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Translating Memory: Politics, Rhetoric & Poetics of Loung Ung's Testimonial Narrative *First They Killed my Father*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at studying and analyzing the techniques of constructing story, with translation of memory into life-narrative; in Loung Ung's testimonial narrative entitled *First They Killed my Father: a daughter of Cambodian remembers*. Politically, while being resident in the U.S.A., the book was written in English language to portray the author's childhood experience of living and surviving under the Khmer Rouge Regime to audiences in worldwide stage. This study founded that life-testimony is a sub-genre of life writing or memoirs, which helps translation and reinterpretation of traumatic experience of the author towards the act of remembrance. Clinging to the genre, the author positioned herself as the agency, the 'I' subject/narrator who 'actually' witnessed the nightmarish situations. Intertwining with the official national history of Cambodia, the author depicted the circumstances by focusing collectively on the lives of herself and her family members, and bringing their long lost voices be memorialized again. However, even though the story was written as "scriptotherapy," poetically in narration and description, literary devices were rhetorically exercised to evoke sympathy in intimate sphere and in emotionally cathartic prevailing.

Keywords: Testimony, Khmer Rouge, Memory, Trauma, Narratives,

Introduction

First They Killed my Father: a Daughter of Cambodian Remembers, a testimonial life-narrative by Loung Ung is about the translation of memory as the construction of traumatic life-experience into a testimonial (life) narrative. The author is a survivor of the killing fields of Cambodia – one of the bloodiest episodes of twentieth century. Some two million Cambodians (out of just seven million) died at the hands of the infamous Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge regime. (Ung, 2001: 2) The narrative depicts her life with her family members under political turmoil during *Khmer Rouge* regime.

Testimonial Narrative: The Life-Story with Emergence of Traumatic Memory Translation

Even though the portrayal of memory is derived from the actual experiences, this article is *not* aimed at seeking out *the validity of historical and factual accuracy* in the narrative, but rather an attempt to read and analyze critically the 'textual performativity.' Focusing on the form of writing, the narrative is elaborated in 'testimonial literature' narrated by the internal narrator, or the witness herself. But the reconstructing memory to be (re) presented to the worldwide audiences-readers, the process of writing itself is unavoidable from its politics, rhetoric, and its poetics. In short, this article is an attempt to read analytically this testimonial narrative as a

literary work on the ‘what’ were selected to be represented and ‘how’ they were constructed with textual conformity to its audiences.

To be discussed and focused specifically on Cambodian testimonial literature, as Klairung Amratisha (Amratisha, 2006: 4) argued that ‘*testimony*’ or ‘*testimonial narrative/literature*’ is a literary sub-genre of life-writing, as autobiography or memoir, in connection with traumatic experience for instance; holocaust, genocide, war, even physical or mental disabilities, rape and other traumatic experiences. In her article, she expanded that the characteristic of Cambodian Testimonial novel is the fine mixture between fact and imagination which appears in every aspect of the narrative.

By revision of experience, Felman and Laub elaborated in the similar stances that this type of the victim’s narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testified to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. (Felman and Laub, 1992: 57.)

While historical evidence to the event which constitute the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma – as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock – has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of. (Laub, 1992: 57.)

And, at the other side, while autobiographical narratives may contain “facts,” they are not factual history about a particular time, person, or event. Rather they offer “subjective truth” rather than “fact.”

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson point out by focusing on the autobiographical dimension of this type of writing about the complexity of autobiographical acts (of expressing narrative) subjectivity, history, events and other discursive components in its performativity that: when life narrators write to chronicle an event, to explore a certain time period, or to enshrine the community, they are making “history” in a sense. But they are also performing several rhetorical acts justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable future among others. The testimonial narrative evokes from experience of real-life witness, elaborate the details of situations deeply for *emotional* reactions. At issue, by emergence of telling story, autobiographical narrators at the centre of historical pictures they assemble and are interested in the meaning of a larger forces, on conditions, or events on their *own* stories. (Smith and Watson, 2001: 10-11.)

