



CHANGING THE STORY

Arts, Education and Reconciliation in Cambodia: Sociological Perspectives

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This is an Accepted Manuscript version of a book chapter published by Routledge/CRC Press in *Participatory Arts in International Development* (edited by Paul Cooke & Inés Soria-Donlan) on 29 August 2019. The final version of the chapter is available online: <https://www.crcpress.com/Participatory-Arts-in-International-Development/Cooke-Soria-Donlan/p/book/9780367024970>

Chapter Eight

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Introduction

Nearly forty years after the fall of Democratic Kampuchea 'Khmer Rouge' regime (1975-1979), efforts to redress and reckon with Cambodia's experiences of genocide and atrocity are ongoing. In three years, eight months and twenty days, some 1.6 million died of hunger, disease or were executed as the Khmer Rouge sought to engineer a classless and ethnically purified society: money and private property were abolished, religion prohibited, and those associated with the 'bourgeois' former regime — including civil servants, teachers, and artists — were brutally purged (Kiernan 2001). This chapter explores the use of arts within attempts to redress and remember experiences of the regime, with a particular focus on the varying participatory and educational methods employed therein. We focus on post-genocide Cambodia as an instructive and unique case, where a history of state sponsored commemorative and memorial activity that has made claim over the experience of the Khmer Rouge regime constrains and obliges the forms of artistic practice at work today. In doing so, we adopt a sociological lens that helps us to see the relationships between different forms of political, legal, pedagogical, and aesthetic interventions, and to better historicize the changing landscape of Cambodian arts practice that is mobilised in the name of redressing experiences of the Khmer Rouge. We

deliberately adopt a broad understanding and definition of participation. We seek to show, firstly, how arts-led efforts to remember the Khmer Rouge have shifted from homogenising representations of a flattened category of ‘national’ Cambodian victimhood, to more complex representations of differentiated victims that accommodate experiences specific to gender and ethnic constituency. Secondly, while participatory and locally-driven arts have been key to the successes visible in this transition, we stress that such projects are shaped by a wider political landscape, as well as a set of relationships and histories that pose important questions for both the experiences of suffering and the *forms* of participation these processes entail. We see, for example, differing levels and forms of participation in arts initiatives: from coercive commemoration demanded by state authorities, to the re-articulation of victims’ stories mediated by influential civil society and external actors; to recent initiatives more faithful to the principles of devolvement and ownership at the heart of participatory approaches. The first section of the chapter reviews state sponsored arts-based initiatives deployed through the 1980s that sought recourse to coercive forms of ‘participation’ in the name of ‘national reconciliation’. The second section of the chapter proceeds to consider the changing landscape of participatory arts in Cambodia today, especially as they emerge in relationships that converge with, and diverge from, high profile political and legal transitional-justice interventions, including, as we shall discuss below, ongoing prosecutions at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia.

The People’s Republic of Kampuchea 1979-1989: Arts, Memory and Authoritarianism

Vietnamese and Cambodian rebel forces liberated Phnom Penh from the Khmer Rouge in January 1979, establishing the 'People's Republic of Kampuchea' (PRK). The new government faced the challenge of near complete economic and social reconstruction in the aftermath of Khmer Rouge rule. The Khmer Rouge had disassembled the basic apparatus of the state and the new government faced significant challenges, including widespread food shortages, the prospect of a protracted civil war with a coalition of Khmer Rouge and other anti-Vietnamese factions, and international isolation within the bifurcated political landscape of the Cold War. Cambodian survivors — who were relieved to see the end of Khmer Rouge rule but wary of the newly occupying Vietnamese forces — began to search for missing relatives. In this context, the new PRK government launched a range of initiatives — with varying forms of participatory art at work — intended to enhance domestic and international legitimacy, promoting themselves as 'saviours' from the 'genocidal' Khmer Rouge. These initiatives were central to the construction of both a narrative and iconography of the Cambodian genocide that remains influential today, continuing to support state sponsored claims for 'national reconciliation' some forty years after Khmer Rouge rule (Manning 2017). We track this story to illustrate key points of departure informing the contemporary landscape of participatory arts as they respond to questions of redress and memory, as well as to highlight ongoing constraints on arts-based interventions today as they engage an inescapably politicised period of Cambodian history.

