

Overcoming Stereotypes: The Long Road to Reconciliation and Development in Anlong Veng

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Much has been written of the oppressive and hostile Khmer Rouge regime that governed Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. As is the case after any mass atrocity, debate over the number of people that died continues, nearly forty years after Vietnamese and People's Republic of Kampuchea forces liberated Phnom Penh. Yet this discussion takes away from the immense human tragedy that was the Cambodian Genocide. Indeed, each victim of the Khmer Rouge was a human being: someone with their own life, their own loved ones, their own interests and personality, their own story.

Of course, in any analysis of victimhood one must look beyond the period of trauma (in this case 1975 to 1979) to the ongoing effects evident in contemporary society. An underdeveloped and under-resourced medical system has meant that the high number of Cambodians that suffer mental health illnesses, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, often remain without diagnosis. Illnesses such as these attribute for the worryingly high prevalence of domestic violence (between 15 and 25 percent of women in a relationship suffer from some form of abuse)¹ and substance abuse seen in Cambodia today. The inability of the current regime to stimulate economic and social development in the post-Khmer Rouge era has meant that Cambodia has stagnated while its neighbours, Thailand and Vietnam, develop at a rapid rate.² Considering that some 63% of Cambodians lost at least one family member³ during the Khmer Rouge period and that intellectuals, such as medical professionals, were targeted in Khmer Rouge purges, an entire generation of survivors have



Anlong Veng Peace Center, Ta Mok's former meeting house.

¹ Beth Van Shaack, Daryn Reicherter., and Youk Chhang. 2011. *Cambodia's Hidden Scars*. 1st ed. Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, p. 110.

² Thailand has consolidated as the 10th largest economy in Asia-Pacific despite its political instability. See: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/09/top-10-competitive-economies-asia-pacific/>. In Vietnam, average annual income has jumped from \$100 in 1986, to \$2000 in 2015. Like Cambodia, Vietnam has a disproportionately large young population and has effectively used youths in driving growth. See: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davisbrett/2016/02/02/vietnam-the-quiet-economic-success-story-of-asia/#2ffba4bb4536>.

³ Joslyn Reedy. 2007. "The Mental Health Conditions Of Cambodian Refugee Children And Adolescents". Senior Honors, The Ohio State University.

grown up without an adequate support network; both medically and in the domestic sphere.

Looking beyond the collective and focusing on each individual's experience is a crucial (yet sometimes overlooked) restorative necessity in a post-conflict society. Allowing individual's the opportunity to recount their experiences can not only be cathartic for the story-teller, but also assist in accurately documenting the atrocities of the past. Indeed, this testimonial process is not restricted exclusively to victims. Providing perpetrators a platform to recount their own story, and listening respectfully, is an essential element in rebuilding and reconciling a traumatised society. This is particularly pertinent in understanding the rule of the Khmer Rouge during Democratic Kampuchea. Such was the destructiveness of the regime, the full extent of the damage done is still being realised. As the years since Democratic Kampuchea advance, and the number of people born since the genocide continues to grow, using testimony as a form of educating the next generation of Cambodia's complicated and distressing past becomes only more important. Listening to others tell their story spreads knowledge and empathy and in turn, these factors have the capacity to empower and unite. Cambodia remains a developing country. Its harrowing history of fragmentation, political instability and genocide continue to impact on the psyche of the nation today. The need for reconciliation is abundantly clear. Cambodia's capacity to successfully develop will depend on its ability to unify.

The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) has, since 1995, shouldered much of the burden of interviewing, collecting testimonies and documenting the Khmer Rouge period of Cambodia's history.⁴ DC-Cam's intent to reveal the 'two-sides' of history through the perspective of both victim and perpetrator has illustrated a detailed picture of the Khmer Rouge hierarchy and ideology, while also given a voice to many survivors. One of its recent ventures, the Anlong Veng Peace Center, is the latest example of this. The center exists within the district of Anlong Veng, Oddar Meanchey province in Northern Cambodia, perilously close to the Thai border. Anlong Veng is remembered in Cambodia as being the final stronghold of the Khmer Rouge, it was not brought under the control of the central government until 1999.⁵ As a result, many of the inhabitants of Anlong Veng's 68 villages were former members of the Khmer Rouge and maintain some sentiments towards the regime. Given its isolation, and the ongoing hostilities between Cambodia and Thailand regarding border markings, Anlong Veng lacks the necessary resources to provide sufficient healthcare and educational opportunities. Poverty remains an issue of pertinence in Anlong Veng and has only accentuated in recent years due to tensions over land ownership, reduction in the price of crops and poor harvests.