Focusing on the subject (and subjectivity) of testimonial-autobiographical storytelling, the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering. (Rose, 1993.) Emerged with the real “I” or the historical “I”, they elaborated, in terms of discourse analysis, that the narrated “I” is distinguish from the narrating “I”, the narrated “I” is the subject of the history whereas the narrating “I” is the agent of discourse. The narrated “I” is the object “I,” the protagonist of the narrative, the version of the self that the narrating “I” choose to constitute through recollections for the reader: For example, the narrator may begin her narrative with memories of childhood. She conjured herself up at the age of five or eight or ten. She sets that child version in the world that she remembers her. She may give that younger “I” a remembered and reimagined of consciousness of the existence of being five or eight or ten. She may give that child a voice through dialogue. That child is the object “I,” the memory of a younger version of the self. But the child is not doing the remembering or the narrating of the story. (Smith and Watson: 60-61.)

Telling stories needs someone to talk to, the same as a spectacle requires its audiences to watch and witness the performance. Essentially, listeners thus play indispensable roles in the process of this very testimonial storytelling. Considering in particular; it can be claimed in a way that such kind of storytelling is attached explicitly and significantly with ‘political’ purposes. What can be told who will be engaged in her life, whom and what will be excluded from it, by which conditions, then the act of remembering as well as the writing?’

Prologue

Back to the past in her memory, she retold about the living in privilege lives in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh until the age of five. Then, in April 1975, Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge army stormed into the city, forcing people including Ung’s family to flee and, eventually, to disperse. The author narrated about the experiences of struggling and surviving lives under the Khmer Rouge violent abuses. As an agency of the narrative, the author assigned herself to be the observers of the series of happenings. People died of starvation, diseases, torturing and killings including her father, her mother and some of her siblings. After surviving, the author and the rest of her siblings relocated to Vermont through sponsorship by the U.S. Conference of Bishops and Holy Family Church parish in Burlington. Loung Ung has been the spokesperson for the Campaign for a Landmine Free World (1997-2003) and the Community Educator for the Abused Women’s Advocacy Project of the Maine Coalition against Domestic Violence. (ibid.) Undoubtedly, as speaking about the “*Human rights*” at the center of ‘*World stage*,’ the book is world-widely and particularly popular. *First They Killed my Father: a Daughter of Cambodian Remembers* became a [U.S.] national bestseller and won the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association award for “Excellence in Adult Non-fiction Literature.” The memoir has been publish in eleven countries and has been translated into German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Cambodian.

History – ‘Her’Story – Their | stories

Loung Ung illustrates her life-experience co extending with national history of Cambodia but in ‘alternative’ way. Details in historical data information were explained as the sources of ‘knowledge’ or for the purposes of acknowledgement, for some exemplary topics; the political chaos, the competitive situations between political parties, the rise of political power, the international relationship between Cambodia with the West and other neighboring nations, the manifesto of CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea, known as Khmer Rouge), the policy of DK (Democratic Kampuchea) and Angkar army, the rules and regulations in the segregation camp or in the prison etc., (Becker, 1998; Chandler L., 1991; 1996; Dy, 2007; Kiernan, 1996; 1996.)

The events were ‘explained’ in form of series and orders of ‘what was happening’ back then or ‘out there’ in the past. Each event is connected with each other with condition of ‘cause and effect’ network. The historical events were explicated from one liaison to another objectively by an author who positioned himself or herself, hidden transparently, ‘outside’ the text.

The storyline of the narrative follows the chronological-order emplotment. It begins the Ung’s happy family living at the period before the Khmer Rouge, then their lives were turned downfall to turmoil by the Khmer Rouge invasion, 17 April 1975. Ung and her family had to evacuate to the country side and struggle for surviving. They are forced to move over in many villages to avoid assaults and fatality; Krang Truop, Anglungthmor, Lo Reap, and so on. They were having harsh living with starvations, dangers, fear and torturing. One-by-one, her Pa, Ma, and two of her siblings were killed Khmer Rouge soldiers. For saving their lives, Loung and the

rest of her siblings decided to separate from each other. She became a soldier novice in Angkar. And at the end, while the war between Vietnam and Cambodia was gaining more serious and spread all over. She escaped to Bat Deng and then Lamsing refugee camp. And finally, she leaved to America where she has been living since 1980.

