

Of Laughter and Remembering:
Violence, Displacement and the Trials of 'Moving On' for
Vancouver's Cambodians

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of the Arts (Anthropology) at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

30 August 2006

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395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
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Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-20707-9

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-20707-9

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ABSTRACT

Of Laughter and Remembering: Violence, Displacement and the Trials of 'Moving On' for Vancouver's Cambodians

Catrina A. McKinlay

How do people 'move on' after experiencing extreme political violence, such as genocide? Discourses in the fields surrounding conflict and refugee studies often exclude the voices of those most affected by violence, while media imagery tends to portray them as powerless 'victims.' This amounts to the silencing of both witnesses to violence and refugees. With the large number of tragedies and atrocities continuing worldwide, a better understanding of how people experience violence and what can be done to assist them is an important and relevant question.

In this thesis, I have talked to a group of Cambodians now living in Vancouver, British Columbia, to try to understand what tactics and strategies they have used in order to 'move on', if they have been able to at all. Since the Cambodian genocide 'officially' ended in January, 1979, these voices offer insight into the lives of people who have experienced genocide and displacement decades ago, and have achieved social and economic success in Canada. The actions, responses and contradictions that arose provide an opportunity to view the perspective of these Cambodians as it pertains to their experiences of genocide almost twenty-five years after the event. They reveal a diverse cross-section of thoughts and opinions of life after violence, the proposed Khmer Rouge tribunal and the possibility of 'justice'. While their stories make a case for the ongoing and long-term affects of violence told through lived experience, they provide a critical view into the ways in which people seek to understand and re-build order in their lives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend deep gratitude to the Cambodians who helped me with this project. The courage, openness and strength of all the people I met, especially the efforts of the community workers, touched me more than I can express. The power and poignancy that was revealed within their story-telling abilities is greatly admired and appreciated.

I would also like to thank Youk Chhang for his passion for his work and his networking abilities which provided me with my first contacts for this project. I would also like to thank Youk and the staff of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia for the work they do, which was not only admired and respected by the people I met in the field, but has also contributed to the ability of many of the people I met in their struggles to 'move on'.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee, who all contributed to the writing of this thesis in important ways. I would like to thank Prof. Vered Amit, for her supportive and unflappable demeanour through panicked phone calls, dramatic e-mails, creative conclusions and relentless procrastination. Had she not put her foot down, I would still be writing this thesis. I would like to thank Prof. Sima Aprahamian for her interest in my topic, her attention to detail, and her amazing wealth of relevant sources. Prof. Katja Neves-Graca had a contagious enthusiasm for my topic from the very beginning, and was at times able to re-inflate my own interest with just a few words. I would also like to thank Prof. Homa Hoodar for her support, and Prof. Frank Chalk, who has demonstrated that interest in this topic is worthwhile, and that these 'small actions' can be important. Not least, I'd also like to thank Jody Stavely, for keeping it all together.

This would not have been the same thesis if it hadn't been for the now-defunct 'Secret Society', as well as my thesis-cheerleaders who provided countless distractions that kept this thesis from becoming too overwhelming, for keeping my phone permanently ringing (and my answering machine full, ahem...) and for tolerating my penchant for internet quizzes.

Finally I would like to thank my father for keeping my mailbox busy with newspaper articles about anything-at-all related to Cambodia- usually with a twenty-dollar bill tucked inside. Thanks, dad.

~OF LAUGHTER AND REMEMBERING~
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

“Will the twenty-first century augur more horror and suffering than the last? While no one can answer that, even a casual survey of last century’s atrocities suggests that we must continue to ponder such an ominous future” (Suarez-Orozco and Robben, 2000, preface).

The woman in front of me will not look at me. Her hands are splayed out flat and press down against the table separating us, as though she can keep the pain that accompanies her words from rising up against her. Her eyes are fixed without seeing, and bore through her hands to bear witness to something that I can't begin to understand. The curve of her spine is rigid and tight, and her ribcage moves awkwardly as she takes deep, reverberating breaths that do not seem to get the air down into her lungs. I sit numb in my chair, staring at strands of hair that fall from the top of her head down over her face. My shoulders rise protectively around my neck, my left arm crossed over my body and held with my right. As I continue staring at the hair concealing her face, I can feel the chair pressing up against me as I shrink down into it. When I had embarked on this project, to understand how Cambodians have moved on with their day-to-day lives in Canada after surviving violence and genocide in the 1970s, I had envisioned a scene something like this. What I hadn't been able to imagine was that it would *feel* so intense, especially when the violence was now so distant- both in time and space. The emotion betrayed by each tremble in the woman's breath, the pain exposed by her body as she prepared herself to talk to me about her life, made the room thick with raw tension and unresolved sadness.

If asked to picture war or political violence, most people could draw up an image of some kind. For many, like me, their recollections would be limited to accounts they have read or viewed through the television screen on the nightly media; always tempered

through others' reports. This is not a unique experience; viewing actual war and violence as news/entertainment has been a part of western lifestyles since the Vietnam War was televised. In her book of essays discussing modern life, Susan Sontag wrote:

"Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience... Wars are now also living room sights and sounds...to which the response is compassion, indignation, or titillation, or approval, as each misery heaves into view" (Sontag, 2003, pp. 18).

Arthur Kleinman has called the transformation of actual experiences of suffering into media fodder, a "dismay of images", even when it's used for mobilizing causes or awareness (Kleinman, 2000, pp. 232). It creates an inauthentic experience in which the viewer engages in scenes of extreme violence and/or suffering and yet "we are outside the field of responsibility, we need feel nothing, risk nothing, lose nothing" (Kleinman, 2000, pp. 232). The concepts and issues that surround, create and perpetuate violence are reduced to an isolated image that cuts out any context. In the end, viewers may connect different events and distant places, drawing them together through analogy, effectively ignoring the uniqueness of place, history, or the lives of the people involved (Kleinman, and Kleinman, 1996; Kleinman, 2000).

But as each misery, as Sontag puts it, "heaves into view", it just as quickly heaves out of view, and, often, out of mind. What happens to the *people* once the 'story' is not 'news' anymore? What do they do next? Where do they go? How do they feel about it? And the question I find the most difficult, how is it possible for them to do anything at all? After seeing your loved ones, not just die- but be killed, after losing your home, belongings and even your way of life, how do you pick up with your life again? How do you move on?

While I stare at the woman as she prepares herself to speak, I have to remind myself what I am doing here and why, because the pain that my questions- even before I have asked them- bring to this woman seem too big a price for anyone to pay. Guilt rises in my

stomach and I feel the shame of hurting someone without meaning to. The purpose of this project I have embarked on suddenly seems small, and I feel anger towards myself for what now seems like the selfishness of this endeavour. It is with some effort that I remember that I haven't caused this pain. The roots of the emotion and grief displayed in front of me go back decades. What's more, the woman's decision about speaking out- and about me- had been measured, weighed and considered for months before she finally agreed to it. These circumstances then, highlight another question- why does she go through this at all?

Before this moment, scenes of people who had experienced loss through war and violence could be brought readily to my mind; news reports, books and articles I had seen and read filled me with knowledge, yet I suddenly realised that I remained lacking in any true understanding. The mood and feeling that filled the room at the start of that interview was evoked by the emotion of experience, and is not depicted through nightly reports or is necessarily taken into account by those who make policy decisions.

While the images of those most affected by violence are often shown in the mainstream media, their voices are rarely heard. Lisa Malkki has argued that the universalizing of 'the refugee' is common not only in images, but in text, wording and content (Malkki, 1997). There is a generalized assumption that the refugee is nothing but the barest humanity, and that by crossing an international boundary they in essence leave their identity behind them, rooted in the place where they once lived. A refugee is imagined as being "a powerless being with no consciousness of history, traditions, culture, or nationality" (Malkki, 1995, pp. 11).

Privileging the voice of first-hand experience over the 'rational' voice of officials and experts is not a usual occurrence, nor is it considered a prudent alternative to the sterile

euphemisms favored by bureaucrats. While experts in the field of violence, policy makers, human rights workers, researchers, development agents and government officials work in capacities that have direct impact on these people, and yet they may have little, if any, dialogue with each other or with those directly affected by violence themselves (Long, 1993; Sanford, 2003). E. Valentine Daniel has demonstrated how the end of the Second World War created a new discourse surrounding refugees, including an entire class of specialists and experts on 'the refugee' (Daniel, 2002). This discourse has become no longer explicitly political, but increasingly racialized and ethnicized (Daniel, 2002, pp. 271). The discourse surrounding refugees is so pervasive that what often gets represented in the media are confirmations of those assumptions that are already expected (Daniel, 2002). "What is counted as 'true' and 'just' and 'deserving' is shaped by discourse", and upon closer examination of local event, both "local and global prejudices can be revealed" (Daniel, 2002, pp. 280). Since the prejudices and assumptions embedded in refugee discourse become normalized, western aid workers or social scientists, even those with the best of intentions may not fully grasp that "the person seeking asylum is first and foremost a human being", the consequences of which are to "reinforce and reproduce the very prejudices that sustain them" (Daniel, 2002, pp. 280).

While this discourse reduces refugees to silent victims, the impact of war is reduced to the most obvious physical effects. While war is most often measured by body counts or casualties, the ongoing and long-term effects violence can have on individuals and groups is just as tragic (Long, 1993; Sanford, 2003). Sanford posits, "when dealing with an event such as a massacre, how do you define 'victim'?" She explains that following a violent event, survivor testimony can reveal that threats and disappearances occur before and after the violent incident. "These provide a lens to community understanding of the massacre

as part of a continuum of violence, rather than a discrete incident” (Sanford, 2003, pp. 63).

These effects may be more difficult to ascertain, but their repercussions are profound. In the introduction of their anthology examining cross-cultural effects of violence, Suarez-

Orozco and Robben attest that:

“We can always do a body count, discern patterns in the amputation of limbs, or explore a torturer’s agenda by the marks he leaves on his victims body. On the other hand, the workings of psychic and symbolic violence are often more elusive but may be equally devastating in the long run” (Suarez-Orozco, M. and Robben, A., 2000, pp. 5).

The work of violence manifests in complicated and intricate ways, which overlap and intertwine “psychic, social, political, economic and cultural dimensions” (Suarez-Orozco, M. and Robben, A., 2000, pp. 1). It targets the body and mind of the person, the social order and cultural practices of groups, and even the formation of these groups, as well as the way people are able to relate to each other within them. In short, it devastates the very way that people are able to be, or exist, in the world (Suarez-Orozco, M. and Robben, A., 2000).

For those who have been affected by violence, many choose to flee their country and find refuge elsewhere. Escape may remove refugees from immediate physical harm or death, but it presents new challenges because of their displacement, their loss of power, and the structural inequality they face in their new ‘home’. What are the consequences of war and violence once they are settled in a new country; a safe sanctuary? How does the legacy of violence affect people in the long term, even after they have ‘integrated’ as citizens of a new country?

Locating Genocide

Political violence can be loosely defined as a series of overlapping events that can include war, genocide, terrorism, ethnic conflict, torture, and oppression (Hinton, 2002).

Genocide, more specifically, can be set apart from these other forms of political violence because it targets a group *within* the nation. It is a sustained and purposeful attempt by a dominant group to rid itself of a particular section of society. The targeted group comes to be seen as a potential threat to the purity and cohesion of the state, not as people whose lives are built with dreams and aspirations. It is this targeting of groups, or the intent to destroy a certain group within a society, when combined with action that separates genocide from other forms of political violence¹. Genocide does not only include the killing of members of a targeted group, but can also include the injuring, torturing, raping, or mutilating of people, as well as deliberately withholding resources needed for survival, preventing births through forced abortion or sterilization, or the forced removal of children².

The term genocide was first coined by a Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin, who combined the Greek word *genos* (race, tribe) with the Latin root *cide* (killing of) (Hinton, 2002). He petitioned to have genocide recognized as a crime, and in 1946 the UN passed a preliminary resolution (96-I), stating that genocide occurs “when racial, religious, political, and other groups have been destroyed entirely or in part” (Hinton, 2002). Many countries had vested interests in seeing that the ‘political or other groups’ segment of the definition be discarded, and in 1948 they succeeded in having it dropped from the UN’s official definition. The full definition now reads:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (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;*

¹ <http://www.preventgenocide.org/genocide/officialtext.htm>

² <http://www.preventgenocide.org/genocide/officialtext.htm>

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
-Article II, 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention

This definition has been widely contested for many varied reasons, among them its exclusion of political groups, and its tendency to be applied to unrelated situations, such as China's one-child policy being labelled genocidal (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990; Jonassohn and Björnson, 1998). From an anthropological perspective, this definition of genocide is problematic since the restrictive phrasing of the UN's definition negates the countless ways that social groupings are constructed cross-culturally and through time (Hinton, 2002). Alexander Laban Hinton demonstrates this point using an example faced by officials at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). When the ICTR held trials for the crime of genocide before an international court, they had extreme difficulties in pressing the charge because of the way the definitions were drawn up. The definition of 'genocide' was limited to "stable, permanent groups, whose membership is determined by birth", and they did not clearly define in detail what constituted a "national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (Hinton, 2002, pp. 5). As a result, the fluidity between who was labelled Tutsi, Hutu or Twa did not fall easily or consistently into any of these categories (Hinton, 2002).

While race, religion and politics are preferred features in current political and human rights discourse, these are not the only categories by which difference can be constructed. Other categories may include, "clan, lineage, class, tribe, caste; and categories based on sexual orientation, mental or physical disabilities, urban or rural origin, or economic and political groupings" (Hinton, 2002, pp. 4). The ICTR eventually extended the definition to include any "stable and permanent group, whose membership is determined largely by birth" to the existing categories, providing a temporary solution, at least for the trials for Rwanda (Hinton, 2002, pp. 5). This demonstrates that even categories that may be assumed to be static and unchanging are socially constructed and may be altered over time

and place. If the fluidity of social boundaries and categories were taken into account, violence and atrocities that are defined as genocide would need to be based on more precise criteria that is culturally relevant to the group and society in question.

Furthermore, the UN definition is thought to be too limited because most of the groups who have been targeted for genocide in the twentieth century, such as Bangladesh, Burundi or East Timor, are not included since they are more readily identified as social, political, or economic groups (Jonassohn and Björnson, 1998). The intent to target a group for elimination is the most important factor in identifying what is and what is not genocide. This is even more problematic when considering the UN's definition of a refugee is "[a]ny person who owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality (D'Souza and Crisp, in Jonassohn and Björnson, 1998, pp. 9). The contradiction and friction that arises between these two definitions creates a paradox in which the people seeking refuge from genocide are recognised as refugees, while those unable or unwilling to flee the same genocide not recognised as being its victims (Jonassohn and Björnson, 1998).

This lapse has motivated scholars in genocide studies to adopt a more comprehensive definition that can take into account the social constructs and fluidity of group boundaries across contexts (Hinton, 2002). Others use a more pointed definition, in which genocide is "...a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator" (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, pp. 23) or a "sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the

surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim” (Fein, 1990, pp. 24). These definitions have been criticized for various reasons, but especially because the social categories are believed to be too malleable. However Hinton argues,

“...this argument could be refuted in its own terms, it is often extremely difficult to stop having a disability or being an untouchable. It is easier to convert to another religion. Even categories of race, ethnicity and nationality are historically constructed groupings with shifting edges and fuzzy boundaries” (Hinton, 2002, pp. 4).

While allowing for the changing nature of boundaries and definitions, these alternate definitions emphasize that the principle criterion that distinguishes genocide as a conceptual category is the intent to eliminate a group in society that is constructed as different (Hinton, 2002; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990; Jonassohn and Björnson, 1998). This intent, when the targeting of violence is sufficient enough to threaten the group’s survival and when the opposing groups are not equal in strength or power, can better denote the criteria that connotes genocide (Jonassohn and Björnson, 1998).

This highlights how difference is constructed locally, and on many different features. Though patterns and similarities can be compared and contrasted in the study of violence and genocide, each still needs to be considered in its own localized context and interpretation. Certain categories have been manufactured and understood in western discourse to be static and unchanging, such as race or ethnicity; however a closer analysis, such as the case with the ICTR, can show that this is not always the case. Group boundaries can shift and discriminate against other groups in any society, and when this targeting is combined with other pre-existing conditions, such as “socio-economic upheaval, polarized social divisions, structural change and ideological manipulation” (Hinton, 2002, pp. 29), it becomes dangerous. Violence does not simply erupt into killing and disappearances, but is localized and starts long before physical violence and killing

begins. Changes in social, political and economic systems are combined with a violent ideology that has bearing on the frustrations and obstructions that are found in people's lives and addresses these in ways to which people can relate (Hinton, 1998). In Cambodia,

“Khmer Rouge ideology glorified violence against the enemy, promoted the persecution of new people and the continued waging of war on the local level, and invoked the doctrine of cutting oneself off from and daring to kill the enemy. Such ideology was salient because it drew upon existing cultural models” (Hinton, 1998, pp. 117).

This negates the image that violence, particularly in certain parts of the world, is tribal or inherent and it also underlines a responsibility to recognise structural inequality and take steps to alleviate suffering before actual violence takes place.

The violence that took place in Cambodia during the 1970's targeted a broad range of individuals and groups who represented former governments, class affiliations and/or organizational systems. The large fraction of the population killed has prompted others to attribute the term 'autogenocide' to illustrate the apparent self-destructiveness of the violence in which Cambodians targeted other Cambodians (Hinton, 1998; Chan, 2003; Shawcross, 2000, 2002). This shows why other definitions, such as the method of identification outlined by Chalk, Jonassohn and Björnson allows for the inclusion of those groups whose construction do not have any obvious differences from the perpetrator, such as the case in Cambodia (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990; Jonassohn and Björnson, 1998). However, given the range of people targeted for violence, there has been some debate over whether this actually fits under the UN's existing definition of genocide (Hinton, 1998). Arguments have been made that the wide range of crimes committed in Cambodia may be more readily defined as 'crimes against humanity' than 'genocide' (Jarvis, 2004). Ben Kiernan (1993, 1996) has argued against this, justifying the use of the term because of extensive violence perpetrated towards certain ethnic groups, such as the Muslim Chams

and ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai, and also towards Christian and Buddhist religious group (Kiernan, 1993; Hinton, 1998).

However, since the people whose thoughts and opinions comprise this thesis have no confusion as to whether or not the violence perpetrated against them should be labelled as 'genocide', and since my interest is based more on representation than on debating legal definitions, this is the term I will use to refer to the violence of DK. But regardless of the definition, just as the structures for violence are positioned long before they are manifested in physical violence, their effects reverberate long after the fact. In recognising the long-term impact of violence, its magnitude, complexity and resounding challenges can show that war and genocide has an ongoing influence on individuals, families, communities and refugees.

Purity and Trust

The globalized system of nation-states and its bounded constructions of difference create what Benedict Anderson coined the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991), in which people living within a state feel a connection or tie to one another, despite differences and distances between them (Anderson, 1991). This creates a tendency to identify a person or people with a physical place (Barth, 2000). Modern sovereign states are dependent on this concept, and "boundaries are assumed to separate what they distinguish" (Barth, 2000, pp. 27). Just as national boundaries mark one nation off from another, social boundaries come to represent one group as homogenous and 'pure' in contrast to another. To assume that concepts such as race or ethnicity are concrete and unchanging bring the notion of 'imagined communities' into play, since who can be targeted is set apart by a process of 'othering' in which the boundaries defining an

'imagined community' are remade, and redefine who is 'pure' enough to remain, and who is a pollutant and must be expelled (Hinton, 2002).

The growth of international refugees is based on this system of purity and exclusions (Barth, 2000). When a person or group of people are not or are no longer 'pure' enough to belong within the state and face increasing pressure and violence, they may chose to flee the nation. The crossing of borders may release them from immediate threat, but it also renders them 'stateless' and introduces other concerns. The definition of 'refugees' is based in opposition to the bounded and sovereign quality of the nation-state (Daniel, 2002). As 'state-less' refugees, they pollute the orderly system of nation-states and are believed to weaken national boundaries and pose a threat to national security (Malkki, 1995). Furthermore, they are seen as a problem, a hindrance for the legal system, for the nation and for the global system of nation states (Malkki, 1995).

The state creates notions of homogeneity and inclusiveness that produce essentialized categories of out-casts and exclusions: groups who may become marginalized or targeted. While it is the promise of the system of nation-states to represent and protect its citizenry, essentializing differences can justify a decision to remove or destroy a group that no longer belongs, resulting in the ultimate betrayal of person by the state. For the refugee, their predicament as recipients or even objects of violence, when ignored or perpetrated by the state, becomes what E. Valentine Daniel has called a "crisis of trust" (2002, pp. 279). In this analysis, a person is rendered a refugee by the loss and resulting inability to trust in the promise of the state to protect its populace. This produces a "violent disjunction between a person's familiar way of being in the world and a new reality ...[that] also forces the affected person to *see* his world differently" (Daniel, 2002, pp. 279). By this definition, it is through living without trust and in fear that one identifies

with *being* a refugee, even before the crossing of borders. If this meaning is given precedence, being a refugee is defined by trust rather than geography.

“In a profound sense then, one becomes a refugee even before fleeing the society in which one lives, and could continue to be a refugee even after one receives nominal asylum in a new place among new people” (Daniel, 2002, pp. 279).

A well-documented example of essentializing difference that resulted in such a profound betrayal of the person was in the early days of the Nazi party's power in Germany. In 1933, 80% of Jews living in Germany were German citizens, descendants of Jews who had settled there generations earlier. They actively participated in German life, considered themselves German, and remained loyal to Germany (Bauer, 1982). By 1941, Jews were obligated to wear a yellow star so that 'national comrades' could tell at a glance who was a Jew and who was a German. This visible symbol separated the Jews from the 'national community' (Burleigh and Wipperman, 1991). The exclusion of Jews who had identified themselves as German first and foremost from German citizenship meant they were forced by state authority to re-negotiate their identity, no longer as Germans, but as Jews. Refusal to do so meant certain death.

“As the Jews experienced disorientation and internal turmoil, there rose a real, tragic tension between genuine feelings of patriotism and loyalty to Germany and the need to evaluate realistically their position as aliens on their own land” (Bauer, 1982, pp. 119).

This betrayal of trust by the state to protect, accompanied by the violence that is unleashed by the ideological desire for purity creates an atmosphere of fear and terror that is omnipresent. The shroud of fear and uncertainty becomes a part of daily life for the people forced to live within it. Using Daniel's 'crisis of trust' as an instrument by which refugee-ness can be assessed, it can be argued that just as one can identify with being a refugee before the crossing of boundaries, one may continue to identify with the practice

of living with fear as a refugee after they have gained citizenship in a new country. The point here is not that people who have been displaced from their country of origin should continue to be labelled as 'refugees', but rather that the fear that becomes part of daily life for those who have been targets of violence continue to influence a person long before and long after the crossing of political boundaries changes their legal status. Therefore a closer examination of what it means to re-build one's life and daily routine after violence and displacement will have much overlap with refugee studies.

If refugee-ness is an issue of trust, and being targeted for genocide is an absolute betrayal of the person by the state, then 'moving on' after such violence will require a process of re-learning and re-gaining trust, not only at the level of the state institution, but in every relationship. The loss and continuing inability to trust in the relationships that makes life meaningful, or the ongoing belief that one may be 'impure' may keep one from feeling a true sense of belonging or 'rooted-ness'- either with other members of one's country of origin, or in the new country.

Violent Memories

The state's decision to employ violence is an assertion of power combined with a need to claim control (Schroder and Schmidt, 2001). State authorities use violence because its "staging power and legitimacy" brings faster and more absolute results than other methods of authoritarian rule (Schroder and Schmidt, 2001). The performative qualities of violence allow it to transform the social environment so quickly and powerfully that the intended message will resonate beyond the person or persons directly affected. To those who witness it, violence becomes a terrifying aspect of the everyday, even when people do not literally get hurt everyday (Schoder and Schmidt, 2001). Contradictions between the doctrine of the state to protect, and the act of violence, often implemented seemingly at

random, increases the intensity of fear by keeping everyone in suspense (Shapiro-Phim, 2002). When used to assert domination and control, the effect of violence on individuals is an internalization of terror that creates a 'culture of fear' that remains long after the violence has ended and the peace process begun (Sanford, 2003).

In her account of her involvement in exhuming the mass graves containing the bodies of Mayans murdered during the 'scorched earth' campaigns in Guatemala, Victoria Sanford refers to this internalization of fear and terror as a "living memory" of terror (2003). "Living memory", Sanford explains, "continues to shape and define individual relationships within families and communities, as well as community relationships with the nation state" (2003, pp. 123). The experiences of each person is made and re-made again and again in their memories, which, Sanford argues, "is as real and current as today's experience with an act of violence, or its threat" (2003, pp. 143). She raises an example of the multiple meanings that a single object, in this case a tree, can symbolize in the memories of people who have experienced violence:

"A tree, for example, is not just a tree. At a given moment, a tree is a reminder of the baby whose head was smashed against a tree by a soldier. The tree, and the memory of the baby it invokes, in turn reinvoke a chain of memories of terror, including witnessing the murder of a husband or a brother who was tied to another tree and beaten to death- perhaps on the same day or perhaps years later" (Sanford, 2003, pp. 143).

The use of the term memory is often over-used and its exact meaning and theorization under-defined. In his review of the academic use of the term, Charles Golden refers to 'memory' as providing a framework in which individuals locate themselves in place and time (2005). But while memory is individual, it is also collective, political, malleable, and therefore deeply contestable. Collective memory is always multiple and selective, and while individuals within any group may retain and recall very different memories, the transmission of memories between group members inherently entails

changes in the significance of those memories (Golden, 2005, pp. 291). The transmission of memory from individual to collective, and the meaning that memory is ascribed, provides a cohesive element that can make it a fundamental component of groups, communities, and societies.

At the personal level, the way people encounter daily life is heavily influenced by their memories and recall of the past (Connerton, 1989). Paul Connerton argues that the way we experience the present is directly related to the past, more specifically, the aspects of past memories which one links to present events. Therefore memories of the past, influenced or distorted as they may be, directly affect the way one is able to *be* in the present. The relationship between the past and the present are shared and inextricably linked, with the present influencing the aspects of the past that are brought forth, at the same time that the past influences the way the present is experienced (Connerton, 1989).

“Thus we may say that our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order” (Connerton, 1989, pp. 3).

In our own everyday lives, we are immersed in a world of memory triggers and enhancements. However, memory is never a neutral recollection of events, but a retrospective reconstruction of events in a particular time and space that is subjugated to the individual's knowledge and understanding of these events (Connerton, 1989; Golden, 2005; Boyarin, 1994). This knowledge has many complicated, multi-dimensional layers that are constantly changing in time. Jonathan Boyarin argues that "the past affects the present in much more complex ways than the model of points on a straight line permits us to imagine" (Boyarin, 1994, pp. 2). This reinforces the idea that the complicated and multi-faceted aspects of traumatic events that are remembered and retained can have an impact on a person's life that is just as complex and dynamic. He maintains that:

"memory is neither something pre-existent and dormant in the past nor a projection in the present, but... is not only constantly disintegrating and disappearing but is constantly being created and elaborated" (Boyarin, 1994, pp. 22).

States use memory to create a shared past. According to Connerton, "it is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory". (Connerton, 1989, pp. 3). When forced out of their country and displaced to another part of the world, refugees are sometimes seen to no longer be a part of what Malkki refers to as the "national order of things" (Malkki, 1995, pp. 5). It is often taken for granted that people are identified with the place in which they live, but often the 'homes' with which people identify are increasingly de-territorialized, and instead they create linkages with a national homeland through memories of a place in which they can no longer live (Malkki, 1997). These memories of people who have been displaced does not always replicate the official history, but can sometimes challenge and transform this history (Seremetakis, 1994, in Das, V., and Kleinman, A., 2001) However, unless this record is challenged, the official history can profoundly shape a social group's memory and identity.

"A particularly extreme case of such interaction occurs when a state apparatus is used in a systematic way to deprive citizen's of their memory. All totalitarianisms behave in this way; the mental enslavement of the subjects of a totalitarian regime begins when their memories are taken away" (Connerton, 1989, pp. 14).

Connerton describes remembering one's past as the objects of one's life history (Connerton, 1989). Memories build and shape each person's past, and remembering an event can be correlated to calling up aspects of oneself. This is where the connection lies between remembering the past and the way in which one is able to live in the present. In their anthology on violence, Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman have maintained that the importance of memory and representation is not an issue of whether or not the memory is accurate. The accuracy of the memory is much less significant than what memories are

retained and how they are remembered. It signifies the struggle of voicing one's story despite the reality of other, more 'legitimate' representations that may privilege a different truth. Therefore, they argue, the "pressure to create a different kind of past for oneself is related to how one deals with the violence of memories in the present" (Das and Kleinman, 2000, pp. 13). When violence is enacted by the state, however, the difference between memory and history is often whose story is being told. In the case of political violence, the state has an obvious interest in ensuring that their role in perpetrating the violence is not found out, and so those injured by state violence are often left with no recognition for their losses.

"These memory claims figure significantly in our self-descriptions because our past history is an important source of our conception of ourselves; our self knowledge, our conception of our own character, and potentialities, is to a large extent determined by the way in which we view our own actions" (Connerton, 1989, pp. 22).

Lawrence Langer, in his analysis on the "ruins of memory" among Holocaust survivors found that memory is often expressed within the context of daily life. Memories of past violence are not a thing of the past, and carry the threat of coming alive at any moment. To overcome the fear that these memories generate, those who carry this fear have considerable obstacles to overcome to re-build a sense of trust and re-build their lives (Langer, 1997, in Das, V. and Kleinman, A.). At a state level, Paul Connerton has also questioned how memories of violence and past injustices can be resolved. He points out that if a society's past, or more specifically its sovereignty and social construction has been historically structured by injustice, "...what now, if anything, ought to be done to rectify these injustices?" (Connerton, 1989, pp. 9).

Power, the Witness and Taking Control

Managing and coming to terms with the 'living memory' of a violent past has implications and challenges not only for those who came to actual physical harm, but also to those who witnessed these acts (Das, 2000). For witnesses of violence, according to Veena Das, violent memories and the loss of trust result in the "death of relationships" in that it becomes impossible to trust in the people you know or those in positions of authority (Das, 2000, pp. 206). It can also make the desire to understand and make sense of events that have led to such losses quite overwhelming. As memories of the past continue to haunt the present, there is often a need for people to speak out and tell their own story, as they have lived it (Das and Kleinman 2000, 2001; Sanford, 2003; Jackson, 2002; Daniel, 1996). Voicing one's experiences can open up possibilities to negotiate new understanding and give meaning to tragedy. Veena Das has argued that this ability to voice one's story can empower survivors to distance the past from the present and view the future without fear (Das, 2003).

Unfortunately, finding ways to speak about the trauma of the past can be an arduous task, because there are no words to convey the meaning of pain and the pain of loss accurately (Scarry, 1985). Witnesses to violence often feel that they have lost authorship over the stories of their individual experience, since not only do words fail them, but individual life stories are not part of "official public memory" (Das and Kleinman, 2000, pp. 12). However Scarry also argues that "acts that restore the voice become not only a denunciation of the pain but almost a diminution of the pain, a partial reversal of the process of torture itself" (Scarry, pp. 25).

The betrayal of trust and the unfeasibility of language to express and convey the meaning of life during and after violence results in a rupture; both in the person's life

before and after the violence, and in their ability to trust in relationships. Veena Das builds on Martha Nussbaum's (1992) notion of "poisonous knowledge" to refer to this rupture. Nussbaum's use of "poisonous knowledge" refers to the transformation that takes place when violence becomes a part of people's lives and therefore, a part of their relationships with one another. In her work with displaced populations in India, Das used this term to describe knowledge that is produced through witnessing violence and how it is this knowledge that continues to haunt the present.

"Even for those who appeared lucky because they escaped, the memory of the past remains in the present. This is why it's important to find ways to speak about the experience of witnessing: if one's way of being with others was injured, then the past enters the present not just as traumatic memory but as poisonous knowledge. This can only be engaged as knowledge through suffering" (Das, 2000, pp. 221).