Memorialisation and museum conservation were key techniques in the PRK's attempts to establish its legitimacy. After the Khmer Rouge were ousted in 1979, PRK forces quickly discovered the Tuol Sleng 'S-21' torture and interrogation site

built within a former high school in southern Phnom Penh, at which some 14,000 people perished (Chandler 1999). The site was discovered as it had been abandoned: blood stained the floors of cells; corpses remained shackled to beds; and documents containing forced confessions littered the site. The PRK quickly exhibited the site for international journalists and delegates as proof of the genocide, converting it into a museum in 1980, and displaying the 'primary artefacts' of genocide (Hughes 2003a; Williams 2004), such as torture instruments, shackles, and cages. The site also played a key evidential role in a 'People's Revolutionary Tribunal' held in 1979 that charged the 'Pol Pot and Ieng Sary clique' with genocide in *absentia*. One survivor of S-21, Vann Nath, had been an artist prior to the Khmer Rouge regime. Vann Nath was spared at S-21 specifically on the basis of his artistic talent, and was enlisted by the Khmer Rouge to paint portraits and sculpt busts of Pol Pot. After the regime, Vann Nath was tasked with painting oil canvas depictions of the violence he had witnessed at S-21, which were added to displays at the museum. Vann Nath also assisted tours of domestic and international visitors at the site, offering testimony about his experiences under the regime there. In other words, Vann Nath's artistic abilities were reenlisted in the service of a state sponsored reading of genocide, performed *in situ* to his experiences of atrocity.

Tuol Sleng embodies the fraught relationship between arts, heritage sites, commemoration and politics. The core representational messages at work at the Tuol Sleng Museum, from its initial curation to present uses, have anchored a set of claims about responsibility for the Cambodian genocide. These messages locate responsibility for the genocide at the hands of the Khmer Rouge leadership — or the Pol Pot and Ieng Sary clique — while largely obfuscating and exculpating the role of

lower-level perpetrators, a core plank of the PRK's reconciliatory initiatives through the 1980s and 1990s. Conversely, the PRK narrative coalesced around the image of 'national' victimhood as a generalised and flattened category. This economy of blame and victimhood was central to key political and legal initiatives, such as the 1979 People's Revolutionary Tribunal or the state sponsored amnesty programmes for lower level Khmer Rouge, but also the aesthetic representation of the genocide throughout the PRK era and since. Tuol Sleng Museum was updated to include 'primary' portrait photographs of those victims at the site — many of whom were former Khmer Rouge — developed from the archived film of the regime itself. These portraits were displayed anonymously, without reference to age, gender, or even context or cause of arrest and execution, and notably, at a later exhibition in 1997 at New York's Museum of Modern Art, a selection of the portrait photographs attracted fierce criticism for appropriating copyright and ownership of the experiences of anonymous victimhood (Hughes 2003b). The PRK initiated similar memorialisation drives across the country in 1983, instructing local authorities to disinter, chemically treat and display mass human remains anonymously in large wooden cases at 81 mass grave sites nationwide. With the gradual liberalisation of religion in the late 1980s, these remains were often removed from boxes and re-displayed inside Buddhist *stupas* within temple compounds. South of Phnom Penh, at the Cheoung Ek 'killing fields' mass grave site, human skulls were collected for display, before transfer to a large, ornate *stupa* in 1988. The site is now Cambodia's principal memorial to its experience of the Khmer Rouge and has become constitutive of the iconography of both Cambodian as well as international experiences of genocide (Hughes 2005).

