

The New York Times

‘Missing arms, legs, fathers and mothers’

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December 1, 2011

The scars of Cambodia’s wars and genocide are more than psychic: this little nation in the heart of Southeast Asia is one of the most densely mined places on earth. And like those mines, the legacy of Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge exacts a constant — and hidden — toll, leaving the country mostly poor, politically repressive, corrupt and violent.

It was only last month that a trial of the three surviving Khmer Rouge leaders got under way, reviving buried memories for many traumatized Cambodians.

In her meditation on the scars of war in Cambodia, “War Remnants of the Khmer Rouge” (Umbrage Books, October 2011), the photographer Maureen Lambray has chosen to emphasize portraits of badly maimed victims of the land mines that were mostly laid during the wars that preceded and followed the Khmer Rouge rule. The quiet mood of her carefully composed and lit portraits of land-mine victims, as they stare intently into the camera, belies the horror of their mutilation.

“I began documenting the people and haunted sites,” she wrote in the book’s preface. “It seems half the population are still missing arms, legs, fathers and mothers.”

Over the last three decades, land mines have caused more than 63,900 deaths and injuries, Helen Clark, the development chief of the United Nations, said at a major international conference on land mines now under way in Phnom Penh.

Apart from these broken bodies, Ms. Lambray’s camera also captures the desolation of ruined buildings and forbidding forests in a land populated by ghosts. In a more direct reference to Pol Pot’s atrocities, she shows an empty corridor at Tuol Sleg Prison, where thousands of people were tortured and sent to a killing field, enclosed by barbed wire to prevent them from jumping to their deaths.

Like her other work, Ms. Lambray’s photographs combine journalistic coverage — sometimes at personal risk — with artistic composition.

In 1979, Yassir Arafat invited her to Beirut for an in-depth look at the Palestine Liberation Organization. The following year, she covered the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, disguising herself at one point as an Afghan man. And in 1994, she was caught up in the Zapatista uprising in Mexico during a project to document obscure Indian tribes.

Her first encounter with Cambodia came in 1979 when she chronicled the lives of refugees in camps along the Thai border where hundreds of thousands of people had fled

as the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed. She returned to Cambodia in 2003 and said she was stunned to see how little the country had recovered.

“The government has begun spirited away the maimed Cambodians as more tourists flock to their country,” she wrote in her preface. “We need images as reminders of how quickly genocide can happen, and the past become the present.”