While the objectives of the Anlong Veng Peace Center are, in many respects, simple, there remains many obstacles to success. The center was established by DC-Cam, in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism, to encourage reconciliation and national dialogue between Cambodians. Peace tours are conducted on a monthly basis which provide students from Phnom Penh the opportunity to travel to Anlong Veng, interact

⁴ See website: <http://www.dccam.org/>

⁵ Dy Khamboly and Christopher Dearing, *A History Of The Anlong Veng Community*. 1st ed. Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, p. 124.

with its' residents and visit the districts' 14 historical sites related to the Khmer Rouge.⁶ The peace center itself exists atop Dangrek Mountain at the site of the meeting house of revered Khmer Rouge leader, Ta Mok. The breathtaking views over deep, rolling valleys encourages a mood of peaceful contemplation and reflection. The center holds a public library with Khmer Rouge-related material that is opened to all in Anlong Veng and welcomes researchers from Cambodia and abroad.

I, along with my co-intern from Monash University Max, had the privilege of visiting Anlong Veng along with our colleagues at DC-Cam. The purpose of our visit was to conduct interviews and further research into the reconciliation process between Anlong Veng and the rest of Cambodia. Our experiences and the people we met have provided the framework for the discussion that follows. I review the work of the Anlong Veng Peace Center and assess how successful it has been in promoting national dialogue in Cambodia.

A primary objective of this paper is to address the notion of stereotypes and explore how they limit a society's capacity to achieve reconciliation and to develop. It is evident that it is human nature to make assumptions and judgements of other people and their beliefs without a detailed understanding of who they actually are and the way in which they live. Indeed, stereotypes emerge and spread due to the events of the past, be they positive or negative, and become so enshrined in the way in which we understand something that our judgements and perspectives become clouded by bias. Yes, it is true that many in Anlong Veng were, be it voluntary or not, associated with the brutal Khmer Rouge regime. And it is no doubt true that some of those living in Anlong Veng would have taken part in some of the atrocities that occurred during Democratic Kampuchea and after. Yet, the importance of peeling back this layer that polarises Cambodia and dictates the notion of 'us vs them' is essential to achieving prosperity. As will be discussed, our interactions with villagers revealed many of the challenges faced by the Anlong Veng community. What struck me most was that many of the challenges identified by interviewees were the very same challenges relevant to communities the world over, namely: infrastructure, education, healthcare and security.

Because, to put it bluntly, people are people. We all share the same concerns for our loved ones and desire a better world for our children and their children, and this desire that makes us so distinctly human has transcended history. We also have the capacity for our views to be manipulated and influenced by our past experiences, by other people and by what we learn or are told to believe. This is a process that can be undone, and recalibrated in order to foster mutual respect and understanding. This process does not happen overnight. It requires a sustained, collaborative effort of which education and cross-community exposure is essential. Within the context of Cambodia, the Anlong Veng Peace Center has emerged as an instrumental mediator between the Anlong Veng community and the rest of the nation in overcoming pre-existing stereotypes that continue to divide Cambodian society. In the foreseeable future, it is feasible for Cambodia to celebrate a story of national unity and growth free from prejudice and conflict. It is hoped that this paper assists, in some small way, to this process.

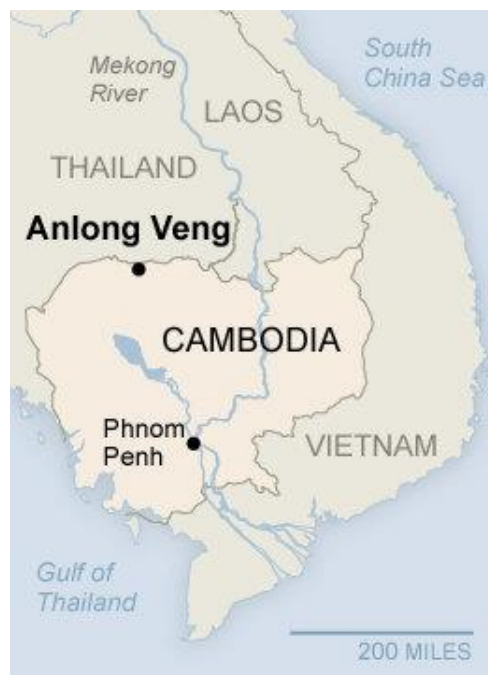
⁶ Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2017. "Documentation Center Of Cambodia (DC-Cam)". *D.Dccam.Org*. <http://d.dccam.org/Projects/AVPC/avpc.htm>.

As DC-Cam's Director, Youk Chhang, has so elegantly and accurately articulated, "...a society cannot know itself if it does not have an accurate memory of its own history..."⁷ Memory and history are factors that make us unique. Be that national, communal or individual, our ability to relate to one another is the result of shared memory and experiences. Let Cambodia remember the atrocities of the past as a collective, in order to embark down the long road to prosperity in unison.

Anlong Veng: A Complicated History and a Misunderstood Present

We had heard much of Anlong Veng and read much of its history in the lead up to our visit at the end of January 2017. I envisaged a place of extreme isolation, with little remnants of the outside world and hostility shown towards visitors. I was, therefore, quite surprised upon arriving in Anlong Veng to discover a bustling town with distinct signs of development and international influences. Lining the dusty, red roads were shops selling a wide variety of goods. On a short wander through town we discovered shops specialising in all manner of electronics, wedding dresses and beauty products such as nail polish.