Understanding the reality of political violence means going beyond official state records to understand what it means to live with the consequences of state policies. For witnesses of violence, being able to speak the truth of their experiences and suffering is a way of refusing to accept a version of events that does not include them in it, which can shift the balance of power in favor of the witness (Sanford, 2003). Speaking truth to power- the ability for people to speak of their experiences under oppression- is a means to restore in part the balance of power to the witness or group being represented (Daniel, 2002; Das and Kleinman, 2000; 2001; Sanford, 2003). It is a way of re-creating a sense of order in the world through narrative, but also a way of re-building a personal sense of power and self. As Jackson attests, "storytelling gives us a sense that though we do not exactly determine the course of our lives we at least have a hand in defining their meaning" (Jackson, 2002, pp. 16).

In recent decades, the question of 'moving on' after violence has been explored in various legal forms, notably truth commissions. Das and Kleinman regard the reparative

potential of truth commissions to be minimal in that they can do little to repair social relationships or regain trust (Das and Kleinman, 2001). What they can do is acknowledge people's suffering and loss, as well as pinpoint the person who caused the pain. It can also recognize the impact violence has on the collective identity of a group, and legitimate the need that group members have to speak out and be heard in order for them to 'move on' (Das and Kleinman, 2001). For those who have witnessed violence, the opening up of a lawful, alternative sphere in which they can voice their stories is a profoundly transformative experience (Das and Kleinman, 2001; Sanford, 2003).

“For survivors giving testimony, the very act of verbalizing the experience and meaning of survival is a contestation and reshaping of the world. While it is painful to recount their experiences, it is also a cathartic relief because the pain is always with them. It is with them in their silence as much as it is with them as they give testimony” (Sanford, 2003, pp. 50).

Testimony is an important tool for negotiating and understanding events and their repercussions, but also for challenging hegemonic discourses that may attempt to silence alternate versions of events. Edward W. Said has theorized that discourses are created and used by more powerful groups to construct the world and/or certain events in ways that rationalize their actions and make sense to them. Therefore, discourses only reflect the worldview of the group doing the constructing, and are subject to interpretation (Said, 1979). The effect that those in power have over discourse is not simply which story is told in the aftermath of violence, but what amounts to the silencing of witnesses. Victoria Sanford has argued that survivors are silenced through the lack of space for survivors or less-powerful groups to participate in a meaningful way in social or political processes, restraining the capacity for survivors to speak freely (Sanford, 2003, pp. 15). In this way, “the impossibility of contesting terror is an effect of terror, and this powerlessness is implicit in its definition and use” (Sanford, pp. 15).

Just as language is communicated not only by what is enunciated verbally, but through the body; in gestures and in silences, discourse is not only communicated verbally. In Daniel's essay on the effect of discourse and the refugee, he depicts discourse as something that includes:

“...signs in general: gestures (say of pity or contempt), structures (e.g., boundaries or shelters), material things (like passports and visas), silence (e.g., the silence of the media about the fact that the financial burden for refugees is disproportionately borne, not by the wealthy nations of Europe and North America, but by the poorer nations of Asia and Africa, and, not least of all, ignorance (regarding such facts, for instance) itself. As signs, not only do they communicate messages, they create a reality “that comes without saying and goes without saying”. Above all, a discourse determines who will speak for what, where, when, and to whom. In short, discourse creates the conditions of authority and truth” (Daniel, 2002, pp. 277).

In her work with South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, psychoanalyst and expert in the areas of testimony and gender, Genevieve Morel has argued, “bearing witness is an experience of discourse, oral or written” (Morel, 2001, pp. 81). To Victoria Sanford, when the witness comes forward in public memorials or forums, it is an act of “agency, political consciousness, representation, and action” (Sanford, 2003, pp. 88). It is not simply the re-telling of a story or of what people did, “...but what they thought they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think” (Sanford, 2003, pp 73).

Opening up public forums to negotiate ideas and memories collectively can enable alternate discourses and interpretations of events to be heard. Over time, events will become further altered in the memory as specific details are forgotten, accentuated or misconstrued (Das, 2001). Allowing for the creation of space to explore other ways of understanding events outside of the 'official' rhetoric, and then, after discovering what makes the best sense “creating a public space in which experience can not only be represented but also molded” (Das, 2001).

The trauma of loss, however, and its debilitating impact on the collective psyche have increasingly called for other mechanisms that could build a credible bridge between, on the one hand the juridical form of justice and on the other the personal need of victims to be heard and entered into the historical record (Enwezor et al., 2001).

Opening up this kind of public forum in which to speak out can be difficult and emotional, and in some political contexts and situations, this can be dangerous. States that have either perpetrated acts of violence within their domain of power or have been complicit in allowing violence to occur have an obvious stake in purporting a version of truth that keeps their slate clean. The voicing of alternative discourses can reveal information and multiple realities that mean that all groups, factions or states have to remain accountable to others.

In political, ideological, and philosophical struggle, words are also weapons, explosives, tranquillisers, and poisons. Occasionally, the whole class struggle may be summed up in the struggle for one against another. Other words are the site of an ambiguity; the stake in a decisive but undecidable battle (Daniel, 1996, pp. 74).

In order to survive, people have to adapt and learn how not to act - not to speak out, not to cry- and after violence they have to learn what it is to be normal. When the grounds on which everyday life is built disappears, everything that once seemed ordinary now appears surreal and needs to be found again rather than being taken for granted. Cathy Caruth (1995, 1996) has argued that violent events are inherently incomprehensible; therefore forgetting is a defining feature of violence. The inability of a person to remember traumatic events fully creates a sense of what she calls the “uncanny.” In Gampel’s longitudinal study on Holocaust survivors, she finds that survivors actively try to keep separate their memories of how things should be, and how things became. When these two worlds collide, they generate traumatic outcomes, such as nightmares (Gampel, 2000). According to Gampel, the uncanny can be seen to be a “splitting and ambiguity

that results when people are unable to confront the feelings connected with their unbearable suffering” (Gampel, 2000, pp. 49). The uncanny makes believing what one sees, or what one experiences near impossible, since their own experiences are unimaginable.

Inner representations of how things once were, or how they ‘ought to be’ according to one’s worldview, will clash when violence un-makes all that one had once taken for granted. The memories of the way things ‘ought to be’ creates a rupture in people’s lives and the way they are able to live their lives. When something so unimaginable as genocide occurs, people have to re-create the means to live ‘normally’ again (Daniel, 1996; Das and Kleinman, 2003).

“What is at stake, especially for those who have been spared the destruction of death, is the death of a way of being-in-the-world, the death of that which constitutes their identity, honour, and dignity. For each ethnic group in this horrific drama, then, the face of the other is the face of either the affirmation of identity or its denial, potential life or potential death (Daniel, V., 1996, pp. 68).

Witnesses to violence have to struggle against incredible and often unseen obstacles to maintain and implement control over their lives. When state policies and violent regimes constrain their opportunities, the most people can do is choose the best option among many disagreeable ones. This is obscure at best, since vital decisions must be made when the ‘best’ choice is unclear and outcome unsure. People are left to interpret the situation, create goals and then pursue them. Sometimes, this is a source of comfort; other times, regret.

Approaching Violence and Anthropology

Ingo W. Schoder and Bettina E. Schmidt outline three main theoretical approaches that can be taken to examine violence: operational, cognitive, and experiential (2001). The

operational approach looks for patterns in actions of violence, so that comparisons can be made between them, while the cognitive approach focuses on the cultural construction of violence and the meaning it is given. The experiential approach takes a much closer look at the subjectivity of violence and views this with higher priority than generalizations.

Omitting the experiential perspective from studies into violence risks losing crucial insight into the subjective experience of violence, and how individuals and groups manage survival and recovery and what challenges they face. It jeopardises the loss of an experience-near understanding of how people cope with changes brought on from above, and how it affects their homes, families, communities and sense of self in the most intimate ways. Most importantly, it ignores how people negotiate their way through these barriers to rebuild relationships and reclaim cultural practices in the aftermath. 'Moving on' after violence is often further obscured by displacement from country of origin, requiring additional adjustment to the practices related to daily life. Schoder and Schmidt further stress that:

“...the experiential approach looks at violence as not necessarily confined to situations of intergroup conflict but as something related to individual subjectivity, something that structures people's everyday lives, *even in the absence of an actual state of war*” (2001, pp. 2). Emphasis added.

The importance of conducting ground level research into the aftermath of violence can also be attributed to the salience of localized knowledge and meanings in the very formation of political violence. Anthropology's empirical and qualitative tradition is capable of illustrating the impact that events of the past can continue to have on people's everyday lives and relationships, how they react and cope with these effects, what the physical and mental effects of genocide are, and the impact on relationships through death and displacement (Hinton, 2002).

Serious questions have arisen in regards to the actions that should be taken to help refugees, societies or states rebuild - or 'move on' - after war, genocide, and other violence. Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch debates the problems and conundrums that arise in the aftermath of violence and extols the value of an anthropological approach to the multifaceted and complex transformations that violence has on societies, families and individuals.

“Are they better served by closing the book on a horrendous past and attempting to move forward or by insisting that those left behind atrocities be held accountable? Is accountability best established through truth telling, criminal trials, or a combination? Is amnesty an appropriate act of forgiveness or an act of impunity that risks promoting further slaughter? ... The debate cries out for the empirical contributions of anthropology”
(Kenneth Roth, in Hinton, 2002, pp. xi).

The meaning that people attribute to their lives and their place within it is not created through economics, politics, statistics or other macro-process. While these structures greatly influence how people are able to live their lives, people situate themselves and those aspects of their lives they find meaningful at the intersection of these structures and processes. Furthermore, it is in the relationships with one another that people negotiate their position, find a sense of self and belonging - or not- and build meaning and knowledge of the world. Anthropology is well-suited to examine this cross-section and analyse the contradictions and paradoxes that emerge in the messy practices of daily life.

The local level positioning of anthropology and the empirical analysis it produces can provide pertinent contributions for those theorizing in the area of policy creation and dissemination, or for those who work directly with refugees or in conflict zones. For example, by examining daily life and personal opinions in the aftermath of state violence, anthropology can contribute important documentation and relevant information regarding

international structures, such as initiatives for legal justice, and help determine how to use such information most effectively.

The potential of a Khmer Rouge tribunal has opened old wounds, both for states that would have to admit complicity and for the people who still carry the scars. While the announcement of the UN's involvement in a trial has been timely for this topic, the tribunal is not central to this thesis. The overlap in timing of the UN's involvement in a proposed tribunal, and the related topic for this thesis has made it a part of the interviews and conversations from which I have obtained information, and therefore provides a backdrop for understanding the role that ongoing global and state politics play in the negotiation of 'moving on.' Similarly, this thesis will not seek to argue against the history of Cambodia as it has been written. Rather, the goal is to privilege the stories and accounts that comprise an alternate history and seek to understand how these stories can collectively represent their present lives. It will also seek to understand what impact the past still plays in their lives, what mechanisms, symbols, rituals or beliefs make it possible for them to 'move on.'

These elements of memory, trust and witnessing combine and collide as I prepare for the initial interview with the woman depicted at the start of this thesis. The deep breaths she struggles with seem to resonate deep into her memory, and while she continues to stare intensely down at the table, avoiding my eyes, she ever so slightly straightens her spine. She nods at the tape recorder that sits impervious on the table between us, and so I reach over and press the 'start' button. The exhalations pushing out from the top of her lungs lengthen considerably as she steels herself to speak. The tension in the room shifts: oscillating between fear and empowerment. As she starts talking, her

voice has a shaky yet monotone quality to it, suggesting that her words have been rehearsed many times before this moment. She begins:

“My name is Dara Tith³, and I would like to share my story and some information that I have with me, that I brought it back from back home. From Cambodia.”

³ All names have been changed to protect the identity of the people who participated in this research, in agreement with the confidentiality and ethics protocol of the university.

Chapter 2: History, Memory and Methodology

Historical Background and Context

By all accounts, the neighbouring countries of Southeast Asia have a long history of fighting for control and dominance over the region. Between the 10th and 13th centuries, Angkor, which would become modern-day Cambodia, exerted its control over much of the landmass, extending all the way to what one day would be the Malay Peninsula (Chandler, 1992). This era has been captured in the imagination of Cambodians as the height of their ingenuity and creativity, and has been preserved by the remaining magnificence of the Sanskrit and Hindu temples in the Siem Reap region of Cambodia that are collectively referred to as Angkor Wat (Gottesman, 2003). This image stands in stark contrast to the modern era of foreign dominance and violence that has plagued Cambodia- one which also has had an impact on its people's memories and imagination.

Its power eventually waned and was replaced by neighbouring states, and by the nineteenth century the state was under the joint protection of Vietnam and Thailand (Chandler, 1992; Chan, 2003). Vietnamese forces occupied the country, imposing the use of Vietnamese language and customs over local practices (Chanda, 1986; Chandler, 1992). Ethnic Cambodians were heavily taxed, and were drafted as labourers to build canals and irrigation system while Vietnamese farmers settled the land (Chanda, 1986; Chandler, 1992; Gottesman, 2003). In the twentieth century, the ongoing battle over power became embroiled in foreign and colonial interests. In the 1860's the French established the protectorate *Indochine*, which subsumed the countries of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, for ninety years, until the middle of the twentieth century (Chan, 2003; Chandler, 1992).

The French colonial powers controlled the administrative, financial and legal systems and commercial businesses (Chanda, 1986; Chan, 2003). While they established plantations and cash crops for export, they did little to modernize the Cambodian economy (Chanda, 1986; Chandler, 1992). Their initial and most concentrated efforts in *Indochine* were focussed on developing what is now Vietnam, with Cambodia being treated as an extension of Vietnam (Chandler, 1992; Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996). In addition, the colonial powers exacerbated the already existing ethnic tensions, privileging Vietnamese with access to education and positions as civil servants, while taxing Cambodian peasants (Gottesman, 2003).

During World War 2 Cambodia was briefly occupied by Japan alongside the colonial powers, disarming and dissolving the French administration and allowing Cambodians a taste of independence (Chandler, 1992; Gottesman, 2003). Five months after defeating the Japanese forces the French re-asserted their control, but this time Cambodia began to push for autonomy (Gottesman, 2003). In 1953 Cambodia gained national independence, and the French installed a young prince, Norodom Sihanouk, on the throne with hopes that his youth would make him a malleable leader (Chan, 2003; Chandler, 1992). However, the prince proved to be a savvy opponent, and attracted broad support from Khmer peasantry (Chanda, 1986; Chandler, 1992). Using intimidation tactics against rival parties and intense propaganda towards the Cambodian peasantry, Sihanouk ensured his longevity in Cambodian leadership for the next fifteen years (Gottesman, 2003).

The country enjoyed neutral status and relative peace throughout the rest of the 1950's and into the 1960's, though its status was often challenged (Chandler, 1992; Shawcross, 2000). The prince's approach to foreign policy and maintaining independence was to play both the West and the Soviets by accepting aid and appearing cooperative

without actually committing to either (Chanda, 1986; Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996). However, Sihanouk's rejection of the anti-Communist South-east Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in the Cold War political climate gradually distanced the country further from the West, while gaining support from China and Vietnam (Chanda, 1986). The geography of Cambodia was a significant concern, since Vietnam was developing close ties with the Soviets on one side, and Thailand was as close to an independent state as was possible in Southeast Asia, with a strong economy and no colonial ties, making the West very nervous about Cambodia's political leanings. Sihanouk grew cautious of possible US involvement in Cambodia and the political strings that might be attached to aid funding, and began to isolate Cambodia from the West, nationalizing Cambodia's national banks and trade (Chandler, 1992; Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996). Cambodia did not transform to the capitalist forms that many other Asian countries had, increasing its isolation, and the growing war in neighbouring Vietnam contributed to its socio-economic decline (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996).

Meanwhile, in Cambodian cities, corruption and political intimidation had become evident, and resentment against Sihanouk's regime began to grow (Chanda, 1986). Chandler dates Cambodian nationalism as emerging in a "cooperative and well-mannered guise" in the 1930's though throughout the latter half of Sihanouk's rule nationalist sentiments became more apparent and intense, causing many militia groups to form and retreat to the rural countryside where they could organize (Chanda, 1986; Chandler, 1992, pp. 162). Among these groups were the 'Khmer Serey', or the 'Khmer Issarak' both independence groups translating into Khmer '*Libre*' or 'Free' (Gottesman, 2003; Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996; Shawcross, 2000; Brissé, 1980). One Khmer Serey group located in the northern jungles was developing close ties with Vietnam, and was supplied weapons and

training by the Chinese. The group did not appear to be a serious threat and was jokingly dubbed the 'Khmer Rouge' for 'Communist Khmer' by Sihanouk (Chanda, 1986; Chan, 2003).

The 1960s introduced the beginning of US involvement in the Vietnam conflict and ongoing Western paranoia about the communist threat. In efforts to drive out the communist guerrilla fighters, the US ordered a secret bombing campaign to commence on Cambodia in hopes of killing Vietcong guerrillas (Shawcross, 1980, Kiernan, 1993). The US occupied part of the country and took over the main transport routes into the country, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Cambodians.

In March of 1970, as the population became increasingly unhappy with Sihanouk's policies, particularly the increasing Vietnamese presence and violence in the northern territory, the prince was overthrown in a 'bloodless coup' while he was in France, and a military government took over under General Lon Nol, with the support of the United States (Gottesman, 2003; Brissé, 1980, Kiernan, 2002; Chanda, 1986; Chan, 2003; Chandler, 1992; McLellan, 2004). Sihanouk took up residence in Peking, where he nurtured ties with the once disparate Khmer Rouge in hopes of regaining his title (Chanda, 1986; Shawcross, 2000).

In 1973, there was a palpable build-up of tension. As the human and financial cost of US involvement in Vietnam rose, the US withdrew its troops and trained them instead on Cambodia, where the fledgling Khmer Rouge now controlled the northern and eastern zones, increasing the communist threat (Kiernan, 2002). Carpet-bombing raids resumed and bombarded the entire country, dropping approximately 3600 tonnes per day, or 15,000 pounds of explosives for every square mile of Cambodian territory- more than were dropped on Japan throughout all of World War 2 (Chandler, 1992; Kiernan, 2002;

Maguire, 2005; Shawcross, 2000). The two carpet-bombing campaigns between 1969 and 1973 are estimated to be responsible for approximately 150,000 civilian deaths (Kiernan, 2002).

The carpet-bombing of Cambodia contributed to severely de-stabilizing Cambodia's already shaky economic and military systems (Gottesman, 2003, Kiernan, 2002). The deaths and devastation became a means for independence groups like the Khmer Rouge to recruit the already-discontent peasants into their armies, and provided a ready excuse for their often violent and radical policies (Gottesman, 2003; Kiernan, 2002). As the Khmer Rouge gained more and more ground, Lon Nol and American personnel left the country, soon followed by other foreigners (Chanda, 1986). In 1975 the Khmer Rouge forces swept the last of the government forces away and took control of the entire country. Despite the jest with which they were named, the strength this group gained was no joke, and summoning their forces from the north and then the east, they took Phnom Penh on April 17th, 1975, renaming the country Democratic Kampuchea (DK), marking the start of the genocide.

The leader of DK, Saloth Sar, who went by the *nom-de-guerre* Pol Pot, envisioned a total agrarian transformation of Cambodian society, an experiment in social engineering based on a radical version of Mao's China. The year was re-set to 'Year Zero', and anyone or anything that existed before this date was considered tainted and therefore disposable. They invented a new term 'Angkar' or 'the Organisation' to refer to the communist party organization (Chanda, 1986; Chandler, 1992; Ledgerwood, 2002). Under the auspices of 'Angkar', the entire urban populations of the country were evacuated to the countryside to work camps, where many more died from the poor conditions, cruel treatment and annual purges. People from these urban areas were categorized as 'new people', while the peasant

farmers and fishermen were 'old people' (Chan, 2003; Chandler, 1992). Educated people, urban dwellers, members of the military and government employees were among the first killed.

Special antagonism was placed toward those of Chinese or Vietnamese descent, indigenous groups including Muslim Chams, and Buddhist monks (Kiernan, 2002; Gottesman, 2003). The kinship and social structure of the country was literally turned upside down, and everyone was to wear black clothing so there were no visual signs of wealth disparity (Chan, 2003). Families and communities were split up and dispersed into work camps in different parts of the country. Roads and other means of communication with the outside world were cut off (Chanda, 1986). Across the country, all cities and hospitals were cleared out, schools, factories, libraries and monasteries were closed down, and the economic system was destroyed, rendering money worthless (Kiernan, 2002). Markets, banks, private property, Western medicine, schools and religion were outlawed (Chan, 2003).

Prince Norodom Sihanouk, still out of the country since the coup in 1970, returned to Cambodia from his exile in Peking, but he, his wife Princess Monique Sihanouk, and twenty two of their children and grandchildren were placed under house arrest in various buildings next to the Royal Palace (Brissé, 1980; Chanda, 1986). He was later asked by the Khmer Rouge to take Cambodia's seat on their behalf at the United Nations General Assembly, providing the Khmer Rouge with international credibility (Chanda, 1986; Chandler, 1992). But not even he was immune to the terror of the DK regime; in the end, two of his daughters, their husbands and ten grandchildren were sent to the countryside to work, where they were eventually killed (Chanda, 1986).

In the late seventies, the Khmer Rouge began to conduct border raids and brutal

massacres of whole villages over the eastern border into Vietnam (Chanda, 1986). Though the fact that Democratic Kampuchea was backed, armed and funded by China made these attacks more serious than mere territorial raids, their severity and unceasing continuance convinced Vietnam that the problem required a military solution (Chanda, 1986). At the same time, internal strife within the DK government resulted in purging and violence toward party members (Chandler, 1992). In this weakened state, it took Vietnamese forces two weeks to take over Phnom Penh (Chandler, 1992). On January 7th, 1979, the genocide was officially over. The death toll ranges between 1 and 3 million, with the official number resting at 1.7 million, or one-fifth of the entire population (Chandler, 1992; Chanda, 1986; Chan, 2003; Kiernan, 2002; Jarvis, 2004; Ledgerwood, 1994; Shawcross, 2002). The liberation of Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge by Vietnam soon became an occupation that would persist for over a decade.

Aftermaths: Political Turmoil and Refugees

The end of the DK period did not end the insecurity or instability under which Cambodians lived, the military occupation, or the threat of starvation (Shawcross, 1980). Instead, while power changed hands and international organizations and states argued over who would represent Cambodia, the people continued to suffer. The period of rule by the Khmer Rouge left the country literally in ruins, with no infrastructure, economy, healthcare or education system to speak of (Shawcross, 2000).

Despite this, the West viewed the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia as a hostile attack. In the Cold War climate that dominated global politics, there were only two sides: pro-Soviet or pro-West (Shawcross, 2000). Since Communist Vietnam had close ties with the Soviet Union, the West could not tolerate the international community's support or recognition of the Vietnamese communist government, the People's Republic of

Kampuchea (PRK) that now effectively ruled the country. Furthermore, it was easier for the UN to ignore the fact that Vietnam now controlled Cambodia (Shawcross, 2002).

The UN created a coalition government to act as the figurative leaders, if not the acting leaders, for the country. The Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) was comprised four political factions, among them Sihanouk's party, and the Khmer Rouge. Sihanouk served as representative of the CGDK at the UN (Gottesman, 2003; Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996; Ledgerwood, 2002). However, their only real alliance in the coalition was their opposition the Vietnamese (Gottesman, 2003). The problem was, Vietnam had very practical control over the country so the coalition government had no real legitimacy.

The US began to withhold aid from communist-held Cambodia, and lobbied the IMF and the World Bank to do the same (Gottesman, 2003). Funding was directed instead at the CGDK, effectively funding the Khmer Rouge, by then operating in the northeastern jungles close to the Thai border with an estimated forty thousand soldiers and a large number of civilians who had been abducted to use as resistance soldiers (Chan, 2003; Chandler, 1992). With Sihanouk as international figurehead, the Khmer Rouge had indirectly gained Western support, while the other factions now had access to Chinese military funding (Gottesman, 2003; Kiernan, 2002). Civil war and violence ensued between the Khmer Rouge and the PRK, and daily life was violent and unstable.

In the immediate aftermath of the end of the communist regime, most Cambodians were more concerned with reconnecting with what family was left than the ongoing strategies of state leaders and global politics. Though there were mixed emotions at the instalment of a new regime headed by their long-time neighbouring rivals, their arrival was met first with skepticism and then relief that the communist time, which had held them

prisoner in their own country, was at last over. Once reunited with remaining family members, when there were any, many Cambodians decided their life chances would be improved if they lived outside Cambodia and the politics that controlled their options. In particular, Cambodians who were educated, former urbanites with family ties to the West had better chances to build a life overseas, and choose to escape to Thailand for re-settlement in a third country (Gottesman, 2003). Thousands of exhausted, emaciated Cambodians walked to the Thai border and risked their lives to arrive in refugee camps, which were very basic, with only bare essentials for life (Gottesman, 2003).

Few refugees had been able to escape Cambodia throughout the DK regime, and those few that had made it into Thailand or Vietnam brought with them stories that were thought to be too outrageous to be true (Chanda, 1986). After the Khmer Rouge was overthrown, the refugees escaping into neighboring countries, particularly Thailand, and the poor physical condition in which they arrived, aroused the possibility that these stories might indeed be true (Chanda, 1986; Kiernan, 1993). By 1979 at least 600,000 Cambodian refugees were on the Thai border, but there was no official tally (Gottesman, 2003; Shawcross, 1984).

Refugees fleeing to Thailand were faced with a long, grueling hike over the two mountain ridges that created a geographic border between the two countries. The steep escarpment of the Dangrek Mountains formed the north-western border, down to the northern ridge of the Tonle Sap Lake. The Cardamom Mountains, or Elephant Range, ran from the Gulf of Thailand and northward. Between these two ranges was a jungle area that was relatively less steep, allowing access to the Thai border. After years of harsh treatment, most Cambodians were in poor health, and made this journey without shoes, food, or supplies; nourishing themselves by eating leaves or bark from trees. In addition to

wild animals, the jungles were rife with bandits, landmines, and both Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge patrols.

With turmoil resulting from the disbanding of *Indochine* and internal conflicts in various Southeast Asian states as a result of independence and post-colonial rule, more and more refuge-seekers fled their borders for Thailand (Chan, 2003; Gottesman 2003; Long, 1993). Those who sought refuge or entry in a third country were given various labels, among them “displaced persons, illegal immigrants, evacuees, refugees, and humanitarian parolees” (Chan, 2003, pp. 2). Since each label had different legal and political implications, the treatment of refuge-seekers would vary accordingly. As Chan surmised, “the use of such labels reflects how highly politicized the international refugee regimen has been and continues to be” (Chan, 2003).

Thailand was now sheltering more refugees than any other Southeast Asian country, and soon became overwhelmed. Without the land or resources to support this population Thailand appealed to other countries for aid to help, but the request did not get a response (Gottesman, 2003). Thai policies toward refugees shifted to that of ‘humane deterrence’, and the label applied to refugees was altered from ‘displaced person’ to ‘illegal entrants’ who could be arrested, jailed and deported back to their country of origin (Gottesman, 2003). This policy was especially harsh towards Cambodian refugees, since their potential numbers were so high.

The refugees on either side of the Thai/Cambodian border were caught in the middle of national and Cold War politics⁴. Those who were unable to make it to the Thai side were in border camps run and patrolled by competing factions of the CGDK

⁴ There has been a great deal of debate and literature produced regarding the situation of the Thai/Cambodian refugee camps, which have further traumatised refugees. However, since none of the people I spoke to brought up this point, I will not be elaborating on this.

(Shawcross, 1984). Some of the camps were armed with Chinese weapons supplied through Thailand (Shawcross, 2002). Unlike people fleeing any other country, these could not appeal to the UNHCR for official refugee status, because after 1980 they made up the population base for the CGDK, giving the coalition government their only legitimacy (Mayotte, 1992). In 1982, the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) was set up specifically to attend to the border population (Mayotte, 1992).

By 1979 the refugee situation had reached a crisis point in Thailand. In late June of that year the Thai army pushed tens of thousands of these refugees back into the mountainous and remote northeast region of Cambodia. Most of them died as a result of being shot, stepping on landmines, or by the Khmer Rouge guerrillas living in the jungle at the base. Those who survived were considered a security threat in Cambodia because they had chosen to escape, and had to fear retaliation by the new government (Gottesman, 2003). This became a huge international incident, and funding and aid for the refugee crisis soon came to Thailand.

By 1983, the Cambodian relief efforts had become one of the largest ever in terms of millions of dollars, but there has been much debate on how that money was spent. This was in part because the Western aid agencies wanted to act as quickly as possible, but also because many of the administrators of aid funding, including the PRK government and the Khmer Rouge faction of the CGDK prioritized their political agendas over humanitarian interests (Shawcross, 2002).

In time, between 250,000 and 300,000 Cambodians were re-settled in Western countries, almost all of them as refugees (Gottesman, 2003; McLellan, 2004). Of these, almost 20,000 were resettled in Canada, although this number will not include approximately 1000 Khmer Krom who identify as ethnic Cambodians but were born in

Vietnam and therefore were classified as Vietnamese refugees, or for those who claimed they were Vietnamese because they thought it would improve their resettlement chances (McLellan, 1999; 2004). The vast majority of Cambodian refugees who came to Canada after 1979 were “designated class refugees” and were sponsored through both private and federal government sponsorship programs (McLellan, 2004, pp. 106). Most had been rural peasants with little formal education (McLellan, 2004). Outside of Quebec, there were few people with the skills to provide translation services to Cambodian refugees and there was little in terms of social or support services and the specific needs of Cambodian genocide survivors were not addressed (McLellan, 2004).

Though there were some concerns over the possible difficulties Cambodians might face in third countries due to the death of approximately 90% of the educated and middle and upper classes during the DK regime, there were some pre-existing Cambodian communities in the diaspora (Chan, 2003).

“This first batch of refuge-seekers composed the main group of Cambodians capable of helping those who escaped in later years, many of whom were farmers or fishermen with no experience living in non-Khmer-speaking, industrialized, modern societies. Just as important, because members of the 1975 group- sometimes called the ‘first wave’- did not experience the horrors of the Killing Fields, they were not traumatized or physically disabled, which meant they could function normally (Chan, 2003, pp. 21).

The next ‘wave’ of Cambodian refuge seekers were those 34,000 who managed to escape during the DK regime, and the ‘third wave’ were those who, like the people who participated in this project, searched for surviving family members after the Khmer Rouge were ousted from power before making their way to Thailand (Chan, 2003).

Many Cambodians that fled left behind relatives, or else were unsure if they had family members still in the country. As a result, there was close attention paid to any events occurring in Cambodia, though outside of the border crisis, there was little news.

The media focus regarding Cambodia changed, however, in the late 1980's with the demise of the Soviet Union, the eradication of Cold War politics and changes within the PRK government, which brought dramatic changes in Cambodia. The end of the Cold War also ended funding and support for Vietnam's activities in Cambodia. The PRK withdrew its military and changed its name to the State of Cambodia (SOC) (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996; Ledgerwood, 2002; Shawcross, 2000). The SOC instituted reforms in an effort to cast off its communist history. They brought back a market economy, restored Theravadan Buddhism as the state religion, and adjusted the flag and national song (Chandler, 1992; Ledgerwood, 2002).

While the PRK had outwardly promised to respect human rights, and was certainly less brutal than the Khmer Rouge, it was still a military dictatorship with one-party politics that used violence against any opponents (Chandler, 1992; Shawcross, 2000, 2002).

Vietnam's motives to occupy Cambodia were not humanitarian, since densely populated Vietnam had expansionist ambitions and a need for more land (Shawcross, 2000). The only source of aid or financial backing Vietnam received was from the Soviet Union, and as a result Cambodia was little more than a poor Vietnamese state, embroiled in an ongoing civil war throughout the PRK occupation (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996; Shawcross, 2000). Needless to say, attaining justice for the crimes wrought by DK was not a priority for the PRK government. Though the PRK held a show trial *in absentia* for some of the perpetrators of DK's atrocities and the mass killings ended, impunity remained absolute (Shawcross, 2002).