Tuol Sleng, Cheoung Ek, and provincial mass grave sites became the focus of a third commemorative activity deployed by the PRK implicating 'participatory' approaches, albeit again of a 'top-down' or state sponsored form. Directed and organised by provincial and local authorities on behalf of the PRK government, 'Tivea Chang Khmang' or the 'Day of Anger' was observed on 20 May annually at mass grave and memorial sites, and sites of forced labour, killing and torture throughout the 1980s (Hughes 2000). Local authorities instructed local schools, hospitals and provincial centres to produce placards and banners denouncing the crimes of the 'genocidal' Pol Pot regime. As Buddhism was reintroduced in the late 1980s, the Day of Anger ceremonies began to incorporate religion rites, such as prayer, wreath laying, and religious offerings to the dead (Hughes 2000, p.40). Survivors were invited to testify about their experiences and express their anger toward the Khmer Rouge, enmeshing deeply personal stories within the public performance of a unified, state sponsored narration of the need to remain vigilant to prevent the return of the regime. Notably, Hughes (2000) and Ledgerwood (1997) observe in respect to the curation of Tuol Sleng Museum and 20 May commemorations that the representations of Khmer Rouge violence resonated with the experiences of many survivors, despite the highly politicised, propagandist, and ultimately coercive forms of participation at work.

Two important observations are apparent at this juncture. Firstly, the Cambodian state deployed varying forms of arts-led intervention, sometimes involving 'participatory' forms that left small margin for refusal or dissent in their observance at the time. To this extent, we can see how the PRK government used arts — and participatory methods — within an assemblage of state-building initiatives that were

monological and, in some respects, authoritarian. At the same time, we can recognise that the PRK's preferred narrative of the Khmer Rouge years, which emphasised vigilance against the return of the regime and blame for the Khmer Rouge leadership, at least rang true for many survivors. Secondly, across the PRK's state-building initiatives, we can see multiple relationships between legal, political, and arts-led responses to atrocities. For example, Vann Nath's paintings of Khmer Rouge violence became political artefacts that were deployed to legitimate a state narrative of blame, and in turn served as forms of evidence prefiguring contemporary transitional justice interventions. The Tuol Sleng Museum and Cheong Ek mass grave sites have deeply political histories. They have been employed as sites rich in forensic evidence of past crimes, and yet today operate as major tourist attractions. Similarly, as we can see from the controversy created around the curation of the portrait photos of those interred and murdered at S-21, artefacts of the dead and the way they have been 'consumed', politically, legally and aesthetically, along with the ability of art to work and travel with different meanings for different groups raises, thorny questions about ownership that are still present in the contemporary landscape of arts interventions in Cambodia.

The Landscape of Contemporary Arts, Education and Transitional Justice

The contemporary landscape of participatory arts — as it is deployed to engage Cambodia's difficult heritage — is both constrained and enabled by the history of the state-sponsored 'top-down' story of national reconciliation. On the one hand, the 'top down' narrative of Cambodia's genocide is still present, reproduced and rearticulated particularly by the prosecutions of former Khmer Rouge leaders at the UN-sponsored Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). The ECCC is the

'centrepiece' of Cambodia's transitional justice efforts and therefore has both immediate and indirect consequences for the kinds of arts-based interventions at play in Cambodia. On the other, a longstanding failure to properly acknowledge, or engage with, more complex and granular histories and experiences of the Khmer Rouge — a problem directly ensuing from the state-sponsored narrative of national reconciliation — has left clear and fruitful terrain for arts-based approaches to apprehend questions of memory and reconciliation. In particular, the challenges of fostering intergenerational dialogue, the acknowledgement of particular harms — such as gender-based violence and the experiences of ethnic minorities — have been broached as important areas of reconciliatory practice. Moreover the role of 'lower-level' Khmer Rouge, who still live alongside or within communities that probably suffered at their hands — but are themselves often also 'complex victims' who may have both perpetrated and suffered violence (Bernath 2015; Bouris 2007) — is pronounced as a key site of reconciliation. In this context, initiatives in the arts, including participatory arts, have grown over the past decades as the limits of existing and conventional political and legal attempts to redress and acknowledge Cambodia's genocide have become starker. At the same time, as we will show, we must understand these initiatives in their direct and indirect relationships to both the history of national reconciliation and the establishment of the ECCC as anchoring points for a wider discursive terrain that permits, enables and constrains arts-based approaches to memory, reconciliation and redress.

