacked Kristof’s reporting on a number of fronts, including his voyeuristic focus on gory violence, the simplified narrative of ethnic violence he offers, and his questionable atrocity statistics.<sup>227</sup> Unfortunately for Kristof, this is not the only time his “moral crusade” on an issue has called into question elements of his journalistic ethos.<sup>228</sup> Perhaps most seriously, Mamdani suggests that activists masquerading as serious journalists, like Kristof, who simplify (or perhaps misunderstand) a conflict and present a simplified moralistic narrative to a complex problem, tend to prescribe impossible, and potentially dangerous, solutions to the crisis (which they are then outraged about if they are not implemented).<sup>229</sup> This is exactly the kind of thing that the peace journalism approach aims to avoid in its desire to delve deeper into

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98% of something is clearly very good because it is so close to the upper bound on the percentage scale, and hence is highly weighted in the support judgement.” Slovic (2007) 85-86.

<sup>225</sup> Borer (2012).

<sup>226</sup> Cf. Scarry (1985); Humphrey (2002); Sontag (2003).

<sup>227</sup> Mamdani (2007).

<sup>228</sup> Kristof (2014). Cf. Simon Mark’s (2014) *Newsweek* feature.

<sup>229</sup> Mamdani (2007).

the background issues involved in a conflict, and through the avoidance of reducing episodes of violence to a good vs. evil scenario. However, both peace journalism and “shock” journalism run a fine line between journalism and advocacy.

The interesting thing about these two approaches is that they are two sides of the same coin. Both peace journalism and “shock” journalism ask news consumers to think about a particular conflict (and, at least in Kristof’s case, for the express purpose of turning thought into action and “doing something” about the violence). On the one hand, peace journalism attempts to draw out a more truthful, deeper, analysis of what can be a complex situation, while “shock” journalism reduces the complexity to a simple formula of good vs. bad, with one individual story filling in for the bigger picture and simplifying the complexity in order to make the conflict easier for the lay-person understand.

In part, the discussion rests on an issue with the journalist and the use of their own voice within the story they tell. The issue of journalistic voice has been around since the beginning of modern journalism.<sup>230</sup> Principally, this is because journalists have always been aware of the power that their words can have, and the tension rests in whether, and/or how, they should use that power. This question is perhaps summed up best by a series of quotations presented in Philip Knightly’s *The First Casualty*, which offers a broad historical discussion on this issue from the Crimean War to the so-called war on terror. In commenting on the Spanish Civil War, one of the fiercest (and most passionately driven) ideological conflicts of the past century, where the position of the journalist was very much debated, Knightly records quotations from two journalists, both working for the *New York Times*, on the duty of the war correspondent. Drew Middleton claimed it was: “to get the facts and write them with his interpretation of what they mean to the war, without allowing personal feelings about the war to enter the story. No one can

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<sup>230</sup> Knightly (2004).

be completely objective but objectivity is the goal.”<sup>231</sup> Herbert Mathews, an experienced journalist who had also covered the Italian campaign against Abyssinia, offered a contrast to Middleton: “I would always opt for honest, open bias. A newspaper man should work with his heart as well as his mind.”<sup>232</sup>

Ultimately, both Mathews and Middleton are attempting to answer the same question: what is the most truthful way for a journalist to explain what they witness during examples of violence and war?

To highlight a more recent example, a number of journalists who covered the “ethnic cleansing” of Bosnia were accused of promoting external armed intervention and for being “pro-Muslim” in their journalism.<sup>233</sup> Given the disproportionate level of violence committed by the Serbs against the Muslim population of Bosnia, and the fact that the world was slow in offering military assistance to the Bosnian population (which many journalists believed was required to stop the violence), journalists began “skewing” their stories towards the Muslim side, in the hope that it would move western policymakers into action.<sup>234</sup>

In the face of the violence they were seeing on the ground in Sarajevo and the Bosnian countryside, many journalists felt that they could not maintain the ideal of “objectivity”.<sup>235</sup> To a degree, this level of engagement may have something to do with the fact that western reporters could identify with the victims as Europeans, and as such, the violence was taking place in a recognisable location that contained many similar ideals of the home nations of those

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<sup>231</sup> Knightly (2004) 208.

<sup>232</sup> Knightly (2004) 208.

<sup>233</sup> See the comments of Vulliamy (1994) xi and Rieff (1995) 9. Cf. Hammond and Herman (2000).

<sup>234</sup> Power (2002) 274-279. Cf. Cohen (1998) 365.

<sup>235</sup> Note the comments of Spencer (2005) 103: “What journalists such as Bell and Vulliamy highlight in their assessment of how the media covered Bosnia is the illusion of neutrality in connection to mass human suffering, and how that by not trying to pressure governments to act, journalists are complicit in their suffering. Neutrality therefore has no useful meaning here since to try to create or not create debates about intervention are equally political acts.”

reporters.<sup>236</sup> The point here is that, while these journalists may not have been able to maintain “objectivity,” the failure to do so does not mean that they were not telling the “truth” since the violence in this conflict was, in reality, disproportionately “skewed” against the Muslim population.

In contrast, journalists who covered the Vietnam War largely remained silent on atrocities committed by American troops until after the My Lai story broke.<sup>237</sup> A number of the more reflective journalists who had witnessed previous American atrocities but remained silent suggested that even if they had recognised that they were witnessing a particular war crime, they would not have commented on it.<sup>238</sup>

For example, Peter Arnett, an *Associated Press* correspondent, claimed that he would not have labelled an event a war crime “because that would have been making a judgement, and as a correspondent for the AP he dealt in facts, not judgements.”<sup>239</sup> He goes on to comment that:

I watched hooches burning down; I saw the civilian dead. I did not write about war crimes either. We took pictures of those burnings, we told of the civilian dead and how they died, but we didn’t make judgements because we were witnesses, and, like witnesses to a robbery, accident, or murder, surely it was not for us to be judge and jury.<sup>240</sup>

Arnett, who spent thirteen years covering Vietnam, and who spent more time in the field than any other correspondent, never became involved in what he was reporting and attempted to

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<sup>236</sup> A number of journalists who covered the Bosnian crisis talk about the multicultural ideals of Bosnia, its European identity, and so on. E.g. Vulliamy (1994); Rieff (1995); Cohen (1998). This aspect made it much harder for the journalists on the ground to understand why their countries were not coming to the aid of people who had similar ideals as them.

<sup>237</sup> Hersh (1970). See also Knightly (2004) 431-436. The My Lai story removed inhibitions from talking about the nature of the war and after it broke a number of reporters came forward claiming that they had witnessed similar atrocities.

<sup>238</sup> See Knightly (2004) 441-442 on the varied nature of journalists who went to Vietnam.

<sup>239</sup> Quoted in Knightly (2004) 435.

<sup>240</sup> Quoted in Knightly (2004) 436.



“observe with as much professional detachment as possible, and to report a scene with accuracy and clarity.”<sup>241</sup> Arnett’s detachment made him, according to one author, “as hardboiled as a Chinese thousand-year-old egg.”<sup>242</sup> One question which arises from Arnett’s determination to remain detached is, whether his simple recording of the facts without judgement is more or less truthful and/or accurate than if he had made a judgement and labelled an event that he witnessed a war crime? The judgement of the individual journalist in relation to this question is a key component of how we should consider the nature and role of the journalist in reporting violent conflict.

This judgement on the part of the journalist becomes even more pertinent to this study when we take into account the language component of Ting Lee and Maslog’s war and peace journalism codification, which calls for the use of objective and moderate language and the removal of “emotive” language (other than in what they consider the most extreme examples).<sup>243</sup> At what point does the opinion of the individual journalist on the nature of the violence that they witness impact their ability to recount accurately the events they bear witness to?<sup>244</sup> In other words, if they witness a war crime, should a journalist expressly label the event a war crime or let the description of the event speak for itself? Furthermore, can and should the journalist describe a scene of atrocity dispassionately? There is also another question which arises within this discussion: Are journalists able to recognise and identify correctly war crimes, genocide, and other human rights abuses when they are “stuck in the moment” and as such do not possess the benefit of hindsight, reflection, and the “bigger perspective?”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Quoted in Knightly (2004) 446.

<sup>242</sup> Quoted in Knightly (2004) 446.

<sup>243</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005).

<sup>244</sup> Gutman and Rieff (1999).

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Becker (1998) xii. Also, Herr (1991); Knightly (2004) 466-7; Chaon (2007) 164.

Journalists who cover war, atrocity, and genocide are not only faced with questions around how they should record examples of extreme human suffering, they are often confronted with moral dilemmas in whether to remove their journalist cap and take part in the action occurring around them, for example, by attending to any wounded within their vicinity.<sup>246</sup> It is important to keep in mind that, while journalists may be present at scenes of violence as witnesses, situations arise where each individual needs to make decisions on whether to take some kind of action, and thus become involved in the story they are telling, or to remain strictly an observer. The best journalists are those who are aware of the questionable morality of their presence during an individual's worst, and potentially last, moments on earth.<sup>247</sup> Others are simply detached and oblivious to the human aspect of the suffering they are bearing witness to.<sup>248</sup> Many journalists found that they could not understand their peers who worked with an oblivious eye to their surrounds.<sup>249</sup>

What this means in relation to the discussion on war journalism and peace journalism is that, while the philosophy of peace journalism represents a noble and worthwhile approach to thinking about how conflict and violence are reported, it cannot be forgotten that journalists are

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<sup>246</sup> Note the comments of Swain (1998) 31-34 who, in the early stages of the Cambodian civil war, was next door to a packed cinema in Phnom Penh that had grenades thrown into it. Swain describes a wounded girl who he drove to the military hospital (with two other wounded) which refused him access, before driving to the other side of town and imploring the reluctant medical staff at the Khmer-Soviet friendship hospital for help. The little girl died, and Swain goes on to say that: "Seldom has the ending of a little life so touched me." Clearly, this incident was an emotional one for Swain, and he describes a common problem facing journalists in similar situations: "Herein lay a recurring dilemma: in what circumstances should a journalist stop being a journalist and intervene to save lives? As I have said, there were some reporters who hardly seemed to care, developing a detached attitude to death. Perhaps they had found that personal involvement brought only pain and so masked their feelings with an outward display of hardened professionalism. Were they right? It was hard to think so. Yet on this occasion I was so preoccupied with the wounded that I was the last to file a story. My story was strong on colour and detail, but it was hopelessly late and I got a rocket from AFP in Paris. The editors there had, however, appreciated my difficulties and my dilemma. At the end of their note they added a single French word – 'Courage'."

<sup>247</sup> This was especially true for photographers and television crews recording the last moments of peoples' lives. See Herr (1991) 227-229; Keane (1996) 76; Hedges (2003) 165; Knightly (2004) 448-456. Cf. Gourevitch (1998) 195-200; Hughes (2007).

<sup>248</sup> See Roskis' (2007) comments on those who took images during the Rwandan humanitarian crisis.

<sup>249</sup> E.g. Swain (1998).

individuals who are affected by what they see firsthand, their backgrounds, and so on. While a number of studies have looked at peace journalism in relation to specific conflicts,<sup>250</sup> very few draw attention to extreme forms of violence such as genocide, and none to date examine individual journalists.

A number of studies have focused on specific newspapers to examine questions around peace and war journalism. In part, this is in recognition of the news “machine” that involves ownership, editorial decisions, target audience and so on.<sup>251</sup> However, the journalists themselves hold the key to explaining what they see, and how to interpret the violence for their readership. Moreover, one gap in much of the peace journalism literature is the lack of examples from specific journalists on “war journalism” and “peace journalism” traits. By examining particular journalists, it may be possible to see how fluid these two categories are at times depending on the nature of the action at hand, and the ability of the journalists themselves.<sup>252</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed peace and war journalism and the different approaches to reporting on situations of extreme violence. It also drew attention to how genocide, as an extreme form of violence, is understudied within PACS literature.

This chapter also offered an analytical frame for the study. Using a bi-modal peace and war journalism model, adapted from the studies of Lynch and Galtung, and Ting Lee and Maslog, it set the frame of reference for the analysis that follows. The next chapter addresses the

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<sup>250</sup> E.g. Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Dente Ross (2009); Hackett and Schroeder (2009); Lynch (2009); Mandelzis and Peleg (2009); Shinar (2009); Lacasse and Forster (2012); Perez De Fransius (2014); Rodny-Gumede (2015).

<sup>251</sup> E.g. Galtung and Ruge (1965); Herman and Chomsky (1988); Lynch and Galtung (2010).

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Lyon (2007) 4-5.

particular methodology more closely, before the following chapters present the detailed analysis of the articles under discussion within this thesis.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### Introduction

A total of two hundred and fifty-four articles were analysed for this thesis: twenty-one from Jon Swain; sixty-two from Elizabeth Becker; fourteen from Richard Dudman; and one hundred and fifty-nine from Sydney Schanberg. The discrepancy in the number of articles between the journalists arises from their historical reporting situations – Schanberg covered Cambodia virtually exclusively from 1973-1975; Becker was based in Phnom Penh from 1973-1974; while Swain spent much of his time in Vietnam, with occasional visits to Cambodia during the latter years of the war;<sup>253</sup> and Richard Dudman was the Washington Bureau chief for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and he returned to Cambodia in late 1978.

The journalists' articles analysed in this thesis emanate from their first coverage of Cambodia through to January 1979, when the Vietnamese invasion stopped the Khmer Rouge genocide.

This study offers a quantitative and qualitative approach.<sup>254</sup> The quantitative comes in the form of a directed content analysis of the journalists' articles (chapter five), while the qualitative comes via an intuitive reading of the articles, along with the journalists' memoirs and other later writings, which is gathered into a discussion in chapter four that considers how and why they wrote the articles examined in this thesis in the manner they did.

This chapter offers an outline of the methodology used in this study before the following chapters detail the analysis of these four journalists and their articles.

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<sup>253</sup> Swain was based in Phnom Penh early in the war while working for *AFP* – upon his return to SE Asia following the conclusion of his initial assignment he spent much of his time based in Vietnam. Swain (1998).

<sup>254</sup> Bogdan and Biklen (2007); Cresswell (2007); Kornelsen (2014) 257-260. See Monroe (2012) 323-324 on the division between scholars who argue that qualitative methodologies are legitimate, and those who see quantitative approaches as more scientifically authoritative.

## Content Analysis

The primary research method involved in this study is a content analysis of the four journalists' articles. Generally, content analysis is a text-based methodology that Bryman defines as "an approach to the analysis of documents and *texts*, that seek to quantify content in terms of pre-determined categories."<sup>255</sup> Content analysis is an analytical methodology based on an already existing text and can be referred to as a "non-reactive" or "unobtrusive" methodology.<sup>256</sup>

For this study, content analysis is the preferred methodology since it allows the researcher to systematically examine the primary documents – the journalists' articles. Specifically, this study uses a directed content analysis method, where pre-determined categories were searched for within the primary texts (see below).<sup>257</sup> Directed content analysis typically begins with relevant empirical research findings or a theory as a guiding framework to develop initial codes.<sup>258</sup> The categories for this study were derived from the peace journalism studies of Ting Lee and Maslog, Galtung and Lynch.<sup>259</sup> In using a content analysis methodology, this thesis follows the majority of other studies on peace journalism.<sup>260</sup> At the same time, however, the researcher remained alert for the themes and passages that lay outside this guiding frame. A number of these passages are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>255</sup> Bryman (2008) 274 (emphasis in original). Cf. Berelson (1952); Weber (1990); Druckman (2005); Babbie (2013); Prior (2014)

<sup>256</sup> Babbie (2013) 294.

<sup>257</sup> Druckman (2005); Hsieh and Shannon (2005).

<sup>258</sup> Babbie (2013) 335.

<sup>259</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Shinar (2009); Lynch and Galtung (2010).

<sup>260</sup> E.g. Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Dente Ross (2009); Hackett and Schroeder (2009); Lynch (2009); Mandelzis and Peleg (2009); Shinar (2009); Lacasse and Forster (2012); Perez De Fransius (2014); Rodny-Gumede (2015).

## The Journalists and Other Considerations

Because these articles were written in the 1970s, a significant amount of time has passed since the journalists recorded these events. On the one hand, this offers an advantage in the sense that researchers today have a greater understanding of what occurred in 1970s Cambodia than those writing in the late 1970s, and so can compare the contemporary journalistic accounts with what is now known. On the other hand, the temporal distance from these events makes issues of memory, especially around the reasoning for certain presentations of material by the journalists, more difficult to lock down.<sup>261</sup> At the same time, however, all of these journalists published reflection articles and/or wrote memoirs that help outline much of their understanding of the events that they witnessed, and explain why some material was presented in a certain manner.<sup>262</sup>

These memoirs and reflections serve as a valuable tool by allowing a researcher to delve beyond a surface reading of the primary material – the articles – and consider why those documents were written in the manner they were, even if issues of memory need to be taken into account on occasion. They also offer valuable insight into the themes that emerged from the writings that lay outside the analytical guideline – i.e. the peace and war journalism table. By examining the reflections of these journalists' on their life experience in reporting on Cambodia, the researcher was able to offer a deeper portrayal of both the journalists' and their writings.<sup>263</sup>

To a degree, this study also follows a case-study methodology.<sup>264</sup> This is in two regards: (1) by focussing on the Cambodian genocide as an example of extreme violence; and (2) through the selection of four specific journalists and their works for analysis.

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<sup>261</sup> E.g. Dudman (2015).

<sup>262</sup> E.g. Becker (1998); (2015); (2017); Dudman (1990); (2015); Schanberg (2010); Swain (1998).

<sup>263</sup> On bio and life methodology see e.g. Clough (2004); Merrill and West (2009); Goodson (2013); O'Neil, Roberts, and Sparks (2014).

<sup>264</sup> Bogdan and Biklen (2007). More specifically, it follows a historical case-study approach through its reliance on existing historical documents.

The Cambodian example was selected for three main reasons: (1) the historical element to the violence allowed for a deeper analysis since historians and researchers have a good understanding of the events that occurred in the 1970s, which allows for comparison and contrast to the writings from the time; (2) The genocide and civil war were difficult to analyse in real-time given the secretive nature of what was occurring within Khmer Rouge controlled territory. This allowed for greater exploration around questions of journalist access in relation to the peace and war journalism table; and (3) A number of journalists who covered Cambodia during the civil war and genocide wrote memoirs and other works that offered a deep contextual analysis to the articles they wrote at the time. This allowed for greater exploration of questions relating to peace and war journalism within the contemporary articles as it provided context and explanation to their writings from the 1970s.

These four journalists and their reports were chosen for analysis because they wrote a number of key articles during the Cambodian civil war and genocide, and were some of only a handful of journalists who were present in Cambodia during significant periods of the genocide. Schanberg and Swain were present during the fall of Phnom Penh, while Dudman and Becker were the only two western journalists who worked for non-communist newspapers permitted to enter Democratic Kampuchea, in late 1978.

Only one other journalist was considered for this study, Henry Kamm of the *New York Times*, who covered various stages of the Cambodian civil war, and who wrote extensively about the Southeast Asian refugee crisis during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Kamm also wrote a detailed memoir of his time in Cambodia.<sup>265</sup> Ultimately, Kamm was not present in the country during the Khmer Rouge revolution and as such was excluded from this study. However, his

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<sup>265</sup> Kamm (1998).



memoir provided much useful material in understanding the journalistic conditions in Southeast Asia during this period.

The articles by Becker, Schanberg and Swain were discovered via the University of Manitoba library website, which contains databases of historical articles from the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *The Sunday Times*. These databases allow for an author search that can then be modified to suit the targeted date range of publication, which in this case was from 1970-1979. Any article written by these journalists that referred to Cambodia was downloaded and filed by date.

A subscription was required to gain access to the articles by Richard Dudman who wrote for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Access to his articles was obtained via the website newspapers.com which also allowed for an author search that could then be narrowed by date. A subscription added to the cost of this study but was deemed worthwhile since Dudman was one of only two journalists present in Cambodia just prior to the Vietnamese invasion, and he offered his readers a deep look into Democratic Kampuchea in a series of articles from late 1978/early 1979. Moreover, an examination of Dudman's articles allowed for a valuable comparison to those of Elizabeth Becker, one of his travel companions to the country in late 1978.

## **Method**

The articles were read through once to gain a feel for the tone and style of the writers. A second, close reading, followed, before the articles were analysed through the filter of Table 4 (below), adapted from the studies of Lynch and Galtung, and Ting Lee and Maslog.<sup>266</sup> A directed content analysis was the appropriate method for this study since it allowed for a consistent analysis of the vast amount of textual data. In other words, a directed content analysis

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<sup>266</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Shinar (2009); Lynch and Galtung (2010).

offered an ideal method of data gathering for a study like this, since the categories being searched for within the texts were pre-determined, and are generally accepted features of war and peace journalism within the broader literature. This allowed the researcher to remain consistent in what they were drawing out of the source material. This study, in using a content analysis method, follows much of the peace journalism literature that gathers data through variations of the war/peace journalism frame outlined in the previous chapter.<sup>267</sup>

*Table 4: Categories for this study*

<b>War Journalism</b>	<b>Peace Journalism</b>
<b>1A:</b> Focus mainly on visible effects of war (dead and wounded, property damage)	<b>1B:</b> Focus also on invisible effects (e.g. emotional trauma, society and culture)
<b>2A:</b> Elite oriented focus	<b>2B:</b> People oriented focus
<b>3A:</b> Focus on difference, on war/military options	<b>3B:</b> Focus on agreements and solutions, peace options
<b>4A:</b> Emphasis on the here and now, shallow background for explanation of conflict	<b>4B:</b> Offers deep background for explanation of conflict
<b>5A:</b> One or two parties emphasised	<b>5B:</b> Multi-party emphasis
<b>6A:</b> Partisan journalism	<b>6B:</b> Neutral journalism (doesn't take sides)
<b>7A:</b> Zero –sum, victory-defeat orientation (the “sports reporting” approach)	<b>7B:</b> Win-win, solution orientation (the “health reporting” approach)
<b>Language Indicators</b>	<b>Language Indicators</b>
<b>8A:</b> Good/bad dichotomy	<b>8B:</b> Absence of labels
<b>9A:</b> Victimizing language	<b>9B:</b> Absence of victimizing language
<b>10A:</b> Demonizing language	<b>10B:</b> Absence of demonizing language
<b>11A:</b> Emotive language	<b>11B:</b> Absence of emotive language

Where an element from Table 4 was present in an article, it was noted accordingly: For example, if an article focused on the visible effects of the war it was labelled with a “1A” notation. If, in the same article, there was the presence of victimising language as well, for example, the article was also labelled “9A”. Each article received as many of the categorical labels as were present, and were not restricted to one side of the table. As such, an article that

<sup>267</sup> E.g. Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Dente Ross (2009); Hackett and Schroeder (2009); Lynch (2009); Mandelzis and Peleg (2009); Shinar (2009); Lynch and Galtung (2010); Perez De Fransius (2014).

focused on both the physical effects of the war *and* the invisible effects, such as commentary on emotional and/or social trauma, would receive *both* a “1A” and a “1B” notation.

Following this analysis, each article was assigned an overall peace journalism/war journalism label based on this categorization and overall holistic “feel” of the article. This involved both a tallying of the categories discovered in the article and an intuitive reading of the material. An intuitive reading was necessary because the presence of certain categories from the table did not ultimately determine the “weight” of each category. For example, a brief mention of emotional trauma does not carry the same weight as a lengthy paragraph giving detail of physical destruction. But, the presence must be noted.

Another example of the need to examine the “weight” of the category is when the volume of material is taken into consideration. Sydney Schanberg, who at times was writing nearly an article a day, would rarely provide deep background to what he was explaining. Yet at times he would devote virtually entire articles to explaining the background of the conflict. When one is writing about the same conflict on a near daily basis, a deep repetition of the background for the conflict becomes somewhat redundant, and ultimately takes up unnecessary space from the description of what was happening in the present. This skews the analysis of category “4” to indicate an emphasis on the “here and now” in Schanberg’s writing, which has the potential to misrepresent the larger context of his work.

The dichotomous nature of Table 4, with distinct categories for specific elements of peace journalism or war journalism, also fails to consider the different “levels” of these labels, for example, whether an article is “slightly” more on the peace journalism side or “strongly” war journalism. Scholars who are advocates for the peace journalism approach to reporting conflict are quick to comment that analysing articles in this manner is not an “either/or” consideration,

but rather, the more “checks” on the peace journalism side of the table, the better.<sup>268</sup>

Unfortunately, the impression one is left with in reading these discussions is that articles fall into one of these distinct categories. Moreover, the implication of this kind of analysis is that the journalist deliberately chose to present the material along one of these paths – in Lynch and Galtung’s terminology, along the “low” road or the “high”.<sup>269</sup> Naturally, this fails to consider the specific situation the journalist was facing in trying to gather material.

While this study categorizes into war journalism and peace journalism classifications, it does so on a sliding scale: Articles are labelled “strong war journalism”; “probably war journalism”; “50/50”; “possibly peace journalism”; and “strong peace journalism.” Strong war journalism refers to those articles that contain virtually no elements of the “B” side of Table 4 and maintain a strong focus on elements of the “A” side. Probably war journalism refers to articles which give some space for “B” side elements, but ultimately focus on “A” elements. 50/50 refer to articles which are strong on both “B” and “A” side elements. Possibly peace journalism refers to articles which contain some “B” elements and “A” elements, with more “weight” given to various “B” side material. Strong peace journalism refers to articles that have little “A” side material and contain a strong emphasis on “B” side elements.

Considering war journalism and peace journalism classifications on a sliding scale allows room for more nuance in the analysis of an individual journalist’s work. It also alleviates some of the criticism around dichotomising these two techniques to reporting on conflict.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010).

<sup>269</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010).

<sup>270</sup> E.g. Lyon (2007).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodological approach used to examine what elements of peace and war journalism were present in the writings of Elizabeth Becker, Richard Dudman, Jon Swain and Sydney Schanberg within their articles from the 1970s on the Cambodian civil war and genocide. The next chapter offers a large contextual discussion of these authors' works, and includes discussion of their writing styles and approaches to reporting on this conflict, before the following chapter details the content analysis of these four journalists' works.

## **Chapter Four: The Journalists and Their Accounts**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on how four key journalists who covered Cambodia at various points in the 1970s attempted to analyse and describe the war and genocide. These journalists – Elizabeth Becker, Richard Dudman, Sydney Schanberg, and Jon Swain – were chosen because they wrote some of the most important articles from this time period.

The purpose of this chapter is to lay some of the groundwork for the following content analysis by offering a deep contextual framework to these authors' works. It identifies and discusses a number of important passages from the journalists' writings, including those that may help to explain why these authors wrote about the civil war and genocide in the manner they did. This chapter draws on passages from their articles written during the civil war and genocide as well as their later books and memoirs.

In offering this extended context chapter, this thesis attempts to address one of the gaps within the literature of peace journalism. The majority of studies that use a similar lens to explore questions around reporting conflict examine peace journalism via a content analysis of particular newspapers, with the goal of uncovering whether, during a particular conflict, peace journalism was practiced, and how much it was practiced in relation to war journalism. In these analyses, there are very few direct quotations from the newspapers to highlight the points under discussion. By focusing on the news media source the voice of the journalist themselves is removed from the discussion, and most studies do not mention the name of the journalists whose articles are being analysed within the discussion. In attempting to highlight the importance of the individual journalist to questions of conflict coverage, this chapter contains a number of direct

quotes from the journalists' writings and discusses their individual work, not the broader content of their newspapers.