With the changes brought forth both by the demise of the Cold War and shifting PRK politics, there was a real threat of the Khmer Rouge taking over again. With this realization, it became apparent that the international community had to answer some tough

questions in regards to Cambodia's instability. A proposal was put forth by an Australian foreign minister, which led to the Paris Peace Agreements in 1991, a UN peacekeeping force in Cambodia, and the 1993 general elections (Shawcross, 2000).

The UN peacekeeping force, or the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) aimed to promote national reconciliation for Cambodia through such measures as holding elections, repatriating refugees, and monitoring human rights. It was mandated to oversee the administration of the country and chair the Supreme National Council, on which would sit a representative from each of the four factions, including the Khmer Rouge (Shawcross, 2000). The inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in a process that was supposed to endorse and uphold human rights was a bitter irony of the UNTAC period (Kiernan, 1993; Shawcross, 2000, 2002). This decision was based in part on the reluctance of the West to get into a dispute with China or Thailand, and it was generally assumed that by taking part in the peace process, the Khmer Rouge would become marginalized by default.

The UNTAC period had some successes, notably the 1993 general election, establishing the Kingdom of Cambodia with King Norodom Sihanouk sitting as reigning monarch until 2004. Some very positive results of the period was a burgeoning civil society, evidenced in the form of NGO's and other independent groups, newspapers, and associations (Shawcross, 2000, pp. 400). The Khmer Rouge, as predicted, withdrew from the peace process, but then threatened villagers who registered to vote. Cambodia's infrastructure remained in ruins and the people desperately poor (Kiernan, 1993). There were some misgivings about the use of UN funds to fuel salaries and purchase vehicles rather than the goals the UN had set out for itself (Shawcross, 2000). The show of wealth created some tangible repercussions for Cambodians, including inflation in Phnom Penh

and surrounding areas, an increase in prostitution and rising HIV/AIDS cases (Shawcross, 2000).

UNTAC offered an opportunity for Cambodia to bring accountability to Cambodian governance and politics, a point that many Cambodians saw as the main purpose of the UNTAC period. However, the principal activity from the UN perspective was the 1993 election (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996; Shawcross, 2002). Corruption remained widespread in Cambodian government, and internal power struggles and external alliances have perpetuated tension, instability and violence (Shawcross, 2002). In 1994, the government released a decree that government employees, soldiers and police could not be arrested without permission from the local minister, which was rarely allowed (Shawcross, 2002).

In 1996 the Cambodian government granted amnesty to some of the leaders of the Khmer Rouge, an act that elicited no response from the international community (Shawcross, 2000). Many former leaders began to deny that they had ever been involved. There was renewed violence in 1997 and 1998 as the Khmer Rouge became entangled in negotiations with rivaling political parties. Tensions rose, culminating in violence in which Hun Sen emerged as Prime Minister of Cambodia (Chan, 2003; Shawcross, 2000). The Khmer Rouge guerilla movement finally collapsed after Pol Pot's death in 1998, but the other leaders have remained in Cambodia- often much better off than the population they once subjugated (Shawcross, 2000; Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004). While many reports have been written by the UN and various human rights organizations about ongoing violence and impunity, little has been done and impunity for crimes remain the norm (Shawcross, 2002, pp. 45).

In 2003 the General Assembly passed a resolution granting the UN the authority to assist Cambodia in setting up and running two Extraordinary Chambers, a Trial Court and Supreme Court within the existing Cambodian justice system. The tribunal has been predicted to last three years from the time it begins, cost about 40 million USD and indict between 5-10 former Khmer Rouge leaders who are deemed most responsible for the genocide in the seventies. By ratifying this agreement, the UN would cooperate with Cambodia in establishing the framework for a criminal tribunal aimed at trying top perpetrators of the DK regime. Though it has been argued that there had been many attempts by "human rights specialists, legal scholars, academics, students and Cambodians in exile to seek accountability" for the crimes perpetrated under DK rule (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004, pp. 70), these are the most concrete plans for justice that Cambodia has seen to date.

The current political situation is still rooted in three major factors in Cambodia's past; the legacy of the Khmer Rouge, the Cold War climate in which the demise of the DK regime was played out, and the twelve year Vietnamese occupation that replaced the Khmer Rouge (Gottesman, 2003). The current situation in Cambodia is better than it has been since 1970, but violence and insecurity are still a part of daily life for Cambodians, a fact that continues to have an affect on Cambodians who may have fled the country years ago, but where their relatives and memories still reside.

Situating the Memory and Experience of Violence

The nuances, contradictions, and terror of life under these circumstances and its actual impact are lost in the often detached and euphemistic tones of historical texts. Most texts depicting political violence focus on the actions of states, rather than the actions and opinions of the people affected by state decisions. What is prioritized and legitimated in

historical records is not the same as what becomes a priority when people are faced with impossible situations, and their choices and the factors and circumstances that influence those choices are often overlooked. This lack of emphasis has the effect of discounting the emotions, strengths, courage and choices that many must revisit for the rest of their lives. If, as Connerton argues, “collective identity is represented by and told in a master narrative”, and the “past becomes a kind of collective autobiography” (Connerton, 1989, pp. 70), how does it affect one’s identity and sense of self when the master narrative doesn’t include the pieces that many people or families consider an integral part of their autobiography?

The experiences that people suffered under during the 1970’s continue to affect the personal lives of Cambodians and their families (Ledgerwood, 2002). After more than a decade conducting research on Cambodia and diaspora groups, Judy Ledgerwood writes, “Until very recently the KR were not a lingering ghost of the DK time but a living resistance movement that still held territory and thousands of people under its control” (Ledgerwood, 2002, pp. 1). Ledgerwood believes that the death of Pol Pot in 1998 has brought “some finality” to the end of the DK period, however, I question whether or not without substantial changes in the governance of the country, “some finality” will be enough. In a regime where once even a child could, and was encouraged to, betray its parents to the regime, re-building requires a considerable show of accountability to eradicate the ongoing nature of impunity and corruption in Cambodian politics before it is possible to move forward once more. In his essay on state partition and terror in Sri Lanka, Daniel points out that yesterday’s terrorist could be tomorrow’s Prime Minister (Daniel, 1996). In Cambodia, it is general knowledge that yesterday’s terrorists still occupy this place of power.

Methods in an Imagined Cambodia

It is hard to say when my interest in the topic of violence began, or when it merged with my interest in Cambodia itself. Certainly I can look back at films I saw or books I read that piqued my interest and informed me of the history and tragedy of the region. Or, I can point to trips I took to Southeast Asia as a traveller, and the jolt and allure I felt at seeing the streets, country-sides, buildings or monuments that I had previously only read about, all aligned in one place in surreal familiarity. But as much as I enjoyed these experiences, it was in Cambodia more than other places I had been to that I was struck with how much the books I had read had left out. Nothing had impressed on me the beautiful yet scrubbed landscape of sugar palms and red soil that was Cambodia, the pungent vinegary tang that hung in the air, or the enquiring smiles of the '*moto*' drivers that ruled the streets and beckoned from their cycles.

The inability to convey everything as it is experienced is, and will always be a restraint and limitation of writing or of any form of representation. However, in Cambodia it seemed there was something vital missing out of all the books and films I had tried to absorb. Cambodia was more than the 'Killing Fields', more than a country of genocide and a land of temples. While the legacy of the past remains a fundamental aspect of Cambodian identity, the books and media sources I had access to essentialized this piece of history, creating a polarised Cambodian identity that was either a glorified past of the Angkor period, or the savagery of the genocide. This had neglected to bring into view the more complex reality of daily life, as any Cambodian would probably recognise it. It was sometime after this that I began cultivating a desire to study Cambodia, but it remained dormant and undeveloped.

Years later, during the summer of 2003, I went to a Human Rights Watch film festival in New York City. All films had a 'Question and Answer' period that followed the film presentations, and the questions tended to indicate a certain amount of general knowledge in the audience about the situation portrayed or the history of the specified region. However, despite the standing-room-only audience in attendance of at a film about a young survivor of the Cambodian genocide, the questions posed about the Cambodian film and its protagonist were much more general, and sometimes quite misguided. There was an energy and intensity in the audience, stronger than idle curiosity, to understand what *exactly* had happened in Cambodia.

This re-fuelled my latent interest, and when I started my master's a few months later, I had committed to pursuing a study of Cambodia and its legacy of violence. But, how I would narrow down such a huge topic still eluded me. In February of that year, Youk Chhang, the director of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam), a Cambodian NGO, visited Concordia University shortly after the announcement of the UN's involvement in Cambodia. Youk's discussion focused on the organisation's potential contribution to a tribunal and also drew upon his own experiences. While he spoke of the ongoing challenges for Cambodians living both at home and abroad, he mentioned the prevalence of former Khmer Rouge cadres within the Cambodian population in Vancouver, BC. I thought this sounded intriguing, and when the talk was over I rushed down to the stage to introduce myself and discuss my interest in doing research with Cambodians. By the beginning of the following week, Youk had provided me with contact information for Cambodians living in BC's Lower Mainland, and with contact information for researchers in other disciplines who were studying Cambodia in some capacity. The

next few weeks became a struggle to contain my interests, my excitement and all of my sudden options.

The first contact I made in Vancouver was with a Cambodian woman named Chanlina, who e-mailed me some initial information on the Cambodian population living in the lower mainland, and introduced me (via e-mail) to Dara. Dara, now in her sixties, ran the Cambodian Family Support and Integration Centre, and was the leader of the Cambodian community⁵ in the Vancouver area. Over the next few months, we exchanged e-mails and eventually began talking by phone. I asked questions about the size and demographics of the group in Vancouver, and the kind of activities they took part in. Both women were genuine and earnest in their attempts to relay information to me, but I was often confused at the vague answers I received.

When I arrived in Vancouver to begin my fieldwork, I discovered that the ongoing struggles of negotiating Cambodian identity amid sometimes hostile countrymen/women and a large Asian population set within a Canadian landscape, combined with living in many of the far-flung towns and suburbs that make up the lower mainland made regular public meetings difficult for Cambodians, and therefore nearly impossible for me. The people that I conducted fieldwork with often lived hours apart, and though many commuted into Vancouver for work, many of them did not, consequently there was no central gathering spot. The pressures and time constraints of commuting, working, family responsibilities and leisure pursuits were a fact of life for most of the people I spoke to, and if these didn't already made it difficult to actively participate in a Cambodian community life, then the politics of being Cambodian did.

⁵ The use of 'community' was used consistently by the people who participated in this project to refer to the people under Dara's leadership and sometimes, Vancouver Cambodians at large.

My initial experience in the field went well, and I was soon satisfied that I had managed at least an adequate start for my research and began to ask for more contacts. But as I entered my second month of fieldwork, instead of my contacts and involvement increasing, in fact my involvement was decreasing, and more gravely, I began to suspect that people were being asked not to talk to me. That there might be rumours circulating about my activities and that people might be being intimidated from being interviewed with me was a possibility that I hadn't thought of once I had decided to conduct my project in BC. Though I never found out whether or not this was completely true, what was true is that all appointments were broken for some reason, and meetings unmade. Unsure of how to respond to this unexpected turn of events, I became very despondent.

Though I didn't realize it at the time, I had hit on an issue that is at the heart of studies of conflict and violence, of refugee studies, as well as my own methodological crisis. Establishing a basis of trust and rapport is of extreme importance for anyone who works with those who have been traumatized or displaced. As people who were once denied control over their lives, they have no intention of allowing that to happen again. Though I was probably not viewed as a threat; my open questions, inability to speak Khmer and relative youth combined to make my position among them questionable. This was further confused by my efforts at participant observation. Since I had already met with Dara, my attempts to speak to other people individually may have been viewed as undermining her authority and knowledge of the group.

Though the people in this study are now all Canadian citizens, what that means in accordance to law, citizenship and rights; and what it means to live life according to your own 'cultural lens' becomes skewed and distorted not only through the loss and rupture of violence, but through the not-here-not-there liminal position of displacement. Though

they were not, and do not identify as being refugees, they also do not consider themselves “real” Canadians. Daniel’s definition of refugee-ness as a ‘crisis of trust’ rather than a geographic and political term became very relevant, since the reality and presence of fear in their lives became evident. It was a combination of this crisis of trust and their liminal Cambodian-Canadian identity that I soon had to negotiate.

The Southeast Asian concept of ‘face’- in which communication is performed in an ‘indirect’ manner, so that comments and questions were posed in a way that always left the person with a way ‘out’- was one I had grown used to negotiating in my previous experience studying and travelling in Thailand and Southeast Asia. Hinton has examined this concept in much more detail, describing it as “an integral element of Cambodian culture that reflects person’s position in relation to others” (Hinton, 1998). Since Cambodian society is hierarchical, “relationships...are structured vertically in terms of power, status or patronage” (Hinton, 1998, pp. 98). Factors that determine a person’s status include age, gender, social class, birth order, education, occupation, personal character, and generosity (Hinton, 1998, pp. 98). In accordance to this sense of order, one must respect, honour and obey social superiors.

This notion of ‘face’ is very important to Cambodians’ sense of self, and is carefully protected (Hinton, 1998). It is representative of one’s place in the social order, and is predicated on the extent to which others respect, honour and obey you (Hinton, 1998, pp. 101). The way a person is evaluated by others directly influences their sense of self, so that being polite is not just necessary but expected. ‘Face’ varies according to the social situation, and the extent to which one need worry about avoiding shame, or ‘losing face’ depends upon who is present, their knowledge of those present and the social distance between them, and the type of social situation involved (Hinton, 1998, pp. 102). By

enabling interactions to flow in a smooth and harmonious manner, the orderly performance of social roles and norms of etiquette helps Cambodians protect the face of others who in turn protect their own: or mutual face-saving (Hinton, 1998, pp. 103). Since one can lose face both by one's own performance and by one's treatment by others, this dimension adds predictability to social encounters- the knowledge that others will usually avoid any actions or words that might make one lose face.

While I hadn't forgotten the importance of 'face' or 'saving face', I had ignored it, since I was conducting my research 'at home' with 'citizens,' most who had been living in Canada for more than two decades. I guess I should have known better: Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) article on the changing contours and growing overlap of fieldwork and globalization had been class reading for me for years; and Appaduri's deterritorialized ethnoscaples (1996) was a key part of my research proposal. But the people I met 'in the field' were so much *like me* despite variations in background, skin colour and life experience, the situation truly seemed to call for a 'western style' approach. However, it was a style that, for all practical purposes of gaining trust, establishing relationships and learning about the predicament of Vancouver's Cambodians, failed miserably.

As fieldwork is the defining feature of anthropological investigation, the opportunity to do 'real' fieldwork was one I had long looked forward to, but I soon found my fieldwork experience disappearing into near non-existence. While I kept up an effort to make new contacts or meet with the people I already knew, I found my efforts evaded and had to reconcile myself with what had become the reality of the project that I had looked forward to for so long. Self-doubt nagged at me, and I wondered if I would even have to admit defeat and switch topics. Finding myself unable to either participate or observe the members of the group I had chosen to study, and with no venues to further explore, I

couldn't see that I was doing anything at all. At times I would run a budget in my head and contemplate packing it all in and flying to Cambodia after all, but would quickly admonish myself for even having the thought- after all, I *knew* it wasn't as if there was *more* 'culture' elsewhere. I believed there must be a way to make it work where I was- but then I had to confront the possibility that the people I had intended to study might not want to be studied anymore. If I believed, and I did, that the interests of the group being studied must be prioritised, maybe I had to let this project go.

In a last-ditch effort to make contact before giving up, I began drafting a letter, outlining all my concerns and the intents for my research project, trying to make clear that if there was some aspect of the project that was unappealing or offensive I was willing to alter it. I spent more than a week editing and refining this letter, until finally one Sunday night I e-mailed it off to several members of the group I had met. Sitting back that evening, I thought that that would probably be my last interaction with them. However, the next day I checked my e-mail to find, to my utter surprise, a response from one of the women, and the next day came another. A week later, I was making my way to Dara's house to conduct my first interview with her and with Chanlina.

The difficulty I experienced getting 'in' to the field became a learning experience and my interview with Dara became pivotal to my research project. This interview separated my fieldwork into two parts, and became a tool through which I recognised how important her role was within the group, but also how important the group was to her decision-making power. As an unknown person approaching the members of the group and asking to talk about painful memories and their current legacies, whether or not I could be entrusted with their pain and stories was very much in question. Perhaps deciding my wishes to talk to the group about the violence too ambitious for me, Dara chose to avoid

me, rather than assist me. By sending out my e-mail plea to several members of the group, I believe that I facilitated discussion among them, and the desire of some members to speak out was communicated to Dara without anyone losing face. Dara responded by inviting me to her house to do the first interview with me; followed by Chanlina and then members of both families, and then the interviews began to spread further and further away from Dara. This also demonstrated clearly that fear is and remains a part of their life, and the people under Dara's leadership are there by choice for the protection and direction she is able to provide.

I did eventually develop rapport and a favourable reputation with the group, and despite the difficulties 'getting in' there was a great deal of efforts made to accommodate me. The interview, with its elements of speaking out, being recorded, and signing papers (albeit confidentiality forms) developed into an event that was formal and politicized, and not everyone was comfortable with this. Instead, I was sometimes invited to dinners in which I would listen to hours of stories about family, escape and loss. I took part in discussions that compared the Vancouver 'community' and other Cambodian diaspora groups, and would sometimes receive phone calls and chat for an hour about various issues related to 'being Cambodian'. In another approach, one person chose to refer me to a book, which was written by a relative who had also escaped from Cambodia, rather than tell me the details about life in Cambodia and the conditions that led them to Canada. After I had read it, we discussed the aspects of the book that were felt to be most relevant, and those that were experienced differently than the book's author.

By the time I finished fieldwork, I had more people who wanted to be interviewed than I had time to do. In total, I managed to collect 23 formal interviews, which were semi-structured and open, allowing the interviewee to elaborate as much or as little as they

chose. Questions were deliberately framed in the present tense, so that the interviewee would not be obliged to go over the past if they did not choose to. The exception to this was my two initial opening questions, which were, “tell me about your life before the ‘communist time’”, and “how did you come to live in Canada?” I had anticipated that this section would be passed over quite quickly, but instead became a long process. The actual questions I asked were fluid and adapted in response to the answers I received; however they followed a general pattern of 1.) Personal information 2.) Cultural practice in Canada 3.) Home and adaptation 4.) Opinions of the proposed Khmer Rouge tribunal 5.) Any additional comments.

The dynamic between the Cambodians and myself was different than the ‘traditional’ relationship that is often referred to in articles about anthropological fieldwork and methodology. I was not researching a group whose power was economically, socially and politically more fragile than my own. In fact, the people I did research with did not need me for anything and I sometimes felt they saw my position not as a ‘Researcher’, but as a ‘student needing help with homework’ whose questions they would answer before sending me home with a good meal and a bus ticket.

Moreover, I am not speaking for the members of this group or anyone else. The people I met are not ‘voiceless’ and are more than capable for speaking up for themselves, and several have already chosen to in other venues. The research question that this thesis explores is one I have grappled with for a long time, and had this been their project; the structure, central question and interpretations would be very different. At the same time, there was an appreciation for my interest in their country and in their lives, a respect for my perseverance, my previous travels to Cambodia, and my attempts at Khmer dancing. People consistently went out of their way to pick me up from skytrain stations or bus

stops, and food was always prepared for my visits. It was in the first formal interview I did with Dara that I realized the full weight of responsibility that I had asked for, and the amount of trust that they were placing in me.

This responsibility has been for me, at times overwhelming, and I must admit I collected much more than I had intended. The dilemma of how to write about violence- even ‘just’ the memories of violence- became an ethical issue for me. I felt caught between voicing their stories in their entirety and wanting to edit out the most violent segments so that they were not sensationalized and possibly overshadow the strength of the choices they made. My head nodded up and down as I found myself in mutual bewilderment with Suarez-Orozco and Robben when they questioned Elie Wiesel’s argument that:

“The truth of Auschwitz remains hidden in its ashes. Only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions can never do so” (Wiesel, 1990. pp. 166, in Suarez-Orozco and Robben, 2000, pp. 7).

What does this mean? Does this mean it is better- more ethical- more just- to leave the kind of inquiry that probes into people’s worst memories to those who have some kind of ownership- and therefore claim- to such memories? As Ruth Behar questions, “Are there limits- of respect, piety, pathos- that should not be crossed, even to leave a record? But if you can’t stop the horror, shouldn’t you at least document it?” (Behar, 1996, pp. 2).

Every interview that makes up this thesis was painful and emotional, and every interviewee broke down in tears at some point. Likewise, evenings of food and storytelling would also release a great deal of emotion and fervor, though through jokes and tactical interruptions it would not evoke quite the same kind of intensity. While I have used statistics, historical references, cultural analysis and comparative literature to build my argument, I wished to convey the emotional and cathartic release of the interviews and stories, which have also been a significant source of knowledge for me and remain a part

of daily life for them. Located somewhere between life history, storytelling and testimony, the transformative power that the emotions let loose taught me more than the words they used alone. For this reason, I have used a narrative tone to express the dynamic and vigorous lives of the people depicted, and also show that the effects of violence are long-term and incredibly complicated, without reducing the people telling these stories to 'victims', 'survivors', or any other single category.

I obviously have chosen to continue with this line of inquiry as best as I am able. The actions, responses and contradictions that arose offer an opportunity to view the perspective of these Cambodians as it pertains to their experiences of the genocide almost twenty-five years after the event. They reveal a diverse cross-section of thoughts and opinions of life after violence, the proposed tribunal and the possibility of 'justice'. While their stories make a case for the ongoing and long-term affects of violence told through lived experience, they provide a critical view into the ways in which people seek to understand and re-build order in their lives.

Chapter 3: Vancouver's Cambodians and Community Building

Queen Elizabeth Park in Vancouver sits on what once was a rock quarry used to build roads at the turn of the twentieth century. As the city developed, its location at approximately 500 feet above sea level made it a popular place for people to go enjoy the scenery. If you were to visit the summit now you'd find a sunken garden, a restaurant, an arboretum and a sheltered area that is often used by picnickers or other leisure-enthusiasts when the sky opens up to the familiar west-coast rain. It offers views of the city and suburbs, the North Shore Mountains, and the islands in the Strait of Georgia.

The broad vistas offered from this vantage spot lays out the equally broad distance between the cities and districts that are home to the people who made up my field. Vancouver, Richmond, Steveston, Port Moody, Langley, Surrey and Pitt Meadows all are home to Cambodians that have chosen to be affiliated with the 'Cambodian Family Support and Integration Center'. Dara is the leader of this group, and has held this position since 1996. She is the only person employed to work specifically on Cambodian issues on the lower mainland. Dara and several other Cambodians, who refer to themselves as 'Cambodian community workers' put in countless hours of volunteer 'community building'. In addition to devoting time to their careers and families, they provide information, referral and translation services to Cambodians in the sprawled region. This service, essential for many of the seniors, is provided with an underlying intent to rebuild and maintain a sense of unity and community between the sprawled members of a displaced society.

The Cambodian community workers share the workload by taking on different responsibilities. In addition to her leadership role, Dara is responsible for seniors, and the

rest of the volunteers divide their roles by culture, women, archives, the radio program, and youth. The group organizes two bi-annual meetings each year, which is attended by between 20- 40 people, quarterly meetings with the volunteers, and other gatherings, such as the picnic I was to attend on this day, and the Cambodian New Year celebration. The announcement in December 1993 of the UN's official involvement in the creation of a criminal tribunal for Cambodia has shifted one of the primary foci of the community workers to include the dissemination of information and events related to attaining peace in Cambodia. The community for whom they work for consists of any Cambodian person who chooses to be involved in these events, but these are statistically few, and many members of the community participate infrequently or marginally.

The members of this Cambodian group were almost exclusively among the middle to upper class in Cambodia prior to the communist take-over in 1975. Prior to 1975, Cambodia was, and in fact still is, a predominately rural, agricultural society whose primary social group is the family (Frieson, 1993). This group however, had been city dwellers, and all of the people I spoke with had been or were going to be university educated, often overseas. They were, or were likely to become wealthy, urban, educated professionals. In Canada, they hold professional jobs and have attained a comfortable standard of living and are not marginal either socially or economically. Many still practice Theravadan Buddhism, outlawed by the Khmer Rouge but once again the official religion of Cambodia. Born into middle to upper class families and educated in cities in Cambodia and abroad, during the communist regime they also made up part of the main group targeted by Khmer Rouge's genocidal regime.

I had come to Queen Elizabeth Park for a community picnic that Dara had invited me to. It would be my first time meeting Dara and Chanlina in person, and an opportunity

to meet some of the community members that were part of this group. I had spoken with both women several times by phone before leaving Montréal, and on our last conversation Chanlina had warned me that response from the community to my project was not good, that people were still afraid of talking and being exposed. I pondered this as I made my way by bus to the park, since it seemed strange to me that here in Vancouver they could still feel fear for a regime whose time has long since past.

As it turned out, getting invited to the picnic was one thing, knowing where to find them in a park of more than thirty acres was another. When asked for more specific information about where they would meet, Dara responded simply that she would be in the park at 10am that Saturday morning, rain or shine. As it turned out, the morning in question was grey and hazy, and much cooler than the week had been. I walked to the peak of the mountain, and as I worked my way down I began my search, in a city with about a quarter of a million people of Asian origin, looking for who could be a group of Cambodians having a picnic. I tried to reassure myself that feeling completely self-conscious in a place where I should feel comfort and familiarity was a sure sign that 'anthropological fieldwork' must be going well.

It took over an hour and many humbling moments spent walking up to groups of people inquiring "Dara? Are you Dara?" to dozens of pairs of raised eyebrows and blank-faced stares before I spotted several men sitting in a tight squat with a group of people sitting under a tree near the duck pond. Many of the older women in the group were in folding chairs, while other people were assembled in twos and threes around the circumference of a blanket upon which there were many plates and bowls full of food. Walking up to them, I asked a teenage girl on the edge of the group if Dara was there. The girl balked, and became red-faced and shy at being singled out by a stranger and she shook

her head at the ground. Confused, I asked again, addressing the group at large. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a woman on my left get up and hurry around the people sitting down to my side. "Trina?" she asked, extending her hand. "Yes!" I replied the relief evident in my voice as I reached out my own hand to shake hers. "I am Chanlina," the woman told me. "That is Dara, sitting over there."

Dara was seated in a chair under a tree, from where she smiled her hello and introduced me to the people near us, before she pointed out each type of food on the blanket before us and encouraged me to try each dish. I took a small helping of the dishes closest to me, taking in my surroundings as much as I could while making conversation with a man sitting near me. There were about twenty people there, mostly families. Directly across from me, sitting on chairs on the other side of the blanket, were three senior women, with their hair cropped close to the scalp in traditional Cambodian style (Criddle and Mam, 1987). They spoke in low tones to each other and chewed betel nut, a mild narcotic very common in Southeast Asia, which stained their lips and teeth red. Dara and I spoke little, though she continually urged me to try each dish.

By the time we finished eating, a few people were looking at the darkening sky, and began gathering up their things to leave. As we packed up, I asked when the group would be meeting next. A few possible gatherings some time in the future were referred to vaguely, though Chanlina promised to keep me informed of any gatherings or events in the future. I said my goodbyes and began walking back to the bus stop. I lowered my head and quickened my pace, as the rain began, hoping to make it to the shelter before I was soaked. I was almost at the street entrance of the park, when a car pulled up on my right side. I looked over and saw Dara leaning across her husband Ary, offering me a ride

downtown after they had taken the two senior women home. Happy to get out of the rain, I opened the back door and got in as the older women moved over with surprising agility.

As we drove to Burnaby and then to Surrey to drop the women off at home, Dara, Ary and the two women kept up a constant conversation in Khmer, as I listened and exchanged smiles with the women beside me. Once they were dropped off, Dara told me a bit more about these women and their lives here- what part of Cambodia they originated from, how many people from their families died during the communist time, and what family they have left. Dara spoke with sadness and informality as she tried to convey how hard life remained for them. “You have to very careful, the way you talk to them. You can’t talk to them like you talk to other people,” she said, alluding to their altered mental state and ongoing nightmares, as well as their loss of place in a hierarchical society that places high value and esteem on elders and many children and grandchildren (Criddle and Mam, 1987).

During the hour-long drive from Surrey to downtown Vancouver, where Dara and Ary were going to broadcast the weekly Cambodian Voice radio program that relayed information on Cambodian news and politics in Khmer language, Dara pointed out various points of interest along the way. Among them was the center where they hold their bi-annual community meetings, other parks where they have had picnics, and a hall they once reserved for the Cambodian New Year celebration, which has remained an important traditional holiday for most Cambodians in the diaspora. As we got closer to downtown, she pointed out her office, where we would meet a few days later.

A Community Without A Center

Because the history of Cambodia over the last century has been tumultuous, knowing how to refer to the country or its people can be confusing. Using the guidelines

laid out by the members of this group, the word 'Cambodian' will refer to all people who live or used to live in Cambodia, regardless of ethnicity. 'Khmer' is an ethnic group; however it is sometimes used interchangeably with the word 'Cambodian' to refer to a person from Cambodia. 'Khmer' is also used in reference to the official language (Chan, 2003). This has a completely different meaning from the 'Khmer Rouge', which was the term used to refer to the communist soldiers of Democratic Kampuchea. While the country's name is still pronounced 'Kampuchea' to many of Vancouver's Cambodians, its official name has gone through multiple changes even within my lifetime. For reasons of brevity and clarity, I will refer to this country from here on as Cambodia, unless specifically referring to a name change or government.

The country of Cambodia today is a small country in Southeast Asia, bordered by Vietnam to the West, Laos to the north, Thailand to the east and the Gulf of Thailand to the south. While Vietnam has been influenced by Chinese culture; Cambodia, Thailand and Burma all have strong cultural ties to Hindu religious practices, mythology, language, dance and music (Chandler, 1992; Chan, 2003, pp. 2). Over the centuries, these Indian influences have become blended with the local culture in their own distinct forms (Chan, 2003; Chandler, 1992). A well-known example of this fusion of Indian and Cambodian structure are beautifully exemplified in the temples found in the jungles of Cambodia, particularly those that surround the Siem Reap region, that reflect Indian cosmology and Cambodian mythology in their architecture and base reliefs.

The wall of Dara's office, from the desk and up to the ceiling was papered with maps and pictures and photos of Cambodian temples, reliefs, and seniors dressed in traditional costume. Sitting in her office beneath these pictorial reminders of her country of birth, we discussed many of her chief concerns as community leader, including

maintaining the integrity of the Cambodian family with children who were born and raised in Canada, the absence of a community center or Cambodian pagoda for people to gather in, and the constant scourge of any not-for-profit community organization, i.e. the need for fundraising.

Dara's position of leadership has much in common with Judy Ledgerwood's analysis of contemporary decision-making in Cambodian villages, in which she found that despite massive change in recent decades, some elements of local-level leadership still have much in common with pre-war Cambodian society (Ledgerwood, 2002). This is based largely around the patron-client relationships that characterize much of Southeast Asian societies. Patronage is based on socio-economic status and influence, in which the patron offers protection or benefits to those of lower status, in exchange for general support or personal services (Ledgerwood, 2002). While in some South and Southeast Asian societies this relationship is particularly rigid and hierarchical, in Cambodia it is less so. Instead, patron power in Cambodia is flexible and constantly in flux (Ledgerwood, 2002). One's position is related to social status, which is based in part on education and skilled work such as teaching or healthcare and in part on moral authority and the amount of protection the patron can provide (Ledgerwood, 2002). This creates bonds based on moral responsibilities rather than economic exchanges (Ledgerwood, 2002)

In Cambodia, while kinship structure is the foundation on which Cambodian society and interpersonal relationships are based, it is highly preferable to have a patron, better known in Cambodian society as "someone behind" (Ledgerwood, 2002, pp. 144). These patronage ties are not placed in opposition to kinship ties; instead they combine to form a vital relationship that creates a stronger sense of unity and sense of place within social networks (Ledgerwood, 2002).