Prefiguring the ECCC

In the years prior to the establishment of the ECCC in 2006, NGOs mobilised a range of arts-based approaches in anticipation of the work of the court, particularly

as a means of ‘translating’ and communicating legal knowledge to a public audience. The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), an organisation central to efforts to document the crimes of the Khmer Rouge since its establishment in 1995, developed a range of arts-led participatory outreach approaches, based on public consultations, that showed Cambodian audiences preferred receiving information about the ECCC through arts media, including storytelling, film and theatre. In 2007, DC-Cam oversaw the writing and production of a one-act 30 minute play, *Searching for the Truth*, performed by student volunteers from the Royal University of Phnom Penh’s Fine Arts School. *Searching for the Truth* was intended to disseminate information about the ECCC and convey basic legal principles to Cambodians living in rural areas. It also introduced larger themes, such as the general principles of fair trials, reconciliation, and discussion of the societal implications of the Tribunal, before encouraging dialogue and question-and-answer sessions after the performances. In other words, it suggested that the arts could be harnessed as an effective, if instrumental, medium for the translation of other disciplinary claims over experiences of atrocity.

Arts-led interventions in the years prior to the establishment of the ECCC had also started to engage thorny outstanding questions around explanations of violence under the Khmer Rouge that the prevailing state sponsored narrative had obfuscated. In other words, arts could be seen to respond to a wider public appetite to better understand the regime prior to the establishment of the court. The director Rithy Pan, himself a survivor of the regime, produced a corpus of critically acclaimed films exploring questions of perpetration and the legacies of the Khmer Rouge, several of which included challenging forms of subject participation. In *Bophana: A*

Cambodian Tragedy (1996), Rithy Pan drew on the first-hand forced confessions of victims interred under the regime at S-21 to weave the narrative of a couple, Ly Sitha and Hout Bophana, and their experiences under the Khmer Rouge. Here, Rithy Panh can be seen to deploy the primary artefacts of atrocity to narrate the story of those who can no longer speak. Sitha had joined the revolution prior to the Khmer Rouge accession to power, separating the pair, only to be reunited with Bophana following the mass evacuations that marked the early days of the regime. The couple's love letters would become incriminating evidence during internal purges and both Sitha and Bophana would be tortured and executed at S-21. In *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), Rithy Pan adopted a different tack, reuniting two survivors of S-21, Vann Nath and Chum Mey, with former Khmer Rouge guards at the site in a documentary format. Vann Nath and Chum Mey probe the guards for their reflections and memories of their time at S-21, querying the guards' self-identification as 'victims' who acted under duress. The film proceeds to darken, as the guards begin to re-enact the routine schedules and duties of their work at S-21, the coercive nature of the confessions they would elicit, escalating to in situ testimony of killing at the Cheoung Ek mass grave site. At one point, Chum Mey asks Vann Nath about his views on 'reconciliation' and the need to 'bury the resentment'. Vann Nath's reply is cutting: 'Until now has anyone said this past action was wrong? [...] Has anyone begged for forgiveness? Have you heard that from the lips of senior leaders or the underlings? [...] They don't even say it was wrong!' *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* — employing a participatory approach to the extent it was led by the questions of S-21 victims themselves — offers both a glimpse of what dialogue between victim and perpetrator might offer, but also the productive possibilities of a politics of 'refusal', where victims are afforded the space and agency to demand

more than prevailing 'top down' political variants of reconciliation and foreclosure dictate.

Challenges of Participatory Approaches

Arts-led attempts to represent and engage experiences of the Khmer Rouge regime can therefore be seen to both prefigure the work of the ECCC — complementing discourses of national reconciliation that pivot on the denunciation of the Khmer Rouge leadership and the exculpation of lower-level perpetrators — as well as working at their limits to challenge them. After the ECCC was established and commenced work in 2006, the limitations of a narrowly judicial response to the experience of the Khmer Rouge years became quickly apparent: only a handful of leaders would be tried for their roles overseeing a limited number of crime sites and wider contextual questions about why violence was perpetrated, the culpability of lower level perpetrators, and the challenges of reconciling communities would remain outstanding. NGOs would quickly begin to address these challenges, often utilising arts-led and participatory-arts approaches in doing so. At the same time, such initiatives remained inescapably within the orbit of the ECCC, often justified as exercises that could generate greater public interest in the court proceedings.

