

**The Quest for Participatory Religiosity: performing reconciliation in post-Khmer  
Rouge Cambodia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The violence that occurred in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge era of 1975-1979 dismantled the social and religious structures that the nation had in place, left millions dead, and has left Cambodians in a liminal state of trauma which remains unresolved. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge – facilitated by a cooperation between Vietnam and defecting Khmer Rouge forces – Vietnam occupied Cambodia for over ten years, a decade within which minimal efforts were made to re-constitute societal functioning, religious restoration, or healing and reconciliation. In the post-Khmer Rouge era, international agents have emerged and acted as leaders the charge of transitional justice and reconciliation; however, religiosity and societal reconstruction has been largely overlooked in those efforts. The frameworks within which local experiences and worldviews are understood by stakeholders involved in the formal reconciliation processes remain rooted in internationally accepted ontologies on trauma and healing.

Historically, Khmer Buddhists have turned to participatory religiosity – the public and collective performance religious belief through ritual – as a means to achieve reconciliation in their communities. Today, they undertaking that work largely outside of the rubric of the formal and internationally sanctioned institutional processes such as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, a United-Nations-led tribunal mandated to bring closure to the legacy of terror that the Khmer Rouge has left Cambodia in. Operating within this mandate are two nongovernmental organizations that are undertaking significant work both in rural and urban Cambodia by providing reconciliation and reparations programming to victims of the Khmer Rouge atrocities: The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, Kdei Karuna.

This thesis examines historical implications of Khmer Buddhism as a societal foundation to set the context within which the problem can be explored, describes theoretical considerations that can be applied to the analysis of the problem in Cambodia, and presents two organizations as cases that confirm the quest for participatory religiosity as a means for reconciliation in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. By critically examining the application of both Cambodian as well as non-Cambodian ontological understandings of trauma and healing, this thesis suggests that reconciliation efforts are more effective and sustainable when planned and directed by Cambodian communities.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Heather Szakacs, whose unconditional love and support has made everything in my life possible, and to my late father, Garth Szakacs, whose memory gave me the strength to return to this project and achieve my academic goals. I love you both so much.

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# GLOSSARY OF KHMER AND PALI TERMS

***Note to glossary:** the terms used in this thesis are translated into English by Khmer-speaking research participants. While many are rooted in Pali, it is understood that language is not static, and can have variant meanings to different communities. The contemporary use of these terms within the body of this thesis have been provided by Khmer speaking Cambodian participants to the research.*

**achars** – a religious and ritual specialist within Khmer Buddhism that has not undertaken the vows that are required to be a *sīlath* (holy person), but who are trained in performing rituals and ceremonies.

**ahimsa** – nonviolence.

**bangskol** – a Khmer Buddhist funerary ritual performed to transfer *bon* or merit to a deceased person from those in the living world. The Pali root, *pansukula* (*paṃsukūlanisaṃ*), refers to robes worn when undertaking the ascetic practice *dhutaṅga*, (see below) or robes worn by one who has undertaken this practice.

**basksbat** – ‘broken courage;’ a TPO-identified construct of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that states that the traumas endured during the Khmer Rouge regime have shattered the courage and strength of Cambodian people causing a lack of trust, submissiveness in social interactions, and fear in those who experience it.

**bon** – merit, accumulated through actions during life.

**boramey** – has a dual meaning: can refer to a specific type of spirit *or* to the perceived energy that circulates particular sacred spaces.

**bray** – commonly feminine spirits within the Khmer pantheon that are considered to be dangerous and impure.

**devarajas** – monarchic rulers that were believed to have been bestowed power by divine decree.

**dhutaṅga** – ascetic practices or austerities that are used as means of purification, undertaken by monks to achieve supernatural powers.

**khmaoch tai hong** – violent death.

**kru khmer** – practitioners of traditional Cambodian medicine.

**neak ta** – a category of Khmer Buddhist spirits that act as custodians or guardians for a given geographic location.

**neamrup** – an offering for the deceased that combines the shape of a human (*rup*) with a specific human’s name (*neam*), frequently utilized in the annual *Phum Ben* festival for the dead.

***paritta*** – blessings done in Pali that are for luck, healing, prosperity, etc. The Pali root, *paritrāṇa* means deliverance through recitation of verses from key religious texts that have been both connected to the generation of merit (ie: transference of *bon*), or as holding the universal truth of reality (instead of the subjectively experienced).

***preah parit*** – a Khmer Buddhist chant that is directed towards the destruction of malevolent spirits and negative energies that are attaching themselves to an individual or a space.

***pret*** – a ‘hungry ghost;’ a spirit that is believed to exist in a non-temporal world continuously hungry, seeking offerings from the living to feed their hunger.

***rhum dah kruah*** – translated as ‘to liberate’ (*rhum*) ‘bad luck’ (*dah kruah*); a Khmer Buddhist sacred chant that aims to erase negativity in a space or person.

***rumsay komhoeng*** – identified facet for dealing with aggressive thoughts that includes externally expressing the aggression through actions and/or words.

***rup*** – a medium who is able to communicate with the spirit world; this ability is obtained involuntarily.

***sangha*** – the Khmer Buddhist community of monks and other religious specialists.

***sdop*** – from the Pali word *stupa*; memorials built to house bones of the deceased.

***sīl*** – refers to the precepts or rules of training and lifestyle that relate to morality. Rooted in the Pali word *sīla*, meaning rules, ethics, or morality.

***sīlath*** – *holy people*

***snang*** – the human victim of an involuntary spirit possession which is used as a vessel of communication by a spirit

***sramay*** – haunting by a ghost

***tuap chett*** – identified facet for dealing with aggressive thoughts that includes blocking or controlling the feeling and internalizing it

***vinaya*** – disciplines of the sangha or monastic community

# ABBREVIATIONS

**ECCC** – Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia

**KDK** – Kdei Karuna

**KR** – Khmer Rouge

**KRT** – Khmer Rouge Tribunal (colloquial language referring to the ECCC)

**NGO** – nongovernmental organization

**PRK** – People’s Republic of Kampuchea

**TPO** – Transcultural Psychosocial Organization

**VSS** – Victims Support Section (of the ECCC)

**GIZ** – The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation), a development agency from Germany

**JHO** – The Justice & History Outreach programme that Kdei Karuna delivers as part of the ECCC reparations project

**TOT** – Training-of-Trainers, an approach to sustainable knowledge transfer that educates local leadership to undertake a project and disseminate knowledge to create multiple leaders within a collection of programming

## INTRODUCTION

Extreme violence has the power to dismantle and destroy social structures in ways that often outlast the violence itself. Beyond death, displacement, and physical destruction, nations and peoples who have experienced the extreme violence of genocide are left with a loss that encompasses the entirety of the nation. The impact of genocidal violence on the religious and spiritual dimensions of social life is devastating. During the Khmer Rouge Era in Cambodia, which lasted from 1975-1979, the nation experienced a unique and particularly destructive internal conflict that pitted members of Cambodian communities against one another. The effects of having suffered through one of the only “autogenocides”<sup>1</sup> of our contemporary global history shattered trust, dismantled community structures, and created a significant breach in societal functioning that has continued to impact the contemporary context of the nation and its peoples.

In 1975, the Khmer Rouge seized the capital city of Phnom Penh under a banner of communism, quickly overtook the entire nation, emptied cities, executed the regime’s decreed ‘undesireables,’ and banned normative practices that made up social, political, and religious life. The Khmer Rouge did not only target a specific national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as is typically defined within the contextual consideration of genocide.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the targeted eradication was of any and all peoples who were considered to be enemies of the state, a loosely defined marker given to all Cambodians who had what seemed to be a foreign connection. With an underlying aim to eradicate and erase the history of external influence on Cambodian people and culture, the Khmer Rouge set the goal of returning to an archaic and romanticized social and political environment wherein agrarian hyper-communism was the framework through which the nation functioned. The particularities of social, cultural, and economic structures were homogenous, centralized, and controlled by the Khmer Rouge itself under the rubric of the nominal Democratic Kampuchea. This particularly unique form of genocide targeted any and all community members who had ties to foreign existence. Included in this group were those who:

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<sup>1</sup> Vittal (2001): The classification of the Khmer Rouge genocide as an autogenocide is because it was inflicted internally: upon Cambodians *by* Cambodians with varying interpretations of the targets.

<sup>2</sup> The *United Nations Genocide Convention* (1948): Genocide is defined, in Article II, as: “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, such as:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

had travelled outside of Cambodia; had a passport; who held wealth; who spoke foreign languages; that were educated; who were literate or had studied, even an introductory academic level.

As part of the cultural annihilation program, the Khmer Buddhist institution was attacked and systematically dismantled<sup>3</sup> in an effort to abolish spiritual forms of resistance that represented any consideration of hierarchy, institution, or autonomous thought that was considered contrary to the Khmer Rouge ideology and regime. All practices related to the Khmer Buddhist cultural identity were banned with an aim at eradication. Sacred spaces were converted into prisons and holy lands were used as killing fields and mass graves. The Khmer Rouge targeted Buddhism in a way that almost broke down its capacity for survival, making the Buddhist religious tradition a target of the genocidal destruction undertaken during this period of extreme violence.

After the Khmer Rouge fell in 1979, various international actors began to emerge from the Vietnamese in 1979 to the United Nations and international civil society from 1992 to the present day. Processes of reconciliation have been undertaken throughout the course of the past forty years, led by civil society. The majority of civil society in Cambodia has had non-Cambodian leadership who set the direction and mandates of these organizations, and of reconciliation in general. This thesis examines the role of the international community in the healing and reconciliation of Cambodia and suggests that the ongoing leadership of the international community has created a context within which decisions about Cambodian reconciliation efforts must be made in a way that is understood by non-Cambodian ontologies, namely international and Western ontologies about healing and justice. This context creates a situation of competing ontologies – Cambodian and non-Cambodian – that have stunted the capacity of Cambodia to reach a full conclusion of the Khmer Rouge saga. The two competing ontologies produce two approaches to reconciliation and healing work through the design of programs within civil society.

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<sup>3</sup> Bergin (2009): Groups targeted for eradication include the Buddhist Sangha and the institution of Buddhism itself, among several other groups. For the purpose of this thesis, Khmer Buddhism will be the focus. For detailed information on the Khmer Rouge genocide and its variant targets can be found in Sean Bergin's *The Khmer Rouge and the Cambodian Genocide*.

## The disruption of religion and society in Cambodia

Prior to the Khmer Rouge ascent to power in the 1970s, Cambodian society held Theravada Buddhism as the state religion, with two predominant monastic orders: *Mahanikay*, a traditional conservative style of rural agriculturalist Buddhism that discouraged education or business aspirations, and *Thammayut Nikay*, which emphasized modern ideals of education – predominantly coming from the West – classical Khmer elite culture, and contemporary approaches to Buddhist philosophical thought<sup>4</sup>. The existing relationship between Buddhist spirituality and social and cultural identity in Cambodia was substantial. The operation of Cambodian social life was contingent upon a dual-stream structure of power: rural Cambodians were connected to the administration of the country through both secular political means (vis-à-vis elected officials at the village level), as well as religious monastic administrative means (vis-à-vis the *sangha* [monastic community]).

Within the context of a dual-branched institutional hierarchy, cooperation and codependence bolstered the successful administration and governance of Cambodia. Education was provided through the religious institution, with state support, and *Mahanikay* spirituality thrived. The two major social/religious institutions supported societal functioning equally and cooperatively.

Understanding the linkages between Buddhist religious practice and societal functioning prior to the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia, and the subsequent establishment of the Communist Party of Democratic Kampuchea, allows for a greater understanding of the devastating impact that the destruction of the Buddhist religious order would have had on Cambodian people. The Khmer Rouge era saw a complete rupture in continuity of life for Cambodians who, living under unscrupulous military monitoring, had no safe haven for retreat, nor capacity for dealing with their fears or their pain. The Khmer Rouge created severe and intense situations for a population whose immediate traumas were only exacerbated by their physical displacement from their homes.

The spiritual aspect of Cambodian life and identity was decidedly undesirable through the lens of the Khmer Rouge. Buddhism was removed as the state religion, and monks were disrobed or targeted for killing. By the time of the Vietnamese invasion in 1979 that ended the Khmer Rouge rule, fewer than 2000 Cambodian religious specialists – of an estimated 65-75,000

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<sup>4</sup> McLellan (2009).

prior to the war – remained alive in the country<sup>5</sup>. Policies were adopted during the regime’s period of control that included forceful disrobing and public execution of monks, exiling or executing those identified as being associates of high rank within Buddhist institutions, and the physical destruction of monasteries and sacred sites. The bodies of those who had been executed under the Khmer Rouge were frequently thrown into mass graves, burnt, or otherwise lost. As such, of the estimated 2.2 million Cambodians killed during this era, virtually none of them received culturally or spiritually appropriate funerary rituals or burial practices that were considered essential in the successful transition between life and the afterlife to Buddhist Cambodians<sup>6</sup>. Of those who remained alive, there were few who could perform religious rites, which could have been used to begin community healing. Because of the limited access to rites and religious institutional knowledge and specialists, a gap emerged between the routes to which Cambodians were taking to heal as a nation and the treatment and healing processes that would have been instrumental in the re-construction of Cambodian society. These gaps contribute to the need for an examination of post-Khmer rouge Cambodia in relation to the reconciliation that has been occurring, with particular emphasis on participatory religiosity, the collective and public performance of religion.

### **The emergence of international actors in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia**

On January 7, 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia under the guidance of former Khmer Rouge cadres who had defected, fleeing internal purges of the regime, and joined forces with the Vietnamese to carry out the so-called liberation of their country<sup>7</sup>. The invasion forced the Khmer Rouge into insurgency, after the resulting death of between 1.7 and 2.2 million Cambodians through starvation, slave labour over-exertion, and execution. The occupying Vietnamese established the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), and proceeded to try two of the leaders of the Khmer Rouge: Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, both of whom had fled following the invasion. PRK leadership established a “People’s Revolutionary Tribunal of the PRK” and convicted the high-ranking leaders of the Khmer Rouge, sentencing each of them to death in absentia.<sup>8</sup> These

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<sup>5</sup> Harris (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Strong (1992).

<sup>7</sup> Chandler (1993).

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

sentences were never recognized by the international community<sup>9</sup>, and former Khmer Rouge soldiers were able to silently reintegrate into their home communities.

The Vietnamese occupation lasted for ten years, during which time Cambodians travelled to their former homes or established new ones, attempting to regain social, cultural, and economic traditions that had been under attack during the days of the Democratic Kampuchea. The PRK encouraged Cambodians to return to their pre-Khmer Rouge practices, and permitted Buddhism to be practiced in an attempt to inspire good will and support for the people re-integrating into community life. However, the dissemination of communism was still absolute during this time period and, as such, the cultural and religious practices were only allowed or encouraged insofar as they “did not offend Marxist-Leninism or pose a threat to the state, the ruling Party, or the Vietnamese.”<sup>10</sup>

The years directly following the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia were met with something of a delayed response from international actors. There was no intervention from the United Nations, nor from any other international parties who had made commitments on a global stage to peacekeeping and international aide. The downfall of the Khmer Rouge regime and the subsequent Vietnamese invasion were ignored on the global geopolitical stage until the later part of the 1980s. This delayed response from international actors resulted in what some have called “western guilt,”<sup>11</sup> prompting an influx of NGO establishment in Cambodia<sup>12</sup> that led to high rates of international nongovernmental organizations in the country. The presence of these international NGOs has exacerbated an already problematic hyper-centralized governance of Cambodia. Marked by an increasing gap between the social and economic elite of urban Cambodia and the impoverished rural communities, the government has tended to leave the rural population in the care of non-Cambodian NGOs who are willing to assist in the provision of basic services and contribute to the improvement of local economies throughout the country.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, many international NGOs have been widely criticized for pilfering aide dollars on

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<sup>9</sup> Gottesman (2000).

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *New York Times* (July 2006): “... it should not be surprising if victims of atrocities see international justice as an expensive exercise in allaying Western guilt for failing to act in time.”

<sup>12</sup> Casey (2016): According to the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (<http://www.ccc-cambodia.org/>), there are over 3,500 registered NGOs in Cambodia. For a comparative look at the statistical rise of nonprofits globally.

<sup>13</sup> Hughes (2011).



large salaries for international staff members while creating cycles of dependency that allow for continuity of the commercialization of humanitarian work.<sup>14</sup>

The social, political, and cultural devastation suffered by Cambodian peoples resulted in a nation without adequate governance, administration, or judiciary in place. Further to this problem was a resultant gap in the fields of archaeology, development, tourism management, economics, urban planning, education, and conservation. These gaps worked to argue for the necessity and legitimacy of the increasing role of international agents in both development as well as heritage preservation activities in Cambodia, and largely isolated local input from the planning and execution of these undertakings. As the legitimization of heritage-based international agents increased, so did the presence of international organizations, normalized by the archaeological stream and expanded into the humanitarian, reconciliation, and so-called development streams. Organizations that are working within the context of the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia – such as TPO and Kdei Karuna, the case studies within this thesis – are attempting to provide that missing connection between local input and international presence.

While many NGOs have since been established by Cambodian founders, it remains that civil society is largely made up of international agents,<sup>15</sup> and has tended to focus on transitional justice. Given the delicate social context of post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, NGOs and donors attached to them tend to legitimize their presence in the region by suggesting that they are needed to maintain accountability in the civil society sector. They believe that Cambodia does not have the social capital with the necessary degree of education and expertise that is deemed to be required for self-directed processes of development, peace-building, and reconciliation. Further, they argue that the international community is neutral in relation to the Khmer Rouge regime and auto-genocide in Cambodia, and that their neutrality is indispensable if Cambodia hopes to develop way that is socially inclusive of both victims and former Khmer Rouge perpetrators – both of whom are participants in contemporary Cambodian society.

Because Cambodian civil society is largely made up of international actors from primarily Western countries, needs assessments are carried out in accordance with international standards exogenous to the Cambodian context. As such, the needs of the nation are assessed with Western

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<sup>14</sup> Domashneva (2011) and Silverstein (2011).

<sup>15</sup> Dosch (2012).

tools, understandings, and definitions of progress and development, rather than exploring the emic understandings of what would constitute progress and development and how decisions would be made in Cambodian society. Decisions on the needs of Cambodia were urged to be undertaken democratically, through institutionalized hierarchies elected through Western electoral processes – secret ballot and individual choice rather than the collective conversation and debate traditional within Cambodian pre-Khmer Rouge society.<sup>16</sup>

The recommended neutrality of an NGO carrying out this work is compatible with the context of an auto-genocide, particularly considering the blurred the line between perpetrator and victim. However, recommending full neutrality to the point that the work would require non-Cambodians seems to imply that Cambodians are incapable of independently and autonomously overcoming social and political fragmentation, and of moving towards sustainable reconciliation. Further to this, the international agents that continue to point to gaps in expertise and qualifications that would be required for success in reconciliation endeavours have seemed to employ this rhetoric to legitimize their presence and control. It is unclear in the literature whether these qualifications are set by some international standards, or if they are agreed upon and defined by the Cambodian people themselves. Nor is it clear whether there is considerable collaboration between donors and Cambodians in regards to cultivating the social capital necessary for Cambodians to achieve said qualifications and subsequently take over autonomous reconciliation endeavours.

Because the main agents within civil society were from the international community, finding a universal language through which to undertake post-conflict development work was a challenge. The solution was for international directors within civil society to posit rational social science as a framework through which developmental planning could be undertaken, which resulted in the mainstream employment of rhetoric and planning in relation to transitional justice and reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> However, this was a solution for the international actors themselves rather than a solution for the Cambodian context, and did not seem to contextualize reconciliation planning within the local culture and society. The focus on technical, legal, and social-scientific aspects of reconciliation relegated the conversation to the realms of transitional justice, sociology, international development and international justice. The marked gap in the literature

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<sup>16</sup> Hughes (2011).

<sup>17</sup> Dosch (2012).

examined that relates to and describes the international approach to reconciliation efforts in Cambodia has revealed that this relegation means that there has been a tendency to overlook the histories of ancestral spirit cults, oral histories and traditions, and contemporary ritual practices in the regions with NGO presence. The understanding of religiosity within these international agents has been rooted in non-Khmer ontologies - or frameworks for understanding existence and being - that did not successfully provide authentic cultural alignment within the direct reconciliation work that has been undertaken in relation to the ECCC. These organizations did not appear to incorporate a phenomenological approach to local spirituality by approaching “religious experience as a real and irreducible phenomenon.”<sup>18</sup> This sort of approach would provide authentic and meaningful ritual for survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide and, as such, they may have been less able to provide adequate spiritually significant services than those grassroots organizations that are rooting their projects in authentic and engaged participatory religiosity.

Without offering the means for Cambodians to have control over their own processes of post-Khmer Rouge development and reconciliation, the presence of international NGOs has worked to perpetuate cycles of dependence wherein international or non-local agents are actively guiding the nation through a course of progress that is primarily defined outside of Cambodia. This course is rooted in understandings that base the very definition of progress on a universalist and empirically observable set of indicators that fail to take either religious belief or culturally based worldviews seriously. As such, the means for socio-cultural healing and reconciliation are, once again, taken from the hands of the Cambodians and given direction by international actors. All of this leads to the fact that very little has changed in terms of the feudal societal structures in Cambodia that held absolute power prior to the emergence and fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in the first place. Given the fragile nature of Cambodia’s social and political structures, the projects that are spearheaded by international actors are particularly risky in their oversight of engaged and localized collaboration and needs assessments.

International NGOs have been lauded for their developmental efforts across the so-called developing<sup>19</sup> world, and commended for the aid dollars that they continue to invest in order to

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<sup>18</sup> Bell (1997): pp. 9.

<sup>19</sup> The use of language around the ‘developing world’ that has been consistent in multiple academic spaces tends to homogenize disparate nations into binary groups (‘developed’ and ‘developing’) that are not useful or reflective of the realities of the diversity of the world.

bolster the developmental process. Billions are spent each year by development agencies, the United Nations, and international NGOs in order to promote a globalized environment of so-called progress.<sup>20</sup> Yet little appears to have been done in the way of assessing whether or not this trajectory of developmental aid and de-centralized lineages of progress are integrated with culturally aligned needs assessments that emphasize the identification and incorporation of localized social, religious, and cultural considerations. This is apparent when considering the divergent trajectory that many local, grassroots, Khmer civil society organizations have taken in comparison with those rooted firmly within the international community: to undertake projects that fit the narrative and framework of Cambodian understandings of progress and development, many organizations have splintered to proliferate throughout the countryside, engaging in peacebuilding and forward-looking projects of healing, social enterprise, and education.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of international NGO programming and implementation, religious heritage has frequently been used as a *tool for the legitimization of high degrees of international presence* in reconciliation efforts in the region. Conversely, local NGOs are working towards building capacity within their own communities to ensure sustainable healing is undertaken, and are using participatory religiosity as a *tool for undertaking local healing* in reconciliation efforts.

The problem here is that there are cases where international NGOs use their own ontologies to guide and direct the work they are doing. By this I mean that the philosophical and fundamental understanding of the nature of being that is used as the framework for providing treatment and healing to Cambodian communities within the international NGO sector is decidedly not Cambodian. By framing the approach to the problem of trauma and reconciliation in Cambodia within a non-Cambodian subjective reality, international NGOs seem to be manipulating local religious practices to fit those frameworks that are brought in. These practices are being steered towards targeting Cambodian trauma as a means to undertake healing practices rooted in Western psychiatric medicine. There is an important and necessary role for participatory religiosity in the reconciliation and healing efforts of Cambodian people. However, in order for

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<sup>20</sup> The term 'progress' is predicated upon the belief of a singular lineage of development based on the social, economic, and technological trajectory of industrialized nations which again ignores the heterogeneity of the world and the autonomy of social and cultural communities to define development goals for themselves.

<sup>21</sup> The divergent paths of civil society in Cambodia is outside of the scope of this work, but Dosch (2012) has illuminated some of these divergences in *Whose Peace-Building* (pp. 1085-1087). Further, during fieldwork I began an exploration into this divergence and conducted several interviews with Buddhism for Social Development Action (BSDA) and Buddhism for Development (BFD) which further illustrated the disconnect between international and grassroots/local civil society.

religiosity to be participatory – for them to be public and collective in nature – the means, methods, and religious frameworks should be determined, planned, developed, and executed by Cambodian-led efforts through a Cambodian ontology, or subjective understanding of reality. That is not to say that there is no place for the international community in this work, but rather that the work itself should be firmly rooted in Cambodian worldviews.

This thesis will present two case studies: first from the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), an organization that provides individualized trauma treatment for Khmer Rouge victims that has been built upon phenomenological understandings originating in Western psychiatric medicine; and second from Kdei Karuna (KdK), an organization that builds programming for Khmer Rouge victims at the community level, localized to individual Cambodian communities and rooted in extensive frontline research and capacity building within the local regions. While each of these NGOs is deeply connected to the international community, the frameworks through which each organization are approaching the work of reconciliation and healing from trauma are different, and representative on the micro level of the macro context of competing subjectivities in trauma work in Cambodia. The objective of this thesis is to gain insight into the variant ways that these two Cambodian NGOs – representative of a multitude of NGOs within similar civil society contexts – have approached the task of incorporating participatory religiosity into their programming related to reconciliation and healing in an effort to assess the most effective route to community healing in a post-conflict social context.

The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization has approached their reconciliation efforts through an existing framework for healing that was developed outside of the Cambodian context. The framework includes a place for a ritual element, and TPO adopted and adapted a local Khmer Buddhist participatory practice called the *bangskol*<sup>22</sup> to fit within the frame itself. As such, this organization has reshaped an existing religious ritual in order to be able to impose an ontological understanding of the requisites to healing within the context of Cambodia that is rooted in Western psychiatric medicine, and provided a packaged programme to various individual victims of the Khmer Rouge atrocities. Kdei Karuna has used the same ritual, *bangskol*, for the work that they are undertaking, however they have first done community-based research to ensure locally driven needs assessments determine the desired acts of reconciliation for each local community,

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<sup>22</sup> The ritual *bangskol* is a funerary ritual wherein the spirits of the deceased are called into a sacred space by religious specialists in order to provide merit in the form of offerings. This ritual will be explored and further detailed later in this thesis.

and provide training to build capacity within the community that will ensure that the means to reconciliation are identified amicably and undertaken in an effective and sustainable way.

### **Trauma and religiosity in psychiatric medicine**

The psychological implications of the experiences of the Khmer Rouge victims have been reported to include re-experience, nightmares, panic attacks, and other disorders that are characterized by international agents – specifically Western psychiatric mental health professionals – as symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When these particular indicators are being observed, victims lose composure, experiencing a state of unease and alarm, and are unable to regain control at will. The routes to re-establishing psychological composure that are undertaken by those experiencing these symptoms have tended to be primarily religious. 37% of patients surveyed in a study of trauma within the Cambodian diaspora community in the United States<sup>23</sup> attested to using traditional techniques, predominantly “coining.”<sup>24</sup> In the same study, 15% of patients reported using other Buddhist techniques such as practicing mindfulness, chanting Pali or Khmer incantations, meditating, or focusing on *ahimsa* (nonviolence)<sup>25</sup>. Even in the diasporic context over 50% of studied Cambodians who were experiencing psychosomatic effects of trauma used traditional spiritual practices to regain control and composure. The relationship between religiosity and healing in this context seems to point to a need of Cambodians in regards to healing from the trauma of the Khmer Rouge: traditional spiritual practices have been adhered to with such rigour as to have physiological responses when utilized for regaining composure. This is indicative of the importance of re-constructing the spiritual dimension of Cambodian life as part of the healing journey for the nation and her people.

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<sup>23</sup> The study undertaken by Hinton et al was relatively limited in scope: it “was conducted among a convenience sample of clinic patients, so it cannot be determined to what extent the study findings apply to Cambodians in the community who have PTSD who are not in treatment” (Hinton et al, 1393). Further, it cannot be determined the applicability of this particular observation to the non-diasporic context of Cambodians who are still living in Cambodia, and have not encountered, to a great extent, the context of Western Psychiatric medicine and the social and cultural education surrounding it.

<sup>24</sup> “Coining” is a traditional form of medicine that involves rubbing heated oil on the skin (usually neck, back, or shoulders) and then dragging a coin along the oiled area to create a red streak that is believed to dislodge blockages and return the normal flow of energy to the body.

<sup>25</sup> Hinton et al, 2009.

The characteristic syncretism between Buddhism and local traditions<sup>26</sup> is not exempt in Cambodia. Deeply rooted belief in spirits and spirit possession was not erased during the period of excessive violence under the Khmer Rouge, and has remained with Cambodians into the present day. In the decades following the fall of the regime, there has been an increase in reports of malevolent spirits, corresponding with a radical increase in the number of violent deaths that were not accompanied by appropriate funerary rituals. It is thought that those spirits are returning to Cambodian lands, plaguing the local spiritual milieu with pleas for proper burial rituals and requests for assistance in overcoming the challenge that their violent deaths have brought to their existence in the afterlife. Experiences of the Khmer Rouge regime have led Cambodians to be haunted by the ghosts of their past, and these haunting challenges development, reconciliation, and societal reconstruction in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia.

## **The Problem**

Cambodian collective trauma is a result of the extreme violence experienced within the nation during the Khmer Rouge regime. Reconciliation endeavours have taken aim at this trauma and included, at the forefront, transitional justice processes within and outside of both NGO and United Nations bodies. However, the spiritual dimensions of reconciliation and societal reconstruction represent an under-examined gap within the academic study and analysis of the nature and practices of these so-called stakeholders, who seem to have frameworks of understanding and practice that are rooted in Western psychiatric medicine, despite operating within a non-Western socio-cultural context. Those organizations that have direct connections to an international presence – namely the ECCC, its Victims Support Section (VSS), and the reconciliation/reparations programming that exist within those structures – tend towards doing work that fits the ontological framework that names PTSD, as defined in the DSM, as the root of mental and psychologic ills within the Cambodian community. By positing this psychiatric ontology as the reality within which healing must be undertaken, the local understandings of the psycho-somatic impacts of the experience of the Khmer Rouge are taken less seriously.

Khmer Buddhists in Cambodia believe that there has been an increased presence of malevolent spirits since the Khmer Rouge Era. This increase is believed to demonstrate spiritual

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<sup>26</sup> Courtney Bender and Wendy Cage (2006) provide an in-depth assessment of the syncretic nature of Buddhist religious traditions across the Asian continent in "Constructing Buddhism(s): Interreligious Dialogue and Religious Hybridity."

ancestral anger at the community largely ignoring the spirits and the spirit world. Contemporary research has taken only a cursory glance at this particular component of Cambodian reconciliation. In order for Khmer Buddhists to heal from the traumas incurred during the Khmer Rouge Era, culturally and religiously appropriate routes must be undertaken. That which constituted the identity of Khmer Buddhist people was shattered by the regime, and to re-construct their communities, it is necessary for Cambodians to re-construct their lost religious identity. The atrocities of the Khmer Rouge era are still fresh in the minds and memories of Khmer Buddhists, and as such Cambodians have remained in a liminal grieving period.

Many nongovernmental organizations connected to the ECCC have taken on the task of promoting reconciliation and guiding the healing work at the community level for those who experienced the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. The extent to which organizations involved in these processes incorporate re-establishment and re-creation of religious significance and spirituality into the endeavours towards reconciliation should be examined, and the utility, community response, and sustainability should be considered.

It remains unclear if there is a consistently held definition or understanding of what reconciliation means for the people of Cambodia, and how it is to be achieved. By examining the work of the civil society sector of the country – specifically as they utilize and engage with Khmer Buddhist understandings of the world – I hope to gain insight into how and why the process of reconciliation is ongoing, and some of the barriers to moving beyond a state of social, religious, and political liminality that is consistent within the context of Cambodia can be identified.

This thesis will explore how TPO and KDK are operating within the ongoing state of liminality that Cambodia has existed within since the fall of the Khmer Rouge. It examines how these nongovernmental organizations define and work towards reconciliation, in both urban and rural Cambodia, focusing on the transitional justice work they have undertaken that utilizes Buddhist practices. I will ask the question: in the context of reconciliation in Cambodia, what is the role of Khmer Buddhism, what does the process of reconciliation mean for these organizations, and how does participatory religiosity fit within the context of these nongovernmental organizations' reparations and reconciliation work? I propose that, while each organization has done good work in the context of post-conflict reconciliation, their approaches to the incorporation of participatory religiosity differ significantly. This differentiation is rooted



in the conflicting frameworks through which the problem of reconciliation is approached by each organization: TPO approaches reconciliation as a therapy process that is meant to address individual traumas of those who have suffered directly under the Khmer Rouge, a perspective that is built upon application of Western ontological understandings of trauma, reconciliation, and healing; KdK's approach is built on Khmer phenomenology through utilizing community engagement to identify local needs for reconciliation that target community healing, sustainable reconciliation, and capacity-building to ensure longevity of the healing journey.

While each approach has considerable merit, because the approach of Kdei Karuna is rooted in Cambodian trauma ontology, community-engaged needs assessments, and capacity development, it seems to be more sustainable and provides Cambodians with ownership that would lead to successful and ongoing healing. TPO has effectively provided psychiatric supports for individual victims of the Khmer Rouge, but this approach is built on a template that was developed outside of Cambodia, is only applicable to a specific group of approved victims,<sup>27</sup> and does not include capacity development that would provide those victims with the tools to continue healing or support the healing journey of other victims within their communities who may not be able to access these individual supports through the ECCC.

## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter One provides a historical overview of the relationship between religiosity, power, and culture within the context of Khmer Buddhism, beginning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and leading up to the implementation of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal through the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). It engages extensively with existing literature to provide the historical context of Buddhism in Cambodia prior to the Khmer Rouge ascent to power, focusing particularly on local perceptions of spirits as they relate to societal functioning and the social and religious milieu of Khmer Buddhist religiosity. This chapter also explores cultural models of socialization and the socio-political ethos that contributed to the rise of the Khmer Rouge. It provides an overview of the Khmer Rouge era in relation to Khmer Buddhist practice, and traces post-KR Vietnamese occupation period of 1979-1991. The emergence of reconciliation efforts following the re-establishment of Cambodia's sovereignty is introduced, paying particular

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<sup>27</sup> The Civil Parties component of the ECCC will be explored fully in Chapter One, which will bring clarity to the routes through which these victims become approved for treatment.

attention to the complexities of Cambodian trauma, the application of modern psychiatric medicine as it relates to spirituality, and the role of the ECCC in the quest for reconciliation.

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical and methodological components of this project. This chapter describes the research methods I undertook to contribute to this thesis and the theoretical considerations that contribute to the analysis of my findings. It identifies the initial hypothesis and research question that motivated the field research I undertook in Cambodia in 2014, and the subsequently identified problem that came out of the work carried out on the ground. This chapter presents the theoretical framework that is used for the analysis of data. It offers a description of the events, meetings, and travel I did to collect and gather information, the route through which I located and recruited my participants, and the interview processes that I engaged in.

Chapter Three will present the data that was collected over the course of 9 months of field research in 2014 from the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO). It describes the reparations-related project that TPO undertakes, and explores the role of participatory religiosity and the use of the Khmer Buddhist traditional ceremony *bangskol* within the execution of that particular project. Exploring the relationship between participatory religiosity and reconciliation, this chapter also describes the relationship between the TPO project and the ECCC, as it relates to performative aspects of justice work and reconciliation. Finally, it aims to describe the definition of reconciliation, as understood by TPO and those who work on their reconciliation project.

Chapter Four presents the data from the same period of field research, undertaken through a reciprocal relationship with Kdei Karuna (KdK). It first describes the organization and the project that is undertaken for reconciliation and reparations relating to the Khmer Rouge era. The various dimensions of the reparations project are explored and described therein. It also describes the role of participatory religiosity and the KdK version of the *bangskol* within their project. It also discusses the understandings of spirits, ghosts, and guardians that are incorporated into the work of KdK, critically assesses the performative aspects of justice that exist within that organization, and offers concluding observations on the ways in which KdK understands reconciliation.

The final chapter provides my analysis to the overarching question of the role and use of participatory religiosity as a means to achieve reconciliation in these two organizations. It offers

an analysis of the applied theories through which this work has been undertaken, discusses the potential outcome of the Cambodian saga of post-Khmer Rouge reconciliation. Finally, this chapter offers concluding observations about the quest for participatory religiosity in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia.

## CHAPTER ONE: Buddhism and the Democratic Kampuchea

To prepare to examine the competing ontologies in present-day Cambodia that are at play within the ongoing reconciliation efforts of the country, I will first provide a background of pre-Khmer Rouge ontology, the Khmer Rouge Era itself, and the subsequent emergence of international actors.

Prior to the Khmer Rouge ascent to power, Cambodian society was built upon an intrinsic structure rooted in two Khmer Buddhist monastic orders. Theravada Buddhism was the state religion with two predominant orders within it: the *Maha Nikay* and the *Thammayut Nikay*<sup>28</sup>. Rural Cambodia and the nation's administrative institutions of governance were connected politically through elected village representatives and religiously through the established Buddhist *sangha* and the administrative structures created within that religious institution. The social ordering of Cambodia was not secular in nature, rather the role of the *sangha* was intimately tied to administration, power, decision-making, and government.

The secular and religious institutions in Cambodia were intrinsically cooperative and co-dependent, governing and administratively presiding over the nation through a collaboratively intertwined system of governance. The state supported the monastery in providing education to Cambodians, introducing and espousing the collaborative system of societal structuring immediately in the lives of Cambodian people. Cambodia was “likened to a chariot supported on two wheels, one of which is the state and the other religion.”<sup>29</sup>

The *Maha Nikay* practice traditionally enjoyed broad appeal and popular support across rural Cambodia, becoming the predominant type of Buddhism practiced in rural Cambodia. Within this early *Maha Nikay*, a symbiosis existed between the animist religiosity that existed prior to the emergence and spread of Buddhism in the thirteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Local traditions of animism were incorporated into Buddhist belief systems, creating a syncretic form of Khmer Buddhism that was localized to the Cambodian context. Those prevalent Cambodian spirits that were held with high esteem in local communities became deified into the Buddhist pantheon, transforming them from strictly Khmer spirits to *Khmer Buddhist* spirits that could maintain ritual propitiation processes, but were integrated into a Buddhist system of belief. These processes have historically occurred when a new religious tradition supersedes an existing one:

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<sup>28</sup> Janet McLellan (2009).

<sup>29</sup> Kalab (1968): pp 532

<sup>30</sup> Chandler, 1996.

Buddhism has incorporated and integrated into local traditions using means that include the appropriation and/or ‘conversion’ of local spirits or deities to Buddhism as guardians, incarnations, ghosts, or supporters of the Buddhist doctrine itself.<sup>31</sup>

*Thammayut Nikay* migrated to Cambodia from neighbouring Thailand in the 1800s, bringing along with it the promotion of a strict adherence to Buddhist precepts and a more formal practice that brought about royal patronage. It began as a reform movement in Thailand that was deeply politicized and adopted by government and royalty in an effort to ensure public patronage.<sup>32</sup> King Norodom established the *Thammayut* order in Cambodia in 1855, similarly utilizing the politicization of this particular tradition by linking it with the monarchy in order to reinforce the legitimacy of the royal family.

### **1.1 Guardians and ghosts: The role of spirits in Khmer Buddhist society**

Khmer religiosity is linked to various categorically arranged guardian spirits to whom veneration, offerings, and appeasements are expected to be made in exchange for support, protection, or even merely the absence of malevolence. Within the village structure typically exist tutelary spirits<sup>33</sup> by the name of *neak ta* that act as the custodians of the entire community and its people. *Neak ta* regularly receive public offerings in exchange for guardianship, and are propitiated for the safety and security of the community. They are considered the protectors of the area, and communicate with the living through a specialized medium called a *rup*, or through dreams.<sup>34</sup>

*Neak ta* also hold the capacity to undertake transformations of status within the spirit world, moving categorically up as well as down the hierarchy that makes up the entire *boramey*<sup>35</sup> pantheon. Many of these spirits were humans who died through violent means, becoming wild and barbarous in the afterlife, but can be tamed through the proponents of the Buddhist dharma:

“The way of the *neak ta* and the way of the *boramey* is the same - the best *neak ta* can pass an exam to become *boramey*. Now very often

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<sup>31</sup> Bender & Cadge (2006).

<sup>32</sup> Thani (2016).

<sup>33</sup> There may be a single spirit occupying a particular region or there may be many.

<sup>34</sup> Mediumship and its relation to religious specialists in Khmer Buddhism will be further discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> *Boramey* can refer to the name of a specific type of spirit, but the term is also used to apply to the perceived energy that radiates and circulates around particularly sacred spaces, locations of spirit houses, and/or spaces with high concentration of bad deaths, like killing fields or mass graves. Anne Yvonne Guillou has broken down the variance in the use of the word *boramey* during her fieldwork in Pursat, Cambodia (2012): pp. 221-223.

they want to become *boramey* because they cannot find a *rup* in their village and there is a need to help the whole country. If the *rup* dies, the *neak ta* can, of course, enter another person, but it is difficult to find a substitute. The *boramey* have a lot of knowledge, the *neak ta* less, but they can change (*pdo*) once they study and pass their exam to become *boramey*.”<sup>36</sup>

The *boramey* represent something of a pantheon of characters that can be either benevolent or malevolent – or both – and exist throughout Cambodian myth and history.

The mobility of these spirits not only reflects the Khmer Buddhist understanding of social ordering within the spirit world, but also connects to the malleability of the spirit world that coincides with the changing external social context. The rise of Buddhism did not eradicate the spirits nor diminish their priority in the religious life of Khmer people but rather were incorporated into the beliefs and practice of the emergent Buddhist hierarchical religiosity in Cambodia.

Another type of spirit within the Cambodian pantheon is that of the *bray*. These spirits are commonly feminine, are generally considered to be quite dangerous and bearers of “extreme impurity”<sup>37</sup> and as such are sources of an intensified magical energy that a spirit requires for functional performance of a guardianship role.<sup>38</sup>

The spirits that exist within the multiverse pantheons of Cambodian religiosity have a history predating ancient Khmer civilization, continuing through to the contemporary nation of Cambodia. These transformed spirits-to-guardians are connected to the pre-Buddhist understandings and ideas surrounding death that have been carried over through time. Through written and oral mythology as well as ethnographic data utilized by French anthropologist Alain Forest,<sup>39</sup> the apparent understanding of pre-Buddhist Khmer peoples was that the dead could somewhat freely travel between the land of the living and the “island of the dead”<sup>40</sup> and after some time would be reborn into the land of the living. These guardian spirits seem to consist

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<sup>36</sup> This quote is from an interview conducted with a medium in Cambodia by Didier Bertrand during his field research, and is quoted in his article “The Names and Identities of the “Boramey” Spirits Possessing Cambodian Mediums” (2001).

<sup>37</sup> Choulean (1988): pp 37

<sup>38</sup> There also exist spirits within Cambodia who are not identified as Cambodian, but rather dress, speak, and exhibit characteristics akin to their country of origin - typically India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Javanese Indonesia, and China (Bertrand, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> This cumulative utilization of Forest’s research is taken from Anne Yvonne Guillou’s extensive research on the dead in Cambodia (2012): pp. 222-223.

<sup>40</sup> Choulean (1988): pp. 222.

primarily of those who had died a violent death, or those who had held high levels of power and status as living beings. For reasons that are unclear in the literature examined, there are also other spirits who do not transform into the type of spirit that are sent to the island of the dead, and therefore remain in a liminal state in the land of the living.

Khmer Buddhists also hold the belief that those who have died a “bad death” – meaning those who have died violently through murder, suicide, fatal accidents, or during childbirth – are considered *khmaoch tai hong* (literally ‘violent death’)<sup>41</sup> and will be unable to leave the corporeal earth, haunting dark spaces until they are able to accumulate the necessary merit, known in Cambodia as *bon*. Ghosts or spirits of this nature have been reported to contact or connect the living through various means; many have seen ‘corpses’ or ghost-like apparitions throughout the country and others have reported being communicated with through dreams, where they can speak with and dictate their needs and desires for appeasement. The experience of personal ghost haunting is called *sramay*, and has been reported as a common affliction for those who have ancestors who died violent deaths.<sup>42</sup>

## 1.2 Monks, mediumship, and communication with spirits

Spirits return to the temporal world to communicate with humanity through dreams, communication with an involuntary medium (*rup*), communication with a trained medium known as a *kru boramey*, or through the involuntary possession of the physical form of a human representative known as a *snang*.<sup>43</sup> The spirit is categorized as a *boramey*, and may choose to either possess a host (*snang*) or communicate to a chosen living individual (*rup*). A medium who has undertaken rituals that encourage controlled possession<sup>44</sup>, *kru boramey*, have more control over the communication and can call to the spirits at will. This term is rooted in the Cambodian word *kru*, which translates as teacher, guru, or expert. When a person becomes involuntarily possessed by a *boramey*, they become the *snang*. When they are trained in mediumship and become experts at controlling that possession, they are *kru boramey*. One who is possessed – either voluntarily or involuntarily – has been selected as the temporal representative of the spirit’s

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<sup>41</sup> Guillou (2012) pp: 215

<sup>42</sup> Janet McLellan has undertaken extensive research into the experiences of *sramay*, specifically in refugees living in Ontario. Her accounts are specifically related to Khmer people who have not returned to Cambodia after fleeing, and while the notion of ghost haunting is consistent across the literature and research, the term *sramay* has specifically been identified by refugee populations living in a diasporic context. See: McLellan (2009): pp. 102-109.

<sup>43</sup> Bertrand (2005).

<sup>44</sup> Beban (2014).

connection to humans. While some *snang* or *rup* have suggested that this representative faculty is temporary or casual, others have reported permanent connections with *boramey* that continue throughout their lives.<sup>45</sup>

There are inherent connections between Buddhism and the *boramey* spirits in that the *snang* become, upon possession, “first and foremost supporters of the *dharma*, the virtues of which they want to teach and illustrate through meditation.”<sup>46</sup> This connection means that experts, *kru boramey*, have become capable of acting as spiritual guides for those who are afflicted by the negative effects of the presence of a spirit; for this reason, *kru boramey* can act as effective therapeutic supports for traumatized Cambodians.<sup>47</sup>

In a state of possession, the mediums exhibit dramatic behavioural alterations that are indicative of the spirit’s physical manifestation within the person themselves. A *kru boramey* is capable of determining a specific time and/or place wherein they will voluntarily become possessed. The spirit will be called to enter the body and will subsequently be expected to manifest. A *snang* or *rup* who is possessed involuntarily may experience something of a pathological possession that will be painful and traumatic. This possession requires ritual exorcism by a trained medium that is also in a simultaneous state of possession. The *kru boramey* will call a spirit to manifest and then will either bargain with or violently expel the spirit from the person who has been stricken. This involuntary type of possession corresponds with Cambodian experiences of *sramay*, or ghost haunting. Reports of spirits visiting family members or other loved ones after they had been violently murdered, but not given proper burial rites, are rife in reports from Khmer Buddhists throughout history.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.2.1 Monks as Kru Boramey

Prior to the establishment of the Democratic Kampuchea, it was common for Buddhist monks to undertake extreme forms of asceticism in order to acquire superhuman power that would allow communication with spirits and the subsequent maintenance of deeply held connections with village guardian spirits. These connections allowed for monks to act as gatekeepers to the needs and the desires of each member of the community as well as the

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid*

<sup>46</sup> Bertrand, 2001: pp. 35

<sup>47</sup> Bertrand (2005).

<sup>48</sup> Choulean (1988).



guardian spirits themselves; these monks function in a mediatory role as the communicator or liaison between the two worlds. Monks would engage in a ritual process known as *dhutang*, translated as ‘means of purification,’ in order to achieve these powers.

There are thirteen steps that are to be undertaken to achieve this superhuman power, including a process of solitary asceticism within which the monk would seclude themselves in a forest area with an aim of encountering a spirit and acquiring powers from that encounter. The spirit encountered is expected to present the monk with a series of “more or less unendurable trials in the form of apparitions and all sorts of manifestations,”<sup>49</sup> the resistance and overcoming of which would be followed with the provision of magical formulas, healing abilities, and the ongoing ability to maintain a line of communication with the spirit world.

The forest is considered “wild, chaotic, threatening places”<sup>50</sup> wherein which a monastic would enter “who was looking to face and hopefully overcome the full chaos and threat of samsara.”<sup>51</sup> The power and fury of the forest provided enough of a test and struggle to accompany the practice of *dhutanga* and lead an ascetic to harness the power of nature in a way that would allow communication between the mundane and the spiritual world.

### **1.3 Ritual practices around death: *Phchum Ben* and *Bangskol***

The spirit world does not have a direct, personal connection to the human world, meaning that those spirits who communicate with humanity are unable to communicate a particular identity. To this end, there is no process through which living descendants can confirm that those dead before them have achieved human rebirth, or if they continue to exist in the form of a ‘hungry ghost,’ or *pret*, a spirit that is believed to have “great bellies and tiny mouths, too small to take adequate sustenance so that they are perpetually hungry”<sup>52</sup>. For this reason, Khmer Buddhists tend to conduct merit/*bon*-making rituals on a regular basis in physical spaces that are connected to the deceased family members – temples, homes, burial grounds, places where the remains are held – even without knowing for certain if their ancestors exist in that world. *Bon* is a gift that is accessible to the deceased, created through a transfer process within which a

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<sup>49</sup> Choulean, 1988: pp. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Strong (1992): pp. 218.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Ledgerwood (2012): pp 194.

descendent makes an offering in the form of a gift that is ritually transformed into *bon* and provided to the deceased person.

During the lunar month of *Photrobot*, which occurs between the Gregorian calendar months of September and October, there is a fifteen-day period within which spirits of the dead who have been unable to achieve a rebirth as a human return to their descendants to seek offerings of food. The food is not considered to be transferable into the spirit world but rather transforms, ritually, into *bon* that is then consumed by the spirits in an ongoing accumulative process that will contribute to an eventual human rebirth. The annual ritual festival of *Phchum Ben*<sup>53</sup> represents a nation-wide ritual participation that appeases spirits of the dead. This particular ritual offering is done as a collective, as a shared way to universally recognize the dead, share stories and memories, and recount the stories of the death of loved ones.

*Phchum Ben* is translated from Khmer as Gathering of the Rice Balls Festival which is related to the lead-up process undertaken during the two-week period prior to the festival itself when members of the community gather at the monasteries and various other sacred spaces to make rice balls (*ben*) that will then be used as offerings during the festival. These rice balls symbolize the *rup* (human shape), and when they are offered, they are associated with names of deceased people, or *neam*. By combining the shape (*rup*) with the name (*neam*), the process during *Phchum Ben* is known as *neamrup*, which is an offering that constitutes the entirety of a person.<sup>54</sup> Because the process of mourning – much like the understanding of the cycles of death and rebirth – is not understood to be linear in Khmer thought, the cyclical nature of *Phchum Ben* represents and reflects the cyclical nature of the mourning process.

The annual performance of *Phchum Ben* is also linked to the notion that the connection with the dead and the performance of this annual ritual is “obligatory”<sup>55</sup> in that people must connect with their dead relatives at least once a year. The *Phchum Ben* ceremony gives an opportunity for descendants to do so who might not otherwise have the time or capacity to perform regular rites. A motivating factor for the performance of this has been indicated to be

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<sup>53</sup> Judy Ledgerwood explores the processes of *Phchum Ben* with particular attention to that festival’s impact on societal ordering in her article “Buddhist ritual and the reordering of social relations in Cambodia” (2012).

<sup>54</sup> Guillou (2012): pp. 218

<sup>55</sup> Field research conducted in Cambodia in 2014 included a conversation with staff at the Transcultural Psycho-social Organization which will a focus in Chapter Four; the interviews revealed subsidiary information on *Phchum Ben* that is useful for expansion on that which has been found in the literature. The “obligatory” nature of ritual was described by a staff member during a focus group interview.

guilt: “*Phchum Ben* is the best obligation. We believe if you do not do this ceremony, people feel a lot of guilt because they miss something.”<sup>56</sup>

A significant part of the ritual processes that surround transference of *bon* to the deceased is the *bangskol* (*pansukula* in Pali) ceremony, a mortuary chant-based ritual that passes on the *bon* made by the offerings through either individuals or collectives to the dead themselves. Traditionally, a *bangskol* refers to the fabric used to make the monks’ wardrobes, according to the rules of asceticism for becoming a monk. The remains of the deceased would traditionally be covered with the *banskol* cloth, and the monks would physically manipulate, pull on, or massage the fabric while chanting and praying, symbolically representing the early ascetic practice of appropriating fabric found on a corpse as a symbol of self-sacrifice and rebirth.<sup>57</sup>

Various food preparations are made and brought to a temple or sacred space, offered to the monks, and then consumed collectively by the community after the ritual offering has been made. There is a separate food offering made to the spirits specifically, which is left on the temple grounds or near the threshold to the sacred space. By using a monk as a conduit for communication and transference of *bon* to the dead, laypeople are able to access the capacity to make corporeal offerings and have the *bon* accumulated to their ancestors.

#### **1.4 Cultural models of socialization prior to the Khmer Rouge**

Human patterns of behaviour are shaped by various socio-cultural structures and worldviews that create patterns of disposition, temperament, and reactions acquired through daily lived experiences. In Cambodia, a particular example of a cultural model that contributes to a holistic consideration of the capacity for the Khmer Rouge to have so quickly and successfully seized the nation is that of disproportionate revenge<sup>58</sup>, as it relates to enculturated patterns of intra-community suspicion. Disproportionate revenge means that retaliation for wrong-doing is expected to be more severe than the initial wrong; this has frequently led to cycles of revenge in Cambodia that have been known to carry on across generational divides.

The roots of this form of disproportionate revenge can be located in Cambodian socialization customs that are associated with a shame-versus-honour dichotomy. Children are

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<sup>56</sup> TPO Focus Group Interview participant.

<sup>57</sup> As described by one of the monks interviewed.

<sup>58</sup> Hinton (2005, 2009): Alexander Laban Hinton has explored the sociological and cultural roots of cyclical revenge in Cambodia, and provides a succinct analysis of the cultural contexts within which the eruption of violence in arose, including that of disproportionate revenge.

socialized into seeking honour for their family through high achievements, while strictly taught to avoid behaviours that would cause them and those in their family shame before other community members. The resulting tendency is for Cambodian culture to perpetuate aggression towards those who are deemed to be the source of dishonour or shame. Identified facets for dealing with aggressive thoughts are *tuap chett*, blocking or controlling the feeling and internalizing it, and *rumsey komhoeng*, external expression of the aggressive thoughts through either actions or words.<sup>59</sup>

### 1.5 Socio-political Milieu and the Rise of the Khmer Rouge

Between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, Cambodia, as the Khmer Empire of Angkor, was a robust and powerful state. Initiated by Jayavarman II, a series of *devarajas* (divine kingships) ruled over Angkor, revered as manifestations of the gods of Hinduism,<sup>60</sup> and imbued with transcendental qualities that connected the power of the kingdom to the divine, elevating the perceived worth of the state and its people to that of a spiritual and celestial calibre. However, residing in a “cultural fault-line between the Indianized, Theravada Buddhist culture of Thailand and the Sinicized, Confucian culture of Vietnam,”<sup>61</sup> the nation experienced episodic invasions, power and rule shifting between Thai and Vietnamese control prior to the colonial era, which saw Cambodia taken over by French hegemony from 1863 until its independence in 1953.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the post-Angkor, pre-colonial period, Cambodia was headed by figures whose power was absolute. These figureheads were believed to be born of a rewarded karmic destiny in the form of divine kingship. Their power was absolute, their ideas infallible, and their authority unchallenged.

During their colonial rule, the French undertook a process to restore the lost Angkorian history to the Cambodian people through endeavours to uncover and re-discover architectural ruins, to explore and establish lost chronologies, and to refine the collective artifacts from Angkorian law, religion, and society. Under the reign of King Norodom Sihanouk (1941-1955), Cambodia resisted French colonization and gained independence, re-establishing itself as a strong

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<sup>59</sup> Hinton, 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Hinduism was the state religion during the regional Kingdom of Vnom, the Indianised Southeast Asian region encapsulating parts of Cambodia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. Angkor Wat was an originally Hindu monument, and the Khmer language is rooted in Sanskrit, the ancient Hindu language considered to be spoken by God. For a history on pre-Angkor Cambodia and the roots of Hinduism, see O'Reilly (2007).

<sup>61</sup> Chandler, 1979.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

nation rich with history that connected them to the religio-cultural milieu of a time long passed. Compared favourably with the *devarajas* of Angkorian period, King Sihanouk was revered as the father of Cambodia. He praised the prestigious history of Khmer heritage, made a mandate to liberate Cambodia from foreign occupation and rule, and succeeded in establishing the independence of the nation before taking the role as Prime Minister in 1955.

## 1.6 Buddhism under the Khmer Rouge

The Khmer Rouge prohibited the practice of Buddhist religiosity during the period of reign, a process that has been referred to as ‘ritualcide,’<sup>63</sup> during which Khmer people were disconnected from processes of ritual practice and religiosity that led to the “rupturing [of] their participation in cosmic ordering.”<sup>64</sup> Ordination of monks ceased entirely, and the annual festival of *Pchum Ben* was abolished and banned. The traditional performance of death rites were similarly disallowed by the Khmer Rouge, as were any propitiation of spirits – guardian or ghost – and all rituals and rites that generally tended to be part of Khmer Buddhist life.

While the Khmer Rouge could do little in the way of preventing internal or individual belief from continuing, it was the external expressions of religiosity that were damaged so severely, particularly on an institutional level. Traditional Khmer Buddhism relies heavily on the rites and activities of the *sangha*, many of whom had been forced to disrobe or break *vinaya* (discipline) during the time that the Khmer Rouge regime was in power.

There are reports of secretive continuity of Buddhist practice during the era of the Khmer Rouge,<sup>65</sup> but many of those reports are victims who undertook meditative practice and performed mental transference of *bon* or merit so as to avoid punishment if caught performing rituals. There were, however, some select groups of Khmer Buddhists who took that risk and continued to practice in subtle ways that did not draw any attention.

The most significant absence of practice during this period is that of funerary rites. Cremation is the traditional method for disposing of the deceased within Khmer Buddhism, but it was rare that this would be possible during the Khmer Rouge era. Often in mass graves, bodies of those who died were buried, placed into caverns or caves, or simply left out, exposed in a heap

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<sup>63</sup> Levine (2010).

<sup>64</sup> Ledgerwood (2012): pp. 192.

<sup>65</sup> Ian Harris’s *Buddhism Under Pol Pot* (2007) provides expansive detail on secret practice, the eradication of rituals, and the ways in which Khmer Buddhists upheld their traditions against the slaughter and forced eradication of practice.

near to a killing field. Not only was the proper treatment of the bodies impossible under the Khmer Rouge, so too was the appeasement of the ghosts or spirits of the dead. The ritualicide meant that there would be no transference of merit or *bon* after the loss of a loved one. Further, the massive loss of religious specialists meant that there was a marked decrease in those who would have the spiritual power or ability to undertake processes that transfer *bon*. The transference of *bon* was limited because of scarcity: forced starvation meant that there was barely enough food for those who were struggling to survive, and certainly not enough food to make proper offerings to the spirits of the dead.

Beyond the ritual aspect of Khmer Buddhist practice, sacred spaces were desecrated and converted into military spaces, prisons, or sleeping quarters, or otherwise significantly damaged and unusable during the Khmer Rouge era. Several monastery compounds were used by the Khmer Rouge as military bases, storage for provisions, or torture chambers for political prisoners. Images of the Buddha and other spirits, including *neak ta* houses, were destroyed, removed, or severely damaged by either Khmer Rouge cadres, either intentionally or by ongoing warfare in various regions across the country. Sacred texts, religious literature, monk robes, and other symbols of Khmer Buddhist religiosity were either confiscated or destroyed. One of the goals of the Khmer Rouge regime was to eradicate any semblance of religious adherence; the eradication of Khmer Buddhism was undertaken violently and with determination.

### **1.7 The Fall of DK and the Vietnam Period**

Immediately after the fall of the Democratic Kampuchea in January of 1979, the nation commenced a hurried process of justice and memory initiatives that included an ad-hoc judiciary process, the Revolutionary People's Court, the transformation of S-21 detention camp into a museum to memorialize the atrocities,<sup>66</sup> and the building of numerous *sdop* (from the word *stupa*, memorials to house bones) across the country. This process occurred under the supervision of the Vietnamese occupying forces, and while there were allowances of memorial rituals led by monks during the occupation, Buddhism was not actively encouraged or supported by the occupying Vietnamese.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Known as the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, the site is a former secondary school that was used as a security prison by the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh. Of the estimated 20,000 detainees held during the Khmer Rouge regime, only 7 people survived at the time of liberation.

<sup>67</sup>Gottesman (2000).

The Vietnamese protectorate over Cambodia was widely criticized, with over 100,000 Vietnamese soldiers and political advisors working in collusion with former Khmer Rouge cadres to control the nation. It has been suggested that the allowance of some ritual aspects of Buddhism, as well as the wide-spread memorialization in the form of *sdop* building and the display of human remains, were primarily for “political and propaganda purposes.”<sup>68</sup> This was done in an effort to legitimize the presence of Vietnam as something that was necessary for the protection of the victims and for the continued resistance of the Khmer Rouge, who had gone into guerilla hiding and receded from the populous areas of the nation.

The Vietnamese occupation era represented a perpetuated state of liminality for the nation: it was no longer engaged in civil war, yet there had not been a process of ‘liberation’ for the Cambodian nation, as it was under control of a violent occupying force. Instead, the Vietnamese installed a government and continued to exercise control over the Cambodian people, limiting their autonomous capacity to create sustainable and meaningful modes of societal healing. The push for legitimacy proved to be a primary motivator of the memorialization projects when, once the United Nations Transitional Authority was established in Cambodia. The *Paris Peace Agreement* (formally titled *Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict*) was signed in October of 1991, after which state upkeep of the memorial projects and of the *sdop* buildings was discontinued, and many fell into disrepair throughout the 1990s.<sup>69</sup>

The *Paris Peace Agreement* marked the conclusion of the Vietnamese occupation period, formally understood as an armed conflict between Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea. Nineteen international governments gathered to be signatories to the agreement during a time when the Khmer Rouge were still holding control over parts of the country, and armed conflict between the KR and the Vietnamese was ongoing. The *Paris Peace Agreement* outlined a process for ending the armed conflict itself, and contributed a framework through which a democratic Cambodia could be politically structured and built.

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<sup>68</sup> Guillou (2012): pp. 214.

<sup>69</sup> Guillou (2012) investigated the discontinued upkeep of the memorials directly and identified, through interviews, that the shifting government structure, the return of Prince Sihanouk, and the political uncertainty of the processes through which reconciliation would be attempted made leadership in local community structures shift focus away from these memorials and towards the processes of establishing political stability. Further, many locals felt that the memorials were state-sponsored, and as such did not feel connected to them.

To end the conflict, the United Nations sent a mission to Cambodia, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), until 1993. This mission supervised a ceasefire, prepared the nation for the development and implementation of a new constitution, and organized and oversaw a democratic election process while promoting human rights across the country. The elections in 1993 saw the country form the framework of a constitutional monarchy with former Prince Sihanouk's coronation as King and a hung parliament that resulted in Sihanouk taking power as the acting Head of State for the country. Hun Sen's *Cambodian People's Party* saw the former Khmer Rouge cadre, who had defected to Vietnam to participate in leading the occupation, become the Prime Minister of Cambodia in 1997 through the execution of a coup d'état that overthrew the democratically established co-premier system within which he was co-leader of the nation, alongside Norodom Ranariddh. He has remained the Prime Minister of Cambodia since.<sup>70</sup>

## 1.8 Post-Occupation Religiosity

Once the shift towards building political stability for Cambodia as a sovereign nation began, local communities took over the processes of caring for the deceased, overseeing the memorials and identifying local needs for spiritual healing and reconciliation with those who had not survived the Khmer Rouge. Participatory religiosity<sup>71</sup> has emerged as a fundamental route towards spiritual reconciliation that has been undertaken at the grassroots since the fall of the Khmer Rouge. Research has indicated that participatory elements of religious practice contribute both to the subjective mental health wellness of individuals as well as to the integration of individuals into a social collective; by sharing the experience of public displays of belief, individuals create a shared experience that supports bolstering community development and nurtures social cohesion.<sup>72</sup>

As identified in this work, the immediacy of the Khmer Buddhists' return to practices of participatory religiosity confirms the significant role that these ritual acts play in the social

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<sup>70</sup> The ongoing reign of Hun Sen as the leader of Cambodia, despite the links to the Khmer Rouge itself and the ongoing inconsistency of free and fair electoral processes in Cambodia are outside of the scope of this work. See Gottesman (2000).

<sup>71</sup> By 'participatory religiosity' I mean the public and collective carrying out of religious adherences and rituals that contribute to a system of outward-facing displays of belief. Participatory religiosity stands in contrast to private and internalized beliefs that are solitary and without a performative or ritual element. For more on the relationship between well-being and devotional (private) and participatory (public), see Ellison et al (1989).

<sup>72</sup> Ellison et al (1989): pp. 103-104.



integration and healing of the nation. It was through local community initiatives – not through the guidance of the international community who were active in Cambodia during this time – that this form of religiosity began to emerge as a strategy for communities to face and contend with the traumatic experiences of extreme violence that had just occurred. This further confirms the need for local direction in the development and delivery of practices of participatory religiosity in the Khmer Buddhist community within Cambodia.

### **1.8.1 Ghosts and Ritual: appeasing the dead after the Khmer Rouge**

Much of the local turn to ensuring that the dead were appeased and taken care of is related to the increased reports of spirits in Cambodia, especially near to the killing fields or to the memorials where collected remains have been housed. There have been many reports of increased sightings of the female witch ghost, *ap*, a phosphorescent light that is able to navigate between the natural and supernatural world,<sup>73</sup> as well as of other apparitions determined locally to be those who have died violent deaths. Part of the shift towards ritual appeasement of spirits has included creating vibrant, livable, and more densely populated spaces around the areas where there have been an increased presence of malevolent spirits, since “ghosts prefer remote, dark and uninhabited places.”<sup>74</sup>

The Khmer Rouge regime saw a marked increase in the number of those who experienced *khmaoch tai hong* (a violent death)<sup>75</sup>. This increase has been responded to through the performance of varying funeral rituals, but those rituals themselves have been complicated by the absence of deceased persons’ remains. Southeast Asian Buddhism has a rich history of varied responses to deaths that were not awarded proper funerary rituals. Offerings that are ritualistically transferred into merit – or *karma*, or *bon* – have undertaken similar processes, and rites of invitation are carried out to open sacred spaces to the presence of spirits and otherworldly creatures across the region, to varying names and specifications.<sup>76</sup> The “offerings are intended to honor but also to attract”<sup>77</sup> the spirits into spaces where they are being invited

Within Khmer Buddhism, this ritual approach to improper burial can be found in the form of a *bangskol*. The requirement of the remains for the deceased is part of the ritual process. In a

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<sup>73</sup> Guillou (2012): pp. 215.