Dara had studied History at the University of Phnom Penh before going to work as a professor at a high school under the colonial system. Her husband, Ary, had studied abroad, receiving his M.D. at the Université de Montréal and McGill University, before eventually opening a clinic in Phnom Penh. Though they had relatives in Quebec, they took the opportunity to settle in Alberta so that their children could be educated in English; a language they believed would open up more opportunities for them. Once there, Dara was offered a sewing job in a factory, and soon after was asked to act as an interpreter and eventually to speak at local universities about her experiences in Cambodia. When she moved to Vancouver from Alberta, she saw one of the Cambodian community workers on TV. After calling the number provided, she began volunteering for the community, which led to the job she now holds. Dara explained:

“Then it happened, [it] come to that job that I work right now? They have two previous men that working. First one, [he lasted] about ten month, [and the] second one, about ten month. Something is not going right, so that's why it come to me. And when my supervisor ask me, [Dara], you want to do it? I say if I do that, it look like in our culture look like you ... grab, you steal somebody's job. Even though they let that guy [quit]. Still, I had that feeling. So, after [waiting] two week or three week, I said, okay. I try to do that because I have a feeling that I like to work with people, I want to keep my culture, and I want to spread all my culture and everything so people here in the third country know that we exist! So that's why. I been working like that for- how many year now? 1996 until now is eight years”.

That Dara was able to hold a leadership position is something unusual, evidenced both by the way she told me the two previous leaders were men, and by the people I interviewed later in my fieldwork, who referred to her as “that woman leader” or as “the new woman leader.” Still, as Ledgerwood maintains, there is enough flexibility in the Cambodian hierarchical structure to allow Dara, especially with her authority, her education and status to hold this position.

Holding and maintaining leadership positions in Cambodian diaspora groups appeared to be tense and factionalized (Chan, 2003; McLellan, 1999). There was much strain in regards to Dara's position despite her success, a situation which seems to have some similarities with other Cambodian communities. In her research on the continuance of Buddhism among Toronto Cambodians, Janet McLellan found that "[e]xtreme political factionalism among Toronto Khmer and particular community leaders remains a major obstacle in the re-creation of a shared Buddhist identity" (McLellan, 1999, pp. 153). Though McLellan's purpose is specifically to examine the role of Buddhism in diaspora groups, it can also be argued, especially given the role Buddhism plays in all aspects of everyday life in Cambodia, that this factionalism has an affect on the ability of Cambodians in re-building shared practices. Both McLellan and Chan have found that the ongoing affects of violence, and the relatively few numbers of Cambodians whose education or religious status have traditionally placed them in leadership positions has weakened many Cambodian groups.

"Cambodian community networks and relationships are weak because of past experiences of mistrust, miscommunication and power conflicts. Cambodians remain suspicious and critical of those aspiring to, or already in positions of authority. The competition for the status of leadership highlights numerous divisions based on class, religious, political and generational differences. This fracturing within the Khmer community is compounded by severe scarcity of individuals who are recognized as leaders. Given the dimension of trauma experienced by Cambodian refugees, the enormous challenges they face in adapting to Canada and their overwhelming need to reestablish family networks, Cambodians have little time or energy left to rebuild their community and the effort to do so remains a formidable obstacle (McLellan, 1999, pp. 142).

While re-establishing their identity and cultural practices after violence is a tremendous task for any displaced group, there have been some allegations that this is particular difficulty for Cambodian groups. Janet McLellan has found that among several Buddhist groups in the Toronto area, it is the Cambodian groups who tend to have the

most hardships in re-creating cultural practices after resettlement. She attributes this hardship to two principal and overlapping factors; the “absence of a strong societal infrastructure within the Cambodian community from which cultural and religious bonds could be re-established and the extensive physical and mental health debilitation caused by violence” (McLellan, 1999, pp. 134). Because only those skilled or educated Cambodians who successfully concealed their former identities were spared, there were few left to act as ‘cultural brokers’ in resettlement countries. Without the presence of such people, McLellan believes Cambodians would have been even more in need (McLellan, 1999). This is not to say that other forms of assistance is not needed and welcomed; when discussing the difficulties he had at first adapting to life in Canada, Chhay told me “[t]he community help a lot after re-settlement. Not only Cambodian community but immigrant community. Help with language, job, family disputes. Not enough, but they do what they can.” Still, McLellan believes that the preservation of Buddhism and Buddhist ties to the homeland can play a strong role in helping Cambodian refugees to cope with the trauma of violence and loss because of genocide.

“Buddhism plays a role in reaffirming, maintaining and recreating ethnocultural identity. For refugees especially, Buddhist belief and practice have supported strong mental health mechanisms to cope with the difficulties of migration and resettlement and ‘survivorship syndrome’. Continuities and transformations of Asian Buddhist identities and institutions in Toronto reflect prevailing social contexts of mainstream tolerance- or intolerance- regarding ethnic or religious diversity” (McLellan, 1999, pp. 3).

There were several remarks lamenting the lack of a religious building to bring Cambodians together. Chanlina felt this was an important practice to help her get over the past, and since there is no centre in Vancouver, often travels to take part in religious ceremonies elsewhere. As for Neara, her feelings about Buddhism are not as strong as Chanlina’s, yet she still acknowledges its importance. As she explained to me:

“It doesn’t always matter if it’s true, but it helps to believe something. You need something to help your mind. ... Most people in Cambodia feel like that. Religion can help part of it. You still take medicine, but like you still have to do some religion. Both help together.”

Buddhism heavily influences Cambodian society and values, which was originally spread by India in the 7th or 8th century (Chandler, 1992). While Mahayana Buddhism came out of India to Cambodia, at the height of Angkor’s power during the 13th century there was a shift to Theravadan Buddhism, which remains an importance aspect of Cambodian identity (Chandler, 1992). The lack of a center or temple specifically for Cambodians is a major source of contention for this group in the Lower Mainland and an obstacle in building a sense of community. While there are many Buddhist temples, churches or community halls for other Asian groups, no such structure exists for Cambodians. In Cambodian society the Buddhist temple has historically been a large part of everyday life, second only to the importance of the family, and the building itself plays a significant role in education, healthcare, and social services (McLellan, 1999). While in Western society the temple in this sense cannot be maintained in the same manner and has been adapted to better suit Canadian policies and norms, the lack of any structure means that Cambodians in the lower mainland neither have a place to worship or one where they can gather together as a group.

In Vancouver, the community workers have managed on a number of occasions to procure funding for a community center, but efforts to establish one had been obstructed. Many people suggested that other Cambodians had felt too intimidated to go to the proposed temple because of threats conveyed through rumors and gossip, and for that reason the idea had to be given up. When I asked other Cambodians about the difficulty of establishing a Cambodian community center in Vancouver, one person claimed the proposed site had been vandalized and burned. Regardless of whether or not these events

actually occurred or who may have carried out these threats is irrelevant, since it was without doubt that the Cambodians I spoke to could readily believe that these threats could be true.

While we talked in her office, Dara would pause to take deep breaths, pulling her shoulders up towards her ears and pressing the palms of her hands together and squeezing them between her knees. She would make very little eye contact with me, and it often appeared that she was close to tears. She told me how hard it was to build the Cambodian community in Vancouver. People were reluctant to get involved and to come to events, because, she thought, they were still afraid. Because of the high percentage of people resident in the British Columbian Lower Mainland who had been a part of the former Khmer Rouge cadres, she claimed, the prospect of gathering in groups that would make their background explicit had become a potentially volatile event.

There are deep divisions among the Cambodian people in the region. According to the 2001 Canada Census survey (Statistics Canada, Ottawa) there are about 28,460 immigrants originating from Southeast Asia living in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, and 1,170 Cambodians registered under 'Ethnic Origins for Census Divisions' put out by the same source⁶. The GVRD does not include all the areas in which the people who participated in this study live, so Dara's estimate that about 2000 Cambodians are living in the lower mainland is likely correct.

The Ethnic Origins statistics provides a breakdown of the total number by gender, but it stops there. Nowhere can you find information concerning the numbers of people who were part of the former Khmer Rouge cadres, whose numbers are reputed to be high. While similar claims have been made to me in regards to Cambodian populations in

Montréal and Toronto, these other Canadian-based groups have managed to have some kind of Cambodian center or temple. There is a sense of invisibility of this group within the background of the west-coast landscape; a sense of being there, but not being seen. The effort and clashes of Cambodians who build their cultural and national communities proceeds, but it is imperceptible to almost everyone but them.

The Edges Within

Of the 2000 people of Cambodian origin in the Lower Mainland, there are perhaps fifteen extended families under Dara's leadership. Through interviews and casual conversations with Cambodians I met through my fieldwork, I learned that divisions were made not only between former Khmer Rouge and non-Khmer Rouge, but also along class lines and ethnic lines. Towards the end of my field period with this group, I became aware of other Cambodian groups living under the radar on the Lower Mainland. From what I construed through conversations with people in Dara's group, these 'other groups' consisted of Cambodians who had lived in rural areas of Cambodia prior to 1975, and who had failed to achieve the same kind socio-economic status and level of integration in Canada that this group had. Since this was due in part to access to education, 'rural-ness' also refers to another division based on education, or class.

Though the meanings given to these divisions fluctuated between each person, ethnic divisions seem to be based less on intolerance than they were a means by which Cambodian identity was asserted. Rather than verbalizing who they were and what their claim to status was, they drew upon ethnicity or country of origin as one of the primary means to assert who they were. The fiercest divisions were maintained towards those of

⁶<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/highlight/ETO/Table1.cfm?Lang=E&T=501&GV=2&GID=933>

Chinese or of Vietnamese origin. This became an issue when in one instance I referred to somebody as being 'Cambodian-Chinese', and was quickly interrupted. It was explained to me that no such a person existed. If a person had Chinese ancestry, they would be 'Chinese-Cambodian', not the other way around. This claim was then supported with a history of migration and the ancient development of the Khmer state. On another occasion, I asked a woman if she had eaten in the Cambodian restaurant we were driving past. "Where," she asked? "In that Cambodian restaurant, right there", I had replied, pointing behind me through the car window. Looking over her shoulder and then in her rear-view mirror, she said, "Oh, that place. That's not a Cambodian restaurant." I looked back at the sign advertising Cambodian food, confused. "The people there, they are Vietnamese, they have just learned to speak Cambodian, that's all".

Who was and who was not Cambodian was an issue of much negotiation. According to Steven Heder and Judy Ledgerwood, this archetype of 'Khmer-ness' is consistent with theoretical models based on "ideals of common descent, and a sense of self in relation to other competing groups in the context of specific circumstances" (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996, pp. 21). Heder and Ledgerwood elaborate that ethnicity is based first on a group that shares some common features, such as language or religion. These features must also motivate identification with and loyalty to an agreed-upon concept of common ancestry. Finally, these identifying features become apparent when they are situated in a particular social context and are positioned in contrast to others around them (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996, pp. 20).

The most common response to my queries as to the difference between Cambodians and people from other Southeast Asian countries was to reference differentiations in cultural practices, language and beliefs. Sometimes this would also

generate a discussion of historical tensions that would further distinguish the differences that are perceived to exist between the groups. Similar to what Heder and Ledgerwood have asserted, these differences seem to have become a means by which many Cambodians assert their identity within a Canadian context that has a large Asian population, and in which Cambodians are largely invisible.

Some members of this group would position themselves as not being Vietnamese or Chinese, as not rural, not poor, and not uneducated which would imply that others were. It was much easier to assert what or who they were not, which was especially the case in regards to being Chinese or Vietnamese. Not all discussions of who could be a 'Cambodian' were based on ethnicity, but were instead often expressed in terms of a set of common values, morals and language. This positioning is adaptive and responsive to internal divisions and external stimuli. Much as Heder and Ledgerwood have found in their research on Cambodian identity:

"This kind of identification, which contrasts self with others, can be strategic, shifting temporally and according to circumstances. The supposed 'givens' that make the world understandable and places people in relation to one another are never static. 'Cambodian culture' and 'Khmer traditions' are labels, the meaning of which shifts over time and in different contexts (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996, pp. 20).

Since boundaries were constructed and re-constructed to articulate who and what they were, divisions within the group were not limited to the ones I have outlined. Instead, they were ever-changing and constantly in flux.

Bridging Gaps and Building Walls

Distinctions between ethnic groups were maintained while simultaneously there was significant effort to bridge these gaps. While the community workers would strive to build solidarity between the various factions, assertions of self made by group members and the

community workers themselves would simultaneously reaffirm these categories and maintain differences. The community workers also spoke about the difficulties of 'building community' in Vancouver, and drew comparisons to other Cambodian groups in cities where some had visited or had family, and explained that they believed participation by the Cambodian community was stronger and more inclusive elsewhere than Vancouver.

Among the people I interviewed, almost all believed that the reason for this difference was a result of the high percentage of people who were former Khmer Rouge living in the lower mainland. It was felt that the presence of Khmer Rouge in the region reduced their ability to be an active community with more Cambodians participating. As one person explained, "Those people- you cannot believe- they wouldn't [let you be] and would just fight for power. It's so hard." The Khmer Rouge presence was believed to create hostility and distrust between people, and to perpetuate rumors and gossip that would intimidate other Cambodians.

"As I said, a big part of the people here are Khmer Rouge. Maybe they don't feel like working with us or something. I don't know because I don't talk to them. But that's what I see. I don't understand them. I try to get people to work together but they never allow it. Even the Canadian people try to get us to get together but it didn't work. We try to arrange some meeting and they never come. That's why we don't have a temple because if we do have one, we fight all the time. So I'd rather not."

The difficulty of building and maintaining a Cambodian community in Vancouver weighs heavily on those who would like to have a more visible and functional group. Despite the challenges they face, Dara and Ary have found that by maintaining a radio program that can keep people informed even if it is difficult to gather together. The radio program is believed to be a success because it disseminates information regardless of their difficulties or dispersal.

"So people know what's happened and what's wrong. Because [if someone] had news from Cambodia, what's happening there, right? So that news,

nobody know here. So, when they listen to the radio, they can say 'Oh yeah.' So if something happen over there we know that too, right? ... Well, some people, like the old, old people, they still want to know what happens over there. It's important, what happen over there. What happen to my country there, even they live here. Some still have relatives there too, so they want to know. And they still want to keep their culture."

The dynamics of the people who comprise the Cambodian population in Vancouver complicate the prospects for gathering and being the kind of group the community workers aspire to build. This is further complicated by the broad dispersal of Cambodians sprawled across the lower mainland. One person said, "It's good to have Cambodian people community. We can be strong together. It would be better than one here, one there, right? So it's good, yes." Yet the difficulty of building and sustaining a cohesive Cambodian group presents never-ending challenges and often proves to be an unsatisfactory undertaking. As one community worker expressed:

"We try, we try so hard to get all together. First we think about what we can do to help the community, we try to get all the people that we already have from before to join us, we ask them to the meeting to ask what do they have in mind? What do you want to do to support your group or can we come all together at one point? What should we do? What should we do to get all together? To have only one Cambodian-Canadian group in Vancouver? They not even show up. And we try and we try so many times, and then we kind of give up. .. I don't know. I'm not really sure. What I thought is that maybe they scared of us, but I don't really know. This is what's happened to Cambodian people. It's always rumors. It doesn't matter what happen. They not investigate. When they hear the rumor, something bad about one person, they keep going on from person to person."

Despite this, life in a foreign country does allow them flexibility to participate in activities and enjoy many aspects of their lives in addition to living life as 'a Cambodian'. Neara was the only Cambodian that I spoke to who did not come to Canada as a refugee in the eighties. Instead, in the 1990's she married a French national who lives in Vancouver, and immigrated to Canada after their wedding. When I questioned her on the differences between living in Canada and in Cambodia, she joked that "at least now I have

a chance of finding out what is happening with Cambodia and the politics!" She has found that living in Canada gave her a break from the daily struggle and can enjoy life and focus on a future for her daughter. She explained that "I like to live here because I can get a good education for my girl. She has a better chance. And this country has peace and health, education and you don't have to worry about all the other things. You just go to work! Have friends."

Since my central question deals with how this group 'moved on' after violence, the time I spent with them was when they were gathered together, and the questions I asked of them during interviews dealt with their Cambodian identity. Notwithstanding the frequent telephone calls between individuals and the regular radio broadcast, there were sometimes weeks between group gatherings. The people in this group held professional jobs, worked with other Canadians from the region, had non-Cambodian friends and pursued leisure activities. Often, the tasks of parenting, employment and recreation were enough to fill their time, and they had very little left over to spend contemplating Cambodian identity. As one woman said, "Sometimes we contact together, sometimes not. Sometimes I too busy and stuff is happening so I don't go to meet. Because sometime one year or six months go by and then I meet." This thesis will present just a segment of their lives which is related to their negotiation of Cambodian identity in Vancouver, and how they cope with 'moving on' after the dangers of their past. Despite their immeasurable successes and their integration into Canadian society, their Cambodian identity remains in many ways a fundamental aspect of their identity, which must be constantly negotiated in a Western context.

What little knowledge many Westerners have of recent Cambodian history is based on the 1984 film, 'The Killing Fields'. Throughout my fieldwork, countless parallels were

drawn to this film, whose depiction of the Khmer Rouge predations is thought to be quite an accurate portrayal of their experiences. In one interview, a woman leaned towards me, asking, "You have seen that movie?" Without waiting for a reply, she continued, "That just one story, it just a *little* bit. Just a little bit. It's a hard little, but we more than that. Ten times. More than ten!" The film offered comfort because it presented a general and accessible portrayal of what they had been through, but it neglected what they were still going through. As is the case with many 'survivor accounts', the story usually ends with the protagonists' arrival in a third country (Chan, 2003; Shawcross, 2000).

Chapter 4: Of Trust and Betrayal

“We had constant fear. Each one of us had fear. I believe that it not just me; it was everyone in the country too. I know that they came in [to Canada] with that kind of fear. Every time you go to the bank or the store it the same, you have no trust. Because of the killing, because of the violence, because of that fear that you take within yourself. Every time that you go somewhere, you don't have trust.” -Kiri

On a Sunday afternoon late in the summer I was invited to go to Dara's house to discuss ways that the community workers might be able to get more Cambodians to fill out statements for a Cambodian-based NGO in the case of a trial for the Khmer Rouge. In addition, I had arranged to conduct an interview with Dara and with Chanlina. This would be the first time I had seen them in a couple of months, and I was feeling quite anxious. I knew I wasn't the only one, since when we had last spoken, Dara had commented with a nervous chuckle, “I think I am ready for that. If you are ready for that, I am ready for that”.

It was late morning when I stood in front of the King George skytrain station, curling my hands into fists and thrusting them deeper into the pockets of my jacket, in a vain attempt to keep warm. As each car drove past, I tried to see through the glare of the cool late-summer sun bouncing off the windshield, worried I wouldn't recognize her sitting behind the wheel.

At last a dark blue SUV pulled up in front of me, and I saw a petite woman peering at me, with probably the same expression I wore as I glowered into each passing car. Walking towards it, I pulled open the passenger side door. “Chanlina,” I inquired? Her clouded expression instantly cleared as she recognized me, and she burst into a wide-open grin. “Hello! Yes, get in!” she replied. “I was worried I wouldn't recognize you either!” I

climbed into the vehicle, and we drove away from the train station and toward the highway that would lead us to Dara's house.

As we drive on, we chatted easily, and our conversation eventually shifted to recent events in Cambodia, and the possibility of a tribunal. Soon, she began talking about her own experiences. She told me how in 1979 she and her remaining family members escaped Cambodia into Thailand, only to be forced back later at gunpoint by Thai officials. The story was particularly tragic, since she and her family had not only survived the communist regime, but had risked death to escape the country after the Vietnamese takeover. They thought they were safe in a refugee camp in Thailand, but without enough funds coming in from other countries to support the refugee influx, Thai officials had forced between 42,000 and 45,000 refugees (Chan, 2003; Gottesman, 2003; Shawcross, 1984) back into Cambodia in a remote, mountainous area inundated with landmines and Khmer Rouge guerrillas. She had been eight months pregnant at this time, and had to survive living in the jungle without food. Eventually other family members risked their lives to finally get them out and into Canada by hand-delivering letters at night in areas mined with explosives and controlled by bandits, providing them with the addresses of relatives overseas. As she spoke, her voice took on an automated quality as she relived the experiences, and tears began sliding down her face. When she got to the end of her story, she glanced over at me. "Sorry," she said. "I always cry. I cry too much."

The forced return in June 1979 of thousands of Cambodians who thought they had reached the safety of the Thai camps is remembered with horror in all the accounts of Cambodians who brought this point up. In a later interview, Nhean described in angry detail the morning they were loaded into busses under the pretence of moving to another camp. Instead, they were transported to the Northwestern border region of Thailand and

Cambodia. The region is extremely mountainous, with steep cliff-faced Dangrek Mountains that jut down into the Cambodian side of the border. The jungle at the base of the mountains was where the stronghold of the remaining Khmer Rouge cadres was located, and this border area was heavily protected with landmines. It was here that they were forced down the mountain at gunpoint. While he talked, his voice dropped down an octave, and became monotone and distant.

“One day, Thai decide not to keep us in their land anymore. So they just took us back to the border of Cambodia/Thailand. At that time, American consulate, they know the Thai going to do like that. So they went to grab the people they already interviewed [and passed]. Luckily my older in-laws, they got in with the American consulate before. But for us, we just stayed there for another week, because we inside the temple, and a lot of people outside the temple. What the Thai showed us they going to do, they just took all the people outside and put in the bus and dump at border of Cambodia/Thailand. So, those people when they got to the border and decide to go down, to the Cambodian side, it's a lot of mine over there. They just step on a mine and they just die, we don't know how many people. The reason I say that because we are the last one. We try to grab and to stay, not let them put in the bus, but we cannot do that, because they just point a machine gun at us and then we don't have no choice. We had to get into the bus and just go along with it. It took almost one overnight from where we stay and to the border. On the road I believe the Thai people they know that all of us are going to go back and we might step on a land mine or this or that or we will die. They know that because they [see] it before. The Khmer communists, they put mines all along the border, everyone know that. So they ... feel sad. They give some rice, give us some fruit when the bus stop for the fuel. So they know and we can tell that these people know that we just go to die. Everywhere that the bus stops, all the soldier are with the machine gun, so we ... got to stay in the bus. We cannot do anything like that. By the time we got into the border of Cambodia/Thailand it was around, I would say, four o'clock in the morning. It still dark, and they just drop everybody down, and push them to the jungle.”

His voice changed at this point, rising considerably to what was almost an indignant shout.

He continued:

“On top of that, we have all Thai soldier ask for money and whatever we have, they will grab it. Doesn't matter what, because they know that we going to die. So that's what they do. So anyway, everybody just stand there. We don't want to move again. And me and my wife, we just stand close to each other and then [all the people there get] all together. One of the young

girls.... just stand close to me. I don't know her but she kind of like, lost, or something. Then the Thai soldier keep saying 'just go, go, go, go!' in the Thai language. And then, everybody just crying and don't want to move down, so he just shoot the gun at the girl. I can see the eye just popping out from her head and she just fell down and die. Just like very, very, very close to me. And he just keep the machine gun, he keep shooting! So I just grab my wife hand. We are so scared, we just drop down to the mountain. The Thai border and the Cambodian border, it's a mountain. This is on the Thai side, up on top of the mountain, and downside is Cambodian side. Very steep. So anyway, we just don't know. We go maybe 50 feet down because we are so scared of machine gun. When we are going down, we see a lot of old people or young people, they cannot move. They just sit there and pray, or say help me, help because nobody can help. Nobody. I mean, you had to do it yourself. If you cannot do it, you just sit there and wait for god. That's all you can do. And then everybody, like, this is the jungle! There's nobody there before! There are a lot of people all over the place, no place to sleep. So, we just like, okay, whatever we can do we do. You know? Like, sit down and sleep until the sun rise again. Also we saw a lot of people die. All die. It's all over the place. This is, I would say, about 500 – 700 meter trip down. It took one day – all day- to get down. And at that time my wife; she was about 7-8 months pregnant with my baby. We don't have no food, nothing to eat. It just... we don't have nothing. Finally we got past the land mine, and we just keep walking in the jungle. It's nothing there. Just grab whatever you can see, like okay, this tree look like it okay to eat. We just eat it, it doesn't matter, because we are hungry, right? We don't have nothing to eat, and we might know this one is okay, it's not poisonous or anything like that. We just grab it and ate it. That's why we survive."

In their book about the Cambodian experience, Joan Criddle and Teeda Butt Mam recounted the official Thai explanation given for this action, rather than repatriating the Cambodians through the more accessible southern region:

"They reasoned if they sent us back there, we would just cross back in, not solving the refugee problem. If returned in the north, we would be forced into the interior of the country. Perhaps many would then stay in Cambodia, or would take longer to get back in. By then, other nations would have offered aid to better handle the influx." (Criddle and Mam, 1987, pp. 259).

The sense of betrayal that was conveyed as Nhean told his account of this experience was very strong. Denied the most basic of human rights by the communist regime in their own country, they were forgotten or simply too insignificant for the most powerful countries in the world to fund, so they were almost sent to their deaths by the

country they had turned to for refuge, whose soldiers robbed them first. This event was described as being harder and crueler than the actual genocide or the forced removal from their home, because now they “had no illusions to sustain us” (Criddle and Mam, 1987, pp. 258).

Turning the discussion away from this event as we continued on our journey to Dara’s house, Chanlina shifted the topic to a humorous account of her arrival in Canada in 1979. After their forced return to Cambodia, Chanlina and her husband were forced to part with their family members so she could find somewhere to give birth. This was traumatic since family was all that remained to them now, but it was the only practical decision, since any other course of action had a higher chance of resulting in being caught and dying, or being trapped in the country again.

Three months later, the two and their infant daughter received a letter from her sister hand-delivered by a smuggler, giving them the addresses of family members in other countries. Soon after, they made their way to the border again. The first time, this arduous trip took them three months walking through dense jungle and being threatened by armed bandits. This time, they bribed an army truck driver with gold retrieved from a mass grave, and made it to the border in two days. “We got there before everybody else, who had gone on ahead. Isn’t that crazy?” Continuing, she told me how she, her husband and daughter arrived in Montréal in the middle of winter. She had become very suspicious of everyone and every situation, so even once she had boarded the plane she was waiting for something bad to happen. When the plane touched down in Montréal, she looked out the window at the frozen ground and the trees that had lost their leaves. “What’s this place?” she had asked shrilly of her husband. “Where have they sent us? Everything here

is dead! What kind of a place is this?" She laughed now at the recollection of her reaction to a Quebec winter, "I had never seen anything like it".

After about 45 minutes, we arrived in front of Dara's house. As Chanlina parked, she noticed a persimmon tree with the still-yellow fruit hanging from its branches. "Look at that, I bet we can eat those. That's what's different between Canadians and Cambodians. Canadians will just go past all the food in front of them and buy things at the store. But Cambodians, we will eat whatever grows." As we slammed the doors of the truck shut, the front door opened, and Dara's husband Ary stood there smiling at us. Chanlina walked toward him, speaking in Khmer and indicating towards the tree. He answered back, and she began inspecting the fruit, finding that they could be pulled from the vine with only a slight tug. "See? We can eat these. We don't need to wait for them to fall on the ground." Chanlina grinned at both of us. She darted into the house just ahead of us, her hands clutching the fruit to her body. She slipped out of her shoes quickly and easily, and she went upstairs, while Ary disappeared into a room on the first floor. I lagged behind, leaning up against a wall to untie my shoes before removing them, and then I followed them to the upper floor.

As I climbed the stairs, I noticed the large paintings that were along the stairwell. They each depicted a scene from Cambodian life; tending rice fields, Apsara dancing girls, and the Angkor temples. Dara was standing to the right of the stairs, just inside the kitchen. She had her back to us and was speaking quickly into the phone in Khmer. I followed Chanlina to the left, away from Dara and into the living room. I sat in a chair while Chanlina sat on the couch and began pulling papers out of her bag. The papers contained news and updates that were sent out by NGO's inside Cambodia. She spread them out on the coffee table, so that the headline of each was visible, before picking one

up and reading it over. Looking over at me, she motioned her head towards Dara, who was still talking on the phone. Chanlina explained that news of setbacks in the peace process upset her, so she sometimes wouldn't read the e-mails that came through from the NGO's. "That's what they are talking about on the phone now. She doesn't like to hear it, to be reminded of all the problems. It's too many disappointments. You know?" I nodded my head, but was surprised to hear this, since Dara always appeared to me to be so strong, and an ardent force in the struggles for Cambodian causes.

When Dara finished on the phone, she came into the living room, saying hello to both of us. She went to the other side of the room, and sat on the vacant couch opposite me. Chanlina moved to sit on the floor, and I did the same, stretching my legs out in front of me. Looking over the papers spread out between us, she spoke of the phone conversation she had just completed, in which a friend had phoned to inform her of some recent problems that had arisen in the plans for a tribunal in Cambodia. There was quibbling between Cambodia and the United Nations over the budget, and Cambodian officials had decided not to allow the UN to return to the country and assist in the logistics of planning a trial. Dara stared at the papers as she spoke, from time to time sighing deeply.

News of further setbacks in the progress of the tribunal cast a pall over the room, as both women, and Dara in particular, were deeply affected by news of events occurring in Cambodia. Based on observations throughout my fieldwork, reactions of sadness or dismay to news of setbacks or further violence in Cambodia were common. In her research with Cambodian groups in Toronto, Janet McLellan found that "[t]he constant military conflicts in Cambodia continue to trigger fears and memories of past horrors

among Toronto Khmer. Their burdens of grief and worry of loved ones still in Cambodia grow with every political incident (McLellan, 1999, pp. 158).

There was a concern that they may get their hopes up for more optimistic news, and then be let down. There was always that fear- that they could strive for an end to the government's corruption or for their relatives to live in peace and security, and then with one report they would be disappointed again. There seemed to be an underlying fear that Cambodia would never gain the legitimate international recognition they wanted and the government would continue to operate without accountability, and they and their family members would be exposed for their support for change.

After we spent some time discussing these recent developments, we shifted the conversation to the statements that were to be filled out for the Cambodian NGO. We considered holding a forum so that the forms could be filled out in a group and members could support one another, if necessary. The concern was that though some people would want to speak individually, not everybody would, so they felt compelled to do make both options available. The plan had some urgency to it, since a group of seniors were taking a return trip to Cambodia very soon, and it was hoped that they could take with them a stack of statements and deliver these to DC-Cam in person. It was essential that Dara agree with the arrangement, since as Chanlina explained, "I can't do it without her. The seniors and many of the Cambodian community, they don't trust me like they do her. I don't have her power"

When we had made arrangements for me to come over, we had decided that Chanlina would go first so she could go home again afterwards. Then I would interview Dara, who would then drive me back into Vancouver in the afternoon when she and Ary went to broadcast the radio program. Now, Dara announced, "I will go first, and talk for

forty-five minutes to an hour. Chanlina will help my husband with something downstairs,” she paused, giving Chanlina a meaningful look. “Then she will go. And she will speak for forty-five minutes to an hour. But first, we will all eat lunch.” She said this with such intensity there was no question that we would do exactly what she said, even though she had just completely changed our former plans. Chanlina and I burst out laughing, leaving Dara looking at us perplexed, but amused.

My Heart Beats Fast, Still

I walked into the kitchen, where several pots were simmering away. The smell was fantastic, and I realized how hungry I was. I wandered over to the opposite wall, where five large framed photographs were on display. Joining us from downstairs, Ary came over to me and explained that most of these were taken in the days just before the Communists had taken over the country. Three of them showed head and shoulder portraits of adults, one was of a youthful Dara holding a baby, her son, and the final one was a snapshot of Ary and his then-six year old daughter standing affectionately in a field, with Phnom Penh airport in the background. The first four photos were enlargements of what had been intended as passport photos, but the decision to escape had been made too late, and the family had ended up trapped in Cambodia.

The images and memories of a lost time and of a failed escape were a bit eerie as they cast their gaze out over the room from their place at the center. Yet their presence seemed also to provide surety that the memories these images evoked were once reality- an archival remnant to confirm that there was a time when a family lived in Cambodia, when fathers and daughters could pose carelessly for a photograph while out for the day with the family. But I questioned what other memories were being maintained by keeping these photos up. Why would they showcase them here? To show that something unexplainable

happened to sever these images from the lives they now live? Or are they reminders of the strength it took to make the attempt to flee? Do they suggest other possibilities of what could have been, if only they had made this choice sooner?

