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## Justice More Than A Verdict

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The landmark closure of the Khmer Rouge tribunal's first case has drawn worldwide cheer and criticism, but for two journalists whose careers have been impacted by the crimes of S-21 jailer Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, justice and the healing of a nation takes many forms.

Irish journalist Nic Dunlop was only 30 when he was scrambling through the jungles of a Cambodia still deeply scarred by decades of conflict in 1999.

"It was an accidental encounter," Dunlop told the Post of his discovery of the notorious chief of the Khmer Rouge's brutal interrogation facility.

"Yes, I was carrying his photo and asked of his whereabouts etc, but I never really expected to come face to face with him."

Dunlop described this chance encounter as bizarre in *The Lost Executioner*, his memoirs of his 1999 trip to Cambodia, and recalls how Duch initially approached him in the jungles of Samlaut.

Duch was subsequently detained that year by the Cambodian Military Court before being arrested and sent to pre-trial detention at the Khmer Rouge tribunal.

"I think it is important for ordinary people to see someone take a degree of responsibility for Khmer Rouge crimes," Dunlop said by email yesterday from his base in Bangkok.

"Success in this instance was a foretold conclusion," Dunlop said of the outcome of Duch's trial.

"Most of the evidence was already in the public domain ... and there was an accused who admitted his crimes.

"It raises the question that, apart from addressing these crimes, what is the purpose of these trials?"

"With so much controversy surrounding the ECCC the increase in the sentence was perhaps a response to give a more positive sheen to a business that appears mired in accusations of corruption, lack of transparency, expense, etc," he said.

“There are some amazing people working on issues of conflict resolution and justice who hardly ever get credit,” Dunlop said.

“And the work of several filmmakers . . . have been incredibly important in reaching people and opening debate about crime and punishment and confronting the past.

“Which goes to show that trials are not the only component to addressing the past. Justice takes many different forms.”

American journalist Elizabeth Becker, one of only a handful of journalists invited into Democratic Kampuchea for a two-week tour in 1978, shares a similar sentiment that justice, and the healing of Cambodia, is realised through increased public debate and discussion about Cambodia’s darkest hours.

“Coming back and forth as I have since 1972, you just kept waiting for someone to say crimes were committed,” Becker told the Post yesterday.

“Even during the Vietnamese occupation period and then when UNTAC came, no one would say it, no one would say what people went through.”

Becker is in Phnom Penh for the opening of an exhibition at the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Centre of materials from her 1978 study tour, which she described as “frightening”.

“We were under house arrest the whole time. We only saw what they wanted us to see – the whole thing was a set-up.

“But you can talk about it now,” Becker said.

“It is an atmosphere, a turning the corner – an opening up, and I think the tribunal has a big part of that.

“No matter what you think of the tribunal, just the simple fact that it has been recognised that crimes were committed [is significant].”

Becker, too, was personally touched by Duch’s crimes when she embarked on a project to find the story of someone “who could help people understand what it was like to be a Cambodian.”

Becker visited Tuol Sleng and on the photo boards there found the picture of a young woman whom she thought was someone she “might have known” if she had been living in Cambodia.

“She was joyful, she was pretty and she went through the tragedy,” Becker said of Huot Bophana, first introduced to readers in her seminal *When the War Was Over* and later the subject of her 2010 novella *Bophana*.

“Duch personally supervised her torture, and she was ultimately killed.

“If you want to understand the regime, come to Tuol Sleng,” Becker said.

“If anything symbolises that regime, it is Tuol Sleng.”

Becker, who attended court during the recent questioning of Documentation Center of Cambodia director Youk Chhang, is herself due to take the stand and give testimony in Case 002.

Becker’s exhibition at the Bophana Centre, called A Reporter’s Dangerous Guided Tour Through Democratic Kampuchea, includes a variety of photos as well as recordings of interviews with Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith.

“Any Cambodian can come in off the street, press a button on a computer and listen to Pol Pot’s voice,” Becker said.

“I don’t want mystery around these guys. I want total, complete transparency and public access.”