Beginning to read her story, we are all endorsed to be the player in this game, ruled by narrative voice, and in some senses, reading is entering to follow author's surrogating from the threshold as if the writing introduced itself discursively as a revelation of intimate and personal secret from the real-life witness who had experienced the events by herself. Up to this point, the authorial narrator calls herself as "I", the narrating "I" and, at the moment, the audience-reader is assigned to play in the role of listener, the audience of her performance, in other words, the interpellated "you" in the ideological mechanism of narrative storytelling.

The narrative begins in 1975 of Cambodia when the author, back then, was five years old. And she is telling her life-story, the (constructed) world, with the perceptive eyes and narrating voice as an 'unworldly' little girl, the 'infantile omnipotence' who ask for 'justice.' Being too young and innocent to the world around 'ourselves', we start to learn step-by-step, both *directly* and *indirectly*, about the surrounding situations and about happening events as the narrator does.

The dimension of 'time' is playing important part for the act of witness in this narrative. Thought-provokingly, although the narrative is illustrating what happened in the past, but the depiction of it is mostly preceded with present tense. Loung confessed in the appendix part of her book that "*I knew I was protecting myself by writing in the past tense ... I knew I had to use the present*" (6.) So, it is clear that the author is intended to tell her story as if everything is happening or is performing 'right here and now' to the eyes of the audiences-reader.

At first, Loung talks about herself and family at their place in Phnom Penh. The picture of living with her parents and her sibling is represented in nostalgic dreams at the "present" time. Her family is Chinese-Cambodian middle class. At the moment, her family is composited of Her Father (Pa), her mother (Ma), and her siblings; Meng (elder brother, 18 years old), Khouy (elder Brother, 16 years old), Keav (elder sister, 14 years old), Kim (10 years old), Chou (elder sister, 8 years old), and Geak (younger sister, 3 years old). "*We have a big family, nine in all: Pa, Ma, three boys, and four girls.*" (7) At issue the book is affirming the truly existence all of this figures by inserting the pictures of them, before and after at the middle pages. Interestingly, the pictures of them are mostly portraits and represented in the way to depict the precious moments that they still have together, although some of them did, actually, pass away.

In a sense, the entity of memory is not solid, as shapeless and slippery as nightmare and resided within one's innermost bottom of unconsciousness. It is an amount of elusive fragmented events which has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during, and no after. (Laub, 1992: 69.) Considering this life-narrative as a literary project, Loung Ung's memory is represented with the techniques of literary writing the same way as in historiography and fictional writing, for instances; emplotment, characterization, figurative language, literary devices, allegories and so on. Notwithstanding, the testimonial narrative was constructed with and drawn upon actual events or at least the verisimilitude of such operation, but without these contriving instruments, the testimonial narrative is rarely possible to be narrated and/or perceived.

Loung narrative is following the literary linear-chronological climactic plot structure: from the beginning, exposition - point of attack - conflicts - climax -denouement, the end. The story develops along with the conflicts of historical events that participate in the main character's (the authorial narrating voice) life, from 1975-1980 in Cambodia. The story begins, as the exposition,