Immediately my preconceived idea that Anlong Veng was a district that was stuck in the past and unable or unwilling to modernise was challenged. My prior assumption that Anlong Veng would be hostile and unwelcoming was also immediately debunked as we took in the beauty of the surrounding landscape. Anlong Veng Lake (formerly Ta Mok's Lake) sprawled across the landscape as the setting sun glistened on its surface. The lake was lined by the Dangrek Mountains that served as almost a natural boundary defining the district. Any evidence of the districts political history during its Khmer Rouge days had been removed, and replaced with 'Cambodian People's Party' propaganda posters as one would see in Phnom Penh.



Anlong Veng is located just 13 kilometres from the Si Saket Province border crossing with Thailand. French cartographers drew the boundary between Cambodia and Thailand in 1907 with the border following the natural watershed between the two countries.⁸ Despite this, the map deviated in Preah Vihear province (neighbouring Oddar Meanchey) as the cartographers included the 11th century temples from the Angkor Empire as part of Cambodia despite being on Thailand's side of the demarcation line.⁹ The resulting conflicts between the nations over where the border lies have been a constant reoccurrence and trickled across into Oddar Meanchey province, thus implicating Anlong Veng.¹⁰ There remains a strong presence of Cambodian and Thai troops stationed on either side of the border.

⁷ Fenn, Roy. 2012. "Documenting Tragedy Reconciles Past". *Usaid.Gov*. <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/democracy-human-rights-governance/documenting-tragedy-reconciles-past>.

⁸ Pou Sothirak, 2013. "Cambodia's Border Conflict With Thailand". *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2013.

⁹ Sothirak, "Cambodia's Border Conflict With Thailand", 2013.

Anlong Veng's borders have constantly shuffled between Thailand and Cambodia. This has been a constant source of difficulty as these border movements have impacted on Anlong Veng's ability to develop a stable culture and system of linguistics. As Lon Nol was installed as head of state in 1970, King Sihanouk announced his support for the Khmer Rouge, his former enemies, as people in the countryside continued to support him. In 1973, the US dropped approximately 500,000 tonnes of bombs on Cambodia's countryside that killed as many as 300,000 people.¹¹ While this delayed the Khmer Rouge's ascendancy to power, the upheaval and resentment felt towards the US saw many in the countryside align with The Khmer Rouge.¹²

Despite the support for the Khmer Rouge, Anlong Veng, like the rest of the country, suffered during Democratic Kampuchea and were not spared from living in highly controlled cooperatives.¹³ Children faced prolonged separation from their parents and were forced to perform heavy labour while also attending classes on ideology.¹⁴ Arrests and internal purges were as common here as they were in other parts of the country and living conditions were trying.

When the Khmer Rouge were ousted from power in January 1979, residents were forced to flee their communes and cross into the Dangrek Mountains on the Thai border. Supporters from Anlong Veng, along with those positioned in Phnom Penh and other parts of the country, lived together and faced great difficulties while living in the mountains. Despite the Khmer Rouge still officially being recognised as Cambodia's ruling party by the international community, they remained in exile until Ta Mok made the decision to move all the people back to Anlong Veng in 1990.¹⁵



Anlong Veng reintegration, 1999. Credit: Documentation Center of Cambodia archives

New villages were constructed as well as houses and farms as many of those who established new lives in Anlong Veng during the 1990s remain living there today. More years of turmoil, conflict and instability followed for the people of Anlong Veng as tension within the Khmer Rouge leadership rose. When Anlong Veng was finally

¹⁰ BBC News,. 2008. "BBC NEWS | World | Thais Accused Over New Temple Row". *News.Bbc.Co.Uk*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/7539412.stm.

¹¹ Khamboly and Dearing, *A History Of The Anlong Veng Community*, p. 27.

¹² Khamboly and Dearing, *A History Of The Anlong Veng Community* p. 27.

¹³ Khamboly and Dearing, *A History Of The Anlong Veng Community* p. 30.

¹⁴ Khamboly and Dearing, *A History Of The Anlong Veng Community* p. 31.

¹⁵ Khamboly and Dearing, *A History Of The Anlong Veng Community* p. 73.

reintegrated into Cambodian society after the death of Pol Pot, there was a sense of relief among Anlong Veng's inhabitants.

In reconstructing a post-Khmer Rouge communal identity, Anlong Veng has had to grapple with its own traumatic and unstable past as well as external judgements and criticisms of continual Khmer Rouge support. Our pre-departure perspectives were shaped by these views and, despite assurances from our DC-Cam colleagues to the contrary, we were expecting a somewhat hostile reception when conducting interviews.