Despite my promise to refrain from asking questions about the past, comments and reminders of the past was a part of every get together. This time remains a source of pain and loss and is a focal point from which 'before' and 'after' are measured. However it is also a symbol of quiet dignity that they had made it through an unbearable time with their remaining relationships intact. But more so than sadness and dignity, there is a sense of obligation that surrounds this: as if by remembering they can preserve not just the memory or the people depicted in those memories, but their family and community as well. Pierre Nora has outlined similar conclusions in what he calls "duty memory", in which it becomes the responsibility of the individual to remember, "as if one's salvation ultimately depends on the repayment of an impossible debt" (Nora, 1985 in Behar, 1986, 112).

This duty that needed to be repaid seemed like a combined duty to remember Cambodian values and culture which could have been lost, and to live their lives well and with success. Like Barbara Myerhoff found during her research with Jewish seniors in California, there was not evidence of "crippling 'survivor's guilt'... [i]nstead it had served as a transformative agent that made it impossible for them to lead the unexamined life" (Myerhoff, 1979, pp. 24). The 'duty' the Vancouver Cambodians felt seemed like a duty to remember what life was like 'before', and with that information to *bear* witness. This was not so much an identity as it was an urge to action- to *do* something.

Behind every person's story was a range of choices made under the duress of uncertainty that had made it possible for him or her to reach this point. The photos on the wall that were taken once the choice to flee was made had been a monumental one for Ary

and Dara and their family, a plan that they were unable to attempt again for years. In order for people to leave their home and belongings behind, the factors that would compel people to leave would have to be unimaginable, and sometimes the choices they had to make to ensure their survival were extremely objectionable, or as Langer would call it, a "choiceless choice" (Langer, 1991, in Ledgerwood, 1998). Dara's husband, Ary, was a foreign trained doctor, and his clinic had been well known in Phnom Penh. His status and his reputation made him a particular target, even among a class of people who were already marked by the new regime. Both Dara and Ary had told me of a time when a man who had been their friend before DK came to Ary for help when his wife had complications while in labor. Ary explained it succinctly, saying he "had a lot of story there, because a lady need a midwife-man, and then they tried to kill me". Dara was more explicit in recalling the day her neighbor came over and asked that her husband risk his life by using his skills to save lives.

"I think one day my neighbor, she got pregnant and when she came time to give birth to her child, she couldn't. ... So, then he call my husband because ... my husband was a doctor. But we never tell anybody that he was a doctor, or I was a teacher, at all! So that young lady, she's about thirty years old and she's crying and she's calling me [Dara, Dara]! And she call my husband say, 'Help me! Help me!' So now it been three days and the men try to push her stomach, and the women try to pull it, on the bottom. And ... nobody can do anything and she said I'm going to die soon, so she called my husband, please come over and help me. ... So my husband say I'm sorry, I cannot do anything. So that's why [the woman], she died. She died with the baby inside."

Though Ary had to sacrifice his friend's wife, the incident drew attention to him, and he and his family were forced to flee by night to another part of Cambodia before the soldiers came for him. But even later, when the Vietnamese took over the country; exhibiting the kind of skill that Ary possessed put him and his family at risk. He told me how under the PRK he worked for a Vietnamese doctor. One day a young boy came in

with a lump on his abdomen. The doctor claimed it was cancer of the large intestine, but Ary insisted it was not. The doctor was going to put the boy through what Ary thought was unnecessary surgery, especially dangerous given that the country had no antiseptic or anesthesia. That night, Ary performed a procedure that cured the boy⁷, and when the Vietnamese doctor came in the next day, he accused Ary of being Khmer Serey⁸ and then said "That very good, very good. The tumor disappear, and now maybe you disappear too." Ary told me, "That's why I don't like to stay. So I begin to escape from Cambodia."

Cathy Caruth argues that through the examination of traumatic narrative, a crisis will be revealed. She questions, "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it? (Caruth, 1996, pp. 7). Survival is built on a foundation of dexterity and chance, of quickly adapting to unknowable circumstances. As Kolab explained of her experience during DK, "You know, in 1977 and 1978 I would say, 'Oh god, will I still be alive tomorrow or not?' I not go to sleep. I never know if I be alive tomorrow, but then I wake and I still alive, so I say 'Okay. One more day.'"

According to Caruth, when one's reality becomes so transformed that even taken for granted events cannot be guaranteed, it generates feelings of anxiety and uncertainty which she labels 'uncanny'. This can be characterized as not just a state of uncertainty, but one of disorganization or re-organization, resulting in sensation akin to anxiety when objects are somewhat familiar; yet somewhat threatening (Bleger, 1967, in Gampel, 2000, pp. 50).

"Those who experience such traumas are faced with an unbelievable and unreal reality that is incompatible with anything they knew previously. As a result, they can no longer fully believe what they see with their own eyes; they have difficulty in distinguishing between the unreal reality they have survived and the fears that spring from their own imagination" (Gampel, 2000, pp. 50).

⁷ He would not explain what he did in further detail.

⁸ Khmer '*Libre*' or Free Khmer was a general term given to independence groups, who in this case would threaten the Vietnamese government.

For the witness, violence transforms all that was 'real' into a state of ambiguity, which destroys what Robben refers to as basic trust. "The feeling of uncanniness overwhelms us when we are thrust into a fragmented, violent social context, one without any continuity and which transmits extremely paradoxical messages" (Robben, in Gampel, 2000, pp. 55). Acts that would once have been gestures of kindness and generosity became life threatening, and what might have once been seen as cowardly became acts of survival. What made this even more confusing and complicated was the arbitrary way in which violence or torture could be threatened and then withdrawn; when suddenly the person who, moments before, had posed as tormentor, could now be the person who saves you. "Even the positive surprises strengthened the overall sense of terror" (Shapiro-Phim, 2002, pp. 187). Often people were compelled to assert themselves in the face of what they were sure would be certain death. Dara told me of the time one of her former students, now a part of the Khmer Rouge cadres, recognized her in one of the labour camps.

"...Every night with the communists, we always have a fear because if they thought that you are a professional or educated people, they just want to kill you. So every night I always pray to god, I look at the door, if nobody come and knock the door. If someone come and knock the door, that mean you have to go. And when you go, you never come back. That because they kill you. They kill you like that. That's the communist regime. I be alive because I lie to them. One day, one of my student grade twelve, he and his family all been killed, only him alive. And somehow he's put himself in to become a Khmer Rouge too. He met me at the field, and he remember me ... so he asked me, ... "Are you a teacher or something?" And I say "No. No!" He say, "You were my teacher ... at the school." And I say "No, you wrong. I never go to school. I don't know how to read, I don't know how to write! I just am selling some small thing on the street!" And he followed me, and I [say] the same thing. [On] the second day I get home I told my husband, "Tonight if you don't see me come home that mean someone kill me". I told my husband like that. So, on the third day, he come and followed me again, and he ask me ... "I think you are a teacher. You were a teacher! Is that right? I still remember you voice, the way you walk, the way you talk. Except that you body is not you body anymore". And then I

know, I have no choice, so I know this guy smart. So before I die, I think that I better say something smart back to him. I say, "No, I was not your teacher, but sometime, your gifts come true, and your dream come true." I just said that. So he's gone. With the big, long gun, and he's gone. And the next day, he always throw me some small fish, some vegetable, to my face! And I say why? My husband say, why? I said I don't know now what happened, I don't know! He feed me for three months! He just throw things like that to my place and don't let anybody around to see him. Because he's not allowed to feed people. He's a Khmer Rouge, he's not allowed to feed anybody."

The confusion and disorientation that such arbitrary mercy would create in people already struggling to maintain some sense of order would make it even more difficult to believe what was happening around them and indeed would only heighten the atmosphere of terror. The constant change increased anxiety and made it impossible for people to trust in themselves, others, or that which they saw around them. "Daily routines and social conventions keep anxieties at bay and establish patterns of expectations that allow people to interact. These everyday practices serve also to renew basic trust" (Robben, 2000, pp. 74).

All the people I talked to share this general sense of confusion about the communist time, and would sometimes show me the scars that remain on their body, as if to prove to themselves as well as to me that these events actually occurred. This was the case when I met Kolab. When I went to her home to interview her, a very petite woman greeted me at the door, with hip-length hair twisted up into a bun on top of her head, wearing navy slacks with a matching long navy tunic. As she led me through her house, we maneuvered past many plants to her living room. While she continued to the kitchen to make tea, I took a seat to the left of a Buddhist shrine holding incense, a bowl of oranges and faded black and white photos of women and men.

Like many of the others I had spoken to, she had been middle class and had attended school before the communists closed the schools down. She was separated from

her family, and made to work long days in the rice paddies, where an older woman furtively took the time to show her the difference between rice plants and grass, a distinction that in all probability saved her life. After the Vietnamese invasion, she was able to get to the Kavidan refugee camp, but when she heard a rumor that her family might still be alive, she returned to Cambodia.

In 1982, she discovered that her mother was in Canada, a discovery made after her mother wrote to all her relatives in hopes that she would find her children. So Kolab made the trip once more to Thailand. Once at the border and past the landmines, bandits and animals in the jungle, she and other refugees kept a watchful eye for *nuna*, Thai border patrol who shot people who tried to cross the border. Smugglers on the Thai side would signal with a flashlight when no *nuna* were in sight, and while the barbed wire was held open the refugees would dash through. When she was taking her turn scrambling through the wire, the smugglers began to shout "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" before they dropped the barbed wire and ran away themselves. Kolab didn't notice the barbs gouging at the flesh on her back, as she pulled herself through the barrier and ran. Terrified, she was beyond feeling pain as she ran barefoot over broken bamboo shoots, and finally making it into the camp. It wasn't until later that she began to notice the pain, and discovered that she was covered in blood from the barbed wire that had gashed her back, and from the bamboo that had sliced up her feet.

Turning around in her Vancouver apartment, she pulled up the back of her tunic to show me the deep scars across her back, and then slipped off her sandals to expose the soles of her feet, which must have been little more than shreds at the time. The scars look angry and deep, and pay their own testament to a silent past. While she gazed at her disfigured feet, Kolab remarked,

“I still think of that time. Oh yes, still. Sometimes I dream of it and when I wake up I disorient and I say ‘Where I am?’ And then I say ‘Oh, I in Canada, and I make a mistake.’ Okay, okay, okay. But my heart is so scared, it beat faster and faster. It beat fast still. But you see? Still! Still.”

At no time was I ever given the impression that making the decision to leave Cambodia had been spontaneous or unplanned. It was a choice that was usually made collectively in “family conferences” or through discussions with appointed “group leaders.” Deciding the best time to flee would also be negotiated, and factors as diverse as weather and potential provisions to the state of politics and international aid in each camp would be weighed. Though there were many reasons that pressed people to escape from Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge were defeated, the reason that was cited most often was the fear that the killing would happen again, and no one would intervene to stop it, again.

Back at the house, Dara waved me away from the wall of photos and over to the table, so I sat down while bowls of food were laid out. Meanwhile, Chanlina had washed and cut up the persimmons and placed them on a small plate, adding this to the rest of the food. Picking up a segment and popping it in her mouth, she said to all of us, “Try, try.” We each ate a piece, assessing its taste. It was not quite ripe, and a bit bitter, but refreshing. “See?” she said. “I told you they were good enough to eat.”

Personified Histories

When I was with members of the Cambodian group and I would explain that I was interested in understanding the aftermath of genocide, I repeatedly received the same reaction. Regardless of the situation, each person I spoke to told me with an air of authority that I had found the right person, that they held the true story of what happened there, and only they could explain to me with absolute accuracy what had happened. *They* were there. *They* knew. As Chan has remarked in regards to his research with Cambodian

refugee groups in the US, "They are not sources but persons who no longer need to look to scholars to tell them in what ways their lives are significant" (Chan, 2003, xiv). Despite all that had been written in books and articles about Cambodian history and politics, it went without saying among Cambodians themselves that this would not give a complete account of events, as they knew them. It also went without saying that what they knew was important. Kolab told me at the end of our interview that "It's important that you ask these questions, because the true story? Oh, very different."

It is a strange fact that those people who might be best able to illustrate what life under a violent totalitarian regime is like are most often not asked and are consistently left out of the dialogue. When a violent event gains media attention, it is the 'experts' who are called upon, not those who have felt the effects of violence within them. Victoria Sanford discusses the controversy after the publication of "I, Rigoberta Menchu". Rigoberta was a Quiche woman who wrote about her experiences during the war in Guatemala. Her story/testimony sparked debate over who had authority to speak publicly about events. Omitting this particular kind of first-hand knowledge/experience amounts to a forced process of forgetting, and certainly of silencing (Sanford, 2003).

"Rigoberta's book drew international attention to the plight of the Maya. In the midst of genocide in her country, she offered an alternate vision to the official version of a 'war on communism' and in so doing, firmly placed herself as an active subject directly challenging state violence. Through her self expression in her autobiography and her political action as a tireless speaker around the world, she put the Maya in general, and Maya women in particular, back into the historical narrative" (Sanford, 2003, pp. 51).

Like the refugee, the voice of witnesses to violence remains a much smaller part of the discourse and policies that also play a large role in people's lives. Sanford argues that "contrasting official discourses designed to silence dissent with the truth-telling discourses

of survivors...reveals truth-telling beyond the 'facts' of the events" (Sanford, 2003, pp. 181).

When Dara told me about how she began speaking in Alberta schools about her experiences, it was clear that this had been a difficult thing for her to do, not only because of the arduous topic, but also because of her discomfort as a new English speaker at that time. I questioned her on this point, curious to know why she would stand in front of many foreign students and try to explain such a personal experience of suffering in a language she barely knew. She explained that though it was always hard for her, it was important for her that people know what the Khmer Rouge did.

"I really like to tell them the truth- what happened to me. Because that is not history, that is mine! So I know. And I still alive. And people come to me because I still alive, and they believe me better than the book. When someone read a book it not the same as when you talk to people that been through it and still alive. I live in the history. I am the history."

Dara's personification of the history, her assertion that she embodies it and that she is still alive, illustrates and reinforces that Dara and the people in this group were explicit targets in the genocide, and through the memories of what they had witnessed, the past remains a part of the present for them still.

Like Das's poisonous knowledge, in which knowledge that is a result of experiencing or witnessing violence becomes a part of life for the person affected and therefore a part of the relationships people have with one another, these memories represent the presence of a past threat in a new environment, which creates a sense of imminent and possible danger. Though everyone I spoke to admitted to still feeling fear in their daily routines and still suffering from nightmares, paradoxically they also asserted that they were not afraid of being hurt here, since in Canada there were laws and rules guiding behavior. However, more tangible elements of the past remained also. When the

Vietnamese had taken control of Cambodia, Khmer Rouge soldiers also fled to the Thai refugee camps, and sometimes were relocated to the same third countries.

It has been mentioned already that a high percentage of the population of Vancouver's Cambodians are former Khmer Rouge. Their presence creates a potential threat, making the desire to speak out a possible risk. Outwardly, there is nothing to distinguish the perpetrators from the victims. I was repeatedly cautioned about pursuing this topic by many people, because my open-ended questions, I was told, were too political. When I asked one woman, "Why is it important that people understand what happened?" the woman I was interviewing recoiled, her spine stiffening. "Do you ask that to Cambodians?" she asked in a whisper with a shocked expression on her face. "Don't ask that question. You can't ask that. You have to be careful." She continued to whisper, but leaned forward across the couch, towards me. "You need to be more careful because many people are Khmer Rouge. You're lucky you met me, other people are Khmer Rouge leaders, and they wouldn't like you asking that question".

When I asked how it was possible to identify someone as being Khmer Rouge; a common response was "[i]f you are Cambodian, you know." The woman who reacted to my question explained:

"I have this feeling sometime when I meet some people. I just know. Cambodians know. I'm so angry, but I have to forgive them. Because- when I see them I remember the suffering way in my life. They Khmer Rouge. That's why they still alive. I know because of when [they] talk. I know because of the way they behave. [When they] discuss family background or life during the [communist time]".

Despite the threat that their mere presence poised and the mixed emotions that they would provoke, there was an understanding among other Cambodians that many former Khmer Rouge had been, like themselves, in impossible situations and trying to survive. Among the people I met and in some cases interviewed during fieldwork were people who

had been Khmer Rouge at one point in time, and I discovered there was diversity even within the Khmer Rouge population. Many of the soldiers were coerced into joining the cadres when they were quite young teenagers, and many had believed initially that they would be a strong nationalist group that would be good for Cambodia. Some joined the Khmer Rouge after the Vietnamese ended the DK regime, because while they abhorred the actions the Khmer Rouge took, they believed the Vietnamese were just as violent as the Khmer Rouge. There was no doubt that many of these men⁹ had experiences that were ultimately as tragic as any of the other Cambodians, and that they continued to suffer as a result of the memories of their participation in the cadres. However, many of these former Khmer Rouge were more aware about what they were getting involved with, and as demonstrated by the continuing inability to have a community centre, use tactics such as rumors and gossip to intimidate other Cambodians in Vancouver.

The differentiation between revenge and justice was expressed several times. Anger and resentment is reserved for the top leaders, while there was an understanding that many other ‘perpetrators’ were simply in an impossible position of trying to survive. While many expressed fear at having former Khmer Rouge cadres in their midst, they simultaneously feel that these lower-level cadres were not to blame. As Chanlina said in this regard during our interview, “When people have power they use it as a weapon, you cannot deny. But by living with them, you become one of them, which is even worse.”

The presence of Khmer Rouge in the Lower Mainland intrinsically entailed the possibility of accidentally meeting up with a person who might have participated in the murder of friends or family members. But, while Cambodians may claim to be able to sense who was and who was not Khmer Rouge, there was no way, unless you had watched

⁹ I did not knowingly meet any former Khmer Rouge women.

the event, of knowing who might be the person who killed your family members, or friends. This creates an element of the unknown, and like the unanswered question, conceals a threat that always hangs over the present, but can never be known for sure.

The Crooked Road

The presence of fear among this group was an aspect of life in Canada that I hadn't anticipated, not in the way it exists. This underlying fear shapes many of the things that the members of this group do and the legacy of this fear has manifested itself in the unfulfilled desire to gather together as a group, and the residual difficulty of expressing oneself freely. Like many (former) refugee groups who have to adopt strategic measures in order to ensure their survival, one of the few things that was affirmed in all of the interviews that I carried out was the need, in both past and present, to lie. During her research in Cambodia, Kate Frieson found that during DK, people were often forced to lie, either about themselves or others from their families or villages, in order to endure the incredible pressures and constraints that were placed on them (Frieson, 1993, pp. 55).

When I asked Kolab how she knew to lie to the Khmer Rouge, she explained,

"Because all my friends tell me don't say the truth, okay? Because they kill you. Sometimes if they don't like what you say they shoot you right in from of your eye. So, you have to change your life, your positions. You had to be a liar. Big liar. And then you still alive. If you not liar, you tell them truth, uh, oh. Easy answer. You die."

Corruption itself was understood to be a survival strategy, but there was a fine line between corruption for survival and corruption for greed. Neara explained that "Some corruption is just to survive, and some corruption to make men rich, with their big house and their cars." Like corruption, because lying became a survival strategy, it was important to know when to lie and what to lie about. On one occasion, a woman explained this

notion to me within what she said was to Cambodians a Buddhist concept of life, in which “Sometimes you have to walk on a crooked road if you are going to survive. You have to lie and be corrupt...but you only do it a little bit”.

To walk on a crooked road was to take a long way around what was being said or done, or to avoid telling the whole truth, in order to bypass any unseen dangers that might be present. In many ways, this crooked path is one that Cambodians continue to maneuver and negotiate as they determine their identity in Canada, and their identity as Cambodians. It is this same notion of side-stepping the truth that made the very first interview with Dara which I described at the outset of this thesis so emotional, since by agreeing to answer questions directly, each person would have very little leeway to maneuver.

Another way of looking at this is to conceive of truth as being fluid and contingent on who holds authority over the master narrative, or the dominant discourse. During the genocide, all Cambodians had been compelled to adapt quickly to the customs and practices that the Khmer Rouge advocated. Survival was based on a combination of luck and dexterity; people were forced to legitimate the new way of life by lying and living the lie, which effectively became the new truth since to contest it meant certain death. Chanlina explained that during the communist time, “You don’t talk too much. You have to be smart enough not to talk. You have to know the time to talk and play your role. And [you need] luck”.

While the genocide has officially been over since 1979, there has been little effort to convince Cambodians that they are free from the threat of violence. There has been no ritual, no closure, no event to provide emotional reassurance that the truth as they have experienced it can be safely told. The betrayal of trust leaves behind a legacy of broken

relationships and those who are outside of the community or kin group, and even sometimes these intimate associates are regarded with suspicion and mistrust. In Veena Das's research on displaced populations, she poses the question,

“How does one bear witness to the criminality of societal rule, which consigns the uniqueness of being to eternal forgetfulness? How does one not simply articulate loss through a dramatic gesture of defiance but learn to inhabit the world, or inhabit it again, in a gesture of mourning?” (Das, 2000, pp. 208).

Das's 'poisonous knowledge' is informed first by the witnessing of violence, but then remains a part of the daily life in the memories and nightmares for those who survive. Violence can create a rupture so great that returning to life, as it was known is impossible, and it becomes necessary to create new routines that comprise the everyday, and build the relationships in which one is situated. Memories of past violence and betrayals continue to evoke 'poisonous knowledge' that is inflicted upon witnesses of violence and makes it difficult to trust in new relationships.

Chapter 5: Displacement, Rupture and Longing

The ocean looms vast and deep, yet
people cross to the other shore.
My mother's goodness has no shore-
So vast and deep it cannot be crossed.

By Prof. Vannsak Keng

Translated by Carol A. Mortland, Ph.D, and Hay S. Meas, MD.

Three Hours to Cambodia

I was on the fourth bus I had ridden that morning, gazing northwesterly at the mountains I was so accustomed to seeing to the northeast. I was on my way to Dara's house again, but I now made a point of making my own way there, rather than be picked up each time. I yawned, and trying to resist the urge to close my eyes in case I missed my stop, I opened my bag and pulled out my field notebook. I knew that I couldn't really write on the bus without risking motion sickness, so I flipped through to my last entry from a few days earlier.

Dara had called me on my cell phone on Wednesday afternoon, inviting me to her house that Saturday for a 'surprise.' I had been at the beach when she had called. It was late November, but on that afternoon, the sun had been shining and the temperature had shot well into the twenties. I had grabbed my bike and high-tailed it for the beach, knowing that this could be my last time to sink my feet into the sand before they were buried in the boots and snow of Montréal. Sitting barefoot on a damp log, I had been writing in my field notebook when Dara called, so that my notes broke off suddenly and on a new line was written the date and time I was to arrive at Dara's, with 'surprise?' written beside it. I was trying to imagine what surprise Dara could have in store for me.

Stuffing the book back into my bag, I got off the bus at the next exchange, and waited for the fifth bus that would drop me, at last, in front of Dara's house. After a final

15-minutes of what had been a three-hour expedition, I could see the persimmon tree, now without its leaves, which was my landmark for ringing the bell and getting off the bus. I walked to the doorway and waited as someone came to answer my knock. I was greeted as usual by Ary, who was in the computer room with several other men on the main floor. He grinned widely and inquired about my journey as I took off my shoes, before going back into the computer room while I led myself upstairs. I could hear many different voices, and was intrigued to know who else was there.

Going to Dara's house made me feel sometimes like I had returned to Cambodia- making me wonder if it felt that way to me, what was this visit like for the others, who were *from* Cambodia and whose relationship to the land and the country was so much more intense, to go to Dara's house. In all the homes I visited I noticed they were filled with posters, photographs, sculptures, books, music and Buddhist shrines reminiscent of Cambodia- making it instantly apparent that this was the home of a Cambodian person. But at Dara's house, in addition to Cambodian artifacts she had managed to create a space for *being* Cambodian, to cook, to listen to news and music, to talk and to discuss the everyday negotiation of being Cambodian in Canada.

The posters, pictures and other art forms in Dara's house were not much different than the decorations that filled the houses of all the Cambodians who invited me to their homes. These artifacts: the pictures, paintings, sculptures, books and other material objects provided physical proof that this space was specifically the residence of a Cambodian person. But the physical objects in Dara's house, plus her position, and finally the ability for groups to gather there made a considerable difference compared to small gatherings I attended in other homes. This was in part due to her status and the protection she was able to provide. Dara's position has created a 'safe space' for displaying

Cambodian-ness; an identity that was once outlawed. The few gatherings I observed in other people's homes were quite reserved compared to the relative lack of restraint that I observed in the gatherings and interactions between people at Dara's house. It may be that the difference had been a response to my presence among them, however because of the role Dara plays as leader and because of some comments made to me in regard to her role, I believe that at least a large part of this difference is due to the perceived security that could be provided while in her space.

There was an atmosphere of pleasure when the women got together to cook that went beyond a sheer joy of the cooking itself. There was exhilaration in the way they talked, laughed and joked with each other in Khmer that was simultaneously matter-of-fact and joyful. It seemed that the women were able to return to a sense of 'before' by cooking together, a way they could re-connect with a way of being that was now past, and means by which they could behave in a manner that was explicitly 'Cambodian' without being obviously political. As they cooked, talked and laughed, they made silent reference to a nationalist identity and maintained a sense of continuity.

I expected, and kept looking for confirmation that the gender roles I observed among the Cambodians in Vancouver were an indication of some kind of subjugation, or at least an obstacle that needed to be overcome. While anthropology has looked at gender roles and the reasons these differences may be maintained in terms of inequitable access to power, privilege or resources (Mascia-Lees and Black, 2000), it seems that for this particular group of people, at this point in time, gender dynamics are not an issue in the regard that they are oppressive. Tried as I might to make sense of the gender roles I observed in this way, I had to admit that instead these roles were a source of comfort- a way of maintaining a sense of continuity and order that paid homage to the way things

were 'before', and in so doing, resisting the restrictions that Khmer Rouge had imposed on them.

During DK, gender roles, along with many of the other norms of Cambodian society, were overturned and outlawed, and both women and men were assigned the same type of work. In order to reduce any visible differences, everyone was forced to wear black, shapeless clothing resembling pajamas, and women cut their hair off to approximately the level of the ears, a practice which one woman described as humiliating. So while gender roles were clearly in place during my fieldwork, they appeared to me to be a way that people asserted themselves and their way of being in the world. The separation in roles were reified and preserved, but were also sunk into with something akin to gratitude, since they were another way of bridging the gulf between 'before' and 'after'.

Prior to DK, one of the roles women had in Cambodian society was to take care of the children and the family. In the book 'To Destroy You is No Loss', the author described a sentiment reminiscent of this when recounting the first day of the DK regime. On the morning the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh, the mother and sisters in the family coped with the stress of the unknown by cooking a big meal for the family, even using rations that had been carefully saved over five years of warfare (Criddle and Mam, 1987). Likewise in Vancouver, as the women prepared certain foods and cooked then served them, there was an elemental sense of comfort and togetherness as the women performed traditional gender roles by cooking food for the group. By using cooking as a tool to construct a sense of togetherness, they could assert a remembered past, a way of taking care of each other, and a set of common values and beliefs.

Gender roles were not the only aspect of Cambodian culture that were used to pay homage to the time 'before'. Also in place were the food, preparations and cooking, the

pictures and language, and the music. These things, combined with the safe atmosphere that could be provided under Dara's leadership created a space reminiscent of being in Cambodia. More than that though, cooking itself became a performative act that recalled a certain time and a certain representation of who cooks, what they cook, and how they prepare what they cook. Like the passport photos on the wall of the same room I was in now, the gathering of women to speak Khmer, to cook and to enjoy the food was an act that was distinctly Cambodian, preserving a sense of the past through images, sounds, taste and atmosphere.

Jackson (2002) has drawn analogies between the homes of the displaced and of 'memory museums', in which objects symbolic of the past are recovered from the homeland and become incorporated into everyday life. Svetlana Boym examines this notion in more detail in what she refers to as "diasporic intimacy" (Boym, 1998 in Jackson, 2002). The relationship between the domestic space and the people living in the homes takes on special meaning as these objects create an intimate link between the present lives of migrants and refugees and the past in everyday life. Within this context, food can be prepared and consumed with attention to detail, becoming not only a memory but an intimate performance of continuity.

Once upstairs, I walked into the kitchen, and quickly took count of the many women in the room as I walked first to Dara, my hands pressed together under my chin in traditional Cambodian greeting, or *samphea*. She put down the spoon she had been holding and turned toward me. "Hello, Trina!" she said with a smile as she returned the gesture. I opened my bag and pulled out a tupperware container, holding out the container of biscuits I had brought. Dara took them from me, and showed them to the other women, who all looked and exclaimed loudly about how amazing they looked, as pots simmered

and bubbled all around us. Contributing to the meal, and insisting on making my own way to our meetings instead of accepting offers of lifts allowed me to feel like more of an equal among them, instead of remaining in the childish-student role I had started out with. By bringing food I was also forging common ground. It gave us something else to talk about, so that our conversations could expand into a shared interest in food and not always be about their relationship with the past and politics.

Dara began introducing some of the other women in the room, and as I said hello to her second sister, Srey, I saw a flash of black hair move behind her, then Chanlina was upon me. "Helllooooooooo!!!" she exclaimed as she rushed at me with her arms out. I laughed at the display as I hugged her. "Hello yourself," I countered. I looked back at Srey, who was laughing also. She put her arm around a younger woman who was shushing a young boy beside her. "This is Veata, the daughter of Dara and my niece," she began. "We walk out of Cambodia together. When it was finally time to get out, we walk out, together."

Despite the level of economic and social competence they had achieved, it took very little time to realize the extent to which the past remained very close under the surface of their being, and was still a highly salient part of people's relationships here in Canada. Relationships were negotiated not only through ethnicity, education and gender, but also through the shared experience of trauma. When one person would introduce me to another with whom they had similar experiences during DK, this became incorporated into our introduction. In a similar way, I was told when they went to visit Cambodian communities in other cities; they would usually begin by talking about the past, which was a way to share an experience with someone who has also had this experience in the same context, but also to situate each other in terms of their suffering.

As we stood talking in the kitchen, I realized that though I was being introduced for the first time to many of the women in the room, they already knew who I was, and why I was there. The women (and the men downstairs) were the family and friends of Dara and Ary. They were all over for a day of eating and dancing, an event that Dara had planned, and the surprise that Dara had in store for me was that I was the featured guest.

When the food was finally prepared and it was time to eat, there wasn't enough room at the table for everyone to sit around it. Many of the women pulled chairs up against the wall, while some of the men stood against an adjacent wall, all eating with their plate in their hands. Ary sat at the head of the table, and I sat beside him, with Nhean, Chanlina's husband on my other side. Also at the table was Dara's older sister, another older woman and her husband; a man consistently referred to as 'the Doctor'. I found this interesting, given that Ary had an M.D., but did not have this label. What 'the Doctor's' credentials were I never found out, though I did discover that in addition to his education, he had been the leader of one of the Cambodian communities in Toronto. As we ate, the conversation revolved around current events in Cambodia and the politics of being Cambodian; such as community building, Khmer Rouge in Canada, and the tribunal. Though the conversation flowed very casually and naturally, I had the impression that this was not a conversation they would have had if I were not present; instead this was a lesson for my benefit.

The Big Scar

Analogies were made to other tragedies in the world where many people had died, but it was often stated that "Cambodia is different", or that "It's not the same for Cambodians". This difference seems to be based on two sets of ideas. One is an idealized

past that signifies not only what Cambodia is, but also who Cambodians are, and the other is the present lack of any legitimate punitive measures to make amends for the tragedy. Cambodia is remembered as being a beautiful country with a proud and ancient history. The break between this past and the present was referred to sometimes as 'the Big Scar'. The first time I heard its use was when the Doctor brought up the 'big scar' at dinner that night; but it was Chanlina who elaborated later, while several heads nodded as she spoke.