The passages selected for analysis in what follows were uncovered by an intuitive reading of the articles, as themes emerged inductively, along with the later writings and memoirs. During these readings, the researcher had two broad questions in mind: What are the key articles and passages from these authors; and do these authors offer any explanations for why they wrote about the Cambodian civil war and genocide in the manner they did.

In asking these two questions, the key articles and passages were assumed to be those written at significant points of the war and genocide (e.g. during Becker and Dudman's trip to Democratic Kampuchea in late 1978; and Schanberg and Swain's presence in Phnom Penh following the Khmer Rouge take-over in April, 1975), and those which offer potential clues to either the author's writing style or their mindset in understanding the events of 1970s Cambodia.

Passages deemed relevant were pulled from the text, along with notations on the broader context of when they were written (for example, with a description of the war setting, political situation, etc.). These passages are analysed below by author and in chronological order (as much as possible) in an attempt to consider how these authors' approach and thinking about the war and genocide evolved over time.

## **Elizabeth Becker**

Elizabeth Becker arrived in Phnom Penh at the end of 1972, twenty-five years old, "straight from graduate school in South Asian politics."<sup>271</sup> She had used money from a fellowship grant to buy a one-way ticket from Seattle to Phnom Penh, where she sought out news

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<sup>271</sup> Becker (2015).

organizations “so desperate for reporters on the spot that they would employ a woman.”<sup>272</sup>

Although Becker was a latecomer to the conflict in Indochina, she arrived just as the United States began an intensive bombing campaign in Cambodia, which caught news organizations short-handed.<sup>273</sup> Within five months of her arrival, Becker became a special correspondent for the *Washington Post*.<sup>274</sup>

While the majority of adventure seekers sought to make a name for themselves as journalists by covering the war in Vietnam,<sup>275</sup> Becker was one of a handful of journalists who covered Cambodia exclusively, and based herself permanently in Phnom Penh.<sup>276</sup>

In a 2017 article for the *New York Times* Becker wrote about how challenging it was to be a female war reporter in Southeast Asia.<sup>277</sup> In particular, she cites the difficulty in gaining the respect of male colleagues and military sources, who often made passes at her and the other female reporters.<sup>278</sup> Becker, as a result of the “noise” of her male colleagues who engaged in wild evenings of sex, drugs, and rock and roll, before covering hair raising battles – as described in memoirs like Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* and Jon Swain’s *River of Time*<sup>279</sup> – preferred to hang out with her Japanese colleagues, who she found much quieter and more respectful.<sup>280</sup>

Following her time at the *Washington Post*, Becker would become the Senior Foreign Editor of National Public Radio, and later joined the *New York Times*.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Becker (2017).

<sup>273</sup> Becker (2017).

<sup>274</sup> Becker (1998) xi-xii; Power (2002) 97. Becker’s first piece for the *Washington Post* was published on May 29, 1973. Becker was also contracted to *Newsweek* and NBC radio. This study focuses on her *Washington Post* pieces.

<sup>275</sup> Knightly (2004) 441-443 talks about the ease of becoming an accredited journalist. Cf. Becker (2017) and her comments on the difficulty of being a woman trying to find a job with a news outlet in SE Asia.

<sup>276</sup> Becker (1998) 401.

<sup>277</sup> Becker (2017).

<sup>278</sup> Becker (2017). Cf. Higgins (1951); Gellhorn (1988); Bartimus (2002); Fawcett (2002); Kazickas (2002); Lederer (2002); Mariano (2002); Merick (2002); Palmer (2002); Webb (2002); Wood (2002).

<sup>279</sup> Herr (1991); Swain (1998).

<sup>280</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlAcMZWJGEE> (accessed 28/8/18).

<sup>281</sup> <https://www.elizabethbecker.com/about/> (accessed 28/8/18).



### *Early Pieces*

Becker wrote twenty-three pieces for the *Washington Post* between May 29, 1973 and March 3, 1974. In these early articles, Becker comes across as a very capable and thoughtful journalist who could find different angles of the conflict to cover. For example, On June 11, 1973, Becker wrote an article highlighting how the local sides in the war collaborated in a tacit agreement to allow the country's rubber industry to survive.<sup>282</sup> An August, 1973 article dives into the issue of Cambodian gems being smuggled out of the country,<sup>283</sup> and a lengthy article from January 20, 1974 delves into the damage being done to the famous Angkor temples during the war.<sup>284</sup> At the same time, Becker hits all the notes from the conflict itself, such as reporting on the supply convoys coming up the Mekong,<sup>285</sup> the refugee crisis in Phnom Penh and the shortage of rice,<sup>286</sup> and coverage of the military situation itself.<sup>287</sup>

### *Figuring out the Khmer Rouge*

When Becker first arrived in Phnom Penh, there was some confusion as to who exactly was fighting on the communist side.<sup>288</sup> Becker, like her journalist colleagues, defined the other side according to the regime they opposed, the Phnom Penh government forces. As such, they were labelled “insurgents”<sup>289</sup> and “rebels”<sup>290</sup> or were defined according to ideological terminology – “communists”<sup>291</sup> – with occasional reference to the North Vietnamese who backed their efforts during the civil war. On occasion, Becker would expand this to a “catch all”

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<sup>282</sup> Becker (1973c).

<sup>283</sup> Becker (1973l).

<sup>284</sup> Becker (1974a).

<sup>285</sup> Becker (1973a)

<sup>286</sup> Becker (1973f); (1973h); (1973q); (1973r).

<sup>287</sup> E.g. Becker (1973e); (1973i); (1973j); (1973s).

<sup>288</sup> Quinn (1989a) 217; Becker (1998) 26-113; Metzl (1996) 6; Power (2002) 95-100.

<sup>289</sup> E.g. Becker (1973c); (1973g); (1973h); (1973m).

<sup>290</sup> E.g. Becker (1973d); (1973e); (1973i); (1973p); (1973t).

<sup>291</sup> E.g. Becker (1973a); (1973b).

labelling “Communist Khmer Rouge insurgents”<sup>292</sup> or “Insurgent Khmer Rouge.”<sup>293</sup> Four articles refer simply to the “Khmer Rouge”.<sup>294</sup>

In early 1974, on March 6 and March 8, Becker wrote two articles outlining how a “rebel unit” sought to defect from the Khmer Rouge side.<sup>295</sup> In these pieces, Becker offers some of the first, albeit brief, hints of what life was like on the “other side” in a western newspaper.<sup>296</sup>

Becker also notes how observers of the conflict believed that

the nationalists have lost in the struggle for control of the Khmer Rouge movement and that the Communists are exerting pressure to unify their side of the war. Since the Communists are demanding greater sacrifices from the nationalists on the front line these experts reason, defections will become more frequent.<sup>297</sup>

The confusion between who was “in charge” of the Khmer Rouge movement,<sup>298</sup> the “nationalists” or the “communists” was to continue among journalists (and officials) right through the Khmer Rouge capture of the country.<sup>299</sup>

On March 10, 1974, Becker expanded her interest on the “other side” in the struggle and published one of the first in-depth attempts at answering a key question of the conflict: “Who are the Khmer Rouge?”<sup>300</sup>

This long feature, which received a full-page spread in the Sunday edition of the *Washington Post*, drew heavily on government and diplomatic sources, as well as a book called *Regrets of the Khmer Soul*, considered at the time by foreign experts as one of the few primary

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<sup>292</sup> E.g. Becker (1973g).

<sup>293</sup> E.g. Becker (1973d).

<sup>294</sup> E.g. Becker (1974a); (1974b); (1974c); (1974f).

<sup>295</sup> Becker (1974d); (1974e).

<sup>296</sup> Cf. Schanberg (1974i).

<sup>297</sup> Becker (1974d).

<sup>298</sup> Metzl (1996) 8; Power (2002) 95-100.

<sup>299</sup> Metzl (1996) 5-6. Cf. e.g. Schanberg (1975ai); (1975aah); Swain (1975h). See also, Becker (1998); Kiernan (2008a) 1-156.

<sup>300</sup> Becker (1974f). Cf. Becker (1998) 140-143.

documents of the Khmer Rouge movement.<sup>301</sup> *Regrets of the Khmer Soul* was written by a former teacher, Ith Sarin, who journeyed through Khmer Rouge territory for nine months in 1972/1973, speaking with leaders, soldiers, and peasants within the movement. Becker had noticed many Cambodians in Phnom Penh reading the book, and with a Japanese friend and colleague, Ishiyama Koki, paid to have it translated.<sup>302</sup>

The *Post* piece begins with two quotes from a foreign expert and western diplomat who mention the strength of the Khmer Rouge and predict their victory. Becker then moves on to note how the leaders of the Lon Nol government say that they would negotiate with the other side, but do not know who to contact. This claim that the government officials did not know who to contact on the other side would become a recurrent, if disputed, theme as the conflict waged on.<sup>303</sup> Becker herself, towards the end of this article, mentions the Prime Minister, Long Boret, being involved in low-level peace feelers the year previously. To a degree, the Khmer Rouge myth of “secrecy” was allowed to propagate on the government side to help avoid an awkward admission that, even with the United States’ help, the military situation was not favourable for a government victory in the war.<sup>304</sup>

Becker continues:

Certainly the actual core of the leadership of the National United Front of Cambodia (FUNK), is unknown. But a fair portrait of the movement has been drawn from documents, low-level contacts and a recently published diary called “Regrets of the Khmer Soul.”<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Becker (1974f).

<sup>302</sup> Power (2002) 98. Becker (2017).

<sup>303</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1974o); (1974p); (1975af); (1975ak).

<sup>304</sup> Schanberg (1975af).

<sup>305</sup> Becker (1974f).

The depth of Becker's investigation, considering that she was unable to access Khmer Rouge territory, is impressive. Becker constructs a detailed analysis of the political structure, and her piece contains the first mention of Salot[h] Sar, the future Pol Pot,<sup>306</sup> along with details about [I]eng Sary, Yeng Thirith, Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, and Hou Yuon. Throughout the piece, Becker is sensitive to how the movement is changing, especially with the North Vietnamese withdrawing, and the "Khmerization" of the war.

The second half of the article offers detail of life in the Khmer Rouge zone, and while Becker notes that life can be harsh, she hardly condemns it.<sup>307</sup> Becker largely presents her account of life on the other side from innuendo, rumour, and commentary from the government side. This includes a portrayal of the egalitarian premises of the Khmer Rouge, which attracted certain Cambodians and foreigners alike.<sup>308</sup> For example, she includes a lengthy quotation regarding the complaints of some government generals, who were angry with the women who defected from the Khmer Rouge side, because they "had the nerve to look a man straight in the eye and who didn't shuffle their feet demurely like good Khmer women."<sup>309</sup>

Becker also notes the Khmer Rouge's infamous discipline through an anecdote about how government officers complained that the defecting soldiers "were too disciplined and hard-working" and therefore were placed in their own, separate unit.<sup>310</sup> This is an interesting way to give an impression of a strong, disciplined, "other side", without being able to examine this for herself. Becker quotes sources that she has access to in Phnom Penh, which gives journalistic credibility to her work on a region and movement to which she has no first-hand knowledge.

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<sup>306</sup> Power (2002) 98.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. Schanberg (1974i).

<sup>308</sup> E.g. Caldwell and Tan (1975); Becker (1998) 400-431; Kamm (1998) 123-124; Kiernan (2008b) 203-213; Brinkley (2011) 48-51.

<sup>309</sup> Becker (1974f).

<sup>310</sup> Becker (1974f).

The article moves on to state that: “Conditions in the Khmer Rouge zones vary region by region. Generally, the further from Phnom Penh and the fighting, the better the life, according to one leading foreign expert.”<sup>311</sup> This sentiment prevailed for the remainder of the conflict and left the foreign journalists with the hope that, with Phnom Penh captured and the war over, life would settle down inside the country.<sup>312</sup> The article concludes with a quote from a military expert predicting a decisive battle for Phnom Penh.

Overall, Becker presents a balanced account of the leadership and life in Khmer Rouge controlled areas.<sup>313</sup> However, she faced criticism for her report from both the left and right.<sup>314</sup> On the journalistic side, Samantha Power records an anecdote where Sydney Schanberg criticized Becker for running a story without ever having travelled to Khmer Rouge territory. Becker supposedly replied to him that she could not ignore the horror stories of the other side, simply because the Khmer Rouge denied her access, and that they “have to publish what they can find out.”<sup>315</sup> In some respects, this encounter highlights a key difference in the nature of their reporting: very rarely does Schanberg record something that he cannot see, or hear, first-hand.<sup>316</sup>

The criticism from Schanberg is an interesting conundrum facing journalists in these kinds of situations, where the one side in a conflict denies access to journalists, and it is dangerous to travel within their territory.<sup>317</sup> At this time, as James Fenton noted in a 1974 article for the *New Statesman*, the Khmer Rouge were “perhaps the most obscure of the world’s major

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<sup>311</sup> Cf. Schanberg (1974i).

<sup>312</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1975az). cf. (1975aah); Swain (1975h).

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Metzl (1996) 10-11.

<sup>314</sup> Power (2002) 99.

<sup>315</sup> Power (2002) 99.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. Schanberg (1974i).

<sup>317</sup> Cf. e.g. Keane (1996) and Doyle (2007) reporting on Rwanda; Gutman (1993) and Vulliamy (1994) on the “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia. More generally, see Knightly (2004).

revolutionary groups.”<sup>318</sup> Deliberately secretive, and ruthless to those who attempted to access and report within their territory, the Khmer Rouge proved to be a unique challenge to any western reporter trying to tell the larger story of the Cambodian war. Not long after this article came out, Becker’s friend Ishiyama Koki decided to follow up and become the first journalist to visit Khmer Rouge territory. He disappeared, as did another one of Becker’s Japanese colleagues shortly thereafter.<sup>319</sup>

### *Cambodia’s “Hero Journalists”*

Between March 10 and June 21, 1974, Becker wrote ten articles from Southeast Asia.<sup>320</sup> By November 21, Becker was back in Washington working as a staff writer for the *Washington Post*.<sup>321</sup> The most interesting of the last ten pieces Becker wrote from Cambodia is an article from June 17, titled ‘Cambodia’s Hero-Journalists: The News Business.’<sup>322</sup> In this article, Becker gives the reader a rare look behind the scenes of how the anonymous field reporters in the western newspapers are Cambodian photojournalists who risk their lives daily to get a picture or information for western journalists. This is one of the few pieces to offer contemporary detail into the help western journalists receive from Cambodian peers in the field. Becker, in a much later article from January 13, 1985, where she reviews the film *The Killing Fields*, comments on her own relationship with Cambodians, including Dith Pran, the *New York Times* stringer whose relationship with Sydney Schanberg would form the basis for the movie.<sup>323</sup> In her opinion, the

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<sup>318</sup> Fenton (1974).

<sup>319</sup> Power (2002) 99.

<sup>320</sup> Becker (1974g); (1974h); (1974i); (1974j); (1974k); (1974l); (1974m); (1974n); (1974o); (1974p).

<sup>321</sup> Becker (1974q).

<sup>322</sup> Becker (1974o).

<sup>323</sup> Becker (1985); Cf. Schanberg (2010) 63-111.

film accurately reflected the relationship between western and Cambodian reporters, and seems to convey much of what Becker herself wrote about in 1974.

#### *April 1975 – July 1978*

With the Khmer Rouge capture of Phnom Penh in April 1975, the country's new regime chose to "live in excruciating seclusion."<sup>324</sup> With the effective closure of the country journalists were unable to access Cambodia and see what was happening with their own eyes.<sup>325</sup> In large part, they were reliant on refugee testimony, which painted life in Cambodia as hell.<sup>326</sup>

Occasionally in the western press the Khmer Rouge regime was directly compared with Hitler's Germany, for example, by Jack Anderson and Les Whitten writing in the *Washington Post* that: "Adolf Hitler at his worst was not as oppressive as the Communist rulers of tiny Cambodia."<sup>327</sup>

Moreover, several books emerged portraying the horrors of Khmer Rouge rule in Cambodia that were widely influential in shaping the overall impression of atrocity within the country.<sup>328</sup>

However, it was still unclear to outside observers what exactly was going on in the secluded country.<sup>329</sup>

For her part, Elizabeth Becker only wrote five articles for the *Washington Post* related to Cambodia between the Khmer Rouge take-over in April 1975 and July 1978. In June 1975, Becker wrote a lengthy piece outlining Lon Nol's (Lon Nol's brother) corruption.<sup>330</sup> In September of the same year, Becker wrote a piece on the seizure of the Mayaguez,<sup>331</sup> outlining

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<sup>324</sup> Becker (1977).

<sup>325</sup> Cf. Metzl (1996).

<sup>326</sup> E.g. Kramer (1977).

<sup>327</sup> Anderson and Whitten (1977); Safire (1978). Cf. Metzl (1996) 24-25; Power (2002) 87-154.

<sup>328</sup> See Becker (1978a).

<sup>329</sup> See Metzl (1996) on the general nature of western media coverage on Cambodia during this time.

<sup>330</sup> Becker (1975e).

<sup>331</sup> Wetterhahn (2001).

the Cambodian version of events as highlighted in a speech by Ieng Sary in New York.<sup>332</sup>

Becker published two articles in 1976 on Southeast Asia, one relating to the legal limbo faced by American parents who attempted to adopt Vietnamese and Cambodian children, and the second on French nuns who were advising Saigon on prostitutes.<sup>333</sup>

In October 1977, Becker published an important piece on the attempt by Ieng Sary and the Khmer Rouge government to “answer” the world’s questions about what was going on inside Cambodia.<sup>334</sup> Sary presented a two-hour long colour propaganda film, followed by an equally long address to the United Nations, neither of which, in Becker’s opinion, “even began to answer the World’s questions.”<sup>335</sup> This article is a good example of Becker’s clever writing style and highlights how she manages to show the reader her frustration at the lack of information while still conveying a sense of journalistic distance or objectivity. For example, without using her own voice, Becker records how a “crop of books” have emerged, presenting “life in Kampuchea as hell” and that the *Wall Street Journal* recently referred to the regime as “the cruelest since Nazi Germany.”<sup>336</sup>

Moreover, as she records elements of Sary’s presentation, Becker uses a technique of undercutting her previous, seemingly positive (or at least “neutral”) sentence, with commentary that contradicts the previous statement. Becker will revive this technique during her trip to Cambodia a year later. For example, after recording Sary’s boasting of what his country had achieved, Becker concluded the paragraph with the quip: “It was a litany of successes hard to believe.” After Sary claimed that the peasants ate two pounds of rice per day, Becker comments:

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<sup>332</sup> Becker (1975f).

<sup>333</sup> Becker (1976a); (1976b).

<sup>334</sup> Becker (1977).

<sup>335</sup> Becker (1977).

<sup>336</sup> Becker (1977).



This struck me as hardly plausible, but these were some of the first answers

Kampuchea has given to the worldwide charges that many of its citizens have starved to death under the new government.<sup>337</sup>

While Becker felt that she received few answers from the film or presentation about what was happening inside the secluded country, importantly, she notes how “Kampuchea is finally beginning to show some concern about its world image.”<sup>338</sup>

By 1977, the number of refugees fleeing Cambodia into Thailand had increased dramatically with the Center’s purge of the Northwestern zone.<sup>339</sup> This created the opportunity for hundreds more testimonies of what was happening within the closed country, and the volume of accounts meant that the stories were not so easily dismissed on the part of the Khmer Rouge government.<sup>340</sup> In trying to present a better image to the world, Ieng Sary hinted that soon western journalists and foreign friends would be allowed to visit Cambodia.<sup>341</sup>

In March 1978, the Khmer Rouge invited a delegation of Yugoslavian journalists to Cambodia, which included both television cameramen and newspaper correspondents. “They gave the world the first true pictures of the revolution, the first nearly objective glimpse of life within Democratic Kampuchea.”<sup>342</sup> While these journalists did not raise questions around the reported massacres of hundreds of thousands of people,<sup>343</sup> there were enough clues embedded in the text and pictures they brought out of the country to hint at the grim situation they had been presented.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Becker (1977).

<sup>338</sup> Cf. Becker (1998) 306-308.

<sup>339</sup> Becker (1998) 308.

<sup>340</sup> Becker (1978a).

<sup>341</sup> Metzl (1996) 104-105.

<sup>342</sup> Becker (1998) 315.

<sup>343</sup> Becker (1998) 315 suggests that they may have been prevented from doing so as fellow communists.

<sup>344</sup> Becker (1998) 315.

Following the Yugoslavian delegation, the Khmer Rouge permitted four American communist journalists to enter Democratic Kampuchea. These journalists spent eight days in Phnom Penh in April 1978, and expressed scorn for those who believed the refugee accounts of labor camps and mass murder, and reported enthusiastically about the success of the revolution.<sup>345</sup> Rather than clarifying the situation for the outside world, these reports tended to confirm the suspicions of those who believed that much of the contemporary western reporting was exaggerating the nature of what was happening in Cambodia in an attempt to avoid a deeper examination of American/Western involvement in Indochina more generally.<sup>346</sup> All of this added to the confusion around trying to understand what was happening in the secluded country.

#### *July 1978 – Becker’s return*

In July 1978, Becker published a lengthy review of two books on Cambodia: Ponchaud’s *Cambodia: Year Zero*, and Barron and Paul’s *Murder of a Gentle Land*.<sup>347</sup> These two works were highly influential in shaping public opinion that an atrocity was occurring within Democratic Kampuchea. However, there were some major issues with the interpretation of Ponchaud’s work and with the style of Barron and Paul’s book.<sup>348</sup> Becker largely praises Ponchaud’s research and analysis, before rounding on the authors of *Murder of a Gentle Land*, who “pepper their book with facile polemics” and “successfully turn their book into a Cold War propaganda piece.” The authors “exaggerate, with little evidence and considerable sensationalism” in their “undisciplined political tract.”<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Becker (1998) 315-316.

<sup>346</sup> Chomsky and Herman (1977).

<sup>347</sup> Becker (1978a). Cf. Swain (1977).

<sup>348</sup> E.g. Herman and Chomsky (1988) 280-285.

<sup>349</sup> Becker (1978a).

Becker appears to not be taken with the sensationalist understanding of events within Cambodia. At the same time, however, she repeatedly makes clear that the refugee evidence was overwhelming and the regime brutal. In other words, Becker believes the refugee testimony but is not prepared to indulge in the sensationalist descriptions that were being described in some areas, like Barron and Paul's book. Unfortunately, because the situation in Cambodia was being examined through an ideological prism by many of those attempting to understand it, and in the absence of significant "hard evidence" from within the country, the slim facts were more often than not presented to reinforce particular ideological positions rather than in terms of real analysis.<sup>350</sup> This created a confusing picture for someone like Becker who felt a connection to the country and who wanted to get beyond the propaganda to understand for herself what was happening.<sup>351</sup> As such, whenever Ieng Sary went to the United Nations, Becker tried to speak to him and persuade him that she "was the journalist he had to invite back."<sup>352</sup>

1977 had seen an escalation in conflict with Vietnam, which until that point had been simmering under the surface but without open hostility. As the guerrilla fighting increased through the year, accusations of atrocities were being reported on both sides, with each attempting to portray themselves as the victim of the others' aggression.<sup>353</sup> As 1978 rolled on, and with the Khmer Rouge becoming more paranoid about the intentions of their Vietnamese neighbours, the regime became more concerned about their world image, and began an effort to get themselves seen in a more positive light on the world stage. In part, this was a response to the

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<sup>350</sup> Metzl (1996) 29; Becker (1998) 364-398.

<sup>351</sup> Becker (1998) 401-402.

<sup>352</sup> Becker (1998) 402. Cf. Power (2002) 137.

<sup>353</sup> Becker (1998) 290-363; Kiernan (2008a) 357-439.

growing international pressure calling for investigations and an end to the killings within Cambodia.<sup>354</sup>

In October 1978, Ieng Sary had gone to the United Nations in New York to distribute Cambodia's "Black Paper."<sup>355</sup> Its intention was to prove that Vietnam was responsible for the threat of war looming between the two neighbouring countries. However, the paper was largely dismissed as unverifiable, abbreviated history and paranoia.<sup>356</sup> At the same time, however, Sary made a rare news conference in which he announced that he had invited Kurt Waldheim, the UN Secretary-General, to visit Cambodia to investigate the allegations of human rights abuses, and that he would shortly issue visas to foreign journalists to do the same.<sup>357</sup> Waldheim turned down the offer, claiming that without Vietnamese approval of the trip, it could be seen as favoritism, since the UN was also considering measures to diffuse the tension between the two SE Asian countries. Vietnam, who was secretly preparing for war, did not agree to Waldheim's visit.<sup>358</sup>

It appears that Sary's offer to Waldheim was to ensure that Vietnam would not invade Cambodia while the UN Secretary-General was in the country.<sup>359</sup> Having failed in his first move, Sary resorted to his second strategy: he issued visas to two American journalists, Becker and Richard Dudman, along with the British scholar Malcolm Caldwell – a supporter of Pol Pot's movement<sup>360</sup> – on the premise that they would investigate the human rights situation.<sup>361</sup>

Since her return from Cambodia in 1974, Becker had been working on the Metro desk of the *Washington Post*. Richard Dudman was an experienced foreign correspondent, who had

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<sup>354</sup> Metzl (1996) 66-125; Becker (1998) 290-326.

<sup>355</sup> Becker (1998) 322-323.

<sup>356</sup> Becker (1998) 322.

<sup>357</sup> Becker (1998) 322.

<sup>358</sup> Becker (1998) 322-323. Cf. Becker (1978c).

<sup>359</sup> Becker (1998) 322-323.

<sup>360</sup> E.g. Caldwell and Tan (1975).

<sup>361</sup> Becker (1998) 323. Cf. Becker (1978c); Kiernan (2008a) 442-446.

covered big foreign assignments in the past, and was a well renowned international journalist.<sup>362</sup>

In contrast, Becker's foreign reporting had been entirely limited to Cambodia. Although Becker had kept an eye on the Cambodian situation, and had lobbied Ieng Sary for a visa to go back into the country, she seems slightly unsure why she was one of only two journalists (who worked for non-communist newspapers) allowed into Democratic Kampuchea. Becker records in her book:

I wrote occasional background pieces about the revolution, including a long review of two books printed on the subject – a review in which I declared that the evidence given by the refugees was overwhelming and the revolution awful. Nonetheless, I was given a visa – apparently because I was best remembered for my wartime coverage that was critical of the American involvement in the war. Moreover I represented the *Washington Post*, an important newspaper if the Khmer Rouge really wanted to get their view across to the American Government.<sup>363</sup>

There is a fair amount to unpack in Becker's statement here. To begin with, in the *Washington Post*, Becker wrote seven pieces relating to Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge capture of Phnom Penh in April 1975 to the announcement of her visa in October 1978.<sup>364</sup> The first piece related to Lon Non's (Lon Nol's brother) corruption; the second, to the Mayaquez incident; the third is about Vietnamese children who arrived in the United States, and contains a brief paragraph on thirty Cambodian children; the fourth addresses Ieng Sary's speech and video at the United Nations; the fifth is the review of Ponchaud, and Barron and Paul; the sixth concerns a plea made by Lon Nol for international support in evicting the Khmer Rouge from the UN seat; and the seventh concerns Sary's offer to open the border to westerners. Really, it is

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<sup>362</sup> Dudman will be discussed in the next section in detail.

<sup>363</sup> Becker (1998) 402.

<sup>364</sup> Becker (1975e); (1975f); (1976a); (1977); (1978a); (1978b); (1978c).

only the last four pieces that relate directly to what Becker understands as the conditions within Cambodia at the time.