One example of NGO sponsored participatory arts initiatives aiming to address questions of memory, trauma, reconciliation, and ECCC awareness, is seen in the production *Breaking the Silence*, that debuted in Phnom Penh in 2009. The play was conceived by the director Annemarie Prins and DC-Cam's Youk Chhang. DC-Cam embarked on the project with the understanding that survivors can find it difficult to talk about the past. In this sense, the performance was intended not only to

represent and acknowledge a set of difficult experiences but also the challenges of reconciliation in the present, especially in regard to survivors' relationships with lower level Khmer Rouge that might still live in the communities that they harmed. For Prins, art can be mobilized to engage traumatic pasts, to instigate more open 'grassroots' dialogue as part of the process of reconciliation in Cambodia. With this in mind, the play employed a participatory method — drawing on real life stories of former Khmer Rouge members and victims who had taken part in interviews conducted by DC-Cam — to inform seven vignettes that structure the play, such as a mother's ostracism of a son suspected of Khmer Rouge membership, or a gesture of contrition from a cadre for complicity in the death of a relative. After its debut in Phnom Penh, *Breaking the Silence* was recorded for broadcast on national TV, and quickly commissioned for a national tour in 2010 and 2011 to engage a wider audience across Cambodia's provincial centres, often alongside or as part of ECCC outreach initiatives. As well as its extensive reach, the play generated positive feedback because it was thought to resonate with both survivors' and former Khmer Rouge experiences, offering a cue and platform for discussion and dialogue.

Participatory arts approaches have become increasingly attractive to NGOs as a means to encourage engagement with experiences of the regime beyond the dominant categories and frameworks of memory anchored at the ECCC, which tend to be narrowly juridical or medically framed through an abstracted language of trauma that is less sensitive to the context and detail of people's experiences (Pugliese 2015). In late 2008, the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO), Kdei Karuna (KDK), the Khmer Institute for Democracy (KID) and an international film team led by Ella Pugliese initiated a collaborative participatory video project in a

village named Thnol Lok. The film team found residents of the village both interested and willing to participate in making a documentary that would explore questions of memory and their experiences of the Khmer Rouge, with the aim of helping to foster a sense of acknowledgement and recognition of past atrocities that took place in this particular setting. Residents were trained, equipped and led the production of *We want (u) 2 know* in early 2009, with the film reaching audiences at theatres in Phnom Penh and several international film festivals. Pugliese has reflected on the challenges of devolving responsibility for the direction of video content, noting ways that participatory approaches can be taken in unanticipated or challenging directions. For example, several Thnol Lok residents were eager to 'reconstruct' and 're-enact' memories of 'crimes of the Khmer Rouge' (including recreating violence and execution), a tack that jarred with the expectations of the film crew. Pugliese made a decision to include only footage preempting, rather than recreating, violence, yet concludes that a participatory filmmaking approach, in traumatic contexts, necessarily involves surrendering notions of 'expertise' to those affected by the subject matter at hand (2015).

Stephanie Benzaquen has critically reflected on both the production and reception of *Breaking the Silence* and *We want (u) 2 know* (2012). Benzaquen, parsing the invariable tension within representations of experiences that are both deeply personal and profoundly collective, notes that *Breaking the Silence* abstracts particular experiences for the purpose of accessibility to such an extent that it risks producing its own 'archetypes of witnessing', undermining the extent to which the play fulfils its participatory rationale (2012, p.47). Indeed, the attendant question of who mediates and arbitrates the production of such representations is still very

present in the participatory approaches at hand. Benzaquen queries the process behind the decision not to include the *We want (u) 2 know* footage that recreated scenes of execution by the Thnol Lok residents, noting that no dialogue or deliberation on the matter was included in the accompanying documentary on the process of producing the film. While it might be possible to read this as part of a western-led flattening of an attenuated Cambodian subject, Benzaquen is wary of such a reading. Instead, she suggests that both projects reflect 'hybrid' forms of 'witnessing' that obeys a similar logic to debates over localism and locality in transitional justice, and should therefore be understood as a contingent 'particular phase of western engagement in the construction of Cambodian memory' (2012, p.50). In other words, each production should be treated as a moment of cross-cultural negotiation rather than an authentic expression of locality or, indeed, the imposition of western aesthetic tropes on Cambodian experiences.