The tranquillity and peacefulness inspired by Anlong Veng's natural surroundings immediately challenged this preconception. Children were playing in the lily paddies of the lake as people went about their everyday activities calmly. Anlong Veng boasts a market and plenty of small restaurants as well as a small temporary theme park for children complete with rides and a jumping castle. In a district in which international visitors are still a relatively new phenomena, Max and I turned lots of heads as we explored Anlong Veng town. Yet despite this, I was pleasantly surprised to encounter an atmosphere that was warm and welcoming. Children and adults alike would wave to us shouting 'hello', clearly thrilled to show off their English skills.

There has been an increased emphasis placed on attracting tourists through Anlong Veng to explore Khmer Rouge sites of significance, such as Pol Pot's grave and Ta Mok's lake house, a venture encouraged by the Anlong Veng Peace Center. This form of tourism serves as a crucial element in the process of increasing dialogue across Cambodia. What is to follow is a recount of the interviews that we conducted in the villages of Anlong Veng. Again, a process that we hope will encourage communication and overcome obstacles to reconciliation in Cambodia.

Interviewing to Inform Reconciliation and Development



Students of an Anlong Veng Peace Tour interview a local villager, Credit: Anlong Veng Peace Tour, 14-17 February 2017

Throughout our time in Anlong Veng, we visited four villages and, with the help of our translators Bota and Bora, interviewed people of varying ages, professions, and with different levels of affiliation to the Khmer Rouge. Without Bota and Bora's help this project would have been near impossible. Not only did they translate, they were also able to identify and warn us when interviewees became uncomfortable

with, or hostile towards, a particular line of questioning. It should be noted that not all interviewees were comfortable with us recording and publishing their names. When referencing these, the interviews are referred to as 'Interview A, Interview B' etc.

The purpose of these interviews were not to interrogate or humiliate. The purpose of these interviews were threefold. Firstly, test how successful our village writing template would be when used on villagers in Anlong Veng. The Anlong Veng Peace Center intends to send students from Phnom Penh to Anlong Veng's 68 villages on a six month tour in which the students will document each villages' history. Our trip to the district therefore provided an opportunity to test the effectiveness of our history writing framework that we have constructed for the students.

Secondly, the purpose was to establish just how involved people in the area were with the Khmer Rouge and to determine the overall sentiments to the Khmer Rouge felt by the contemporary villages. This process is of the utmost importance in pursuing efficient reconciliation. A degree of mediation is required when promoting conversation between the Anlong Veng community and wider Cambodia. Given its isolation and lack of connectivity to the rest of the nation, the importance of travelling to Anlong Veng, learning the stories of those that reside in the district, and sharing these with urban Cambodia is an essential element in the peace building process.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the purpose of our interviews was to observe the struggles faced by the Anlong Veng community and ask its' people what the priorities should be when it comes to development. While there are, of course, logistical challenges when it comes to development such as funding and resource availability, asking those that are living through difficulties of their priorities in each village is essential when constructing a development plan.

Thus, the results from the interviews are split into these three subgroups below. This is followed by a series of recommendations and a reflection on the experience of interviewing ex-Khmer Rouge members. There remain too many people in the world faced with the invasive and constant threat of poverty. Poverty is not something that grabs headlines on a daily basis simply because it is just there, and always has been. In my experience of growing up in a wealthy, developed country, most people who can afford a comfortable and stable livelihood are willing to contribute significant amounts of money to improve the lives of those less fortunate. Yet without any exposure to those living in poverty, determining how or where money is best spent is difficult to conclude. I hope that this paper assists in some way to increasing exposure to Cambodia's past, and also to the challenges it faces going into the future.

1) History Writing as a Means of Educating

The purpose of the village history writing project in Anlong Veng is to educate other parts of Cambodia about each village and to emphasise the importance of the district as a part of Cambodia's identity. As such, our interviews allowed us to gather preliminary information regarding each village to test the relevance of our framework. These questions also provided context for later questions on reconciliation and development. We discovered that each of the villages we visited were settled after the fall of Democratic Kampuchea with most being established during the Ta Mok period of the

1990s. The population of each village has steadily climbed with one village rising from 70 families (when it was created in 1996) to 142 families as of 2016.¹⁶ Almost all of our respondents were cassava and rice farmers while some had secondary professions such as shopkeeping.

When we raised questions regarding the Khmer Rouge with interviewees some were willing to share their experiences as part of the group, whereas some were more reserved and suspicious of our motives. Many of those associated, while being sympathetic towards Ta Mok, were grateful when Anlong Veng reintegrated as it meant they could stay in one place and would have constant access to food. Many were extremely critical of the Khmer Rouge in hindsight, whereas others used less strong language and while they were not entirely supportive of the regime today, they considered the regimes intentions to be good. When we asked whether the Khmer Rouge committed crimes, we got a mix of responses with many suggesting that it was difficult to determine which sides were responsible for what crimes. Indeed, when you consider the bombings conducted by the US in the early 1970s, and the crimes committed by Vietnam during its occupation, it appeared that there remained a degree of confusion over guilt and intention.