Becker, it seems, wrote enough to keep herself in the loop about what was happening in Cambodia, and to remain known for her reporting by Ieng Sary, whom she pressured at every opportunity to let her return to the country.<sup>365</sup> By the same token, Becker was not pumping out article after article criticizing the Khmer Rouge regime, nor giving voice to the more sensationalist elements that had been appearing in western media. In this regard, she gave Sary a good option in that she was a respectable reporter, working for an important paper, who had not been excessive in her criticism, and who knew Cambodia by having lived there for two years. She gave Sary's invitation to open the border to western journalists credibility. Richard Dudman, as will be discussed, was in a similar position.

At the same time, what Becker does not mention in the above quote, is that she had been writing to the Khmer Rouge behind the scenes as well. Samantha Power notes Becker telling her that she: "had been clamoring to get back into Cambodia since she left in 1974. She had written more than a dozen letters paying what she remembers as "disgusting" homage to the KR's "glorious revolution" in the hopes of winning a visa."<sup>366</sup> Sary was potentially aware of these attempts by Becker, and perhaps saw her "disgusting homage" as an opportunity to guide Becker into writing a positive review of the country. Becker also comments on how she had been applying for a visa for three years.<sup>367</sup>

The second element of Becker's quote to unpack is a further comment on her review of the two books on Cambodia. Becker makes clear that she believes Ponchaud's "unsettling"

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<sup>365</sup> Becker (1998) 402.

<sup>366</sup> Power (2002) 137.

<sup>367</sup> Becker (1978j). Cf. The *St Louis Post-Dispatch* (Nov 19, 1978. Pgs. 1, 16) which notes that Richard Dudman had been trying to get a visa for three years through letters, cablegrams, and personal requests to Cambodian officials.

account of the “self-slaughter”, which she goes on to claim seems “indisputable”, and draws on quotations from his work that describe Khmer Rouge rule as “the bloodiest of our century” and a “terrifying one for all who have any respect for human beings.”<sup>368</sup> However, for at least one reader, Becker’s language was not strong enough. In a letter to the *Washington Post*, Henry Roisen accuses Becker of being “unusually hard-hearted and cynical, or else must be an advocate of a political philosophy similar to the rulers of “Democratic Kampuchea.””<sup>369</sup> Roisen takes issue with Becker’s negative review of Barron and Paul, and her lack of appropriate (in his mind) terminology to describe the “evil” of what is happening in Cambodia.<sup>370</sup>

Becker’s terminology is addressed in the next chapter but there is a point to be made about how she presents her opinion in the review piece. Largely, her criticism of the regime comes through the voice of Ponchaud, via direct quotes or reference to what he claims in his book. At the same time, while her criticisms of Barron and Paul’s *Murder in a Gentle Land*, are well-justified, in the same manner as her Ponchaud thoughts, she uses quotes from their work to dissect their extrapolations, sensationalisms, and their lack of historical detail.

While Becker clearly agrees with Ponchaud’s interpretation, the fact that much of her pejorative terminology towards the regime comes in his voice rather than her own takes some of the strength away from her own “declaration” on the awfulness of the regime. At the same time, her dissection of Barron and Paul offers proof that Becker is a serious reporter who is unlikely to exaggerate the “awfulness” of the regime, especially if it is based on her own observations from within the country. In other words, her review may not have been as jeopardizing to her obtaining a visa as she suggests.

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<sup>368</sup> Becker (1978a).

<sup>369</sup> *Washington Post* (Aug 27, 1978) Pg. E2.

<sup>370</sup> Becker responded briefly to this criticism in the *Washington Post* (Sep 10, 1978) Pg. E4.

Becker's claim that she was given a visa because she was remembered for being critical of the American involvement in the civil war is undoubtedly true. But it is informative to compare that statement against her reporting for the *Washington Post* during her two years in Cambodia. Of the forty articles Becker wrote for the *Post* while in Cambodia, only a handful criticize the United States in some way. One article from 1973 mentions the fear of American bombing as a cause of refugees fleeing to Phnom Penh;<sup>371</sup> one mentions the U.S. bombing campaign's damage to the rubber industry;<sup>372</sup> another notes how the United States failed to supply rice;<sup>373</sup> and a couple of pieces talk about either the impending withdrawal, or the effects of the withdrawal, of the United States in August 1973.<sup>374</sup> On the other hand, twice Becker notes how United States funding has supplied rice and other aid to the country,<sup>375</sup> and in one piece Becker notes how American bombing saved a city.<sup>376</sup> One other article addresses the continuing United States presence in Cambodia in an advisory role, but this piece merely reports what Becker saw without positive or negative comment.<sup>377</sup>

As such, while Becker may well have been remembered for her coverage that was critical of the United States involvement in the civil war, this was not necessarily the dominant feature of her reporting at the time, especially when compared with, for example, Sydney Schanberg's voluminous criticism of American involvement in his reporting for the *New York Times*.<sup>378</sup> However, what one is remembered for and what one actually did do not necessarily need to be the same thing.

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<sup>371</sup> Becker (1973f).

<sup>372</sup> Becker (1973c).

<sup>373</sup> Becker (1973b).

<sup>374</sup> Becker (1973d); (1973h); (1973k); (1973m).

<sup>375</sup> Becker (1973q); (1973m).

<sup>376</sup> Becker (1973t).

<sup>377</sup> Becker (1973g).

<sup>378</sup> Schanberg will be discussed in detail below.



The last sentence of Becker's quote may be the most relevant. The fact that Becker worked for the *Washington Post* undoubtedly enhanced her chances of being one of the journalists chosen. If the Khmer Rouge were serious about trying to get their views across to the west, and the United States especially, then the *Post* carried a gravitas that would mean that Becker's reporting in Cambodia would be taken seriously, and would be read widely.

### *Becker's Return*

Elizabeth Becker wrote eight pieces for the *Washington Post* between December 24 and December 31, 1978 that analysed various elements of her two-week tour around Cambodia. Becker's pieces focused on, in turn, Malcom Caldwell's death;<sup>379</sup> an overview of the tour and what Becker hoped to discover;<sup>380</sup> the military and political situation in the border war with Vietnam;<sup>381</sup> the condition of the Angkor temples, and how the symbol of Angkor relates to the revolution;<sup>382</sup> Cambodia's production of rice;<sup>383</sup> commune life;<sup>384</sup> the citizens of Phnom Penh, and questions around their whereabouts;<sup>385</sup> and the response of Pol Pot to some of her written questions.<sup>386</sup>

One major theme that runs throughout these pieces is Becker's inability to understand what is happening, and how this tour of the country did not help her to answer many of the world's questions. A handful of quotes will suffice:

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<sup>379</sup> Becker (1978d).

<sup>380</sup> Becker (1978e).

<sup>381</sup> Becker (1978f).

<sup>382</sup> Becker (1978g).

<sup>383</sup> Becker (1978h).

<sup>384</sup> Becker (1978i).

<sup>385</sup> Becker (1978j).

<sup>386</sup> Becker (1978k).

For all that I saw and heard, I have no definite answers to many troubling questions.<sup>387</sup>

...what makes all that has taken place in Cambodia particularly difficult to understand is that no one seems to be able to offer a coherent philosophical basis for the extreme upheaval that has taken place.<sup>388</sup>

No one seemed able to explain satisfactorily why it was necessary to empty Cambodia's cities following the Communist victory in 1975 ... Nor could I find any explanation of why it was necessary for thousands of Cambodians to die from disease, malnutrition and summary execution in the course of fashioning this new Cambodian society.<sup>389</sup>

After receiving a less than satisfactory reply to a question about reports of atrocities being committed by Cambodian troops in Vietnam, Becker concludes her piece on Phnom Penh's vanishing citizenry:

This was only one of many answers I received during my visit that struck me as far less than satisfactory. To many questions, I got no answer at all. I must also confess that I ultimately decided that in view of my doubts and uncertainties about the situation in Cambodia, it might be better not to ask certain questions. When I received my visa to Cambodia after three years of applications, friends called me to ask that I search for missing Cambodians they had known. I took down the names, added names of persons I was interested in, and carried the list with me to Phnom

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<sup>387</sup> Becker (1978e).

<sup>388</sup> Becker (1978h).

<sup>389</sup> Becker (1978h).

Penh.<sup>390</sup> I finally decided, however, not to ask after anyone by name. The biggest favor I could do for missing friends, I decided, was to leave those that survived to the anonymity of the new Cambodia.<sup>391</sup>

There are two points to be made regarding Becker's frustration and lack of a complete understanding of the situation. The first is that, as Becker herself notes in the preface to the 1998 edition of her book *When the War Was Over*, she, like "other journalists and historians who follow a country through extraordinary times" rarely understand the enormity of events they are witnessing until after the fact.<sup>392</sup> This is especially true in a situation like Cambodia, where even the so-called "experts" could not tell Becker what was happening on the Vietnamese-Cambodia border, and were relying on her for information.<sup>393</sup> Becker recalls that:

It is hard to exaggerate our confusion and incomprehension at the time of our visit to Democratic Kampuchea. We were the original three blind men trying to figure out the elephant. At that time no one understood the inner workings of the regime – how the zones operated; how the party controlled the country; how the secret police worked; that torture and extermination centers like Tuol Sleng even existed; the depth of the misery and death.<sup>394</sup>

Becker also notes that the tour was guided – a point she stresses at times – and that the three of them would only see what the government wanted them to.<sup>395</sup> If the stories of

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<sup>390</sup> Becker was not the only one who had a list of people to look up. Ben Kiernan records how Caldwell had been asked to enquire about various Cambodians who had returned post-1975. Kiernan added his in-laws to the list for Caldwell to ask about. Kiernan (2008a) 443.

<sup>391</sup> Becker (1978j).

<sup>392</sup> Becker (1998) xii.

<sup>393</sup> Becker (1978f).

<sup>394</sup> Becker (1998) 409.

<sup>395</sup> Becker (1978e); Becker (1978h). cf. Becker (1998) 409.

the mass graves that were being referenced in refugee accounts were true, Becker was convinced that her and her companions were not going to be allowed to see them.<sup>396</sup>

The second point to note is that Becker had a deeper sense of frustration than her two companions, in part, because she lived in Phnom Penh for two years. As such, she notices more subtle things than the other two, and is at a loss to put into words, at times, how Phnom Penh was “familiar but skewed.”<sup>397</sup> One quote from Becker sums up her frustration on this point:

Most of the evidence attesting to the horrors that have taken place in Cambodia has been furnished by the thousands of refugees who have fled the country ... I saw little indication of these problems during a very strictly supervised government tour. But I lived in Cambodia for two years, and perhaps the most telling indication of what has taken place here is that I saw not one familiar face during my two-week stay.<sup>398</sup>

In her descriptions of Caldwell and Dudman in her book, Becker comments how neither of them had ever lived in the country and had only made brief trips to Phnom Penh before: “I should have been an able guide but I felt as much of a tourist as they.”<sup>399</sup> She then moves into one of the more interesting comments in her work:

Moreover, we were just beginning to know each other and did not entirely trust each other. Normally it would have been of little consequence, but on this trip we were all conscious of our role as singular witnesses of the revolution and, perhaps, of the war that everyone was predicting.<sup>400</sup>

The comment that Becker and her companions were conscious of their role as “singular witnesses” indicates the tension involved in their attempts to report on Cambodia. As Becker

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<sup>396</sup> Becker (1978e).

<sup>397</sup> Becker (1978e). Cf. Becker (1998) 403-404.

<sup>398</sup> Becker (1978h).

<sup>399</sup> Becker (1998) 400.

<sup>400</sup> Becker (1998) 400.

points out, she had heard all the stories about what was happening inside Cambodia,<sup>401</sup> and now was her chance to both bear witness to those stories, and confirm and enlighten the world about the horrors that were occurring. Yet, when they were being toured around the country she still retained the feeling that the truth was being hidden from her.

All of this seems to have played on Becker's mind, and she recalls how her lack of being able to see someone or something familiar affected her:

My mind was becoming numb, in fact, lost without the signposts of the Cambodia I had known and forbidden by our keepers from understanding the Cambodia hiding in front of our eyes.<sup>402</sup>

While staying the night at a rubber plantation, about halfway through their tour, Becker had a nightmare in which her moans and screams woke up the household.<sup>403</sup> She notes that, something had jarred her while in the countryside, and suggests that it was perhaps the disappointment of finding the countryside as hidden from them as Phnom Penh.

That night my subconscious broke through. All the fears and doubts I had tried to ignore, the obvious implication of all that I had not seen so far on the trip, burst into my dreams.<sup>404</sup>

As their tour of the country continued, and the real Cambodia remained concealed from Becker, she records how she became rather combative, arguing with her Khmer Rouge hosts, but also Dudman and Caldwell.<sup>405</sup> Becker's combativeness stemmed in a large part from the fact that her confidence in the guides to show them anything of significance shrank as the tour went along. She also became frustrated with Caldwell's and Dudman's asking seemingly meaningless

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<sup>401</sup> Becker (1978e).

<sup>402</sup> Becker (1998) 413.

<sup>403</sup> Becker (1998) 413-414.

<sup>404</sup> Becker (1998) 413-414.

<sup>405</sup> Becker (1998) 418-419.

questions when the (few) chances arose to speak to a Khmer. She records an instance where they were touring a dam, and comments on how her companions asked questions to a young man, a veteran of the war, about the dam itself. When it was her turn, she asked about the war – about the American bombing and their living conditions – to the shock of Caldwell in particular.<sup>406</sup> Becker had gone to get answers to questions that were continually being kept from her, and her frustration is evident in her reports.

Because Becker had lived in the country, she seems to have felt more pressure than the other two to find some answers, in part, at least, because she kept seeing the implications of their guides' refusal to show them certain things. This led to her examining the country through the lens of her worst fears – that friends of hers from Phnom Penh “were in graver danger” than she had suspected.<sup>407</sup> Moreover, Becker comprehends the importance of the absence of things that should be there in a way that her companions do not.

While Becker was doing her best to peer through the curtain and see the “real” Cambodia, she was at times forced to admit that certain things seemed to be working. Herein lies the problem in reporting on Cambodia during this time – as a reporter who wanted to be taken seriously, Becker could not just speculate on the human rights issues, she also needed to report on what she saw. For instance, in describing peasant life, she notes that she saw neither the “joyous society” of “happy peasants singing” as reported by some communist visitors, nor the “grim picture” widely portrayed in the west of peasants toiling under armed supervision.<sup>408</sup> This

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<sup>406</sup> Becker (1998) 418-419 records Caldwell's reaction after this interview: “You're an American,” he said. “How can you ask questions like that of a Cambodian? It's as bad as if a German reporter came to London after the war and asked a British soldier what it was like to fight the Nazis.” Becker comments on how they both wrote nasty notes about the argument in their diaries.

<sup>407</sup> Becker (1998) 418.

<sup>408</sup> Becker (1978i).

example indicates how much background noise, largely ideological, Becker was trying to filter out as she observed Cambodia.

Becker astutely continued her observation by noting that, there was no clue why everyone worked so uniformly, and notes that:

One possibility that must be considered, of course, is that most Cambodians toe the line today because they have first-hand knowledge of the stories told by refugees of how thousands of persons were killed during the months following the Communist takeover.<sup>409</sup>

In this way, Becker undercuts her seemingly “neutral” statement about what she observed of peasant life.

One other example of the background “noise” Becker was dealing with was commentary about the level of production of rice in the new society. Becker notes that, despite what she had heard prior to arriving, she was surprised at the general level of production in the country.<sup>410</sup> She adds a caveat, though, noting that there is no way to know that the figures given were accurate, but concedes that they could not be too misleading, based on what she saw. However:

The methods that the new rulers of Cambodia have used to get their system working are an entirely separate matter that will continue to be discussed – and condemned – by much of the world for years to come. But the economic system, I am forced to conclude, seems to be working.<sup>411</sup>

Again, Becker undercuts her observation with a remark that reminds the reader that, despite what she observed and reported on, there is much more going on behind the scene. In this regard, her reporting on Cambodia is more nuanced than Dudman’s.

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<sup>409</sup> Becker (1978i).

<sup>410</sup> Becker (1978h).

<sup>411</sup> Becker (1978h).

One of the more significant things Becker recognises because of its absence is Buddhist culture:

I also found that the Buddhist culture, which was the foundation of Cambodia for centuries, had been totally done away with, and this left me with a sense that I was in a country which had lost what I once considered its soul.<sup>412</sup>

This is significant, because it highlights how Becker was able to see the potential tear in the social fabric of Cambodia at the time. Social destruction is one of the key signs of genocide,<sup>413</sup> and Becker, by having lived in the country was able to recognise the potential implications that lay behind the absence of Buddhism within the country she now traveled – unrecognisable to the one she had lived in a few years previous.

Elizabeth Becker, as one of the two key journalists to travel to Democratic Kampuchea, is one of the main sources of contemporary information on the secluded country. By virtue of her having lived in the country for two years, she was able to offer an important insight into what was missing from Cambodia, along with a detailed description of what she witnessed. How this impacted her reporting in relation to peace and war journalism elements will be addressed in the next chapter. The following section discusses her travel companion, Richard Dudman, and highlights his reporting from their guided tour and contrasts his observations with Becker's.

### **Richard Dudman**

Richard Dudman was born in 1918 in Iowa, and passed away in 2017, aged 99. By the time he went to Cambodia with Elizabeth Becker and Malcom Caldwell in 1978, he was a well-known and well-travelled reporter who had covered numerous major international and national

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<sup>412</sup> Becker (1978h). cf. Becker (1998) 253-260.

<sup>413</sup> E.g. Lemkin (1944); Cf. Card (2003).



events. He was in Dallas for the assassination of President Kennedy, and witnessed Jack Ruby gunning down Lee Harvey Oswald two days later. He covered the 1956 Arab-Israeli war, was in Havana when Castro toppled the Batista government, and covered revolutions in Latin America, the Middle East and the Far East. He obtained and published excerpts from early copies of the Pentagon Papers, an official history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam in 1971, and had made his first trip to that country in 1962, returning eight times between then and 1977, when he was the first American reporter to enter Vietnam after the communist victory in April 1975.<sup>414</sup>

Dudman joined the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 1949, and in 1954 was assigned to the Washington Bureau, where he went on to become Bureau chief from 1969 to 1981. On his last day, March 30, 1981, President Ronald Regan was shot not far from the paper's office, which meant he missed his retirement party to run down the street, notebook in hand, and publish his report the next day. Very much from the "old school" of journalism, which sought "the elusive goal of some absolute truth and objectivity",<sup>415</sup> Dudman was a prolific and energetic reporter who worked in the industry for nearly three-quarters of a century, and who supposedly had a motto: "Reporter who sits on hot story gets ass burned."<sup>416</sup>

Dudman is perhaps most famous for his capture and eventual release by Vietcong and Cambodian forces just inside the Cambodian border in 1970.<sup>417</sup> With Elizabeth Pond, of *The Christian Science Monitor*, and Michael Morrow of *Dispatch News Service International*, Dudman was held for forty days behind enemy lines. Upon release, Dudman offered the world

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<sup>414</sup> Grimes (2017); Sorkin (2017).

<sup>415</sup> Dudman (1971) 99; Rabe (2016) 102.

<sup>416</sup> Grimes (2017). After retiring from the Washington Bureau, Dudman still contributed to the *Post-Dispatch* and wrote Editorials for *Bangor News* until 2012.

<sup>417</sup> Dudman and his colleagues were captured on May 7, 1970, six days after President Nixon announced he was sending ground forces into Cambodia to destroy Communist sanctuaries. It was also seven weeks after Lon Nol had overthrown Prince Sihanouk in Phnom Penh. As Dudman notes, the date was significant, and it appears that the journalists had somehow gotten ahead of the invading American and South Vietnamese troops they thought they were following. Dudman (1971) 1-5.

one of the deepest looks of the other side during this period, including exposés on how they viewed and understood the conflict with America.<sup>418</sup>

Even before his capture, Dudman had been one of the first journalists to recognise, and attempt to expose, the gap between the reality on the ground in Vietnam and official narratives from Washington, and he had been personally opposed to the war for a long time.<sup>419</sup> In his articles and subsequent book about his time in captivity, Dudman wrote sympathetically of his captors, and attempted to portray the guerrillas as human beings, who bravely protected them at times, and not demonized, faceless, “evil communists”.<sup>420</sup> In 1994, Dudman returned to Vietnam and tracked down one of his captors, General Bay Cao, who he believes saved his life, and published a series of articles about the state of the country in 1994, and his memories of his capture.<sup>421</sup>

Dudman’s articles and subsequent book about his captivity spawned a small amount of controversy. Despite the consensus that public opinion had largely turned against the Vietnam War by 1970/71, Dudman’s humanization of the “enemy” and his apparent friendship with individuals that he described in detail in his book took arguments about the Vietnam War beyond a purely “pro” or “anti” war stance.<sup>422</sup>

Dudman claimed that his work was an objective retelling of his time in captivity,<sup>423</sup> and it appears as though immediately upon capture, Dudman realised the unique opportunity to tell the story from the “other side”.<sup>424</sup> Journalistically, it was an incredible, and lucky, coup.<sup>425</sup> Overall,

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<sup>418</sup> Dudman (1970a); (1970b); (1970c); (1970d); (1970e); (1970f); (1970g); (1971).

<sup>419</sup> Dudman (1971) 5. Cf. Rabe (2016) 95-96.

<sup>420</sup> Dudman (1971). Cf. Rabe (2016) 91-92.

<sup>421</sup> Dudman (1994).

<sup>422</sup> Rabe (2016).

<sup>423</sup> Dudman (1971) 176.

<sup>424</sup> Dudman (1971) 5.

<sup>425</sup> Dudman (1975b).

despite the controversy, his work was well received, and many found his writing informative.<sup>426</sup> However, he faced accusations from some quarters of being brain-washed by the enemy, being unpatriotic, and becoming a propaganda mouthpiece for the communists.<sup>427</sup> Interestingly, the criticism Dudman faced appears to have caused him to double down on the importance of objectivity in reporting. He complained about the “American first, correspondent second” mindset of many Vietnam reporters, and stressed the need for the reporter to unbind themselves from American policy and to remove the “burden of thinking in terms of ‘we’ and ‘they.’”<sup>428</sup> The controversy, and criticism, passed quickly, and certainly did not hinder his professional career.

### *Reporting on Cambodia*

Dudman wrote prolifically for the *Post-Dispatch* on many things between his release from captivity and his return to Cambodia in 1978. However, he wrote only a handful of relevant articles relating to Cambodia during that time.<sup>429</sup> In a March 1975 article, for example, Dudman analyses the military realities which were bringing an end to the Cambodian war, and offers a deep background (going back to the Eisenhower administration) on U.S. involvement in SE Asia.<sup>430</sup> In April of the same year, just after the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh, Dudman recounts his unique look at the other side from his time in captivity five years earlier, and notes that: “To anyone who had the dangerous opportunity to observe the other side of the conflict, even at its start, the latter unfolding disaster could come as no surprise.”<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Rabe (2016).

<sup>427</sup> Rabe (2016).

<sup>428</sup> Rabe (2016) 102.

<sup>429</sup> Dudman (1975a); (1975b); (1975c); (1976a); (1978a).

<sup>430</sup> Dudman (1975a).

<sup>431</sup> Dudman (1975b).

In an October piece, Dudman recounts, with little of his own commentary, an *AFP* report which claimed that several leaders of the Lon Nol government were killed when Phnom Penh was captured.<sup>432</sup>

The key article for Dudman relating to the Cambodian situation during this time is from April 1976 that addresses the reports of mass murder emerging from within Cambodia.<sup>433</sup>

Dudman opens the article by commenting:

A pattern has developed in a current rash of reports of mass murder by the new Communist regime in Cambodia. Most of the news dispatches have used a figure of 500,000 to 600,000, or even 800,000, as the number of Cambodians estimated to have died in the past year from hunger, disease or execution.<sup>434</sup>

He goes on to note how most of the accounts have attributed these deaths to a deliberate, fanatical, and ruthless campaign, and offers some examples of the reports that used extreme language to describe the slaughter. As the article continues, Dudman notes that most of the articles claiming a “bloodbath” draw heavily on refugee reports and vaguely identified western intelligence sources. He notes two issues with these sources: (1) vague phrases such as “intelligence analysts” have caused some observers to suspect that the CIA are helping to shape the narrative of Cambodian affairs; (2) “Some noted that refugee reports are frequently biased or even fabricated and are generally unreliable.”<sup>435</sup>

Throughout the piece, Dudman maintains a neutral voice in discussing the reports of a bloodbath, and he balances the article by noting that, while some analysts are arguing that extreme forms of violence are occurring in Cambodia, many other officials are skeptical of the

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<sup>432</sup> Dudman (1975c).

<sup>433</sup> Dudman (1976a).

<sup>434</sup> Dudman (1976a).

<sup>435</sup> Dudman (1976a).

death estimates being reported. Dudman records three possibilities that one official he interviewed suggested: (1) that the reports are true; (2) that the refugees are making up/exaggerating stories in the hope of saying what the interviewers want to hear for the purpose of obtaining a U.S. visa; or (3) that the Cambodian government is merely giving the impression of a reign of terror and encouraging the circulation of these stories to intimidate the population and help control it.

Dudman also discusses Khieu Samphan's 1959 doctoral thesis, which was being heavily dissected by interested parties in order to try and discern what the philosophical underpinnings of the revolution might be. Again, he has comments from all sides on the question of Samphan's influence on the revolution. This particular piece is a good example of Dudman's journalistic philosophy of maintaining detached neutrality and letting the facts speak for themselves.<sup>436</sup> In this article, Dudman cannot trust any of the sources or reports, since the facts are not clear, and so he balances his piece in a thoughtful way that attempts to highlight the fact that there is no clear knowledge at this time as to what is happening within Cambodia.

In January 1978, in response to the break-out of large-scale fighting on the Vietnamese-Cambodian border, Dudman wrote an article that analysis the history of hostility between Vietnam and Cambodia going back to 1623.<sup>437</sup> He compares the "bitter hatred" between the two peoples as being similar to the Turks and Armenians, Moslems and Jews, and Hindus and Moslems. While he offers a deep history, Dudman cannot pinpoint exactly why the two sides are fighting at this time, and concludes by noting that outside observers have little confidence in their ability to guess what the Vietnamese intend to do at this point. The confusion around what the situation is on the border between these two countries was still unclear eleven months later

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<sup>436</sup> Rabe (2016) 102.

<sup>437</sup> Dudman (1978a).

when Dudman and Becker were asked by officials to enquire about travelling to certain spots along the border, in order to confirm if different towns were in Vietnamese hands or not.<sup>438</sup>

In her book *When The War Was Over*, Becker, in describing Dudman, claimed that:

He was also the only one of us who had not written about the Khmer Rouge after 1975 and had yet to form his views on the Cambodian revolution. Caldwell had immediately dubbed him the Edgar Snow of Cambodia.<sup>439</sup>

While Becker's claim that Dudman had not written about the Khmer Rouge is not entirely accurate, it is clear that he was waiting until he could see the evidence for himself before forming an opinion on the revolution. Like Becker, Dudman had been applying for a visa for three years,<sup>440</sup> which was granted in November 1978.

However, unlike Elizabeth Becker, Dudman does not appear to question why he was one of the journalists chosen. In a number of ways, Richard Dudman was an ideal candidate to obtain a visa for Cambodia, both from Ieng Sary's point of view, and the outside world's. From Sary's angle, Dudman had not written critically of the regime and had even written a sympathetic account of his time in captivity during the early part of the movement. Dudman was also a credible, experienced journalist, who would know how to handle the pressure of conveying what he witnessed to the outside world. In 1977, Dudman was the first American journalist invited back into Vietnam and he wrote an exclusive account of the state of the country.<sup>441</sup> As such, it perhaps came as no shock that he was one of the two journalists invited to report on Cambodia.