"[There is a] big scar since the Khmer Rouge. That part of my life is a scar. I always doubt in my mind, what would have happened if we don't have this communist time? We were doing so well, and all of a sudden we drop and we step back instead of step forward. This scar is for all the people in Cambodia that have lost whatever they had there. And, especially for the loss of hope."

'The Big Scar' signified the disjuncture between what had been, and what should be. One of the biggest losses was the loss of potential, or of what *ought* to have been. Seniors who had expected to live out the rest of their lives at the center of extended families instead now lived alone in rented housing in a foreign land, too afraid of strangers or haunted by nightmares to learn English. But for people who had been of university or high school age in the mid-seventies, their lives had been torn by the loss or rupture in their education. They have come to Canada as young adults, and lost the chance to go to school with friends and peers and build their lives in the way they had envisioned.

Chanlina had continued:

"Oh, [it's] a big scar. The loss of family and friends. You know, especially when I was still student. It was a very big impact. I was crying because I couldn't go to school anymore because I was just about to go to university. I was 18 in 1975. So I was just in the last year of college before university, it was a big thing. And then I had to just all of a sudden stop going to school. I was so disappointed. I was crying. But you couldn't even let them see you cry. I had to hide. Can't let them know you cry because you want to go to school. They destroy everything. And then they took my father away, and then we just expect that they kill him. How, we don't know. And that was a big scar that I regret to this day. Because, our success in life he wanted to see. He was very proud of us. Very proud."

The 'big scar' metaphor signifies the rupture or severe break in the flow of life in the aftermath of violence. Though the people who participated in this study are now Canadian citizens and have become homeowners, professionals and parents, there has still been so much lost that can never be recovered. Their displacement from their country of origin has lost for them the kind of shared understanding of people with similar backgrounds or experiences, people who know what has happened to them, since many of their neighbors and co-workers may have no idea of the past they carry with them from 'back home'. Of Cambodians who were not there during DK, the so-called 'first wave', they may understand the culture, but they may not be able to comprehend the extent of the suffering they experienced. While the 'first wave' Cambodians were able to assist in sponsoring family members and acting as 'cultural brokers' in the resettlement process, there was also resentment felt towards them since they could not understand the level of suffering those who were trapped in the country experienced. As Ary explained:

"The people, the Cambodians who left before the war, they don't know what the communist did. We lived in a holocaust place! For almost four years, and we know that. What I want is for other people to know that too. Don't follow a communist regime, I want them to know! ... I want everybody to know the special [circumstances] of Cambodia."

Now, they are unable teach their children through example in the same way they had been taught. This loss represents what they had taken for granted more than anything else; that they would have children who would live in Cambodia as they had, and that life would continue in much the same way as they had experienced in their childhood. There are also those who came to Canada as children and have grown up away from the countries of their birth. The transformations wrought on each Cambodian, first through violence and then through displacement, affect their relationships with their children, grandchildren, other Cambodians and non-Cambodians alike. On either side of the 'big scar' there exists a

'before' and 'after' that cannot connect with one another. While the acts of violence perpetrate a 'crisis of trust', the permanent displacement from one's country of origin and the inability to join together the severed ends of one's life is felt like an insult that continues to overrun principal moments in one's present life, and ensures its presence in the future. This ongoing insult must be suffered and endured, even as they begin to regain control over their lives.

The grief and suffering caused by this inability is articulated in Barbara Myerhoff's ethnography of an aging Jewish population in California in 'Number Our Days'. In it, she depicts an elderly Jewish man speaking with sadness at growing old in a place other than the town in which he was raised, and in which he presumed he would live out his life. This town, he explains, and its inhabitants, is

"...erased like a line of writing...no way back remains because there is nothing there, no continuation. Then life itself, what is its worth to us? Why have we bothered to live? All this is at an end. For myself, growing old would be altogether a different thing if that little town was there still. All is ended" (Myerhoff, 1979, pp.74).

This continuing insult imbues the present with nostalgia and serves as a reminder of all that they have lost, inscribed in the physical and visceral landscape all around them. Every reminder of their losses in their country of origin, or homeland, causes grief and regret. Often, a response to this grief and loss is to create the culture from their memories in the new place, creating linkages between the various sites they have inhabited, even as the memories of their homeland is mourned (Leonard, 2000; Malkki, 1997).

The displacement of people from their countries of origin to new countries, the rupture of the 'big scar' and ongoing insult creates confusion in the way they conceive of 'home'. While seeking to explore the cross-cultural meaning of 'home', Michael Jackson

found that the more he explored this topic, the more vague and obscure this notion became. He writes:

“Home is a double-barreled word. ... always lived as a relationship, a tension. ... Home may evoke security in one context, and seem confining in another. Our consciousness shifts continually between home and the world (Jackson, 1995, pp. 122, 123).

From this perspective, 'home' in the context of these Vancouver Cambodians can be understood as a tension between their memories of Cambodia, and the comfortable lives they have established in Canada. For some, the slack resides heavily on one side of this tension, while the other side remains taut and unyielding.

According to Valentine Daniel, a refugee or displaced person is also “decentered” (Daniel, 2002, pp. 283). He argues that “home in the case of displacement connotes something physical whereas in the case of decentering it connotes something psychological, moral, and even spiritual” (Daniel, 2002, pp. 283). Returning or re-creating ‘home’ may become more complicated in the case of decentering than in the case of displacement. Displacement, as Daniel argues, can be remedied in the physical sense, by returning to a physical place, as in repatriation. ‘Decentering’, on the other hand, is much more complicated because it requires maneuvering of a person’s way of being in the world in order to return to a moral or spiritual center. For many, this is ultimately an impossible task.

Jackson further complicates this idea in his findings that ‘home’, like ‘homeland’ often brings up memories and ideas of ‘home’ as a romantic land of harmony and togetherness, where certain values were upheld and social structures remained intact. Jackson further explains that, “the refugee is double-bound by impossible contradictions” because at the same time that home invokes a sense of contentment and nostalgia; it also invokes “images of terror and death” (Jackson, 2002, pp. 76). Re-gaining a sense of ‘home’

becomes, if not impossible, at least a negotiation between altering one's way of being in the world, and disregarding the contradictions between wanting to return to a place that is remembered with romance and nostalgia, and the knowledge that one can never go back.

When I asked these Cambodians where 'home' was for them, or how they perceived 'home', needless to say there was a wide range of answers. Inevitably, there would be explanations and refined definitions of what this term meant for them. Oftentimes, I found that regardless of where they claimed 'home' was for them now, they continued to refer to Cambodia as 'home' or 'back home' in our casual conversations. But for some, the meaning was concrete and clear. Kolab's distinction signaled that for her, her life was indeed severed, as Chanlina depicted using the metaphor of the 'big scar'. She said, "Canada [is] my second home. My first home was destroyed, but I still miss it. I will always miss my old home. But my life is new born. In my old life, I pass away already. But it's okay, because I'm new born in Canada."

This represents an extreme break in her life 'before' and 'after', so much so that she considers her 'before' self already passed on. In this case, it is not only herself that has passed on, but Cambodia itself that no longer exists. In her article examining constructions of 'homeland' in the Cambodian diaspora, Judy Ledgerwood finds that the two essentialized aspects of Cambodian identity; as descendants of a grand and ancient history, and as a people of genocide, combined with the knowledge that the genocide was perpetrated by 'their own people' has created a myth that the real Cambodia no longer exists. It is through "[Cambodia's] mythical death that diaspora Khmer can re-create a 'deterritorialized' imagined homeland" (Ledgerwood, 1998, pp. 92). Because the Cambodia they knew is gone, except for in their memories, and because of the strength of their

conceptions of 'home' which are weighted by a desire to return, they feel able to start over in their new country, while simultaneously maintaining emotional ties in Cambodia.

“[Cambodia is] home, but not home like where I am right now. But Cambodia is home in my heart. I never forget. ... Never. I never forget that. ... Cambodia is in my heart. But home to live, to stay is here. But I'm not going there and live there. I have a fear and I cannot get away from that”.
(Dara)

"Home? I'm 50/50 now. Most of my life has been in Canada. I absorb all the lifestyle in Canada, I would say about 85%, and back home is only 15%. I still count Canada as my home, but when I say 50/50, I still thinking about going back home one of these days, but right now I don't think that I really want to go there and live there." (Leap)

For the community workers, the frustration at trying to build a cohesive Cambodian community in Vancouver is a thwarted attempt to re-create an imagined homeland of like-minded people of similar background within a new land, and is one that may not ever be realized. But for many more of the community members, like Kolab, this assertion is less an attempt to create a new homeland and more an attempt to create a fresh start or herself and her family. Still, Kolab's break appears more extreme than many others who find themselves negotiating a constantly changing in-between identity, since most people I spoke with nuanced their understandings of 'home' as more of an in-between tension that was constantly negotiated, demonstrating the struggle between fear and memory.

“They are both my home. Home is Canada, but Cambodia is still home too. It's both, right? Like mother and father! (Laughter) But what happen make you not love the country anymore. When you want to run away from something you don't love it. But you do that because something force you go out or else you might die.” (Bopha)

“I think its in Cambodia. It's my home. Maybe- if in the future- Cambodia will be my home again. Even in the situation, I love my home. I think maybe when I'm older, I'll move back, because it's a hot, tropical place. Canada, it's very nice. Don't care about skin, about culture. Call you like a human being.” (Visna)

This suggests that though there is a range of definitions and ways of conceiving of home, few are able to reference home as being simply a physical site. 'Home' combines a place to stay with feeling of safety and comfort. More than this, however, 'home' connotes a relationship between the person and the place, and with others. Jackson found that rather than a physical place, 'home' could be better imagined as a "lived relationship" (Jackson, 1995 pp. 123) that is "grounded less in a place than in the activity that goes on in a place (Jackson, 1995, pp. 148). In his research, Leonard also found that 'home' rarely signifies a physical place, but is more often "an experience born of what one makes of what one is given, and the work is always before us all becoming "bosses for ourselves" (Leonard, 2000, pp 155).

The lived relationships and activities that go on within and between the people in this group, contribute to their ability to conceive of themselves as being, at least in part, at 'home' in Canada. But these same relationships, as well as the continuing relationships and ties with family members still living in Cambodia, also form part the ongoing 'insult' that I described earlier. In particular, children and the establishment of families are simultaneously acts that represent empowerment and defiance, and acts that present extreme obstacles. So much so, in fact, that many people claimed that this presents a larger concern to them than the potential of a tribunal. Even Dara, an outspoken supporter of a Khmer Rouge tribunal, officially named her community office the 'Cambodian Family Support and Integration Center' to indicate the primary focus of her community work. For people who attach so much importance to kinship, children meant re-rooting kinship connections that signify a new status in their own lives.

The majority of people who make up the basis of this study were teenagers or in their early twenties in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge took over. Their chance to establish

their status in Cambodian society was interrupted, and having children enabled them to renew their position in a way that restored and furthered their standing in a recognizable way. Every single one of them now has children, and though most have married with other Cambodians, some have married and had children with non-Cambodians, including Dara's daughter, which does not seem to cause any concern. More importance is placed on going on to have children who will be raised to know the customs and language of Cambodia than on remaining ethnically 'pure.' As people who were told in no uncertain terms that their lives had no value, having children was an ultimate act of defiance. This was evidenced in the way in which the people who had had children after the DK period proudly pronounced their children's names to me, explaining that they were the names of Cambodian folk-heroes or deities, or Cambodian words which could be translated as 'freedom', 'liberty', or 'hope.'

Wardi found that European Jews who survived being killed by the Nazis perceived of having children as a "symbolic victory" over the Nazi's. They would be a link between those family members who had been killed and the future, to help re-build a new foundation of family, learn and preserve the culture and guarantee their survival into another generation (Wardi, 1992, pp. 32). The symbolism that children pose to a targeted population in the aftermath of targeted violence is very common, and may be one of the few truths that emerge across cultures. Like Wardi, Sanford also found in her research with Mayan widows, that:

"Twenty years after the massacre of Mayans, I sat with a woman as victims of the massacre were finally buried and remembered in a Mayan religious ceremony. When her young son came over, she smiled proudly at him. "Just as she was her grandmother's faith in a better future, her son is hers"(Sanford, pp. 71).

Children are a 'symbolic victory', but often carry with them a legacy. In his book "The Politics of Storytelling," Jackson cites Jansen (1990) whose research has focused on Laotian refugees. One Laotian woman told Jansen "We also want our children to know what we've been through, and where we've come from (Jansen 1990 in Jackson, 2002, pp. 72). The 'symbolic victory' for these Cambodians is confirmed in their growing families, but is constantly set aside or 'insulted' by the inability to bring this victory full circle by overcoming the cultural divide between the next generation(s). This inability is attributed sometimes to the impossibility of expressing what the aftermath of this experience has been like, but more often to the lack of resources in Vancouver, or the fear that prevents them from returning with their families to Cambodia.

"I need one temple, at least. For all Cambodian children grow up right, they know about my customs, what to follow. ... You know, because we are Cambodian, not 'real' Canadians, right? I want all children grow up and be like the children born here, because they didn't know what...it's different right? They look different. Different skin, different eyes- and people say 'where you from?' and they say. "I'm a Canadian." [But] no, you look like Cambodian, not Canadian, right? But still, I would like to let them know about the culture. Where we from, why we here..... Yes. I want to let them know about the lanterns, about the culture. The songs, the church, and then the temple. Let them know, let them learn about both. And let them compare. I teach them how to pray, how to look like the Buddhist. And teach you how to do right. Just an example, like, if you hit somebody, somebody going to hit you back, right? And if you robbery in the bank, and they catch you, you have to go and be punish. I teach my children what the Buddhist told you, and don't do the wrong way." (Kolab)

For Srey, this 'insult' is especially apparent because their fear prevents them from fully being able to teach their daughter about their background and culture, despite the fact that her daughter, unlike many children of refugees and immigrants, would like to know. The fear that return brings with it is the risk of being trapped inside the country again, which remains a real source of stress to Srey and many others. Despite the recent changes

in the security of the country and the reassurances of friends who have returned over the past few years to visit, no amount of intellectual priming can get past this instinctive fact.

"My children ask us about Cambodia sometime. My daughter, she say "Mom, I want to see Cambodia. How does it look like? I want to see Angkor Wat. I want to see *Cambodian* people." *Cambodian* people, you know? I think for her yes, [we should visit Cambodia] but I'm just kind of scared. If something happens you're going to stay there again. I don't want to stay there! It's scary. No food, no nothing. You don't know who know nothing. It's so hard." (Srey)

The ongoing 'insult' that results from displacement and decentering are felt most profoundly through the gap between the generations. But what is also painful is the inability of the children to really comprehend and understand where and under what circumstances their parents have come from and what they had gone through. Tevy explains the sadness, as well as the shame of not quite belonging.

"In a way, it's really hurts. I don't want to take my kids to go visit a home country like that. Basically you live in Canada but you have no country of origin, our own country. This is how I feel. I mean, you have Cambodia, but its not really belonging to us because of all the government corruption. And then you kind of feel ashamed, because you have a home but you cannot really go back home. ... I will never forget home. The kids will grow up here but I want the kids to remember who they are. It's important. I want to tell my kids what I been through. (Tevy)

Like most refugee groups, children born in the new country tend to situate their own identity within the new social landscape, and position their history, culture and language in the new homeland. The trauma and experiences of their parents and grandparents is not their own, and they cannot completely relate to it (Leonard, 2000). Both the idealized past of Cambodia's grandeur and its violent legacy is detached for them, and its myth becomes one closer to fiction than of history.

Of Listening and Small Actions

This process of balancing their Cambodian identity and their own and especially their children and grandchildren's Canadian identity is a matter of highest importance and of constant negotiation. Kiri's solution is to take what he calls the best of Canadian culture and the best Cambodian culture and in so doing, construct for his children what he believes will be their best path. He explains:

"I have to have a good education, a good job before I start my family. And then so that family-raising idea that my father had that impacted on me and I brought it forward here. And then I still bring it on for my children because every time I say 'Okay now, here is what was taught to me, I have to learn what the culture is [here]. And you know, a lot of people don't do that because they say 'Here is my Cambodian culture, here is my way. You do this.' And then the kid says 'No, I'm here now, I'm not accepting it.' So I accept both ways, and then I see which one is more fit. And then, I would lead in this line. I'm not of this line or that line. And then so my kids don't have to be just like Cambodian, but not just Canadian either. I tell them there is good and bad happening here, and I allow you to do what you want, but this is the custom I want to be, so I want you to do that also.'"

Kiri indicates that finding and maintaining a balance between various aspects of his children's identity is one that needs to be constantly regarded and negotiated. He indicates that this negotiation involves a consultation and discussion between members of his family, in order to settle on a path which can be deemed, as Kiri says, "most fit." This negotiation leaves many of Vancouver's Cambodians, like many diaspora groups, in a liminal position, most notably the second generation. As Ary elaborated in another conversation:

"But the next generation, the kids who were born here, they become in the in-between. If you talking about highways, they in-between Cambodian highway and Canadian highway. It's not easy. Because they raised with kids here, not in Cambodia. So the culture, they have difficulty. Because they study the Canadian school, not the Cambodian school. And the Canadian school they don't teach Cambodian culture, see? Not easy."

While a distinction is made between themselves and, as they put it, "real Canadians", their displacement from Cambodia makes them in a very different position than Cambodians still inside the country. Almost all of the people in this group still have family members residing in Cambodia, making the prospect of forgetting or ignoring Cambodia or its constant political upheavals and corruptions improbable. The ease of transnational communication and, especially since the country became open to international travel in 1998, makes the ease and accessibility to Cambodia as close as ever. In his research with Indian diaspora communities in the United States, Leonard found that modern technology, communications and transportation makes the connections between "transnational migrants", their homelands and each other closer than ever (Leonard, 2000).

"They have had little chance to forget Indian politics, since the ease of transnational travel and communications keeps them all too aware of communal conflicts of contemporary India." ... They live in a transnational setting where technology allows them to maintain multiple connections; many legal constraints have been removed and others, given their resources, can be negotiated" (Leonard, 2000, pp. 192, 193).

There is no doubt that some of the actions taken on the part of some community members and the community workers is done with the intent to help rebuild Cambodia to its former glory. Ledgerwood has argued that "Khmer who have returned to Cambodia and Khmer abroad who do not literally return but who live with social networks in both countries are actively involved in 'nation-building'" (Ledgerwood, 1998, pp. 93). While this may account for some of their activity, I also suspect that part of the reason that social networks are established or maintained and the reason why actions are undertaken is due to people needing to take some kind of action to ease the memories the past brings up. It seems next to impossible for Cambodians to forget about what is happening with Cambodian politics, regardless of where they are located. Like Nora's 'duty memory' there seems to be an obligation for many to make an effort to keep up to date with events going

on inside the country. Doing so seems to offer some small comfort in their daily lives and personal situations.

Across the board, regardless of how much the people I spoke with still miss Cambodia, it is generally believed that their lives are undoubtedly better than they would have been if they were still living in Cambodia, and better than that of their relatives still living in Cambodia. For some, like Chanlina, staying up to date with Cambodian politics is an obligation to gain knowledge of what happening in Cambodia. Sometimes, this knowledge will be communicated back to family, and sometimes so that they can take action, as with the collection of personal accounts and statements for the Cambodian NGO.

"If someone want to know about our country, they come to me because I listen everyday to Radio Free Asia. Everything that happens there I know. I don't know why I want to listen to it. [Some people, they] avoid it. [They don't] want to know. But avoidance is not good about this. It's my point of view. Knowing...if you know a lot, maybe there are some things that you can help. But if you don't listen, if you shut down, if there is some way you can help you cannot do it. I just keep on listening."

There are many small actions that people will do to make some difference, for themselves, for their families and maybe, for the good of the country. The sights, sounds, tastes and textures that the memories of lived experience take on vary dramatically as each person associates something that captures a memory, or some aspect of their culture that they want to remember. Visnu is less active in the community than many of the other members, yet she still has a need to make a difference that is relevant to her. At the first Cambodian wedding she attended in Vancouver, the couple had no costume to wear, so they substituted a fusion of Chinese and Western dress. This made her very sad, despite the joyous event. "So," she told me with great dignity, "I sew." She began designing costumes for Cambodian weddings as a way of exhibiting her culture in BC.

"If I don't do this maybe my culture will be gone. What if someone ask me where you from? What language do you speak? What do you wear? I want people to see this is my culture. I don't want to lose my culture. People look and then say, 'Oh, what is it?' And then I tell them. I love it. I'm proud."

What people do to make a difference is as diverse and varied as people themselves are. Within seemingly innocuous acts such as sewing, cooking or maintaining societal roles, such as gender, there is an element of defiance and resistance in re-constructing practices and rituals that were deemed illegal or forbidden by the genocidal regime. While dance was not banned outright during DK, it was changed to endorse and accommodate the message of the regime. Only recently in Cambodia have surviving dance masters found the courage to resurface and begin to teach and dance once more.

During the communist time, dancing had been banned because of the "signifying power of songs and dances (Shapiro-Phim, 2002, pp. 180). Instead, they were replaced by songs and dances that were loyal to the revolutionary doctrine. Pre-revolutionary popular, folk or ritual songs were prohibited. Because corporeal and musical expressions are at the loci of meaning-making, as Shapiro Phim argues, the songs and movements that replaced the traditional ones became fear- inspiring and invoked messages of hate and violence. These messages were used to program people, and children in particular, to respect and obey Angka and to eliminate all enemies of the regime, or else become the enemy. The use of dance and music in accomplishing these goals was extremely effective (Shapiro-Phim, 2002). This has been examined in depth by Toni Shapiro-Phim, in an article discussing meaning-making in the aftermath of violence.

"...possessing the power to capture imaginations and emotions and thus to 'transport' people to other times and spaces, dance and music are sensually and socially impassioned. Dance and music are integral components of spiritual life and rites of passage, and popular forms of entertainment or people the world over. In Cambodia, that is true as well. As symbols of identity, they are particularly compelling; social boundaries are often

manipulated in the practice of performance” (Shapiro-Phim, 2002, pp. 181).

Shapiro-Phim explains how Cambodian classical dance has been linked to historic temples and therefore to royalty for hundreds of years (Shapiro-Phim, 2002). She posits that “It has been assumed that because of their intimate association with the state, dancers and artists were targeted by the Khmer Rouge. In post-DK it has been estimated that 80-90% of professional artists perished. But dance *itself* was the target” (Shapiro-Phim, 2002, pp. 186).

After we finished eating and talking, the party had moved downstairs to where Ary had been setting up a karaoke machine. While he adjusted the sound (to very, very loud) Chanlina handed around some Cambodian karaoke DVD's that she had bought in San Francisco when she had been down to visit her sisters and brother who were living there. Much attention was given to the pictures and costumes of the Cambodians shown on the cover of the DVD's, but even more attention was drawn to the landscape of Cambodia in the background.

Things Left Unseen

Part of the ongoing 'insult' that makes it difficult for the Cambodians to forget what happened to them in spite of their successes is that the very landscape in which they are now embedded is so much different than the countryside they had to leave behind. So much of what they long for, like the physical landscape, are those things left behind which can't be seen. Another source of longing is the status and achievements which family members who went before worked so hard for. The economic status the families of these community members had achieved was fought for and attained only after a struggle against discrimination, scarcity and foreign interference in Cambodia. The newfound successes of

individual Cambodian families had been achieved in only a short time following Cambodian independence, an achievement that was gained with hopes of ensuring a better life through many generations.

On the main floor of Dara and Ary's house as the karaoke videos played, one of the women moved to sit beside me. Holding one of the DVD's in her hand, she pointed to the scene depicting sugar palms by a body of water, beside which two water buffalo stood.

"I used to have a view like this from my window," she told me. "I shared the room with my younger sister, and we could see the lake. Next to our room was the very small room of my younger brother. In April, 1975, we were told to get out of our house, but the soldiers told us we get out only for three days. Outside, there were many, many people. My little sister and brother, they got separated and we never saw them again. My house, I never see again, until last year."

"Until last year?" I inquired.

"I went back, my husband and I went back for a vacation. I went to Phnom Penh, and I had to see my house. It still there, but other people live there now, not related to me. I knock on the door, and ask if I can look around. The woman at the door, she just stare at me. She stare and stare. But then she know who I am. After she stare at me for minutes, she say, 'You can't live here, this my house now!'"

The woman repeated this last line to me, for emphasis, leaning forward, her eyes on me but her focus intent on telling this story with the same intensity with which she felt. "I tell her, I know, I just want to see it. So she let me in, and I see my room, oh my god." The woman pauses as she wipes her eyes. "Then I went into the small room of my little brother, and I not believe it. His bed is still there! Not just the room, but his bed there, made by my father. I have bad dreams about that now, the bed of my brother there, but my brother, gone."

The desire to go back and see where she once lived seems analogous to the need Kolab had to expose her scars, and that Ary and Dara had to display the enlarged passport photos in the center of their kitchen. The inexplicable events that result in sensations of

the 'uncanny' creates an awful desire to exhibit physical reminders or return to the site of suffering in order to discover if somehow by doing so they can reveal some answers that may enable them to make sense of the past.

The allusions made about nightmares were common to everyone I spoke to. For some, they believed that the nightmares might end when the government is made accountable for its past crimes, ending impunity and doubt. Whether this is done by a tribunal or some other state-level process did not seem as important as the action of something actually happening to work towards this goal. It was as though by some action, like the proposed tribunal, the violent events seem more real, or less 'uncanny', and possibly help put an end to the sense of the 'uncanny' with which they live. It would also acknowledge publicly that these events happened so that non-Cambodians would have access to this same general knowledge. However, many of Vancouver's Cambodians seem skeptical now that real change will ever happen. Srey, listening in on the woman's dialogue with me, said,

"I still have nightmares. This week I had a bad dream that the communists coming and we had to get out of the house. Woke up thinking 'Oh no! Not again! Is it true? Mum, where are you?' I couldn't find my Mum! I still dreaming about the communists coming and getting all of us out of the house again. I had to go, and I see everybody out on the street. All those people! Oh my god. I'm still dreaming. How many years now? It's scary. So, I'll tell you, I'll never go over there."

The lack of any punitive measures for Cambodia has been seen by many of the people I met as a betrayal of Cambodians by the rest of the world. Headlines of the articles circulated by the Phnom Penh-based NGO's often reflect this betrayal, "Cambodia Still Waits for Justice" and "The Bones Can't Rest." As the survivors of the Cambodian genocide have gotten older, the absence of a trial and the continuing impunity in Cambodia seems to have become a part of being Cambodian, as much as the food, the

dance and the language is. In spite of recent changes, the leaders who perpetrated the genocide remain free or in positions of power, corruption remains rife, and rule of law non-existent. Efforts to convince people in Cambodia to adhere to a set of rules or guidelines for behavior would be paid little heed, since mass murder received no punishment, and in fact the perpetrators lived better than most people in the country. The stories that were revealed to me repeatedly confirmed a sad truth, which is that Cambodians long to go home, but fear the same. They have no trust in the international bodies to protect them if the regime should close again, and have more proof that this could happen than it could not. Nera has not returned to Cambodia, for the fear that she will come to harm and be left to fend for herself.

"I still have those fears. Like, go back to Cambodia, and something happened and you can't get out. You couldn't run into Thailand or something like that. I have those fears, you know? And what you going to say? Who's going to feel sorry for you? You're the one who make the decisions to go back there, and you get stuck again. ... But there's a lot of Cambodians that went back. Maybe they don't have the same amount of trauma, like how I feel. But I have that fear."

Settlement in Canada is not what they anticipated or ever expected to live out their lives, but it has given them a place to start over. As Ary said, "In Cambodia, I could not close my eyes. But we live here, and you can close your eyes. In Canada, it very safe. In Cambodia, we don't know. We never know"

In these small actions, the things they do to make some difference in their lives, a repeated theme is that they want non-Cambodian people to know about Cambodia's recent history, but also about Cambodia more generally. They also would like non-Cambodians to know that they are there. This is especially the case for the community workers, who try hard to build the Cambodian community, and would like others to know

of their efforts. Srey felt insulted and her pride wounded when she comes into contact with people who don't know about her country or where she is from.

"Some people don't know about it- what's wrong with Cambodia? Some people know, some people don't know. Some people say what's Cambodian? They don't know where is Cambodia! They don't know the word! I say, 'Oh! You don't know Cambodia!' They say 'No, I don't.' I say 'You know what? My country, its small, but its very nice country.' I don't say about right now, I say about before. Now, I don't know."

Negotiating and measuring the impact of the genocide on their lives today seems to be weighted in part on how much one feels able or unable to return to Cambodia, regardless of whether or not that return is to live or just for a visit. Their lives in Vancouver have been marked by the memories of violence, the constant reminder of what they have lost by virtue of being in Vancouver, without all of their family members- whether they have been lost by death or by displacement, and the cultural separation between them and their children. Though they have taken control over their lives and for the most part, lead good, happy, economically sufficient lives, they are continually reminded in their everyday lives of what they have lost, and will never be able to have.

While they have re-built routines and a sense of normalcy, they are constrained by the physical landscape surrounding them, the cultural divide between the generations, the presence of a potential threat in their midst, and by ongoing global politics; including the push/pull of a potential tribunal. Though some have and will continue to return to Cambodia to visit, many confirm that they will never live there again, because they don't believe that the corruption that has been entrenched in Cambodian government(s) and politics since the seventies can ever be rectified. But even living their lives outside of Cambodia, they still feel that they are a part of the country. Veata explained that, "We are Cambodian, not real Canadians. We have different skin, eyes..." This was supported by

another woman, who said, "Your nose, your brain, your insides, your eyeball, they don't change. You are Cambodian."

As we watched the DVD's, there were many comments on what the lyrics meant, and how the lyric and the style of dress, while still 'Cambodian', was different than what it was like when they all lived there. "Secular!" cried Srey. "I haven't seen my country since I left, and they are so Western! Oh my god!" She laughed and shook her head. Chanlina jumped up and began to perform a Cambodian dance, stretching her hands back and lifting her toes off the ground. Grabbing my hand as she passed me, she pulled me up to teach me how it was done.

Chapter 6: Doing 'Justice'

“Justice is not only the end result. It is also in the process”
-South African Supreme Court Justice Albie Sachs

The Politics of '*Bonne Chance*'

In December a community Christmas party was held at an Italian restaurant where Dara's son worked. While most of these Cambodians remain Buddhist, they took advantage of the pervasive western holiday season to hold a festive gathering. Invitations were sent out, and RSVP's had to be given. When I walked in the door Cambodian music was blaring over the sound system and I had to shout my greeting to Dara's son. Dara saw me at the door and came over to lead me to the table I had been assigned, where I had my choice of seats since I was the first to arrive. Instead of leaving me to sit alone, Chanlina came to join me, and we chatted about Montréal and the upcoming holidays. The restaurant was full, with about sixty adults plus their families, and a few other non-Cambodians, including a local MP. While many Cambodians wore traditional Cambodian costumes, others wore contemporary styles with Cambodian cloth, while the children and grandchildren were mostly in Western dress. I carried a purse made of Cambodian cloth that I had purchased in Phnom Penh, which was admired by a few of the older women when I mingled around the room later in the evening.

The menu offered several choices of Italian cuisine, with two Cambodian dishes. As I looked over my options, the couple with whom I would be sharing my table arrived. The man worked at the Immigrant Services Society (ISS), an organisation with which the Cambodian Family Support and Integration Center was affiliated, and this couple had come as representatives. They had no personal relationship with any of the Cambodian community members, and it soon became apparent they knew little about Cambodia

either. They asked me many questions about Cambodia's geography, climate, culture, food and history, and were pleased to discover that Cambodia was a tropical country similar to their African country of origin. When I told them I had decided to try a Cambodian dish on the menu, they chose the same. They were hoping that the food would share some of the other traits in common with their country, but were disappointed to find it rather mild for their palate. After everyone had arrived and ordered, several community workers, as well as a local MP gave speeches. Either Dara or Kiri stood to the side of the speaker, translating from Khmer to English, or English to Khmer- which gained laughs when Kiri accidentally translated English to English. This would be the last large group gathering in which I would be with them, and the evening promised to be fun.