Intergenerational dialogue and reconciliation

Breaking the Silence and *We want (u) 2 know* can be read as responses to two problems. Firstly, the early phases of the ECCC prosecutions had quickly generated a tension between their prosecution of crimes at a narrow number of sites and events, and their attempt to produce generalisable representations of experiences of the Khmer Rouge for a public audience of 'national' victims in order to support a narrative of national renewal (Manning 2017). Secondly, in the wider landscape and history of state-sponsored discourses of national reconciliation, there had been an absence of more detailed and granular forms of acknowledgement for experiences of the Khmer Rouge. In this context, NGOs were concerned that gaps in knowledge and understanding of the regime amongst younger Cambodians could undermine

Cambodia's transitional justice and reconciliatory processes. Both *Breaking the Silence* and *We want (u) 2 know* were mobilised with one eye on instigating dialogue between younger Cambodians and survivors, emblematic of a wider shift in NGO initiatives after the initial ECCC proceedings in 2009 that located intergenerational acknowledgement of the experience of the regime as a key site for reconciliatory practice. In this context, arts were often powerfully fused with educational impulses.

Participatory methods have been widely deployed in NGO initiatives promoting intergenerational dialogue. Youth for Peace (YFP), for example, initiated a series of workshops in 2009 under a programme entitled 'Understand, Remember and Change', exploring issues of reconciliation and the need to learn about and understand the experiences of survivors to enhance critical thinking and citizenship values. The workshops were meant to stretch ideas of reconciliation beyond forgiveness (and forgetting), characteristic of state sponsored discourses of national reconciliation. Instead, they were to encourage participants to actively explore questions of reconciliation by searching for information themselves, reading, discussing, and listening to others talking about Khmer Rouge history. Study tours were convened at key heritage and memorial sites in Phnom Penh, including Tuol Sleng and Cheong Ek, to promote historical awareness and education about the ECCC process. YFP also launched initiatives deploying participatory arts to develop intergenerational dialogue, training participants in painting and drama. For YFP, the targeted use of art as a tool for expressing and representing participants' local histories offers a means to critically envision peace in the future (YFP 2011, p.11). In this sense, the YFP initiatives illustrate the similarities in educational approaches that employ the principles of active learning and participatory arts approaches, as each

devolve responsibility for, and ownership of, the creative process to the young people involved.

DC-Cam has also initiated a series of educational programmes working with young people, encouraging intergenerational dialogue as a means of enhancing reconciliation and peace-building. DC-Cam oversaw the production of a new textbook on the history of the Khmer Rouge, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea* (Dy 2007), for use in the public school system, and has continued to work on engaging young people in human-rights and genocide-education programmes. DC-Cam has been particularly responsive to outstanding questions of reconciliation in respect of former Khmer Rouge communities, seeing value in understanding and de-stigmatising former lower-level members. Such a position works with wider discourses of national reconciliation. Participatory tours to heritage and memorial sites have been critical in these educational initiatives. In 2014, for example, DC-Cam established the Anlong Veng Peace Center and Anlong Veng Peace Tours. Anlong Veng was the final Khmer Rouge stronghold in northern Cambodia, and former residence of several senior Khmer Rouge leaders, including Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea and Ta Mok. The Peace Tours employ a participatory approach, as student groups are tasked with researching and writing news stories about issues of reconciliation, memory, and intergenerational dialogue, based on conversations with (the principally former Khmer Rouge) local residents. Since 2017, the Peace Tours have adopted a participatory filmmaking methodology with student groups producing short documentary films based on the experiences and testimony of the Anlong Veng community. For DC-Cam, history education with, and through,

the lives of former perpetrators is reconciliatory, as it can help deter future violence, while cultivating relationships across estranged communities (Ly 2016).