<sup>74</sup> Guillou (2012): pp. 216.

<sup>75</sup> Arensen (2012).

<sup>76</sup> Strong: pp. 261-268

<sup>77</sup> Strong (1992): pp. 265.

post-KR context, this ritual needed to be re-imagined in order to accommodate the absence of human remains that were specifically identified; the same prayers and chants were used, and the simple offering of a piece of cloth to the monks was re-determined to be something that produces *bon* in itself as a means to sending the dead along to a path of rebirth. Those who wish to give *bon* to the dead make offerings to the monks while offering the dead person's name with the understanding that the presence of that name would represent the corpse or remains that are not available for the ritual process.

After the Khmer Rouge regime, following the Vietnamese Occupation period, *Phchum Ben* became increasingly important as a means for the nation to collectively appease spirits and ancestors. The traditional festival of the dead increased in social and cultural importance in correlation with an increase in the amount of people who had died bad deaths without proper funerary rituals and who then became *pret* (hungry ghosts). The eradication of ritual practice during the Khmer Rouge regime meant that many of those who died during the period of the Democratic Kampuchea rule were not laid to rest in an appropriate manner. Further exacerbating this problem was the mass grave nature of the thousands of killing fields that had been utilized during the DK era.

Propitiation of guardian spirits – including the creation of new *neak ta* – began after the fall of the Khmer Rouge as well. Many Khmer Buddhists believed that the lack of propitiation during the DK period would lead to a further agitation of local spirits and guardians, and that many of those who wielded power during the DK era, as well as those who sacrificed their own lives for the sake of others, would have obtained the power during their *khmaoch tai hong* (violent death) to become a *neak ta* or guardian.

Pol Pot himself has come to share many of the characteristics of a guardian or *neak ta*. While dissimilar to the aspect of worship that would be connected to a watchful or benevolent guardian, the propitiation of Pol Pot as something of a *neak ta* is linked to the continued prevention of malice that his spirit could cause in Cambodia. Anne Yvonne Guillou explains that, “even after his death, Pol Pot remains powerful, although this power can be used in a positive or a negative way, just like that of the *neak ta*. He is believed to be able to help the living who come and pay tribute to him, but I assume that, on the contrary, he can harm those who are not respectful towards the place where his ashes have rested since his cremation.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Guillou (2012): pp. 224.

The Cambodian belief in the capacity for the spirit world to impact the living world has contributed greatly to the need for the Khmer Buddhists to return to ritual practices that appease spirits. These beliefs also underwrite the increase of attention to ritual practices and Khmer Buddhist ontologies related to meaningful participation in the human world. The specific attention to ritual practices involving the dead can be linked to particularized traumas that were experienced by those who had survived the Khmer Rouge regime.

### **1.8.2 Trauma and mental health after the Khmer Rouge**

To understand the importance of the incorporation of re-constructed Buddhist ritual in the healing processes and reconciliation endeavours of Cambodia, first the level of trauma and the gravity of their suffering must be considered; Buddhist Cambodians can be linked to their identity as genocide survivors/victims<sup>79</sup> and the traumas that were experienced during that period of their lives. The experiences of Cambodians living in the genocidal context of the Khmer Rouge resulted in intense and sustained trauma for millions of victims.

Trauma itself has been described as an almost universal experience that transcends borders and cultures<sup>80</sup>. From this perspective, emic understandings of what trauma means for a given culture are less important; a universal experience can be explored through varying subjective lenses. Joel Robbins suggests that, “in our current understanding any person anywhere can be expected to suffer traumas of essentially the same kind in the face of certain kinds of violence and deprivation.”<sup>81</sup> This understanding lends itself to the interpretation that, since trauma is a communal experience, the response to trauma can be similarly communal. That is to say that Western ontologies of trauma can be used to treat traumatized subjects across various cultures, as the trauma itself is considered to be similar.

Within the ontological framework of Western psychiatric medicine, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders defines trauma as having occurred when both “the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or

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<sup>79</sup> While it is common in the context of international discourses around extreme violence and genocide to use the term ‘survivor,’ during the course of my field research interviews I discovered that the term survivor translates to *anak rsarean meanchivit*, which contextually is more aligned with the English word ‘leftover.’ As such, there is not a Khmer term for ‘survivor’ that does not have a less negative connotation. In English, the word ‘survivor’ is considered empowering, but in Khmer it is a word that devalues the action of surviving. For the purpose of this work, the word ‘victim’ will be used to describe Cambodians who lived through the Khmer Rouge, to respect the local context and opinions on the language of this discourse.

<sup>80</sup> Robbins (2013): pp. 453.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid*: pp. 453.

threatened death or serious injury, or the threat to the physical integrity of self or others, ... [and] the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.”<sup>82</sup> The Khmer Rouge was wholly violent and cruel, and each criterion for trauma was unequivocally met among Cambodians during the Democratic Kampuchea era.

The threat to physical integrity was immediate. Khmer Rouge cadres entered Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, and within three days they had evacuated all inhabitants from the city, publicly executing all resisters. Within the week, all urban centres in the country were occupied and evacuated. Internally displaced, over two million Cambodians struggled to survive as they were forced from the urban regions with no direction or information, and no food, water, or shelter. Families were split up and scattered and many died of thirst, hunger, exhaustion, illness, or execution. The threat to the physical integrity of Cambodians under the Khmer Rouge was also persistent. After the evacuations, the KR cadres forced those that they did not kill to undergo intensive manual labour, with almost no food or water, until their bodies gave up and they could no longer work. Exhaustion, illness, and disease took many lives while others were constantly faced with hunger and unremitting labour; the response to these experiences was uninterrupted terror.

Many who were not bound in forced labour were sentenced to prisons as suspected class enemies.<sup>83</sup> In these prisons – constructed out of former schools and temples – they were subjected to particularly violent forms of torture, intending to coerce the prisoners into confessing to enmity of the Khmer Rouge. In these torture prisons, Cambodians both witnessed and experienced extreme violence on a daily basis. All across the nation, those who were not participating in the atrocities as soldiers and cadres were being consistently exposed to both direct as well as indirect forms of brutal violence while the Khmer Rouge systematically destroyed the social and religious fabric of the country in pursuit of their agenda.

“The essence of psychological trauma is the loss of faith that there is order and continuity in life. Trauma occurs when one loses the sense of having a safe place to retreat within or outside oneself to deal with frightening emotions and experiences.”<sup>84</sup> There was no continuity of life for the Cambodian victims of the Khmer Rouge; they lived in a constant state of terror and despair

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<sup>82</sup> Armstrong & McBride (1995): pp. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Because the Khmer Rouge identified as a Communist group, they adopted Communist rhetoric to describe victims of their persecution. ‘Class Enemy’ is commonly used to refer to those who are resistant of a particular revolution; in the traditional sense they would refer to middle and upper classes of society.

<sup>84</sup> Armstrong & McBride (1995): pp. 6

under unscrupulous military observance. They had no safe haven for retreat. Their physical environment was unsafe, and their bodies and minds were pushed to such extreme limits that there was only a narrow capacity for introversion to escape the harsh realities of their daily lives and manage their fear and pain. The Khmer Rouge regime created severe and intensified forms of trauma for the entire population.

Trauma victims frequently develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is defined as “an anxiety disorder including three symptoms of clusters: re-experiencing the trauma through nightmares, flashbacks, or intrusive memories; autonomic hyperactivity, such as exaggerated startle response, night sweats, irritability; and avoidance symptoms, including social isolation, restricted range of emotion, and absence of intimacy in relationships.”<sup>85</sup> Cambodians who have undergone psychological evaluations and assessments have reported high rates of psychiatric disorders,<sup>86</sup> with over half (56%) having diagnosable PTSD. Anger is a particular factor in the development of PTSD which has frequently led to anger-associated autonomic stimulation, with 58% of those participants having episodic outbursts of anger that result in physiological responses such as increased heart rate and heart palpitations that match the classification of a panic attack. The psychological afflictions that are most relevant to the psycho-spiritual well-being of Khmer Buddhists include that of re-experience. A survey conducted amongst Cambodians in the diaspora shows the frequency (in percentage) of re-experience during panic attacks caused by PTSD and trauma:

“(1) Performing slave labour while starving: 34%; (2) Being tortured (e.g. being beaten in prison, being forced to stand while biting ants crawl over body): 11%; (3) Being the victim of intended execution (most commonly surviving being struck in the back of the head with a club): 9%; (4) Witnessing evisceration: 9%; (5) Being exposed to bombing during the Vietnamese invasion in 1979: 9%; (6) Seeing someone killed (in some cases a family member): 7%; (7) Memories of the escape journey from Cambodia to the Thai border camps: 7%; (8) Being beaten up by a SO officer [senior officer] (in all cases the victim was a woman): 7%; (9) Being raped (in all three cases, the

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<sup>85</sup> Sigmund (2003): pp. 222.

<sup>86</sup> The particular study of Cambodian trauma from which these statistical figures are taken was a study of Cambodian refugees conducted by Hinton et al (2009). It is important to note the limitations to the scope of this study: it was undertaken in the diasporic context of the United States; it was conducted among a convenience sample of patients in clinical treatment; it cannot be universalized or essentialized as a concise exemplification of Cambodian experiences of trauma.

victim was a woman and the rape occurred during the Pol Pot period): 7%.<sup>87</sup>

Such panic attacks are reported to be often triggered by feeling anger, a cultural model determined to have been a major factor in the socialization of Cambodians prior to the Khmer Rouge era.<sup>88</sup> Through a Khmer Buddhist lens, however, these so-called symptoms of PTSD are understood very differently.

The understanding of PTSD through a subjectively Khmer Buddhist lens is religious in nature. Flashbacks or re-experiences of traumatic events are attributed to the presence of spirits who continue to suffer because of the absence of appropriate ritual undertakings at the time of their death. They can be found in the form of a spirit haunting, such as the *sramay*. Older generations of Cambodians – particularly those who grew up in the pre-Democratic Kampuchea era – often attribute illness or misfortune to malevolent or angry ancestral spirits and believe their somatic symptoms to be manifestations of those spirits who have entered into the realm where these people live in order to deprive them of their essence of life, or to possess them and turn them into a *snang* or *rup*.<sup>89</sup>

The ontology of trauma for Khmer Buddhists, defined here as “the sense of the psychosociocultural experiencing of a particular individual”<sup>90</sup> is closely linked to the religious belief system associated with the presence and reality of spiritual beings than it is to the Western psychiatric definition of the PTSD construct. This unique trauma ontology confirms my assumption that there is need for significant attention to the responses to those experiences, and to the routes through which the nongovernmental sector has approached inclusion of treatment for these ailments in the reconciliation endeavours associated with civil society and the ECCC in Cambodia. These experiences among Khmer people has been identified as significant and prevalent. For many older Khmer Buddhists, Buddhism itself - especially the role played by religious specialists within this tradition - remains the most appropriate mechanism for community as well as psychological healing.

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<sup>87</sup> Hinton et al (2009): pp. 1391

<sup>88</sup> Hinton (2005): pp 96-125

<sup>89</sup> Choulang (1988).

<sup>90</sup> Hinton, et al (2009), pp. 1393.

## 1.9 Western Psychiatric Medicine and Spirituality

Western psychiatric medicine has recognized and acknowledged that religious adherence is a significant dimension of human life that provides an outlet for an individual to give meaning to experiences.<sup>91</sup> As such, amalgamated approaches to facing trauma between classical psychiatric treatment and spiritually-based therapeutic methods have emerged. Western psychiatry has paid an increasing amount of attention to the notion that psychological trauma can produce a loss of control that “invites existential questioning on the part of the victim”<sup>92</sup> and as such, the American Psychiatric Association has become a proponent of spiritual facets to mental health treatment planning. Psychiatric researchers have reached a relative consensus that spirituality provides an “energy, creative force, and general power for living [that] is often blocked in the life of the traumatized person”<sup>93</sup> and that re-building and cultivating these forms of spirituality that have been lost by that trauma is integral to healing.

The problem with the Western-developed approach to incorporating spirituality into treatment planning is that such processes have been linked primarily with Western cultural models and Western conceptualizations of the Divine and of spirituality. Contemporary research has been primarily focused on the role of North American Christianity in treatment for military veterans with PTSD, finding links between trauma relief and the capacity for traumatic events to be classified as part of a ‘sacred order.’<sup>94</sup> This research suggests that praying to the Abrahamic God is a positive means for coping with PTSD,<sup>95</sup> either as a means to combat the impact of trauma<sup>96</sup> or as a means to allow individuals to move past the disruption of social bonds that contribute to the isolation and social dysfunction that is characteristic of PTSD.<sup>97</sup>

While this research has created a conceptually adequate frameworks for those enculturated in a Western society – one within which openness, extroversion, sharing, and humanistic monotheism is proliferated – when applied to the Khmer Buddhist context, they fall short. They do not address the introversion, paranoia and distrust, cultural models of revenge, or acceptance of the existence of spirits that characterize the Khmer Buddhist case.<sup>98</sup> Cambodian

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<sup>91</sup> Sigmund (2003), pp 221.

<sup>92</sup> Sigmund (2003), pp. 222

<sup>93</sup> Armstrong & McBride (1995), pp. 8

<sup>94</sup> Chen & Koenig (2006).

<sup>95</sup> Peres et al (2007).

<sup>96</sup> Drescher et al (2004).

<sup>97</sup> Sigmund (2003).

<sup>98</sup> Hinton (2005): pp. 55-60.

cultural models that internalize anger and trauma seem to disallow productive therapy when conducted via Western psychiatric methods of treatment, regardless of the extent to which Khmer Buddhist spirituality is acknowledged.<sup>99</sup> Further to this is the continued emphasis - by psycho-social researchers in the Western world - on the presence of spirits as a causal factor for psychological duress. For these reasons, it is pertinent that traditional Khmer Buddhist healing be incorporated into the reconciliation and healing processes for Khmer Buddhists, and that this incorporation be applied through Khmer ontologies rather than Western ones. An understanding of this requisite has led to the emergence of mental health-based approaches to the reconciliation endeavours occurring within the context of Cambodia, specifically those that are linked to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, or the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

### **1.10 Khmer Rouge Tribunal**

In order to understand the use of participatory religiosity in reconciliation and healing in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, we must examine the non-religious reconciliation efforts that have been undertaken. The Khmer Rouge Tribunal<sup>100</sup> was a result of over a decade of negotiations between the United Nations and the Government of Cambodia to create a model for an international tribunal that would mix the use of local Cambodian professionals with those international experts as determined by the United Nations. 2007 marked the official start of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). This was ground-breaking in that it would prioritize the legal system of the host country<sup>101</sup> and create a mixed court to try those senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge and those “most responsible for crimes committed during the

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<sup>99</sup> Hinton et al (2009).

<sup>100</sup> It is important to note, but outside of the scope of this thesis, that there have already been trials that have convicted leaders of the Khmer Rouge. Immediately following the Vietnamese takeover, the Revolutionary People's Tribunal in Phnom Penh indicted Ieng Sary and Pol Pot for genocide and they were sentenced to death *in absentia*, though neither were executed. It has been speculated that part of the reason for the ECCC's establishment to once again try KR leadership was an attempt from Prime Minister Hun Sen to distract from his recent coup, distance himself from KR ties, and attempt to gain favour on the international stage as a leader. For more on this, see Margolis (2007).

<sup>101</sup> The creation of this mixed system that prioritizes the legal system of Cambodia was in contrast with – and considered to be more progressive than – the United Nations sanctioned Genocide Tribunals that had been held in Yugoslavia and Rwanda following the mass atrocities in those countries. Those particular tribunal systems were *ad hoc*, and did not put importance on the local systems of law and understandings of retribution and transitional justice.



period of the Democratic Kampuchea”<sup>102</sup> who would be charged with the orchestration of the crimes against humanity, or of the war crimes that were committed during the KR era.<sup>103</sup>

The mandate of the ECCC is to prosecute two categories of perpetrators: senior leaders of the Democratic Kampuchea, and those believed to be most responsible for grave violations of national and international law. There are two stages of each case: the judicial investigation and the trial. Investigating judges conduct impartial investigations of all evidence and, if there is sufficient proof against the charged persons, an indictment sends the case to trial. The trial begins with the indictment, evidence is then presented in court, deliberations are made, and the judgement decides guilt and provides sentencing.

### **1.10.1 Khmer Rouge Tribunal: the prosecution of identified leadership**

The infamous Khmer Rouge S-21 Security Centre (Tuol Sleng) was a torture prison administrated by Kang Kew Lew, also known as Comrade Duch. Within this prison, electrocution, starvation, water-boarding, lashing, hanging, bludgeoning, and other forms of violent torture were used to attempt to force prisoners to confess their ties to foreign agents, or to confess to being traitors of the Khmer people. As the former Chairman of S-21, Duch was the first case (Case 001) to stand trial before the ECCC. The case lasted 72 days of hearing evidence, with various witnesses and 22 Civil Parties.<sup>104</sup> The Trial Chamber convicted Duch of crimes against humanity<sup>105</sup> and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions<sup>106</sup> on July 26, 2010, sentencing him to 35 years imprisonment.

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<sup>102</sup> [www.eccc.gov.kh](http://www.eccc.gov.kh)

<sup>103</sup> The research in this section has been conducted through a combination of interviews with various participants in the ECCC processes and attendance of several sessions of the proceedings in-person during field research in 2014. Full details of the ECCC can be found at [www.eccc.gov.kh](http://www.eccc.gov.kh)

<sup>104</sup> Civil Parties consist of any person who is able to demonstrate significant “physical, material, or psychological injury as a direct consequence of at least one of the crimes prosecuted before the ECCC” (<https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/organs/civil-parties>). Becoming a Civil Party includes an application process that must be reviewed by representatives of the ECCC. Not all victims of the Khmer Rouge regime are Civil Parties, but all Civil Parties are victims of the Khmer Rouge regime.

<sup>105</sup> Including: persecution on political grounds; extermination (encompassing murder); enslavement; imprisonment; torture; and other inhumane acts (<https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/case/topic/90>).

<sup>106</sup> Including: willful killing; torture and inhumane treatment; willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health; willfully depriving a prisoner of war or civilian of the rights of fair, regular trial; and unlawful confinement of a civilian. (<https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/case/topic/90>)

Case 002<sup>107</sup> began on 15 September 2010 and concluded on 23 June 2017. It initially indicted Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, and Ieng Thirith for crimes against humanity, genocide against Muslim Cham and Vietnamese peoples, and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. The proceedings against Ieng Sary terminated following his death on March 14, 2013, and Ieng Thirith was found unfit to stand trial after being diagnosed with advanced dementia in 2012. Nuon Chea was primarily responsible for propaganda and education of the party, acted as the Deputy Secretary of the Party, was acting Prime Minister of the party when Pol Pot was unable, and was a main contributor to the design and execution of the DK plan. Khieu Samphan was the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Cambodia, and a direct supervisor of the mass dislocations.

This case was divided into two separate trials to identify and indict specific crimes. Case 002/01, which focused on the crimes against humanity related to the forced evacuations, the execution of Khmer Republic soldiers at the *Toul Po Chrey* execution site<sup>108</sup> following the takeover; and the roles of the accused relating to policy development that acted as a foundation to the remaining crimes during the DK era. Case 002/02 was directly focused on genocide against Cham and Vietnamese peoples; forced marriages and rape; internal purges; crimes against humanity committed at various security centres; forced labour at various work sites; the treatment of Buddhists; Tram Kok<sup>109</sup> cooperatives that seized agricultural production from local farmers and used forced labour to do the farming; and the targeting of former Khmer Republic Officials. On 7 August 2014, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan were found guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced to life imprisonment, concluding Case 002/01. On 23 June 2017, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan were found guilty of genocide, and sentenced to life in prison.

Cases 003 and 004 are ongoing and seeped in controversy. In case 003, Meas Muth,<sup>110</sup> secretary of division 164 in the Khmer Rouge, was investigated for charges of genocide, crimes against humanity, other inhumane acts, grave breaches of the Geneva Convention, wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, and premeditated homicide. Case 004 sees investigation for charges for Khmer Rouge leaders Im Chaem, Ao An, and Yim Tith, with

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<sup>107</sup> For the duration of my field research, Case 002/01 was ongoing. The proceedings attended were in relation to this case, and all of the interviews conducted in the data collection that will be discussed in Chapter Two were conducted during of these particular proceedings, in 2014.

<sup>108</sup> This site operated between 1975 and 1977 in the province of Pursat and was a site of mass executions of both ex-military personnel as well as civilians.

<sup>109</sup> A Khmer Rouge District located in the province of Takeo.

<sup>110</sup> The original case also charged Sou Met, but that investigation ceased after his death in June 2015.

the case being divided into three sections (004/01; 004/02; 004/03). The case against Im Chaem, who allegedly oversaw execution and torture at the Phnom Trayoung security centre, has been controversially dismissed.<sup>111</sup> Case 004/02 against Ao An and case 04/03 against Yim Tith are both ongoing.

Case 003 has been publicly opposed by Prime Minister Hun Sen and the arrest of Meas Muth has been continuously postponed, with support from the three Cambodian judges on the panel. Both Cases 003 and 004 have been publicly scrutinized for placing limitations on pursuing cases against Khmer Rouge leadership. These limitations are connected to alleged political pressure to close cases relating to those former leaders who had defected prior to the fall of the Khmer Rouge; the placing of political pressure places the legitimacy of the entire ECCC in question.<sup>112</sup> Further to these political pressures, the ECCC cases have been criticized for the rejection of certain victim applications. The initial requirements for a Civil Party to be registered as a victim were that applicants could demonstrate that they had been harmed or victimized by any crime that fell within the jurisdiction of the ECCC. However, in 2010 the registrant protocols changed to require the victimization to have been as a direct impact from the specific crimes of the person being charged. This shift not only greatly limited the ability for multitudes of victims to register as Civil Parties, it also retroactively stripped some CPs of their status, causing significant duress. Researchers in Cambodia have suggested that for Cambodians to have been registered as a victim and then had that revoked was significantly harmful, “with the applicants perceiving the revocation of civil party status as a rejection of their experiences of harm”<sup>113</sup> Despite these rejections, both the Victim Support Section as well as the Civil Parties component of the ECCC remains a crucial part of the process of the tribunal, and continues to be considered important as a formally recognized outlet for victims of the Khmer rouge who have been accepted as Civil Parties to cope with trauma.

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<sup>111</sup> Reports of governmental interference in the decision to try Im Chaem have led to much criticism around the process of the ECCC and the collusion of the government, with accusations of hindrance to the proceedings being connected to the high level of former Khmer Rouge cadres and mid-level leadership being in government. The decision was not unanimous within the judges, and appeals have been filed and overturned since. See Julia Wallace’s profile on Im Chaem for the New York Times in February 2017 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/24/world/asia/cambodia-khmer-rouge-im-chaem.html>)

<sup>112</sup> Mydans (2017), “11 Years, \$300 Million and 3 Convictions. Was the Khmer Rouge Tribunal Worth It?” *New York Times*, April 10, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/world/asia/cambodia-khmer-rouge-united-nations-tribunal.html>

<sup>113</sup> Killean (2018): pp. 283.

### **1.10.2 Khmer Rouge Tribunal: Victim Support Section (VSS) and Civil Parties**

The ECCC has innovatively increased the capacity for victims of crimes that are within the jurisdiction of the court proceedings to be recognized, and to participate in the proceedings themselves. In order to facilitate this participation, the ECCC established the Victims Support Section (VSS) as a liaison between the ECCC and Civil Parties, and as a special body to process applications for victims who choose to participate in the proceedings of the tribunal. “The VSS is created for facilitating the meaningful participation of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime in the legal proceedings of the ECCC and coordinating the process of seeking reparations to those victims through legal and non-judicial measures and programs that address broader interests of the victims during the course of the ECCC proceedings and beyond.”<sup>114</sup>

The primary functions of VSS are to provide information to victims about their rights to participation, to enable victims to file paperwork and Civil Party applications, provide assistance in obtaining legal advice, facilitating and collectivizing groups of Civil Parties for each case, holding outreach events to ensure the rights of victims are accessible across Cambodia – even to those who are not registered Civil Parties – and ensure that victims who participate as Civil Parties are provided support to manage risk and trauma.

Civil Parties are the formal participants of the ECCC<sup>115</sup> that have the right to participate actively in the judicial proceedings, and are entitled to seek “collective and moral reparations.”<sup>116</sup> This active participation is an innovation of the ECCC in that it is the first time in the history of UN-sanctioned International Criminal Courts that victims of the mass atrocities have access to participation directly within the tribunal, and the first time that they are able to contribute (through consultation) to the determining adequate collective and moral reparations and non-judicial measures. By enhancing the recognition of the victims in a formal tribunal process related to mass atrocities such as the Cambodian genocide, those directly impacted by the violence that occurred at the hands of the Khmer Rouge are allowed the narration and amplification of their experiences, allowed access to formal processes of reconciliation and reparations, and centred in the quest for justice. Providing agency to those victims of the Khmer Rouge could potentially increase the capacity of the ECCC in general to be seen as beneficial for

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<sup>114</sup> Mission statement from the VSS section of the ECCC website: <https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/vss-structure>

<sup>115</sup> According to the ECCC website, 3, 866 victims have so far been admitted as Civil Parties in the ECCC.

<https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en>

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/vss-structure>

Cambodian people themselves, not just for the attempt of international standards to be set and met by participating nations within the rubric of the United Nations.

The ECCC Reparation Program<sup>117</sup> has identified four categories of collective reparations that are targeted to providing meaningful redress to Cambodia as a nation in an effort to heal the traumas of the mass atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. These identified areas are: remembrance; rehabilitation; documentation; and education, with four projects housed in each category.<sup>118</sup> Projects that are tied to memory and remembrance of the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge are aimed at “commemorating the lives and deaths of victims, providing literal and metaphoric spaces for grieving and reflection;” rehabilitation projects are “intended to restore the mental and physical health of Civil Parties/Victims, or at least mitigate the harm resulting from the trauma suffered;” documentation projects are “aimed at documenting the history of the Khmer Rouge regime with a focus on the victims and the harms they suffered as well as ECCC jurisprudence, contributing to a nationwide reconciliation;” and education projects are “aiming at educating on the history of the Khmer Rouge regime with a focus on the victims and the harms they suffered as well as ECCC jurisprudence, in order for the crimes to be remembered and not repeated.”<sup>119</sup>

Non-judicial measures (NJM) are undertaken in collaboration with external partners to address some of the broader needs of coping with or healing from trauma as various individuals or groups of Civil Parties. These measures are intended to support victims, as a whole. NJM projects are intended to address “the broader interests of victims,” while collective and moral reparations are aimed at national healing for Cambodia as a country and the specific trauma of the victims themselves. The VSS recognizes reparations as “an important remedy for victims of

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<sup>117</sup> This program’s consultation process includes the VSS, Civil Party Lead Co-Lawyers of the ECCC (that represent the Civil Parties), and other relevant stakeholders, including Victims Associations, NGOs Government Agencies, Donors, and Development Agencies. During field research, I attended several stakeholder meetings as a participant observer to gain insight into these processes through which reparations have been identified.

<sup>118</sup> The projects are as follows: Remembrance – National Remembrance Day; Community Memorials Initiative; Preservation of Crime Sites; and the Tuol Sleng Stupa Project. Rehabilitation – Testimonial Therapy Initiative; Self Help Groups for Rehabilitation; Gender & Transitional Justice Project; and National Reconciliation Event. Documentation – Forced Transfer Exhibition; Victims Register; Publication of ECCC Verdict; and ECCC Documentation Centre. Education – Chapter on Victims Participation in a National History Textbook; ECCC Virtual Tribunal; Community Peace Learning Centres; and Victims Foundation of Cambodia.

<sup>119</sup> Victims Support Section (VSS) and Civil Party Lead Co-Lawyers (LCLs) of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) (2013). The full Reparation Program can be found at <http://vss.eccc.gov.kh/images/stories/2014/Reparation.pdf>.

mass atrocities ... [that] aim at acknowledging the sufferings of Civil Parties and help to restore their dignity and wellbeing.”<sup>120</sup>

### 1.11 Seeking Reconciliation outside of the ECCC

The ECCC has endeavoured to incorporate some semblance of religiosity, however small, within the context of the courts as well. The court grounds are home to a large *neak ta* statue that acts as both a guardian to the ECCC as well as a symbol of the marriage between local and international actors that is represented by the court itself. When a witness or otherwise enters the courtroom, they must first swear in front of the *neak ta* outside, and secondly in front of the judges in the trial chambers. The inclusion of this particular performative ritual within the rubric of the tribunal indicates that there is an acknowledgement, however minimal, of the need for participatory religiosity in order to create meaningful routes to social and national healing. This small caveat to the largely non-religious and legalistic framework for the ECCC’s operations, however, does not provide a fullness of reconciliation for Cambodian people. There is a gap between the non-religious reconciliation efforts that the ECCC represents and the reconciliation that is needed by Khmer Buddhists in the journey to heal from the mass atrocities of the Khmer Rouge.

Despite the massive undertaking that the Khmer Rouge Tribunal represents on a national and international stage, the fact remains that reconciliation has continued to be sought outside of these formal channels. It is significant to note the aforementioned rejection of Civil Party applications<sup>121</sup>: *only* the victims who register as Civil Parties are able to formally access the reparations and reconciliation projects affiliated with the ECCC; *only* Civil Parties are given access to the proceedings; and given space for their experiences to be centred and amplified. The restrictions that exist in the declaration of an individual as a Civil Party – including barriers to participation that are built into the complex system through which one would have to apply, such as education, physical access, poverty, literacy, and being in the diaspora – mean that this significant innovation is still only representative of a small portion of those who experienced trauma at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. The very nature of the Khmer Rouge atrocities means that every Cambodian that lived during that period, as well as the generations that follow them,

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<sup>120</sup> Victims Services at the ECCC: <https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/vss-structure>.

<sup>121</sup> Page 49 of this thesis.

are impacted by these mass atrocities. The restrictive nature of the inclusion of the VSS and Civil Parties does not adequately reflect the high level of need for reconciliation, healing, and support from Cambodian people.

Beyond the formalized processes of reconciliation that have been identified through the ECCC processes at the national and international level, reconciliation at the grassroots level is an important aspect of reconstructing Cambodian society. The degree to which this tribunal is important to Cambodian people remains unclear; urban and educated Khmer have widely criticized the high cost of an international tribunal against elderly people who are unlikely to survive even a small portion of their sentences, and rural Cambodians seem generally disinterested in this urban-centred and internationally motivated process of justice.<sup>122</sup> The indifference towards the tribunal is somewhat exacerbated by the fact that there is former Khmer Rouge leadership – particularly Prime Minister Hun Sen – who have remained at the institutional helm of the country and who have made continuous efforts to encourage the nation to “dig a hole and bury the past.”<sup>123</sup>

The trial itself has, over the course of its existence from inception to its ongoing Case 004, encountered a number of criticisms the way that it has been carried out.<sup>124</sup> Some have suggested that as a body that constitutes the pursuit of what has been considered to be a sense of closure for the nation, the ECCC will actually do little more than “re-traumatize and destabilize a people that has had decades to recover.”<sup>125</sup> It has increased the presence of international actors in a way that has contributed to cyclical dependency on continued international presence which damages the proliferation of capacity building and sustainable autonomy within Cambodia.<sup>126</sup> Further to this, the trial has been highly criticized both nationally as well as globally for being a

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<sup>122</sup> Anne Yvone Guillou conducted a literature review of journalist reports and reflected on the urban/rural divide between reasons for disinterest in her article “An alternative memory of the Khmer Rouge genocide” (2012).

<sup>123</sup> In an article in the Cambodia Daily (December 29, 1998) Prime Minister Hun Sen was quoted suggesting that Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea should not stand trial in Cambodia and stated that “We must dig a hole and bury the past, and look ahead into the 21<sup>st</sup> century” as part of the “new government’s policy of pacification and national reconciliation.” (Chantara & Johnson, 1998).

<sup>124</sup> Some of the problems include political interference, demands for an end to foreign participation, involvement of former Khmer Rouge leadership, and a price tag of hundreds of millions of dollars that critics believe would be best used serving the collective nation of Cambodia directly. For more on these criticisms see Margolis (2017).

<sup>125</sup> Margolis (2007): pp 155.

<sup>126</sup> The ongoing and problematic nature of international NGO presence in the so-called lower-income countries is outside of the scope of this paper, but it should be noted that ‘development’ and ‘international aid’ has become a multi-billion dollar industry in the context of LCDs in South and Southeast Asia.

“failure”<sup>127</sup> that has cost hundreds of millions of dollars, has only convicted 3 people so far, and has done little in the way of creating forward-looking societal, community, and social developmental healing. It has provided some psychological reparations and healing programs for victims who have applied and become Civil Parties, but the fact remains that the nation’s entire population has direct or indirect trauma from the Khmer Rouge era, and these tribunals have not focused on the social ordering or community healing that could contribute to national stabilization and societal healing.