with the author's family living in Phnom Penh. With personifying the city, this just wakes up to be the place of happiness, (as if the opening scene in Disney fairy tales.) "*Phom Penh city wakes early to take advantage of the cool morning breeze before the sun breaks through the haze and invades the country.*" (1.) [emphasis is mine]. Then the story continues with the people living, doing their activities, in this 'happy' and 'peaceful' city. Then the protagonist, Loung Ung in 5 ages calling herself as "I", talks about life as 'privilege middle class' in her 'third-floor apartment', where she live with her Pa, Ma, and her siblings. "*Many of my friends live in crowded homes with only two or three rooms for a family. (...) We are very Modern – our bathroom is equipped with amenities such as a flushing toilet, and iron bathtub, and running water.*" (7.) They are and somehow perfect family that is 'in-between' Cambodian and Chinese cultures. "Noodle soup is a traditional breakfast for Cambodian and Chinese. "*We usually use this for a special treat, French bread with ice coffee.*" (2.), with standardization of cleanness and hygiene in every tiny details of their living. They also have very comfortable life with maid. So that they have time and money for other extra activities in life also can possess anything that they desiring for:

During the age of five, little Loung is characterized as a curious girl who has energetic motivation to explore the world. Notably, because she is young and know not much things, one statement that is reiterated all the time in the narrative is '*I don't understand.*' "*What's going on? Who are these people?*" '*I don't know. I am going to find Pa. He will know.*" (18.) By this rhetorical technique of writing makes the audience-reader got "interpellated" into the narrator's pedagogical process. Similarly to the narrator, the information that audience-reader is getting and learning through her observation, sensation, and listening to others.

While the act of narrator's act listening that links to the reader's, the story twists the story plot to be create and develop the conflicts in the story of the narrator, the protagonist's life. As a popular marker, the usual 'point of attack' of stories on these historical events of the Khmer Rouge genocide, often collides with the entering force of Khmer Rouge Army in Phnom Penh on 17th April 1975. (Amratisha, 2006: 4.) The Cambodian Communist forces seized the nation's capital of Phnom Penh. Approximately two million people were living in Cambodia's capital city at the time. Immediately upon arrival, the Khmer Rouge began the first phase of what they described as an 'evacuation.' And it begins to be threshold of development of the whole conflicts in this story. The narrator mentions about this event that:

It is an afternoon and I am playing hopscotch with my friends on the street in front of our department. Usually on a Thursday I would be in school, but for some reason Pa has kept us all home today. I stop playing when I heard the thunder of engines in the distance. Everyone suddenly stops what they are doing to watch the trucks roar into our city." (18.) [Emphasis is mine]

So it is obviously that, in order to grasp the audience-reader's attention and also to play with their sentiments, the translation of memory is constituted with selection of language. Literary devices are exquisitely supports the representations of all illustrated implement. By the reason that the narrator is the protagonist herself, progressively, the speaking voice assigns the 'roles' or characterizations through representations.

Being opposite to herself and her family, Loung portrays the image of Khmer Rouge solders in antagonistic way. Textually, Khmer Rouge soldiers are described as '*not nice people ...*' (18.), interestingly not because of act or what they are doing at the moment, but rather, their appearances: "*They are soldiers and people are cheering because the war is over,*" he [Pa]

replies quietly. (...) "They are not nice people. Look at their shoes – they wear sandals made from car tires" (18.) Not knowing or calling them as Khmer Rouge, Loung talked about the soldiers that she sees at her first sight that:

... men wearing faded black long pants and long sleeves black shirts, with red sashes cinched tightly around their foreheads, stand body. They raise their fists to the sky and cheer. Most look young and all are thin and dark skinned, like the peasant worker's at our uncle's farm, with greasy long hair flowing past their shoulders. Long, greasy, hair is unacceptable for girls in Cambodia and is a sign that one not take care of her appearance. Men with long hair are look down upon and regard with suspicion. It is believed that men who wear their hair long must have something to hide." (18.)

Moreover, the 'Khmer Rouge' or 'Angkar' soldiers were depicted as non-human living things that are cruel, brutal and blood thirsty or even the devil. "I dare not look into his eyes, for I have for I have been told that when look into their eyes you can see the **devil** himself" (32) [Emphasis is mine] Not only represented with antagonistic shadow, but the narrator's voice push them to be 'the Otherness' amongst Cambodian people. Then, this group of people who breaks the order of living in Phnom Penh are introduced that "*Keav, why the solders so mean to us?*" (...) [Keav replies] "*Shhh. They are called Khmer Rouge They are the Communist*" the reason behind such 'mean' actions with brutality was explained by focusing on "what" are these soldiers. At this sense, being as communist was represented at first as more unpleasurable group of "not nice" "dirty" and "mean" people than they should be.