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<sup>438</sup> Becker (1978f).

<sup>439</sup> Becker (1998) 401. Snow had been largely responsible for introducing the world to Mao Zedong, and the Communist movement in China, in his 1937 work *Red Star Over China*.

<sup>440</sup> *St Louis Post-Dispatch* (Nov 19, 1978. Pgs. 1, 16).

<sup>441</sup> Dudman (1977a); (1977b); (1977c); (1977d); (1977e); (1977f); (1977g); (1977h); (1977i); (1977j).

## *Dudman Returns*

On January 15, 1979, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* published a special, revised, multi-part feature from Dudman about his experience in touring Cambodia.<sup>442</sup> In a cruel twist of journalistic fate, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* was going through a strike when Dudman returned from Cambodia, and so he could not immediately publish in his own newspaper the eight-part series of articles, each totalling over 2,500 words, that he had written in transit and upon his return to the United States. However, this series was published in over 40 other worldwide newspapers, and ran, for example, in the *Chicago Tribune* from December 25 – December 31, 1978.

There was a lot of pressure on Dudman to write a readable, high-quality, series of articles, because Elizabeth Becker was publishing her series of articles in the *Washington Post* at the same time.<sup>443</sup> The pressure was so great that Dudman did not see his wife and children upon returning home, and merely spoke with them on the phone.

Dudman opens his account of his tour through Cambodia by analysing the country's relationship with Vietnam. Like Becker, Dudman seems well aware of the unique nature of their experience, and comments on how the trip provided fresh insights into the mounting Vietnamese-Cambodian hostilities, the evacuation of cities, allegations of genocide, and the nature of daily life in the secluded country. Again, Dudman, like Becker, is sceptical of the Cambodian presentation, and notes that their guides refused or ignored requests to visit other border points. However, Dudman notes that:

While the visit amounted to a conducted tour, with strict limits on conversations with ordinary Cambodians and no opportunity to speak with any but a few top

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<sup>442</sup> Dudman (1979c). Dudman's piece highlighted: Malcom Caldwell's death; the relationship with Vietnam; the question around the reported killings; how the country works; on rice and food production; on other industrial projects; on the government; and several smaller pieces detailing: the lack of money; a brief biography of Caldwell; on there being mirrors in the country; and on their treatment as they toured Cambodia.

<sup>443</sup> Rose (1978).

government officials, there was plenty of opportunity for observation in tours of 11 of the 19 provinces.<sup>444</sup>

Observation was to be the method of Dudman's analysis during his time in Cambodia. While Becker was prepared to speculate more on what was going on "behind the scenes" and repeatedly infers that there may be a sinister reason for the absence of particular things, Dudman on the other hand largely leaves the "big question" open.

For example, in the second chapter, Dudman addresses the human rights question, which, as he notes:

In the eyes of much of the world, the most important question about Cambodia is whether the now-dislodged Pol Pot regime systematically killed off entire classes of the population, as charged by Vietnam and Cambodian refugees.<sup>445</sup>

Like Becker, Dudman is frustrated that, despite persistent requests to obtain eyewitness accounts of the mass exodus of Phnom Penh, their guides only produced one man and one other family.

A handful of quotes show Dudman's uncertainty in relation to the refugee reports, accusations of genocide, and the true nature of the state of the population at large:

Two weeks of questioning and observation in 11 of the country's 19 provinces led to the conclusion that the Cambodian revolution must be one of the bloodiest of our era. But repeated interrogation produced no clear answer to the question of "auto-genocide," the term for an alleged methodological execution of much of the entire class of former professionals, tradesmen, civil servants, and soldiers.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Dudman (1979c).

<sup>445</sup> Dudman (1979c).

<sup>446</sup> Dudman (1979c).



The revolution, an unprecedented leveler, had made conforming a condition for survival...The new Communist Cambodia became one huge work camp, but its people were clearly not being worked to death as foreign critics often charged.<sup>447</sup>

On the bright side, moreover, I found the country in the midst of one of the world's great housing programs.

What I found in two weeks of touring Pol Pot's Cambodia – under strict government supervision but with good opportunity for observation – was a regimented life of hard work for most Cambodians, leavened, however, by much improved housing, regular issuance of clothing, and an assurance of apparently adequate food...I did not find the grim picture painted by the thousands of refugees who couldn't take the new order and fled to Thailand or Vietnam. In this lull between wars, those who remain appeared to be reasonably relaxed at the height of the busy harvest season. They sometimes leaned on their hoes like farm workers everywhere. And they often stared and smiled and waved at the rare sight of Western faces.<sup>448</sup>

On the rumours of starvation within the country he noted that:

My observation of hundreds of ordinary Cambodians suggested they got an adequate diet, if a plain one.<sup>449</sup>

Dudman was clearly impressed by the vast housing project that was under way, which he comments on several times (and discusses again in a 1990 article for the *New York Times*).<sup>450</sup>

While Elizabeth Becker comments on the housing project as well, she notes that: "I saw many

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<sup>447</sup> Dudman (1979c).

<sup>448</sup> Dudman (1979c).

<sup>449</sup> Dudman (1979c).

<sup>450</sup> Dudman (1990).

comfortable roadside homes that seemed to have been abandoned, and I asked an official if some of this new construction might not be redundant?”<sup>451</sup>

Where Becker questions the reason why there is uniform acceptance of the strictly regimented life, and highlights the possibility that the reason everyone obeys is because they are well aware of the deadly consequences of not following along, Dudman takes a different approach. While he notes that clearly there was no place for independent thinking in the new Cambodia, he comments that: “At the same time, the physical conditions of life may well have improved for the many peasants and former urban workers – possibly for the vast majority of the population as the regime claimed.”<sup>452</sup>

Overall, Richard Dudman’s reaction and analysis of what he saw in Cambodia is more positive than Elizabeth Becker’s, and he comments more fully on observable things. Dudman presents much of his material as a comparison between what he understands as the *SE Asian peasant life* of “old” with the peasant life he is observing “now.” Becker, on the other hand, is comparing what she knew of *Cambodia* before the Khmer Rouge take-over with what she cannot see now – the cultural vibrancy, people she knew, and the absence of Buddhism, which she considered the “soul” of the country.<sup>453</sup>

Dudman also abstains from offering any suggestions on what is happening “behind the scenes” and does not delve deeper into any questions around why the things that he witnessed were the way they were. It is largely in this regard the two journalists differ in their analysis. Becker, in contrast to Dudman, is more concerned with uncovering the “why” than the “what”.

This is significant because twelve years after touring Democratic Kampuchea, Richard Dudman wrote an editorial for the *New York Times* in which he claimed that Pol Pot was not a

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<sup>451</sup> Becker (1978i).

<sup>452</sup> Dudman (1979c).

<sup>453</sup> Becker (1978h). cf. Becker (1998) 253-260.

perpetrator of genocide, but a revolutionary leader, who was riding the crest of a violent and disorderly uprising by a downtrodden people.<sup>454</sup> In this piece, Dudman argues that, while he saw evidence of brutality and a regimented life, he also saw a generally healthy population. As such, despite a decade of mounting evidence which suggested that genocide had occurred under Pol Pot's reign, Dudman still placed an emphasis on what he himself had observed at the time.<sup>455</sup>

### *Dudman's Reflections*

In a 2015 piece for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*,<sup>456</sup> written when he was 97 years old and following his testimony in a case against two Pol Pot associates charged with genocide, Dudman reflects on his analysis of Pol Pot and the Cambodian genocide.<sup>457</sup> Dudman recounts his experience in the article, and notes how, at the time, he disputed intelligence reports that the population was starving to death due to the fact that he had observed, what he considered, a healthy population. Dudman, comparing his account with Elizabeth Becker's, notes:

My judgement at the time was that I should write what I saw. Becker, far more experienced in Cambodia than I, later wrote that we were shown a prettied-up and totally false picture. She may well be right.<sup>458</sup>

Dudman goes on to mention the defense attorney's questions to him, especially those concerning how often Dudman had been "soft" on Pol Pot in his writing. This made Dudman feel almost as though he were the one on trial: "All I could tell him was that I wrote what I saw and beyond that I could not recall the circumstances."<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Dudman (1990).

<sup>455</sup> See Ben Kiernan's reply in the *New York Times* outlining the genocidal nature of the regime: Kiernan (1990).

<sup>456</sup> Dudman (2015).

<sup>457</sup> Cf. Becker (2015).

<sup>458</sup> Dudman (2015).

<sup>459</sup> Dudman (2015).

The final three paragraphs of this article are worth quoting in full:

The experience has troubled me about what I have always considered as my normal reporter's skepticism and willingness to see and hear both side of any story.

In fact, I wonder how I would have behaved if I had been a correspondent in Germany during the early rise to power of Adolf Hitler. Would I first have tried to report his side of the story? How long would it have taken me to realize that he was all bad and that any sympathy or even-handedness would have been misplaced?

The short answer is that I don't know. I am glad that I escaped that assignment. I might have written some stuff that would have haunted me for the rest of my life.<sup>460</sup>

Richard Dudman, of the four journalists under discussion, is the most determined in relying on observation as his main journalistic method, and he is the most resolute in preserving an objective neutrality in his reporting. Yet, of the four, his reports are also the most inaccurate in terms of an analysis of what was actually happening within Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge reign. Moreover, he is the only journalist of the four who later questions their initial analysis and understanding of what they witnessed. This point is worth highlighting since it offers a contrast with the reporting of Elizabeth Becker, who was less determined in her neutrality and reliance on observation, and yet whose reports were much more in line with the reality of the situation on the ground. This is an important point to note: objectivity and neutrality do not necessarily equal accuracy. The connection between neutrality and accuracy in relation to peace and war journalism will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>460</sup> Dudman (2015).

The follow section discusses Sydney Schanberg and his articles on the Cambodian civil war and genocide.

## **Sydney Schanberg**

Sydney Schanberg was born January 17, 1934 in Clinton, Massachusetts, and died July 9, 2016 in Poughkeepsie, New York. Harvard educated, he graduated in 1955 with a degree in American history before being drafted and serving as a reporter for an Army newspaper in Frankfurt, Germany. In 1959 he joined the *New York Times* as a clerk earning \$49.50 a week. Ten years later, he was awarded a foreign assignment as the bureau chief in New Delhi. When Nixon launched the 1970 incursion into Cambodia, Schanberg was sent to bolster the war coverage there. He returned to New Delhi later that year to cover the autonomy movement occurring in East Pakistan.<sup>461</sup>

Over the next few years, Schanberg would go on to cover the Vietnam War, India's advance into East Pakistan, and most famously, Cambodia's civil war.<sup>462</sup> As he puts it: "My life, essentially, had turned into a war assignment."<sup>463</sup> Schanberg would become the *New York Times'* Southeast Asia correspondent, based in Singapore from 1973-1975, but spent much of the latter part of the Cambodian civil war in that country, placing a large strain on his family.<sup>464</sup> Many regard him as the conscience of the media in the Cambodian war.<sup>465</sup> In 1976, he won the Pulitzer prize for his coverage of Cambodia, a prize he accepted on behalf of himself and Dith Pran, his friend and associate who was missing inside that country.<sup>466</sup> His relationship with Pran would go

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<sup>461</sup> Schanberg (2010) ix; McFadden (2016); Schudel (2016).

<sup>462</sup> Schanberg (2010).

<sup>463</sup> Schanberg (2010) ix.

<sup>464</sup> Schanberg (2010) 68.

<sup>465</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 276.

<sup>466</sup> Schanberg (2010) 90.

on to be memorialized in the 1984 film *The Killing Fields*, which was based on Schanberg's 1980 article in the *New York Times Magazine* "The Death and Life of Dith Pran."

Following his return to the United States, Schanberg would go on to become the metropolitan editor of the *New York Times* from 1977 to 1980, and wrote a twice-weekly column from 1981 to 1985, which was discontinued after he criticized his paper's coverage of the proposed Westway highway in Manhattan.<sup>467</sup> Schanberg went on to become a columnist for *New York Newsday* for ten years, and later wrote pieces for the *Village Voice*, and contributed to *Vanity Fair*, *Penthouse*, and *The Nation*.<sup>468</sup>

Schanberg was an intense, abrasive, headstrong, and fiercely competitive newspaperman with a "bulldog tenacity" that served him well as a foreign war correspondent.<sup>469</sup> He had a "legendary temper" which led to Cambodian assistants of the press corps and employees at the Hotel Le Phnom nicknaming him "Ankalimir" – an ogre of Cambodian legend who cut off the fingers of ninety-nine people who annoyed him, before reforming and becoming an enlightened disciple of Buddha.<sup>470</sup> According to Schanberg, his Cambodian friends explained that he was the man who made a lot of "bad noise" at the beginning, but deep down was a good person. Schanberg accepted the nickname as "comradely, if critical, flattery."<sup>471</sup>

### *Schanberg's Style*

To begin the section on Schanberg it is necessary to offer a brief comment on his writing style, since it differs from the other three journalists under discussion. At times, Schanberg uses a

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<sup>467</sup> McFadden (2016).

<sup>468</sup> McFadden (2016).

<sup>469</sup> Becker (1985); McFadden (2016); Schudel (2016).

<sup>470</sup> Schanberg (2010) 70. Cf. Becker (1985).

<sup>471</sup> Schanberg (2010) 70.

literary, or richly descriptive writing style to describe a scene. For example, a piece from late 1972 describes how:

It is common for a Government force to open a stretch of road after an intermittent but fierce fighting lasting only three or four weeks to find macabre tableaux of the putrefying bodies that they have been unable to retrieve. Skeletons leer from green uniforms, the neck bones still adorned with the magic scarves that were supposed to protect their wearers from death. A bony foot detached from the rest of the body still stands upright in its boot.<sup>472</sup>

In August 1973, an American bombing error flattened part of the Mekong village town of Neak Luong. While the United States Embassy described the damage as “minimal” and tried to prevent journalists accessing the area, Schanberg and Pran were able to investigate and expose the attempted cover up of the damage.<sup>473</sup> In what was the worst accidental bombing of the Indochina war, large parts of the town were flattened, and there were nearly 400 casualties. This report was to prove Schanberg’s biggest scoop to date in his coverage of the war, a scoop which he was only able to obtain because of Pran’s ability to arrange (by bribery and cajoling) transportation to and from the area.<sup>474</sup> Schanberg describes one scene from the town:

Ammunition also exploded in this compound and many people died. A woman’s scalp sways on a clump of tall grass. A bloody pillow here, a shred of a sarong caught on barbed wire there. A large bloodstain on the brown earth. A pair of infant’s rubber sandals among some unexploded artillery shells.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Schanberg (1972g).

<sup>473</sup> Schanberg (1973v).

<sup>474</sup> Schanberg (2010) 65. Cf. Becker (1974a).

<sup>475</sup> Schanberg (1973v).

In a less morbid example, Schanberg sets the scene before describing the state of the Cambodian army on Route 5 out of Phnom Penh. He opens his article with:

The sun burns the road soft, but the shade and the countryside are lush and actively cool like a gently running air-conditioner. There are mango and lime trees, clumps of bamboo, waving rice and languid streams with languid, sweet tasting fish.<sup>476</sup>

Other examples of Schanberg's literary style in setting the scene for his readers abound.<sup>477</sup>

In his writings, Schanberg is regularly more descriptive and emotive in his language than the other journalists under discussion. Often, Schanberg focuses on stories of individual wounded, especially children, to highlight the awful nature of what he is witnessing in the war, and he often draws attention to the state of medical care in the country. For example, in an article from January 1975, entitled: 'In a Besieged Cambodian City, Hunger, Death and the Whimpering of Children,' Schanberg focuses on a wounded seven-year old girl.<sup>478</sup> He also comments that:

The tile floors of the military infirmary and civilian hospital are slippery with blood. They have long since run out of pain-killing drugs. Bodies are everywhere – some people half conscious crying out in pain, some with gaping wounds who will not live. Some are already dead and, in the chaos, just lie there with no one to cover them or take them away.<sup>479</sup>

In the same article, after describing a colonel standing in the market sniffing French cologne, he comments on how out of place the scene was by presenting a contrast that describes how the

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<sup>476</sup> Schanberg (1972e). Cf. e.g. Schanberg (1973p).

<sup>477</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973j); (1974e); (1975d); (1975j).

<sup>478</sup> Schanberg (1975h). Cf. e.g. (1973w); (1974e); (1974n); (197ae).

<sup>479</sup> Schanberg (1975h).



norm was blood soaked stretchers, the smashed bodies of infants attached to plasma bottles, wounded soldiers being dragged or dragging themselves from every lane, and a meadow on the northern edge of town where the wounded who still had a chance were carried to await the evacuation helicopters.<sup>480</sup>

In order to try and emphasise the awfulness of the war, Schanberg occasionally compares the raw figures to a New York or American equivalency. For example:

Cambodia has about the same number of people as New York City, and if the war in Cambodia were happening now in New York, by now the equivalent of the entire population of Staten Island (295,443) would have been killed or wounded – twice over. Or, superimposing the Cambodian situation on a more populous borough, nearly half the people in Manhattan would have fallen as casualties.

Statistics cannot explain a war because people are not digits, but they can convey to some extent the enormousness of the destruction that has been caused in the four-and-a-half years of fighting.

He concludes with a comment by a western diplomat that a fire in an elevator which kills five people in New York would be front page news, but the Cambodia story is buried:

Perhaps this is not a fair comparison. Elevator fires in New York are fairly uncommon. In Cambodia, the war is as certain as the sunrise.<sup>481</sup>

Schanberg draws the reader's attention to the awfulness of the war through his attempts to present the human element to the violence, and not simply the statistics of those killed.

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<sup>480</sup> Schanberg (1975h).

<sup>481</sup> Schanberg (1974n). Cf. Schanberg (1975an); (2010) 1.

## *Schanberg Themes*

The theme of corruption comes through strong in Schanberg's writing.<sup>482</sup> This is, on the whole, not overly surprising, since the Lon Nol government was notoriously corrupt.<sup>483</sup> Schanberg focuses on how the corruption affected the local, disenfranchised population:<sup>484</sup> from the generals lining their own pockets through "ghost" armies;<sup>485</sup> how the government was selling weapons to their enemy; and the ability of the upper-class to pay their way out of the draft. For example, in an August, 1974 piece, Schanberg highlights how corruption has invaded everyday life and now "Little people were now preying on little people" which in Schanberg's opinion was "a sure sign that the norms of war have at least for now replaced Cambodia's Buddhist traditions, which teach Khmers to help one another."<sup>486</sup>

While Schanberg wrote clearly on his views that rampant corruption was eroding what he saw as traditional Khmer values, he is less clear in his commentary on the relationship between the United States and this corruption. Occasionally, and after the United States ended its bombing support in August 1973, Schanberg notes the connection between the corruption and American money which helped source it.<sup>487</sup> More often, though, the corruption angle is expressed through the view that wealthy Cambodians are exploiting the poor which has angered the population at large and debased many of the traditional values of the society.

By the same token, however, Schanberg at times appears to insinuate that Cambodian culture is a part of the reason why events are playing out the way they are. This is not to suggest that Schanberg was disrespectful or culturally insensitive to the Khmer population, for he was

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<sup>482</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1972l); (1973k); (1973s); (1974h); (1974l); (1975al); (1975ao).

<sup>483</sup> Cf. Becker (1998); Kamm (1998) 100-119.

<sup>484</sup> Schanberg (2010) 64-65.

<sup>485</sup> Cf. Power (2002) 93-94.

<sup>486</sup> Schanberg (1974l).

<sup>487</sup> Schanberg (1974h); (1974l).

not, but in his search for explanation he often comes back to notions of a Cambodian “fatalism” as a reason for the seeming lack of drive to repel the communist force. He mentions this cultural aspect on numerous occasions in his articles, for example:

Rather than any sense of urgency here, there is the grand fatalism that is so much a part of Cambodia’s Hindu-influenced Buddhism: Things are ordained. Men do not act upon events; events act upon men.<sup>488</sup>

The headlines in the foreign press may suggest that Armageddon is at hand, but the Cambodians don’t see any reason to panic. Their lives are largely governed by their Hinduized form of Buddhism, which has made them fatalists.<sup>489</sup>

In discussing the siege of the Mekong town of Neak Luong, in early 1975, Schanberg notes that,

There was squalor, fear and bedlam. But there was also the traditional Buddhist fatalism of the Cambodian people. Some of this trapped population, which totals at least 250,000 counting the refugees, seemed almost to accept that being caught here is simply their lot.<sup>490</sup>

In a piece from six weeks later, continuing the story of Neak Luong, Schanberg makes the comment that: “Still, there is no noticeable panic here, for Cambodians are given more to fatalism than hysteria.”<sup>491</sup> Along the same lines, Schanberg notes several times how, no matter the situation of the war, behind the scenes in Phnom Penh the city largely remains calm as if there is no war on the city’s doorstep.<sup>492</sup>

The implication of many of these pieces is two-fold: (1) it ties into Schanberg’s presentation of the Cambodians as inherently or culturally accepting of their fate – this is simply

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<sup>488</sup> Schanberg (1973n).

<sup>489</sup> Schanberg (1973ab).

<sup>490</sup> Schanberg (1975h). Cf. Schanberg (1975v).

<sup>491</sup> Schanberg (1975v).

<sup>492</sup> Schanberg (1973x); (1973ac); (1975u).

their “lot” in life, and what will be will be; and (2) it gives an impression of the “never-never” land atmosphere Schanberg describes of the Cambodian population’s inability to realise and prevent the danger close at hand.<sup>493</sup> Closely connected to this last point, is Schanberg’s comments that western logic is incapable of understanding the war.<sup>494</sup>

In Schanberg’s writings, there is more than an insinuation of Cambodian incompetence, both culturally and militarily, in their lack of desire to save themselves – hints of which run through his pieces and, at times, clearly frustrates him. There is also an element of western saviour-ism which seeps into his work, especially in relation to the question of financial aid – which, if ended, in his opinion, will speed up the victory for the communists.<sup>495</sup>

This element of his writing comes through strongest in the numerous articles that stress the inevitability of the government’s defeat in the war, and in his repetition of how seemingly purposeless the fighting has become – two themes which flick back and forth over the course of his articles.<sup>496</sup> For example, at the beginning of 1975, when the rebels were within ten miles of Phnom Penh, Schanberg wrote:

Once again, in this nearly five-year-old war, neither side seems able to win military victory, and the outlook is for another bloody repetition of what has become an annual dry-season ritual – an insurgent drive against Phnom Penh and its environs, in which tens of thousands more are killed, the refugee rolls swell and more of the devastated country is leveled.<sup>497</sup>

The year before, in February 1974, Schanberg had written that:

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<sup>493</sup> Schanberg (1973n).

<sup>494</sup> Schanberg (1973j). Cf. (1975ab); (1975ai).

<sup>495</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1974f); (1974p); (1974r); (1975c); (1975h); (1975n); (1975ad).

<sup>496</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1974b); (1974c); (1975a); (1975o); (1975ae); (1975ag); (1975at).

<sup>497</sup> Schanberg (1975a).

The two million people in this fatigued city, most of them refugees from the war that has raged in the countryside and chewed at the city's fringes for nearly four years, are doing what they have done since the war began – waiting nervously for the next attempt by enemy troops to choke them off or to penetrate the city itself.<sup>498</sup>

There is a weariness and fatigue in Schanberg's descriptions of the fighting, and a sense of relief when the end of the war is clear and apparent, with the Khmer Rouge poised to finally take Phnom Penh.<sup>499</sup> In this regard, Schanberg's presentation of the "average" peasant situation in Cambodia has been criticized for being over-simplified, if not misleading.<sup>500</sup> For example, in a piece from March 1975, Schanberg writes:

The average peasant is achingly wearied by the war, having been forced to flee the fighting sometimes three or four times and almost certainly having lost some member of his family to a shell or a bullet. He only desires its end. He looks forward to possible Communist rule neither with anticipation nor fear, for he is usually a nonpolitical person.<sup>501</sup>

The criticism of Schanberg's presentation of the "non-political" peasant simply desiring war's end, comes about because of his lack of acknowledgement of the impact of the massive U.S. bombing campaign through the Cambodian countryside, of varying degrees of intensity, from 1969-1973. Herman and Chomsky, in discussing the media coverage of the period just before the end of the most intensive bombing campaign (February- August 1973) note how the western media (these authors focus on Schanberg for their criticism) present the "Cambodians" as "fatalistic" while expressing shock at how the "other Cambodians" – i.e. the enemy – are

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<sup>498</sup> Schanberg (1974b).

<sup>499</sup> Schanberg (1975az).

<sup>500</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 274-280.

<sup>501</sup> Schanberg (1975ab). Cf. (1975ai).

determined to struggle on in the face of the awesome firepower of the Americans.<sup>502</sup> These authors note how the media pitted the two “Cambodians” against one another – one-side fatalistic and resigned to defeat if the bombing support ends, and the other which struggles relentlessly in spite of the odds and baffles the so-called “experts” with their determination.

Herman and Chomsky also comment on how there are virtually no columns in the western press dedicated to asking the victims of the massive bombing campaign what they think about the situation in Cambodia.<sup>503</sup> This is in spite of the fact that there were an estimated one to one-and-a-half million refugees in Phnom Penh, at least some of whom could have described to journalists what it was like to live in these bombed areas.<sup>504</sup> For authors like Herman and Chomsky, the neglect of western journalists like Schanberg of their responsibility to (in their view) appropriately convey the damage done by the United States in what they identify as the first phase of the genocide, is part of a broader issue related to how the western media presents and “manufactures consent” of United States involvement in conflicts overseas.

Herman and Chomsky imply that Schanberg, and the western media generally, missed the important story of the effect the bombing campaign had on the countryside by focussing their narratives on how the cessation of the bombing campaign would impact morale from the “fatalistic” Cambodians, who are the “real” Cambodians.<sup>505</sup> Where this criticism becomes interesting in relation to Schanberg’s reporting is that, by this time, Dith Pran was working exclusively with Schanberg, now as an official stringer to the *New York Times*.<sup>506</sup> This is important because Schanberg notes that Pran was taking him to

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<sup>502</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 274-280.

<sup>503</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 274-280.

<sup>504</sup> Cf. Swain (1975h).

<sup>505</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 274-280.

<sup>506</sup> Schanberg (2010) 64-65.

the jammed and underfed refugee camps and to the dirt roads not far from Phnom Penh where villagers were streaming away from the fighting, leaving their homes and rice fields behind.<sup>507</sup>

Schanberg in other words had access to these camps through Pran, and he had a reliable translator, both of the Khmer language and customs, at his side.

Schanberg returned to Cambodia in May 1973, in order to cover the last phase of the U.S. bombing campaign before it was halted by Congress that August. Schanberg, at times, presents his confusion at the lack of success of the bombing and attempts to explain why there seems to be a gap between the government's claim that the bombing is effective, and the seeming lack of efficiency in halting the rebels.<sup>508</sup> By way of explanation, Schanberg claims that,

One curious aspect of the bombing is that, despite claims by the Government and the Americans of hundreds of enemy soldiers killed, no enemy bodies are ever found. This can be explained in part by the fact that the insurgents make every effort to remove their dead from the battlefield and bury them out of reach of Government hands.<sup>509</sup>

Schanberg, in his writings from 1973, often refers to the belief that, once the bombing campaign ends, the rebels will easily take Phnom Penh – there is a perception that it is only the massive bombing campaign that is doing anything to halt the rebel advance.<sup>510</sup> In this regard, Herman and Chomsky are correct in highlighting how Schanberg seems to avoid the question around what the villagers think of the bombing campaign. Bolstering Herman and Chomsky's point is the fact that there is only one direct quotation from a villager in Schanberg's articles

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<sup>507</sup> Schanberg (2010) 65.