The work of the Bophana Center also helpfully illustrates the relationships and translations between educational initiatives to remember the past and participatory arts-based practices. In 2015, the Bophana Center launched the *Acts of Memory* programme to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the capture of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge, under the slogan ‘Learn the Past, Create the Future’ (Bophana Center 2015). A public audience was invited to the opening ceremony to reflect upon the damage of the Khmer Rouge period and, in the process, to explore questions of identity, self-expression and community. In particular, the programme aimed to engage young Cambodians on issues of memory through events and activities that sought to enhance historical understanding and to raise questions about how a society remembers, in order to move past atrocity. The student participants were trained how to use a recently developed educational mobile app that explored and explained Khmer Rouge history — approved by the Ministry of Education as a supplementary curriculum resource — and then were encouraged to talk with their older relatives about their learning as a starting point for dialogue. The students were also trained in filmmaking and interview techniques before being tasked with producing short films based on their conversations with older relatives. The programme ran again in 2016 and 2017. For Bophana, *Acts of Memory* attempts to record the experiences of survivors to not only acknowledge their memories but also to enhance the knowledge of young people and to help build better relations between them. As Keo Duong of the Bophana Center notes, ‘many survivors feel their stories are told but not through themselves, but through other people’ (Manning

and Ser 2018a). Across these examples, we see the potential for arts and education to address questions of reconciliation in two ways. Arts and education are, here, enmeshed to cue and generate intergenerational dialogue that enables recognition of the experiences of survivors in the eyes of younger people, in order to confer dignity to memory. The translation of 'knowledge' of atrocities into the public 'acknowledgment' of suffering is an important step (Cohen 2013). Secondly, across these initiatives, we see more instrumental rationales for indigenous to human-rights education at work: as younger people engage in these processes, it is hoped that future violence will be deterred, citizenship values enhanced, and reconciliation nurtured.

ECCC Reparations and Participatory Arts

There remains one final area that brings together participatory arts, education and the legal (as well as socio-political) processes at work at the ECCC. The ECCC is an innovative mechanism in the wider landscape of retributive transitional justice strategies because it affords victims groups, termed 'civil parties', the potential award of 'collective and moral' reparations (ECCC 2015, p.23; see also Killean 2018 for a full account of civil party victim participation at the ECCC). In initial ECCC proceedings, these included the compilation and publication of defendant apologies and the publication of the verdict. More recently, as the ECCC reparations process has been streamlined, several NGOs led victims groups in their development of reparation requests, including awards for commemorative and memorial activities, the provision of testimonial therapy and self-help groups, and the reform of the high school history curriculum. Today, in the latest ongoing case against former 'senior

leaders' of the Khmer Rouge, NGO facilitated reparations requests notably include participatory arts-based initiatives.

One important example of the value of participatory arts in reparations awards is visible in the production and performance of *Pka Sla Krom Angkar*, (*Areca Flowers*), a dance production based on the stories and experiences of those forcibly married under the Khmer Rouge. NGOs and victims groups campaigned throughout the ECCC proceedings for the court to recognise forced marriage as a specific crime under the Khmer Rouge. Yet the ECCC has only recognised it as such under the most recent, ongoing proceedings in Case 002/02 against 'senior leaders'. Drawing on oral histories compiled by the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation that detailed the experiences of victims' forced marriage, a consortium of NGOs and the Khmer Arts Academy worked in coordination with concerned civil parties to write and produce *Pka Sla* (TPO 2017, p.2). The production was first performed alongside youth exhibitions on forced marriage, before touring the country in provincial centres. A performance of *Pka Sla* was also broadcast on national television later in 2017. Civil parties have requested further backing for future performances of *Pka Sla* as an ECCC reparation, in the hope that the production can help the wider community of victims of forced marriage and gender-based violence (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2017).

Pka Sla was initiated with two aims in mind. Firstly, Cambodia's past efforts to redress and reconcile with the crimes of the Khmer Rouge had largely omitted experiences of forced marriage, even as the legacies of the practice are still present today in relationships and families that have chosen to remain together despite their coerced origins. In this sense, the production offered a way of acknowledging the

specificity of harms arising from such experiences as key sites of justice and reconciliation in their own right. Secondly, *Pka Sla* also spoke to broader human rights issues in the present. Sotheary Yim, a clinical psychologist involved in victim support during consultations in planning *Pka Sla*, pointed out that the production was ‘thinking of the future. It’s not just a mechanism of the court because that is just a civil party reparation. But what can we learn from this history, for the youth, through dialogue? [...] Students at conferences believe that sexual abuse is their fault. If we don’t come together and criticise those ideas, it will keep happening’ (Manning and Ser 2018b). In other words, confronting the gendered dynamics of violence under the Khmer Rouge offers a means to think and talk about issues of gender inequality and violence today.