The continuous information that she receive, mainly from Pa as well as others, or perceives from the situations around herself are structured like memory, they are fragmented like scattered, jigsaw pieces, somewhere that the narrator has to recollect and reconstructed along the way in different place and times, and certainly with the act of remembrance and narration. The things that she has learned are basically starting with family living, culture, history, life in the camp, extensively to the political situations that can be found in historical writing.

As Pa continues to talk, (...) Led by Prince Sihanouk, Cambodia, then the French Colony, became an independent nation in 1953. Throughout, the 1950s and 1960s, Cambodia prospered and was self-sufficient. However, many people were not happy with Prince Sihanouk's government. Many regarded the Sihanouk government as corrupted and self serving, where the poor got poorer, and the rich became richer. Various nationalistic factions sprang up to demand reforms. One of the groups, a secret communist faction – the Khmer Rouge – launched an armed struggle against the Cambodian government. (40.)

Apart from Pa's 'national' (official) history which is focusing on the war and political fighting between groups of political power, there are still some other pieces of historical situation that cause impacts on people living as well as the rumors about the killing act:

"The killings have started" Pa tells my older as we walk back down the mountain to our rendezvous area. "The Khmer Rouge are executing people perceived to be a threat against the Angkar. This new country has no law and order. City people are killed for no reason. Anyone can be viewed as threat to the Angkar – former civil servants, monks, doctors, nurses, artists, teachers, students – even people who wear glasses, as soldiers view this as a sign of intelligence. Anyone the Khmer Rouge believes has the power to lead the rebellion will be killed (...)" (54.)

At the temples in this area, Khouy says the soldiers mutilated its animal guards, and either knocked or shot off the stone heads of gods, riddling the sacred bodies with bullets. After they destroyed the temples, the soldiers roamed the country searching for monks and forced them to convert to the Angkar. Those monks who refused were murdered or made to work in minefields. To escape examination, many monks grew their hair and went into hiding in the jungle. Others killed themselves in mass suicides. Although these monks maintained and took care of the temples, now they are left to the jungle once again. I wonder where the gods go now that their homes have been destroyed (68.)

Up to this point, the narrator brings the act of witnessing compatible with the act of criticizing. Though the inner voice of young girls, she keeps complaining and lamenting about the justice onto these 'barbaric' behaviors that cause sufferings on her, her family, and other people. *"I remember when we first arrived at Ro Leap, the chief told us the Angkar would take care of us and would provide us with everything we need. I guess the Angkar doesn't understand that we need to eat."* (86.) Even though, the inquiry is simply stated, but in this situation there, the simple question becomes cynically powerful.

Many saying that Pol Pot is the leader of the Angkar but still no one knows who he is. They whisper that he is a soldier, that he is brilliant, and that he is the father of the country. They also say he is fat. (...) They say he has round face, full lips, and kind eyes. I wonder if his kind eyes can see us starving? (88.)

As being set as 'hyper-curious' narrator from the starts, even at the age of five, through Loung's childish eyes on what she has learned and heard about the policy or the manifesto of , the analytical personality of narrated 'I' becomes interfering. As a discursive weapon, she criticizes, with her interrogations, on the ironies of the Khmer Rouge principles and regulations, in practical, that they have attached their faith to.

Though the Angkar says we are all equal in Democratic Kampuchea, we are not. We live and are treated like slaves. In our garden, the Angkar provides us the seeds and we may plant anything we choose, but everything we grow belongs not to us but to community. The base people eat the berries and vegetables from the community gardens, but the new people are punished if they do. (66.)