<sup>508</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973y); (1973z).

<sup>509</sup> Schanberg (1973y). Cf. (1973k); (1973n); (1973o); (1973q).

<sup>510</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973i).

from this time, who rather politely tells Schanberg that: “I would be very grateful if the Government would stop sending the planes to bomb.”<sup>511</sup>

However, while there is only one direct quotation from a villager, Schanberg does, at times, present the bombing as something that is shocking to those who suffer through it. For example, after quoting a doctor from a mental hospital who noted that the bombing is bad for his patients, Schanberg wrote: “It would make anyone frightened – the great claps of noise and then the clouds of black smoke that mushroom up over the distant tree-tops.”<sup>512</sup> Moreover, in his detailed account of the U.S. bombing error at Neak Luong,<sup>513</sup> Schanberg makes it graphically, and viscerally, clear, the damage and horror that these bombs can do.

At the same time, however, Schanberg is more often than not rather ambivalent in his treatment of the bombing campaign. The sentence which follows the quote above from the mental hospital adds the caveat that “these people are already afraid. They have retreated from life, and they need reassuring.”<sup>514</sup>

Schanberg, in his articles, clearly believes that the bombing is necessary to halt the rebel advance, but there is a discomfort in his writing about the overall damage it is doing to the country. One example of Schanberg’s attempt to balance his presentation of the bombing comes from his piece on the mental hospital. Schanberg contrasts a quote from a patient who claims to be unafraid of the bombing with one from a patient who remains frozen at attention in fear of the bombing nearby.<sup>515</sup> Schanberg presents similar contrasts in other pieces, which highlight the necessity of the bombing while attempting to portray the devastation it causes.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> Schanberg (1973h).

<sup>512</sup> Schanberg (1973w).

<sup>513</sup> Schanberg (1973v).

<sup>514</sup> Schanberg (1973w).

<sup>515</sup> Schanberg (1973w).

<sup>516</sup> For discussion, see Herman and Chomsky (1988) 274-280.



In these articles, we begin to see the tension in Schanberg's writing around what he thinks will help the country achieve peace after three years of war.<sup>517</sup> As he continues to cover the war, his writing turns sharply towards a belief that the United States does not have Cambodia's best interest at heart. For Schanberg, Cambodia was trapped in a situation where its fate does not matter to the big powers who became involved in the war for their own interests, and he laments how the world is now ignoring the country's plight.<sup>518</sup> In Schanberg's view, the United States and other big powers are getting in the way of a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and as time goes on, he notes how the chances of peace have diminished.<sup>519</sup>

### *Understanding the Khmer Rouge*

On March 9, 1974 Schanberg published an article where he outlines some details about life on the "other side."<sup>520</sup> In this article, Schanberg was able to interview some of the 20,000 people who had come over to the government side at Kompong Thom, north of the capital. This is one of the few times Schanberg has direct quotations from individual refugees, and while he highlights some aspects of life on the other side, he does not go into great detail, and instead often brings the discussion back to how bad the government side is.

For example, Schanberg comments:

The refugees had been under enemy control since the beginning of the war, and judging from interviews with many of them, they are happy to be out of it – even though they know about the failings on the Government side, including widespread corruption and frequent indifference or ineptitude in dealing with the problems of

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<sup>517</sup> Schanberg (1973z).

<sup>518</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1974f); (1974s). Cf. (2010) 64.

<sup>519</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1974o); (1974p); (1974s); (1975af).

<sup>520</sup> Schanberg (1974i).

war victims and refugees. Describing their lives in enemy territory, some say they saw people shot; others say they only saw people taken away, not to return. Some say their movements were narrowly restricted, while others say the rules were more flexible. Apparently it depended on the village and the degree of rigidity of the particular insurgent unit.<sup>521</sup>

For Schanberg, this last point is something that he will hold on to as the Khmer Rouge cement control of the country.<sup>522</sup> Importantly, this article by Schanberg was published a day before Elizabeth Becker's *Washington Post* article detailing what was known about the Khmer Rouge at that time.<sup>523</sup> While Becker was prepared to rely on the accounts of others to go in-depth, Schanberg relied on what he could see and hear for himself.

Nearly a year later, on March 2, 1975, Schanberg would finally address the key question on who the other side was, in a piece titled: 'The 'Enemy' is Red, Cruel and, After 5 Years, Little Known.'<sup>524</sup> Eleven days later, he again addresses the question of who occupies the other side again in a lengthier piece titled: 'The Enigmatic Cambodian Insurgents: Reds Appear to Dominate Diverse Bloc.'<sup>525</sup> Neither of these pieces offers much new information from Becker's article a year previous.

What they do show, however, is Schanberg's attention to the "Cambodians" and his scepticism concerning the possibility of a future "bloodbath". For Schanberg, by this stage in the war, the question around the nature of the other side is less important than the end of the war. He concludes his piece from March 2 by saying:

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<sup>521</sup> Schanberg (1974i).

<sup>522</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1975az); (1975aah). Cf. Becker (1974f); Swain (1975h).

<sup>523</sup> Becker (1974f).

<sup>524</sup> Schanberg (1975ab). Cf. (1975ag).

<sup>525</sup> Schanberg (1975ai).

To see an emaciated infant gasp and die on a cold metal table in a clinic here, or to see a peasant soldier have his mangled leg amputated in a military hospital is to see Cambodian reality today. In these places, you hardly ever hear anyone talk about geopolitical epicenters or superpower détente or American foreign policy credibility.<sup>526</sup>

In the piece from March 13, Schanberg, after mentioning the rumours of a bloody take-over by the Khmer Rouge, notes:

In any case most non-Cambodian observers – foreign diplomats and military experts – view the bloodbath debate as essentially irrelevant because they believe that an insurgent take-over is certain and that the wisest and most realistic approach would be to bend all efforts to make it as orderly and humane as possible.<sup>527</sup>

Schanberg's main hope for this "orderly" transition seems to lie in the hope that, once the Khmer Rouge manage to take power, they would have no need to commit a "bloodbath" of their fellow Cambodians. At the same time, despite not really knowing a whole lot about the nature of the Khmer Rouge leadership structure, Schanberg (and others) appear to place faith in Khieu Samphan, who had the reputation of being an incorruptible nationalist as well as a communist.<sup>528</sup> Because of the murkiness relating to the leadership group and their ideology, Schanberg, like many, was prepared to wait and see what happened once the inevitable fall of Phnom Penh occurred and to see what the new regime looked like.<sup>529</sup> Especially, because, in his view, it could not be any worse than the current situation.

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<sup>526</sup> Schanberg (1975ab).

<sup>527</sup> Schanberg (1975ai).

<sup>528</sup> Schanberg (1975ab); (1975ai).

<sup>529</sup> Schanberg (2010) 70-71.

In discussing the rumoured bloodbath that was projected by some American officials Schanberg is careful to temper his descriptions with a qualifying comment. For example, after commenting on the Khmer Rouge's battlefield brutality, including the burning of villages, murdering peasants, and in some cases mutilating bodies, Schanberg notes that this behaviour has not been monolithic or countrywide.<sup>530</sup> In a later article, published four days before the fall of Phnom Penh, Schanberg specifically compares the rumoured brutality with what he witnessed committed by the Government troops.<sup>531</sup> He then comments:

Wars nourish brutality and sadism, and sometimes certain people are executed by the victors but it would be tendentious to forecast such abnormal behavior as a national policy under a Communist government once the war is over.<sup>532</sup>

It is hard to know if this comment was simply a case of wishful thinking due to the inevitability of Khmer Rouge victory or a genuine belief on Schanberg's part. Throughout his articles from 1975, Schanberg indicates his belief that American involvement in Indochina is preventing opportunities for peace, and at times he comments forcefully on how the United States never had good intentions in involving itself in Cambodia.<sup>533</sup> Schanberg, like Swain, came to believe that with the Americans gone an Asian solution can be found to an Asian conflict, and that it would be better for all involved.<sup>534</sup> After witnessing the fall of Phnom Penh, Schanberg would admit that he was wrong in this thinking.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Schanberg (1975ab); (1975ai).

<sup>531</sup> Schanberg (1975az). Cf. e.g. (1972g); (1974j).

<sup>532</sup> Schanberg (1975az).

<sup>533</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1975az).

<sup>534</sup> Schanberg (1975az); Swain (1975h).

<sup>535</sup> Schanberg (1975aah).

## *Key Pieces*

Schanberg was one of a handful of western journalists to observe the occupation of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge. After being holed up in the French Embassy for thirteen days, with eight hundred other foreigners who decided to remain in the capital,<sup>536</sup> or who were unable to get out prior to its fall, Schanberg and about half of the other foreigners were driven to the Thai border and released on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May. The remainder of the refugees were released a few days later on May 8. Upon release, Schanberg and the other journalists placed themselves under a self-imposed embargo and promised not to write about their experience until the remainder of the foreigners were released. On May 9, Schanberg published several articles detailing his account of what happened on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April and included his thoughts on life inside the compound and the differences between western and Cambodian attitudes to hardship.<sup>537</sup>

In these articles, Schanberg describes how the Khmer Rouge expelled everyone from the city, including the old and sick, many of whom were undoubtedly too weak to survive the trek, in what he refers to as an “astonishing spectacle”.<sup>538</sup> He notes how the Khmer Rouge appeared to be remaking the society in the peasant image.<sup>539</sup> Schanberg goes on to mention how the United States’ descriptions of the Khmer Rouge as indecisive and ill-coordinated were inadequate, and comments on how the predictions of a bloodbath seem to be inaccurate. Yet he also acknowledges that many of the top people of the former regime were killed, and how many civilians will likely perish in the exodus from the city to the country.<sup>540</sup>

Indeed, Schanberg appears uncertain about how exactly to think about the exodus from the city and what he witnessed through his, admittedly small, window into the new Cambodia:

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<sup>536</sup> And Cambodians who had sought sanctuary before being forced out by the Khmer Rouge.

<sup>537</sup> Schanberg (1975aah); (1975aai); (1975aaj); (1975aak). Cf. Schanberg (2010) 63-111.

<sup>538</sup> Schanberg (1975aah). Cf. Ponchaud (1978); Bizot (2003).

<sup>539</sup> Schanberg (1975aah).

<sup>540</sup> Schanberg (1975aah).

In almost every situation we encountered during the more than two weeks we were under Communist control, there was a sense of split vision – whether to look at events through Western eyes or through what we thought might be Cambodian revolutionary eyes.<sup>541</sup>

Was this just cold brutality, a cruel and sadistic imposition of the law of the jungle, in which only the fittest will survive? Or is it possible that, seen through the eyes of the peasant soldiers and revolutionaries, the forced evacuation of the cities is a harsh necessity? Perhaps they are convinced that there is no way to build a new society for the benefit of the ordinary man, hitherto exploited, without literally starting from the beginning; in such an unbending view people who represent the old ways and those considered weak or unfit would be expendable and would be weeded out. Or was the policy both cruel and ideological?<sup>542</sup>

What struck readers of Schanberg's account was his sense of his own fallibility and his attempt to try and consider events through "other eyes".<sup>543</sup> In these articles from May 9, there is a striking sense of Schanberg's awareness of the differences between Cambodian and American/Western values. This is something that Schanberg had emphasized in his articles from time to time during the civil war, especially in his comments on the Cambodian belief in mystic signs and spirits.<sup>544</sup> He mentions numerous times the selfishness that was on display by the westerners trapped in the compound and on the journey out of the country.<sup>545</sup> After questioning why there was not more of a communal spirit among those in the embassy, he asks:

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<sup>541</sup> Schanberg (1975aah).

<sup>542</sup> Schanberg (1975aah).

<sup>543</sup> E.g. Lewis (1975).

<sup>544</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1972a); (1972e); (1972j); (1973j); (1973ab); (1975h); (1975o).

<sup>545</sup> Schanberg (1975aai); (1975aaj).

Why did all the Asians live outside, in the heat and rain, while many of the Caucasians, like my group, lived inside, with air-conditioning? We explained it by saying the living arrangements were up to the embassy, but this was clearly not an answer. Was our behavior and our segregation a verdict on our way of life?<sup>546</sup>

In fact, Schanberg felt the behaviour was so poor on the journey out, including fighting over the food rations, the petty squabbling, and threats to expose stowaways on the convoy, that he commented: “If the Communists were looking for reasons to expel us as unfit and unsuited to live in a simple Asian society, we gave them ample opportunity on this journey.”<sup>547</sup>

Schanberg concludes his account of the evacuation to Thailand by describing how his Cambodian friend, Chhay Born Lay, immediately began to suck the blood out of a cut on his hand that Schanberg received on some barbed wire while crossing the border.<sup>548</sup> After the descriptions of poor western behaviour, it is a fitting conclusion for Schanberg’s ordeal when he highlights the selfless nature of his Cambodian friend. This also ties into his description of how Dith Pran managed to save his life, as well as Jon Swain’s, Al Rockoff’s, and their driver Sarun’s, when he talked his way into the army personal carrier (APC) that they expected to take them to their execution. While Schanberg does not go into great detail in the May 9 piece,<sup>549</sup> in a later work he offers a detailed account of how Pran was willing to sacrifice himself to try and save Schanberg and the others, and how the guilt of not being able to do the same for Pran ate away at Schanberg until their reunion four years later.<sup>550</sup>

Of the four journalists under discussion, Schanberg is the most prolific and the most descriptive in his accounts of what he witnessed during the war and the early days of the Khmer

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<sup>546</sup> Schanberg (1975aai).

<sup>547</sup> Schanberg (1975aaj).

<sup>548</sup> Schanberg (1975aaj).

<sup>549</sup> Schanberg (1975aak).

<sup>550</sup> Schanberg (2010) 63-111.

Rouge rule. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the volume of his writing allowed for a deeper analysis within consideration of the various categories of the peace and war journalism table. In particular, it highlighted an issue where the sheer volume of his writing meant that certain peace journalism categories (in particular, category “4” – deep vs. shallow background to the conflict) became redundant to the larger peace and war journalism equation.

The following section addresses Jon Swain’s writing on Cambodia and offers a comparison and contrast to Schanberg’s articles.

## **Jon Swain**

Jon Swain was born in London in 1948, and spent his early years in West Bengal, India where he had a fairly typical British colonial upbringing.<sup>551</sup> After an unhappy schooling experience in the U.K., he left as a teenager to join the French Foreign legion. After failing to make the cut, he became a journalist, finding a job with the *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), where he worked for two years on the English Desk before they sent him to Phnom Penh in 1970, after Swain had badgered his editors “unashamedly” to send him to Indochina.<sup>552</sup>

Swain spent five years in Indochina, initially working for AFP, before he quit at the end of 1972, having been recalled to Paris because his assignment was over. Swain, however, was determined to get back to Indochina, and caught a plane back to Saigon as “a near-penniless freelancer”.<sup>553</sup> He had a Vietnamese girlfriend, Jacqueline, and their relationship forms much of his memoir *River of Time*. He claims to have fallen in love with Indochina, feeling as though he was happiest there. As he puts it:

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<sup>551</sup> Swain (1998) 15.

<sup>552</sup> Swain (1998) 15.

<sup>553</sup> Swain (1998) 79.



I knew I had to return to Indo-China. I had passed the best times of my life there; I had been at the centre of the world and I had found harmony between myself and outside events. ... The lure of Indo-China was that of a young enchantress. I was bewitched and could no longer resist. It was impossible to imagine that I could ever be happier.<sup>554</sup>

Swain's memoir, despite the tragic subject matter, is largely an account of his love for Indo-China.

By mid-1973, Swain had taken up a job with *The Sunday Times*, where he would go on to become a staff writer based on the strength of his account of the fall of Phnom Penh.<sup>555</sup> He worked for *The Sunday Times* for thirty-five years, often taking dangerous assignments. For example, in 1976, he spent three months in captivity in Ethiopia, where he had gone on a short assignment to cover the war with Eritrea.<sup>556</sup> His decision to go to Ethiopia was to become the final dagger in his relationship with Jacqueline, who could no longer compromise with the "mad lifestyle" Swain had imposed on their relationship by taking on dangerous assignments.<sup>557</sup>

Swain was the only British journalist in Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, and his account of the Khmer Rouge capture of the city and subsequent detainment at the French Embassy and release, won him the 1975 Journalist of the Year in the British Press Awards.<sup>558</sup> Because Swain wrote for a weekly newspaper, he had time to think about and dissect the information he was reporting on to a deeper level than, for example, Sydney Schanberg, who was competitive in his desire to be the first with a piece of information.<sup>559</sup> Accordingly, while Swain did not publish as

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<sup>554</sup> Swain (1998) 79.

<sup>555</sup> Swain (1998) 173.

<sup>556</sup> Swain (1998) 211-239.

<sup>557</sup> Swain (1998) 239.

<sup>558</sup> Swain (1998) 214.

<sup>559</sup> Schanberg (2010) 64-70. Cf. Herr (1991).

often as Schanberg on Cambodia (and Swain spent much of the time in Vietnam and elsewhere in SE Asia) his reporting often contains a greater depth of nuance, understanding, and explanatory power.

#### *Mid-1973-April 1975*

Between mid-1973, when he began reporting for *The Sunday Times*, and April 17, 1975 Swain published twelve articles relating to Cambodia. From August 1973 until April 1975 – when he caught the last available flight into Phnom Penh after the U.S. withdrawal<sup>560</sup> – Swain periodically went to the Cambodian capital from his base in Saigon to report on events. On August 12, 1973, three days before the U.S. bombing halt, Swain published an article outlining the current state of affairs. This was the first time in three years he had been back in Phnom Penh, a city which in his opinion had retained its charm despite the influx of thousands of refugees.<sup>561</sup>

Similar to Sydney Schanberg, Swain noted how one could ride thirty minutes out of the city, see the war, and be back at the pool by breakfast. He, too, noticed the difference between local and foreign views:

But Phnom Penh residents are mostly undisturbed by the fighting that rumbles menacingly close. For all they care the war could be on a different planet. They are still trapped in a fatalistic state of torpor, a traditional Cambodian mood that permeates even the thick walls of the great palace.<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> Swain (1998) 121-123.

<sup>561</sup> Swain (1973a).

<sup>562</sup> Swain (1973a).

Swain goes on to comment on the American bombing campaign, which was at its height during mid-1973, and questions why the insurgents are pressing on with fighting instead of waiting for the bombing to halt in a couple of days. He comments that they:

have relentlessly pursued their offensive near the city's gates in the teeth of punishing American air raids that jar the nerves and create a frightening sensation of living permanently on the fringe of an earthquake.<sup>563</sup>

While the Cambodians may be fatalistic, the intense bombing is frightening, and for Swain the insurgents' desire to push on in the face of its violence represents their "Passchendaele type mentality"<sup>564</sup> In this regard, and similar to Schanberg, Swain divorces these "other" Cambodians from the fatalistic Khmers in the city.

Swain notes how little is known of the true make-up of the insurgents and highlights the possibility of a split in the ranks between the Khmer Vietminh and the Khmer Rouge. He comments on how the olive branch offered by Lon Nol for negotiation was spurned, and wonders whether an under the table deal between the "big powers" who help control the warring sides through the provision of arms, may be coming. If so, he concedes, this may explain the big push by the insurgents who want to hold as much ground as possible before any potential negotiations take place on their behalf. For Swain, on his first visit to the city in three years, there are a lot of unknowns.

Swain wrote two further pieces in 1973: on August 19, just after the U.S. bombing ended, and November 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>565</sup> In February 1974, he published a lengthy piece on the state of Phnom Penh after months of an insurgent offensive. He notes:

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<sup>563</sup> Swain (1973a).

<sup>564</sup> Swain (1973a).

<sup>565</sup> Swain (1973b); (1973c).

The city of Phnom Penh has suddenly lost many of its easy-going characteristics and for many has become the most hazardous city in the world. The general air of well-being and bonhomie so evident even a couple of months ago has been sadly snuffed out.<sup>566</sup>

There is a “terminal smell” about the city despite no one talking about an imminent collapse, and for many the “city has become a prison without walls.”<sup>567</sup> Perhaps the pessimism of this piece is to be expected after the lengthy dry-season offensive by the insurgents against Phnom Penh. For Swain, who pops in and out of the Cambodian capital, there is a stark contrast between August 1973 and February 1974.

In a couple of articles Swain highlights how the French are leaving Phnom Penh.<sup>568</sup> He perceives this as a betrayal of the Cambodians. In July 1974, Swain observed that the predominant nationality in the city is American, a presence that “strikes a discordant note.”<sup>569</sup> He claims that the Americans are all motivated by a single desire – “to make a fast buck out of the Cambodian tragedy.”<sup>570</sup>

In an earlier article from February, Swain reported that most observers were predicting that the city would not fall so long as American arms kept pouring in at the rate of \$1 million a day.<sup>571</sup> By July, he asks:

But what, one asks, is the American policy in Cambodia all about? Cambodia, for reasons that most of its people find incomprehensible, is well into its fifth year of a destructive war that all parties deny they want.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> Swain (1974a).

<sup>567</sup> Swain (1974a).

<sup>568</sup> Swain (1974a); (1974c).

<sup>569</sup> Swain (1974c).

<sup>570</sup> Swain (1974c).

<sup>571</sup> Swain (1974a).

At the start of the insurgent offensive, in November 1973, Swain had written about the corruption of the generals, and monetary inflation in the city that made living hard for those who could not afford to purchase goods and fulfil their basic human needs. He observed: “Small wonder then that the first question Cambodians ask the small number of Westerners arriving in the capital is: when will the nightmare end?”<sup>573</sup>

Journalists like Swain, who question what the United States is doing in Cambodia, also imply that “ordinary” Cambodians look to external powers to stop the violence. While Swain, Schanberg and others note how the Cambodians look for an outside saviour to end the war they also comment on how the brutality on display in the war as very “Cambodian.” For example, Swain notes how: “One thing is certain: the military trial of strength expected to develop in the coming months will, in grisly Cambodian fashion, be no more than another chapter in a very ugly war.”<sup>574</sup>

Through 1973-1974, Swain was unsure of the Khmer Rouge strategy. He seems baffled by their decision to stop their advance towards Phnom Penh in August 1973 after the U.S. bombing ended.<sup>575</sup> However, after a few months of the renewed insurgent offensive, by February 1974, Swain comments on how, with the insurgents shelling the city, “an irreversible process seems to have begun.”<sup>576</sup> By this stage of the war, the insurgents had by and large taken the countryside and only the city remained as the big prize. Swain at this stage was still holding out hope for some kind of negotiated settlement.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> Swain (1974c).

<sup>573</sup> Swain (1973c).

<sup>574</sup> Swain (1973c).

<sup>575</sup> Swain (1973b).

<sup>576</sup> Swain (1974a).

<sup>577</sup> Swain (1974b).

By the start of 1975, the insurgents had virtually closed the Mekong river. With the siege of Neak Luong, a strategic river town on the Mekong, the government was unable to get supplies up the river to the capital from Vietnam. Like Schanberg, Swain visited Neak Luong in January 1975,<sup>578</sup> while it was still open. By March, the Mekong river was effectively shut, and it had become clear that the end was coming for Phnom Penh.<sup>579</sup> With this unfolding reality now in focus, the tone of Swain's reporting also changed.

Swain published a series of four articles from Phnom Penh during March 1975: On March 2nd, he published on the siege of the city;<sup>580</sup> March 9th, on the state of the hospitals and the health of the people;<sup>581</sup> March 16th, on questions of the Khmer Rouge, and the different factions involved;<sup>582</sup> and on March 30th he wrote on the state of corruption in the city.<sup>583</sup> For Swain, corruption has damaged the populous, and escape is only possible for a very privileged few.<sup>584</sup> He notes:

Almost every Cambodian agrees that it is a rotten society. Yet because of the extraordinary tolerance of the people there is almost no active agitation. There is only resignation and despair.<sup>585</sup>

There is an "amazing casualness" in the air,<sup>586</sup> despite the "nightmare conditions."<sup>587</sup> In Swain's eyes: "Seldom has a city faced such a black outlook" as Phnom Penh in March 1975.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Swain (1975a).

<sup>579</sup> Swain (1975b).

<sup>580</sup> Swain (1975b).

<sup>581</sup> Swain (1975c).

<sup>582</sup> Swain (1975d).

<sup>583</sup> Swain (1975e).

<sup>584</sup> Swain (1975b); (1975f).

<sup>585</sup> Swain (1975e).

<sup>586</sup> Swain (1975d).

<sup>587</sup> Swain (1975c).

<sup>588</sup> Swain (1975b).

Like Sydney Schanberg does in his comparison between Phnom Penh and New York, Swain attempts to put the numbers into a British perspective for his readers:

Hospitals in Phnom Penh deal with 200 casualties a day and it is estimated that half a million people, 10 per cent of the population, have been killed or wounded since the start of the war. In Britain, this is the equivalent of about 5.5 million people.<sup>589</sup>

Swain also uses richly descriptive language to describe some of the scenes of horror, especially hospital scenes. For example: “A little girl of seven, with her left arm open like a piece of raw meat, cries out to the nurse who is bandaging it: “Don’t shoot me, please, don’t shoot me.””<sup>590</sup>

The main theme that runs through these articles is the question of when the suffering will end. In particular, Swain highlights the various influences of the United States on the government side, and comments on the awareness of the Phnom Penh government that American opinion, both government and public, is trending towards the desire to terminate involvement in Indochina. The final withdrawal of American personnel came on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1975 when the U.S. officially pulled out of Cambodia.<sup>591</sup>

With the inevitable fall of Phnom Penh to the insurgents, the big question was what would happen after their victory? On March 9, Swain wrote:

Few Cambodians are sophisticated enough to understand the finer points of the debate in Washington over whether the US should continue to support the government of Marshal Lon Nol. The Khmers are not as politically motivated as their neighbours the Vietnamese, but given a choice the majority of Cambodians would opt against living under a Communist regime, particularly one seemingly as harsh as the Khmer Rouge. Reports of atrocities are now too numerous to be discounted.

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<sup>589</sup> Swain (1975b).

<sup>590</sup> Swain (1975c).

<sup>591</sup> Swain (1975f).

There are many Cambodians who are genuinely frightened by the prospect of a Communist takeover.<sup>592</sup>

A week later, Swain wrote on the difficulty of piecing together the Khmer Rouge leadership structure, and debates the possibility of different factions, within the “perplexing liberation movement.”<sup>593</sup> The secret nature of the movement had been an impediment to negotiations. Swain, however, expresses hope that the victors will be more nationalist than communist. However,

the rigidity of their regime will depend on which faction has the upper hand. The old guard Communist are likely to be the most traditionalist. In any event, that victory will be accompanied by some sort of bloodbath.<sup>594</sup>

A couple of points need to be made: By March, Khmer Rouge victory seemed all but assured, and like Schanberg, Swain is hoping that with the end of the war the suffering of the Cambodian people will also end. Swain criticizes the U.S. for not giving Cambodia its full attention, and for letting the people suffer. Similar to Schanberg, Swain does not see the Cambodians as “political” – just scared of the potential bloodbath that some had been predicting with a communist take-over. In this regard, he holds out hope that the possibility of a nationalist faction within the Khmer Rouge movement might be more lenient in its treatment of civilians on the other side of what had been a vicious five-year war.