As a specific request for reparation at the ECCC, *Pka Sla* foregrounds questions about the value of (participatory) arts as a way to address experiences of trauma. As Sotheary Yim notes, ‘Survivors who joined the project said “You are describing my story. You use my language, my story. You express my suffering through the performance”’ (Manning and Ser 2018b). The ability of participatory arts to harness a sense of ownership for victims over their experiences appears pivotal. Yet Yim acknowledges the challenges of such representational strategies at the same time. *Pka Sla* depicts experiences of gender-based violence and its aftermath with a degree of realism that can invite questions of re-traumatisation. For Yim, the key with such strategies is reconfiguring the dynamics of the relationships within which victims are situated: ‘The environment has to be different from the traumatic experience. If they were powerless, we have to make them powerful. Healing is a process. Don’t expect magic to happen’ (Manning and Ser 2018b).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored a history of arts-based interventions in Cambodia that have become increasingly central to the work of NGOs as they support Cambodia's transitional justice process, especially noting the increasing presence of participatory methods therein. In adopting a sociological lens to explore this history, we can conclude with several key observations. Firstly, in Cambodia, it is clear that the level and forms of participation in participatory arts vary, obliging further questions about levels of ownership. Participatory methods are evident in early state-led commemorative and memorial activities about life under the Khmer Rouge. These initiatives were, however, invariably directed by state authorities, to the extent that voluntarism, ownership by, and the devolvement of creative direction to, participants is highly questionable. Yet, at the same time, such initiatives often resonated among survivors. More recently, we see authoritative NGO groups harness artefacts of atrocity and testimony to produce arts-based responses to the experience of the Khmer Rouge. Yet, in cases such as *Breaking the Silence* or *We want u (2) know*, it is unclear where final authority over creative practice lay. In this respect, we see participatory arts practice in Cambodia provoke familiar but vexed questions about the extent to which participation can empower subjects in practice.

Secondly, we can observe that the arts can be mobilised in a variety of competing ways in response to experiences of violence. In Cambodia, we see participatory arts deployed in an instrumental fashion, as a medium to translate, communicate and transmit different forms of disciplinary claim over experiences of violence, be they legal, political or cultural. In contrast, as illustrated by *Pka Sla*, we see participatory

arts mobilised as an intrinsically cathartic medium in their own right, as a means to express the language and experiences of victims. The value of arts in the service of intergenerational dialogue is also clear on this point: the translation of 'knowledge' of suffering to public forms of 'acknowledgement' and recognition (Cohen 2013) is enabled through the arts. A third issue is apparent here. Art can be deployed to do different things, one of which is to shine a mirror back on the competing ways that the work of transitional justice has been conceptualised in Cambodia. Across the practices reviewed in this chapter, arts are variously mobilised to restore relationships, acknowledge suffering, deter future violence, de-stigmatise perpetrators, or enhance civic values. In other words, in an analysis of arts for reconciliation, we can see that reconciliation is itself conceptualised in varying ways even in the same milieux and contexts.

As a final point, a sociological lens allows us to see how arts interventions are bound in historical relationships to other fields of practice and thinking that make some forms of intervention both possible and necessary. In Cambodia, arts, conservation, memorialisation and commemoration were central techniques in the state-building project after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. Yet as arts were deployed to cement a flattened narrative of national victimhood, alongside legal and political interventions, the contemporary landscape of participatory arts was prefigured, ultimately allowing a more nuanced approach to the past, including greater recognition of gender-based violence, the experiences of minority communities and the attenuated dialogue between survivors and younger Cambodians. Participatory arts are now a key element in Cambodia's transitional justice landscape precisely because they afford

mediums to redress the historical failures and limitations of dominant political and legal interventions in the past.

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