There have been shifting and conflicting opinions in literature regarding the social ordering of Cambodian society post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. Research from the early 1990s has suggested that social relationships were so extensively ruptured by the extreme violence of the DK period that only households remain as units of trust and dependency, with minimal demonstrated sense of the community interdependence that existed prior to the rise of the Khmer Rouge. This narrative perpetuated the idea that the collective trauma of Cambodians is so great that social obligations to their communities seem near impossible.<sup>128</sup> Later research<sup>129</sup> has produced a counter to that narrative suggesting that while Cambodians may not be returning to the pre-KR ideal of social relationships and obligations, there is human agency that is linked to the re-negotiation of social organization that draws on pre-war structures.

A further aspect of the reconciliation process undertaken by Cambodians is that not only are they re-establishing the social relationships that they have among those who are living, they are simultaneously re-establishing cosmic stability that had been so ruptured during the era of the Khmer Rouge and the period following. Exacerbating the need for this cosmic stability is the notion that so many of their immediate relatives are likely to be *pret* (hungry ghosts) and in need of *bon* (merit) and offerings to be able to move onto a rebirth.<sup>130</sup> At the same time, the guardians and various spirits associated with regional social and cultural spaces had been angered by remaining unappeased for the Khmer Rouge period, resulting in an apparent doubling of the need

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<sup>127</sup> Campbell (2014).

<sup>128</sup> Viviane Frings (1994) argued that the processes of forced and violent “collectivization” during the Khmer Rouge period have created a social rift that sees no future reparation, and Cambodians have been unable to move past this due to trauma. The contemporary state of ongoing societal fracturing that is demonstrated through the continued priorities of civil society to mend these rifts seems to indicate that this assessment holds true.

<sup>129</sup> Both Judy Ledgerwood and Kobayashi Satori have conducted research that provides analyses considering social relationships and ritual participation as interdependent in grassroots reconciliation processes in Cambodia. See: Ledgerwood (1998); (2008); (2011); and Satori (2005).

<sup>130</sup> McLellan (2009).



for ritual reconciliation in the form of participatory religiosity, which aligns with the assumption of this work.

Religious belief and practice can be seen as a way for Khmer Buddhists who have undergone extreme and traumatic violence to re-establish and re-create their cultural identity. Interspersed with Khmer Buddhism is the pervasive belief in *neak ta*, which remain a salient factor in the fullness of mental health and healing for Khmer Buddhists in Cambodia. Further to the role of Khmer Buddhism in trauma and mental health treatment,<sup>131</sup> local and indigenous spiritual therapy could be used as an alternative mode of reconciliation with the past. While the Khmer Rouge era saw a near eradication of religious specialists who had the training and knowledge to undertake practices of spiritual therapy that include communication with the spirits, there is an identifiable need from the community for those processes to take place. This need has been identified by Kdei Karuna through community-based research, and has been incorporated into the programmes that are delivered to communities across Cambodia, a point which will be further explored in chapter four.

Psychological disturbances that are identified by Cambodians are understood to be directly resultant of spirits that were not receiving the proper rites during the Khmer Rouge era, and as such justice and healing projects should prioritize developing routes through which this phenomenology is addressed: the trauma experience of Khmer Buddhists that were victims of the Khmer Rouge is understood as spiritual in nature, therefore the response and treatment must incorporate a needs-based response to the identified religious needs of the Khmer Rouge victims in order for authentic reconciliation to occur. The ECCC's structure is built within a framework of legal theory and academically oriented social and political thought. Those frameworks are inadequate as the sole approaches to seeking reconciliation, and this inadequacy creates the impetus for Khmer Buddhists to seek reconciliation outside of the judicial system, desiring participatory religiosity to be included in the routes through which justice and healing are undertaken.

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<sup>131</sup> See 1.8.2: Armstrong & McBride (1995); Sigmund (2003); Hinton et al (2009).

## CHAPTER TWO: Method, Methodology, and Theory

The Khmer Rouge Era follows a narrative that aligns with that of Victor Turner's Social Drama,<sup>132</sup> which suggests that the disruption of the social life of a given group will follow an orderly sequence until the disruption is solved by either a permanent division of the group or a mending of some social rift. The third stage of this sequence is the redress phase<sup>133</sup>, within which mechanisms are employed to resolve the crisis. In Cambodia, the ongoing presence of competing approaches to reconciliation has perpetuated the redress stage, halting resolution of the social drama. The needs assessed by each approach are driven by competing ontologies that provide different definitions of what Cambodia would need to heal and achieve reconciliation.

To understand the differences between the international and local approaches to reconciliation and healing in Cambodia, I conducted field research in Cambodia from January until August, 2014. During this time, I was able to engage in-depth with two nongovernmental organizations, undertake archival and limited edition library research at the Document Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam) research facilities, attended a Stakeholder Consultation meeting<sup>134</sup> related to the VSS, and attended various stages of the proceedings of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia Case 002 against Nuan Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Thirith, and Ieng Sary.<sup>135</sup>

I entered the field with the intent of answering the question: *To what extent is the reconstruction of spirituality a priority in the program planning and implementation of NGOs in Cambodia? Is there a difference in the needs assessed by local versus international NGOs? Are local ritual needs being met in the process of reconciliation and reconstruction of Cambodian social and religious life?*

I had hypothesized that Cambodians would have found the ECCC tribunal somewhat useful in their healing processes, as a nation; that the international and local NGO actors would be aware of and engaged in spiritual dimensions of reconciliation; and that the local needs for authentic healing would include participatory religiosity. As a researcher, I was not only as an

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<sup>132</sup> Turner (1980).

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> This meeting brought together representatives from the ECCC, Cambodian and international NGO representatives, members of the community, and other interested parties.

<sup>135</sup> Ultimately, Case 002/01 only tried Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan. Ieng Sary died during the proceedings and the case against Ieng Thirith was severed after she was found unfit to stand trial due to dementia. During my fieldwork I was able to attend the proceedings during which all four accused were on trial.

outsider to Cambodian religiosity and the experiences of the Khmer Rouge, but also as a Canadian with limited language capacity beyond very rudimentary conversational Khmer.

The time spent in the field quickly revealed the ever-changing nature of conducting human-based research, and the need for flexibility in research design and strategy in fieldwork-based, ethnographic research endeavours. Throughout the course of this project, my own identity has shifted in ways that have impacted my own subjective approach to the work of this project, and a markedly different version of myself has emerged from these experiences than had existed upon entering the field. As such, this chapter will speak to the fullness of the research undertaken, the theoretical framework that I chose for the purpose of this work, and an engaged and reflexive description of the approach and strategy of the research itself, including how it has been shaped by my own growth, transition, change, and experiences.

## **2.1 The Problem**

While exploring the role of Buddhism in the post-Khmer Rouge reconciliation work being done on the ground in Cambodia, it became apparent that there was a discernible difference between how organizations that were engaged with the ECCC through specific ties to international interests – including funding streams and hired advisors – were using Khmer Buddhism in their reparations projects. This difference notably contributes to the overarching understanding and definition of reconciliation in Cambodia that exists within those organizations. After some time in the field, the original intent and question of this work was proven to be partially incomplete; this prompted a shift in the question through which the research would be undertaken.

I initially hypothesized that the tribunal would be useful in the reconciliation process and lead to positive outcomes that would assist in Cambodia as a nation. What I found upon entering the field was that much meaningful work was happening outside of the context of the urban centres and away from what had, as an outsider, seemed to be the epicentre of social justice processes in Cambodia. In fact, the transitional justice of the ECCC was largely removed from the social justice work of local grassroots organizations in general. This separation creates a disconnect between the perspectives of the international stakeholders, who are primarily located and working from the urban capital of Phnom Penh, and those of the impacted community itself.

My initial assumption of the mass appeal of the ECCC was proven incorrect almost immediately after entering the field.

I further had hypothesized that those NGOs identified as working closely with the ECCC would be engaged in culturally aligned practices as part of the processes of transitional justice and reconciliation with which they were engaged. Non-Khmer engagement with Buddhism is undertaken by varying bodies of the ECCC – including those that participate within the rubric of the Victims Support component of the tribunal – in a somewhat limited capacity. Programmes related to reconciliation in Cambodia often include decisions that are made based on the perspectives of international stakeholders, inclusive of the use of Buddhist ritual. Kdei Karuna engages in a phenomenological approach to the use of Khmer Buddhist ritual in their programming work in that the rituals themselves are considered real. The subjective understanding of those involved in the ritual process is bracketed to prioritize and treat as reality that which is the reality of the people that the ritual is being performed for. TPO, conversely, uses existing models of treatment for post-conflict trauma that were developed elsewhere – namely in South America – and adapts them to fit the local religious experience with the subjective understanding that TPO's psychiatric interpretations of the experience of the participants are the centred reality. This work is led and guided by non-Cambodian theorists, researchers, and practitioners typically those from the West.

My hypothesis that the local communities would need authentic religiosity, including the appeasement of spirits, in relation to the social healing of the community was proven correct, but I quickly realized that these needs were not being fully met by the centralized programming that was delivered primarily within the urban centres. My discoveries during the first months of field work prompted an extension of the work to engage with these organizations further, to allow participant observation outside of the Phnom Penh epicentre of the ECCC. I hoped to ascertain some of the ways that Khmer Buddhism was used as a framework for reconciliation in relation to the ECCC and the international community. As such, I transformed the problem and research question to be: *What are the ways in which Khmer Buddhism is related to the work being done directly by the ECCC stakeholder community? What is the role of participatory religiosity in the post-Khmer Rouge NGO engagement of reconciliation work?*

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework from which I undertook literature-based research approached the notion of spiritual reconstruction and reconciliation in a post-Khmer Rouge context by exploring Victor Turner's social drama and adapting that model of understanding societal rifts to the context of Cambodia. The intent of my thesis project has been to develop a way to construct a theoretical framework for dealing with notions of spirituality and religion, the influence of violence on them, and the need for *local* direction, management, and programming in the work of NGOs that focus on reconciliation in post-conflict societies. Entering the field, I adapted my research to include the realities of the reconciliation work being undertaken by NGOs directly related to the ECCC within the urban context. The theory of the Social Drama, which I will explain in section 2.2.3, remains a valid framework through which the saga of the Khmer Rouge regime up until the contemporary Cambodian society can be considered, however the resultant analysis has proven in need of significant restructuring, and more theoretical models for understanding this context have been identified as necessary.

Incorporating subjectivity into this theoretical framework facilitates an exploration into the human experience that is salient only insofar as it aligns itself with reality; the challenge of this theoretical application is "to reinstate the uncertainty and angst that life holds when it is actually lived rather than merely studied and theorized."<sup>136</sup> As such, translating the theoretical concept of Turner's social drama into an application for the real-world context of Cambodian social milieu is particularly challenging. To understand this impact, there is a need for an understanding of what I mean when I use the word 'subjectivity' and how that word will be used.

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, despite significant and justified criticism on much of the body of his work,<sup>137</sup> has developed a definition of 'the subject' that I find to be useful in this case, supplemented with the incorporation of intersubjectivity and cross-cultural symbolic social patterns that point out the need to identify what general environment a social drama has occurred within. Subjectivity, here, means quite simply that each subject tells their own story based on what they perceive to be the truth. The subject's story negotiates a particularized position that answers the question of origins (where one comes from), knowledge or meaning

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<sup>136</sup> Biehl et al (2007): pp. 9.

<sup>137</sup> Lacan has drawn significant criticism in his "Return to Freud" psychoanalytic approach – particularly the perpetuation of phallogocentric discourse that is particularly ignorant of the complexities and variances in gendered experience to the point of near misogyny. See Irigaray (2011) and Roudinesco (1997).

(the epistemological understanding of a subject), and bodily integrity (the ways in which a subject moves through physical spaces). Subjectivity, here, describes an ontology that is specific to individuals or particular groups.

In reaching a conclusion about the relationship between competing subjectivities, I frequently consider the implications of variant phenomenologies and ontologies within the field of civil society in Cambodia. The clear distinction between these two terms relates to realities, knowledge, and experiences. Phenomenological considerations are given to the experiences and understandings of reality that are held by a given subject; ontological considerations are given to that which is explained, believed, or implied to exist – or not exist – but is not related directly to the experience of a subject, rather related to the *acceptance of a reality* that is *understood to exist*. Phenomenology can exist within an ontological framework, but ontology does not necessarily exist with phenomenological understanding. Subjectivity refers to the individual's cohesive reality that is shaped by the combination of ontological understandings and phenomenological experiences.

As outlined in Chapter One, current research on reconciliation, transitional justice, and local post-conflict development, as it relates to the nongovernmental sector, has not proven adequate at grappling with the relationship between spirituality, development, and post-conflict social and psychological healing. The spiritual dimensions and local understandings of the ways in which the material and immaterial world coincide are often glossed over or translated into social-scientific representations of those beliefs. The crux of the research on the ECCC, Khmer Rouge, and Cambodian healing has been done through a lens of political and international legal theory. Reconciliation and transitional justice are explored through legal frameworks and anthropological or religious analyses of the human or social community itself pre- and post-Khmer Rouge. The tribunal itself has been constructed around legal theories that are undertaken through an international and globalization-based lens, which results in the existing literature's inadequate theoretical framework for grappling with this issue authentically, as the spiritual dimensions and legal dimensions are consistently separated from one another. It is my belief that these dimensions of the transitional justice and reconciliation of Cambodia need to be examined in relationship with one another to begin to comprehend the role of the various nongovernmental organizations in constructing a new moral order within Cambodia.

In attempting to construct a theoretical framework for the variety of research undertaken in this project, I will combine three theoretical considerations to illuminate the relationship between participatory religiosity - the ways in which religion is expressed through active participation in ritual, space-making, and meaning-making activities within a given context - and the creation of a new moral order in post-conflict Cambodia. First is the idea of biopolitics and biopower – the relationship between political power and the human biological condition – as developed by Michel Foucault<sup>138</sup> and expanded upon by numerous other theoretical researchers. This concept will be used to examine the control over knowledge, power, and bodies that has been achieved by applying political power to the mental health components of the Cambodian post-conflict healing processes. Secondly, the performative aspects of transitional justice, as understood by Kimberly Theidon<sup>139</sup>, can help to identify the aspects of the transitional justice work related to the ECCC that are performative in nature in that the ongoing and consistent utterances of internationally rooted language around transitional justice, reconciliation, and reparations have transformed the societal healing context of Cambodia into an international geopolitical issue and has, by nature of that performativity, solidified the role of the international actors within these processes. Finally, Paul Connerton's work in *How Societies Remember*<sup>140</sup> will be applied to the memorialization work of the ECCC.

### **2.2.1 Triangulating Theoretical Approaches: biopolitics, performance, and memory**

A goal of this project is to identify the differences in approach to using Buddhist rituals within the context of nongovernmental organizations between two case studies associated with the ECCC: The Transcultural Psycho-social Organization and Kdei Karuna Organization. To undertake the analysis of these projects, a triangulation of the utility of Foucault's Biopolitics, theoretical frameworks for understanding performance as it relates to transitional justice, and Connerton's memory work will be undertaken. Foucault's theory will be applied to understand the medicalization of the Cambodian experience that has led to a western psychiatric approach to attempting to mend the rift and close the social drama. The performative aspect of the rituals themselves will be linked to the performance of justice through the ECCC. The ways in which Cambodian memory has been rejected, accepted, and pushed for through various stakeholders

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<sup>138</sup> Cisney & Morar (2015)

<sup>139</sup> Theidon (2006)

<sup>140</sup> Connerton (1989).

will be identified. This work will be applied to the direct data that has been collected throughout the course of the research for this project.

Biopolitics is a term closely links political and social systems with biological life systems, coupling human social sciences with biological sciences to suggest intrinsic links between biology and the decisions and occurrences of political life<sup>141</sup>. In 1976<sup>142</sup> French scholar Michel Foucault defined the notion of biopolitics, suggesting that throughout the course of history, multiple strategies and techniques have been developed and utilized by systems of governance and power to facilitate the “political administration of biological life.”<sup>143</sup> By this, Foucault was linking biopolitics with the concept of biopower, which is essentially conceptualized as a means for management and control of human populations – by systems of power – that is rooted in obtaining that control through a political strategy that objectifies basic biological features of human beings.

Kimberly Theidon’s work on transitional justice in Peru has provided a theoretical framework that is particularly useful in understanding the performative aspects of transitional justice that has normalized the use of international language in a way that creates sustainable legitimacy of the international community in Cambodian civil society. This seems to be a central theme that is not only embodied in legal practices, but also in the re-establishment of community and the unification for those who have experienced extreme violence and must return to a continuity of life that brings victims and perpetrators into the same spaces. Theidon describes transitional legal practices as “not just a set of procedures but also of secular rituals that make a break with the past and mark the beginning of a new moral community” and continues with the assertion that, outside of these formal legal processes, “communities also mobilize the ritual and symbolic elements of these transitional processes to deal with the deep cleavages left – or accentuated – by civil conflicts.”<sup>144</sup>

While there are marked differences between the armed conflicts in Peru and in Cambodia, the theoretical considerations of transitional justice work as being part of a narrative that leads to the adoption of international language can be applied to the context of this project. This idea is rooted in theoretical considerations of performance and performativity within the context of

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<sup>141</sup> Lemke (2011).

<sup>142</sup> Foucault, trans. Graham Burchell (2007): Foucault details this in a lecture series titled *Security, Territory, Population*, given in French between 1976-1978, and translated in this version in 2007.

<sup>143</sup> Alsheh (2014): pp 15.

<sup>144</sup> Theidon (2006): pp. 436.



societal functioning that aims to understand the ways in which people situate themselves within the social world, and react within a social context. Performativity, here, means the ways in which language and action combine to create meaning and form subjective perspectives. Essentially in this context, it refers to the processes through which actions and activities are undertaken to construct and perform the creation of a new social order: a reconciled community after the social schism of extreme violence. That social order is defined and directed by international legal perspectives through the consistent use of international legal languages that have successfully merged the notion of healing with the notion of transitional justice, creating a coexistence of the two.

Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember* provides a succinct grounding through which the ongoing use of participatory religiosity, as it relates to nongovernmental organizations' utilization of Buddhism in social justice work in Cambodia, can be assessed. He suggests that modes of experience are based on a "prior context in order to ensure that they are intelligible" and that "the world of the percipient, defined in terms of temporal experience, is organized by a body of expectations based on recollection."<sup>145</sup> He goes on to suggest that *commemorative ceremonies* and *bodily practice* are the two primary modes of recollection that are utilized by a given social group as a way to frame and understand experience.

Commemorative ceremonies are events, rituals, festivals, or otherwise that are explicitly connected to the continuity of a particular memory within the context of a community or society. These ceremonies are related closely to the notion of rites. Rites, for Connerton, are not "merely expressive," nor are they "merely formal," nor are they "limited in their effect to the ritual occasion."<sup>146</sup> Rather, they are instrumental to an end, deliberately structured, wholly meaningful and real; they represent the phenomenological reality of the participants, and affect their lives long after the rite itself has been performed.

That is to say that although commemorative ceremonies may be undertaken within a particular time and space, the impact of these ceremonies potentially holds and maintains significance to the whole life of those participants who undertake the ceremony. Connerton suggests that "ritual behaviour is best understood as a form of symbolic representation"<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Connerton (1989): pp. 6

<sup>146</sup> Connerton (1989): pp. 44-45

<sup>147</sup> Connerton (1989): pp. 48

wherein the participants of the ritual or ceremony use various symbols, as are available to them, to represent intangible or abstract concepts that are at the root of the ritual itself.

Foucault's collusion of biology and power exists within what Sherry Ortner, building on Joel Robbins' work on the "suffering subject"<sup>148</sup> refers to as "dark theory:" a perspective on the world that sees everything "almost entirely in terms of power, exploitation, and chronic pervasive inequality."<sup>149</sup> Within this rubric is the understanding that societal functioning, particularly as it operates within a lower-income region of the world, is inseparable from colonial history and the power structures that exist within that history. The wielding of biopower is inherent within colonial structures, and it follows that this particular relationship lends to the assumption that a particular power differential has been created through the medicalization of trauma.

The notion of the "suffering subject" refers to a shift in anthropological research that Robbins suggests occurred in the 1980s. Instead of focusing on the "radically other," anthropology began to focus on those who experience what Robbins and others have described as culture-transcending: the subject who has experienced trauma, or the "suffering subject." An important balance to the focus on the "suffering subject"<sup>150</sup> can be found in Robbins' "anthropology of the good,"<sup>151</sup> which he proposes a shift towards three groupings of work: value, morality, and well-being; empathy, care, and the gift; and time, change, and hope.<sup>152</sup>

While the crux of my thesis rests upon the study of the "suffering subject" of Cambodians who have experienced trauma, the counter and balance to that is found in the positionality of the organizations which are the focus of this case study, which I argue falls within the third grouping of Robbins' position: time, change, and hope. Each organization in its own way recognizes that the passage of *time* separates the subject from the suffering, offers remedial solutions to *change* the subject from a "suffering" one to one that is "healed," and provides *hope* that the healing will occur and Cambodians will be reconciled, forward-looking and optimistic about the future of their communities.

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<sup>148</sup> Robbins (2013).

<sup>149</sup> Ortner (2016): pp. 50.

<sup>150</sup> Robbins (2013).

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Robbins (2013): pp. 457-458.

### 2.2.2 Subjectivity

Subjectivity can be defined simply as being the perspective through which an individual filters their experiences and makes meaning of the world around them. What contributes to and shapes subjectivity has been identified first by Freud and then expanded upon by Lacan<sup>153</sup> as what is known as splitting, or *spaltung*. This term represents the division of the human, as a subject within the context of an objective world. The human self-conscious differentiates *itself* from the rest of the world, through the recognition of that which is the “I.”<sup>154</sup> Through further identifications of the self as *via negativa* – the negative identification of something as one thing by virtue of it *not* being another – subjectivity emerges at the individual level. Lacan identifies the ‘mirror stage’ as being the initiation of the individual into the process of subjectivization that every human undergoes; the process of *becoming a subject*.<sup>155</sup>

The relevance to the process of applying subjectivity to the theory of the social drama in the context of this project is that of Lacan’s notion of the *symbolic realm*.<sup>156</sup> The symbolic realm represents the capacity for abstraction and thought, the realm of human consciousness wherein lies the ability to utilize representation to conceptualize ideas. Closely aligned with language, as a system of signifiers that abstractly represent that which is being signified, the symbolic register pre-exists an individual’s interaction with it, and is closely aligned with community, society, culture, and those elements which make up a symbolic network of meaning that constitutes human social life. By entering into a symbolic world, Lacan suggests, human beings tacitly agree to the representational capacity of those signifiers that underscore the environment within which they are entering: the context that builds the worldview and subjectivity of that individual. That is to say that the entirety of symbolically represented signifiers has been established and legitimized throughout history. These signifiers relate to meaning-making and the advancement of language. Human subjectivity is created *by these symbols* as much as humans themselves are contributing to the continuity of the symbols’ accepted representation of the signified.

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<sup>153</sup> The term originates with Freud and there have been multiple theorists that grapple with this concept, but my thesis will focus on the Lacanian understanding of *spaltung*.

<sup>154</sup> Stavarakakis (1991).

<sup>155</sup> Stavarakakis (1991).

<sup>156</sup> It is outside the scope of this work to delve into Lacanian theory, but his tri-composed register theory sees of the ‘Three Orders’ sees The Real, The Imaginary, and The Symbolic as the registers through which all human experience is filtered. For further explanation, see Harari (2004).

Humans contextualize themselves into an environment that has already been established, a socio-cultural milieu constructed over a historic timeframe. Lacan suggests that the priority is given to the signifier over the construction of the signified: “meaning is produced by signifiers”<sup>157</sup> and that which signifies creates meaning, and places that meaning upon that which is signified. The world into which a human is born is full of abstract and concrete objects and paradigms which are already embedded with meaning from past generations, and a human entering that world starts from an already established position of meaning-making: subjectivity is wholly dependent on the symbolic realm, the contexts within which human beings find themselves.

To apply subjectivity within the Cambodian context is a useful starting point to exploring social drama and subjective theory. A challenge, however, to this application is the Euro-centric perspective (ironically, the subjective perspective), from which these theories have been developed. Cross-cultural considerations of such concepts is markedly absent from the theoretical musings of Lacan and, as such, it is important to inject theoretical considerations that take into account the multiplicity of social and cultural milieus within which subjectivity is established and developed at both the individual as well as the collective level. As a response to the limitations of Lacanian thought as it applies to the anthropological study of religion, Clifford Geertz emerges as a proponent that subjectivity should be considered aligned with the embodiment of culture, leading to the anthropological turn that “understands subjective life by analyzing the symbolic forms”<sup>158</sup> in a way that incorporates the notion of intersubjectivity as being significant. In this thesis, I have expanded the consideration of that which influences subjectivity to include cross-cultural elements as well as the introduction and induction of the multiplicity of subjectivities that shape the modern cultural context of Cambodia.

Strictly relying on Lacanian understandings of subjectivity and the symbolic register puts limitations on the capacity for a hyper-localized exploration into subjectivity that ignores the changeability of human social life. A theory that uses subjectivity must respond to issues facing human subjects on the ground, and engage “particularities of affect, cognition, moral responsibility, and action.”<sup>159</sup> A three-part model that explains the aspects of subjectivity that emerge across space and time has been developed by Biehl et al (2007): “[1] historically situated

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<sup>157</sup> Stavrakakis (1991): pp. 16.

<sup>158</sup> Biehl et al (2007): pp. 15.

<sup>159</sup> Biehl et al (2007): pp. 15

differences in social sensibility and what it means to feel and regard oneself as human; [2] cross-cultural differences in cognition, affect, and action; and [3] the peculiarities of each individual.”<sup>160</sup> As such, each of these conditions must be taken into account when localizing subjectivity and grounding it into a given context. By contextualizing subjectivity, my thesis will be more capable of situating the conditions within which Cambodian society has operated, which I believe to be integral to assessing the impact of the social drama on Cambodian subjectivity.

That is to say that the exploration of subjectivity should include intersubjective and contextual constructs that allow for the social drama and its impact to be coherently displayed. The impact of the social drama on Cambodian subjectivity is clearly transformative. However, the ways in which subjectivities are transformed is not so clear: rather it is flexible and contextual. Nonetheless, subjectivity is not a stagnant property of human experience; it is a dynamic entity that is both transformative as well as transforming. By understanding the way that subjectivities are shaped, it becomes clear that the social context and use of language have indomitable impacts on the subjective realities of a given cultural milieu. As such, the events of the social drama have shifted the Cambodian subjective reality by significantly altering the elements that make up the symbolic network of meaning for Cambodian social life.

### **2.2.3 Victor Turner’s social drama**

The organization of humanity into operative social collectives is predicated upon the notion that these group formations are not fixed, but rather are highly susceptible to the influence of a multiplicity of factors that configure, de-configure, and re-configure the social milieu in which this organization takes place. The nature of human subjectivity is also not immutable; it follows that as subjectivity is influenced, changed, and transformed, so too are the societal organizations that align with those subjectivities. That is to say that a social group is made up of a collection of individuals organized around some semblance of commonality: regional, ideological, religious, ethnic, or otherwise. These linkages are recognized and incorporated into the identity formation of a given individual which contributes to the collective grouping and bolsters that group’s continuity. Victor Turner (1982) identifies one such occasion within the context of human social history that leads to the dissolution of a given social group and follows a pattern towards societal re-configuration: that of the social drama.

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<sup>160</sup> Biehl et al (2007): pp. 16

The social drama operates in four successive stages, beginning with an initial rupture in the normative operation of a social group. This first stage is a schism (or breach) – either intentional or unprompted – that presents a challenge to the continued unity of the social group. The breach is followed by a crisis in which a moment of choice is presented to the group, and the group is split into factions as sides are taken. The third phase of the social drama is that of application of law, in which those representatives of unity with the societal whole attempt to mend the social cleavage by administering their own authority in order to isolate and contain the conflict. The final stage of the social drama is that of the outcome; this may be either the reconstitution of something similar to the pre-existing social group, or a reconfiguration of the group itself. In the context of the social drama, the outcome itself is not necessarily of much importance, for no matter what the outcome amounts to a change has occurred in the social group and the group itself has transformed into something new.

The breach disrupts the normative operations of society, and may be intentional and premeditated, or it may be spontaneous. It is not necessary that a breach will lead to the unfolding of the social drama, for once it has occurred there may be immediate response from authorities and proponents of social cohesion and unity who strive to immediately resolve the factioning and regain stability of the social context. However, if the breach is significant enough to cause a ripple effect within the social group in a way that is recognized and acknowledged by the entire group, then a schismatic breach has occurred. This phase, along with the outcome phase, should more appropriately be considered as moments rather than a set of elapsed chapters; they are occasions that bookend the crisis and redress stages, which have more longevity within the context of the social drama.

Once the breach has occurred, the crisis phase has been set into motion. Within this phase, the breach is expanded until it has encompassed the normative operations of a social group. Within this phase, resistance to the disruption that the drama has caused the social operations begins to emerge, demarcating the social group into factions that are either proponents of or opponents to the drama and the ways in which it is unfolding. The manifestation of the crisis phase is accompanied by societal reflexivity in the group; members engage their individual subjectivities, assuming partisanship positions within the emerging schismatic social context.

The crisis phase of the social drama is characteristically liminal, a quality shared with the redressive phase as well. Turner suggests that liminality is particularly pertinent in regards to the

process of “regenerative renewal.”<sup>161</sup> Positioned in a temporal space within which the pre-existent social condition has been eradicated, but a new one has yet to be stabilized, members of the group must shift towards redressive actions in an attempt to escape the liminal existence within which they have found themselves to be. Suspended between the bookend occasion of the breach and the eventually emergent outcome, liminality is that which blurs the lines between the crisis and redressive stages, particularizing the impact on subjectivities within the group. Liminality contains trace elements of both the previous as well as subsequent phases of the social drama, leaving liminars<sup>162</sup> in an unbound transformative process.

The redressive action stage marks a shift away from crisis and towards the reconstitution of unified societal continuity. This is the stage in which subjectivities are engaged to enact reflexive consideration of the crisis phase in an attempt to prompt construction of a transformed social context. Emergent processes of meaning-making are linked with the completion of a particular process, indicating the turn towards seeking redressive potentials to propagate meaningful social configurations from which the subjects in question may re-align themselves with one another: construction of the transformed/new society begins.

The outcome phase of a social drama marks its completion. It is that finality to the drama that leads to either reconstitution of the pre-existing socio-cultural milieu of a particular group, or alternatively the recognition of an *irreparable schism*<sup>163</sup> between the factions. The social drama theory has multiplicity inherent within it; social rupture does not necessitate a negative occurrence, but more simply operates as a framework from within which to assess social change, as it is instigated by historical occurrences. As such, the outcome of a social drama may constitute both positive as well as negative social transformations.

It is important to note the weaknesses of the social drama approach to analysis of the Cambodian context. This theory, as it exists, does not adequately incorporate instances of forced or violently undertaken social breaches in which the crisis phase does not reflect the existence of choice. The “moment of choice” that Turner heralds as leading to the social faction is not universal. Further theoretical considerations should explore notions of violently determined fragmentation of society.

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<sup>161</sup> Turner (1985).

<sup>162</sup> Those who are existing in a state of liminality.

<sup>163</sup> Turner (1985).

## 2.3 Data Collection

Data collection in Cambodia was undertaken in four phases: extensive archival and literature review research at the Document Centre of Cambodia; naturalistic observation of the judicial component of the reconciliation efforts in Cambodia; participant observation at two NGOs operating under the rubric of the Cambodian ECCC transitional justice endeavours; and in-depth interviews conducted with various stakeholders, NGO workers, religious specialists, and registered victims participating in the programs of reconciliation<sup>164</sup>.

The Document Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam) is a Cambodian NGO with a stated mission of researching and recording the era of Democratic Kampuchea. It contains the largest archive in the world on the Khmer Rouge period and is acknowledged to be the leading research centres on this issue. I was able to obtain a research pass from the DC-Cam office and access on-site literature and archives for literature-based research<sup>165</sup>. It is important to note the limitations of my research capacity at DC-Cam that coincide with a significant language barrier. I was not able to achieve a literacy level fluency of the Khmer language or in French – two languages in which there exist significant archival information – and so was limited to primarily English documentation and works that had been translated into English. Due to the scope of DC-Cam as an organization and international research repository, there were English translations of most of the articles that had been written in Khmer or in French.<sup>166</sup> Some primary sources such as newspaper articles, the Khmer Rouge era biographic databases, and collected confessions and transcribed interviews were not accessible in English.

Beyond the literature reviews and access to archival research, I utilized other forms of research methodology in the fieldwork of this thesis. Here, I will outline the research strategy, approach, methods of data collection, selection of participants, and ethical considerations, and discuss the limitations of the research done for this project.

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<sup>164</sup> Bernard (2000): The *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* is a collection of articles that inform each of the various methods that I utilized in undertaking my field research.

<sup>165</sup> Brettell (2014).

<sup>166</sup> Because Cambodia was colonized as a French Protectorate within French Indochina between 1867 and 1954, much of the research and archival information from that time period is in French.



### **2.3.1 Research Strategy and approach**

The strategic design<sup>167</sup> of this research project uses a triangulation approach that combines various methodologies to study my identified problem, using a qualitative approach that was best suited to the smaller sample sizes available to me. The aim of the qualitative ethnographic approach is to provide a complete and detailed description of the unfolding of the social drama in Cambodia. The direction and theoretical assumptions that I held at the beginning of this project have shifted significantly, and the project design was an ongoing process through which my own participation and impact were considered at length.