### *Key Pieces*

Jon Swain caught the last available flight into Phnom Penh after the U.S. withdrawal and arrived on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, 1975.<sup>595</sup> On the morning of April 17<sup>th</sup> the Khmer Rouge forces

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<sup>592</sup> Swain (1975c).

<sup>593</sup> Swain (1975d).

<sup>594</sup> Swain (1975d).



captured Phnom Penh. During the twenty-four hours prior to the communications being cut at around 6am, Swain filed continuous reports to *The Sunday Times*, which they published on April 20. Largely in note form, Swain describes his movements around the city trying to figure out what was happening.<sup>596</sup>

The short-form descriptions Swain offers give the impression of confusion, as the story jumps from one scene to the next. No doubt this is reflective of the uncertainty and rapid development of the events themselves. After describing the state of southern Phnom Penh, and the conditions of the hospitals and temporary surgery stations, Swain comments: “Over the years in Indochina I have become a reluctant expert on human misery, but the carnage here shakes me to my core.”<sup>597</sup> He goes on to describe graphically some of the wounded and dying people that he sees.

Swain notes the poor attitude of some of the French and other foreigners who have remained at the Hotel Le Phnom, the upmarket hotel in the city that had been converted into a refugee camp. In a foreshadowing of what was to occur at the French embassy in the following days, Swain records how the foreigners protested the arrival of the Cambodian refugees into their sanctuary in what he considered an incredulous lack of acknowledgement of the reality of the situation, and a misguided sense of colonial superiority.

Like Schanberg, following release on the Thai border on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Swain wrote a lengthy account (12,225 words) of his time in Khmer Rouge controlled Cambodia.<sup>598</sup> It is a piece written in diary form, and it is sprinkled throughout with commentary and Swain’s take on what he witnessed during his (admittedly narrow) window into the new regime.

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<sup>595</sup> Swain (1998) 121-123.

<sup>596</sup> Swain (1975g).

<sup>597</sup> Swain (1975g).

<sup>598</sup> Swain (1975h).

Swain describes in detail the events of April 17. He documents the arrival of the Khmer Rouge, the fighting that was going on in various parts of the city, and gives a lengthy account on the confusion of the character of the initial Khmer Rouge soldiers they came across. Swain and Schanberg, who were travelling together around the city with Dith Pran (and eventually Al Rockoff), ran into “friendly” Khmer Rouge cadres. This group, initially thought to perhaps be representative of the nationalist faction of the insurgents, soon proved to be a false, opportunistic, attempt by some Cambodians to disguise themselves as Khmer Rouge. When the real Khmer Rouge turned up – largely from the south – they were not “pussy footing” around but meant serious business.<sup>599</sup>

At midday, Swain and his group went into one of the hospitals. Swain uses richly descriptive language to convey the “scenes of horror.” For example:

People by the dozen were bleeding to death in the corridors, the floors of the wards were caked in blood. The hot, fetid air was thick with flies – the sight of these swarming over the living and the dead, over the anguished faces of those who knew they were doomed to die, churned the stomach and made the mind reel.<sup>600</sup>

Following this hospital visit, Swain was captured with the others and taken to the river where they thought they would be executed. Swain highlights the courage of Dith Pran to get in the APC with them and coax their captors into releasing them. Swain moves on to describe the looting of the city, as well as the events at the Ministry of Information – where they went after release, and also their forced relocation to the French Embassy.

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<sup>599</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>600</sup> Swain (1975h).

At the Ministry of Information, an officer of the Khmer Rouge had assured them that there would be no bloodbath. By the end of the day, Swain had become well aware of the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh that was taking place. He concludes his April 17 entry:

The unthinkable was happening. In their zest for revolution the Khmer Rouge soldier peasantry had not embarked on a bloodbath, as the Americans always claimed they would. Instead, they were emptying the city of its two million people, equivalent to the population of Merseyside and Tyneside combined. There have been few precedents for such behaviour, and the reason why they did it is still obscure.<sup>601</sup>

In his April 18 entry, Swain describes this forced evacuation – writing how the Khmer Rouge were emptying the hospitals by dumping the patients into the street “like garbage.” He comments:

In five years of war this is the greatest caravan of human misery I have seen. The Khmer Rouge must know that few of the 20,000 wounded will survive. One can only conclude that they have no humanitarian instincts. The entire city is being emptied of its people: the old, the sick, the infirm, the hungry, the orphans, without exception.<sup>602</sup>

Only those housed in the French Embassy remained in the city. Swain offers a few detailed examples on how some of the foreigners came to be in the embassy and admits that he does not know what to think of the make-up of the Khmer Rouge now that he has seen them up close. He concedes that they are disciplined but qualifies it with a comment that it is not the kind of discipline respectful of human life.<sup>603</sup>

In the entry for April 19, Swain describes how he and the other “internationalists” moved into the Ambassador’s residence. While Swain notes the contrast of the westerners living inside

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<sup>601</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>602</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>603</sup> Swain (1975h).

in comparative luxury to the Cambodians outside, he is far less self-deprecating about this point than Schanberg. The next day, the Khmer Rouge forced any Cambodians, Vietnamese and Chinese from the embassy, and Swain comments on his feelings of rage and helplessness.

In his entries for April 21 and 22, Swain highlights and contrasts several western individuals who thrived in the adversity and held themselves to a high standard of comportment (people like Francois Bizot), and those who were odious. Like Schanberg, he comments on the tension and tempers that frayed after only a few days of confinement.

Swain, on April 23, describes the perception that there is a disconnect between the military and political sides of the Khmer Rouge. He notes that the Khmer Rouge have no time for cities, and that for them salvation lies in the land:

It is a sweeping, unprecedented reform, brutal in its application, but for the sake of the Cambodian people who have suffered so much one can only hope it will work. At least the country is now at peace.<sup>604</sup>

Swain, without a clear picture of what is happening outside of the confines of the embassy, is unsure how to think about the bits and pieces he did witness. He holds out hope that a peaceful interpretation of the forced evacuation is possible.

On April 29 (Swain makes no entries between April 24 and 29), Swain discusses the evacuation plan: eight hundred of the foreigners will leave the next morning by road, in trucks. Included in this first group were the six journalists, who were asked to go in order to ensure an information embargo was kept in place until the remainder could be released as well. Swain describes the evacuation plan as “outrageous” because it would be far easier to be flown out than driven all the way to the border.

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<sup>604</sup> Swain (1975h).

Like Schanberg, however, Swain tries to put himself in the mind of the Khmer Rouge, in part, because “to try and probe the Khmer Rouge mind is fruitless. To apply Western logic to it is an irrelevance.”<sup>605</sup> He notes:

I don't think they are being bloody-minded. It is just that they have no faith in planes, and who can blame them? The only ones they know were American and those bombed them. The United States has much to answer for here, not only in terms of human lives and massive material destruction; the rigidity and nastiness of the un-Cambodian like fellows in black who run this country now, or what is left of it, are as much a product of this wholesale American bombing which has hardened and honed their minds as they are a product of Marx and Mao.<sup>606</sup>

In describing his journey out of Phnom Penh, through a “sinister wasteland”, Swain offers his thoughts on the purpose of the forced evacuation:

The mind still gropes at the horror, and the enormity of the emptying of Phnom Penh. But has there been a “bloodbath” in the city, in the more conventional style of military revenge? ... I can only say that what I have heard and seen provides no proof of a bloodbath (and I would question the reliability of reports of mass executions that almost from the start have circulated outside Cambodia). ... What has taken place, though equally horrific, is different in kind.<sup>607</sup>

My overriding impression – reinforced as we journeyed through the countryside en route to the Thai border – was that the Khmer Rouge military authorities had ordered this mass evacuation not to punish the people but to revolutionise their ways and thoughts. Many thousands will no doubt die. But

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<sup>605</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>606</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>607</sup> Swain (1975h).

whatever else, this does not constitute a deliberate campaign of terror, rather it points to poor organization, lack of vision and the brutalization of a people by a long and savage war.<sup>608</sup>

Years later, Swain would admit that he got this interpretation wrong.<sup>609</sup>

In his description of the countryside on their journey out, Swain expresses shock at finding virtually all of the cities, towns, and villages evacuated – not just Phnom Penh. He also highlights the impact of the U.S. bombing: “The entire countryside has been churned up by American B-52 bomb craters, whole towns and villages razed.”<sup>610</sup> The war damage had been total, and it is important to remember that the areas they were driving through had largely not been accessible to journalists during the war. Swain, in comparison to Schanberg, offers a far more damning account of the impact of the U.S. bombing on the countryside.

Finally, Swain offers his concluding thoughts:

Much has been written in the newspapers that reflects the new Cambodia in an unfavourable light. After sorrows I have seen I am certainly no apologist for the excesses of the new regime, but I feel it would be wrong to condemn a whole nation and its chances of a decent, peaceful future on the terrible things that have happened over these past weeks. In the last five years, Cambodia has lost upwards of half a million people, 10 per cent of its population, in a war fuelled and waged on its soil by outside powers for their own selfish reasons. The people who run, live in and try to reconstruct the heaps of ruins they have inherited in Cambodia today deserve the

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<sup>608</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>609</sup> Swain (1998) 166.

<sup>610</sup> Swain (1975h).

world's compassion and understanding. It is their country and it was their sacrifices.

They have earned themselves the right to organise their society their own way.<sup>611</sup>

Swain's concluding thoughts indicate his weariness at the war and in his desire to see what happens in the hope that Cambodian can be at peace. It also highlight his willingness to try and see the Cambodian situation through the lens of the victors. However, at the same time, it is a conclusion that is born out more of wishful thinking than any detailed analysis of what he witnessed after the Khmer Rouge victory.

#### *May 1975-January 1979*

Swain wrote seven articles relating to Cambodia following his expulsion from the country and prior to the Vietnamese invasion.<sup>612</sup> Of the journalists under discussion, Swain was the only one to have spent time on the Thai border, listening to the refugees' accounts, and looking into Cambodia from beyond its borders. Swain, in an article from July 27, 1975 even crossed the border, briefly, and talked with a Khmer Rouge soldier who was sixteen-year's old.<sup>613</sup> In this brief conversation, Swain was able to ask four questions before two other soldiers, seemingly less friendly, scared him back into Thailand.<sup>614</sup>

Swain spent time in the refugee camps on the border. However, he offers a caveat to the refugee accounts he reports:

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<sup>611</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>612</sup> Swain (1975i); (1976a); (1976b); (1977); (1978a); (1978b); (1978c).

<sup>613</sup> Swain (1975i).

<sup>614</sup> The four questions were: who is your leader? *Angka*. What about Prince Sihanouk? *He will have to work in the fields too if he comes back*. Do the people have enough to eat? *All those willing to work are fed*. What about the stories of executions? *Only the traitors have been killed*.

Here one has to exercise another kind of caution, that of a careful analyst. It is necessary to sift through the tales of refugees to find a common denominator.<sup>615</sup>

Even with the margin of exaggeration that one must always allow refugees' stories, their description of life in their country today is depressing.... Most refugees tell tales of executions but few have witnessed them.<sup>616</sup>

Swain makes the interesting point that many of the refugees are peasants, and not the city-folk whom one would perhaps expect to try and flee across the border.<sup>617</sup>

By the first anniversary of the Khmer Rouge victory, Swain can be found much more confident in claiming that the Cambodian revolution has been far more radical than either its Chinese or Russian precursors:

It is now clear that this has obliterated what little progress had been made in the past 100 years and destroyed an ancient civilisation which had stayed intact for centuries.<sup>618</sup>

Swain is conscious, however, that the situation which the Khmer Rouge inherited in 1975, after years of brutal warfare, could not be cured by the "simple fact of liberation."<sup>619</sup> In his opinion, it should not be a surprise that there is an obsession with internal problems among the Khmer Rouge leadership that are often dealt with on a brutal basis.<sup>620</sup> Swain also highlights how the war wrought "fantastic damage" on the country. He comments:

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<sup>615</sup> Swain (1975i).

<sup>616</sup> Swain (1976a).

<sup>617</sup> Swain (1975i).

<sup>618</sup> Swain (1976b).

<sup>619</sup> Swain (1976a).

<sup>620</sup> Swain (1976a).



But it has been the Khmer Rouge, forcing a uniquely painful brand of communism on to a bewildered, demoralized peasantry at the point of a gun that has prolonged and darkened the tragedy.<sup>621</sup>

On the first anniversary of the Khmer Rouge capture of Phnom Penh, Swain claims that it is possible to say that the worst excesses of the new regime are over, but the brutality with which the Khmer Rouge sought control of the country means that the soul of the Cambodian village is gone.<sup>622</sup> Cambodia's

outlook is fiercely nationalistic. But so radical have the changes been, so great the sacrifices demanded of its people, that it must be hard for Cambodians to believe they are living in the country of their birth. With the passing of time their wounds may heal. But for the moment they must rank among the saddest people on earth.<sup>623</sup>

In 1978, Swain wrote three articles relating to the Cambodian relationship with Vietnam.<sup>624</sup> He would also go on to write a series of articles outlining the state of the country following the Vietnamese invasion.<sup>625</sup>

Jon Swain and Sydney Schanberg were two of only a handful of western journalists present in Phnom Penh during the Khmer Rouge capture of the city on April 17, 1975. Both journalists emphasise the need to consider the events they witnessed from the point of view of the Cambodians themselves – especially the peasant Khmer Rouge who have finally won a long and bloody civil war. In this regard, they maintain an open mind on how to interpret what they bear witness to during their small window into the new regime. The impact of this open-minded approach in relation to the peace and war journalism question is addressed in the next chapter.

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<sup>621</sup> Swain (1976b).

<sup>622</sup> Swain (1976b).

<sup>623</sup> Swain (1976b).

<sup>624</sup> Swain (1978a); (1978b); (1978c).

<sup>625</sup> Swain (1979); (1980a); (1980b); (1980c); (1980d).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter offered a deep contextual discussion of the four journalists and their writings on Cambodia. It highlighted a number of important articles and drew attention to various passages that outline, or indicate, how and why they wrote their articles in a particular manner.

The following chapter contains a directed content analysis of the articles in relation to the peace and war journalism frame described in the previous chapter. Embedded within the analysis are a number of salient points discussed in this extended context chapter which highlight several important areas from within the peace journalism frame that require a more detailed discussion than a simple content analysis provides.

## **Chapter Five: Peace Journalism Analysis of the Four Journalists' Articles**

### **Introduction**

This chapter offers detailed content analysis of the articles examined in this thesis. It opens with an analysis of how the articles examined warranted a war journalism or peace journalism designation. The chapter then moves on to an investigation of the individual journalists, and considers what elements of peace and war journalism were present within their writings. Following this is a brief analysis on how each person chose to label the other side in the civil war and genocide. Finally, this chapter draws the analysis together in a short summary outlining how these journalists and their articles relate to the peace journalism/war journalism research in this thesis.

### **War Journalism/Peace Journalism**

Of the two hundred and fifty-four articles examined, one hundred and five were classified as strong war journalism – or 41.3% of the articles. Sixty-five were considered probably war journalism – 25.6%. Twenty-one out of the 254 were 50/50 – 8.3%. Forty-six were classified as possibly peace journalism – 18.1%. Seventeen articles were considered strong peace journalism – 6.7%. As such, 67.2% of the articles examined were classified as war journalism articles and 24.8% were classified as peace journalism.

Of the fourteen articles by Richard Dudman analysed, thirteen were classified as possibly peace journalism – 93%, with one falling into the probably war journalism category – 7%.

Obviously, this is a small sample size of Dudman's work, but it is significant, especially in his

determination to maintain a neutral writing style in his work.<sup>626</sup> As discussed in chapter four, however, this determination in his journalistic ethos does not inherently mean that he got the story right about what was occurring in Democratic Kampuchea during his two-week visit in late 1978.

Sydney Schanberg had one hundred and fifty-nine articles analysed, eighty of which were classified strong war journalism – 50.3%. Forty articles fell into the probably war journalism category – 25.2%. 50/50 accounted for twelve of the one hundred and fifty-nine articles – 7.5%. Twenty were categorized as possibly peace journalism – 12.6%. There were seven articles that were considered strong peace journalism – 4.4%. As such, three-quarters of Schanberg's writing fell onto the war journalism side of the ledger.

Eighteen of Elizabeth Becker's sixty-two articles were considered strong war journalism pieces – 29%. Thirteen were classified as probably war journalism – 21%. There were nine articles in the 50/50 category – 14.5%. Twelve articles were considered possibly peace journalism – 19.4%. Strong peace journalism was found in ten articles – 16.1%. Elizabeth Becker, therefore, was virtually 50/50 on the peace journalism/war journalism scale, with 50% of her articles falling onto the war journalism side.

Of the twenty-one articles from Jon Swain, eight were classified strong war journalism – 38.1%. twelve were considered probably war journalism – 57.1%. Only one piece was considered possibly peace journalism – 4.8%. None of Swain's articles were considered strong peace journalism. Again, like Dudman, Swain's articles constitute a smaller sample size than Becker and Schanberg's writings, yet their articles also reveal interesting elements that will be discussed below.

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<sup>626</sup> Rabe (2016).

*Table 5. Breakdown of the Journalists' Articles by Peace Journalism Continuum*

	Strong War Journalism	Probably War Journalism	50/50	Possibly Peace Journalism	Strong Peace Journalism	Total number of articles
Elizabeth Becker	18 (29%)	13 (21%)	9 (14.5%)	12 (19.4%)	10 (16%)	62
Richard Dudman	-	1 (7%)	-	13 (93%)	-	14
Sydney Schanberg	80 (50.3%)	40 (25.2%)	12 (7.5%)	20 (12.6%)	7 (4.4%)	159
Jon Swain	8 (38.1%)	12 (57.1%)	-	1 (4.8%)	-	21
Total	105 (43.1%)	65 (25.6%)	21 (8.3%)	46 (18.1%)	17 (6.7%)	254

### **Sydney Schanberg**

Between 1970 and 1974, Sydney Schanberg scored high on the first four categories of the war journalism side of Table 4. That is, in thirty-seven out of ninety-five articles his focus was mainly on the visible effects of the war (38.9% of his articles); seventeen out of the ninety-five were elite focused (17.9%); thirty-five contained focus on war/military options (36.8%); and twenty-seven emphasized the here and now (28.4%). Often, these categories were present in conjunction with one another.<sup>627</sup> Interestingly, many of the articles containing a combination of these categories, with little or no other elements from the table, were written in 1970. Those from 1973 and 1974 contained more variety in their combination of the categories from both sides of Table 4, even if they maintained an overall war journalism focus.

This is significant, because Sydney Schanberg was only temporarily in Cambodia in 1970 between June 2 and July 12, to help the Saigon bureau cover the American incursion (Schanberg

<sup>627</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1970d); (1970e); (1970g); (1970i); (1970j); (1970k); (1970l); (1970m); (1970n); (1970o); (1972b); (1973m); (1973t); (1974a).

was based in New Delhi at the time).<sup>628</sup> He returned in late 1972, and from about May 1973 was spending more and more time in the country. Significantly, by mid-1973, Schanberg had encouraged the *New York Times* to take on Dith Pran as an official stringer, with the friendship between them growing strong.<sup>629</sup> In *The Death and Life of Dith Pran*, Schanberg comments that Pran and he had similar ideas about the war – Cambodia as a nation pushed into war by other powers – and that the propelling factor for them to get the stories was the human impact.<sup>630</sup> Schanberg claims that neither he nor Pran were much interested in local or international politics, nor in military strategy.<sup>631</sup>

Schanberg's comments are interesting in relation to the peace journalism/war journalism discussion especially around category two: Elite oriented focus vs. People oriented focus. From 1970-1974, Schanberg scored seventeen on the elite focus side of Table 3 (17.9%) and fourteen out of ninety-five on the people focused (14.7%). In 1975, Schanberg tallied six out of sixty-four for an elite focus (9.3%) and nine out of sixty-four for people-oriented focus (14.1%). Moreover, as the war continued, Schanberg dedicates more space in his writing to focus on the “ordinary” person, or those largely forgotten or ignored in the war.<sup>632</sup> Overall, Schanberg had an equal amount of 2A and 2B in his reporting, with twenty-three of his one hundred and fifty-nine articles, or 14.5% of his writing, focusing on elites and twenty-three on the “ordinary” people.

In many respects, Schanberg's interest in the human impact is what his reporting is remembered for.<sup>633</sup> Yet, at the same time, he has been criticized for his lack of attention to the

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<sup>628</sup> Schanberg (2010) ix.

<sup>629</sup> Schanberg (2010) 64.

<sup>630</sup> Schanberg (2010) 64-65.

<sup>631</sup> Schanberg (2010) 64.

<sup>632</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973w).

<sup>633</sup> McFadden (2016); Schudel (2016).

impact of the U.S. bombing campaign in the countryside.<sup>634</sup> Also, despite his claim that he was uninterested in military strategy, thirty-five articles between 1970-1974 (36.8%), and forty-three in 1975 (67.2%), contained a focus on military strategy. For his 1975 articles, the focus on military strategy was far and away the highest tallied category. Between 1970-1974, Schanberg focused on agreements and solutions in eight articles (8.4%), and in five pieces in 1975 (7.8%).

Schanberg's focus on military strategy is, on the whole, not surprising, given the fact that there was a war going on. Nor does his focus on elites counter his claim that he was interested in the human impact, not the political context – after all, as a journalist he was required to explain the larger picture for his audience.

Overall, Schanberg scored significantly higher on category 1A – the visible effects of war – and 4A – emphasis on the here and now – than he did on their peace journalism equivalents. Fifty-four articles (34%) focused on the visible effects of the war compared to nineteen (11.9%) on the invisible. Thirty articles emphasised the here and now (18.9%) versus eleven which offered a deep background to the conflict (6.9%).

Again, these results are not overly surprising. Given that Schanberg was, at times, reporting nearly daily, he needed to give significant attention to the visible effects of the war. For a truly accurate representation of the conflict these visible elements needed to be described. At the same time, Schanberg, when he does draw attention to the invisible, offers a deep look at the conditions which lie below the surface. For example, a piece from August 1973 focuses exclusively on a mental hospital and discusses the nature of mental health care within Cambodia, including the stigma attached to mental health issues.<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 274-280.

<sup>635</sup> Schanberg (1973w).

In regards to the emphasis on the here and now versus deep background, it does not make sense for Schanberg to delve into a deep explanation of a conflict that he is writing about multiple times a week. For those who follow his reports, they are already aware of his background analysis, and therefore there is no need to take up space within his daily reporting to regurgitate that background every time he writes. Schanberg, when he offers background, devotes great space to it which helps the reader to gain a deeper insight into his daily reporting, and why he reports in the manner he does.<sup>636</sup> This is one area where the peace journalism/war journalism dichotomy is unfair to an author like Schanberg, for he offers abundant background detail, but just not on a regular basis. The question for this kind of analysis is whether or not a deep background piece should be given more than one “tally” in the peace journalism column to account for its length and depth, or should the analysis remain based upon volume. If so, then, Schanberg scores unfairly low on the 4B category.

Ting Lee and Maslog consider categories 5 and 6 on the peace/war journalism table as two of the three most important indicators of peace journalism (the third being the avoidance of demonizing language).<sup>637</sup> In relation to Schanberg’s reporting, there is not a lot of emphasis placed on parties external to the main three: the Cambodian government; the United States; and the rebels. Early in the war, Schanberg occasionally mentioned the North Vietnamese or Vietcong<sup>638</sup> – usually in relation to how they are helping the rebel side, and, at times, he conflates North Vietnamese and Cambodian rebels into one force.<sup>639</sup> He also occasionally

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<sup>636</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1972a); (1972d); (1973b); (1974i); (1975ab); (1975ai); (1975an).

<sup>637</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005).

<sup>638</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1970d); (1970f); (1970i); (1970t); (1972a); (1972f); (1972g); (1972i); (1973ae); (1974c); (1974o); (1974p); (1975ag); (1975aah); (1975aam).

<sup>639</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1970k); (1970l); (1970m); (1970n); (1970o); (1970v); (1972b); (1972c); (1972d).



mentions China,<sup>640</sup> Russia,<sup>641</sup> and Thailand.<sup>642</sup> However, the majority of these references contain very little detail on how these parties relate to the conflict.

For the question of partisanship, it is hard to accuse Schanberg of partisan journalism for he constantly criticizes the United States and the Cambodian government in his articles.<sup>643</sup> At the same time, it is difficult to describe his writing as neutral, for he tends to write passionately about how unfair the war is to the “average” person in the country, especially those who suffer from other kinds of official corruption. Moreover, once the Khmer Rouge take Phnom Penh, Schanberg tried to place himself in the mind of the conquerors, to see if that could help explain what was occurring at the time – a perspective for which he was praised.<sup>644</sup>

On fourteen occasions, Schanberg ascribes a zero-sum approach (category 7A) to his reporting on how the conflict would be resolved (8.9%). Not once does he hint at the possibility of a win-win outcome for the war (category 7B). During the 1970s, there was a real fear of the communist movement taking over large sections of the world. As such, very few, if any, analysts looked at conflicts like the Vietnam and Cambodian wars through the lens of a potential win-win outcome. Either communism was going to take over Cambodia, leading to a bloodbath of those officials and individuals who opposed it, or the communists would be destroyed. In this regard, Schanberg’s reporting is reflective of his time, although he largely refuses to engage in the more extreme versions of the “bloodbath” myth.<sup>645</sup>

In many respects, the language indicators (categories 8-11) are the most difficult to assign to a side of Table 4. For the most part this is because it is incredibly challenging to “reward” the

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<sup>640</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973al); (1974n); (1974o); (1975l); (1975ai); (1975az); (1975aah).

<sup>641</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973al); (1974n); (1975az).

<sup>642</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1970f); (1970m); (1975i); (1975o).

<sup>643</sup> Contrast with Herman and Chomsky (1988) 274-280.

<sup>644</sup> E.g. Lewis (1975).

<sup>645</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1975ab); (1975ai); (1975az); (1975aah).

absence of something. Each of these indicators, for the peace journalism side, require assigning a positive notation to something that is not present. On this front, it is impossible to know whether the absence of a label, or a certain type of language was a deliberate choice on the part of the journalist. In this regard, I found it difficult to give a tally on the peace journalism side for the language component because I did not want to skew any of the articles towards the peace journalism side of the ledger for something that was absent, and unable to be ascribed to a deliberate decision on the part of the author. The only exception to this rule was if the journalist appeared to deliberately choose language that removed labelling, victimization, demonization, and emotion.

As such, for the absence of labels (8B) Schanberg received one mark; for the absence of victimizing language (9B), he received two marks; absence of demonizing language (10B) received one mark; and absence of emotive language (11B) received one mark.

On the war journalism side, Schanberg used a good/bad dichotomy in fifteen articles (9.4%). He used victimizing language in thirteen pieces (8.2%). Demonizing language was present in one article, and emotive language was present in two pieces.

Sydney Schanberg, therefore, scored higher on the war journalism side of the language indicators. However, ultimately, this is misleading since the vast majority of his work contained an absence of those language indicators. This would suggest that, even if one of his articles scored highly in other areas of the war journalism divide, his language was much more inclined to rest on the peace journalism side of Table 4.

**Elizabeth Becker**

Becker, like Schanberg, scores high on the first four categories in the war journalism side of Table 4. Of her sixty-two articles, thirteen focused on the visible effects of the war (21%); ten contained an elite focus (16.1%); twenty emphasised war/military options (32%); and eleven detailed the here and now (17.7%).