But, above all, there is no experience that is as 'clear' and 'private' as the experience that subsume with sensory perception. These types of information are constructed with the physical and mental reaction. Up to this sense, the narrative, which transcribing with act of remembrance, plays materially with sensorial perception. At this sense, memory is evoked by the senses – smell, taste, touch, sound – and encoded in objects or events with particular meaning for narrator. (Smith & Watson: 21.)

Under the summer sun, the stench of death is so strong in the village, I cover my nose and mouth with my hands and breathe only the air that filtered through my fingers. There are so many dead people here. The neighbors are too weak to bury all the corpses. Often the bodies are left in the hot sun, until the smell permeates the surrounding air, causing everyone passing by to pinch their noses. The flies come buzzing around the corpses lay million of eggs on the bodies. When the bodies are finally buried, they are nothing more than large nests of maggots. (85.)

This aspect of descriptions is psychologically merged with imaginative reactions. To generate memory, the narrative demonstrates the situation, imbued the sense-awakening, as if it is happening to the audience-reader. Up to this discursive practice, the audience-readers are involved into the act of 'witnessing' as if it also happens to them. They may feel, sense, or react similarly to the narrator does. Yet, this authoritative experiencing 'materiality' is brought into play with description on the undesirable experiences as well as the acts of violence and/or torturing that has been executed with herself and her family.

Not only speaking for her family, but also for victims that she has found during living at the camp under the Khmer Rouge non-human atrocities. More focusing on women's lives then, she depicts about the living of women that they had to work hard equivalent to men. But in some cases, they need to take responsibilities in other chores. Besides from her Ma and Keav deaths, some are extremely pity to be assigned some 'special' chores, the sexual harassment. Under the order of Angkar, lots of girls are abducted from her family, or are assigned to 'harvest corn for the organization's special feast.' Importantly, she talks about a pretty adolescent girl, at her elder sister Keav's age, named Davi who has undergone the compulsory 'mission' from the Angkar:

"No! Don't argue with us. We need her and she must perform her duty for the Angkar! She will return in the morning." (...) True to their words, the soldiers returned Davi to her parents the next morning. But the Davi returned was not the same one they took away. Davi stood before her parents in front of their hut, hair disheveled, face swollen, shoulders slumped, arm hanging like dead weights. She could not meet the gaze of her parents. (...) A few days after her abduction, the bruises on her face turned deep purple before they gradually disappeared. The scabs on her arms dried up and became little scars, barely visible. But to Davi, they would always be there. (...) The soldiers do not stop with Davi, They come many more nights and take many other girls. Some of the girls are returned in the morning but many are not. Other times, the soldiers come back with the girl and tell her parents they have married. It is her duty, they say, to marry soldiers and bear sons for the Angkar. Many girls choose to escape from their abductors by committing suicides. (70-72.)

Be considered as an unspeakable anathema, sometimes we recognize that 'rape' is serious and dreadful experiences, especially when it happens to people we know, even people in our own families. Rape is then deemed unspeakable, in respect of the assaulted. And even they are forced to be married, as mentioned above; even a daughter is not desirable for the Angkar. After her indisputable assignment, Davi is mentioned as 'dead' or 'invisible' walk body.

At issues, the narrative of Loung is not limited only in the empirical experience but it expands to imaginative experiences as well. That is to say her story becomes, an 'imagined community' the sites of/and for intersecting voices which reechoing 'unspeakable' traumatic events as if she is an amanuensis of her parents and her siblings who were already dead with silence. She says as narrator that her father used to talk about her special ability of witnessing: "*My thought turns to Pa, and I remember how he told me I have extrasensory perception.*" (159.)

To make the dead of Pa becomes significant either in the plot or in the narrator's memory; the illustration of him with such dramatizing and emotional dimension is brought into the story. By focusing on this character, it seems that Loung places priority onto this figure above all others. As he has, *a priori*, mentioned in the title of the book as '*First They Killed my Father: a Daughter of Cambodian Remembers*,' even though her elder sister passed away before him.