Six months earlier I had walked into another room where there was a large gathering, this time instead of loud music there was the low buzz of many people talking. I looked around the room and tried to figure out where I should sit, finally deciding on one of the middle rows on the far side of the room. I was disappointed to see that Chanlina was not there, but then I remembered that she was in the United States attending a meeting on Buddhism. As I crossed in front of all the people gathered there, I smiled at some of the children in the front rows who looked at me curiously as I crossed the room, unlike the adults who paid me very little attention. Once I was seated, I surveyed the people sitting and talking around me. June marked the meeting of one of the bi-annual community meetings, and a few weeks earlier Chanlina had invited me to join this one.

Rather than the image of a series of neat rows made up of identical chairs that I conjured up at the thought of a meeting, the chairs in this room formed haphazard clusters of people huddled together in loose groups speaking loudly in Khmer. There were about thirty to forty people in the room, and only six of them were men. One man, heavily

marked with tattoos and wearing army pants and a menacing look came into the room and picked up a very small boy, who he carried to the back of the room and cuddled until the boy fell asleep. Their affection for one another formed a scene that many of the younger and older women alike turned around to watch and remarked on.

Dara came over and sat next to me, and as she gestured at the people congregated in the room, she explained that though this was a good turnout, there were many people in the community who were not there. She then began to point discreetly to several of the men in the room who, she said, had been Khmer Rouge. This seemed to be a fact of their identity, rather than threatening news. I was vaguely surprised that the man with the menacing look was not among those who had been Khmer Rouge. Dara then introduced me to two other community workers who I hadn't met yet, Kiri and Nary. Kiri spoke to me briefly about his role within the community and the archival work he did for them, before he excused himself to assist with something near the front of the room. When he left, Nary took the opportunity to talk about her role as well as some of her frustrations with the group. Nary's primary responsibility was to work with women, but until recently she had also been teaching Khmer language classes to children. This activity, however, had lost government sponsorship and could no longer continue.

As she prepared for the meeting, Dara ensured that everybody had a copy of the meeting's agenda, and several pamphlets. One pamphlet gave information about Hepatitis B and had been translated into Khmer. Dara explained that Hepatitis B was an increasing problem in Cambodia, and so she wanted to inform the community about it so they could tell their relatives still in the country who often didn't have access to health information. She went on to tell me that since HIV/AIDS became epidemic in Cambodia, she and Ary

also announce health information related to infection and prevention from time to time on the radio program.

Once the meeting began, Dara stood at the front of the room and addressed the group in Khmer, while Nary stayed by me and translated. They discussed new funding possibilities for the women's group and for language classes, followed by the need for more funding, funding, funding. Dara announced (not for the first time) that she would be retiring the following year, a picnic at Peace Arch Park for the July 1st holiday, and some recent news that had been sent out from DC-Cam. The discussion then turned to the upcoming federal election.

During the time I had previously spent in Southeast Asia I had become accustomed to a constant murmur of conversations taking place at the same time as an address by a person whom I would presume to be the principal speaker. In contrast, throughout this talk I noticed with some surprise that how the group members were mostly silent, with only a few other conversations softly overlapping while she spoke. Now, at the mention of the election, the room erupted into a chaotic and animated rumble as members shouted out their choices and debated their options. Attention quickly turned to the youths present who would be old enough to vote for the first time, and they were asked if they had thought over their options. As they mumbled and responded vaguely, looking uncomfortable or aloof, the elder Cambodians teasingly admonished them to be sure to vote and express their choice. They made it clear that voting and informing themselves about the candidates was their right, but also their responsibility.

Participating in Canadian politics was clearly important to the people present that day, and it was hard not to compare participation in Canadian politics with the opportunities and contingencies of participating in Cambodian politics. I would question

their opinions on this in later gatherings and interviews, and their ability to have a voice in Canadian politics was brought up time and time again.

“The communists not the same like a free country. ... You cannot vote, that's for sure. That's why I keep telling my people here in Canada and in Vancouver, especially some of my [Canadian] friends, when the elections coming, it doesn't matter what kind of elections; federal or provincial, I try to tell them to go vote because back home we cry for that, and we never get it. Never get a chance to select a leader of the country or the province. Here we have freedom, we have a choice” (Nhean).

“Because of here when you do something related to politics, you safe. You safe. But in Cambodia you run a political, you not safe. Don't! ... I keep thinking here [in Canada], when you do politics or elections or anything, you're free! ... You can say whatever you want to say. You have the freedom to say, but in Cambodia, you don't have that freedom” (Dara).

For the most part, their information on politics and the current quality of life for Cambodians is based on reports from relatives in the country and news that is distributed by Cambodian NGO's, and, when it reports on it at all, the worldwide press. Since the border opened for tourism, Cambodians in the diaspora have been able to return to Cambodia for visits. They also use their observations and experiences during their visits to make comparisons between the political climates respectively of Canada and Cambodia, as Kiri did in the following excerpt.

“We live in Canada now, everyone [have] freedom of speech, you can do whatever you want to do. You can see people portrayed here in cartoon of the Prime Minister and everything! It's okay, there's nothing happening to them. They have the voice to say what they want on the radio and the TV and the newspapers. And in Cambodia right now, it different. Because people not supposed to say that about their culture. They still have that fear. And I know from my recent trip, my family and my wife family, they have that center of fear. They always worried what's going to be happening, but they can't even say that. Because in Cambodia, the government did not allow that, did not allow people to accept that feeling. They still have that kind of feeling like if you do something wrong, you disappear.”

The strength of ties between the people I spoke to in Vancouver and their relatives in Cambodia increased their concerns about politics and governance in Cambodia. This

concern was expressed and acted (or not acted) upon in various ways. While some believe a tribunal will be important to establish democratic governance, it was only one point of significance. Most of the community workers, as well as many of the community members expressed a desire to be able to have a say in the development of Cambodian politics and have an impact on the outcome of political proceedings. Dara explained, "So we can [have] our word, and we can give the idea, whatever the word we want to say, even if we leave Cambodia. But still, we want to have a voice. Even elections too, not just this, this tribunal."

Participation in Cambodia's international politics, for example by including their statements in the tribunal process, was felt by many of the Cambodians I met to be an important act and an opportunity to intervene positively and legally in the current state of Cambodian politics. It was a chance to speak of their experiences in a permissible space, and also a chance to convene with others who shared comparable experiences or had similar points of view. But as much as this was an opportunity for some, for many others it still appeared to be too much of a risk. When Dara and Chanlina organized a forum for Vancouver's Cambodians in order to fill out statement forms that would be returned to a Cambodian NGO, they were initially pleased at the turnout of 'other' Cambodians: those Cambodians who do not consider Dara their community leader. However, their pleasure turned to frustration when those Cambodians refused to speak at all. "They just sat there. They wouldn't speak. Nothing!" Dara told me angrily over the phone. When I asked her why, in her opinion, they would come but not say anything, she replied "I don't know. Ahhh, I just don't know."

There are many theories or speculations that could be made as to the reasons why some people would come to the forum and then refuse to speak. It may be that they

wanted to be a part of this process, but then were too fearful to speak. It's also possible that they opposed the tribunal and the forum, and their silence was an intimidation tactic towards the others present. Ultimately, there is no way of knowing. There remain ongoing fears and uncertainties on all sides in regards to various groups and factions, as well as a residual inability to trust in the political process. The attempt of the community workers who organized the forum and invited the 'other' Cambodians was an attempt to repair these ties and increase the networks of Vancouver Cambodians. The forum was an experiment in voicing their experiences within a small and relatively controlled environment, while at the same time it was hoped that as a larger group they could participate and possibly affect the outcome of a process that could result in a better future for them, for their relatives and for the future generations of Cambodians.

While there is a wide range of opinions about the efficacy of a tribunal, most of the people I spoke to expressed the conviction that this will be the first of many important steps. As Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis assert, "the tribunal cannot be a complete panacea" (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004, pp. 145). In the event that the tribunal does become a reality, there will still be many challenges that Cambodians both inside and outside the country will have to face in order to regain trust in Cambodian governance, and in each other. On a local level, it seems that there is significant work to be done in order for trust to be built (if possible) between the various Cambodian factions in Vancouver. However, Chanlina believed that a tribunal would be a necessary first step in changing Cambodian relations, even for Cambodians outside the country, such as the Vancouver group. When asked what difference a tribunal could make for her, she didn't stop to pause before she replied.

“[It would bring] peace of mind, really. Everyone lost something. By doing that, they can reconcile in their hearts, just a little bit. It's not going

to bring back those dead people, but at least the people doing the bad things is being punished...to show next generation.” [The tribunal would...] “bring justice to Cambodia and all the Cambodians. We have all suffered, the whole country. If we succeed to do that its good to teach people, not just for Cambodia but for the world. Show them that doing that thing- you cannot get away with it. We will find a way to bring you to justice. We will show the world that you should be punished. That what I'm thinking. It's nothing to do with, "Oh, by doing that I'll feel better for myself." It's nothing like that. It's just like; teach the future generation that it's not good, that it's not right, what they did. For me, it's not revenge. Even though somebody killed my dad. It's not their fault. I don't blame them, really.”

What would make a difference, according to Chanlina's comment is not simply punishing the perpetrators, but also acknowledging past wrongs, and engaging the public through the process of a tribunal. In other words, a tribunal would attract the attention of Cambodians and non-Cambodians alike, including much of the next generation. It would also put pressure on those who are most responsible for the genocide to publicly admit they were wrong. This would make a difference in the way many Cambodians are able to relate to people in their daily lives, and would therefore have a larger and more lasting impact on them than an act of revenge.

The relevance that a tribunal could have on the Vancouver Cambodians, who are now 'officially' Canadian, is not immediately clear. Though these Vancouver Cambodians already appeared to have remained fairly connected to Cambodia because of kin ties and their own powerful memories, the possibility of a tribunal has both renewed debates and spurred a growth of new networks both among them, and with non-Cambodians. The burgeoning civil society that has been growing in Cambodia since the UNTAC period has created new networks in which they are able to participate and feel a reciprocal connection. Also, the increased media attention and tourism has gained substantial attention from Westerners, allowing for new ways for some of the Vancouver Cambodians to interact with Canadians that they are in contact with from day to day. The increased attention also

prompted interest in the Vancouver Cambodians from other Canadian students. When I first came into contact with Chanlina and Dara in February of 2003, I was told that there had been only two other non-Cambodians who had approached them to ask questions: a nurse and another graduate student. In September of 2004 seven Canadians, almost all graduate students, approached them through ISS, and even more than a year after my fieldwork ended Dara continued to give lessons in Khmer language in her home to people who plan to go to Cambodia for work or travel. This interest in Cambodia from non-Cambodians has given great satisfaction and pride to the people I have spoken to since my fieldwork officially ended. The creation of new ways for Cambodians and non-Cambodians to interact is based on knowledge of Cambodia that was either previously unknown or under-valued, and gives credence to Das and Kleinman's assertion that "the attempt to build a community is never a purely local affair" (Das and Kleinman, 2001, pp. 4). It also symbolizes the transformation of 'poisonous knowledge' into something new.

There are many pundits and critics who question why Cambodia should concentrate on having a tribunal when so much time has already passed and when Cambodia already has a multitude of other current social issues that require dire attention (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004). It is clear that the networks and intimate ties between people remain strong, however despite these ties there are some Cambodians who resolutely disagree that a tribunal is worth the expense and the pain of the memories it will potentially evoke. Kiri and I met for lunch at a café near his work to conduct our interview. We had been speaking for close to an hour when I began to question him about his opinion of the tribunal. He became agitated, and fiercely shrugged off the jacket he had been wearing throughout. Eyes blazing and his voice rough, he threw his questions back at me. "I don't really understand so much about that but I don't know...like, what do they want to do?"

Can you explain that? Can you?" Though he was upset, I didn't want to drop the point, so

I responded cautiously, "I think they would like to facilitate some form of public justice.

Do you think it's important to do that after so much time?"

"You know what? After 25 years now, I don't think that's important anymore, to me. It's like, everybody was sad, they suffered, losing everybody there. At that moment everybody had that kind of pain inside that they wanted revenge. And it's like they wanted to see that happening. But to me, I think revenging each other is not going anywhere, killing each other is not getting anywhere, I know it's not right, the way that Pol Pot did, killing, killing us. But, same thing is still happening and if we going to see it, I want to see it in a ten year frame that the justice been brought forward. But now? After 25 years? I don't see anything that's important anymore. I was a kid. I still remember. But what about other people that at that time were like 40, or 45 years old? They were tortured, they were suffered by them. Those people needed justice within 5 or 10 years. Now, half of those people are probably already gone. Or maybe 75% of them already pass away. Do you know the life of Cambodian? The life expectation is short. They will live 55-57 years old; that's all they have to live. To me, now you only left with the younger ones, the younger generations and they not had that impact against them. So I don't see any more importance to it. It just like me, when they were coming in they were 5 years old, 16 years old [for] example. I was full of hatred, I was thinking that a lot of those people should be just killed, and then you know die, after the Vietnamese take over, because of the way they tortured people and stuff like that. But now after so many years, that memory is gone and I don't want to think back and I don't want to bring back those memories. To put them out on the table and bring them back, no."

"To put them out on the table" means opening old wounds and triggering painful memories and anger, but also leaving themselves vulnerable to further denials of recognition or accountability. By opening up a discussion for recounting past harms and placing blame, they are taking a risk, especially since punitive measures may not come of it. For many like Kiri, the best course of action is a course of active forgetting, as demonstrated by his anger and his allegation that "that memory is gone." The ways in which people cope or confront the past are as rich and as varied as people themselves are, and each person may discover a different way to find meaning in the past and with their present. Though Kiri didn't support the tribunal, he volunteered as a community worker,

planned gatherings, provided translation and archived records and photographs of the Vancouver Cambodians and their gatherings. His own small actions in his everyday life provide evidence that there are many ways to relate to others that can be profoundly meaningful to the person doing the action. However, I can only assume that for the few Cambodians I have spoken to in Vancouver, there are many more who have not found ways to assist them in the process of 'moving on', and would stand to gain from Cambodia's corruption and injustices being brought out into the open.

Kiri's statement articulated discouragement in the lack of legal justice, and also questioned the security of Cambodians, not just physically but in terms of mental, social and psychological well being when participating in the tribunal process. Participation in global politics, such as an international tribunal, risks opening oneself up to further betrayal by the global politics of nation-states which might not acknowledge the intimate needs of the people involved, or the anger of the opposition. The psychological healing and national reconciliation which these processes of legal justice are supposed to make possible have been called into question by activists, academics and legal scholars (Swartz and Drennen, 2000). In the aftermath of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), there are questions as to whose interests really were at stake (Swartz and Drennen, 2000). It has been suggested that "the TRC process was vulnerable to the accusation that it has put survivors at risk in the interests of national healing and reconciliation (de Ritter, 1998). A prevalent debate in regards to these kinds of international legal proceedings questions whether their supposed purpose matches their outcome.

"Why not concentrate on building the future rather than dwelling on the past? Supporters of a tribunal dismiss this kind of thinking as a false dichotomy – the issue is not a choice between more food or more justice. Human rights is about both. Likewise, one is not forced to choose either

to deal with the past or to focus on the future. The Khmer Rouge tribunal will deal with past, present and future. Beyond issues of law and justice it has the potential to address the conscience of future generations to understand that what happened must never happen again (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004, pp. 146).

The responses I received from the Vancouver Cambodians indicate that one of the most important factors of a tribunal is the impression it will leave with their children. Having seen that legal initiatives like the tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda and the TRC gave those affected by violence and loss the opportunity to receive judicial acknowledgment for their experiences; many of Vancouver's Cambodians want their chance. But, while there are numerous arguments made among the Vancouver Cambodians at either extreme of opinion, there are many more that express ambivalence. Though this may be due to a combination of different reasons, the responses I received indicated a lack of knowledge about the process. When I asked Srey if she thought a tribunal would help Cambodia, she replied "I think so. For Pol Pot and the communist people, right? What is this tribunal to do?" This lack of knowledge highlighted the turbid and confusing process of the tribunal, but it is also probable that many people remain guarded against false hope and disappointment, and just don't believe that a tribunal will make relevant change to their lives.

"I don't think much about that, but sometimes I hear from my friends. They say the UN going to try to help Cambodia? Because they want to stop the violence that around there, and take control, take care of government. I'm glad the UN going there. They need help. I don't know. I don't listen. ... I don't know if [the tribunal] will bring change. Yes...yes? Maybe it will. I would like change." (Kolab)

"I don't know how they handle that, that tribunal. Like, I read in the paper that Cambodia will have a court and everything. ... One thing they want to do now with this trial and bring back the Khmer Rouge and judge right or wrong. ... It would be easier if the country would go back to normal. But I'm living here, and I don't know. How can I know? I don't know how to help. Only thing to do is wait and see what's going on. Not much you can

do! Not anything to think about. Most people hope it get better, but what can you do? (Neara)

It is important that the impact of a tribunal is felt by the people living in the region for which the tribunal seeks redress and accounting. Unfortunately, it would seem that without knowledge and transparency in the process, there is little chance of this happening. National and international considerations often have little in common with the personal interactions and subjective realities of everyday life. At the same time, these same politics can have a resounding effect on the way in which people are able to live their lives. Das and Kleinman comment that "[r]econciliation is not a matter of confession offered once and for all, but rather the building of relationships by performing the work of the everyday. Such work is comparable to the reconstitution of everyday life" (Das and Kleinman, 2001, pp. 14). The genocide of the 1970's has permanently affected Cambodian lives in many immense and minute ways, and yet they endure without legitimate recognition for their suffering.

Their expectations and disappointments have been influenced to a large extent by United Nations human rights discourse, as well as by comparable genocides. While recognition of their suffering needs to be granted on many levels, the lack of recognition thus far by a legitimate international forum is sorely felt. These actions demonstrate that it is not worth pursuing punitive action, while for Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and Iraq, it is. During my interview with Ary, he had remarked,

"...we need justice. Justice! Because if you compare, another country that had a war like the Yugoslav. After a few months only of killing people, they take the president at the Hague, still right now. Now Iraq, and they will try Saddam. How about Cambodia? How many years after the war are we? There's no tribunal! No trial! There's nothing! We are almost thirty year! Tell me about that! What is that? We should have the trial and a fair judge for the trial. That way we'd be satisfied! We'd be happy with that. ... We not satisfied. We don't have a trial. After a trial, we could be happy."

There is a sense of unfairness in the treatment of Cambodia when compared to other tragedies. The extent to which other states were involved in the starting and then perpetuating the level of insecurity in which Cambodia still remains and is commonly known. Their involvement, along with the corruption and impunity with which the Cambodian government operates and the ongoing absence of a tribunal exacerbates the sense of betrayal that many of Vancouver's Cambodians felt, and results in the inability of many to trust in the administration and intent of state agencies. Each disappointment on the path to a trial is further confirmation that legal justice will never be achieved for them. Fawthrop and Jarvis remark that "[i]n contrast to the Yugoslavia and Rwanda conflicts, the Cambodian case was complicated by the past support to the Khmer Rouge by so many governments, with China, Singapore, Thailand, the US, the UK and others all having something to hide" (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004, pp. 232). What has been seen by some Cambodians as a betrayal by the entire world has also ensured that while other countries receive attention and punitive measures for the harms inflicted by the state (no matter how problematic those measures may be) Cambodia remains without any formal action whatsoever.

As we discussed the genocide in Cambodia in reference to other tragedies in the world, analogies were made comparing the Cambodian example to other events. It was shown that while what happened elsewhere is terrible, it was believed to be distinctively unique and unnatural for it to happen in Cambodia.

"Iraq fights with another country, but these- to do it to your own people- that is so insane. Only insane people can do that... It was just so impossible for Cambodian people. Cambodian people are very peaceful. In our religion, we don't even allow to kill ants or mosquito, and these, they kill they own parents, they kill they own people." (Chanlina)

"That still bug me, every day. When I hear something or read something about [the Cambodian genocide], and it still... I mean, why did they do

that? German killed Jews, now they a different nationality. But Khmer Rouge kill they own people. (Nhean)

The Cambodian tragedy had an ideological impact on its survivors, in that after the initial purge of the educated and high class, there was no clear directive for the violence, no two groups to oppose one against the other. The Cambodian people that I met felt that this was a clear difference that separated their experience from other wars and genocides that had occurred in recent times, a separation that is exacerbated by continued impunity and lasting corruption without punishment. "In Rwanda, you had two sides," Ary explained to me. "There were Hutus, and there were Tutsis. In Cambodia, there were not two sides. Only Cambodians and Cambodians." Later in an interview, he said with an ironic grin, "With the communists, we have a lot of problems. Still now. That's why we say, [these] politics, two words only. We are the politics of *'bonne chance'*! Ha! Good luck."

While it is generally understood that the tribunal alone will not end the long era of danger and corruption in Cambodia, those in its support expect that it will be able to give some answers as to why it happened. However, regardless of the arguments surrounding the success of trials and truth commissions, many Cambodians resent that no such effort has been made in their case leaving them to fend for themselves without the possibility of watching their tormentors sent to jail. However, even more than the opportunity to see their tormentors imprisoned, is the opportunity to be watch the international community work to officially recognize and acknowledge the crimes of the past. The betrayals that led to the lack of trust and ongoing insults that Vancouver's Cambodians continue to live with were produced at many different levels and by forces outside their daily lives as well as by developments occurring inside their country and communities. As such, it is important

that the forces involved in the betrayals created by violence and the perpetuation of 'insults' be involved in the process of 'moving on'.

A History of Forgetting

Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, who have both worked in Cambodia for many years, have termed what has happened in Cambodia since 1979 'A History of Forgetting' (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004). Since the death of Pol Pot in 1998 and the beginning of relative peace in Cambodia, the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge have remained at large, living in greater wealth and comfort than the majority of Cambodians and in some cases remaining in positions of power. With the increasing call for reconciliation and justice, some former KR leaders have once again spoken up, proclaiming innocence and un-involvement, such as Khieu Samphan, who had his story published in a book which was distributed in Cambodia, along with his urgings to "let bygones be bygones." After a cabinet meeting in the late nineties, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen commented "If we bring them to trial it will not benefit the nation, it will only mean a return to civil war. We should dig a hole and forget the past" (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004, pp. 135).

The state's urgings to forget the past has implicitly been endorsed by the international community which has not pushed for a proper accounting of the crimes committed in Cambodia. While some of the Cambodians I spoke to would agree that an act of forgetting is the best way to move on, they are motivated by different reasons than the accused perpetrators or state leaders. Fawthrop and Jarvis write that:

"...after so many long years of being denied the opportunity for a Khmer Rouge trial that many ordinary people have gradually eliminated it as a topic of everyday conversation. In an effort to rebuild their lives and move on, they have built their own mental warehouses in which to store away their tortured memories" (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004, pp. 141).

The ability to give voice to their own experiences is not only important so that they can locate their own experience within, or outside of, the master narrative. It is also important because it is the ability to voice one's experience that constitutes an assertion of power; of taking control of one's life and of resisting further oppression. This is the case in the aftermath of any form of physical violence, but since the Cambodian genocide was what Amitav Ghosh describes as "a war on history itself" (Ghosh, 2003, pp. 10), for individual Cambodians, being able to place themselves and their family members back into history is an act of re-balancing, or re-centering, a chance to tell one's own story and put the pieces back into place (Phelps, 2004).

"Several qualities involving the use and misuse of language characterize the activities of an oppressive regime. First, such regimes tend to operate in secret, concealing the truth about what they are doing; second, they construct their own narratives about their activities, thereby creating a master narrative about the country and its citizens; and third, they operate in ways that fragment social bodies, such as families, that might challenge the master narrative. Each of these qualities results in the appropriation and subversion of language and requires restoration of language to effect an adequate rebalancing" (Phelps, 2004, pp. 46).

When Dara readied herself to tell her story in the first chapter, why should voluntarily put herself through such an emotionally strenuous experience was questioned. She probably knew what her emotions would evoke as she re-told and re-lived the experiences through her stories, and yet she chose to do it anyway. A large part of the motivation to speak out in spite of the pain of re-telling –and therefore re-living- the pain of the past, is to have that pain heard, and acknowledged. This desire to have their stories heard was at least part of the reason that, after I had interviewed Dara and Chanlina and their families, an increasing number of people requested that I interview them. As my time remaining in the field grew shorter, I was no longer able to interview every person who contacted me, and would refer them instead to a

documentation project that had started up at University of British Columbia. One of my very last interviews was with Visnu, who I had contacted much earlier, but who had been out of town until just before I left Vancouver. When we spoke on the phone to arrange our meeting, she was unsure of what kind of information I would want from her, and asked if she needed to read anything in order to prepare for our interview. When I replied that I wanted to know about her experiences and opinions, so no preparation was required, there was a long pause. After several moments she said excitedly, "You mean you would like me to tell my story from my own heart?"

When we did meet, she was with her husband Sokun and two other men, Heng and Chhay, who also wished to be interviewed. I had not expected to do three additional interviews, so I suggested that to save time we conduct a group interview. At this suggestion, the men became quite agitated at the lost prospect of talking about their experiences. I pressed the issue gently, but when they remained tense and distressed, I relented and agreed to interview each person separately. I ended up at the house until it was quite late in the night, and when we were finally through it was too late for public transportation, so Sokun agreed to drive me home. The night-time air was cool, and blew a dampness over us as we waited for the engine to heat up. Sokun turned to face me, and with sincerity said "Thank you for listening to us tonight. People don't want to hear our stories."

Part of the reason that it was so important to be heard was because their stories and experiences often become real to the listener when it is heard, or as Das and Kleinman would say, is "narrativised" (Das and Kleinman, 2001, pp. 19). Such 'narrativisation' opens up a dialogical relationship and negotiation between the speaker, the listener, and official discourses. Sanford has noted that in the aftermath of violence,

there are always a number of different versions of each story: as told by the news media, analyses by academics, reports from human rights organizations, government documents, writer's fiction tales (based on 'true' events), and survivor testimonies (Sanford, 2003, pp. 180). The many-sided faces of truth open up some debate over who has the authority to speak for events, and what is at stake for each speaker? For witnesses to violence, the voicing of life stories structure and then re-structure experiences, shifting the balance of power in the direction of the speaker and demarcating the issues and events that matter most to them. It is for this reason that it is important that respect is given to the need many have *not* to speak, since not speaking is also as choice. Giving voice to experience is an act of empowerment and agency, and therefore control over how or when to do this should not be compromised. In his research analysing people's storytelling methods in the truth commission in Sierra Leone, Jackson found that "in times of extreme hardship, people see in silence the only way of respecting it (Jackson, 2002, pp. 20).

So while giving voice to experience is a key issue in re-balancing power after violence, it is also a treacherous one. Bringing personal accounts out of personal memory and into the public realm is a way of officially contesting history and results in the production of new knowledge. By publicly positioning oneself in the history that personifies or contests the history as it is presented, each person enacts a conscious act of agency, and also resistance in that it gives the targeted group an opportunity to show the oppressors that they failed. Therefore, the desire of some to document a written record of their lives, especially given the validity that written language is given in Western society, did not strike me as suprising. What I did find suprising was that I was repeatedly asked to conceal the identities of the people who revealed this information. Despite the personal

and sensitive topics that were covered throughout the interviews and conversations, it was *this*, this intent to write and therefore document their story that was considered perilous.

This signified a need to record their story, so that it could be remembered, but it also suggests the extent of the inherent risks that are a part of speaking out and voicing stories. Authoring a book could disturb the balance of power and there are some within the Vancouver milieu who could lose out if they spoke. Writing a book would mean leaving a permanent record of one's own story and having absolute control and authority over the book's content. It would also leave behind a legacy that could be read, debated and discussed in the future. Since writing is an indication of education and therefore was once a capital offence, it is also a significant act of resistance to a regime that once not only denied, but criminalized their literacy and refused the value of their education. Writing would also allow them to control the language, pace and content of their stories and choose how they wish to express and position themselves.

It was while I talked with Ary that the immensity and enormity of this kind of undertaking really struck me. During our interview, both of us were continually frustrated by our inability to communicate fully due to our language differences. He finally asked me to stop the tape, and quickly walked out of the room. When he returned, he was carrying a small, red book with a hard vinyl cover, the kind commonly sold in any retail store. The adhesive on the faded price sticker had grown gummy, but was still stuck to the front cover. He placed the book on the coffee table, and leaned over my shoulder as I kneeled on the carpet and opened it. As I looked at the tiny, precise handwritten notes in Khmer and French, he described how he had hidden a pencil and piece of paper in his clothes after the forced exit from Phnom Penh. In meticulous, painstaking detail he had recorded where he stayed each night and the method of travel, for the duration of the DK regime.

He tried to explain to me what this had been like, "To try to picture, because you not allowed to bring anything. Just a small piece of paper I have tried to write everyday I did...see?" Upon arrival in Canada he bought the small notebook, and with precision he wrote out each step he took during those four years, and produced a highly detailed, hand-drawn map to further illustrate his journey.

The motivations that compelled Ary to keep this record and translate and transcribe them into a book and laboriously draw a map upon his arrival in Canada, indicates a strong urge to document his experience so that the drastic circumstances from which he and his family endured can be remembered. His plans to turn this information into a book would enable his experience to become public and allow his story to become a part of the collective memories of Cambodians, and possibly of Canadians. Given the importance of families and the gap between children and grandchildren, a written record gives future generations the opportunity to read and understand Ary's story, his sacrifices and his family. As Phelps explains, "the silence that is associated with an oppressive regime fragments people" (Phelps, 2004, pp. 48). Silence allows the construction of master narratives to be constructed unchecked, and will not include the events that happened from perspectives of others, nor the enormity of what these events might have meant. She continued:

"For justice to be achieved and families to be re-membered, the true story must be told and acknowledged. Above all, families need to know the truth. And the revelation of this truth necessarily destroys the false master narrative that the regime has created. Its activities become known and acknowledged, and a space appears in which the new regime has the opportunity to rewrite the story" (Phelps, 2004, pp. 48).

Recording and documenting life stories and experiences offer the storyteller and the listeners alike the opportunity to make sense of events and organize the details. Voicing one's story is not a passive occurrence. Rather it makes a personal memory public, and

allows a wider group of people to negotiate, integrate or refute that memory according to their version or interpretation of events. While this can aid in the process of understanding the past, the ability to save a record or document a personal account means for witnesses that they may one day have the opportunity to use these records and accounts to dispute the official version of events in the future.

Some peace processes, notably the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have made dramatic efforts to provide public space for stories of terror to be told. Rather than probing into the legalities of human rights violations and incarcerating perpetrators, this truth commission attempted to come to terms with a violent past by giving voice to experiences and bestow them “judicial acknowledgement” (Das, 2001, pp. 13). Like recognition, acknowledgment of past injustices is required in order for people to feel like their experiences have counted for something. Without the acknowledgement of their suffering, it denies those who live with the pain of such experience the dignity of validation.

Unlike ‘knowledge’, which is similar in meaning to “possessing information, or being aware of facts” (Sachs, 2001, pp. 52) public acknowledgement can alter a situation by broadening public discourses and influencing civic opinion. Sachs argues that a great many people, both inside and outside of South Africa, knew of the repression and violence enacted under apartheid, but there was “hardly any *acknowledgement* of what this actually meant in human terms” (Sachs, 2001, pp. 52). He defines acknowledgment as:

“...an acceptance not only of the existence of a phenomenon, but of its emotional and social significance as well. It presupposes a sense of responsibility for the facts, an understanding of the significance they have for the persons involved and for the society as a whole” (Sachs, 2001, pp.).

‘Acknowledgement’, therefore, unlike ‘knowledge’, requires greater emphasis on what it means to live with the memories of violence, and the need to question and demand

accountability for actions that may contribute to, or do nothing to stop, the pain of such experience. It is also a way of conveying to the international community that what happened in the past, even decades ago still matters, and that this has implications that carry far beyond the borders of Cambodia. As Heng declared, "You have to educate kids to what happened, so when they grow up they know. The world not understand the Khmer Rouge. If the world understood the holocaust, genocide would not happen. But the world not pay attention."

