### FOCUS

## Things I could never have thought possible The reconstruction of Cambodia

#### **BY LISA LACHANCE**

"The most tragic thing is that..."

So begins the simple inscription at the Genocidal Museum, otherwise known as the "kill-

ing fields", 5 kilometres outside Phnom Penh, Cambodia. I was travelling through the country during the Khmer New Year, an event that is held each April

Because of the holiday period and the Khmer people's openness, I had the opportunity to participate in many traditional customs during my time

there. I woke up at 5:12am one morning to experience the celebratory gunfire. Although this gunfire is outlawed, it continues to ring in the new year. Monks and citizens alike doused me with water in the streets and markets. It is a traditional act that is believed to bring luck in the new year — to both the thrower and the person being drenched.

But my mind kept slipping back to questions about Cambodia's past. In May 1975, the Khmer Rouge, under the leadership of Pol Pot, took control of the country and renamed it "Kampuchea". The state, religion, family and all social ties were abolished The cities were emptied in the two weeks following Pol Pot's victory and everyone was driven to the countryside, creating a classless agrarian society.

Millions died, directly through purges, torture and mass killings; and indirectly they died from overwork malnutrition and disease.

In 1978, the Vietnamese entered the country to assist the citizens and by 1980 the international community was involved in the long, painful reconstruction of Cambodia.

I have never met :

Cambodian friend who had not lost a family member during Pol Pot's reign. I watched the people who were raised in Pol Pot's work camps try to create a place

streets - in 1980 more than half of the population was under 40.

It was raining in Cambodia this April — an anomaly as

#### THE SECURITY REGULATIONS

1. YOU MUST ANSWER ACCORDINGLY TO MY DUSTIONS DON'T TURN THEN AWAY 2. DAN'T TRY TO HIDE THE FACTS BY MIXING PRETEXTS THIS AND THAT, YOU ARE STRICTLY PROVIBITED TO CONTEST ME 3. DON'T BE A FOOL FOR YOU AVE A GUAR SHO DARE TO THOUGHT THE REVOLUTION 4. YOU HUST HYDEDATEDY ANSWER MY CONSISTENCY VARIANCE TO REFLECT 5. DON'T TELLME EITHER ABOUT YOUR IMMORAL MUSICR THE ENERGY AT HE REVOLUTION 6. WHITE GETTING LISHES OF ELECTRIFICATION YOU MUST NOT CRY AT ALL. 7. BO MOTHING SIT STILL MAD WAIT FOR MY ORDERS IF THERE IS NO ORDER, KEEP QUET. WHEN LASK YOU TO DO SOMETHIZE, YOU MUST DO IT RIGHT ALAY WITHOUT PROTESTING. 8. DON'T ISHE PRETEXTS ABOUT KAMPLCHA KNON HOTORE TO HAVE YOUR JAW OF TRAITOR. S. IF YOU POIN'T FOLLOW ALL THE NAME RULES, YOU SHUGET THAN THAN'T LASHES OF ELECTRIC WIRE ID. IF YOU DISLOEYANT POINT OF ITS REED, JITSTS YOUSSAULT HITHER TEN USHIS OR FIVE SHOCKS OF HELLERK DISCHARGE

> this is the height of the hot, dry season with temperatures in the mid 40s. Rain is a sign of cleansing and good luck.

> The death of Pol Pot was another event that harkened the dawn of a new age. The day he died caused me to search for answers to Cambodia's haunting past at the Teoung Sleoung



Prison Museum or "Old Schoolhouse", the former Interrogation and Torture headquarters of the Khmer Rouge.

number of old faces seen on the a former high school in an av- with both outside help and inerage neighbourhood. At first glance it simply looks like any two-storey high school. The Vietnamese army that found the prison after the regime's demise

> preserved the tools of torture they found. The graphic photographs they took left me feeling as though blood still seeped from the walls. I didn't want to breathe deeply for fear of smelling it.

As I gazed at the thousands of pictures of victims that line the walls, CNN camera crews arrived to supple-

ment their coverage of Pol Pot's death. Khmer press did not provide coverage of his death for three days following the initial CNN report. I tried to tell Khmer friends of his death, but they did not believe me. They wanted to see the death reported by their own Khmer sources the reason being that so many

times in the past his death had been reported and had been untrue.

If it was true, the implications were vast and Cambodians didn't want to be disappointed again. After the Khmer press finally confirmed his death and pictures of the body appeared, Cambodians were quiet in their reaction, mostly because people felt that a peaceful death was too good for him. They would have liked him to suffer as their friends and family did.

My continuing interest in Cambodia's past, present and future led me to the "killing fields" Located 5 km outside of Phnom Penh, it is essentially an unearthed mass grave. The field's discovery, as well as that of other mass graves around Cambodia, helped to shed light on the Khmer Rouge's brutality.

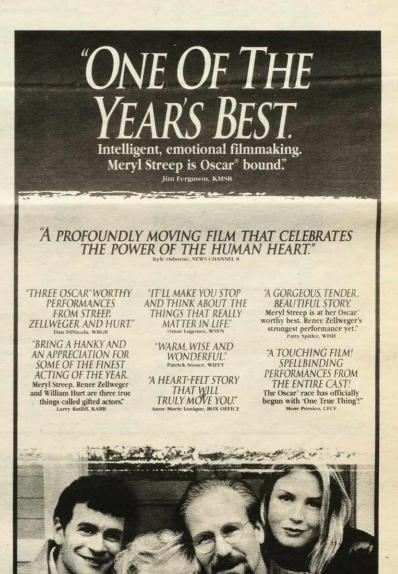
I won't try to adequately assess the current rioting in Cambodia. However, this is a The prison was located at nation that has rebuilt itself terference. From being stateless and structure- societal building blocks fos-

though often described as the "wild west", these less, towns, neighbour- tered ideas of expectations, norms



hoods and families have and justice. Working together on a needed to define their own rules and sanctions. Al-

national level and combining these ideas is the next step.



in society. I marvelled at the small

OH SWEETIE, I DO WISH YOU WOULD WRITE MORE OFTEN.

# THE GAZETTE ROOMA 312 SUB