For the first four peace journalism categories, eight of Becker's articles focused on the invisible effects of the war (12.9%); eleven were people focused (17.7%); five drew attention to peace/solution options (8.1%); and six offered a deep background to the war (9.7%).

Like Schanberg, Becker focuses on the three main parties in the war, the government, United States, and the rebels. Also, like Schanberg, Becker had occasional references to Vietnam,<sup>646</sup> Thailand,<sup>647</sup> and China.<sup>648</sup> However, few of these articles go into great depth on the role and relationship of these external parties. In contrast, Becker in her book *When the War Was Over* spends a great amount of time sorting through the various relationships between the numerous interested parties – undoubtedly a product of her being able to spend more time researching material that may not have been present at the time.<sup>649</sup>

Again, like Schanberg, Becker offers no win-win analysis in her reporting of the conflict, while a zero-sum outcome for the war was found only in one article. By the same token, it is hard to accuse Becker of partisanship, and in fact no articles were found that contained obvious signs of partisan writing. Six articles contained clear attempts by Becker to be non-partisan in her writing (9.7%).

For the language component, Becker scored higher on the peace journalism side of the ledger than Schanberg. More of her articles appeared to deliberately avoid the use of labels (eight

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<sup>646</sup> E.g. Becker (1973p); (1977); (1978c); (1978e); (1978f).

<sup>647</sup> E.g. Becker (1973k); (1973l).

<sup>648</sup> E.g. Becker (1978c); (1978f).

<sup>649</sup> Becker (1998). Cf. Becker (1979a); (1979b); (1979i); (1979k).

out of sixty-two – 12.9%), victimizing language (five articles – 8.1%), demonizing language (four articles – 6.4%), and emotive language (three articles – 4.8%). On the war journalism side, only one article contained a good/bad dichotomy, and one used victimizing language. There were no articles with demonizing language, and four contained emotive language (6.4%).

The language component is interesting for Becker since, as was discussed in chapter four, she is a very clever writer, and often grounds any negative opinions in quotations from other people. As such, for example, the demonizing language in her work comes through in other voices than hers, which she often leaves embedded in her text without author comment.<sup>650</sup>

Becker has written about the struggles of being a female war reporter during the 1970s in Indochina.<sup>651</sup> The struggle she faced to gain credibility among some of her colleagues, and some military personnel in the country, seems to have encouraged her to look for stories that lay outside the “normal” accounts of the Cambodian war. Becker’s key piece from 1974 came largely from her research of a book by Ith Sarin,<sup>652</sup> and several of her most interesting articles deal with subjects such as: the rubber trade;<sup>653</sup> the smuggling of gems from Cambodia;<sup>654</sup> the French archaeological team leaving Angkor;<sup>655</sup> art theft;<sup>656</sup> and Cambodia’s hero-journalists.<sup>657</sup>

## **Jon Swain**

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<sup>650</sup> E.g. Becker (1977).

<sup>651</sup> Becker (2017).

<sup>652</sup> Becker (1974f).

<sup>653</sup> Becker (1973c).

<sup>654</sup> Becker (1973l).

<sup>655</sup> Becker (1974a).

<sup>656</sup> Becker (1974i).

<sup>657</sup> Becker (1974o).

Of Swain's twenty-one articles analysed, the majority contained a focus on the war/military options (twelve articles – 57.1%). Eight pieces drew attention to potential solutions to the conflict (38.1%). Similar to the analysis of Becker's and Schanberg's articles, the majority of Swain's articles contained elements from the first four categories. Seven articles focused on the visible effects of the war (33.3%), while four concentrated on the invisible effects (19%). Two articles were elite focused (9.5%) and four were people focused (19%). Two articles concentrated on the here and now (9.5%), while two offered a deep background to the conflict (9.5%).

It is interesting that Swain has a high percentage of articles that focus on the military situation. Because he was based in Saigon, and largely corresponded from Vietnam, he made only a handful of trips to Cambodia prior to his return to Phnom Penh just before its capture. One possible reason for Swain's focus on the military situation was that this information was the easiest to gather during these visits, via official sources. At the same time however, the fact that Swain had twice as many articles that were considered people focused than elite, indicates that Swain, like Schanberg, was more interested in how the war effected the "ordinary" people. Obviously, this is a small sample size for Swain, and it would be interesting to compare his Cambodian reporting to his Vietnamese to see if being based in Saigon altered his overall "score" of Table 4.

One other factor that is important to consider in Swain's reporting is the fact that he was working for a weekly newspaper, not a daily. Consequently, he had more time to consider how he would go about his analysis of the war situation. In this regard, many of his articles that do focus on the military situation are longer, and more in-depth, than Schanberg's.

Again, like the other journalists, Swain's articles focus on the main players in the war, and whenever external parties are mentioned there is not a lot of detail on their relationship to the war.<sup>658</sup> Similarly, it is hard to accuse Swain of partisanship – possibly because, as a British writer, he felt no allegiance to any of the main parties. At the same time, only one article contained obvious elements of an attempt to present the material in a non-partisan manner.

. One article detailed a zero-sum element to the conflict (4.8%), while none presented a win-win solution to the war.

In the analysis of the language component, there were no articles that presented a good/bad dichotomy, while one deliberately avoided the use of labels (4.8%). Three pieces used victimizing language (14.3%), and one avoided it (4.8%). One article contained demonizing language (4.8%), and two deliberately evaded demonizing a particular side (9.5%). There were no elements of emotive language in Swain's reporting, and the conscious absence of emotive language was found in one piece (4.8%).

Like Sydney Schanberg, in his lengthy article outlining what occurred during the Khmer Rouge take-over of Phnom Penh, Swain attempts to rationalize, and analyse, what he witnessed through the lens of the victors.<sup>659</sup> Having spent so much time in Southeast Asia, Swain recognizes the importance of seeing the conflict beyond a western mentality, and draws attention to some of the inherent logic in what was occurring, given the destruction and devastation that had been bestowed on the country.<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> E.g. Swain (1973b); (1976a); (1978a); (1978b); (1978c).

<sup>659</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>660</sup> Swain (1998).

## **Richard Dudman**

Unlike the three previous journalists under discussion, Richard Dudman had a very clear non-partisan element to his writing. All fourteen of his articles that were analysed scored a mark in category 6B. Of the journalists discussed, Dudman was the clearest in his desire to present the material in an objective and neutral fashion.<sup>661</sup> Obviously, this is a very small sample size of his writing, but his experience of being captured by the Cambodian forces in 1970 allowed him to intimately witness the “other side” in the conflict,<sup>662</sup> which is a major part of the reason why he seems to have “doubled down” on his professed desire for neutral and objective reporting. In his mind, much of the SE Asian reporting was far too American focused and partisan, and he appears to have gone out of his way to try and correct what he saw as a mistake in the journalistic process.<sup>663</sup>

In the first four categories, there were no articles which focused on the visible effects of the war, with three that drew attention to the invisible (21.4%). One article was elite focused (7.1%) and two people focused (14.3%). One article contained reference to peace options (7.1%), and none referred to military options. Dudman gave no analysis on the here and now, but five articles contained a deep background to the conflict (35.7%).

For categories 5 and 7, one article gave a deep background on the relationship with Vietnam,<sup>664</sup> but the majority focused on the Cambodians themselves. In part, this is because Dudman’s major pieces on Cambodia came after the Americans had already pulled out of the country. Dudman gives no reference to either zero-sum or win-win solutions to the conflict.

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<sup>661</sup> Cf. Rabe (2016).

<sup>662</sup> Dudman (1971).

<sup>663</sup> Rabe (2016).

<sup>664</sup> Dudman (1978a).

Again, this is no doubt partly because when he was writing on Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge had already taken control of the country.

For the language component, Dudman had no references to a good/bad dichotomy, victimizing language, or demonizing language. He had one article that contained an element of emotive language. There were no obvious attempts by Dudman to avoid victimizing language, but he scored one check each for categories 8B, 10B, and 11B.

Again, while this is a very small sample size, Dudman is the only journalist who did not use victimizing language at some stage in his writing. Perhaps, in part, this is because of the four journalists under discussion, Dudman was the least likely to see the Cambodians through the lens of victims and victors – and he was the journalist with the most references to the positive elements that the Khmer Rouge were bringing to the country.

More importantly, however, is the fact that, while Dudman was the journalist who maintained the most objectivity and non-partisan writing style, he was also the journalist who was the most wrong of the four under discussion about what was occurring in Democratic Kampuchea. As one of only two western journalists to visit the country, Dudman was in a unique position, much as he had been in 1970, to get a first-hand look at the other side.<sup>665</sup> It appears that Dudman's experience from 1970 had coloured his view of what to look for in late 1978 – which is logical. As discussed in chapter four, Dudman's analysis is based on a comparison between the life of peasants that he knew from his numerous trips to Southeast Asia and what he saw now in Democratic Kampuchea. Because he did not know Cambodia, this was the obvious lens for his analysis, and when combined with his desire for objectivity it is understandable how his report was much more positive than his companion, Elizabeth Becker, who had lived in the country and was comparing what she knew about Cambodia to what she recognised was missing.

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<sup>665</sup> Dudman (1979c).



This is important, because, if, as Ting Lee and Maslog argue, non-partisanship is one of the three most important indicators of peace journalism,<sup>666</sup> and Dudman received a perfect score in this category, then the implication is that these indicators of peace journalism do not imply that a non-partisan report is inherently more truthful than a war journalism account.<sup>667</sup>

## Labels

One of the issues with analysing the Cambodian civil war was trying to understand who the other side was. As such, the journalists used a variety of labels to try and present what would become the Khmer Rouge to their audience. Below are a series of tables that outline the various labels used by the different journalists.

*Table 6. Jon Swain labels for the “other side”*

<b>Label</b>	<b>No. of articles present</b>
Communist Insurgents	2
Insurgents	6
Khmer Insurgents	1
Khmer Rouge Insurgents	1
Khmer Rouge	8
Cambodian Communist Insurgents	2
Cambodian Communists	1
Red Khmers	4

*Table 7. Elizabeth Becker labels for the “other side”*

<b>Label</b>	<b>No. of articles present</b>
Khmer Rouge	4
Communists	2

<sup>666</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005).

<sup>667</sup> Contra e.g. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005); Lynch (2007); Lynch (2014); Lynch (2015); Abunales (2016).

Insurgents	7
Insurgent Khmer Rouge	1
Khmer Rebels	1
Communist Khmer Rouge Insurgents	1
Rebels	11
Cambodian Liberation Army	1

*Table 8. Sydney Schanberg labels for the “other side” – 1970-1974*

<b>Label</b>	<b>No. of articles present</b>
Enemy	24
Communist-Led Cambodian Guerillas	1
Khmer Rouge	6
Communists	26
Communist-Led Cambodian Insurgents/Cambodian Communist Insurgents	8
Insurgents	34
Rebels	2
Communist-Led Insurgents/Communist Insurgents	13
Khmer Rouge Insurgent Army	1

*Table 9. Sydney Schanberg labels for the “other side” – 1975*

<b>Label</b>	<b>No. of articles present</b>
Insurgents	53
Rebels	11
Communist-Led Rebels	2
Communist-Led Cambodian Insurgents	11
Communist Insurgents	31
Enemy	5
Communist-Led Forces	3
Cambodian Communists	3
Khmer Rouge	5

*Table 10.* Richard Dudman labels for the “other side” – 1970

<b>Label</b>	<b>No. of articles present</b>
Pro-Sihanouk Forces	1
Cambodian United National Front	3
Guerillas	7
Cambodian Liberation Front	1
Cambodian Peoples’ Movement	1
FUNK: Cambodian National Front	1
Khmer Rouge	1

*Table 11.* Richard Dudman labels for the “other side” – 1971-1979

<b>Labels</b>	<b>No. of articles present</b>
Insurgents	2
Communist-Led Revolutionary Army	1
Guerillas	1
Communist-Led Guerillas	1
Communist-Led Cambodian Insurgents	1
Cambodian Communist Troops	1

The question of how to label the other side in this conflict is important because, ultimately, the label reflects how the journalist wants them presented. So, for example, while it is difficult to accuse Sydney Schanberg of being partisan overall, he does refer to the other side as the “enemy” in twenty-nine out of his one hundred and fifty-nine articles (18.2%). None of the other journalists specifically refer to them as the “enemy” preferring instead to use some kind of insurgent, communist, or rebel label, with occasional pieces referring to the Khmer Rouge. The exceptions to this are Becker, who once refers to the “Cambodian Liberation Army”,<sup>668</sup> and Dudman, who has more variety in his titles, probably because he was withheld by these forces and gained an intimate understanding of how they labeled themselves.

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<sup>668</sup> Becker (1974d).

Undoubtedly, some of these titles reflect a desire on the part of the journalist to vary their language in describing the other side, but it is significant that Becker, Schanberg, and Swain all describe the Khmer Rouge from the perspective of the government side, which no doubt represented the language used by official sources at the time. Importantly, even after the term “Khmer Rouge” became more widespread, these journalists still preferred to use labels from the perspective of the side they had access to.

## **Discussion**

Ting Lee and Maslog argue that,

The three most salient indicators of peace journalism are the avoidance of demonizing language, a nonpartisan approach, and a multiparty orientation. The war journalism frame is supported by a focus on the here and now, an elite orientation, and a dichotomy of good and bad.<sup>669</sup>

The avoidance of demonizing language and writing in a nonpartisan manner are closely connected. As discussed above, none of the journalists under discussion offers much in the way of demonizing language or partisanship, with the exception, perhaps, of Schanberg who refers to the Khmer Rouge as the enemy in nearly one-fifth of his articles. In some respects, the avoidance of demonizing language and writing in a non-partisan manner is a basic approach to good journalism. In other words, these elements can be considered good journalism, not specifically peace journalism, since any serious reporter would be likely to follow some objective mentality in how they approached reporting on the conflict. At the same time, as discussed in the previous chapter, a non-partisan approach does not necessarily mean a more accurate one.

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<sup>669</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005).

The multiparty orientation is more challenging. During the Cambodian civil war and subsequent genocide, it appears to have been difficult to gain information about how external parties were either affected by the conflict, or engaged with it. Significantly, Elizabeth Becker, who spent a number of years researching the Cambodian civil war and genocide in the 1980s, devotes a significant amount of space in her book to explaining the broader picture of who was involved and affected by the Cambodian violence.<sup>670</sup> Once the picture became clearer on what happened, the significance of these other parties became an essential part to the story – but one that was hard to see and comprehend as it was occurring.

The multiparty orientation is one element of the peace journalism philosophy that aims to expand the coverage to give a broader perspective on a conflict. Connected to this are the attempts to orient an article towards examining the potential for peaceful solutions to the conflict, and discussion on how all parties involved can come together in a win-win outcome. It seems that these two elements were the two that were the most significantly missing in the reporting from these journalists. Even on those occasions where the potential for peace was mentioned, it was more often than not presented in such a way as to deny the true possibility of a win-win outcome.

At the same time, however, the manner in which the conflict was fought seemed destined for a win-lose trajectory. When the United States pulled out of the country in a military capacity, in August 1973, the presentation of how the conflict would end turned sharply towards one of doom for the government side. For those articles that examined the possibilities of how the war would end, the majority discussed the rebel victory as

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<sup>670</sup> Becker (1998).

something that would only be a matter of time, and the main question became, how brutal would that victory be?

There is the possibility that journalists such as Schanberg and Becker, who were living in Cambodia for long stretches of time, could have explored deeper the grassroots potential for peace – especially since they had Cambodian friends and colleagues. Ith Sarin, for example, seemed to prove that one could travel through Khmer Rouge territory, if one had the right “credentials”. Presumably, there were more people like this who could have been found. However, the general understanding of the Khmer Rouge throughout the war was that they were a secret and brutal group, and their territory was a place that one dared not go – especially as a western journalist. In part this is completely understandable, since in the early stage of the war, the Khmer Rouge killed twenty western journalists which gave them a foundation of ruthlessness for those who were trying to tell their side of the story. This, undoubtedly, was a major factor in why the war was told virtually exclusively from the government perspective.

In relation to Ting Lee and Maslog’s salient features of war journalism, one of the more interesting points of analysis in this research was how often these journalists focussed on the people rather than elites. Schanberg was 50/50 on this front, while the other three journalists scored higher on the people side of the equation. Obviously, there has to be some focus on what the elites are doing in a conflict, and it would be significant to consider how much is “enough” of a focus for a researcher to consider a journalist a “peace journalist”? For example, is Schanberg’s 50/50 split enough to place him on the peace side of the equation, or does he need to score significantly higher – in which case, does this take away from his reporting on what the elites are doing, and thus potentially weaken the

“truthfulness” or full picture of what the Cambodians are doing in the war? Again, if the whole point of peace journalism is to give a fuller picture to a conflict, then there has to be a decent amount of space assigned to the elites, who have the potential to control the destiny of the conflict, in order for the report to be as deep as possible.

For the question of whether to focus on the here and now versus offering a deep background to the conflict, this study has shown that, when this question is asked in relation to individual journalists, not newspapers, it becomes a much less salient feature of peace journalism. This is because individual journalists cannot keep repeating the same deep background information in each of their – possibly only one-thousand word – articles. This would take up unnecessary space and ultimately become boring for the journalist to do repeatedly.

Of more interest is how the individual journalist deals with this element. Rather than adding deep background information for the majority of their articles, all four of these journalists devoted entire, or significant chunks of, their articles to offering a deep background context to the story. This is a much more effective way of explaining a conflict than devoting a few lines in each article to the background, as the journalist can dive into much richer detail in a full-length piece. Future studies, perhaps, should consider how to “score” a full-length background piece in such a manner as to not skew this category towards the here and now on account of the volume of a journalist’s work.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis examined how significant elements of a peace journalism approach to reporting conflict were present in the articles of Elizabeth Becker, Richard Dudman, Sydney Schanberg and Jon Swain during their reporting from 1970s Cambodia.

While most studies have found that war journalism remains the dominant frame of reporting conflict, this study highlighted how, if the question is shifted to examine individual journalists, the war frame appears much less dominant. An important first step for those who wish to shift journalistic frames from a war focus to a peace journalism one, would be to take into greater consideration the role of individual journalists, especially on how they are trained, and not merely the study of news outlets. If these individuals are more cognate of the importance of searching for the broader frame that peace journalism intends, then there is a greater chance that more peace journalism makes it into publications as a whole.

The following chapter considers more broadly a number of questions that arose during the course of this analysis.



## **Chapter Six: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter addresses three main areas for discussion that are salient to the research and analysis of this thesis: The significance of refugee accounts as a source of information; the issue of access and the danger involved in trying to report on areas undergoing situations of extreme violence; and the use of culture as causal explanation for violence.

The purpose of this discussion chapter is to flush out these important areas that were hinted at throughout the body of this thesis, and to consider them in relation to questions around peace and war journalism approaches to reporting extreme violence.

### **Refugee Accounts**

When Richard Dudman and Elizabeth Becker received their visas to travel to Cambodia at the end of 1978 both journalists recognized the importance and uniqueness of the opportunity to observe first-hand what was occurring in the closed off country.<sup>671</sup> Rumours of atrocities and numerous refugee reports suggesting that Cambodia had turned into a giant work camp were swirling around in the western press,<sup>672</sup> yet there was skepticism of the truth and accuracy of these reports. Becker notes that:

All news about Indochina spawned controversy. Many of the experts themselves had been embroiled in the bitter wartime debates over the American involvement. They could not discard their deeply embedded views overnight. It took time for even the experts to put the war behind them and see Indochina as the new region it was

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<sup>671</sup> Dudman (1979c); Becker (1998) 400.

<sup>672</sup> E.g. Anderson and Whitten (1977); Safire (1978). Cf. Metzl (1996); Power (2002) 87-154.

becoming, to see the countries on their own terms and not through the prism of America's war.<sup>673</sup>

Part of the problem in piecing together what was happening in Cambodia during the early years of the revolution was the reliance on refugee testimony. Both Becker and Swain have written disparagingly about relying solely on refugee accounts, with Swain noting that there is a "margin of exaggeration that one must always allow refugees' stories"<sup>674</sup> This caution undercuts their level of belief regarding the accounts. Inherent within this problem of refugee testimony is the ideological analysis of the accounts that was used to push various agendas. For example, Becker accuses Barron and Paul's work of exaggerating the testimony and sensationalising the details in their attempts to write a "cold-war propaganda piece."<sup>675</sup>

In other words, the refugee testimony was being selected to strengthen pre-existing ideological positions. This created a certain level of unsureness on the part of those journalists, such as Swain, who were attempting to gather the evidence from refugees first hand. In part, the refugees fleeing Cambodia were, at times, ascribed an ideological agency by external parties which they did not necessarily possess. Noticeable here, at least in the newspaper reporting, is the lack of direct quotations from the refugees themselves. In contrast, however, it should be noted that Ponchaud's work is packed full of direct quotations from refugees, and because of this, is considered one of the best early accounts of Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>676</sup>

In her discussion of refugees from the Great Lakes region of Africa, Liisa Malkki comments on the danger of considering refugees as ahistorical actors or "speechless

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<sup>673</sup> Becker (1998) 366.

<sup>674</sup> Swain (1975i); (1976a).

<sup>675</sup> Becker (1978a). Cf. Swain (1977).

<sup>676</sup> Ponchaud (1978). Cf. Becker (1978a).

emissaries”.<sup>677</sup> Malkki notes how these refugees very much consider themselves as actors in their own lives,<sup>678</sup> and that by presenting them through a prism of suffering, the western media removes their sense of agency, which prevents a deeper understanding of what they are going through, and trying to achieve in the future.<sup>679</sup> This removal of agency is problematic because when refugees feel like their voices are not being heard in the process of actively trying to go about improving their lives, there is a risk that some could be drawn towards more extreme activities out of a sense of frustration.

In the Cambodian example, the refugees whom journalists working on the Thai border managed to interview were one of the few sources of information for what was occurring in the closed-off country. In this example, it was not just that these refugees were lacking agency to tell their story, but also, those who managed to tell their stories had them filtered through a prescribed ideological prism by journalists to confirm or deny what they thought to be taking place. Because of this, it was hard to trust the “truthfulness” of the refugee accounts that were being presented in the media until there were simply too many similar stories to dismiss their evidence out of hand. Still, even years after the Vietnamese invasion some academics considered the accounts of refugees exaggerated for ideological purposes.<sup>680</sup>

Not helping this situation were those accounts that were published in the certain areas of the western press that proved to be faked, exaggerated, or otherwise misleading – particularly in the early years of the revolution.<sup>681</sup> Largely, refugee testimony was used to back up pre-existing positions and to support rumour, rather than as a primary source for understanding the conditions within the country.

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<sup>677</sup> Malkki (1996).

<sup>678</sup> For the Cambodian example, see e.g. Ngor (2003).

<sup>679</sup> Cf. Engle Merry (2007).

<sup>680</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 280-284. Cf. Vickery (1984) 27-63.

<sup>681</sup> Vickery (1984) 27-63.

In some regard, there is logic behind the caution regarding refugee testimony. As Becker contends, the refugees in Indochina did not necessarily represent a cross-section of society, via class, geography or political persuasion.<sup>682</sup> In other words, those who initially fled to the border were likely to be the wealthier members of the cities who perhaps were previously involved with the government in some capacity – i.e. the ones likely to be targeted by the new regime.<sup>683</sup> Theoretically, there is some reasoning in this caution. However, as Swain comments, the unusual element of the Cambodian refugees was that they were largely peasants, the people supposed to benefit in the new political climate.<sup>684</sup>

As the conflict wore on, the sheer volume of refugee testimony made the claims of executions, torture, and other examples of atrocity hard to dismiss, even if one had to allow for some “exaggeration”. A further problem in the refugee testimony was that, according to Swain, who conducted interviews on the Thai border, very few individuals claimed to have witnessed executions first hand but had rather “heard” of them.<sup>685</sup>

All of this is to raise an interesting point regarding those who flee genocidal violence: when should we believe refugee testimony, and why are the accounts of those who flee often seen as unreliable? On the surface, the answer is relatively easy – we distrust the refugee accounts because there is a chance that those who flee have an agenda, for example, in that they were the class, ethnicity, or other identifier that had power until removal, and thus they exaggerate the awfulness of the new regime to encourage intervention in order to regain

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<sup>682</sup> Becker (1998) 366.

<sup>683</sup> Cf. Dudman (1979c).

<sup>684</sup> Swain (1975i).

<sup>685</sup> Swain (1976a).

power.<sup>686</sup> Yet, time and again, refugee accounts have borne the truth of what is occurring in a state going through an upheaval of genocidal violence.

In relation to questions around peace and war journalism, there is a further issue at hand with regard to refugee testimony. For the peace journalist, who aims to give a voice to the voiceless, how should they consider refugee testimony in relation to their philosophy around victimising language and absence of labels, emotive language, a people oriented focus, and the other categories from the peace journalism framework? More research on how peace journalism interacts with refugee testimony is required to strengthen the relationship between the philosophy and its use in examples of extreme violence where large numbers of people flee their homes for safety.

### **Access and Danger**

A reporter's identity matters when faced with an ethical decision during war and in their choices about how to cover what they witness. It also matters in their decision to go cover conflict in the first place, and in their desire to pursue leads which take them to dangerous locations.<sup>687</sup> While not all journalists who cover war risk their lives for a story,<sup>688</sup> many do, and former correspondents have compared the excitement of war with an addiction to narcotics.<sup>689</sup> Even for journalists like Sydney Schanberg, who experienced close calls with death in order to gain a story, the adrenaline high of covering war remains a life-long addiction.<sup>690</sup> Ambition

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<sup>686</sup> Cf. Kuperman (2004).

<sup>687</sup> E.g. Swain (1998) 29-31.

<sup>688</sup> See the comments of Hedges (2003) 142-143.

<sup>689</sup> Hedges (2003) 5, 162-163. On journalists use of narcotics, see e.g. Herr (1991); Swain (1998).

<sup>690</sup> Schanberg (2010) 215-218. While an addiction to the thrill of covering violent conflict drives many journalists, it must also be noted that many of them feel a deep ethical commitment to tell the story of those who are suffering in violence, and to draw the attention of the world's eyes to those parts of the world that are kept in the dark

brings journalists to some of the most dangerous places on earth, and for a number of them the opportunity to view up close and first-hand the violence of warfare is one of the greatest ways to challenge one's own courage.<sup>691</sup>

Many journalists are unable to escape the addiction to the dangers of warfare and are killed in the course of trying to get a story.<sup>692</sup> Those who survive often have multiple close calls with death,<sup>693</sup> and are lucky to have escaped particular situations alive – especially since journalists are often targeted because of their ability to expose atrocities that perpetrators do not want the world to know about.<sup>694</sup>

During the Cambodian civil war, for example, those journalists who wanted to get the story from Khmer Rouge controlled territory were heading into areas that the Cambodian army feared to go.<sup>695</sup> Unlike Vietnam, where journalists were more often than not escorted by the military,<sup>696</sup> reporters in Cambodia were very much on their own. Twenty out of twenty-three journalists captured by the communists in the early 1970s never came back, and the three who returned unharmed were fortunate that one of their members spoke Vietnamese,<sup>697</sup> and all three seemed to have sympathetic ideological leanings to their captors – although they remained uncertain about exactly why they were released.<sup>698</sup>

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through violence. E.g. Vulliamy (1994); Keane (1996); Gutman and Rieff (1999); Knightly (2004); Doyle (2007); Hilsum (2018)

<sup>691</sup> See e.g. Swain (1998) 14, 36-7; Hedges (2003); Knightly (2004) 368-371; 442.