A significantly high number of those who had arrived since reintegration in 1999 came from Siem Reap province, where it was impossible for them to buy land and find work. This suggests that in Siem Reap (one of Cambodia's poorest provinces)¹⁷ much is still to be done in relation to development. Indeed, issues of land ownership were highlighted by a number of interviewees. Many in Anlong Veng did not own their land and paid a significant amount of rent to landowners. The most recent harvest was particularly unsuccessful and many were reporting that they had lost money.

Given the movement of the population throughout the Cambodian Civil War and under the Khmer Rouge it was difficult to determine the early origins of the district. It appears that people from throughout what is now considered Cambodia and Thailand settled in the area before French cartographers marked the borders in 1907. However, there was much to be learned regarding the villages' recent history. We found that by first visiting the village chiefs' house before going to the houses of others, people were more welcoming and we were also provided some context by the chiefs. The students who will be undertaking this project have quite a task on their hands, and while it may seem daunting and difficult to accurately document the history of these complex and troubled villages, it is an extremely worthy project that will greatly assist the reconciliation process.

2) *Reconciliation in Cambodia*

The response of most interviewees when queried on their relationship with the rest of Cambodia was that there were no feelings of animosity in the aftermath of the collapse of the Khmer Rouge. Many who previously supported the regime claimed to be angry towards it now for the hardships experienced over previous decades. As previously

¹⁶ Interview A, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

¹⁷ Martin Orth. 2013. *Regional Economic Development In Siem Reap*. Phnom Penh: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

mentioned, those interviewed welcomed reintegration as it promised reliable food supplies and stability.

However, delving deeper into the answers that were provided by village chiefs and comparing them with the opinions of those from outside Anlong Veng suggests tension remains. A female village chief, who was a civilian under the Khmer Rouge, recalled the isolation she felt as her family and friends condemned her association with the Khmer Rouge and ignored her for several years.¹⁸ As she has established success and influence in Anlong Veng, she has donated large sums of money to her loved ones and gradually been able to reconcile her relationships.¹⁹

A second village chief was hugely critical of the Extraordinary Chamber in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) in which a small number of senior Khmer Rouge officials have been tried over the last decade.²⁰ This man identified the cost of the courts as a major problem.²¹ However, his primary concern was that the trials were a divisive, targeted process that may disrupt reconciliation and lead to further conflict.²² He was also angry that the courts had been established exclusively for Khmer Rouge leaders and that Americans responsible for the large scale bombings throughout the Cambodian countryside during the Vietnam War would not be indicted.²³

Three interviewees opposed Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party that has been ruling Cambodia since the Vietnamese formally handed over control. Each of these people were reluctant to comment in any depth on Hun Sen's government out of fear of retribution however, one lady was suspicious of our motives, and somewhat hostile towards us, as she had criticised government officials publically the day before.²⁴

Yet despite these anomalies, the vast majority of interviewees held no outstanding grudges against people from outside Anlong Veng. It therefore appears that the obstacles to reconciliation are from those that maintain preconceived ideas of the people in Anlong Veng. Many of those interviewed were critical of the Khmer Rouge for the crimes they had committed and for the hardships they had been responsible for over preceding decades.

One interviewee recalls the exhaustion he felt at being a messenger for the Khmer Rouge as every aspect of his life was dictated by the regime.²⁵ He, along with many others interviewed, had turned to the communist movement in the early 1970s in an attempt to get his rural concerns recognised and to oppose the US and elitism in Cambodia.²⁶ He recalled how it was very easy to join the Khmer Rouge, but attempting to escape would result in execution.²⁷ These sentiments were reflected among other

¹⁸ My Peou, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

¹⁹ My Peou, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

²⁰ Im Lot, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

²¹ Im Lot, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

²² Im Lot, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

²³ Im Lot, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

²⁴ Interview B, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

²⁵ Brom Sahn, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

²⁶ Brom Sahn, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

²⁷ Brom Sahn, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

interviewees as the consensus was that there was a feeling of being stuck and being held hostage by the Khmer Rouge.

For these periphery members of the regime it raises the question of determining guilt and compliance to the atrocities committed. Crucial to reconciliation is acknowledging and appropriately remembering the past. It appears that condemnation of the Khmer Rouge exists, not just among those who were not associated, but also among those who could not escape. It is clear that criticisms of the regime are shared nationally, yet the assumption that those in Anlong Veng remain sympathetic has hindered reconciliation. The importance of telling the stories and sharing the memories of those in Anlong Veng with the rest of Cambodia is therefore amplified. Understanding that all Cambodians are still feeling the effects of trauma and anger towards the oppressive regime is essential in the pursuit of reconciliation and the creation of a shared memory.

3) Development Priorities in Anlong Veng

'Development' is a term that has a tendency to polarise opinion as its effective implementation has been a source of international tension. Indeed, models for development are constantly proposed and implemented to varying degrees of success. It is a process that requires external funding and support and as such, those who make decisions on how to effectively develop generally come from outside the affected community. Such extensive discussion and debate can lead to a community's priorities being misunderstood or misrepresented while delays in developmental aid may have a significant impact on the community.