Limitations and differences between the qualitative ethnographic approach undertaken for this project and that of a quantitative approach guided my decision to use a qualitative approach to conducting this research. One limitation to this approach is that it is heavily based on my own personal judgments, interpretations, skills, and abilities and as such is difficult to replicate and to verify. Further, the research instrument in this approach is the researcher myself, which tends towards subjective immersion in the research field rather than an objective and distanced separation between the researcher and the researched. As such, the data collected is not constituted by numeric and statistic data, but rather through a narrative that was collected and interpreted by myself.

My approach to conducting this research was through an exploratory and inductive process of ethnographic data collection and analysis. The inductive approach used here has identified the problem for the purpose of conducting research – that there remains a period of liminality for Cambodia that has halted the completion of the social drama so as to contain the drama in the redressive stage – and then has built explanations from my own experience in the field. By taking an inductive approach, it allowed the research to shift and remain malleable to adjustments based on the realities in Cambodia.

### **2.3.2 Reflexivity: locating myself in the research**

Prioritizing reflexive and intersubjective approaches to the research in this project allowed space for the awareness of my own positionality within the context of the research itself. I consider the effect that my contribution had on the outcome of the research and believe that it is important to identify my role and my own contribution and influence on the subjects and findings

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<sup>167</sup> For a full overview on research design and strategy, see Johnson & Hruschka (2014).

as I conducted the research. Throughout the course of this project, I have grown increasingly committed to acknowledging that the information and data is intrinsically skewed not only by my ethical and political opinions, but also the intersubjective distance that I have – culturally, linguistically, and socially – from the subjects of research. Recognizing personal biases contributes to understanding the limitations of conducting research in this field. There is a fundamental need to build a relationship between the researcher and the subjects in order for the researcher to even attempt to ascertain any truths. Further, truth itself is subjective to the research subject, and the perceptions and interpretations of that information are intrinsically tied to the subjective worldview of the researcher. It seems impossible to acquire enough accurate knowledge about a subject to make a declaration of definitive findings.

Critical engagement in the academic study of social and cultural communities outside of my own has proven both necessary and productive in contributing to the capacity of this project's analysis of the findings of field research. I hope to guide the analysis and description of findings through a critically reflexive lens that intentionally addresses the politics of knowledge production in an effort to decolonize the research that was undertaken with significant naivety.

Shannon Speed has suggested, quite succinctly, that: "Understanding the inherent inequalities of research relationships, we have reached some consensus in anthropology of the importance of "situating ourselves" – incorporating a reflexive consideration of how our positioning affects the knowledge that we produce. This includes considerations of our power and authority in the relationship with our research subjects."<sup>168</sup>

At a personal level, the power differentiation between me and the subjects was not immediately or inherently obvious; my positionality as a student seeking to undertake a massive research project has a power dynamic that placed me to a lower stratification. That said, the act of academic research with the backing of a large-scale research university inherently creates a power differential that can wholly impact the results of the research, and have an effect on the responses garnered from participants within the research.

In contemplating power differentiations and the processes through which academic research is undertaken, my political stance, throughout the course of the research, has shifted significantly towards that of anti-oppression and decolonization. With a political perspective that is committed to anti-oppression and critical of the neocolonial nature of many Western academic

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<sup>168</sup> Speed (2006): pp. 74

pursuits to understand the socio-cultural other, particularly within the anthropological study of religion and cross-cultural studies – or, in this case, the anthropological study of religion through cultural contexts – it is important to identify the distance that I had from those researched: it is not my culture, and it is not my history. Participating in research, particularly research that is rooted in and linked to so much trauma, from an inexperienced researcher has felt, at best, problematic and at worst, neocolonial and harmful.

In an attempt to circumvent this political barrier to the completion of this project, I attempted to ascribe to the phenomenological understanding of religiosity, with the justification that by treating this research as phenomenological it would give academic credibility to the field research that would be less harmful, and less colonial. If the subjects of the research were treated in a way that would legitimize, above all, their own experience, then it could support practices of development, academia, post-conflict reconciliation, and transitional justice that are moving towards decolonization.<sup>169</sup>

That said, the reality of the lens of academia is such that through an endeavour nominally referred to as ‘research,’ it seems unlikely for the rectification of the desire to ‘legitimize’ cultural practices and the conceptualization of those practices as needing legitimacy. Further to this problem is the pursuit of analysis of cultural practices based on theoretical models of interpretation that are predicated upon a western Euro-centric model of understanding the world.

These political barriers have somewhat limited the execution of this thesis, but have allowed the space to frame the exploration and the undertaking itself with a critical lens of reflexivity that locates myself and my politics within the research. Adhering to the understanding that beliefs that are derived from experience – phenomenological belief systems – are significant realities in relation to religiosity – especially those phenomena which are included within ritual practices – has been a method I have used for thinking through the findings of my research that has helped to rectify my political location.

Further, ontology is at the basis of the research being done in two ways: first, the ontological assumption that the ritual work done in the communities through which the investigation for this thesis occurred has the potential to lead to a solution or tempering of the

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<sup>169</sup> Tuhiwai Smith (1999) & Richards (2014): There is a body of literature that has shifted the conversation away from post-colonial academia towards a consideration of decolonial academia. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* and Patricia Richards’ *Decolonizing Globalization Studies* are both excellent examples of the shift in academia towards decolonial research and writing.

problems associated with experiencing trauma, social healing, and closing the social drama. Secondly, it is my assumption that this trauma and the practices around which the ritual undertakings are centred neither belong to me, nor are mine to share. In saying this, I mean that it is not my role as an academic to assign legitimacy to a given cultural practice; it is my role as an academic to describe it, to name the limitations to their capacity to understand, and to protect the stories and traumas of those with whom the research has been conducted.

### **2.3.3 Methods, ethics, and limitations of data collection**

I undertook the research for the purpose of this project over a period of 9 months in Cambodia in 2014. This study included close cooperation with various NGOs, stakeholders, and other researchers in the field, as well as with several individuals who have used Buddhism in reconciliation and reparations work in Cambodia. I obtained Behavioural Research Ethics Board approval in May of 2014.

The initial research undertaken was naturalistic observation<sup>170</sup> of the proceedings of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. Using an emic approach to observe and note the structure, process, and environment of the ECCC, I obtained a researcher observation pass to attend the preliminary hearing of Case 002/02<sup>171</sup> as well as the sentencing hearing that saw Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan condemned to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity.<sup>172</sup>

I also undertook an emic approach to data collection through participant observation<sup>173</sup> throughout the course of the field work. This was initially through an invitation to participate in a stakeholders' consultation meeting regarding Case 002/02. The meeting itself included a morning session of background information on lessons learned, best practices, and next steps regarding the framework and history for the reparations projects associated with the ECCC.

Various aspects of victims' rights, basic principles of Cambodian law, and civil codes in relation to international law set up the afternoon, which was a participatory workshop and share-

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<sup>170</sup> Johnson & Sackett (2014): An approach to research that observes subjects in a natural environment without participation, manipulation, or interference from the researcher.

<sup>171</sup> Note: in 2011, I also visited Cambodia to attend four days of the initial hearing of Case 002 against Khieu Samphon, Ieng Sary, Nuon Chea, and Ieng Thirith. This initiated the interest in this project, and notes made during that visit informed the project design.

<sup>172</sup> Crimes against humanity are acts deliberately committed within a widespread and systematic attack directed against civilians.

<sup>173</sup> Dewalt, Dewalt, & Wayland (2014): An approach to collecting data from a community by observing and participating in certain social processes of that community.

out of ideas, experiences, and questions to be posed to the work of developing collective and moral reparations, and non-judicial measures of reconciliation in relation to the ECCC. I participated in various workshops, including: an interactive dialogue on process and outcomes relating to best practices for reparations planning and development; the identification of reparations projects for Case 002/02; and three separate brainstorming sessions on rehabilitation programming, documentation strategy, and remembrance initiatives.

Participation in the stakeholders' meeting introduced me to the leadership from two NGOs that were charged with doing significant work in reparations for the ECCC: Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) and Kdei Karuna (KdK). From this early connection, I developed a rapport with these organizations and each became heavily involved in the research for this thesis.

TPO conducts a series of participatory religious rituals connected to a form of trauma treatment developed in Chile in the 1980s and translated to the Cambodian context since 2009. I was invited two sessions of the ritual that culminates this treatment program as a participant observer, which will be detailed in the next chapter of this work. Kdei Karuna conducts community healing projects. I was first invited on two separate trips to rural village, Prey Veng, along with Kdei Karuna staff, to participate in community-based healing ceremonies. Prey Veng was a former killing field during the Khmer Rouge Era where there is thought to have been between 30-40,000 Cambodians killed. Following those trips I was accepted as an intern in the Kdei Karuna organization, which allowed ongoing access to the work of the organization and the relationship with the ECCC, TPO, and other stakeholder organizations.

Further to participant observation with these two organizations, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews<sup>174</sup> throughout the course of the field research in Cambodia. Visiting the headquarters of TPO on several occasions and participating in the religious ceremony of *bangskol* allowed me to set up various interviews through the organization. First, I interviewed the monk who had conducted the *bangskol* that I observed at the pagoda where the ritual took place. This interview was intended to ascertain a deeper understanding to the ritual process and the intentions

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<sup>174</sup> Levy & Hollan (2014): I conducted person-centred, semi-structured interviews rather than structured/questionnaire based interviews. This means that my interviews were done ethnographically, treating the participants as *respondants* to my questions, interacting with my interview by relaying their experiences and what their phenomenological understanding of their experiences were. This stands in contrast to structured interviews that tend to treat respondents as *informants* that answer the exact same questions as others across the body of research to ascertain information rather than experience.

behind the various acts the monks conducted during the ceremony itself. I conducted another interview with a lead psychologist from TPO, with the intention of understanding the reparation project that is offered to victims of the KR through the TPO. I also conducted a semi-structured interview with a representative from GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), and the anthropologist who had developed a method coined ‘testimonial therapy’ in South America, Inger Agger,<sup>175</sup> who was leading the translation and application of that approach to psycho-social healing in the context of Cambodia through TPO. GIZ is a German corporation that does human rights and development internationally as a representative or cooperative partner with varying organizations and governments. It has been working in Cambodia on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development since 1994, it was a major presence within the VSS reparations work of the ECCC, and had staff presence at both organizations that were researched for this work.

Finally, I conducted a focus group<sup>176</sup> with several TPO staff with the intention of garnering a sense of how they understood the reparation project, reconciliation, their work, and the ECCC within the larger context of Cambodian social healing.

My internship at Kdei Karuna allowed for significant access to various staff members for in-depth interviews. I conducted two semi-structured focus group interviews with staff of Kdei Karuna who were working on the various reparations and non-reparations related projects within the organizations. This work focuses on the Justice and History Outreach (JHO) reparations project that are within the rubric of the ECCC. The first focus group was with four staff members directly supporting their JHO project. The second focus group was with three staff members who worked on the development and implementation of the project. An interview was also conducted with a staff member at KdK working on the JHO project who is a former monk. Finally, I conducted two in-depth interviews with the Director of KdK: one while we were in the field in Prey Veng, another after the site visit.

To supplement some of the background on ritual and religiosity in Cambodia, this research also included two in-depth interviews with head monks of two separate pagodas in Phnom Penh: Wat Ounalam and Wat Lanka. Each of these monks was English speaking, and have both conducted *bangskol* ceremonies several times in varying contexts.

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<sup>175</sup> Agger (2009, 2015 & 2012).

<sup>176</sup> Levy & Hollan (2014).

Ethical approval was granted for this project by the University of Saskatchewan. At the beginning of each interview conducted, signed informed consent was obtained. I explained the objective of this project as obtaining insight into the instrumental use of Buddhist ritual in nongovernmental organizations' work relating to social healing after the Khmer Rouge. I also assured the participants of their anonymity, recorded each interview and transcribed the content myself.

A significant limitation to the completion of this project was my own ethical uncertainty regarding making judgments as an outsider to the social and cultural context within which I was researching. Other limitations to the project as a whole include the sampling bias that limited the samples to a specific set of participants. Language was similarly limiting: without fluency in Khmer, the sampling bias was further exacerbated and restricted to only those who speak English. Using a triangulation approach to this research supported the elimination of some of these biases, but these limitations remain an important note to the completion of this project.

### **CHAPTER THREE: Participatory Religiosity and Healing: Transcultural Psychosocial Organization**

The ontological framework through which the internationally-led efforts towards reconciliation exist is decidedly Western. There exists a significant body of civil society that are approaching this project through a framework of international law, or through a framework of global health, namely mental health and trauma treatment. The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization is demonstrative of that branch that medicalizes the reconciliation needs of Cambodian people, approaching healing through the lens of Western Psychiatric Medicine, the first ontology that my thesis will examine.

The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization works within the rubric of the Victims Support Section's reparations work and has undertaken, as part of the ECCC's Civil Parties reparations work, projects that are supportive of those who have been accepted as Civil Parties in the tribunal. TPO is a leading NGO in Cambodia that works directly within the context of mental health care and psychosocial<sup>177</sup> support, which combines psychological factors with the social environment to provide a holistic approach to mental wellness and functionality. Established in 1995, TPO was a branch of the international NGO TPO-International<sup>178</sup> until it registered as an independent organization in 2000 to become an organization that is staffed and directed by Cambodians. The mission of TPO is "To improve the well-being of Cambodian people with psychosocial and mental health problems, thereby increasing their ability to function effectively within their work, family, and communities."<sup>179</sup>

Initially, TPO was the only organization that was recognized by the ECCC to provide "psychosocial support in the process of the trial."<sup>180</sup> The processes leading up to the development of the project included a series of early stakeholder meetings that were attended by the staff of TPO, who received training not only on the testimonial therapy and narrative exposure work that would follow, but also training and education on the processes of the tribunal

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<sup>177</sup> Erikson (1958): Psychosocial development was a concept first introduced by German American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Homburger Erikson who contributed to theoretical understandings of personality and ego.

<sup>178</sup> TPO International has since become Health Works and is an organization that primarily provides support to strengthening health and care systems in areas affected by war and disaster. <https://www.health-works.org/>

<sup>179</sup> <http://tpocambodia.org/tpo-vision-mission-approach/>

<sup>180</sup> TPO Psychiatrist Interview. Stakeholder meetings revealed two directions for rehabilitation aspects of the reparations work: psychological help and health/hospital access, free of charge. TPO was in charge of the psychological reparations piece related to the trial, and the government handled the medical direction.



and the rights of the Civil Parties. Further, the organization was involved directly with the development of the reparations projects and the design for how claims to such would be made and processed. Early consultancy meetings with the court, alongside other intermediary organizations that would make up the reparations organizations of the VSS portion of the ECCC, led to the development<sup>181</sup> of the three components of the reparations model: rehabilitation, documentation, and memorialization. The work done by TPO in the testimonial therapy project falls within the rubric of the *rehabilitation* component of this model. The reparations project was proposed through VSS for TPO as “Promoting Healing and Reconciliation in Cambodia through Psychosocial Interventions”<sup>182</sup> and was described as a process through which truth-telling and memorialization would be fostered by offering testimonial therapy to those Civil Parties filed through Case 002/02.

The interviews I conducted through TPO included a monk that had been leading several of the *bangskol* ceremonies for the year leading up to the interview, a lead psychiatrist on the VSS-driven reparation project, two international advisors who contributed significantly to the development, adaptation, and delivery of the testimonial therapy aspect of the project, and a focus group consisting of several staff members from TPO: two psychologists, three support staff, and a counsellor, all working on the reparation project.

### **3.1 Testimonial Therapy: an approach to post-conflict healing**

TPO utilizes a form of trauma treatment called testimonial therapy, or narrative exposure therapy, which was developed by in Chile in the 1980s<sup>183</sup> and modified and expanded by Inger Agger<sup>184</sup> as a culturally tailored intervention to address trauma that is inclusive and respectful of dominant local beliefs and values. Agger has suggested that the translation of this methodology into the Asian trauma context has been a primary goal and application in Cambodia. In 2009, Aggar came to Cambodia to train the staff of TPO in testimonial therapy and was joined by GIZ employee and expert Judith Strasser.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> The psychiatrist described early consultancy meetings as processes of collecting information, collaborative brainstorming, collecting input from those who would be Civil Parties, and organizing plans for action.

<sup>182</sup> Overview of Civil Party Proposed Reparation Projects, ECCC Stakeholder Meeting workshop.

<sup>183</sup> Agger (2009): Two Chilean therapists, AJ Cienfuegos and C Monelli, first described this approach to therapy using pseudonyms (Elizabeth Lira and Fanny Pollarollo) in 1983.

<sup>184</sup> Agger (2009, 2012 & 2015).

<sup>185</sup> Judith Strasser was a co-author on a report released in partnership between TPO and the International Centre for Conciliation Cambodia titled *Victim-Former Khmer Rouge Dialogue Project: Lessons Learned* (2011), which

TPO has identified an ethno-cultural response to trauma in Cambodia that is called *basksbat*, roughly translating to ‘broken courage.’ *Basksbat* is identified by TPO as a Cambodian construct of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that is underpinned by Cambodian language, culture, and history. The idea behind the notion of *basksbat* is that the experiences of the Khmer Rouge regime left the courage and strength of Cambodian people shattered, and that symptoms of this *basksbat* include “a lack of trust in others, submissiveness, feeling fearful, and being ‘mute and deaf’ (Khmer: *dam doeum kor*).”<sup>186</sup> As a means to rebuild the lost or broken courage that is described by the notion of *basksbat*, TPO has used testimonial therapy in their reparations work relating to the ECCC.

Prior to the culmination of the program with the *bangskol*, a four-day workshop occurs with a group of Civil Parties.<sup>187</sup> The first two days include the testimonial collection, where the participants are given semi-structured guidelines by TPO staff to prepare their testimonials for writing. On the third day, the testimonials are shortened and written into a 2-3 page document, in Khmer language. TPO staff then undertake the process of condensing the testimonials, working closely with the participants, who approve the final version. Some things are removed if they are too personal for sharing with a larger group outside of the cohort itself. On the fourth day, the program finishes with a *bangskol* ceremony and the narrative exposure therapy is complete.

### **3.2 Participatory Religiosity: the *Bangskol* ceremony**

In an in-depth interview, Cambodian psychiatrist suggested that Buddhism’s deep and rich history in Cambodia has contributed to the inability of the Khmer Rouge to eradicate it from the minds of the Cambodian people, even with the efforts of extreme violence undertaken. It was with immediacy after the fall of the Khmer Rouge that Cambodian Buddhists attempted to re-connect with the Buddhism of their beliefs and families: “when liberated from Khmer Rouge, people tried to re-establish themselves among the old, small community. They go back to the previous pagoda, even if [the] pagoda was destroyed, but they start with that, the small thing they

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provides a report for a joint project that TPO and KdK undertook to tackle reconciliation between former Khmer Rouge soldiers and victims. Agger and Strasser were unable to participate in a full interview, but met with me for lunch discuss the testimonial therapy, narrative exposure therapy, the development and adaptation of this to the Cambodian context.

<sup>186</sup> Agger (2015): pp. 545.

<sup>187</sup> The ceremonies that I participated in were segregated into male/female cohorts, each with 12 participants. Sometimes there is a mixed gender cohort, and there are anywhere from 10-15 participants per cohort.

can do to re-establish again the representation of Buddhism.”<sup>188</sup> This immediate turn back to Khmer Buddhist practices confirms the assumption that Khmer Buddhists have an intrinsic and significant need for participatory religiosity as a means to heal from the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. By returning immediately to locations where ritual acts and community-based religious participation occurred prior to the fall of the Khmer Rouge, these victims have demonstrated the intensity to which religious practices had been held as important, and have also contributed to the use of Khmer Buddhist ritual in the reparations work of TPO.

Within TPO’s testimonial therapy reconciliation project, a *bangskol* ceremony is utilized as the culmination of the treatment for Civil Party victims that are accessing the services of the organization. At the time of research, TPO had been conducting this ritual at least twice per month for the duration of the project that began in 2009<sup>189</sup>. TPO also works with Cham Muslim and Vietnamese communities<sup>190</sup>. There were no specific Muslim ceremonies used at the time of research, and the Vietnamese and Cham communities were given the option to participate in *bangskol*. The psychiatrist interviewed indicated that many Cham and Vietnamese people had opted to participate in the *bangskol*, but did not indicate a percentage or number. The blanket application of a Khmer Buddhist participatory ritual further contributes to the assumption that the framework for the treatment from TPO is wholly rooted in non-Khmer trauma ontologies, and that the religiosity is not considered phenomenologically, but rather symbolically. Testimonial Therapy experience for the Civil Parties working with TPO involve ritual elements that are detailed by the work of Agger, and adapted to the context of Cambodia.

Agger details the need for eight common elements of the therapy<sup>191</sup>: a symbolic location; key actors to perform the ceremony; an audience of significance; a visually impressive or aesthetically pleasing document that symbolically inscribes the narrative; an auditory impression of the narrative, provided to the survivor in a safe voice; a document presented to the survivor by key actors with symbols of honour; a purification of the document; and interventions embodied with *spiritual significance*. Spiritual significance, here, is a blank space that is left to be filled by any such ritual that can be manipulated to fit the framework of Agger’s therapeutic approach to healing from trauma.

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<sup>188</sup> Interview with TPO psychiatrist.

<sup>189</sup> Agger (2015).

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> Agger (2012): pp 575.

Within the context of the treatment of Cambodian Civil Parties, the key actors to perform the ceremony are Khmer Buddhist monks. Monks conduct this ceremony due to the purity that would allow for the communication and transference of *bon* to the deceased, as well as for the social status of respect and authority that they represent to Khmer Buddhist communities. The focus group participants, who were all Khmer, explained that monks are considered to be “close to the Buddha” due to the belief that they have not accumulated any bad karma. The understanding is that through their purity, offerings made to the monks are able to reach ancestors or ghosts due to them being *sīlath*, or holy people. The adherence and respect to the disciplines of the Buddha connect the monk to the ghosts, the spirits, and the otherworld.

The lead psychiatrist described the combined use of testimonial therapy and *bangskol* being “an adaptive method to Cambodia” that includes the role of the ‘audience of significance.’ He suggested that the ritual would typically include an invitation to a “high ranking authority of the community or commune to listen to the story” but that it would not be possible to do so in the context of Cambodia, so an adaptation is made. Monks are high ranking authorities in Cambodia, and so they are invited to conduct the ceremony, with various guests invited as witnesses. These guests are made up of interested researchers, donors, and representatives of the international community that have interest or investment in the work of the testimonial therapy.

I attended two *bangskol* rituals during my time in the field in Cambodia. For each of the ceremonies, the morning began at 6am at the Choung Ek Memorial<sup>192</sup>, a mass grave site that contained almost 10,000 bodies, many of whom were the political prisoners and victims of the Tuol Sleng (S-21) detention centre. The two monks who perform the ceremonies throughout the morning sit with their backs to the Choung Ek Memorial Stupa, a large stupa filled with skulls and bones that had been excavated at the Choung Ek site. The victims who are participating in the session are seated on the ground in a cluster facing the two monks, and facing the collection of bones housed within the stupa<sup>193</sup>. Victims are all dressed in typical Cambodian funeral attire: men in dark trousers and white collared shirts, women in dark skirts with white tops and white scarves.

This component of the therapy project is predicated upon the need for the victims to be *exposed*, in a tangible way, to the death through representation of the spirits of those who died.

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<sup>192</sup> Appendix I: Image I: Choung Ek Genocidal Center and Memorial, Phnom Penh.

<sup>193</sup> Appendix I: Image II: TPO testimonial therapy participants facing the *stupa* housing skulls of deceased Khmer Rouge victims.

The direct and physical exposure to tangible artifacts – the skulls and bones of those who were killed by the Khmer Rouge – allows participants an opportunity to face the reality of the deaths and trauma they experience, with blessings for strength and fortune from monks during this initial exposure. It gives the participants an opportunity to deal with the emotional response to that exposure before participating in the *bangskol* ceremony, and to receive blessings from monks that the psychiatrists, organizers, and staff believe would give them strength to continue to the *bangskol*, which is held in a pagoda nearby the killing field. The monk that conducts the *bangskol* ceremonies suggested that the initial feeling of shock at seeing the bones and skulls of those killed during the Khmer Rouge regime would provide the participants with concrete evidence that would ground the participants in the reality of the atrocities and help to prepare them for the rituals to proceed.

The monks sprinkle water on the participants, and this process of spreading water is related to a concept called *sīl*. *Sīl* is rooted in the Pali word *sīla*, roughly translated to indicate ‘precept,’ or rule of training that is related to morality, conduct, and the three stages along the eightfold path. For the monk conducting the ceremony, *sīl* means something akin to ‘medicine’ that is intrinsically tied to the life of a monk: “*sīl* is head. No have, no still alive. So if your *sīl* is cut, it means the same as your head. For us, you are no more. It is like medicine from the monk to the people. To give our *sīl* we give strength.”<sup>194</sup> *Sīl* is that power which is gained by monks through varying abstentions, and by following *vinaya* (disciplines of the monastic community);<sup>195</sup> this particular mastering of power allows the monks to receive offerings from the community and to transfer power back to those who are receiving the blessings.

The psychiatrist leading the project indicated that Choung Ek was chosen by TPO for the site of the ceremonies because of the memorial nature of that location. He suggested that “grief spread throughout the countryside, so we could not expose them to the direct place where their relatives died” and so they chose the Choung Ek Memorial because it is “a national museum which we think represents the killing places of the whole country.”<sup>196</sup> The group arrives at Choung Ek at 7:30 in the morning, before the grounds open to tourists. This is intentionally planned to ensure that the participants in the ceremony are not disturbed by visitors to the

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<sup>194</sup> TPO Monk

<sup>195</sup> Disciplines of the sangha or monastic community

<sup>196</sup> TPO Psychiatrist

Choung Ek site. Choung Ek represents the element of “symbolic location”<sup>197</sup> that is required of the ritual aspect of testimonial therapy.

While seated facing the bones of the stupa, the monks began chanting *paritta* (*Pali* blessings)<sup>198</sup> to the victims, using sticks of wood to sprinkle blessed water onto the participants. The participants were seated on the ground directly in front of the monks, and the audience was seated approximately five feet behind the participants, on stools. TPO staff members were seated on either side of the victims. Flowers were handed out to participants as well as audience members by the staff of TPO. The flowers are another representation of *sīl*, and are meant to provide a feeling of comfort and happiness: “when we spread the flowers to the people, they will get it and every flower will be represent [sic] of a happy day.”<sup>199</sup>

The monks are essentially advising the people, preaching the dharma, meditating, and calming the devotees. It is a spiritual preparation therapy that honours all of the dead. This was devised by the TPO staff and monks together as a way to encourage the participants to face the realities of the Khmer Rouge regime by facing literal bones and skeletons that were left behind and meditating on the death and remains of those who died in the Khmer Rouge Era. When the *paritta* is completed, the cohort along with guests, TPO staff, and monks move locations to the Sala Chhan pagoda nearby the Choung Ek site. This is where the *bangskol* ceremony itself will be conducted and the narrative exposure component of the project will be undertaken.

Inside the pagoda, two monks were seated in front of a large Buddha statue and altar, facing towards the audience. The participants were clustered in front of the monks, facing them. TPO staff was again on either side of the participants, with the audience seated approximately ten feet behind the participants with the translator, all on the floor. The monks were joined this time by two *achars*,<sup>200</sup> one male and one female, seated to the right of the monks, facing them. Two large candles were situated on either side of the monks;<sup>201</sup> when they were lit by the *achars*, introductions began by the TPO staff. First, staff members brought greetings and introduced the

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<sup>197</sup> Agger (2012): pp 575.

<sup>198</sup> Blessings done in Pali that are for good luck, healing, prosperity, etc.

<sup>199</sup> TPO Monk Interview

<sup>200</sup> Choulean (1988): An *achar* is a religious and ritual specialist within Khmer Buddhism that has not undertaken the vows that are required to be a *sīlath* (holy person), but who are trained in performing rituals and ceremonies. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the decimation of the population of monks increased the presence and utility of *achars* in community ceremonies significantly.

<sup>201</sup> Appendix I: Image III: Inside Sala Chhan pagoda.

audience to the ceremony. The participants in the cohort<sup>202</sup> had undertaken exposure therapy for the duration of the week, as a group, and had the opportunity to discuss their experiences and share together with counsellors and psychologists. Once introductions were made, the ceremony began.

TPO staff brought offerings to the monks in the form of food,<sup>203</sup> placed at the feet of the monks and on top of the altar. As the staff brought up the offerings, the monks began chanting and the participants called the names of their deceased loved ones to whom they were presenting their offerings. The joint effort of prayer and devotion by the monks and lay people aimed to call the spirits to the pagoda so that they would be there to receive the offerings given, both spiritual and physical.

Throughout the course of the testimonial therapy week, TPO staff had collected and chronologized the testimonies of each participant, typed them up, and created individual books of testimony that were bound in silk cloth. This bound testimony represents the “visually impressive document”<sup>204</sup> that is part of the elements to the ritual process. Each victim was called to stand at the front next to a TPO staff member, one by one, to have their testimony read. Each victim’s testimony was read by a counsellor or psychologist who had been working with that participant throughout the week, building a relationship that would constitute their reading aloud of the testimony be a “safe voice”<sup>205</sup> for the participant. A second TPO staff member stood behind the participant, offering support and comfort as they experienced exposure to the narrative.

Once narration of the testimony was complete, the participants knelt in front of the monks who offered blessings for both the participants as well as for the physical copies of the testimonies. Once the physical copies had been blessed by the monks, they were presented back to the participants. This represents the element of the ritual process in which the document is symbolically purified and then presented to the participant. Staff in the focus group describe this process as such:

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<sup>202</sup> Each of the rituals I attended had a cohort of 12 Civil Parties.

<sup>203</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (1994): pp. 308: “The Mahavagga (Mv. VI.23.9-15) forbids ten kinds of flesh: that of human beings, elephants, horses, dogs, snakes lions, tigers, leopards, bears, and hyenas. To eat human flesh entails thullaccaya [a grave offense]; to eat any of the other unallowable types, a dukkata [wrong action]. Human beings, horses, and elephants were regarded as too noble to be used as food. The other types of meat were forbidden either on grounds that they were repulsive ... or dangerous.”

<sup>204</sup> Agger (2012): pp. 575.

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*

“when we write down the story and put it on paper, it’s like we are trying to take a black spot, a black spot from their emotion or their feeling to put on paper. Then the paper, we give it to the monk and the monk accepts the black point from their emotion. And when the monk accepts, the belief is that the monk is a representative, because the monk is quite powerful for Buddhists, and when the monk accepts then they can lift all the emotion and all the suffering that they put on paper, and it’s acknowledged from the monk.”<sup>206</sup>

The monks have received training and briefing from TPO about the processes involved in testimonial therapy prior to the ceremony, and the chanting chosen for this specific *bangskol* is informed by that briefing. The TPO staff indicated that the chosen chants were related to their need to “feel relief.”<sup>207</sup> First, they chant a piece called the *rhum dah kruah*,<sup>208</sup> which is intended to remove bad luck from the person and offer fortune and good luck to the individuals. A red bracelet is tied to the left hand of the participant to carry that fortune with them beyond the ceremonies themselves. This chanting is in Khmer to ensure that the participants can understand the blessings they are receiving. The translation of the chanting included that “the Buddha acknowledges your suffering.”<sup>209</sup>

The second component of the ritual chanting was directed towards the spirit world. Once the individuals had received blessing, the *bangskol* shifted in tone and language to Pali chanting<sup>210</sup> called *preah parit*,<sup>211</sup> which the monk whom I interviewed indicated was a way to “pray the dharma that will destroy some vampire.”<sup>212</sup> These ‘vampires’ represent negative energy that has clung to the participants due to the spirits of their lost loved ones having died such violent deaths. Vampires are part of a pantheon of Khmer Buddhist undead: liminal beings or monsters that are related to *pret*, those spirits that are eternally hungry.

Staff members have related the use of the *bangskol* ceremony to therapeutic attempts at easing suffering for those who are participating as Civil Parties in the reparations project. One staff member suggested that “when someone has a problem, especially loss, especially lost

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<sup>206</sup> TPO Focus group: staff member.

<sup>207</sup> Focus group interview.

<sup>208</sup> *Rhum* means ‘to liberate,’ *dah kruah* means ‘bad luck,’ according to the TPO monk that I interviewed.

<sup>209</sup> According to the TPO monk that I interviewed.

<sup>210</sup> The Monk from TPO indicated that on occasion he will translate the Pali language to Khmer and recite the chants in both languages for accessibility. Not all of the monks do this, and it is not standard for the ceremony.

<sup>211</sup> Needham, (2015): pp. 105-109: A protection prayer conducted in Pali, formally called *Chumrean Preah Parit*, “*chumrean* meaning to improve or become prosperous; *preah* meaning holy or sacred; and *parit*, meaning protective prayer. In Khmer vernacular, the ceremony is referred to as *sout moan*, meaning to chant a secret religious code or magic formula.”

<sup>212</sup> Interview with TPO Monk



someone, we use this *bangskol* to ease the suffering. The person already died, but we still need this *bangskol* to help the alive person to continue to connect with the relative who died.” The relationship between the ritual and the outcome is more predicated towards the living person and the utility of the ritual to them. That is not to say that the belief of the ritual was not understood or described by the staff members: while they acknowledged and linked traditional Cambodian beliefs to the participatory religiosity of the ritual in their reparations project, the *outcome* appeared to be more concerned with the Civil Parties themselves.