<sup>692</sup> According to Reporters Without Borders, 50 journalists, 10 citizen journalists, and three media assistants have been killed since January 2018. <https://rsf.org/en> (accessed 29/08/18).

<sup>693</sup> E.g. Higgins (1951); Herr (1991); Arnett (1995); Becker (1998) 427-431; Swain (1998); Hedges (2003); Doyle (2007); Schanberg (2010) 52-53. Cf. Knightly (2004).

<sup>694</sup> E.g. Vulliamy (1994) 329. Cf. Knightly (2004).

<sup>695</sup> Kamm (1998) 57-60.

<sup>696</sup> Herr (1991).

<sup>697</sup> Dudman (1971). At the time of Dudman and his colleagues' capture, in May 1970, the Cambodian communists who would eventually reveal themselves as the Khmer Rouge, were intertwined with the Vietnamese communists – some of their captors were Khmer, some Vietnamese. For a detailed account of the complex history between the Vietnamese and Cambodian communists, see especially Becker (1998) 1-204.

<sup>698</sup> Dudman (1971) 176-182.

Access is one of the key issues for journalists who want to investigate reports of atrocity. For example, journalists who were in Rwanda during the genocide were heavily reliant on the various military actors for protection, access, and transportation.<sup>699</sup> Fergal Keane was reliant on the Hutu militia for access to their area of control and to guarantee the safety of the BBC crew.<sup>700</sup> Keane's BBC crew were only able to gain access to the militia side because they employed an African correspondent named Rizu, who spoke Swahili and was able to persuade their driver to take them to Butare.<sup>701</sup> Rizu's knowledge of Swahili came in handy at one of the roadblocks when a drunk militiaman aggressively demanded beer and to know if they were Belgian – Rizu was able to calmly placate the man in Swahili, allowing them to pass.<sup>702</sup>

The issue of language is an important one in determining which journalists are able to gain access to certain key actors or remote locations, allowing for a fuller or more nuanced account of a conflict.<sup>703</sup> Henry Kamm has written about how his knowledge of French gave him much greater access to Cambodian leadership than those journalists who only knew English.<sup>704</sup> Roy Gutman, who exposed the Serbian concentration camp system to the world, had spent ten years in Belgrade during the 1970s and spoke Serbo-Croatian.<sup>705</sup> While many journalists employ a translator to help with their investigations, often the connection to a foreign journalist puts the translator's life in greater danger.<sup>706</sup>

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<sup>699</sup> Keane (1996); Doyle (2007). Cf. Dallaire (2003) 332.

<sup>700</sup> Keane (1996).

<sup>701</sup> Keane (1996) 161-162.

<sup>702</sup> Keane (1996) 166-167. Cf. the comments of Hilsum (2007) 172.

<sup>703</sup> Language is not just an issue for journalists: Dallaire (2003) e.g. 72, 110, 122; (2007) 16-17 has spoken about the difficulties in trying to translate between the English and French speaking groups in Rwanda – how this may have led to his missing key information – and how his UN team lacked the ability to monitor the local broadcasts in Kinyarwanda.

<sup>704</sup> Kamm (1998). Cf. Swain (1998).

<sup>705</sup> Gutman (1993).

<sup>706</sup> E.g. Schanberg (2010) 90-91.

For those journalists who do not speak the local language, they are, perhaps, even more reliant on military forces to get them to certain conflict zones.<sup>707</sup> This reliance on the military causes its own issues, since the military generally wants to present events in a certain way,<sup>708</sup> and journalists have often been used to promote myths and ideals about what a particular conflict is about.<sup>709</sup> Moreover, as Knightly has discussed in his section on the Iraq war, those journalists who made a break away from the confines of American military to work more independently, possibly became specific targets for attack by the U.S. Central Command due to the information they were reporting.<sup>710</sup> In another example, the sister of Marie Colvin, the war journalist killed in Syria in 2012, has recently launched legal proceedings against the Syrian government and offered evidence indicating that Colvin, along with other journalists, were deliberately targeted for death by the Assad regime.<sup>711</sup> There is significant and real danger involved in trying to gather information from areas which are deliberately being kept from public view, due to the violence being performed in those “dark” locations.<sup>712</sup>

All four of the journalists discussed in this thesis faced near-death experiences at certain points of their reporting. Schanberg and Swain feared execution when they were forced at gun point into an armored vehicle and taken to the river. In both journalists’ opinions, it was only the

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<sup>707</sup> For discussion on the problems with “embedded” journalism, see e.g. Knightly (2004) 528-536.

<sup>708</sup> Cf. the comments of Keane (1996) 56-57 on how he had been warned that the RPF – who they had relied on for initial access to Rwanda – would try to show his crew exactly what they wanted to. Keane had been directed to “make sure” he told the other story as well.

<sup>709</sup> E.g. Hedges (2003); Knightly (2004).

<sup>710</sup> Knightly (2004) 527-548. This is a delicate issue, and one that the U.S. has strongly denied. However, there is significant evidence that western journalists were deterred from attempting to report from the other side, and that the Pentagon viewed any such journalism as an act of “military significance” which justified (in their view) the bombing of certain media outlets. As Knightly himself pointed out earlier in his discussion on “neutral” journalists in Germany prior to World War Two, there is a fine line between information sought by a journalist and that of a spy, and those journalists who attempt to operate from the “other side” run a real risk of being accused of espionage. Knightly (2004) 240.

<sup>711</sup> Dwyer and Gallagher (2018).

<sup>712</sup> Cf. Hilsum (2007) 172-173.



pleading of Dith Pran which saved their lives in this instance.<sup>713</sup> In the case of Jon Swain, he would go on to face several more instances of near death in his journalistic career.<sup>714</sup> Dudman and Becker faced an armed intruder in their Phnom Penh accommodation on the final day of their tour.<sup>715</sup> Dudman was shot at several times and their colleague Malcom Caldwell was killed. It is still unclear why Caldwell was a target for execution. Upon return, Dudman wrote about his regret and self-loathing that he had put his family in the position of fearing for his life again (after being held captive in 1970) and vowed to never place himself in danger again.<sup>716</sup> Similarly, Swain after being held captive by rebels in the Ethiopian-Eritrean war wrote about a similar level of regret, and his exposure to danger would cost him his relationship with Jacqueline, in part because she had painful memories of the death of a previous lover who was a war correspondent and did not want to face that again with Swain.<sup>717</sup>

The danger involved for journalists to cover stories like the Cambodian civil war and genocide is very real, and is part of the adrenaline rush of covering conflict. However, it also has the potential to limit access to all sides of a particular story. As discussed, there was not a lot of journalism which focused on what the Cambodian rebels were trying to do – mainly because their territory was too dangerous to access. This greatly skewed the analysis to the government goals in the war, and led to much mythology in the reporting of the other side.

More research is required in relation to how the difficulty in gaining access to an area of extreme violence plays into the peace journalism philosophy. How can one tell the full tale if they are denied access to one of the key sides or locations of the conflict? As discussed in the above chapters, the inability to access Khmer Rouge territory severely limited the journalists'

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<sup>713</sup> Swain (1975h); Schanberg (2010) 63-111.

<sup>714</sup> Swain (1998); (1999).

<sup>715</sup> Becker (1978d); Dudman (1979c). Cf. Becker (1998) 427-431.

<sup>716</sup> Dudman (1979c).

<sup>717</sup> Swain (1998) 213-239.

ability to offer a deep analysis of exactly who the Khmer Rouge were and what their goals for the country entailed. Accordingly, this skewed the focus of the journalists' articles towards the government side in the civil war. In turn, this impacted how these articles were parsed through the peace and war journalism frame for analysis and tilted a number of written pieces towards a war journalism designation. Ultimately, this seems unfair since the conditions meant that the journalist largely lacked the ability to follow a different, more open approach to reporting on the conflict that included an exploration of the other side.

### **Cultural Explanations**

For those journalists who covered the civil war, and those who were offered a brief glimpse behind the curtain into Democratic Kampuchea, a cultural explanation for certain things they witnessed became a key point of their analysis for the audiences they were writing for. In particular, during the civil war, especially as it became clearer that the insurgents would eventually take Phnom Penh, Schanberg and Swain commented often on the sense of “fatalism” among the Cambodian population, which they often attributed to the Buddhist faith.<sup>718</sup> These journalists used that impression of fatalism as a means of explanation for why the people in Phnom Penh seemed to be less concerned than they should be about the impending danger.

As Herman and Chomsky have pointed out, the western media divided the Cambodians into two different Khmer groups.<sup>719</sup> On the one hand the “true” Cambodians – those in the capital – were fatalists, resigned to their fate.<sup>720</sup> The insurgents, on the other hand, were determined in the face of intensive American bombing, which surprised all of the so-called

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<sup>718</sup> E.g. Schanberg (1973n); (1973ab); (1974h); (1974l); (1975h); (1975v); Swain (1973a).

<sup>719</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 274-280.

<sup>720</sup> Brinkley (2011) 24-25.

experts and analysts, including the journalists themselves.<sup>721</sup> Two versions of “Cambodians” were fighting not just for the territory but for the definition of what a Cambodian was. In fact, whenever the journalists attempted to highlight the opposition, they focused on how rigid, disciplined, and serious they appeared, in direct contrast to the smiling, loafing, undisciplined Cambodians they saw around Phnom Penh.<sup>722</sup>

The significance of this bifurcation lies in the descriptions of the fall of Phnom Penh by Swain and Schanberg. After describing the fall of Phnom Penh, and their detention in the French Embassy, Swain concludes his lengthy account with a look to the future, and a plea to his readers to let the Cambodians decide themselves how the country should look.<sup>723</sup> Schanberg, too, is aware of his own fallibility, and western (American) responsibility in what was unfolding.<sup>724</sup> In their minds, the United States and outside powers have intervened in the country to its detriment and now it is time to let the Khmers figure out their own country.

While there is no doubt that the United States and other powers have a lot to answer for in terms of the ethical nature of their involvement in Cambodia, and Southeast Asia generally, the deferral to the notion that Khmers should decide the fate of Khmer territory belies the dichotomous nature of the two Cambodians the western journalists themselves had presented. In their pleas, there is much a sense of wishful thinking than analysis. There is nothing in their reports to suggest that there will be the hoped-for transition of power where elements of the two Khmers merge to become a stronger Cambodian populace. Rather, it is evident that the one side has assumed total dominance over the other – a point which Elizabeth Becker stresses through

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<sup>721</sup> E.g. Swain (1973a); Schanberg (1975ag).

<sup>722</sup> E.g. Becker (1974f); Schanberg (1975ab); (1975ai); (1975ag) (1975aah).

<sup>723</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>724</sup> Schanberg (1975aah); (1975aai); (1975aaj).

her continued commentary on the absence of what she knows about Cambodia during her visit some three-and-a-half years later.<sup>725</sup>

Of course, in those early days of Democratic Kampuchea, there was no way to know exactly how bad things would become inside the country, and Schanberg and Swain can certainly be forgiven for hoping for the best and giving the new regime a chance after the years of terror and destruction that Cambodia had witnessed over the previous half-decade. However, the late recognition and acknowledgement that the rebels were “true” Khmers as well, and the hoped-for peaceful transition (if not reconciliation) between the Khmers, highlights one of the key elements that was missing for much of the journalism in Cambodia during the 1970s – that is, there was a distinct lack of consideration given to the possibility of a peaceful or win-win outcome to the war. Now that there was a clear victor, any presentation of a peaceful (or, indeed, less severe) take-over was a clear case of wishful thinking rather than astute analysis. Indeed, Schanberg and Swain spend much of their articles describing the Khmer Rouge take-over focusing on the misery they witnessed.<sup>726</sup> Because they had not envisioned what a peaceful transition would look like,<sup>727</sup> they could not see any alternative to what they witnessed, yet, at the same time, they relied on hope to explain why the future may not be as dreadful as the evidence suggested.

Another component which journalists were keen to point out to their audience is the idea that there was a darker side to the “smiling Khmer.”<sup>728</sup> The logic here goes that the Khmers are known for being friendly and for having a permanent smile on their face, and yet there is violence lurking behind that smile. Moreover, the contrast between the friendly, smiling

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<sup>725</sup> Becker (1978h). Cf. Becker (1998) 399-431.

<sup>726</sup> Schanberg (1975aah); (1975aai); (1975aaj); (1975aak); Swain (1975h).

<sup>727</sup> Cf. Boulding (2000).

<sup>728</sup> E.g. Becker (1998); Brinkley (2011).

“Khmers” from Phnom Penh and the un-smiling, cold “Khmers” of the Khmer Rouge is a present feature in some of the journalistic writing.<sup>729</sup> Swain, moreover, was quick to note how the peasants they saw in their journey through the countryside no longer smiled.<sup>730</sup>

In some regards, the Cambodians invited this interpretation through the extreme brutality and violence seen on the battlefield during the civil war and after, and through their own understanding of their Khmer psyche.<sup>731</sup> Obviously, the gentle reputation of the Khmers, promoted in various areas of western writing and by the Khmers themselves, is largely a myth.<sup>732</sup> Yet, the reputation of the gentle Khmer was pervasive during the 1970s, and served as a contrast to what journalists witnessed in the field of battle. Ultimately, it seems that many western observers to the violence in Cambodia during this period were unable to reconcile the myth of the smiling Khmer and the brutal reality of the battlefield, and this may help to explain why a number of journalists struggled to make sense of the different nature and character in the personalities of the Khmer Rouge compared to their “smiling” Phnom Penh brethren as discussed in chapter four.

By way of exploring the violence that lay behind the gentle myth, some have searched the deep Khmer cultural past for an explanation.<sup>733</sup> Elizabeth Becker, for example, in attempting to understand the violence – and especially the brutality – draws on deep cultural signifiers, including examples from Cambodian folk tales, as a means of explaining the violence. For example, she opens the third chapter of her book on the war and genocide with a detailed example of a Cambodian folk tale called “The Devious Woman.”<sup>734</sup> In this tale, a wife plans to

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<sup>729</sup> E.g. Becker (1974f); Schanberg (1975ag); Swain (1975i).

<sup>730</sup> Swain (1975h).

<sup>731</sup> Hinton (2005) 45-95; Schanberg (2010) 66-67. Cf. Ung (2000); Ngor (2003).

<sup>732</sup> Herman and Chomsky (1988) 266; Becker (1998); Hinton (2005) 7; Brinkley (2011).

<sup>733</sup> Becker (1998); Brinkley (2011).

<sup>734</sup> Becker (1998) 66-68.

murder her husband, but is tricked by him into boiling her lover alive (who had been hiding from him in a large pot). In attempting to dispose of her lover's body the woman fools four local robbers into helping get rid of the urn, and the woman then sells these robbers to a ship's captain as slaves. The slaves escape and end up in the same tree as the woman, who has stopped for the night, where she promises to become the lover of one, bites his tongue off, and pushes him out of the tree. The robbers flee, the woman climbs down and returns to her husband, and the tale ends.

As Becker notes, folktales reflect the culture they are from, and she argues that, in the Khmer tales, there are often no apparent moral lessons, and sometimes no point. She comments:

This folktale of "The Devious Woman" is ghoulish, belonging to the same general category as those of the Brothers Grimm. But the character of the acts of violence and the fact that the cruelty goes unpunished set the Khmer tale apart. No moral lesson is drawn, at least in a Western sense, only the accurate portrayal of how man's violence toward his fellow man begets more violence.

Obviously a culture that produces such stories is not as single-mindedly gentle as its reputation.<sup>735</sup>

In a similar fashion, some accounts of the violence seen in Cambodia during the 1970s have reached back to the Angkor period in an attempt to draw a historical/cultural connection between the violence and the most famous period of Cambodian history.<sup>736</sup> This connection to the ancient past attempts to draw analogous examples of extreme violence to indicate that the Khmer population is prone to heinous acts of violence writ large, and the evidence for this assumption is via a historical thread from Angkor to the Khmer Rouge. This is despite the fact that, often in these analyses, there are centuries missing from that historical thread.

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<sup>735</sup> Becker (1998) 67.

<sup>736</sup> E.g. Becker (1998); Kamm (1998); Brinkley (2011).

For example, Brinkley expressly draws a connection between the Angkorian period and the country's more recent examples of corruption, barbarity, and the Cambodian population's lack of protest about their leadership's behaviour. He comments:

But then these afflictions were prominent features of Khmer society in the time of the great kings of Angkor 1,000 years ago. The lineage of larceny is clear. Far more than almost any other state, modern Cambodia is a product of customs and practices set in stone a millennium ago.<sup>737</sup>

The Khmer Rouge, of course, encouraged a connection to Cambodia's glorious past through references to Angkor,<sup>738</sup> and in their attempts to recreate some of that period's glorious achievements, especially seen in their desire to construct dikes and canals.<sup>739</sup> Yet, in terms of a cultural explanation for genocide, and especially as a causal explanation for the violence, this linkage seems tenuous, and draws focus away from the political climate of the 1970s Cambodian experience. In other words, there is a danger in conflating violence as a historical cultural trait with violence that results from specific geopolitical circumstances.

All of this is not to say that culture played no part in the violence, for it did.<sup>740</sup> However, the cultural aspect of the violence merely explains its form, not its cause.<sup>741</sup> Hinton, for example, has demonstrated how the Cambodian cultural model of disproportionate revenge (*karsângsoek*) played a part in the manner of extreme violence seen in the country during Khmer Rouge rule.<sup>742</sup>

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<sup>737</sup> Brinkley (2011) 15.

<sup>738</sup> Other genocidal regimes also encouraged links to a glorious past. Arnold (2002); Hinton (ed.) 2002; Kiernan (2007).

<sup>739</sup> Becker (1998); Kiernan (2008a).

<sup>740</sup> Hinton (2005).

<sup>741</sup> Hinton (2005).

<sup>742</sup> Hinton (2005) 45-95.

Under the warped ideology of the Khmer Rouge, any perceived slight against *Angka* required extreme punishment, often resulting in torture or execution for relatively minor infractions, such as stealing small amounts of food.<sup>743</sup>

While Hinton convincingly demonstrates how this cultural model impacted the violence, he does not suggest that the behaviour of those who committed the violence were impacted in a deterministic manner by the cultural model of disproportionate revenge.<sup>744</sup> As he notes, Cambodians have a variety of strategies to manage anger, however, where situations of honor and shame are involved, the desire to do harm may lead to a path of violence.<sup>745</sup>

In searching for a causal explanation for the violence within a cultural frame, there is a danger of presenting the violence as something that is inherent, or inevitable, because of cultural traits.<sup>746</sup> Obviously, this is something that the peace journalist aims to avoid. At the same time, however, the cultural component to the violence needs to be analysed and addressed by any journalist who aims to offer the deeper explanation for the violence.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed several salient points from this research. Issues of refugee credibility, access to all sides of a conflict, and the use of culture as an explanation for violence, are important areas to consider when examining the broader question around how to report episodes of extreme violence. Often, there is a tension between the philosophy of reporting and the reality of reporting from zones of conflict and violence.

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<sup>743</sup> Ngor (2003); Schanberg (2010) 93-94.

<sup>744</sup> Hinton (1998); (2005) 45-95.

<sup>745</sup> Hinton (2005) 64.

<sup>746</sup> One can compare this to the *New York Times*' infamous framing of the Rwandan genocide being a result of "ancient tribal hatred". Power (2002).



This chapter highlighted three areas that are worthy of deeper consideration when thinking about how to apply a peace journalism philosophy to the reality of reporting extreme instances of violence. What all of the points discussed have in common is the idea that, while a journalist may have the best intentions in following a peace journalism line, specific wartime factors may not allow them to take that approach to their reporting. What future peace journalism studies should take into consideration is how to combat issues like those described here in order to consider how to apply the peace journalism approach within situations that may not be the ideal environment for either a philosophical or practical application. In other words, more real-world examples of how individual journalists (peace journalists or otherwise) attempted to tackle these issues in real time could offer future researchers more viable ways and means of thinking about how to preserve a peace journalism philosophy and approach to reporting extreme forms of violence in less than ideal journalistic conditions.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis examined how four journalists – Elizabeth Becker, Richard Dudman, Jon Swain and Sydney Schanberg – reported on Cambodia in the 1970s. Chapter one offered a brief overview of the Cambodian civil war and genocide. Chapter two presented the theoretical framework for this study, a bi-modal peace and war journalism frame that was used for the analysis of the four journalists' articles. This chapter also situated genocide and peace journalism within PACS, and considered how the peace journalism philosophy relates to the reality of reporting on situations of extreme violence. Chapter three outlined the directed content analysis methodology used in this study. Chapter four analysed key passages from the journalists' writings, both their articles and later works, and offered a discussion on how they approached reporting from Cambodia during the civil war and genocide. Chapter five presented the content analysis and broke down the articles examined in this thesis via the bi-modal peace and war journalism frame, in order to consider what elements of peace journalism were present in the journalists' writings from the 1970s. Chapter six addressed three important areas for discussion that are hinted at through the body of the thesis: The significance of refugee accounts as a source of information; the issue of access and the danger involved in trying to report on regions undergoing situations of extreme violence; and the use of culture as causal explanation for violence.

This conclusion briefly summarizes the most salient points from this thesis

## Key Findings

The articles of Elizabeth Becker, Richard Dudman, Sydney Schanberg and Jon Swain were analysed using a bi-modal peace and war journalism frame in a directed content analysis that examined what elements of peace journalism were present in their writings. Perhaps the most significant of the elements found and discussed were: The avoidance of demonizing language; a nonpartisan approach to reporting conflict; and a multiparty orientation – the three most salient features of peace journalism according to Ting Lee and Maslog.<sup>747</sup>

The fact that these elements were present in writings from competent and capable journalists reporting in the 1970s indicates that much of the peace journalism philosophy is a “double down” on what can be considered good journalism – the need for non-partisanship, neutral language, and so on. All of this is to imply that, as a philosophical approach to reporting conflict, peace journalism relates closely to what are traditionally considered good journalistic practices. The strength of peace journalism lies in this connection and encourages its promotion as a reporting philosophy.

At the same time, however, as discussed in chapter five, the journalist who most closely followed a non-partisan, neutral approach to his reporting, Richard Dudman, was also the most inaccurate in his understanding of what was transpiring inside Cambodia. An additional point needs to be made, which is that of the four authors under discussion, Dudman was the only one to not have spent significant time in Cambodia prior to his visit in late 1978.

In contrast to Dudman, Elizabeth Becker, in her articles from the same trip, is much less determined in her neutrality. However, she is also much more accurate in her account precisely because she understands what is missing from the country and the significance of that absence, due to her deeper knowledge of Cambodia from having lived there for two years.

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<sup>747</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005).

By the same token, Sydney Schanberg's and Jon Swain's articles from their observations of the early days of Khmer Rouge rule were powerful and resonated with their audiences in part because they were not, strictly speaking, neutral, and both conveyed the emotions each journalist felt during their captivity. Schanberg in particular devotes a lot of space to his own involvement in what he witnessed, particularly while trapped inside the French Embassy, and includes deep reflection on his status as an American journalist amongst a Khmer population who were being forced from Phnom Penh towards an uncertain fate. Again, like Becker, Swain and Schanberg knew the country by having lived in it and therefore were able to consider the significance of what they were witnessing through the lens of what they understood to be "Cambodia."

Two points are worth noting here: (1) journalists who have a deep connection with a region undergoing violence are able to offer more perceptive and accurate analysis of what is truly going on; and (2) determined neutrality does not necessarily equate with accuracy in reporting.

Both of these points are, perhaps, fairly obvious but they are worth emphasising in relation to questions around peace journalism as a journalistic philosophy. If the main goal of peace journalism is to report on conflict with a higher degree of "truth" – by taking in more of the "reality" than what is covered in traditional war reporting<sup>748</sup> – then the standard of non-partisanship should be considered a much less salient feature of the philosophy than what Ting Lee and Maslog suggest.<sup>749</sup> Importantly, this research indicates that a connection to the region undergoing violence may be a more salient indicator of accuracy in reporting on extreme forms of conflict rather than standards and goals of neutrality.

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<sup>748</sup> Lynch and Galtung (2010).

<sup>749</sup> Ting Lee and Maslog (2005).

The extreme nature of the violence seen in the Cambodian civil war and genocide highlighted tensions between a peace journalism philosophy and the practice of reporting violent conflict. During the civil war, none of these journalists were able to access the other side and were largely reliant on government sources for information. When Elizabeth Becker wrote one of the few portrayals of the Khmer Rouge, in what would prove to be a fairly accurate description of the movement, she faced criticism from Sydney Schanberg for attempting to analyse the rebels without having ever travelled into their territory. This criticism is valid, if possibly misplaced – even if access to their territory is denied a journalist should at least attempt to explain who the key protagonists are in the conflict. This raises significant questions in relation to the peace journalism philosophy.

A peace journalism approach aims to give voice to all sides of the conflict in order to present a deeper reality of what is occurring. Yet, if the journalist is denied access to a particular participant, this element of peace journalism becomes largely mute. Future research should take into consideration how a journalist can approach the question of a fair portrayal of all sides in a conflict or during an episode of extreme violence when one participant denies access to their territory and their account of events.

Significantly, peace journalism elements were present among all of the journalists under discussion. Most studies that have examined conflict through a peace journalism lens conclude that war journalism is the dominant reporting frame and suggest that more promotion of the peace journalism philosophy is required for it to enter more fully into mainstream news media.<sup>750</sup> This study indicates that, if the analysis is reframed to consider individual journalists, there is more practice of peace journalism than what analyses of news media sources alone indicate. If

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<sup>750</sup> E.g. Ting Lee and Maslog (2005); Dente Ross (2009); Hackett and Schroeder (2009); Lynch (2009); Mandelzis and Peleg (2009); Shinar (2009); Lacasse and Forster (2012); Perez De Fransius (2014); Rodny-Gumede (2015).

individual journalists are the building blocks of news media outlets, and they are the ones charged with reporting on conflict, then the fact that peace journalism tenets were present in articles from individuals writing in the 1970s is an encouraging sign for those who wish to promote the philosophy, for it suggests that there is already an understanding, if not willingness, by individuals to report within certain peace journalism frames of reference – even if the journalist themselves is unaware that they are doing so.

### **Further Research**

There are implications in this study relating to the theory, research, and practice of peace journalism. While this thesis highlighted a number of important points in relation to how competent individual journalists dealt with the challenges they faced in reporting extreme violence, more research is required to try and meld these points into a broader theory on how to report on mass atrocity and genocide using a peace journalism philosophy. Further research could move forward in time to consider how individual journalists who covered Rwanda, South Sudan, and Syria, for example, dealt with the unique challenges they faced in reporting on those situations of violence. The more studies that are done which draw attention to individual journalists and their reporting of extreme violence the stronger any theoretical approach to peace journalism becomes.

This study also adds to the growing PACS literature around peace journalism. In particular, it addressed two understudied areas within peace journalism research: (1) through its focus on a situation of extreme violence; and (2) by focusing on individual journalists, not news media outlets.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, this thesis highlighted the difficult nature of reporting on war and extreme violence through an examination of select journalists who covered Cambodia in the 1970s. A bi-modal peace and war journalism frame was used to consider the articles of Elizabeth Becker, Richard Dudman, Sydney Schanberg, and Jon Swain, to discuss the challenges these journalists faced in reporting on Cambodia in relation to the wider peace journalism literature. In particular, this study offered commentary on the tensions between the peace journalism philosophy and the reality of reporting on situations of extreme violence. While many tenets of peace journalism were found in the writings of these four authors, more work is required to create a tighter theoretical peace journalism method of reporting in situations of mass violence and genocide in order to close some of the gaps between the philosophy and practice.

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