Significantly, Pa was established as good man, the best qualifications in all ever, and he is everything in the Loung's life "*Pa is everything a good father could be, kind, gentle, and loving.*" (5.) He is Loung's loved idol. "*I only hope that someday I can be half as smart as he is.*" (18.) He is a 'self-made man' who earning his life and family honestly and make them living with great qualities of lives. Even in crisis under Khmer Rouge, he is still a great household leader who looks after everyone, protects them with all of his 'brilliant' knowledge and well-rounded skills. "Pa has many skills and can do everything the chief ask for him. He is skilled carpenter, builder, and farmer. Pa is always quiet and enthusiastic about the work – a trait which proof that he is an uncorrupted man." (66.)

Here, the narrator describes about the day that her Pa is called out from their countryside shelter by Khmer Rouge soldiers. Back then, the fathers of lots of families from the capital is called out and 'disappeared' with no sign of getting back. Some of her intuitive thoughts implicit that it will not return. Because of this distinguish qualification, as character; the narrator can deploy this 'assign' capability of clairvoyance to witness the slaughtering event of some important figures to present textual 'performativity' of the action of killing before the eyes of the audience-reader:

Pa told me once that the really old monks could leave their bodies and travel the world as spirits. In my mind, my spirit leaves my body and flies and fly around that country, look for Pa. (...)

A soldier leads another man to the edge of the hole – my heart howls with agony. "It's Pa! No!" The soldier pushes Pa on shoulders, making him kneel like the others. Tears stream out of my eyes as I whisper thanks to the gods that the soldier has blindfolded Pa. He is spared from having to see the executions of many others. "Don't cry Pa. I know you are afraid," I want to tell him. I feel his body tense up, hear his heart race, see tears flowing out from under the blindfold. Pa fights the urge to scream as he hear the sound of hammer crack the skull next to him, smashing into it. The body falls on top of the others with a thump. The other fathers around Pa cry and beg for mercy but no avail. One by one, each man is silenced by hammer. Pa prays silently for the gods to take care of us. He focuses his mind on us, bringing up our face one by one. He wants our faces to be the last things he sees as he leaves the earth.

(...) My eyes dare not blink as the soldier raise the hammer above his head. "Pa" I whispers, "I have to let you go now. I cannot be here and live." Tears wash across my body as I fly away, leaving Pa there by himself. (196.) [italized by the author]

The point is *not* focusing on how 'factual or fictional' is this event? But rather, the description above is quite similar to 'crime re-enact simulation' in investigation process. It is constructed for the most possible the murdering action could be. In particular, as it can be clearly noticed, the illustration of killing action performed in this scene is insightfully described. Indeed, this 'imaginative clairvoyance' has the functions importantly, here, in this narrative. And it is emphasizing intimately onto the fates of her 'beloved' people, Pa, Ma, and her siblings, who never be appeared in official history.

Considering this specific description of extrasensory, as spoken by and for the author herself, it has been uttered as 'requiem' within her personal memory, functioning like funeral,

the postmortem commemoration to the lost, dead people. Hence, as scriptotherapy, the construction of 'revitalizing' voices of her passed way parents and siblings helps demystification, and healing of her own traumatic inquiries towards the death of them. The description of fates or violence onto the victims is, comprehensibly, enacted with pathos affection. It is sentimentally touching because it is happening with 'our beloved.' Furthermore, such utterance reminds about Martha Nussbaum's concepts of "Poetic justice," she argues how (literary) devices, either in literary or other sorts of text, are able to contribute to 'just' in some levels. (Nussbaum, 1995.) Up to this stage, testimonial narrative brought emotions into play an important role in this dramatic and 'cathartic' spectacle. The author does not speak merely for herself but for her family as well as her 'compatriots' who have been victimized under the events, on the world-stage Human right. Nonetheless, they are not excluded anymore from the past. And for the author, they are still living, presence in absence somewhere, within the memory and her consciousness.