Staff members at TPO confirmed what the limited literature<sup>213</sup> has suggested: that living relatives are unsure of the status of their ancestors in terms of rebirth. One support staff suggested that “we [are] not really sure that our relative or their relative already reborn or not. But this is just a way to make them feel calm, they feel happiness. They feel like they already did something good to their dead. So even [if] they died for ten, twenty, thirty, or fifty years ago, they still do that ceremony. Even not only in our project, but also in already Khmer tradition.”<sup>214</sup> The fact that many of the victims were separated from their loved ones early on in the Khmer Rouge Era without the chance to say goodbye, and often without closure or even the confirmation of death, these ceremonies provide the opportunity to transfer *bon* to the deceased in order to alleviate emotional conflict and suffering.

The purpose of the *bangskol* is to connect the spirits with the victims, provide offerings to appease them, and allow these spirits to hear and accept the testimonies of the participants. A staff member at TPO suggested that, “we show the suffering to the dead in order to gain acceptance from the dead, through the monk. Because the story is the suffering of the client, reading this allow[s] the monk to give [the story] to the dead relative to gain acceptance. They all accept and recognize the suffering of the victim. So then, in this ceremony, when they heard the story the monk say they take in those stories, they absorb the story from the client in order to relieve the suffering of the client.”<sup>215</sup> The suffering is presented and absorbed in a sort of transference; the suffering is symbolically accepted by the monk and presented to the spirits, along with offerings that will support the spirit in the dark world<sup>216</sup> in a way that removes the suffering from the participant and relieves what TPO has identified as symptoms of PTSD,

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<sup>213</sup> Satori (2005)

<sup>214</sup> TPO Focus Group Interview.

<sup>215</sup> TPO Focus group: psychologist.

<sup>216</sup> Needham (2015): The division between this world and the unseen world was described by monks interviewed as “darkness,” or the world you cannot see, and “light,” the world that we can see and exist within.

providing a healing opportunity and “an opportunity to do psychological treatment using Buddhist stories that fit to this solution, in order to instilling [sic] hope.”<sup>217</sup>

The final element of the ritual component of this project is the communal blessing that closes the *bangskol*. The audience, who has been seated ten feet behind the participants, are asked to move closer for this portion of the ceremony. Lotus petals and water blessings are sprayed upon the entirety of the room, and the monks are chanting *paritta* once more, this time taken from a sacred text called *Proychum Pinarayat Nien Matbava*.<sup>218</sup> During this communal blessing, each of the victims touched the back of another and reached back to include the audience. In an effort to connect the group with the receiving of the blessings, every participant was physically touching another.

### **3.3 Performance, Justice, and the ECCC: *Testimonial Therapy***

Testimonial therapy was adapted to fit the context of the Cambodian project facilitated by TPO as part of the ECCC’s VSS Reparation work. This therapy is a short-term approach to treating trauma that is specifically designed to improve the victims’ capacity to cope with stress, as well as reduce the symptoms of PTSD after experiences of extreme violence.

Part of the adaptation of the testimonial therapy includes a combination of this particular therapy with what was described as ‘narrative exposure therapy.’ The difference being that the testimonial therapy focuses specifically on a main traumatic event and targets that event for healing; it is used significantly on the treatment of torture victims.<sup>219</sup> Narrative exposure therapy investigates the entire life – the narrative – of the person in treatment, starting with childhood up to present day, includes an exploration of the events they remember, and includes a detailed account of major life happenings of the person receiving therapy. The process of facilitating the narration of the life is undertaken by staff supporters, counsellors, and psychologist with TPO. These people record all of the information collected through the narrative prompts, which are given by the staff, and then organize it into a chronology of that person’s life. Through a review of the narrative of one’s life, the counsellors and psychologists working on this project provided a

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<sup>217</sup> TPO Focus Group interview: counsellor.

<sup>218</sup> TPO Monk Interview.

<sup>219</sup> TPO also undertakes a project that focuses on the psychological healing of torture victims which has been discussed and researched during the duration of this project, is outside the scope of the current endeavour.

guided exposure to that narrative, were able to pinpoint specific events and occurrences that tended to come up most, and provide support to the people in the program.

The testimonial method included a significantly performative element that links it to the ECCC's VSS programming. The testimonials themselves seemed to follow something of a pattern, across each of the 24 testimonials that I heard directly (in translated form). First, the life story of each participant was told to the TPO staff, from childhood through to the emergence of the Khmer Rouge regime. Next the narrative would detail where the victim was on April 17, 1975, the day the Khmer Rouge seized Phnom Penh. Third, they would recount where they worked, and some descriptive anecdotes of horror that were experienced as a means to detail some of the experiences that led to the trauma. Fourth, they would list the losses – who died or was lost and anything that was taken, including a home or material possessions. Fifth, they would detail the years directly following the fall of the Khmer Rouge, and where they were during the Vietnamese occupation.<sup>220</sup> The final piece of the testimonial was a 'thanks and dedication' component: each of the testimonials thanked both TPO as well as the ECCC, before dedicating the ceremony either to a specific lost loved one, or to the entire collective of victims of the Khmer Rouge.

### **3.4 Reconciliation and TPO: Concluding observations**

TPO deploys participatory religiosity in an attempt to apply cultural authenticity to a therapeutic approach that was developed outside of the Cambodia. The organization identifies some of the symptomatic fear and trauma that the participants of this project experience as being PTSD, and applies a developed treatment to that specific mental health condition. The *bangskol* ceremony itself is adapted and somewhat altered in order to fit the ontological framework of Western psychiatric medicine in a way that links performativity to memory: by engaging the memory initiatives of the full testimonial therapy project and culminating this experience with the performance of a *bangskol* therapy, TPO adapted a Khmer Buddhist phenomenology to a Western psychiatric ontological understanding of trauma and PTSD.

For TPO, reconciliation is built upon the need to repair the damage and suffering that the Civil Party victims of the Khmer Rouge experienced. For this reparations project, reconciliation

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<sup>220</sup> None of the testimonials mention the Vietnamese occupation with any great detail or significance; the highlighted enemy of these narratives was pointedly the Khmer Rouge.

comes with the combination of Khmer Buddhist participatory religiosity as a means to legitimize the use of a Western psychiatric medical style of trauma treatment that is represented by the testimonial therapy. The process is predicated upon *power* and *empowerment*: the symbols that are included in the *bangskol* ceremony represent *sīl*, which is a form of power that is used to heal; the monks' presence and participation represents a spiritual power that facilitates the connection with the deceased and alleviates the suffering of the victims; recognizing and acknowledging the suffering experienced is a form of empowerment for the victims; and the document that is purified and blessed is imbued with power that the victims then are able to take with them to their home lives as they continue on their healing journeys. The process of reconciliation, here, is linked to providing the victims with *power*.

While this approach to reconciliation has merit, it remains that the route through which TPO understands the ongoing experience of trauma and suffering is non-Khmer. By rooting their practices in Western psychiatric ontologies, TPO has provided a particularized treatment for a specific community of victims. The programming is *delivered to* the victims, rather than *derived from the needs of* the victims. Further, the connection with the ECCC is intrinsically tied to the internationally derived judicial processes that hold power over the victims' experiences *as victims*: the only victims that are eligible for the testimonial therapy project are those that have been *confirmed* by the ECCC as Civil Parties. Further, the victims themselves are passive recipients of the treatment, and are not provided with tools or capacity to continue their healing work on their own, or to share the work within their home communities. They are brought in from rural areas across Cambodia by bus to the capital of Phnom Penh where they are provided a short-term individual treatment program that specifically targets what is understood to be PTSD. The quest for participatory religiosity within the TPO testimonial therapy project remains unfulfilled: instead, the participatory religiosity is manufactured by the organization and presented in a way that is coherent to the Civil Parties, but *provided to them* through a template of trauma treatment.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Participatory Religiosity and Healing: Kdei Karuna

The approach to reconciliation that is rooted in a Khmer ontology accepts the phenomenological experiences of Khmer Buddhist religiosity – ghosts, spirits, and hauntings – as reality. This approach acknowledges that this phenomenology underpins the ongoing trauma of the victims with which they are working, and recognizes the need for culturally Khmer responses: community-based participatory religiosity. Kdei Karuna represents this branch.

Kdei Karuna is a local nongovernmental organization that established itself in Cambodia in 2005, initially as a branch of the American NGO International Center for Conciliation (ICC). KdK initially utilized the Historical Conciliation methodology of the ICC to develop their programs and operations. This methodology aims to reconcile community members who have a history of violent conflict by addressing memory directly and guiding those community members through a four-component process.

The first component in the methodology, train the trainer<sup>221</sup> is an approach to knowledge transmission through which local community members are able to ensure sustainability of reconciliation efforts by creating local facilitators who are capable of delivering the programming themselves. ICC refers to this as “community-based preparedness training.”<sup>222</sup> The second component is to “turn pained memory and anticipation of the future into cooperation.”<sup>223</sup> Here, a series of workshops are delivered to the local community – co-facilitated by those trainers being trained – wherein the community members openly discuss their reciprocal perceptions of the past. This is intended to foster a sense of empathy that hopes to “transform conflict into cooperation and interdependencies that are more effective solutions to what challenges the safety of the community.”<sup>224</sup>

The third component is to “turn cooperation into action and preparedness for natural disasters” wherein participants collaborate on community projects that establish healthy relationships between individuals that have a history of conflict with one another. This includes training for preparedness for natural disasters, supply dispensing in emergencies, triage for wounded people, operating specialized equipment, and preventing marginalized people from becoming targets of violence. By focusing on preparedness for a context that would necessitate

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<sup>221</sup> Assemi et al (2007): Train-the-Trainer (TOT) is a widely recognized model of educating key stakeholders across a variety of disciplines on how to disseminate training and knowledge.

<sup>222</sup> International Centre for Conciliation (2017).

<sup>223</sup> *ibid*

<sup>224</sup> *ibid*

community collaboration that is outside of social or political conflicts, the methodology builds a sense of community that supports inter-dependence and cooperation. The final component is to “develop sustainable leadership,”<sup>225</sup> wherein community leadership is identified and given the tools necessary to continue the work of fostering cooperation within the community.

This methodology is rooted in the aim of creating a sense of community and empathy through reflection, dialogue, and collaboration. Within the context of Cambodia, the methodology has been adapted by Kdei Karuna to fit the unique needs of trauma and post-Khmer Rouge reconciliation that many rural Cambodians face in contemporary times. In 2010 Kdei Karuna registered as an independent local nongovernmental organization and has operated since as a “politically-neutral peacebuilding NGO aiming to contribute to sustainable peace efforts in Cambodia.”<sup>226</sup>

Research at Kdei Karuna included a reciprocal relationship built on an internship<sup>227</sup> that brought me into a rural Cambodian village, Prey Veng,<sup>228</sup> to participate in the JHO project, as well as a series of in-depth interviews with focus groups and staff of TPO. The first focus group was with four staff members directly supporting the Justice and History Outreach (JHO) program. The second focus group was with three staff members who worked on the development and implementation of the projects. I also conducted an interview with an intern at KdK working on the JHO project (who is a former monk). Finally, I conducted two in-depth interviews with the Director of KdK.

#### **4.1 Justice and History Outreach: an approach to healing**

The Justice and History Outreach (JHO) program “aims to empower villagers [in rural Cambodia] to take ownership over their healing process through strengthening community relationships, increasing communication on issues from the past, building capacities on conflict resolution and dialogue facilitation, and development of locally-driven memory initiatives.”<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> *ibid*

<sup>226</sup> Kdei Karuna Website (2016): <http://www.kdei-karuna.org/>

<sup>227</sup> As a means to create reciprocity in the work of collecting data from the organization, I undertook a 4 month internship wherein she participated as an assistant in various project operations, aided in the facilitation of training workshops for KdK staff, and provided editing services to grant applications and website descriptions that had been translated into English.

<sup>228</sup> Prey Veng is located within Prey Veng province, approximately 100 kms from Phnom Penh. It is located near Kamplock Mountain, a mass killing cave during the Khmer Rouge era. It is estimated that 30-40,000 Cambodians were killed in this area during the KR regime.

<sup>229</sup> Kdei Karuna (2016): “About Us” <http://www.kdei-karuna.org/>

The KdK staff described a major goal of this project as being to encourage open dialogue about the Khmer Rouge experiences and to develop and foster a culture of sharing. As indicated in the first chapter, when Cambodian trauma was studied in the diasporic context, it was purported that cultural models of socialization that are rooted in the internalization of anger and trauma have inhibited productive sharing-based therapy when conducted via Western psychiatric methods of treatment.<sup>230</sup> In the Kdei Karuna case, the motivation for fostering this culture of sharing is not to heal individual traumas, but rather to encourage healing by sharing experiences not only with one another, but also with other generations. This thrust towards sharing culture as a means to sustain inter-generational understanding and a relief to the continuity of suffering experienced by victims is unique from the incentives that had been exemplified in the diasporic cases in the United States<sup>231</sup>, and in Ontario<sup>232</sup>.

At the time of research, KdK was operating in sixteen villages within fifteen provinces in Cambodia. The communities are chosen based on KdK's criteria as follows: the community was significantly and directly affected by violence; there is significant trauma still experienced by members of the community; there are victims as well as former Khmer Rouge in the surrounding area that would facilitate a need for a community healing process; and local participation is anticipated. Most of the projects are undertaken in communities that were the site of mass killings, mass graves, or areas where forced labour camps were in place.

KdK first undertakes a process of assessment in the community. This assessment includes interviewing local community members, setting up meetings with existing leadership in the community, and getting a sense of the social structure and milieu of the village itself through a series of visits. The purpose of these assessment visits is not only to create a framework for a localized version of the JHO project that meets community needs, but also to build trust and develop a rapport within the community. Staff members at KdK have acknowledged the need to build trust, particularly in beginning to encourage people to talk about the past, and to share experiences that are deeply traumatic and personal. Along with building trust and rapport, the assessment period allows the staff to clearly explain the project and goals of JHO to the community to ensure a full understanding of the outcomes, potential benefits for participating, length of project, commitment, and framework through which the project will be undertaken.

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<sup>230</sup> Hinton et al (2009).

<sup>231</sup> *ibid*

<sup>232</sup> McLellan (2009).

Assessment is also a way in which Kdei Karuna successfully provides agency to each community to identify the needs and what would best support that community. One Kdei Karuna staff member indicated that, “[w]e give ownership to the community to decide what they should do for their communities about reconciliation projects.”<sup>233</sup> The result of the assessment will guide the work being done in each community and indicate some of the outcomes that will be surveyed upon completion of the project. Specifically, it will guide the Community Memory Initiative portion, which aims to produce a physical memorialization of the Khmer Rouge atrocities within the community. This physical memorial will create a tangible space around which the rest of the social and community healing work can be built.

#### 4.1.1 Community Memory Initiative

The objective of the Community Memory Initiative aspect of the JHO project is to provide an understanding of the Khmer Rouge occupation and create intergenerational connections that can provide future generations of Cambodians a way to understand the history of the Khmer Rouge in their community. Through the assessment process, KdK identifies a memory initiative that the community chooses to be built in their area. Each of the Khmer Buddhist communities that hosted a JHO project indicated that they wanted to build a *stupa* to house any bones of Khmer Rouge victims that were dug up near or in the community.<sup>234</sup>

An initial task, then, for the JHO project is to find a location and support the building of a *stupa*<sup>235</sup> for the remains that have been uncovered in that area. This need was identified through consultation within each community: “after we discuss to them related to their suffering from the past, they seem like they want a *stupa* ... they came up with the *stupa* idea.”<sup>236</sup> KdK staff suggested that “we build the *stupa* like it’s for the house; so if we don’t build the *stupa*, when people die that means they don’t have a house to live. So when some suggest [through community consultation] that they build a *stupa*, it means they want to build a house for the dead

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<sup>233</sup> Participant from the KdK Focus Group.

<sup>234</sup> According to the Kdei Karuna staff, many communities that were not Buddhist chose various other memory initiatives like public art pieces depicting the Khmer Rouge era, memorial plaques, or story books that told the story of resilience of those who survived, to be printed and given to the community.

<sup>235</sup> Thirteen of the sixteen communities that KdK works with are Buddhist; the other three are Muslim, and there are different processes of memorialization and ritual that are done in those communities, which is outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>236</sup> Participant from the KdK Focus Group.



people.”<sup>237</sup> Building a *stupa* allows for continuity of healing in that there is a physical representation of the deceased lost during the Khmer Rouge that people can continue to pray at, to make offerings to, and to connect with lost loved ones through individual ritual processes.

The *stupas* are built auspicious locations that have been identified by local facilitators and agreed upon by the community. Any location for a *stupa* would hold a high level of spiritual significance. In the case of Prey Veng, the village, the *stupa* was built near a large Bodhi tree<sup>238</sup> that had existed during the Khmer Rouge era. Home to several spirits, including one of the village’s *neak ta*, this tree was wrapped in saffron cloths, an offering of protection to the spirits that resided inside.

The building of *stupas* are imbued with meaning that is instrumental to the collective social memory of a community. More than just a physical space, *stupas* act as the performative space which is inhabited for the carrying out of social and collective memorialization rituals.<sup>239</sup> As a building that represents a habitual undertaking – rituals that have been performed collectively across the history of Khmer Buddhism in Cambodia – the building of a *stupa* is intrinsically linked to the societal healing and re-construction of Khmer Buddhism in Cambodia by providing a physical space for the current and future generations to re-construct habitual ritual processes that will both reignite participatory religiosity as well as bolster its continuity in the community.<sup>240</sup>

#### **4.1.2 Sustainable reconciliation: Training-of-Trainers and conflict resolution**

One major aspect of the JHO project is to empower the communities that KdK works with to continue this work beyond the direct support and presence of the KdK program staff. Building capacity within the community is a primary target for the work of Kdei Karuna, accomplished through a Training-of-Trainers (TOT)<sup>241</sup> approach. The objective of the TOT within the JHO project is to empower the community to resolve conflict, to understand local issues, and to acquire conflict resolution and dialogue facilitation techniques.

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<sup>237</sup> *ibid*

<sup>238</sup> Spiro (1985): The Bodhi tree is an auspicious tree in Buddhism as it is the type of tree that the Buddha gained enlightenment under.

<sup>239</sup> Connerton (1989).

<sup>240</sup> Connerton (1989): pp. 23: *How Societies Remember* discusses the role of personal memory and collective memory and how those are related to – and different from – habitual memory.

<sup>241</sup> Assemi et al (2007).

An important step to the JHO project is to identify and train local facilitators “and contribute some knowledge to them [so] they can show some activities [to] that community.”<sup>242</sup> Once training is provided, the project leaves a community with their own facilitators who are trained in the facilitation process, but also who have a built capacity to identify needs within the community and create activities that can support ongoing reconciliation and healing.

To identify leaders within the community that would be ideal candidates for becoming facilitators, JHO support staff enter the community sequentially throughout the assessment activities of the program, several months before the program is set to begin. They set up meetings with local authorities, people who are identified as key actors within the community such as teachers and monks. These authorities would be poised to first receive the training, and then to identify other local leaders who may be candidates for facilitation training. The requirement for a facilitator is a person who is respected, compassionate, and innovative, capable of identifying activities and programs that would support the healing of the community.

KdK does not train monks themselves as facilitators because the rigid schedule of a monk would be a barrier to full participation. For example, monks would not be able to meet at certain times of day, such as early morning when they are collecting alms<sup>243</sup>. Instead, monks are utilized as “the middle person between our work and our local facilitator.”<sup>244</sup> They are invited to join all activities and engaged with the recruitment of local facilitators, but are not trained as facilitators. Further, the elevated respect that a monk has in the community will support the confidence needed for local community members to become facilitators: being recruited and encouraged by local leadership within the pagoda and *sangha* contributes to the likelihood that a potential facilitator would have the confidence to accept that role. Each community has a minimum of four local facilitators trained by KdK.

The process of training facilitators first has them volunteering with the project to create a localized, needs-based program that will be undertaken by the organization. In volunteering, potential facilitators are being monitored for capacity by KdK staff as well as building skills and confidence to become facilitators themselves. KdK believes that an important route to achieving

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<sup>242</sup> Participant from the KdK Focus Group.

<sup>243</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (1994): The Monastic Code and rules for monks lay out a rigid schedule for monastics within Buddhism.

<sup>244</sup> KdK Focus Group 01

reconciliation is to “encourage the community to understand about the non-judicial justice,”<sup>245</sup> and as such the processes of reconciliation that are linked to the ECCC and the VSS are provided within the TOT program of the project. KdK and the JHO project arose out of the non-judicial measures (NJM) component of the ECCC.<sup>246</sup> Non-judicial justice, in relation to the ECCC, is undertaken in partnership with organizations like KdK and TPO to address the coping, healing, and individual senses of justice that the victims of the Khmer Rouge need in order to face the trauma of the Khmer Rouge Era.

In addition to the capacity-building of a program model that trains local facilitators, trainers in this project are also being provided with the skills and preparation of conflict styles, conflict types, and conflict resolution strategies. For the staff at KdK, the conflict resolution training is fostering that peace-building initiative within the community, and providing tools for community members to settle disputes, increase their capacity to create dialogue in an effort to circumvent dispute, and foster a sense of community for local residents of rural Cambodia. This conflict resolution aspect is not just related to resolving conflict that occurs in contemporary life, but rather it expands to past conflicts in a way that would facilitate victim-perpetrator reconciliation<sup>247</sup> within communities themselves.

## **4.2 Participatory Religiosity**

The Cambodian director of KdK – a childhood survivor of the regime – confirmed that Khmer Buddhism holds a particular significance in the healing journey of Khmer Buddhists in Cambodia, and that the inability of the Khmer Rouge regime to eradicate Buddhism during their reign was linked to the powerful connection that Khmer Buddhists felt towards their religiosity. Though ritual practice was strictly prohibited, the director indicated that the majority of Khmer Buddhists who survived the regime indicated that they had continued to practice in secret during the regime, and that consistent prayer within their minds was a driving force in their survival.

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<sup>245</sup> KdK Focus Group 01.

<sup>246</sup> Victims Services at the ECCC: <https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/vss-structure>.

<sup>247</sup> Srun, Rothany et al (2011): The Berkeley Human Rights Center undertook a study in 2010 that revealed that 49% of Cambodians surveyed were uncomfortable living in the same community as former Khmer Rouge cadres. This report spurred a collaborative project between KdK and TPO called the ‘Victim-Former Khmer Rouge Dialogue Project’ that was aimed at building understanding between these two groups. It was a pilot project, and the findings can be found at [http://tpocambodia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Report\\_Victim-Former-Khmer-Rouge-Dialogue\\_TPO\\_ICFC.pdf](http://tpocambodia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Report_Victim-Former-Khmer-Rouge-Dialogue_TPO_ICFC.pdf). This collaborative work was completed by the time of research, and while it came up several times in the research conducted, it is outside of the scope of this work to explore it further.

Like TPO, KdK uses a *bangskol* ceremony as a significant part of the process of their reparations work within the rural villages of Cambodia. Importantly, this approach is unique in that KdK uses a community-based approach to the preparation and carrying out of the *bangskol*. Community consultation with facilitators and local *achars* decides the location of the ceremony, and also of the *stupa* to be built. Once the *stupa* is ready, the preparations for the *bangskol* begin and a date is selected. The facilitators employ the support of volunteers to go into the community and ask for donations to pay for the ceremony itself. This offers a sense of ownership and agency to the local residents that not only provides incentive for participating, but also provides a sense of empowerment through the collaborative approach to conducting this ceremony.

An intergenerational element is brought into the *bangskol* of the JHO project involving students from the local schools in the preparation process. Facilitators, along with KdK staff, go into classrooms to educate the youth on the project, and on the *bangskol* that will commence within the community. Youth from the school volunteer to be junior leaders in the project, and a significant part of their role is in preparing the grounds for the ritual itself. The days leading up to the *bangskol* see youth preparing the location, physically, for the setting up of the tent within which the *bangskol* will be held. Unlike the TPO project, KdK conducts their *bangskol* not in a pagoda, but in a makeshift ritual tent set up on the grounds near the *stupa* that has been built in the community. The high level of consultation and engagement with community members that are not necessarily registered as Civil Parties supports the assumption that the approach of KdK is more sustainable in its ability to reach a larger number of participants and circumvent the limitations that the ECCC's process of registering Civil Parties has presented to reconciliation in Cambodia.

On the morning of the *bangskol*, facilitators meet with KdK staff to collect and transport the materials for the ceremony: water, decorations, stereo and PA system, and offerings. Local facilitators and supporting volunteers arrive early to light incense and pay respects to the *stupa* in front of which the ceremonial tent will be constructed.<sup>248</sup> Some youth who were selected as junior facilitators meet with staff to discuss the plan for the day and what each facilitator's role will be. The remaining youth meet the facilitators and KdK staff at the site to finish preparations of the

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<sup>248</sup> Image IV: Local facilitators light incense at the *stupa* built in Prey Veng for KdK's JHO project.

grounds, and set up the ritual tent.<sup>249</sup> The *bangskol* ceremony itself is held in the afternoon. Once the ceremonial tent is set up, villagers begin to arrive at the site. The local *achar* is seated at the front of the tent, welcoming the attendees as they arrive.<sup>250</sup> Those participants who are bringing offerings and who are victims of the Khmer Rouge regime arrive wearing the traditional dark bottom with light top, as would be worn to a funerary ritual.

Monks will lead the ceremony arrive last, after everyone has been seated and are prepared for the *bangskol* to begin. The monks who will lead the *bangskol* differ from community to community; some villages choose to invite monks from that same village or a nearby pagoda; some invite monks from other places that are linked to their family lineages: “for example, like my grandparents or my parents always [went] to the pagoda ‘A,’ so the younger generation has always to go to pagoda ‘A’ and invite the monks from there.”<sup>251</sup> Some communities do not have a pagoda of their own, so they will go outside of the community, and others choose to invite high ranking or famous monks from other places.<sup>252</sup> The use of variant monks, depending on the local needs and access, supports the adaptable and community-driven approach that Kdei Karuna takes to participatory religiosity within their reconciliation endeavors.

The monks are seated at the front of the tent, alongside the *achar*, and the ceremony begins<sup>253</sup>. While the monks are speaking to open the ceremony, they choose an array of topics based on the consultation done by the community and the indicated needs, which are passed to the monks from the local facilitators. Structurally, the speeches of the monks consistently include a discussion on trauma, the way that people feel as victims, parables from Buddhism that relate to the experiences and journeys of resilience of the victims, and some more esoteric Buddhist teachings. One KdK staffer suggested that the monks will aim to “evoke the topics of reconciliation” but that “mostly they talk about current situation or problem, and how we could act or behave to be a good human.”<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Appendix I: Image V: Youth preparing the site for the *bangskol* ceremony in Prey Veng.

<sup>250</sup> Appendix I: Image VI: Local *achars* gather in the *bangskol* ceremonial tent, preparing to greet attendees as they arrive for the ceremony.

<sup>251</sup> KdK Focus Group 01.

<sup>252</sup> It is interesting to note that the staff at KdK revealed there to be competition linked to the invitation of monks for the *bangskol*; some communities have wealthy members who want to invite high profile monks, and so will make large-scale donations to cover the costs of transportation for such monks to the community.

<sup>253</sup> Strong (1992): This ceremony is more reminiscent of the

<sup>254</sup> KdK Focus Group 02

KdK describes *bangskol* as a “small part of a big ceremony;”<sup>255</sup> it is the aspect of the ceremony that includes communication with and praying to the dead while also wishing good fortune to those left behind, who are still living. The ceremony supports the emotional healing for the community members, as they are able to pass *bon* on to those who have been lost and receive emotional release and support through that process. The *bon* is passed through the *sīlath*, the monks who have gained the powers to communicate with the deceased through ritual means.

KdK’s *bangskol* first invites the spirits of the dead to come to the location, into the sacred space that has been constructed by the community. Members of the community pray the names of their loved ones along with the monk chanting to bring those spirits into the space: “when we pray to them, we call their name to come to get what we have prepared for them.”<sup>256</sup> The understanding is that through praying and calling out the names of the deceased, bolstered by the spiritual power of the monks or *sīlath*, the spirits of the dead will hear their own names and be drawn into the space where the *bangskol* will occur. The spirits of the dead are “all around us, all the time;”<sup>257</sup> the initial part of the *bangskol* ceremony is a ritual process that simply catches the attention of those spirits and gathers them into a central location. The utilization of traditional tactics for calling spirits into the space supports the authenticity of the *bangskol* that KdK performs across rural Cambodia.

Within the context of the KdK *bangskol*, the healing process is facilitated by the monks themselves. Whereas in the TPO context, the *bangskol* is an act that facilitates the healing of a therapy process rooted in psychiatric medicine, for KdK, the monks themselves act *as the healers* and the project is an ongoing healing journey for the community. “We see some monks play a role like medical healers ... like people they have, we can say, like mental problems, and that can bring to the monk ... like traditional healers, like *kru khmer*.”<sup>258</sup>

#### 4.2.1 *Neak Ta* and the local Guardian Spirits

Kdei Karuna has made significant efforts to respect and include local religiosity within the context of the work done through JHO. Unlike TPO, this project did not take villagers *from* their homes, but rather took the ceremony and project *to the villagers in the countryside* and

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<sup>255</sup> *ibid*

<sup>256</sup> *ibid*

<sup>257</sup> KdK Focus Group 02

<sup>258</sup> Kdei Karuna Director. *Kru Khmer* are practitioners of traditional Cambodian medicine

undertook an extensive assessment to ensure local needs were met and local beliefs were respected and incorporated into the project itself. During my first research trip to Prey Veng, which was KdK's final assessment trip, KdK staff members were discussing what may be identified as gaps in the existing plan for the ceremony. The director indicated that there would need to be an additional meeting with the facilitators to devise a way to include prayer to the *neak ta* within the context of the *bangskol* and ceremonies around it. Speaking to an international advisor:<sup>259</sup>

“I suggest we have a meeting with all of them [facilitators]. I think we need more time to explain this idea, ... I see that the spirits still are, like, people still believe in the spirits, and they [could] pray for *neak ta* and for the people who died during the Khmer Rouge, a little bit but differently. Because for *neak ta*, they pray and then they expect for the guardian, for protection.”<sup>260</sup>

By considering carefully the needs of the community to incorporate *neak ta* ceremony and worship to their prayers and participatory religiosity within the JHO project, the director of KdK demonstrates that the phenomenological experiences of Cambodian people are incorporated into the ontological framework through which the program delivery is built. In description of the program planning provided by the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, the notion of *neak ta*, guardianship, and spirit appeasements was not incorporated or communicated to me during research. Conversely, TPO focused solely on the idea of the spirits of the victims of the Khmer Rouge, whose believed presence TPO considered markers of trauma and PTSD.

#### 4.3 Performance, Justice, and the ECCC

Kdei Karuna is connected to the ECCC through the VSS reparations projects, but staff members note some disconnect between the ECCC and the needs of local Cambodian people. Staff members identify a gap between the prosecution of the leadership and the reconciliation aimed for at the local level. “The ECCC is focused on the leaders, not the local people. But our project is focused to the local people.”<sup>261</sup> The role that KdK feels it plays is to bridge the gap between the ECCC, VSS, and people in rural Cambodia who are suffering from the trauma of the Khmer Rouge regime.

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<sup>259</sup> The JHO project had a German advisor on staff from GIZ who supported the work of the project and assisted the implementation of JHO in several village communities.

<sup>260</sup> KdK Director, recorded meeting observed in Prey Veng

<sup>261</sup> KdK Staff Member.

Many participants and community members within Cambodia have expressed frustration to KdK staff in regards to the ongoing reminders of the Khmer Rouge regime that the reconciliation projects have provided. The notion of performing trauma is something that is consistent in the critiques of undertaking reconciliation and reparations measures at a time that is so distant from the events of trauma themselves. Some participants that worked with the JHO have indicated to staff that “they don’t understand our work. Like, why do we remind them again about the Khmer Rouge regime? It is something that they want to forget – not forget, but it isn’t something they want to talk about again or be reminded again.”<sup>262</sup>

KdK staff, however, have indicated that once the initial frustration is overcome, the process of performing trauma and increasing the capacity for the community to share has contributed to healing efforts for many individuals and communities being worked with within the project: “I mean, when we talk to them about the past they change their mind. They’re still angry, but they feel better about it. Something happened with them. ... They join with us, they want to release their feeling.”<sup>263</sup>

KdK also fills the gap between social and legal justice and the quest and need for spirituality in the process of reconciliation, in the minds of the Khmer Buddhist people. The incorporation of Khmer Buddhism has contributed to the success of that project. By conducting the *bangskol* ceremony, there is sense of relief and hope built into the expelling of negative feelings that accompanies participatory religiosity. When support is provided, it allows people to cope with having experienced traumatic events. Building the *stupas* allows continuity of the connection between the dead and the living in a way that each individual can return to and continue to heal.

#### **4.4 Reconciliation at KdK: Concluding observations**

Empowering communities to undertake ongoing healing themselves, providing autonomy in the decisions as to what reconciliation means for them, and providing the resources and tools to do the work themselves is at the crux of the reconciliation process that Kdei Karuna undertakes. For Kdei Karuna, reconciliation is built not only upon healing direct traumas of the Khmer Rouge experiences, but rather upon empowering the community to continue and to “heal

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<sup>262</sup> KdK Focus Group 01

<sup>263</sup> KdK Focus Group 01



their suffering themselves.”<sup>264</sup> This organization aims to provide a sustainable and ongoing healing trajectory that has continuity beyond the presence of KdK within the community.