One interviewee disdained the term 'development' as she believed it served as an excuse for government officials and NGOs to discuss and propose change without taking any real action.²⁸ These sentiments were shared among others as one couple spoke of their need to send their children to work in Thailand illegally as a means of providing economic support.²⁹ Another middle aged lady's daughter was working in Phnom Penh and sending a proportion of her income back to her family in Anlong Veng.³⁰

When queried on what the development priorities should be, the same issues were reoccurring among interviewees. The major concern was income security and employment. The main profession of those interviewed was, of course, farming with cassava being the primary crop and rice also being a survival necessity. Cassava is a potato-like root that is laid on the ground to dry by farmers before being sent off to factories to have starch or flour extracted from it. The price of cassava has dropped dramatically over the last twelve months with it being sold for 525 riel (approximately \$0.12) per kilogram.³¹ Many indicated their growing concerns over the price of cassava suggesting that there was no crop that could be harvested as a substitute. Those that did not own land had to pay rent while also contending with these falling prices.

When asked of the most important development needs, interviewees identified necessities that are priorities for everyone in the world. Concerns over the proximity

²⁸ Interview C, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

²⁹ Interview D, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

³⁰ Interview E, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

³¹ Kang Sothear, 2016. "Cassava Prices Drop Sharply Amid Low Demand". *The Cambodia Daily*.

and reliability of healthcare and education were recurring trends. One of the most common responses were infrastructural concerns over the state of the roads. Indeed, many villages in Anlong Veng are connected through dusty, rocky roads that are not only dangerous and difficult to navigate, but also near impossible for trucks or emergency vehicles to travel down.

Upon visiting a primary school and speaking to three teachers, the issue of school attendance was flagged as a major concern.³² Children are required to assist parents on family farms which not only means they fall behind in class, it also creates difficulties for teachers in conducting lessons as the level of knowledge among pupils is staggered. Students at this particular school only attended for four hours and teachers also acknowledged their desperate need for greater funding and the provision of greater resources.³³ Of the 102 students that were enrolled in the school, only 60% were expected to go onto middle school.³⁴ The teachers, very honestly, also acknowledged their own restrictions as they had received only limited training. They did not receive updated or continual training meaning that they were not equipped to educate students with different learning requirements and their teaching methods could not evolve.

Finally, we visited a hospital and spoke to the head of mental health. He himself admitted to not being a mental health expert and had access to only four types of medication for mental illnesses due to a lack of resources and knowledge of diseases.³⁵ This doctor highlighted the link between the high prevalence of mental illness with domestic violence, poverty and drug and alcohol abuse.³⁶ It is commonly accepted that many suffering mental illness in Cambodia remain undiagnosed due to the ongoing stigma associated with such diseases. The doctor even went as far as to say that people with mental illnesses were considered by some as being 'crazy'.³⁷ He highlighted the importance of reducing this stigma in alleviating the burden of not only mental illness, but of domestic violence and substance abuse.

When addressing these concerns brought up by people that were interviewed, it is important to not look at them in isolation but to address the correlation between various concerns. Many students were not attending school regularly enough due to required help on family properties. Providing support and resources for families could therefore be considered a viable way of improving attendance. Additionally, improving the quality of roads would not only increase safety, but would also allow for greater ease of access to schools and hospitals.

There is much that can be done in Anlong Veng. Many people still live in the ghosts of the past and continue to suffer from poverty and from externally perceived ongoing associations with the Khmer Rouge. Cambodia, as a nation with one of the world's largest civil service, still suffers from crippling poverty and a lack of opportunity. Anlong Veng is just one example of a community that requires attention and support.

³² Interview F, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

³³ Interview F, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

³⁴ Interview F, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

³⁵ Interview G, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

³⁶ Interview G, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

³⁷ Interview G, Personal Interview, 30/01/17.

The purpose of this next section is to address how answers from interviewees can be used to benefit the Anlong Veng community.

Towards Reconciliation and Development

Our interviews with the people of Anlong Veng highlighted the glaring inequalities that exist within Cambodia and across the world. The daily struggles experienced by the community was evident, not only through the answers given to questions, but also in the clear expressions of pain and frustration in the faces of interviewees. Reconciliation and development are constant processes that require a continued effort to ensure progression. Ideally, stimulating economic and social growth would be immediately achievable. However, this process is gradual and takes a sustained effort over an extended period of time. As such, I have identified two realistic areas in which action can be taken in the immediate future: the provision of electricity and education. Within each area are a series of achievable goals targeted at promoting reconciliation and development that may also lead to economic growth.