Preserving a record of events therefore brings with it obvious risks, which some, despite the importance given to documentation and understanding, and despite their courage, find too perilous to navigate. Srey told me of an incident which occurred during the communist time that provided an unexpected opportunity to gain insight into another perspective of events. This recollection conveys how incomprehensible the DK regime was for almost all Cambodians, and the ways in which people would reach for some kind of understanding, even under the most dire of constraints. Towards the end of DK, when internal strife was rampant among the Khmer Rouge, a group of soldiers were killed in a massacre and hastily buried in shallow graves near a village. After a few days, the smell was too much to bear, and some workers from the village dug the bodies up to rebury them properly. Srey was among them, and while they were digging the graves, she found a journal that belonged to one of the murdered men, which she hid and saved.

"And because of the [heat of the] day, the body they kill they cover it with dirt, you know? Oh my god. And two or three day later, it smell, because they been buried improperly, right? You can see their hair, and the flies, everything. It so smelly. So after that I, all the village people, we say we cannot live like that, so we bury all those people. We bury them. And I saw one book, I got it. A diary of one guy. I saw it, and picked it up. You see, for me, book is very important. I like it. And that guy, he's a student too. But they led him to be a soldier with communists, right? So when he said in that book his name, how old he is, whatever ... his mom, his dad name, and how many sister and brother. He say he know that his parents

come to be in the top mountain, or something, so he want to come and look for his parents, too. But he die. And so I read the diary. Yeah.... After that, people say, 'Don't keep it. They kill you! Don't keep it. Be careful!' So, I throw it away. I like to keep it, because I want to know, you know? I want to know this guy. But they say don't keep it. We still had a long way to go. We don't know where we going to stay and when they see it, they kill you too! So, better throw it away. So I throw it away. Because I scared."

The chaos and sense of the 'uncanny' result in a real need to find order and a desperation for understanding. In response to Das' and Kleinman's questioning of how people learn to re-engage in the aftermath of violence, this account suggests that engagement requires an intellectual connection in addition to medical care and basic needs. Srey's desire for understanding, "I want to know this guy", showed that her need for understanding was related to negotiating her position with the people around her. Making the transition from individual memory into the collective sphere also assists in attaining an intellectual connection, in that memories and accounts of others can be compared and help interpret and understand events. Srey's brief details of the dead anonymous soldier would suggest that he too had concerns about his family members that are similar to those of the people who, by virtue of his position, he subjugated. In addition to making an intellectual connection, there is a need for interpersonal relationships as a means to make sense of what was happening, which was expressed not only by Srey's desire to understand him but also in the soldier's search for his parents. By trying to know him and reading his diary, a little bit of his story lives on too. This drive for interpersonal connection can be linked to Das's earlier argument, in which violence results in the "death of relationships."

Rebuilding a sense of trust in political process and systems requires restoring faith in democratic processes, and the inclusion of those silenced. Authoring and giving voice to one's experience works to renegotiate one's position and allow new histories to be developed that include a personal version of events that may contest more official versions

that already exist. In other words, giving voice to one's experiences places oneself into history and enables the speaker to take control over one's life, giving them the opportunity to bring new understanding to a private suffering. This new understanding can create a shared history, and avoid the pain of remembering in silence.

Doing Politics to Get Away From Politics

At the Cambodian Christmas party, we had been entertained throughout most of the meal with music and later with a door prize draw, which gained applause and laughter when Dara's young grandson won a bottle of wine. After everyone had eaten, some of the tables were pushed back and the microphone was moved to the side. As the space was cleared, Cambodian dance music was played and the karaoke machine was set up. Chanlina got up to dance, and urged me to join her. My cheeks flushed as I got up from the table and I tried to remember the intricate steps and perform them in time to the music, while pulling my fingers up toward the back of my hand in Khmer style. As we danced, I saw many people getting up, but instead of joining us, they got their coats and prepared to leave.

There were however, many other people who did get up to dance, and we circled the open space with people singing along to the music. The couple from the ISS, having watched the movements carefully for the first few dances, got up and joined the circle and began to dance with great vigor and enthusiasm, incorporating their own African style into the Khmer movements. This brought smiles and laughter from everyone, and many people clapped. Attention soon shifted to the karaoke machine, and traditional and contemporary Khmer songs were sung. Chanlina brought over some English karaoke DVD's and tried to convince me to sing too. Fortunately for me, the man from ISS was

more than happy to take part. After looking through the selections, he chose an old soul song, which he sang loudly.

By this time we had been dancing and celebrating for hours, and slowly the revelers were getting ready to go home. The ISS couple were among them, and they said goodbye to the people they had met through the course of the night, and thanked the community workers for the invitation and the enjoyable evening. The four or five standing near the door watched them leave with big smiles, and Kiri commented that it was good to see people come and really try to do the dances and have fun. This was met with nods of general agreement. As I stood with Leap near the back of the restaurant, he too agreed with this sentiment, but expressed anger and frustration that so many people had left right after the meal. "Why?" he asked angrily? "Why not stay? Why they have to leave like that? They just eat and leave. Why?"

The cultural, social and psychological transformations that are wrought on people, groups and societies after genocide and displacement means that people aren't able to live their lives the way they believe they 'ought' to live. This is a reality that cannot be changed, regardless of the personal or professional status they may achieve. For this group, some cultural adaptation is deemed necessary and acceptable in order to conform to a Western calendar and norms, so the irony of a group of Buddhists holding a Christmas party is conceded with shrugs, jokes and good-natured grins. The failure of others to participate in these festivities is felt like a sting for those who want the parties to be held the way they imagine they ought to be despite their displacement: with full participation by every person in the group. The failure of others to become completely involved makes it impossible for those who do wish to engage to do so fully, because they are not able to accomplish their desire of having every Cambodian involved. Their refusal to get further

involved and their quick departure reduces the ability of the community workers to take joy and pride in what they have done, rendering it not quite a failure, but at the very least a disappointment and less than a success. It is an affront to their sense of belonging, a sense which is articulated through lived experience and through one's position among others.

When I questioned people on how they perceived 'justice', there was an overlap between my observations and what I was told. The general answer to my query on justice was that there needed to be a retrieval of fairness and rule of law. Visnu explained that after a return trip to Cambodia in 2001, "no one follow the rules, even the traffic rules. It was no order, no way to know". Her sentiment seems to express the latent fear: 'they could do it to you again'.

"It's the rule. We have a problem with stopping rules- some people not follow rules. I like the rules in Canada. They have rules and have human rights. It everything fair. But my country is not fair yet. Maybe the UN can help with that. ... Now, nobody follow the rules, so it like, no order, no way to know" (Kolab).

"Justice mean it fair. Whatever you do, it go by the law or the rules. It's not like you kill some people and just walk away. Justice mean it fair for everybody. Every country has to have justice and rights. If you don't have justice, you have a violence country" (Nhean).

It seemed that the mention of the UN's involvement in Cambodia or the use of human rights language was often used to appeal to Western listeners, such as myself. However, I also noticed that these responses would almost always follow a long discussion about their inability to engage fully in cultural practices. I got the impression that rather than speak to an 'outsider' of those things that would make the most immediate difference in their lives, they used language such as 'human rights' to instil the seriousness of the topic. The circumstances have received little attention world-wide in relation to other tragedies, and even in the Lower Mainland they were virtually invisible compared to other

Asian or immigrant groups. It seemed to be a way of speaking and using language in order to get their point across.

Understanding people's circumstances and perspectives in the aftermath of violence necessitates moving away from the dominant discourses which are created and maintained by the 'experts' who dominate the field(s) of conflict, refugee and legal studies (Daniel, 1996; Hinton, 2002; Sanford, 2003). Instead, attempts to understand how people perceive and combat their circumstances should remain open to those practices and 'small actions' that people find relevant in their own lives. It seemed that what would make a relevant and noticeable difference in the daily lives of the majority of the people that I spoke to is the freedom to engage in cultural practices that are meaningful to them. However, the comments some people made to me in regards to Cambodia's need for effective rule of law is not separate from the desire to be able to participate in cultural activities. By allowing the space for people to voice their experiences, it might broaden public awareness of how people's experiences might differ from their public expectations. Such challenges would thus challenge the dominant discourse by allowing for alternative discourses to be heard. But this requires more than the rule of law; it requires the development of a democratic society, and an active civil society. As Fawthrop and Jarvis argue, "The realm of justice is far broader in scope than the cold mechanics of law. Law is essentially no more than a set of rules by which a democratic society hopes peacefully to attain the objective of justice" (Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004, pp. 147).

The value of voicing experiences does not stop with the enhancement of knowledge and the contestation of dominant discourses, but is compounded by a desire to be heard by a wider audience. Dominick LaCapra has observed that "for memory to be effective at a collective level, it must reach large numbers of people. Hence, the acts or works that

convey it must be accessible.” He further argues that “[t]estifying itself, in its dialogic relation to attentive, empathetic listeners, is a way of affecting, at least in part, a passage from the position of victim compulsively reliving the past to that of survivor and agent in the present” (LaCapra, 2001, pp. 92).

The dialogic relationship between the speaker and the listener(s) has elements in common with Charles Taylor’s 1992 notion of the ‘politics of recognition,’ which points to a link between identity and recognition. Defining and essentializing characteristics that are ascribed to a person or group but do not accurately reflect who they are can be damaging because it distorts not only how people are perceived, but the way in which people are able to view themselves (Charles Taylor, 1992). The call for recognition in the case of these Cambodians does not appear to be aimed solely at gaining recognition of their identity, but rather at the recognition that they *have* an identity.

The dialogical relationship in both these arguments suggest that how these stories are received and represented are as important to the speaker as voicing and authoring them in the first place. The appropriation of human rights language to talk about their situation is a means by which they can be heard by a specific audience, one which may gain them legitimacy for their situation. But while it may open them up to a judicial sphere, by engaging the public in general, such as by writing a book, one may attract a larger audience. This engagement might broaden public awareness in a manner which could allow, especially given the violent “death of relationships,” a new context for bystander, witnesses and perpetrators to interact (Das, 2001, pp. 13), as evidenced in the inclusion of former Khmer Rouge at community meetings, or the community workers’ attempt to get Cambodians from other groups to participate in a forum to gather statements.

Before the interviews with Visnu, Sokun, Heng and Chhay, the five of us had gone to a Chinese restaurant just north of the city. We spoke about the current state of Cambodian politics and they told me of their belief that Cambodians need to be a part of re-building the country. This is not just about re-building Cambodia, they said, but about re-building Cambodians. Sokun explained to me that “Cambodia and Cambodians need to heal from the inside out. We must heal the Cambodian soul before anything else can happen.”

It seems that for Cambodians to be affected by the outcome of a tribunal, they need to be involved in the process, especially since virtually all Cambodians have been implicated in the process. While the orders and architects of the genocide came from ‘above,’ many of the Cambodians present in Vancouver participated in one way or another, whether by circumstance or choice. Since Cambodia lacks the resources or personnel to conduct legal proceedings of this magnitude, it is essential that the UN and the international community get involved (Etcheson, 2005; Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004). However, as much as it is important to help Cambodia in this situation, the responses of the people I spoke to would indicate that many Cambodians in the diaspora may wish to remain part of the process, despite their displacement.

If a tribunal is to be a starting point from which national reconciliation will be built, Cambodians must be able to recognise themselves in the process instead of getting lost in the projects of the international community. The responses of the people who support the tribunal would indicate that they believe that attaining legal justice on an international scale will prove to the rest of the world that not only did they survive, but they deserve recognition of their efforts. On a more intimate level, recognisable justice will help prove

to their children that they have a home to be proud of. But they wish to ensure that this is done in ways that are relevant and meaningful to their lives and worldview.

While I sat in Visnu and Sokun's living room late that evening interviewing Heng, I struggled to keep track of his verbal meandering. Heng's recollections were particularly angry. He was involved with the Khmer Rouge prior to 1975, then was tortured during the DK regime, from which he has suffered permanent hearing loss. After the Vietnamese took over the country, he became involved with the Khmer Rouge again, this time in resistance to Vietnamese occupation. Still, he believed that a tribunal has to occur in order for Cambodia to heal. Though it was not clear that he was any further involved than announcing his support, he said he would do whatever he could to ensure a tribunal happens. When I pressed him to explain further why he feels it is so important to support the tribunal, especially given his involvement in the Khmer Rouge, he found it hard to answer and stumbled over his words. I asked again, if he could explain why helping the tribunal was so important. His body became extremely tense, and he sat anxious and rigid on the edge of the couch, his hands curled up into tight fists upon his knees, which he stared at angrily as he clenched his jaw. Finally, he lifted his arms toward me as if they could somehow make me understand what he was trying to say, and burst out in frustration, "Don't you see? We have to *do* politics, if we are going to get *away* from politics!"

I suspect that Heng's support of the tribunal and of political process is motivated by a need to find order in his life that is separate from government corruption. He seems to feel constrained by the political chaos that defines Cambodia – and therefore Cambodians. Because of the current state of Cambodian politics and the on-going insecurity of the country, he is no longer able to live his life in what he called "the Cambodian way." In

order to 'be' Cambodian in a public way, he feels they have to participate politically, so that these politics will no longer dictate their identity. Therefore, 'doing politics' is relevant to achieving a resolution that will change the way they are able to live their life and be in the world. So while the focus on voice may seem distinct and separate from politics, it is in fact linked, not only to political participation but also to agency, resistance, and empowerment. He has to "do politics", to contest the ongoing corruption and impunity that has become a part of 'being' Cambodian, so that he can live without these politics maintaining control over his life. By doing so, he will be able to make some change in his way of being in his daily life. While he is now living in Vancouver, he identifies himself as a Cambodian, and asserting this identity against the Canadian landscape he is currently in represents a small action that can help change his personal context.

Finding one's voice does not always imply just speaking, in the same way that discourse does not only refer to verbal language. Through alternative forms such as dance, cooking, sewing, writing, organizing, and sometimes forgetting, one may be able to express agency, empowerment, self-control, and selfhood in a context in which that was once denied. In Vancouver, I believe this element remains, but it is also a method by which some can assert their uniqueness in contrast to other Asian groups.

The failure of the Cambodian government to take care of the people under its charge has made it necessary and relevant for Cambodians outside the country to do so themselves. The dissemination of information over the radio and at meetings about pertinent issues in Cambodia, such as Hepatitis or HIV/AIDS, is not only a way of delivering crucial health information that government officials don't provide, but is also a way of strengthening civil society and local politics, as well as participating in the development of a democratic state from abroad.

The Cambodians I met in Vancouver had social networks across both countries, plus other countries where relatives reside. Ledgerwood argues that Cambodian groups abroad can be involved in nation-building, with the assistance of technologies, communications, NGO's on the ground in Cambodia (Ledgerwood, 1998). Ledgerwood links the multiple ties and networks across the distance and Cambodian activity in the diaspora to nation-building. The lives of people inside Cambodia may become transformed by the lives of those in their social networks, even across borders. Recent interactions between NGO's and Cambodians in and out of the country have opened opportunities to participate not only in local and national networks but also in Cambodia's development as a state. As Ledgerwood found, "[t]he activities and commitments of these overseas Khmer span the borders of "homeland" and host country, and mire them as transmigrants in networks of relationships in both places" (Ledgerwood, 1998, pp. 103).

Because it seemed inappropriate for me to ask outright if the Vancouver Cambodians sent money to their relatives and networks overseas, I did not discover if sending remittances is a common practice. However, I did discover that the Vancouver Cambodians, through meetings, the radio program and their own social networks, use the strategic advantage they have in terms of access to information in Canada to have an impact at the very least on those in their extended networks. Crucial health information, or news on political events are disseminated over the radio and at meetings, with the intention that Vancouver Cambodians will relay that information back to people in their networks. In addition, those who have returned to Cambodia for visits have treated extended family members to large meals, to trips to Angkor, or to visit recently established performance halls in city centers: non-monetary gifts. These are activities that many

Cambodians would otherwise be unable to take part in because of poverty, and also may increase pride in themselves and their surroundings.

It is worth questioning the efficacy of a tribunal, especially given the time that has elapsed since the genocide took place, and the number of other social ills widespread in Cambodia. It is also worth questioning how such a tribunal can affect Cambodians no longer living in the country. I would also like to question the potential impact(s) of creating alternative discourses and broadening public awareness on those who do not support the tribunal, or those who choose not to speak out? This is not an attempt to contest or challenge the choices or opinions of the people I have depicted in this text, or question their knowledge. However, I can't help but wonder if the effects of a tribunal, given the space it has the potential to create for competing truths and negotiating memory, could potentially have a resounding affect on Cambodians both inside and outside the country - even those who do not openly participate.

Chapter 7: Of 'Moving On' and Future Inquiry

I'm on another bus, heading southwest towards the King George skytrain at the very end of the line. I carried out several interviews this afternoon and evening, composed of stories that have left me exhausted and slightly sick to my stomach. I lean my head up against the cool window of the bus, ignoring the rattle that vibrates my chin and teeth, and watch the light change against the mountains north of me. They are so different than the hazy view of the mountains I used to know so well in my childhood on Vancouver Island, and so different from the view I had in my early and mid-twenties when I lived on Vancouver's westside. In the last few months I have watched the landscape change back and forth in front of me, and it seems as though as I have watched the view shift, the multiple realities that co-exist within the lower mainland have come into focus, with the Cambodian model somewhat sharper than the one I had known before.

The experiences of the Cambodians I have met here over the past few months have made me realize that the Vancouver they live in is not the same Vancouver I have lived in. Within their Vancouver is an imagined Cambodia; not in the same way that 'Chinatowns' and 'Little Italys' have become a visible part of the urban landscape in many cities, but a Cambodia which occupies a small discursive space in which they are able to interact with one another and collaborate in moments of shared practices, language and acceptance. It is a space built upon their memories, which has captured simultaneously a Cambodia of laughter, hope, nightmares and betrayals.

Part of being Cambodian is being a survivor of genocide. Despite my personal distaste at a term that has been overused and rendered generic, I can't think of a more appropriate expression. Even now, decades and an ocean away, I was constantly given

reason to believe that reconstructing their lives had been an experience marked by fear. Every person I spoke to have experienced a brush with death, had been a bystander to the death of someone they knew, and had witnessed both arbitrary acts of violence and arbitrary acts of mercy. Being Cambodian meant living with the memory of what they had lost, the transformations imposed on them through trauma and loss and the continual presence of fear. This sentiment has been similarly expressed by Haing Ngor, who played the main Cambodian character in the film 'The Killing Fields'. He has been quoted as saying, "I have been many things in life. ... But nothing has shaped my life as much as surviving the Pol Pot regime. I am a survivor of the Cambodian holocaust. That's who I am." (McLellan, 1999, pp. 135).

While this is still only one aspect of their identity, it is one that often overwhelms and struggles to the fore. It moves between other positions that are inhabited, including but not limited to that of 'victim', 'perpetrator', or 'agent'. However, even in this space that has been carved out within Vancouver, the efforts that the community workers and some others take towards solidarity and union paradoxically reify categories and divisions between them, and maintain the boundaries that they try to overcome. While they remain 'survivors' in the genuine sense of the word, the effects of violence are so complicated and multifaceted, they still cannot be subsumed within any single category.

'Moving on' is incredible work. The efforts of the community workers to build a Cambodian community in Vancouver has made a difference for many of the group members in many practical ways, such as with translation and adaptation, but also by creating ways of keeping people informed about events taking place in Cambodia. The efforts put forth to build solidarity among Cambodians in Vancouver and participate in building civil society in Cambodia with the assistance of Cambodian NGO's is also an

attempt to bridge the gaps and social boundaries between these different contexts. The meetings and occasional events offer a respite to those who wish to maintain a space for being 'Cambodian,' speaking Khmer, practising Buddhism, dancing, singing or other forms of performing identity. This also offers an opportunity to assert their identity against a Canadian landscape that subsumes many groups of Asian origin that may become seen as one homogeneous group.

At the same time, the small actions I observed were the acts of people consciously taking control over their lives in multiple ways. Religious practice, performing arts and language all carry significant meanings for the people I met, and maintaining these traditions and practices are ways of demonstrating their survival and shifting the power balance back towards them. Various forms of legal justice that gain recognition and public acknowledgement will probably give many Cambodians some comfort, or 'peace of mind', but this has to be received on many levels. No one action or event can offer an all-encompassing solution for every person affected by violence. But each small action and story told with the group make it easier to 'move on' and try to find ways to interact and live with each other. However, it is essential that the small actions and personal transformations must be relevant. Those actions that are imposed or do not include the voices, moral realities or concerns of the principal protagonists should be contested. The breaking of silences, the need to talk to open up space to talk about the past will not begin or end with a tribunal, or with the small actions that people are putting forth. But all these efforts contribute to the process of 'moving on.'

Taking control of their own life histories and negotiating an always oscillating power balance was demonstrated not just in the emotional and evocative stories they told, but by the strategies engaged to tell them. When some people chose not to participate in

interviews, they came up with innovative ways to convey the information to me, such as by referring me to a family member's book, or by creating an event in which to invite me. Interviews and conversations were also augmented by phone calls or e-mail exchanges in the days following a meeting. Decisions about what to tell me were made in advance, given the number of times stories were initiated to me by one person, and then later finished or further contextualized by a relative or spouse. Taking control over their lives included not only choosing what will be remembered, but also what will be represented.

The effect of truth telling - not necessarily contesting the events of a story but including the person at the heart of the story - is power. The empowerment of people through telling their own 'personified histories' should therefore be included amongst processes that are designed to assist people in 'moving on,' and heard by people that are a part of that person's networks. As Kolab has commented, "the true story? Oh, very different" (pp. 93) may not be so different in terms of the telling of events, but may be different in terms of the intimacy of the knowledge. The omission of the people most affected by violence amounts to silencing.

Serious questions have arisen over what to do to help people, groups and societies devastated by this kind of loss, and how to help people move on and situate themselves in relationships and in new contexts. What becomes clear is that while there is much to be done to assist in making a viable and relevant difference to people whose lives have been injured by violence, there is also much that people do for themselves. Violence utterly transforms people and makes it impossible for them to inhabit the world in the same way again. Memories are made and then made again, and the shroud of fear and uncertainty become a part of daily life. 'Moving on' requires a process of relearning, regaining trust at the state level and in every relationship. It also requires creating contexts in which to forge

a connection between these memories and living in the present. This is anything but simple, since the relationships, social networks and intimate ties in which people are embedded are infinitely complicated and differ with every person affected. Moreover, no person reacts exactly the same to violence, and may not receive the same satisfaction from certain 'small actions' as another person. As Das and Kleinman contend, "[t]here is no definitive 'crossing over,' no time when the healing is done. But there is also no complete surrender. Social life does continue." (Das and Kleinman, 2001, pp. 24).

Despite the amount of time they have lived in Canada and their overall satisfaction with their lives in Vancouver, it became obvious that for most of the people I spoke to, that events taking place in Cambodia were still very important for them. People's lifeworlds are closely linked, and are able to become even closer with the assistance of technology and communications. Kinship and place of origin remain important despite geographic distance, because of intimate ties and social networks of people. Though the people I spoke to all live outside Cambodia and are happy to live in Canada, there were many who feel very much a part of Cambodia and face constant reminders that they are not there. Their lives remain de-centered, but participating in both Canadian and Cambodian rituals and practices allow them to negotiate a liminal way of being.

The intimate ties that link them to events occurring in Cambodia continue to affect their abilities to 'move on.' This is at least part of the motivation either to actively forget or remain up to date with events occurring in Cambodia, and for some, to take part in activities that may affect the development of Cambodia as a democratic state. I have stated that in my observations among this group I found that the gender divisions did not indicate that the women were being subjugated or treated as inferior, but rather were choosing to maintain a role that was symbolic of their memories of how things should be.

Though this appeared to be the case among this particular group of people, it is not necessarily the case in every group, regardless of location. The aftermath of years of war and violence in Cambodia have resulted in a marked gender disparity, with a much higher ratio of females than males (McGrew, Frieson, Chan, 2004). Since 'moving on' will require the development of a democratic civil society, the inclusion and participation of women to ensure fair representation in this process will be essential.

Furthermore, the gap between generations has some dire and unsettling prospects for the future of Cambodia unless space is created to speak about Cambodia's past. The NGO's that disseminate information to the people with whom I conducted research have faced threats and intimidation from people in Cambodia. The communist period is a forbidden topic in Cambodian schools, and children might only hear about the Khmer Rouge from their parents or grandparents, when they are able to talk about it (Etcheson, 2005). Craig Etcheson has ominously reported that many Cambodian children simply do not believe the events ever took place, because they see the people who allegedly committed these crimes living their lives with absolute impunity (Etcheson, 2005).

The education of Cambodian children can affect the future development of Cambodia, as can the public education of non-Cambodians. The increased awareness of issues that involve other parts of the world can potentially have an effect on people regardless of locations. The involvement of state actors in the affairs of other states, the relationships many people have with those in other countries, and improvements in technology that facilitate intimate ties have profoundly affected people all over the world and make it difficult to argue that issues and atrocities occurring in 'other' places don't have importance or relevance in our own.

But this leads me to ask another question, about the environment in which persons

are resettled, and how this might influence the ability of groups to move on. Though I can't accurately measure the numbers or percentages of Khmer Rouge in any one location, I have heard claims that they are present in Vancouver, Toronto and to a lesser extent Montréal. However, despite the other challenges they face, groups in Toronto and Montréal have managed to set up a community or religious center. It could be that the percentage of Khmer Rouge is significantly higher in Vancouver than the other cities, creating a more considerable threat, as has been suggested to me during fieldwork. Or could this be due, at least in part, to the local environment or to public education? What other factors could be playing a role? Perhaps a closer look should also be paid to the social milieu within which groups attempt to move on, and to what changes could better facilitate this. As Das has stated, the focus should not be only on the "content of narratives, but also to the processes of their formation within local communities" (Das, 2001, pp.5).

However, by giving voice to people's stories, in large and small forms, and in spaces that do not necessarily have an explicitly political character, space can be slowly created in ways that impact social life on a local level. Going back to Daniel's interpretation of discourse, it is argued that discourse refers not only to verbal communication, but also signs, structures, material culture, the things left unsaid or even a lack of knowledge and awareness (Daniel, 2002). The messages conveyed by discourses communicate messages and ideas that may often be accepted as 'fact'. While the meetings, events, and parties usually pass unnoticed by non-Cambodians, they contribute to creating an alternative discourse, which in turn contributes to creating a small discursive space in which some are able to take comfort.

The master narrative conveyed by the media and many journalistic efforts allow many westerners feel that they are knowledgeable about politics and violence in other countries, but often the information they take in only reinforces what their expectations may lead them to believe, and maintains a hegemonic discourse that already exists (Daniel, 1996). This leaves little space for people in need of establishing a sense of continuity to assert themselves. Moreover, the images conveyed in nightly newscasts and sensationalized newspaper articles are rooted in Western based assumptions about 'other' places. Discourse creates 'facts' out of assumptions about authority and truth, and these assumptions about can influence and even legitimate policy decisions whether by government or NGO decision makers (Daniel, 1996). It becomes all too easy to see people as they might be presented, and forget the power they have within themselves and as a group, despite the challenges they face.

There is much knowledge that could be lost by ignoring or silencing the attempts and small actions that people undertake in order to 'move on' in the aftermath of violence. The small actions undergone in Vancouver may have little significance to global processes or even national processes in Canada or Cambodia, but they may make a large difference to a small number of people directly affected. By acknowledging these small actions, those who work in fields related to conflict and refugee studies stand to gain important and inimitable knowledge. Part of my motivation in choosing this topic has come from my own desire to work with people who have been affected by violence and displacement, and from my positioning as a Westerner with no direct experience of violence. By trying to uncover ways by which people 'move on' with their lives after terrible violence and suffering, I hope to gain insight into the ways in which 'outsiders' can make a relevant

difference in people's lives, without being constrained by already existing frameworks or theories to which refugees and survivors of violence are often forced to adapt.

Many academic accounts of similar research undertaken with people who have faced violence discuss the anthropologist or researcher as 'witness'. While my experience of 'witnessing' during fieldwork did become a source of significant knowledge for me, I have chosen not to engage in any such discussion. Though I was affected and continue to be affected by what was evoked in many of the stories I heard, the 'witness' ultimately was not me. My experience as listener was diluted from their direct experiences with violence, and my interpretations depicted here are diluted further still. It is the people directly affected by violence that carry not just images, but the 'living memory' of terror and fear within them.

So what of Wiesel's argument in regards to who has claim to these stories? Should I have refrained from this project because I have no experience of this kind? My position is not one of experience, but it can still carry some value. It has been said that "[a]nthropology has evolved as a discipline which largely seeks to interpret and explain the range of human experiences and understanding, to examine not only what is but to determine what is possible" (Clay, 1988, pp. 115). In response to my research question, is it possible to 'move on' after violence? And furthermore, what is made possible through this knowledge? Though I have tried to negate the discourse of refugee as 'powerless' and survivor as 'victim', and have tried to illustrate the power and agency that people ultimately have, this does not mean that there is nothing left for an 'outsider' to do to assist. Some broad areas have been revealed that could be acted upon in order to have a positive impact. If they are implemented in ways that include and have relevance to the people they are designed to assist, then work that facilitates the creation of space for people to

voice their experiences, to engage in alternative discourses, or increase public awareness can all have resounding effects on people's lives. Perhaps my motivations are pragmatic, or perhaps pessimistic. But despite the need for research into identifying genocide and other forms of mass violence in order to prevent it, this is a tactic that will ultimately have slow results, and in the meantime there are increasing numbers of people who are already or will soon be living with violence and terror, and answers on how to best assist them need to be developed.

Janet McLellan has claimed that, "[t]he Cambodian's achievements in resettlement, their gradual re-creation of cultural and community ties, and their attempts to rebuild shattered lives are all testament to the strength and tenacity of the Khmer spirit." (McLellan, 1999, pp. 135). While I agree with this statement, I also believe that the words 'Cambodian' and 'Khmer' could be removed and replaced with the name of any group, and this statement would still likely be true. Unfortunately, there are far too many opportunities to prove this hypothesis.

I started off this thesis by asking a question that I know I can't answer, but that in itself is the conundrum in which survivors of violence find their lives embedded. Over and over the question is asked "Why? Why did this happen?" But no answer can be given, only more questions asked in the hopes that one of them will eventually offer up enough relief to take comfort in. The question I ask, how people 'move on' after such unimaginable violence, is one that cannot be summed up in a neat paragraph. To say 'yes' would deny the struggles that people face each day, and to say 'no' would deny the strength of their efforts. The information conveyed by the Vancouver Cambodians certainly open up more questions in regards to the need for more long-term study of people who have experienced violence, and whether or not the ongoing impact of genocide differs in any

way from the effects of other forms of violence. But, the answers to these questions will ultimately open up more questions.

As the first interview drew to a close, I asked Dara, still seated across the table from me, if there was anything else she might like to add. Without hesitation, she sat forward.

"Yes. Because the thing is, you do this project that's related to our Cambodian people, our culture, and I think something with the tribunal- something like that. I would like you to extend whatever information I try to explain to you about my life over here. I'm happy to be here, because..."

Her voice trailed off as she chose her next words. When she began again, she spoke with purpose, enunciating each word with deliberate care. "I don't get my job as a teacher back, but I get to work as a community worker. It's very good for me, and I will work until I retire. I am so happy. I build the strength of the Cambodian society here, the community here." She paused again briefly to reflect on her words before continuing, her voice gathering in strength, pitch and emotion.

"You know, culture and life here and the system in Canada is different. You cannot just talk to the seniors, and say, 'Okay now, you see, here is Canada, so you have to forget whatever you were and just come and adjust. It's not easy for them. For us. I just want you to come here and then give away this information. I'm happy here. *I'm happy!* I'm not rich, I'm not poor, and I'm *happy*. I have something that people don't have. Because, you know why? People, the Communists, they all gone. But, I'm still here! Still here, still working. I talk to Canadians, I talk to Cambodians, I talk to other people. We help with so many things. So, I would like you to do that. Please."

Her palms were pressed flat against the table, as they were at the very start of this interview. But now her body was poised over them, her eyes on me as she asked her question as a statement. I knew it was not meant to be rhetorical. Meeting her eyes, I reached across the table to turn off the recorder. "I will," I answered, as I did so. The tension between us broke, and her laugh, at once joyful and relieved, was the last thing that could be heard before the tape shut off.

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