A primary function of reconciliation that is undertaken in the JHO project is peace-building. As one focus group participant suggests, “the project is about peace;”<sup>265</sup> if people are able to shift their focus from past conflict towards community based needs and collaborative support, ongoing peace-building can support the route to reconciliation.

For Kdei Karuna, reconciliation means committing to ongoing support for communities in their work, framing thought aimed at peacebuilding, and re-establishing locally sustainable means to build capacity within a given community. It endeavours to strengthen that sustainability through collaborative approaches to this work that engage with local communities fully to ensure they are dictating the narrative of their own healing. A significant objective of KdK is capacity building, and it follows that successful reconciliation would look like a series of communities that, although haunted by the ghosts of mass atrocities and death, have developed the skills and tools to continue to heal themselves. Reconciliation is not, in the eyes of this organization, something that is packaged and delivered; it is something that is collaboratively achieved through processes of healing.

KdK is similarly engaged in collaborative efforts to undertake the religious and ritual aspect of reconciliation, which have been identified *locally* as necessary components to authentic and successful healing. The community itself undertakes the planning and implantation of the *bangskol* and, as such, has a significant amount of ownership over what that ceremony looks like, who attends, and who officiates. The community collaboratively works to put the *bangskol* together, connecting generations through education and outreach, in a way that is fully participatory.

Kdei Karuna endeavours to meet Khmer Rouge victims *where they are at*. They travel outside of the urban centres to first engage with rural Cambodians to identify the needs of the local communities they are serving. They then compile that data to create a locally-specific need that can then be incorporated into the JHO project. The programming offered by Kdei Karuna is not packaged and delivered *to the community*, but developed and implemented *alongside the community*. This approach offers an opportunity for participatory religiosity that is wholly

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<sup>264</sup> KdK Focus Group 01

<sup>265</sup> KdK Focus Group 01

participatory and rooted in local ontologies that are identified by the community itself. Further, Kdei Karuna is able to circumvent the limitations of the program delivery being applicable only to those victims who have been accepted as Civil Parties by the internationally-mandated ECCC by providing capacity building through the train-the-trainer component of the program. This way, even though many direct participants of the program are Civil Parties, they are given the tools to incorporate the reconciliation processes into their communities and provide these opportunities for healing to the entire community. This approach is more sustainable in that it gives each community that participates in the JHO program the tools that are needed to continue healing, provides spaces for performing participatory religiosity that are concrete and long-lasting, and allows this reconciliation and healing process to be dispursed beyond the Civil Parties alone. The JHO project confirms the assumption that through Kdei Karuna, the quest for participatory religiosity is achieved in that the organization is providing a program that is, by very nature of its community engagement, wholly participatory.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Dynamics of Participatory Religiosity in Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia

The research undertaken for my thesis has created a framework for examining the role of Khmer Buddhism as a means to heal Cambodia's social wounds, and illustrates that competing ontologies within the arena of reconciliation has extended the reconciliation process in Cambodia, creating a barrier to the closure of the Khmer Rouge saga in Cambodia. Victor Turner's social drama indicates that closure exists when the outcome phase has been achieved. My thesis has adapted Turner's theory to extend application to an entire historical period of Cambodia: 1979-present-day. The application of this theory to the context of Cambodia has shown that significant limitations exist that prohibit Cambodia from reaching the outcome phase of its own social drama, and that it remains luminally positioned within the redress stage through the ongoing presence of civil society perpetuating reconciliation endeavours.

The limitations to achieving this outcome are plentiful: the definition of what those wounds are is not consistent across so-called stakeholders involved in the reconciliation process; there remains corruption within the government that has limited the meaning-making capacity of the ECCC; poverty is consistent and rampant in the country; there is dependency perpetuated on the international community<sup>266</sup> that has been bolstered in part by the ongoing presence of the UN through the ECCC, and the influx of international NGOs after the signing of the Paris Peace Accord in 1992<sup>267</sup>; the long period of war and instability has exacerbated the cultural models of suspicion and disproportionate revenge<sup>268</sup>; and there has been a disconnect between the generations that has seen social development and reconciliation split into two trajectories<sup>269</sup> that are seemingly non-communicative with one another; and there is inconsistency in the ontological framework through which reconciliation endeavours are being undertaken.

There is a lack of clarity regarding what, exactly, reconciliation means for Cambodia, what it looks like, and what needs to happen in order for the social drama to reach the outcome phase. NGOs that are working on reparations are rooted in the past. The notion of reconciliation and justice is linked to the notion of *reparations*: healing for each of these organizations means allowing the victims of the Khmer Rouge to access what they need in order to support their

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<sup>266</sup> Hughes (2011).

<sup>267</sup> Domashneva (2011) and Silverstein (2011).

<sup>268</sup> Hinton (2005, 2009).

<sup>269</sup> Though outside of the scope of this paper, there are social development activities being undertaken that are separate from those related to the ECCC: these focus on creating a sustainable future rather than healing from the past. The need for further exploration into this aspect of Cambodian development work is named later in this chapter.

deceased loved ones. The work that they are doing is part of a larger tendency towards healing from trauma that incorporates efforts to create psychological and social stability for victims of the Khmer Rouge.

Using ethnographic analysis, this final chapter will explore my findings in order to identify the differences in the ways in which TPO and KdK use participatory religiosity in their reparations work. I will determine the role of participatory religiosity in reconciliation and healing in Cambodia, critically discuss and compare the two reparations projects, and point to further considerations that could contribute to the field of study that examines the relationship between religiosity and societal healing in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia.

## 5.1 Cambodian Subjectivity

Establishing subjectivity allows for a more adequate analysis and application of the theoretical models through which this work has been examined. The systems of meaning creation that exist *vis-à-vis* the social and cultural milieu of pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, and they garner a *gestalt* understanding of a Cambodian subjectivity. Although the individual subjectivities of the Cambodian population are impacted greatly, the effect on the collective subjectivities of Khmer Buddhists is the most salient focus for examining these shifts.

The historical situation of pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia should be understood as it relates to the social sensibilities of the Cambodian people during the period leading to the social breach. The ordering of social life, subjective to Cambodia, was introduced and discussed in Chapter One. By describing and examining the cultural models of socialization in pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, a historical contextualization of the social milieu within the country gives a foundational perspective on the subjective world of Cambodians leading to the breach, and can contribute to the assessment of the impact that the social drama has had on Cambodian subjectivity. The pre-Khmer Rouge subjectivity was developed through the cultural model of disproportionate revenge and community suspicion.<sup>270</sup> This led to cyclical patterns of revenge that carried over generational divides<sup>271</sup>, rooted in a shame-versus-honour dichotomy wherein aggression tends to be displayed through the notion of *rumsay komhoeng*, the external expression of anger.

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<sup>270</sup> Hinton (2005, 2009).

<sup>271</sup> Hinton (2009).

There also appears to be a marked shift at the collective level, away from aggression and towards avoidance and neglect of the health and wellness of the community. This is identifiable by examining the tendency for much of Cambodian society to ignore the history of the Khmer Rouge and maintain quiet life, prior to the resurgence of the conversations regarding reconciliation that accompanied the establishment of the ECCC.<sup>272</sup> This has been significantly facilitated by the Cambodian government, particularly Prime Minister Hun Sen, who had encouraged the nation to “dig a hole and bury the past,”<sup>273</sup> indicative of the shift in subjectivity away from the aggressive outlook that had historically been shaped by violent experiences and towards a more passive social suspicion and intentional ignorance of the past. The move towards this subjectivity is particularly interesting as the emergence of the ECCC has shifted the country into an ongoing continuation of talking about the Khmer Rouge, sometimes to the resistance of local community members. It follows, however, that there has been an apparent impact on the subjectivity of Cambodian people, but the restructured subjective framework through which Cambodians experience the contemporary world remains incomplete. Further to this aspect is the normalization of violence that is resultant from ongoing and long-term experiences of living within a context of extreme violence. This subjective way of experiencing the world is connected to ongoing and unhealed trauma of Cambodian people in general.

It is important to note that a limitation to gaining insight into Cambodian subjectivity and experiences is that access to the social and cultural milieu of historic Cambodia is filtered through interpretive layers of documented work. The inability to directly observe the Cambodian context pre- and post-conflict, combined with the documentation of both eras having been interpreted already through researchers’ own subjective lenses, presents a challenge to confirming the specific shifts in subjectivity that are posited in my thesis. Further presenting limitations to my work is the aforementioned reflexive acknowledgement that authentic exploration into emic cultural understandings is challenging: the starting point will always be one’s own socio-cultural ethos. Our own subjectivities limit our capacity to authentically understand subjectivities from a different cultural context.

Subjectivity is formulated through veritable contingencies of human experience, but is also not stagnant once that formulation has taken place. Subjectivity is flexible and fluid, and as

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<sup>272</sup> Campbell (2014).

<sup>273</sup> Hun Sen, quoted in Cambodia Daily (December 29, 1998)

such the notion of the social drama has potential for significant impact on both individual as well as collectively developed subjectivities. This thesis confirms Lacan's suggestion that "meaning is produced by signifiers"<sup>274</sup> through the demonstration of the ongoing and embedded role of the international community within the construction of meaning as it relates to the experiences of the Khmer Rouge Era. Since entering the field, civil society in Cambodia has engaged with non-Khmer signifiers – namely language around international law and transitional justice – to create a cultural paradigm within which all actors - including Cambodian - must operate. That is to say that civil society work that is being undertaken in Cambodia related to post-Khmer Rouge reconciliation is led and shaped by the international community's subjectivity, even when those organizations are Cambodian. They must operate in English to be competitive with donors and funding; they must engage with the international legal language; their programming must align with mandates set by the ECCC, which is an organization operating within an international subjectivity. As such, rather than completing the project of the social drama, this coalescence between competing subjectivities - local ontologies about religiosity with international ontologies of health and healing - may have led to the liminality that now faces Cambodia.

## **5.2 Cambodian Social Drama**

In the context of Cambodia, the application of Victor Turner's social drama can be broken down by examining each of the stages historically. My analysis is that the current state of Cambodia, in accordance with the social drama trajectory, is that of the outcome. The ECCC-related NGO work that is undertaken by Kdei Karuna and the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization work towards creating a context within which the closure of the social drama may occur, but this closure is not yet complete. Each of these organizations is operating from within a different ontological framework for understanding trauma and the subsequent needs of the community in order to achieve societal and social healing. TPO operates through a framework of Western psychiatric medicine that targets individual experiences, while KdK operates through a community-driven and Cambodian phenomenological framework that legitimizes local beliefs and worldviews, and provides capacity development opportunities that can proliferate the work throughout the community. These approaches each have their own merits, but the inconsistency

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<sup>274</sup> Stavrakakis (1991): pp. 16.

of the approaches to reconciliation, and the sustained direction of exogenous decision-makers and stakeholders, contribute to the inconclusive nature of the Cambodian social drama.

### **5.2.1 The Breach: disrupting society in Cambodia**

The breach phase of a social drama is initiated when some schismatic event significantly disrupts the normative social process of an entire group. That which begins the social drama is predicated upon a transgressive action or occasion that is met with resistance from those who represent normative continuity of the social group. In order for it to be considered the launch of a social drama, this breach must take place publicly, ensuring a collective acknowledgement of the rupture. The breach will confront basic group suppositions regarding the stability and continuity of the unified social group.

In Cambodia, the breach is the seizure of Phnom Penh by Khmer Rouge Cadres in 1975. This breach was a series of moments that lasted for three days, until all inhabitants from the urban centres in the country had been evacuated, and over two million Cambodians faced forced migration to rural environments where they were assigned forced labour duties, provided with minimal sustenance, or executed for resisting. The rise of the Khmer Rouge immediately challenged the unity of Cambodia as a nation, and the regime was met with resistance leading to a significant and obvious rupture in the continuity and sustainability of Cambodian societal functioning. From the grounded perspectives of Cambodian history, the developed subjective experiences of the nation were significantly altered by the Khmer Rouge annexation. As such, the Cambodian experience confirms this breach to be the initiation of the social drama.

### **5.2.2 Crisis Phase: The Khmer Rouge Era in Cambodia**

The crisis phase of the social drama seems to represent the notion that the symbolic form – as propagated within the framework of the Lacanian<sup>275</sup> subject – is not necessarily indicative of behavioural patterns. The occurrence of a crisis presents a challenge to the idea that the symbolic necessarily produces unity or patterning in that which dictates subjectivities: the symbolic register. Clearly exercising differentiation within a single socio-cultural context, the crisis phase divides a society and demonstrates the impact that individual subjectivities still hold over behavioural patterns and motivation of subjects.

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<sup>275</sup> Stravakakis (1991) & Biehl et al (2007).

The Cambodian crisis phase lasted from the 1975 breach until the Vietnamese invasion of 1979. Internally displaced inside of days, millions of Cambodians were faced with an immediate and dramatic shift to social operation as their lives became a survival pursuit, confronted with challenges even to the most basic human necessities. The threat to the physical integrity of Cambodians was consistent under the Khmer Rouge, and the era is marked by extreme violence and social control. Armed conflict, genocidal conditions, spiritual and institutional religious denigration, and tyrannous oppression resulted in particularized trauma and a subsequent blow to the subjectivities of the Cambodian population unprotected from the power of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Leaders from all factions within a schismatic crisis phase recruit followers and “stigmatize rivals”<sup>276</sup> in an attempt to build the social capital required for control over the social construction process. In Cambodia, the factions were clear between the Khmer Rouge regime and the rest of Cambodian society. Cadres were set against civilians, with the choice limited to either joining the Khmer Rouge or facing execution, slave labour, torture, and submission. The challenge with the crisis phase of this particular context is the notion of choice itself: the Khmer Rouge exercised such brute and violent power as to limit the moment of choice to one of life or death. Without the ability to choose a faction that was resisting the Khmer Rouge, the only choice was only to submit.

Lacanian views on subjectivity also include the register of ‘the real’ which consists of that which is ineffable; it does not contain imaginary aspects of self-differentiation, nor does it contain symbolic aspects of the human capacity for abstract thought and subjectivity development. Rather, Lacan suggests, the ‘real’ register is that which exists before subjectivity is developed; that other thing beyond imaginary and symbolic which cannot be comprehended. Aligning with Lacanian thought, the notion of the real is at the core of trauma; trauma is something so unspeakable and unutterable that it does not translate to image or symbol. Traumatic experiences “isolate the person and remain an unrepresentable experience, outside the network of meanings.”<sup>277</sup> Trauma presents a subjunctive aspect to the construction of subjectivity following a crisis phase of the social drama. Trauma is anxiogenic in that it is an ineffable experience that cannot be connected to a past experience; it can be considered an experience that

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<sup>276</sup> Turner (1980): pp. 152.

<sup>277</sup> Sturm et al (2010): pp. 32.



lies within the Lacanian ‘real’ register, and as such is unable to be transformed and appropriated by the psyche into something that can lead to finality. The redressive stage is that which deals with the reconstruction of subjectivities, and endeavours to do so with emphasis on re-constituting traumatic experiences into the symbolic realm so as to allow finality and re-composure, prerequisites for subjectivity reconstruction.<sup>278</sup>

The crisis phase lasted until the Vietnamese invasion in 1979. The Khmer Rouge regime created severe and intensified forms of trauma for an entire population, who then had to carry these experiences over with them into a new and unfamiliar social context, haunted by painful memories and psychological and physical debilitation. As such, the notion of trauma as it impacts both individual as well as collective subjectivity is an important consideration in the context of the social drama and its impact.

### **5.2.3 Redressive Action Phase: after the fall of the Khmer Rouge**

At the helm of the redressive phase are those who hold legitimized power of representation; those actors or agents committed to the continuity of the group. Importantly, the crisis phase impacts the legitimization of certain leadership within the context of pre-existing social structures, and so the redressive action phase is met not only with established authorities aimed at continuity or re-construction of society, but also with emergent authorities that seek to either replace or revolutionize the systems of authority previously in place. Formal or informal, institutional or advisory, these figures represent the capacity to lead the social group in the transformation process that will cumulate with the outcome: the finality of the social drama. A major endeavour of any given leadership group is to make meaning of the crisis that has occurred, and to mend the rupture. In the context of Cambodia, I have identified two significant bodies of leaders who have taken different routes in an attempt to achieve this goal. The routes taken by KdK and TPO are considered to be redressive actions – part of the redressive stage – and participatory religiosity has proven to be potent and effective within them.

For Victor Turner, ritual is defined as a composite series of acts that symbolically achieve some end goal<sup>279</sup>; a cause-and-effect taxonomic feat. Within the context of the social drama, rituals are utilized to mark the completion of the crisis, to redress wrongdoings, to face ongoing rifts or grievances, and to find solutions to the social rift that would allow the continuity of the

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<sup>278</sup> Harari (2004): pp. 29-41.

<sup>279</sup> Turner (1979).

group. Participatory rituals are a route through which the subjects may confront the experienced dissolution of subjective meaning-making that has occurred in the crisis phase, and can be used as a tool for reconfiguration of the subjective self. However, this reconstruction can only take place “if social bonds are previously reconstructed, and if the person who goes through this kind of ritual practice feels ready for it.”<sup>280</sup> As such, the context of Cambodia presents a challenge to Turner’s proposal of ritual as a means to redress wrongs, since the reconstruction of the Cambodian social world does not appear to have occurred. This absent reconstruction can be attributed to the competitive subjectivities of authorities representing continuity and reconstruction within the context of post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia.

New types of political and social authority have arisen in the form of globalized conglomerates of international power, such as those of the United Nations and international nongovernmental organizations that are doing extensive work in lower-income countries.<sup>281</sup> The relevance of these emerging global actors relates to the redressive stage of the social drama, particularly considering the influx of interested parties from outside of Cambodia working within the realm of reconciliation and transitional justice in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. What has emerged seems to be competing authorities with competing subjectivities that influence the notion of what is necessary for reconciliation and justice, and what a constituted unification may be. In this case, these competing subjective forces come from varied historical contexts, varied social sensibilities, and varied culturally contextualized cognitive, affective, and behavioural norms. This raises a new theoretical consideration in the notion of social drama and subjectivity: how can the redressive stage ever be completed if perspectives regarding what sort of unity should be established are fragmented? Competing subjective authorities extend the social drama in Cambodia, ensnaring Cambodians in a liminal state of redress, which must be addressed in order for the completion of the social drama to unfold.

This assumption is demonstrated through the divergent approaches to healing that have been presented in the case studies of TPO and KdK: these fragmented authoritative bodies include either local/Khmer or international/non-Khmer ontologies, which represent competing subjectivities in reconciliation work in Cambodia. While international organizations like the United Nations have been lauded for their efforts in Cambodia, they represent a very different

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<sup>280</sup> Sturm et al (2010): pp: 29.

<sup>281</sup> Biehl et al (2007).

construction of societal unity and healing than do local authorities. The trajectory of the efforts for societal reconstruction that are bolstered by international subjectivities is contingent upon needs assessments that emphasize a rubric of globalization within which they aim for Cambodia to fit, positing Western ontologies of trauma, healing, and reconciliation as normative. Localized social, religious, and cultural considerations are not prioritized, and the pre-Khmer Rouge subjectivity that marks the symbolic register of the Cambodian people is largely overlooked.

The devastation suffered in Cambodia because of the Khmer Rouge Era left a nation without strong governance or judiciary systems, and with very few localized experts to begin to rebuild what was lost. These gaps legitimized the initial role of international agents in the reconstruction activities of the country,<sup>282</sup> but largely excluded Cambodian input from the planning and execution of such.<sup>283</sup> In order for the redress to be complete and for the outcome phase to culminate, Cambodian people must be decision-makers. The ECCC falls short in its considerations of local needs in program planning and implementation; consultation processes are insufficient in that they are mandated and controlled by international administrators.

Cambodian society was shattered by the Khmer Rouge regime, and in order for authentic reconciliation and reconstruction of communities that could result in the outcome of unity, the priorities and mandates of the international community must be bracketed in order to prioritize local subjectivities. The prioritization of Cambodian subjectivity and input in the work around reparations and healing is what Kdei Karuna is offering through their push for community engagement in developing programmes of participatory religiosity that serve the goal of societal healing. A notable difference between KdK and TPO is in their approach to healing: KdK is focused on collective healing work that is guided by collaboration and input from local communities and is undertaken through Cambodian ontologies that are rooted in local phenomenologies and developed *by the* program subjects; TPO aims at individual healing from specific traumas that are largely understood through a lens of Western psychiatric medicine, offering programs that are developed and mandated by the organization itself and delivered *to* the program subjects.

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<sup>282</sup> Dosch (2012).

<sup>283</sup> Domashneva (2011).

#### **5.2.4 Outcome Phase: seeking a conclusion to the social drama**

In Cambodia, it seems that the schisms between the factions aiming to control the nation appear to be irreconcilable. However, a new dimension has been added to the consideration of the potential outcome phase: a new moral order. Cambodia did not acknowledge an *irreparable schism*,<sup>284</sup> nor did it permanently divide itself into factions of groups. Quite contrary, in fact, those who had sided with the Khmer Rouge attempted to reintegrate into society after the regime's downfall, a reintegration process that is still underway. The time between the fall of the Khmer Rouge and the present Cambodian post-conflict era is such that the memories of the regime are still fresh in the minds of many. These memories have been reawakened in the minds of others through the Khmer Rouge tribunal. Cambodia continues to be in a state of liminality that is perpetuated by the influence of international actors that are primarily focused on the redress chapter of the social drama.

The competing subjectivities that control the reconciliation process in Cambodia have trapped the community in an ongoing redressive stage, stalling the conclusion of the social drama. Cambodia's capacity for achieving this phase remains ambiguous in the face of competing subjectivities with fragmented understandings of what Cambodia needs. Focusing on exogenous understandings of political, economic, and psychological development, the international agents of control such as the ECCC are largely ignoring the importance of re-creating a subjective world in Cambodia for Cambodia people. There is some evidence of a shift towards the formation of a new moral order that would see the re-creation of a subjective world and completion of the social drama, identified through the programs of TPO and KdK.

#### **5.3 New Moral Order: TPO and KDK in the arena**

The need for establishing a new moral order is closely linked to the experiences of extreme violence under the Khmer Rouge that have seeped into a perception within Cambodia that violence is a normative experience. The experience of extreme violence during the Khmer Rouge regime, followed by over a decade of ongoing violence during the Vietnamese occupation have enculturated acceptance of violence into the subjectivity of the nation. Cambodian experts have identified the links between the experience of sustained violence and the normalization and internalization of bearing witness to such violence. As one participant in my in-depth interviews

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<sup>284</sup> Turner (1980): pp. 151.

suggested: “because of the society, you know, experienced long wars, and then this can effect to the people. And especially the other thing, like they can see violence, they see violence every day. It becomes the normal thing that happens to them.”<sup>285</sup>

Normalization of violence, at the surface, seems to be incompatible with Buddhism, which teaches nonviolence as an elemental aspect of religiosity. In practice, however, the political environment and ongoing extreme violence has disconnected that particular perspective of Buddhism from the actual, on-the-ground lives of Khmer Buddhists. It is not that those who would commit violence would reject Buddhism or deny being Buddhist. Conversely, a research participant from Kdei Karuna suggested that “if you ask them, people who commit violence, or perpetrators, are they Buddhist? They say yes, they are Buddhist.”<sup>286</sup> In the quest for a new moral order, the utilization of Buddhism and the push to re-construct Khmer Buddhism as a root or foundation for morality is undertaken by the NGOs in this case study.

The role of monks in contemporary Cambodian society is changing rapidly. Prior to the Khmer Rouge, the monks had a strictly spiritual role in which their daily activities included collecting alms, prayer, supporting prayer, providing blessings, make merit, and so on. In contemporary Cambodia, the role of the monk in society has broadened significantly. There has emerged a rejuvenated role for education and the development of morality that could contribute to the closure of the redressive stage and a resultant outcome of the Khmer Rouge social drama.

The role of monks and religious specialists is also closely linked to the development of a new moral order within the context of Cambodia. Before the rise of the Khmer Rouge, monks were religious specialists as well as educators; education was provided through Khmer Buddhist institutions with the support of the state.<sup>287</sup> The distancing between the provision of education and the Khmer Buddhist institution subsequently also distanced the capacity for Cambodian people to build morality<sup>288</sup> – including the basis for nonviolence – upon the Khmer Buddhist framework. As such, the construction of a new moral order would significantly support the nation’s capacity to enter the outcome phase of the social drama.

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<sup>285</sup> Kdei Karuna Director Interview.

<sup>286</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> Kaleb (1968): pp. 531-532.

<sup>288</sup> The director of KdK indicated that within the context of the pre-KR education system, there was even a course that was specifically dedicated to morality; basic education was inclusive of morality education, as a standard in Cambodian curriculums prior to 1975.

One consistent aspect of the development of a new moral order within the context of Cambodia relates to conflict resolution, and the routes through which community conflicts should be addressed. As it relates to the identified cultural model of disproportionate revenge,<sup>289</sup> immediately following the fall of the Khmer Rouge, many Cambodians engaged in violent inter-personal conflict that resulted in the revenge killings of Khmer Rouge cadres whom had returned to their communities.<sup>290</sup> Further, the subjective experience contemporary Cambodia society normalizes violence and potentially damages the repertoire of nonviolent conflict resolution strategies. As such, the development and implementation of conflict resolution training and facilitating workshops around such is one of a major focus of KdK, following that identified need.

TPO does not endeavour, through their reparations projects, to build a new morality, to provide morality training, nor to sustain moral education within their work. Their primary focus is on healing individual trauma through transcultural psychosocial therapy, a mode for healing predicated upon a treatment program that manipulates parts of local religiosity to fit into a framework of Western psychiatric medicine. This process has been developed under the guidance of research from outside of Cambodia, and the translation and application of it has been facilitated in a top-down approach that applies a Western ontology of healing to the Cambodian context, adapting it as needed in an effort towards cultural alignment. The limitation of this approach is that there is no attempt to ascertain what the self-identified needs of the participants are, but rather their needs are decided by those who would design and deliver the project. There is no capacity development, and the programming is a one-time treatment that does not provide space or opportunity for the participants to collaboratively assess and determine structures and frameworks of healing that could be then be developed and disseminated horizontally within their local communities.

KdK overcomes some of these limitations by engaging in a fully collaborative process of establishing local needs and creating systems of sustainable and horizontal education. Train-the-trainer programmes allow for a lateral sharing of knowledge that is strategically sustainable, building matrices of capacity development rather than approaching the work with a hierarchical framework. KdK is committed to supporting communities in their work towards framing thought

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<sup>289</sup> Hinton (2005).

<sup>290</sup> Hinton (2009).

towards peace, and believes that the morality of the community should be linked to building and sustaining that peace. The organization endeavours to support and strengthen the development of morality through its collaborative work with monks. Monks are identified as authorities within the community who hold a significant amount of respect and power. They are capable of advising community members on conflict resolution matters and prevent aggravation through their identification with the Buddha, as a figurehead of a moral order. They have power and perception that allows “sharing or advising to how to be a good person.”<sup>291</sup> By operating within the phenomenological understanding of participatory religiosity, KdK collaborates with the community, identifies and cooperates with local religious specialists to ensure authenticity, and provides tools for the community to continue healing after the organization is no longer serving the community directly.

#### **5.4 Participatory Religiosity and Transitional Justice**

The atrocities of the Khmer Rouge era are still prevalent in the minds and memories of many Cambodians, and as such this community has remained in a “bereavement period, as they have to deal with the trauma of this unexplained and terrific past.”<sup>292</sup> The attribution of psychological maladies to the presence of angry or suffering spirits is combined with characteristic suspicion and distrust<sup>293</sup> in Cambodia, leading many to feel “more comfortable consulting spirits than fellow community members to address their distress and misfortune or to find advocacy and support from their everyday life in the context of religious development.”<sup>294</sup>

As has been established via literature based on research conducted on Western models of treatment,<sup>295</sup> in order to endeavour a holistic approach to treating trauma, therapeutic approaches must take into account the spiritual dynamics of the individual. Spirituality itself can be defined as connectivity with the creative principles of the universe, and its properties contribute to the completeness of an individual. For this reason, efforts towards reconciliation in Cambodia tend to focus on supporting a person in their journey to re-creating a completeness lost from the traumatic experiences of the Democratic Kampuchea era. This is often done through participatory religiosity, namely: the *bangskol* ceremony.

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<sup>291</sup> KdK Focus Group 01.

<sup>292</sup> Bertrand (2005): pp. 310.

<sup>293</sup> Hinton (2005).

<sup>294</sup> Ibid: pp. 310

<sup>295</sup> Segmund (2003): Western psychiatric medicine has acknowledged the fact that adherence to some form of religiosity provides meaning-making that is intrinsically linked to healing from traumas.

Connerton suggests that rites “keep the past in mind by a depictive representation of past events.”<sup>296</sup> In the context of *bangskol* as part of the reparations and healing journey of Khmer Rouge victims, the ceremonies allow a depictive representation of the loss of loved ones experienced by the participants in a way that contributes to building a commemorative ceremony around symbolic representation of the dead combined with phenomenologically literal representation of the dead in the form of the spirits called into the sacred spaces by the monks for the *bangskol*.

My original hypothesis was that the local communities would need religiosity, including the appeasement of spirits, in relation to the healing of the community. I find this to have been partially correct; there are ritual elements of local spirit appeasement that are directly linked to societal development, social justice, and post-conflict healing within the work of both TPO as well as KdK, but each organization approaches this need differently.

Meeting with Inger Aggar and Judith Strasser, the two international advisors for TPO who had developed and implemented the testimonial and narrative exposure therapy aspects of the reparations project with TPO, provided insight into the context of research on the ground in Cambodia and had confirmed that in the context of social scientific research, the area of ritual and NGO work has remains relatively untouched. Further, it has become apparent that much of the incorporation of Khmer Buddhist rituals into NGO work in post-conflict Cambodia has not been prevalent in the individual therapy sessions (for example, with torture victims), but rather has come into play when looking at therapy and social healing, as a collective.

At TPO, the *bangskol* itself is a participatory ritual with significant performative aspects that shift the tone of the ritual away from phenomenologically substantive. The audience members are frequently not Cambodian, which limits comprehension. To respond to this limitation, TPO provides a translator, which demonstrates that the ceremony itself is *not just for the victims* but it is also being *performed to* the audience. The layout of the room during the *bangskol* has the participants at the front of the room with the audience members seated towards the back. Frequently throughout the duration of the *bangskol*, staff members of TPO asked the participants to repeat themselves more loudly while the translator would translate to the non-Khmer-speaking audience at the back. This was uncomfortable for me, and sparked reflexive thought about the role of the audience, my own role, and the international presence within the

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<sup>296</sup> Connerton (1989): pp. 72.



context of these ceremonies. The incorporation of participatory religiosity is purported to be *for* the victims, but it is somewhat disrupted by the presence of an international audience. This confirms the need for considerable criticism of the approach that TPO utilizes, which prioritizes Western ontologies and, perhaps unintentionally, tends to centre the international community or, at the very least, decentralizes the victims themselves by virtue of ensuring access to the performance of their treatment via the *bangskol* ceremony.

#### **5.4.1 Community versus Individual**

A marked difference between the participatory religiosity of KdK and TPO was the identifiable objectives of the use of the ritual itself. Each organization approaches the ritual in a very different way: TPO tends towards specifically individual healing for those who experience trauma, while KdK's JHO project is designed to initiate a community-based approach to support and ritual that is sustainable and capacity building. Further to this, the treatment program of TPO is limited to those victims who have applied and been accepted by the ECCC as Civil Parties, whereas KdK offers the community tools to spread the reconciliation efforts throughout their communities, accessible to those who either did not apply or were rejected but, nonetheless, are victims of the Khmer Rouge regime.

At TPO, the use of the *bangskol* ceremony is specifically related to the particular experiences of trauma that each individual victim experienced during the Khmer Rouge era of Cambodian life. There is no collective or community-based strategy of the testimonial therapy project, nor does the ritual engage in a particularly participatory methodology. The participants of the programme are not, in effect, participants in designing the process: the preparation of the ceremony is undertaken by the staff of the organization itself and the ceremony is carried out in a central urban location with participants brought in from all across the country in small cohorts of people who are not necessarily from the same region. It is lacking in a community-based approach to healing, and is instead dedicated to each person's own individual experiences. The program is *delivered to* the participants rather than *developed and undertaken with* them.

TPO utilizes existing models of treatment for post-conflict trauma that were developed elsewhere – namely in South America - and adapts them to fit the local religious experience. TPO understands the participatory religiosity as a performative *tool* for easing suffering and trauma;

KdK has more of a phenomenological understanding of the ritual as an actual means to appease ancestors and thereby ease the haunting of the nation.

TPO has also medicalized the ritual processes in a way that engages biopolitics: connecting the need of the work of TPO – and in relationship with them, ECCC – to a biological and physiological *need*: PTSD treatment. This contributes to the continuity of international oversight on these projects, and is indicative as to why they have remained distinctly urban, disconnected from the rural areas of the country where a significant portion of the victims of the Khmer Rouge are living.

KdK, conversely, is more focused on the sustainable health and wellbeing of each community as a whole, and healing the spaces that are occupied its members. The *bangskol* in this case is prepared and facilitated *by* members of the community within which the JHO project is being carried out. As part of the KdK exit strategy,<sup>297</sup> there is emphasis on agency that creates engaged and participatory religiosity, which includes trainings to ensure that there can be ongoing healing carried out after KdK has completed its programming in the community. It also includes conflict resolution strategies to support ongoing community development in a trajectory of a moral order that focuses on collectivism. This approach is a potentially sustainable aid to community healing, and is cognizant of the trauma that exists in the physical space of the community as well – a belief that incorporates local phenomenological understandings of spirits, *neak ta*, and Khmer Buddhist ontology.