At the heart of ensuring reconciliation in Cambodia is promoting cross-community dialogue and education. 85% of the population live in rural areas and have restricted contact with those outside their community.³⁸ This is accentuated by a lack of access to electricity and internet. The government has committed to ensuring that 70% of Cambodians have readily available access to electricity by 2030.³⁹ This meagre attempt at providing support for people in rural areas will only place these communities at a greater disadvantage to those living in urban landscapes around the world. Global inequalities are further exaggerated as the developing world is unable to compete with wealthy nations in regards to access to IT.⁴⁰ This has an impact on education, access to information and entertainment for those living in affected communities.

In Anlong Veng's villages, most people relied on battery power in order to light up rooms at night. Among those who were more financially secure, there had been a gradual, and successful, shift towards the use of solar power. While the cost of installing solar panels is a burden, it does appear as a viable alternative in the meantime before the introduction of reliable electricity. Installation of a solar panel starts at \$175.⁴¹ Maintenance costs are cheaper than that of generators or power bills and solar panels have greater reliability.⁴² Cambodia receives well above the global average of solar energy each day.⁴³ One interviewee that had installed a solar panel received enough energy to power lights and fans for 2 to 3 days from one full day of sunshine.⁴⁴ By comparison, building a kilometre of power lines in Cambodia costs \$1,000, and power

³⁸ M Sarraf, B. Rismanchi, R. Saidur, H.W. Ping, and N.A. Rahim. 2013. "Renewable Energy Policies For Sustainable Development In Cambodia". *Renewable And Sustainable Energy Reviews* 22: 223-229. doi:10.1016/j.rser.2013.02.010.

³⁹ Sarraf, Rismanchi, Saidur and Ping, "Renewable Energy Policies For Sustainable Development In Cambodia", 2013

⁴⁰ G, D, M, Wijers, 2010. "Determinants Of The Digital Divide: A Study On IT Development In Cambodia". *Technology In Society* 32 (4): 336-341. doi:10.1016/j.techsoc.2010.10.011.

⁴¹ Rann Reuy, 2013. "Solar Panels See Sunny Times Ahead". *The Phnom Penh Post*.

⁴² Reuy, "Solar Panels See Sunny Times Ahead". 2013.

⁴³ Igor Kossov., 2015. "Solar Market Soars As Panel Prices Fall". *Khmer Times*.

⁴⁴ Interview H, Interviewed by Max Durie, Andrew France and Phat Bora, Personal Interview, 29/01/17.

lines suffer a significant drop in electrical charge for distances exceeding 50 kilometres.⁴⁵

To alleviate the cost on individual households, large scale solar panels can be installed to provide the energy needs of a village. This has been a successful project in Indian villages as power companies have sponsored the installation of 30 kilowatt solar panels.⁴⁶ This gives these so called 'smart villages' enough energy for work that demands excessive power such as irrigation pumping for farming.⁴⁷ It has also led to introduction of Wi-Fi hotspots, gradually reducing the digital divide between India's rural and urban areas. Large scale panels such as these can be controlled, and energy usage monitored by the installation company from anywhere.⁴⁸

The importance of education must also be increasingly emphasised and class attendance strongly encouraged. This is a difficult topic to discuss with families due to the necessity of children in assisting at home. The importance of family-school partnerships cannot be underestimated as when parents play an active role in the education process, it has a positive effect on their children.⁴⁹ Thus, emphasising education as a shared experience within a family unit will help in fostering a positive approach to learning. The prospect of non-traditional school hours could also be explored in order to allow students the opportunity to assist their parents at home, and receive an education.

The introduction of an exchange program also has the potential to contribute to both reconciliation and development in Cambodia. Such a program is a common occurrence in other parts of the world and could potentially be run by the Anlong Veng Peace Center and its extensive network. High school students from Phnom Penh that have previously completed peace tours to Anlong Veng may be considered eligible for such tours. Students would stay with a host family for a period of two weeks or more, and attend school daily with the children of the family. This process could then be reciprocated with students from Anlong Veng High School staying with those from Phnom Penh. This would not only be rewarding exposure for the students who partake in the program to experience other ways people live across the country, but it would also allow encourage communication and the sharing of stories between youths nationally.

If successful with students, such a program could also be conducted among teachers. As previously discussed, the teachers we spoke to in Anlong Veng believed they were at a disadvantage due to a lack of support and continued education. A short term exchange program in which teachers from Anlong Veng spend time observing and participating in the classrooms of those in Phnom Penh would be beneficial in developing teaching skills. This could also be mirrored with teachers from Phnom Penh spending time in the schools of Anlong Veng's villages. Sharing ideas and learning from one another in such a

⁴⁵ Kossov, "Solar Market Soars As Panel Prices Fall", 2015.

⁴⁶ Edd Gent, 2016. "How India's 'Smart Villages' Are Centralising Solar Power". *BBC News*.

⁴⁷ Gent, "How India's 'Smart Villages' Are Centralising Solar Power", 2016.

⁴⁸ Gent, "How India's 'Smart Villages' Are Centralising Solar Power", 2016.