Epilogue: The Flight to Freedom

As the author names her life testimony as "*a daughter of Cambodia remembers*," it is obvious that Loung Ung identified, with legitimacy, herself as one of a Cambodian. Then notwithstanding, one main the politics of telling her story is proceeded as commemorations to them. Acknowledgeable, this book was written in English language, printed in America and supported by domestic and international organization. But, thought provokingly, some questions that are raised up with the 'emergence' of this testimonial writing is talking to and talking about. What is hidden underneath the route that her family was evacuating back then?

Literarily, as Loung states that she moves to settle down in America, the land of freedom (myth) after the years that she has lost her beloved Pa, her 'everything'. "*To hope is to grieve his absence and acknowledge the emptiness in my soul without him.*" (108.) the point of view and narrator itself is revealed the desire towards American-ness underneath with some sorts of fascination.

The doubt on the infix of this American man might be clearer by investigation somewhere in the narrative. By reaching back for 5 pages before she met the 'Barang', it is founded out that she had a conversation with Pa about the political situations in Cambodia and her Pa explicated with juxtapositions of them between in America and in Cambodia that:

"In many countries, it's not that way," he [Pa] says. In a country called America it is not way."

"Where is America?"

"It's a place far, far away from here, across many oceans."

"And in America, Pa, you would not be forced to join the army?"

"No, there two political parties run the country. One side is called the Democrats and the other the Republicans. During their fights, whichever side wins, the other side has to look for different jobs. For example, if the Democrats win, the Republicans lose their jobs and often have to go elsewhere to find new jobs. It is not this way in Cambodia now. If the Republicans lost their fights in Cambodia, they would all have to become Democrats or risk punishment." (12.)

And while she has been moving to America, she says:

“In my new country, I immersed myself in American Culture during the day, but at night the war haunted me with nightmares. (...) I’d hoped being Americanized could erase my memories of the war.” (236.)

As we can see, critically here, that while claiming herself as a daughter’s Cambodian remembers she has self-identified intentionally with American-ness and it, in these selfhood disguises, makes her feel relived with comfort, peace and/or even emancipates herself from haunting nightmarish days. And at the same time, the narrative immediately pushed Cambodian-ness to be the otherness ‘under Western [ized] eyes.’ By comparing with ‘Americane-ness’ Cambodia was represented discursively as the nation of entrapment of ‘undeveloped,’ ‘backward,’ ‘vulgar,’ ‘aggressive,’ yet ‘terrified.’

In a sense, this can be interpreted that America becomes, with personification, her new ‘father’ which embraces her with new life, and nurtured herself to be an outstanding woman who, individually choose determinedly to speak out her life on the stage to the worldwide audiences’

Conclusion

First Day Killed my Father: A Daughter of Cambodian Remember, a testimonial life-experience narrative written by Loung Ung, was launched in the era which the genre is largely consumed in global market. The book is the result of translation of memory from real-life witnessing who survived from the epoch that Cambodia had been under the controlled of Khmer Rouge regime. Notwithstanding, the narrative is aimed at speaking out the author’s voice to reveal about the situations of struggling lives of people, through her point of view, in/to public stage of Human Rights concerns.

Being alternatively from the (general) national history, the fate of victimized people was illustrated in the author’s life-narrative, focusing on author herself, her family, her relatives, and the others that she met, talked to, and/or confronted during that time, who had been one monopolized, *en mass*, as a group of victims without specificity. In this light, the author’s narrative functions as intersubjective community that preserves their voices from the shadow of atrocity in history.

With expectation that her repressed silent yet traumatic experiences would be heard, the relationship of narration or communicative components: *the subjectivity, the memory, the act of remembrance, the narrator, the narrative/the story, the medium, and the audiences* are coherently and reciprocally interwoven altogether, *unavoidably*, inseparable with politics, rhetoric and poetics in telling stories.

Furthermore, looking through the glasses of liberalist middle class ideology and being written in America. This testimonial life-narrative book is aimed at revealing this story to worldwide audiences-readers based on the demands, popularities and expectations in the ‘market’ of this genre

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