Commemorative and memorial buildings are constructed by members of the community as a means to facilitate ongoing healing and act as symbolic representations of those lost in the Khmer Rouge era. While KdK has developed its role in the Cambodian reparations projects through coordination with the international community, it has developed autonomously, using emic understandings rooted in Cambodian subjectivity as a means to do this work.

While there are hints of the belief in the processes and religious underpinnings of the work that TPO does in relation to the *bangskol* and the reparations project, the distanced relationship between me and the participants created limitations to my gaining a full understanding or ascertaining the authentic beliefs of the TPO staffers who conduct these ceremonies. Conversely, my experience of in-depth immersion in Kdei Karuna allowed for the

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<sup>297</sup> Silverstein (2011): An NGO exit strategy is a principle or plan for closing projects that encourages sustainability and capacity development and discourages dependency of the community on the organization's continued presence.

building of a rapport that opened the lines of communication and trust between KdK staff members and me. This gave more legitimacy to the acquisition of the subjective truth of the KdK staff members.

The stakeholder consultation meeting<sup>298</sup> that I attended during my fieldwork showed that there have been limitations to the work of reparations and reconciliation. Some stakeholders at the meeting expressed frustration that the internal rules for becoming a civil party were changing and unclear. Others complained that the requests for reparations were too non-specific, and that there was no strategic plan or timeline for how these projects would be carried out. During the question-and-answer period, multiple questions arose about building Buddhist *stupas* in local communities, and about the provision of funding for local rituals. The number of questions from the community that were related to sacred spaces and participatory religiosity confirmed that there exists a strong desire from the Khmer Buddhists of Cambodia to ensure that participatory religiosity is prioritized in the strategies of VSS program development.

Solutions to the limitations and failings of the formal reparations projects included identifying specific reparations that could be claimed by non-civil-parties, and prioritizing or short-listing projects that were accessible and manageable. Stakeholders identified the need to receive information early as a way to ensure partners for the projects could be identified and secured, and that those partners were aligned with the needs and desires of the community. Accessibility of projects, fundraising endeavours, and seeking agreement from community consultation outside of urban centres were all identified by the stakeholders as necessitating a revisit, as those had been failures in the program development leading up to the meetings for Case 002/02.

A further problem identified in the ongoing development of reparations projects is that there has been insufficient investigation into the *outcomes* of the projects themselves. New reparations projects are frequently being brainstormed and developed without adequate review of the completed projects, and no evidence of the effectiveness of existing and ongoing projects. In addition, local spaces of spiritual significance are being ignored while the building blocks for the reparations work were located in urban centres that had *historic* significance to the Khmer Rouge

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<sup>298</sup> This meeting brought together representatives from the ECCC, Cambodian and international NGO representatives, members of the community, and other interested parties. It was not a publicly advertised event, and access was only available through a registration process which limited participation of victims.

regime. As such, much of the internationally-driven reparations programming is taking place in urban settings – much like is the case with TPO – rather than bringing programming into rural communities. Phnom Penh is acting as a veritable think-tank for reparations to be *provided to* communities that are situated within a rural space.

The performative aspect of participatory religiosity being used by the VSS and ECCC is further demonstrated by the gaps in addressing the needs of those who are not registered as Civil Parties. Several Buddhist organizations<sup>299</sup> that are not related directly to the ECCC are attempting to fill that gap: a large segment of the population who was impacted by the Khmer Rouge regime is outside of the purview of the reparations-related organizations, and reconciliation and reparations efforts supporting them do not fit the mandate of VSS and the ECCC. The horizontal and capacity-building efforts of Kdei Karuna confirm that this is a gap in the programmes related to the ECCC, and the train-the-trainer component of the JHO programme attempts to rectify this problem. TPO, conversely, does not appear to include efforts to circumvent the barriers to participation that exist within non-Civil Party victims of the Khmer Rouge regime, and it remains unclear if they identify this as a limitation in their work.

## **5.5 Biopower and the legitimization of international presence**

Within the context of the ECCC and the projects that have developed in relation to reparations, a clear narrative has emerged: the ‘healing’ of the victims is a primary function of the VSS and its reparations project insofar as they relate to the utilization of Khmer Buddhist ritual. By focusing on ‘healing’ and ‘health,’ these projects have consistently underlined the trauma of victims – namely PTSD – as the biopolitical test for social suffering of the nation. This has sufficiently utilized a form of biopower to create systems wherein the ECCC is elevated in importance by reinforcing control over the healing of the nation through linking it to reparations in the form of trauma treatment.

An enforced reliance on Western-style psychiatric treatment contributes to the ongoing presence of international actors and of the systems of power that preside over the ECCC:

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<sup>299</sup> My fieldwork included several in-depth interviews and visits to local Khmer Buddhist social development organisations (Buddhism for Development and Buddhism for Social Development Action). The findings of that research proved outside the scope of this work, but it is important to note that there are means of participatory religiosity that are undertaken to facilitate social development as a means of healing from the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge that operate wholly outside of the purview of the ECCC.

Namely the United Nations and international NGOs.<sup>300</sup> Anne Yvonne Guillou succinctly describes the problematic nature of the ongoing reliance on Western psychiatric medicine as a means for overcoming the schism of the Khmer Rouge era by suggesting as follows [italics added]:

“The ideology underlying the overuse of the psychiatric scheme helps to *reinforce the marginalization of small societies* such as Cambodia in the globalized world by producing a particular image of them: not only did the Cambodians slaughter each other during an “auto-genocide”, not only did they suffer from mental illness caused by trauma, but they also remained unconcerned and passive after the genocide. This ideological pattern in turn *aims to make the proliferation of so-called humanitarian organizations in Cambodia acceptable by spreading the idea that Cambodians cannot help themselves or be treated as responsible citizens.*” (emphasis added)<sup>301</sup>

Utilizing the so-called evidence of ongoing PTSD of former victims, the subtle use of this narrative reinforces the idea that Cambodia is a nation unable to recover from the mass atrocities of extreme violence and thus is *in need of* the ECCC, the United Nations, and the international agents contributing (financially and otherwise) to the ongoing work of the reparations projects. The medicalization of the Civil Parties component of the VSS and ECCC has legitimized the ongoing presence of these actors within the context of Cambodian nongovernmental organizations’ work, and further legitimized an increasingly criticized tribunal. This is illustrative of the use of biopower and biopolitics in the context of international justice.

The international community who lead reconciliation efforts have effectively wielded biopolitical power to maintain their ongoing presence and leadership within the realm of transitional justice in Cambodia. TPO has supported this endeavour by linking reconciliation to healing, trauma, and psychiatric medicine. The testimonial therapy project is also rooted in the performance of collective memory: participants in the project are urged to return to the memory of the Khmer Rouge regime, to retell the experience to an audience, and essentially *perform* their own memories and traumas for the sake of healing.

Conversely KdK has benefited from the privilege of being associated with those international bodies who have harnessed a biopolitical assertion of legitimacy, but has undertaken

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<sup>300</sup> Dosch (2012).

<sup>301</sup> Guillou (2012): pp. 212.

a different approach to front-line service delivery. By aligning with the phenomenological understanding of the Cambodian need to heal from the literal spirits of those who died during the Khmer Rouge Era – a conclusion that was drawn through community consultations – KdK has instead engaged in a participatory religiosity that evokes collective memory not in a performative way, but through ceremony and collective bodily practices that harmonize the social group: they are deliberately structured, wholly meaningful and real, and they are instrumental to KdK’s definition of reconciliation.

The biopolitical linking of reconciliation to healing, trauma, and psychiatric medicine has led to an ongoing process of performative reconciliation in the context of reparations projects linked to the ECCC. These projects are rooted in the notion of collective memory in that participants in the reparations projects are inclusive of ongoing return to the memory of the Khmer Rouge regime in such a way that the participants are essentially *performing* their own memories for the sake of healing and subsequently reconciliation. A shift towards countering a narrative of the “suffering subject”<sup>302</sup> could be undertaken through expansion of the notion of morality within the context of Cambodian reconciliation work, especially through the intergenerational collaborative processes undertaken by KdK. While TPO focuses primarily on the suffering, and on remediating that suffering through trauma treatment, KdK offers more hope and focus on the future through providing ongoing healing, community development, and opportunities for autonomous continuity of their projects.

## **5.6 For further consideration: victim-perpetrator dialogue, generational differences, and Cambodians in the diaspora**

There have arisen a number of subsidiary areas of interest that would merit further exploration in order to more fully identify the process of reconciliation in Cambodia. During the course of my research, repeated indications towards the importance of victim-perpetrator reconciliation were brought up by Kdei Karuna staff members. Also consistent in the field research was the indication of marked differences between the youth and the older generations in terms of how they understand Khmer Buddhism, how definitions of reconciliation are understood, and what strategies and goals should be developed for the sustainable healing of the

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<sup>302</sup> Robbins (2013).

nation. Of further interest is the demarcation of the reconciliation efforts within the country and the capacity for reconciliation and healing to occur in the diaspora.

For some of those working within the reparations project of TPO, reconciliation must include reconnecting the victims to the perpetrators by supporting forgiveness so as to allow the communities that have the groups living side-by-side to achieve social harmony. One aspect that came through in the interviews was that of the desire for the confession from perpetrators as having some power within the healing journey of the nature. A psychologist in the TPO focus group suggested that there is a need for facilitators to work with perpetrators<sup>303</sup> in order to “guide them, or help them to accept their reality, what they have done. Yes, and we must help with a confession as much as possible.”<sup>304</sup> Many different participants from Kdei Karuna have suggested that former Khmer Rouge cadres have often witnessed or noticed the work they are doing in communities but not actively participated in it.

KdK staff members recounted that after the organization has spent a long stretch of time in a given village – sometimes 2-3 years – former Khmer Rouge cadres have begun to join in the programming, come to community events, or attend the public rituals. However, the very existence of the ECCC has ignited fear in former KR cadres; there is a perceived risk of getting arrested and standing trial. This perception is partially related to misinformation about how perpetrators are defined by the ECCC<sup>305</sup>, but also links to the culture of fear and suspicion that is part of the Cambodian subjectivity in the post-conflict context.<sup>306</sup> “They are afraid that they'd be sent to jail, or that they would have to go to court and speak about what others did.”<sup>307</sup> With KdK, former Khmer Rouge cadres who know that the organization is linked to ECCC may assume that KdK staff have come to the village to get information for further prosecutions. While KdK and ECCC are linked, and are both part of the nation-wide reparations project, further work

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<sup>303</sup> There is another project that is operating out of TPO that is focused on the perpetrators, but that is outside of the scope of this thesis, which is focused on the reparations projects.

<sup>304</sup> TPO Focus Group Interview.

<sup>305</sup> Perpetrators are defined as senior officials and decision-makers; many former Khmer Rouge soldiers worry that a soldier status or member of the Khmer Rouge army would be considered a ‘perpetrator’ by the ECCC.

<sup>306</sup> Interestingly, following the fall of the Khmer Rouge, there were reports of several former Khmer Rouge cadres returning to their home communities and being killed in revenge by victims and families of those who were killed. This led to significant exodus of Khmer Rouge cadres from the country, and others who relocated to a different home community and took on the identity of a victim. Many who defected from the Khmer Rouge at the end never revealed that they had been cadres, and so many of those identities are lost.

<sup>307</sup> KdK Focus Group 02.

is necessary for reconciliation – including directly engagement with former Khmer Rouge cadres. That work is limited by the relationship between Kdei Karuna and the ECCC.

The relationship development between the victims and perpetrators in the context of the reparations project includes elements of performance. One staff member suggested that “in the reparation project, we work directly with the victim, but what we publish will be known by the perpetrator side.”<sup>308</sup> The role of the perpetrator in this particular approach to reconciliation is to consume the materials that have been produced by the performance of trauma and ritual that the victims undertake throughout their participation in this project.

Generational differences should also be considered when attempting to construct a whole picture of the role of participatory religiosity in Cambodian reconciliation. Staff at KdK suggested that rigidity of Khmer Buddhist ritual and pagoda attendance is inaccessible and time consuming to the younger generation, but is something that Khmer Buddhists tend to move towards later in life when the immediate responsibilities of earning income, having a family, etc, are not pressing: “when people are young they start thinking about what is their needs, like current needs, because they still have a kind of, I mean like a lot of needs that they see in their surroundings, surrounding them.”<sup>309</sup>

Further, young people are not appearing to access Buddhist routes to healing in the same way that the older generation have clung to. There is a gap in understanding between generations; not just in understanding history, but also in understanding one another. This is apparent in some of the efforts towards generational reconciliation that have been made through some organizations that were participating in the stakeholder meetings, but with whom this project did not participate directly. Some organizations, for example Youth for Peace, have been attempting to connect Civil Parties to younger generations through ritual processes like cleansing ceremonies that would bring youth together to cleanse or bathe Khmer Rouge victims with *sil-*infused waters.

Similarly, organizations that work outside of the rubric of the ECCC<sup>310</sup> have indicated that there are several generational differences in the goals and priorities of nongovernmental work and the role of Khmer Buddhism in social justice. While those involved in the

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<sup>308</sup> TPO Focus Group Interview.

<sup>309</sup> KdK Director Interview

<sup>310</sup> Buddhism for Development (BFD) and Buddhism for Social Development Action (BSDA), both of which are outside of the scope of this thesis.



reconciliation and reparations piece of the ECCC aim to repair rifts of the past, other organizations are more forward-looking, working alongside younger generations to develop a new morality that is rooted in Buddhism principles and ontologies.<sup>311</sup>

Further analysis could be made into these generational differences, as they relate to the forward-looking versus backward-looking approaches to social development, healing, and civil society work in Cambodia. These generational differences could contribute to the perpetuated liminality of Cambodia and the slowed process of reconciliation: there is discrepancy between what the youth and what the older generations believe is needed for the nation to reach an outcome phase.

An final interesting discovery that is outside of the scope of this thesis but is worth further research is that of the diaspora community of Cambodians. A barrier to recovery for Cambodian refugee communities and other Cambodians who are living in the diaspora has been named by psychiatric and sociological researchers<sup>312</sup>, particularly as they have experienced refugee trauma of relocation on top of the trauma of experiencing the KR. Further, the inability of the refugee communities to disconnect the trauma of the KR from the country itself is related to their having not returned, and having not been able to see the re-establishment – or the process of re-establishment – of the nation. In the refugees' minds, Cambodia is still Democratic Kampuchea, and the Khmer Rouge are still infiltrating the memory – individual as well as collective – of what Cambodia is, and what it is like, for re-located persons.

## **5.7 Concluding Observations**

The intent of this project has been to explore the role of Khmer Buddhist participatory religiosity in reconciliation programmes linked to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Cambodia. To strive towards the closing of the social drama in the context of Cambodia, the divergences between various understandings and definitions of what reconciliation means for Cambodia must be rectified. The existence of competing ontologies and subjectivities have resulted in a continued state of liminality for the nation and her people.

In the context of post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, reconciliation efforts must be undertaken with clear and consistent adherence to community consultation, amplification of stakeholder

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<sup>311</sup> Edwards (2008).

<sup>312</sup> Hinton et al (2009) and McLellan (1999 & 2009).

voices, and incorporation of best practices that emerge from consultation processes. It follows that there is a need for participatory religiosity in these projects, and that stakeholders and victims alike have identified a need to prioritize the spiritual dimensions to post-conflict healing in the work of the ECCC's VSS component. Reparations projects must be transformative in that they should reach beyond the immediacy of short-term impact to strive for institutional and systematic structures that are cooperative and collaborative. This would increase sustainability and contribute to the capacity to address broader social justice issues in the country.

The work of the two organizations in this case study represent the conception of dichotomous needs for community healing and reconciliation: that of the individual, and that of the collective. Both organizations are tied to the international community through the ECCC. TPO has incorporated direct leadership *from* the international community through program design, development and management that is largely influenced by Western ontologies of psychiatric medicine, operating under the assumption that trauma is a universal experience that transcends cultural differences.<sup>313</sup> International involvement in KdK's programming is limited to funding and a single staff member who acts in an advisory capacity. This gives space for KdK to undertake program design and development more autonomously, assessing the needs of the communities that it serves, and developing localized programming that responds to those needs through a framework that centres Cambodian ontologies and subjectivities. TPO is beholden to the development of a programming structure that was created outside of Cambodia and then adapted to fit the local context, and utilizes the Khmer Buddhist ritual of *bangskol* as a means to bring cultural competency to the work that it undertakes.

Each organization has undertaken, as part of the ECCC's Civil Parties reparations work, projects that are directly supportive of those who have applied and been accepted as part of the Civil Parties in the Khmer Rouge tribunal. While each organization works directly with Cambodian victims of the Khmer Rouge regime and employs staff made up of primarily Cambodian people, they are working within the directive of the formalized processes of reconciliation that have been outlined by the Khmer Rouge Tribunal with guidance, funding, and program development largely contributive of an internationalized framework of reconciliation.

TPO serves individuals only; further to the limited impact of TPO, it serves *Civil Parties only*. That is to say that unless a Cambodian was registered as a Civil Party, they would not be

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<sup>313</sup> Robbins (2013): pp. 453.

able to access the programming offered by TPO. This creates a fundamental barrier to service provision that intrinsically limits those served to a particular definition of what a victim is, as defined by the ECCC. There is a tendency for TPO to lean towards consistent naming of the ECCC and its success and importance, as evidenced in the testimonial therapy template,<sup>314</sup> and the erasure of the Vietnamese occupation period from the framework through which trauma has been identified as having occurred. It is unclear from the research here whether the evasion of the Vietnamese occupation period in the trauma testimonies of Khmer Rouge victims is linked to the international involvement or to the influence of the Cambodian government in the ECCC's work, but this question should be considered and explored more thoroughly.

The use of *bangksol* offers a religious and cultural legitimacy to the testimonial therapy delivered to the Khmer Buddhist victims who participated in the sessions where I conducted research. That is to say that by adapting an exogenously developed treatment model to a Khmer Buddhist context, TPO has seemingly bound together a meaningful religious ritual and a standardized treatment program that is rooted in Western ontology surrounding trauma and psychiatric medicine. The keyword here is *delivered*: TPO *delivers programming to victims*. It is developed by the organization whom then removes participants from their home spaces to bring them to an urban centre where they undergo a short-term treatment program designed for one-time delivery. As such, the contribution to long-term healing and meaningful reconciliation for Cambodia as a country is somewhat limited in that the program itself is not actively participatory – rather it is passively received – and is focused on individual healing rather than collective.

Kdei Karuna engages in a community development approach to developing and delivering programming that aims at sustainability and long-term local healing. The organization initiates their programs by choosing locations that are deeply affected by the violence and trauma; they identify *spaces* within which a significant amount of spiritual suffering has occurred, and utilize a phenomenological approach that wholly incorporates Cambodian subjectivities surrounding their own trauma, and the ongoing suffering. The subjective experiences of Khmer Buddhists in Cambodia are such that the trauma that they are experiencing is a direct result of violent deaths that occurred in close proximity to the victims, and the continued unrest of those who died during the Khmer Rouge regime. The demand from the communities that I accessed during my research

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<sup>314</sup> See section 3.3: the testimonials follow a precise format that include a thanks and dedication component that mentions the importance of the ECCC.

were often religious in nature: building a *stupa* to house the bones of those deceased and carrying out *bangskol* rituals as a community to offer healing and *bon* to their deceased loved ones.

Participants in the Justice and History Outreach project have a significant amount of agency in the quest for reconciliation. There are community consultations and local leadership involved in each step of the process of establishing local programming. Those involved are then trained to continue the healing journey, and trained on how to train others to carry on in that work. There is not an expectation that a given community will be fully healed from the traumas of the past once KdK exits the region, but rather the role of KdK is to provide the community with the tools necessary to build sustainable healing, and to offer guidance and framework development that would allow the community to undertake the task of holding other *bangskol* ceremonies in the future.<sup>315</sup>

The *bangskol* itself is focused on community healing and engages the entirety of the community. There are no limitations to participation; that is, it is not restricted to verified or accepted Civil Parties. The reach of this ceremony is much more lengthy, participants feel ownership over the ceremony because it is in their own communities, and the monks and religious specialists that carry out the *bangskol* itself are local or locally chosen. The planning, fundraising, education, advertisement, and execution of these *bangskol* ceremonies through the facilitation of Kdei Karuna incorporate varying members of the local community within which they are being held. As such, the agency of this process is such that Kdei Karuna has successfully implemented a programme that engages participatory religiosity in its delivery, and has shifted towards a model of ongoing and long-term healing that provides communities with a sustainable framework for moving towards reconciliation.

Ritual, as a “social phenomenon”<sup>316</sup> greatly impacts the functioning of a social group. Religion, in the case of Cambodia, is a social rather than psychological phenomenon. During the Khmer Rouge Era, the context of extreme violence on the level of risk associated with performing or publicly participating in religious adherence was such that Khmer Buddhism was contained within the psychological framework of individual experience: prayers were internal and recitations done in private. While religion has psychological impacts, participatory religiosity has the social function of cohesion, collaboration, and trust. It functions in a way that secures

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<sup>315</sup> While in the community, KdK facilitates fundraising planning, event planning, and logistics coordination for the *bangskol*, all the while mentoring leadership to take on this work without the support or assistance of KdK staff.

<sup>316</sup> Bell (1997): pp. 23.

group unity,<sup>317</sup> and has a transformative quality of *creating* stability for both the individual as well as the group. It follows that religion as practiced within the Western ontological framework that TPO perpetuates is a valuable and transformative contribution to therapeutic models that are hyper-focused on individual treatment, medicalizing the issue of trauma in an attempt to contain and remedy it. KdK circumvents that aspect to focus on the social functioning of participatory religiosity as an inherently cohesion-building mechanism that creates community and contributes to forming of social bonds, demonstrating shared values within a community, resolving conflicts and transforming community life.

In order for sustainable reconciliation to occur, there is a need for local direction in the work of NGOs focused on reconciliation in post-conflict societies. Without active collaborative consultation with local communities to undertake a long-term process of identifying needs, identifying leaders, delivering training, and building capacity, the project cannot be considered to be utilizing participatory religiosity in the work that it is doing. While TPO has proven successful at delivering short-term, single-use trauma treatment programmes, the use of *bangskol* loses some of its authenticity through the inclusion of international audiences and the overarching management by international actors. The use of *bangskol* is derived from the organization itself and is more performative than participatory. Kdei Karuna has created a sustainable program development model that incorporates *bangskol* at the request of the community, after significant consultation efforts have been made. That the *bangskol* ceremony came out of consultations is indicative of the saturation of a desire to undertake a quest for participatory religiosity from Khmer Buddhists in Cambodia who seek healing and reconciliation for the atrocities of the nation's past.

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<sup>317</sup> *ibid*: pp. 27.

## Appendix A: Photographs from the field



*Image I: Choung Ek Genocidal Center and Memorial, Phnom Penh*



*Image II: TPO testimonial therapy victims gather facing the Choung Ek Memorial, Phnom Penh*





*Image III: Inside Sala Chann Pagoda, TPO Testimonial Therapy*



*Image IV: Local facilitators light incense at the stupa built in Prey Veng for KdK's JHO project*



*Image V: Youth preparing the site for the bangskol ceremony in Prey Veng, (KDK JHO)*



*Image VI: Local achars gather in the bangskol ceremonial tent, preparing to greet attendees as they arrive for the ceremony, (KdK JHO)*



# Appendix B: Interview Questions

## **KDK.01: Interview with KdK Staff Member**

1. What is your role with KdK?
2. How long have you worked at KdK, and in what is your role?
3. Can you explain the stupa building projects with JHO? Why were you building stupas?
4. What is the relationship between this project and the ECCC?
5. What other organizations do you work with? Why? What do they do?
6. Are most of the people you serve Buddhist?
7. You've talked about putting bones in the stupas; where are the bones from and why are they put in the stupas?
8. Do you know who the bones belong to? What happens to people whose bodies are not recovered; is there something else than bones to be put in the stupa?
9. What is the ceremony that you do with JHO?
10. Where do the monks come from? What do they do in the ceremony?
11. Why do you use Buddhism and Buddhist ceremony in this project?
12. KDK.02: Kdei Karuna Focus Group 01
13. Can you each explain your role at KdK?
14. What is the goal and purpose of JHO?
15. How many communities are you working in right now?
16. Are most of the villages Buddhist?
17. How do you choose local facilitators?
18. Tell me about why you build stupas in the communities.
19. Tell me about why you use Buddhism for the project.
20. What sort of ceremonies do you do with JHO? How do you decide to do those?
21. Can you explain the Bangskol that was done at Prey Veng?
22. Do you use monks as facilitators? What do monks do with your project?
23. How do people respond to you being in the community?
24. How do people respond to talking about the past and about the Khmer Rouge?
25. Who is participating? Are there different types of people that want to participate?

## **KDK.03: Kdei Karuna Focus Group 02 (Follow-up)**

1. We talked about former Khmer Rouge yesterday; what is their participation in JHO?
2. How do you know who is former KR and who is not in the community?
3. You talked a lot about people being afraid and that is why former Khmer Rouge don't participate. Do you mean the KR are afraid? Or victims? What are they afraid of, in your opinion?
4. What are some strategies for building trust that you use in the community? How do you get people to talk to you and to participate?
5. Can you explain the victim-perpetrator dialogue project?
6. Tell me about the young people that participate in JHO.
7. What is the relationship between the youth and the older people in JHO?
8. Can you explain to me why Buddhism comes up so much in all of the projects that you are doing?
9. Do you do bangskol for the former KR? Or just victims? Have you come across family members of former Khmer Rouge who died that are participating in JHO?

10. Are there other projects or organizations that use bangskol?
11. Are there other religious ceremonies being used?
12. What are the spirits that are coming for bangskol? Where are they coming from?
13. How do the spirits become contacted? How do they know there is a ceremony?
14. What other spirits are there? In Prey Veng you were talking about witches. What is the magic you were talking about there?
15. When we were in Prey Veng, there was a big tree near the stupa. Can you tell me about that?
16. Do you think that reconciliation is working?

**KDK.04: Director - in Prey Veng during site visit**

1. What is significant about this place? Why are we here? Why is the stupa here?
2. What is the significance of the markings and fabrics on the tree near the stupa?
3. There were lots of talking about neak ta today near the stupa. What are they, where do they live?
4. What other spirits are here, and do they have anything to do with JHO?
5. Who performs ceremonies, if not the monks that will come for the bangskol? Who is doing the neak ta ceremonies here?
6. Are there people in the community that communicate with the spirits?
7. Do people in the community tell you about the spirits and how they affect them?
8. How many people died in this killing field?
9. What happened to the bodies?
10. Do the people in the community have any relationship to the people that died here?

**KDK.05: Director - in Phnom Penh after site visit**

1. How do you choose what communities to go to for JHO?
2. What do you do when you get to the community?
3. How do you get local facilitators?
4. When you are speaking to the participants before the project starts, does Buddhism come up a lot?
5. Walk me through the setting up of a program in JHO.
6. What is the purpose of the ceremonies you're using?
7. I talked to a lot of people that said that during the Khmer Rouge people would pray just in their minds, so it never really went away. Do you think Buddhism is back in Cambodia the same as before? Has it changed? How? Why are things different, if they are?
8. We talked about traditional healers in Prey Veng; do you ever work with Kru Khmer?
9. What are the spirits you were talking about? How do they fit in to the JHO project?
10. When JHO goes into a village with a specific belief or with specific haunted places, do you incorporate that into the program design? How?
11. What are the younger people doing at Prey Veng? What is their relationship with the older people?
12. Where does the connection with the school/students happen? Where is education happening, and are the students aware of what JHO is and why you are doing reconciliation work? What do they think?
13. You talked about gangs; is violence and gangs a big problem? Does that come up when you are in the communities? Why is that? How do you respond?
14. What do you see as the relationship between Buddhism and violence in the communities?

15. What do you see as the relationship between Buddhism and politics?

**TPO 01: Psychiatrist Staff Member/**

1. Can you tell me about the background of narrative exposure / testimonial therapy?
2. How do you connect the clients to the monks? Is it always the same monks that do the ceremonies?
3. Can you explain the ceremony that is done by the monks?
4. Do you do this therapy with any other religious communities, other than Buddhism?
5. Buddhism was really destroyed during the Khmer Rouge; can you talk about how it's re-emerged and being used again by the people you work with? What kind of Buddhism are you working with?
6. How did you get connected to the reparations part of the ECCC?
7. There is a neak ta statue at the ECCC. Does TPO do anything with neak ta?
8. What do you think is the impact of combining the spiritual aspect of Buddhism with the internationally brought in concepts of therapy?
9. As a psychiatrist, how important do you think spirituality is in someone healing from this type of trauma?
10. Can you describe what is happening at the pagoda? At Choung Ek? What is the difference between those two ceremonies? Why do you do them both?
11. What is the role of the monks at each place?
12. What are the monks chanting during the bangskol? Do you know the source?
13. Can I talk to the monk from the ceremony?

**TPO 02: Monk who does bangskol**

1. How many bangskol have you done with TPO?
2. When people bring the offerings, what are they bringing? Why?
3. What is Pchum Ben and how is it different from what you do at bangskol?
4. What is the difference between the ceremony you do at Choung Ek and the one you do at the pagoda? What are the prayers you are doing?
5. What is sil? What does it mean to give sil? How do you do that?
6. When you are praying and chanting: is it the same for everyone? Do you do the same prayers at all of the bangskol ceremonies?
7. What prayers are you giving each person as they come up with their books? Is that always the same?
8. Do the prayers come from tradition or text? Or do you give personal blessings?
9. Can you explain all of the tools that you are using in the ceremony? For example, water and flowers. Are they special? Why are you using them?
10. Do you think that the bangskol you do here with TPO is the same as bangskol being done other places?
11. Is bangskol important? Why?
12. What would happen if people did not get a bangskol?
13. What are the ghosts that the bangskol are for?
14. When people died during the Khmer Rouge, what happened to them?

**TPO 03: Focus Group**

1. Can you introduce yourselves and say what your role at TPO is?
2. In your opinion, what does reconciliation mean for the people you work with?

3. How do you get people to a point where they are ready to heal?
4. Is the bangskol only done with victims? Or also with perpetrators?
5. Is the bangskol only part of the reparations project of TPO?
6. Can you explain the bangskol to me?
7. What if you don't know where a body is located?
8. Is bangskol the only ceremony that is for the dead like this? Are there others? Do you use them? Why/not?
9. What are the offerings that are brought to the ceremony? Where do they go after?
10. When the clients go to the bangskol, they all have their books; what is it that makes the books / stories work best?
11. Earlier, you said that you showed the suffering of the people to their ancestors for acceptance. Why do they need acceptance? Why would showing suffering give acceptance?
12. What is the connection between putting the story down and taking it to the monk? How does that help?
13. How long have you been doing bangskol with victims? Why did you choose bangskol? Are there other ceremonies you could choose? Why this one?
14. You are the reparations team, working with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal; how important has Buddhism been in the work that you are doing?

#### **MONK 01: Wat Ounalam**

1. What is a bangskol ceremony?
2. What offerings do people give? Does it matter what people bring? Are there lists of standard offerings?
3. Is it believed that the offering goes to the spirits? Where does the offering go? How does that work?
4. When you do ceremonies – what are you chanting? Is it always the same? How do you know or decide what chanting to use?
5. Are there other ceremonies for the dead besides bangskol? What are they?
6. How long does a bangskol take?
7. Are bangskol very common?
8. Who is bangskol for? Who are the people getting the offerings?
9. Where do the spirits of the dead end up after they die?
10. Do you know about dhutanga? What is that? Do people still do that?
11. When you do the bangskol, are the spirits present? Or are they somewhere else? Do you call them? How? How do they 'hear' you?
12. How many monks does it take to do a bangskol?
13. What is the meaning of the chanting? Why are those chants happening? What language is used?
14. Do you think bangskol is important? Why/not?
15. Do you think there are ghosts here? Because of the KR? Or were there always lots of ghosts here?
16. Do the ceremonies being done make the ghosts go away?
17. Are there different kinds of ghosts? Or just one kind? Can you explain them?
18. What happens when spirits are around, like haunting. How can you make those go away?

#### **MONK 02: Wat Lanka**

1. Can you tell me what a bangskol is?
2. Can you tell me about Cambodian Buddhism – how is it unique?
3. What are neak ta?
4. Can you explain to me what happens to the people who died in the Khmer Rouge whose bodies did not get found?
5. Do you ever get people asking “why did the Khmer Rouge happen”? What do you say?
6. During the Khmer Rouge, there was no Buddhims allowed. How do you think Buddhism started to become used again after the Khmer Rouge was over?
7. Now to think about all the people that are suffering from having experienced things in the Khmer Rouge – how does Buddhism help with that?
8. Can you explain to me the process after somebody dies? What’s the traditional way to deal with the dead?
9. What about the bones that are on display in the different memorials? What do you think about that?
10. I went to the Khmer Rouge tribunal and there were many monks seated in the front. What is the relationship between the monks and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal?
11. Do you think that Buddhism has been included in the ECCC enough?
12. What does justice mean in Buddhism?
13. If people come to you with problems because of the Khmer Rouge Era, what do you tell them?

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