⁴⁹ Amanda Witte and Susan Sheridan. 2011. *Family Engagement In Rural Schools*. National Center for Research on Rural Education.

way has the capacity for students to learn in a positive, productive environment that encourages cross-community interactions.

Conclusions

Cambodia is a country at crossroads. With 70% of its population being born after the fall of Democratic Kampuchea in 1979,⁵⁰ and the ECCC's impending closure after the completion of its current trials, the way in which history and memory are documented will construct the nation's identity and inform generations to come. Cambodia's recent history of division and hardship is still evident in the psyche of contemporary society through the challenges faced. Underemployment remains as high as 38% of the population,⁵¹ while political corruption, mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence significantly disrupt the effective functioning of society. The Khmer Rouge fractured the traditionally understood livelihood of Cambodians and the long term impact is still being felt.

Recovery from an atrocity is a gradual, and at times tedious, process. It requires a sustained, unified effort over an extended period of time and relies upon the patience and open-mindedness of the affected. The people of Anlong Veng have suffered deeply over the last four decades. Their continued association with the Khmer Rouge has only accentuated their isolation from the rest of the nation. Inhabitants of Anlong Veng share the same concerns and aspirations of those in Phnom Penh and indeed across the world. They desire a reliable income, security and access to healthcare and education just as people do everywhere. The work of the Anlong Veng Peace Center in promoting reconciliation through cross-community interactions is therefore essential in the continued reintegration process for Anlong Veng. Cambodia will always be a nation that attracts tourism and the interests of the international sphere. Encouraging further research and exploration of Anlong Veng has the potential to positively influence the people of the districts' villages through exposure to the outside world, while also providing valuable insight for visitors into the past, and future needs of Anlong Veng.

I also wish to provide recommendations in order for the suggestions in the previous section to come into fruition. I discussed the possibility of introducing solar energy as an alternative to electricity, an approach that has had success in rural India.⁵² This would provide villages in Anlong Veng access to lights and fans in the evening at a subsidised price, and assist in reducing the digital divide between Anlong Veng and the rest of the world. Such a project requires collaboration between the government and donors. The government has committed to development in the area through the provision of the 'peace' round about and Hun Sen's schools in Anlong Veng town, as well as the Ministry of Tourism's ongoing relationship with the Anlong Veng Peace Center. Our interviewees revealed that the CPP government provides economic support to its representatives in Anlong Veng's villages. If these contributions could increase and village chiefs use such donations on the installation and maintenance of solar panels, then such a program would have limited or no costs for those in the villages.

⁵⁰ Van Schaak, Reicherter and Chhang, *Cambodia's Hidden Scars*, p. 5.

⁵¹ I-Hsuan Cheng, 2015. "Re-Modelling And Reconceptualising Skills Development In Cambodia: How Are Social Enterprises Preparing Young People For Successful Transitions Between Learning And Work?". *International Journal Of Educational Development* 43: 134-141. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.06.003.

⁵² For more information on India's 'smart villages', visit: <http://smartvillages.org/>

Alternatively, approaching a solar energy provider in Cambodia such as Khmer Solar, Kamworks or Picosol and requesting large scale solar panels is a possibility. Smart villages in India have successfully done this with the solar provider, Samanvay, able to promote itself as a sustainable energy provider that is assisting in the provision of energy for less developed areas.

An exchange program between students and teachers could feasibly, and realistically, be introduced by the Anlong Veng Peace Center and its affiliates as its other works strengthen and its network broadens. As previously discussed, those who have completed peace tours previously could pioneer such a program. It is recommended that these students become the 'leaders' of this program. They would be responsible for identifying worthy exchange candidates, training participants, serving as mediators between schools, families and communities, and by providing support for those undertaking exchanges as cultural shocks and home sickness are challenges to such a program. With the support of the Ministry of Tourism, this exchange program has the potential to provide valuable exposure to youths across Cambodia to different methods of teaching and ways of living.

Reconciliation and development are achievable objectives for Cambodia. Vietnam, neighbouring Cambodia to the east, serves as a successful case study for what can be achieved. Having experienced a devastating war through the 1960s and 1970s, which spilt into Cambodia, Vietnam has successfully recovered and now has a strong, emerging middle class. The importance of education and accurately remembering history for Cambodians in order to replicate the successes of Vietnam cannot be underestimated. Cambodia has a rich history that can be traced back to the Angkor Empire. This is something that should be of great pride for Cambodians. The nation's twentieth century history is one of division and conflict. Remembering this is of extreme importance to Cambodia's future. It is also of extreme importance in reconciling Anlong Veng with Cambodia.

While it is hoped that this paper has revealed some of the challenges to reconciliation and development faced by the people of Anlong Veng, there is much work still to be done. Creating a collective memory and history will not only provide a sense of reverence and remembrance of the past, it will also provide clarity for the future. Through a common understanding of the past, an emphasis placed on the importance of education and a greater availability of opportunities to all, Anlong Veng will prosper in a united, powerful Cambodia.

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