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Changing the story: Intergenerational dialogue, participatory video and perpetrator memories in Cambodia

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Abstract

Questions of reconciliation and memory after genocide and conflict in Cambodia remain finely poised. Young people often do not believe the stories of hardship and loss of the older generation, and cleavages remain between divided and stigmatised former factions. This article reflects on a series of participatory video projects led by young Cambodians that sought to engage and explore complex 'perpetrator' memories with the aim of building dialogue across communities and generations. Working in partnership with the Documentation Centre of Cambodia through 2018, our participatory-video project sought to document the experiences and accounts of former lower level Khmer Rouge community members. Through a discussion of the 11 films produced, and young filmmakers' reflections on their involvement in the project, we show how participatory video allows and produces interventions on memory that can renegotiate, augment and contest dominant narratives of past violence. Crucially, we argue, that when read together, the films outline the contours, ambiguities and contestation of claims for 'complex victimhood' in Cambodia, and the problems of stabilising singular stories of past violence. We argue that this has implications for transitional justice more broadly, which is a field that tends to rely on neat distinctions of victim and perpetrator and shared accounts and meanings of past harm in the ways it intervenes on memory.

Keywords

Cambodia, intergenerational dialogue, participatory video, transitional justice

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Introduction

Scholarship in memory studies has tended to caution against treating state-level and official narratives of past violence as determinant of memory. While recognising their role and influence in framing the parameters of what is publicly 'memorable', the question of how state-level and official histories can be actively renegotiated and remoulded requires further attention. This is particularly the case with regard to memories that implicate complex questions of responsibility and victimhood for mass violence. Existing literature on the relationship between arts and memory, especially in the context of transitional justice work, opens particularly promising potential answers to these questions. In this article, we wish to discuss a participatory-video (PV) project overseen by Manning and involving all of the authors. Specifically, we seek to explore the use of PV as it implicates questions of – and encounters with – politically complex 'perpetrator' memories in Cambodia. The article reflects on our work in partnership with the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and young people in Cambodia enrolled on a pre-service teacher–trainer programme from across the country (part of DC-Cam's 'Along Veng Peace Tours' initiative discussed further below). Our PV project was explicitly intended to intervene in and advocate for greater intergenerational and cross community dialogue about the history of the Khmer Rouge. As such, this article sets out to reflect on PV as a form of situated intervention on and through memory, and the way the films produced on the project reflect young Cambodians active roles in renegotiating complex memories in relief of broader demands made on them in the name of memory and reconciliation by the Cambodian state, civil society organisations and transitional justice advocacy.

Our aims in this article are twofold. The first is to explore and reflect on how, through PV, young Cambodians navigated and produced accounts of 'lower level' Khmer Rouge experiences, a group who occupy politically complex positions as often both 'victims and perpetrators' of the Khmer Rouge regime (Bernath, 2016). Such lower level Khmer are located within politically ambivalent spaces in Cambodia as both 'reconciled' and yet often also stigmatised (Manning, 2015). Our second aim is to explore the tensions between the multiple contextual purposes and constraints that are inevitably at play in such participatory projects as these intersect with issues of memory; most notably looking at the relationship between the project's overall rationale as an intervention on and in memory – in terms of its commitment to supporting processes of transitional justice and reconciling memories – and the wider discursive and political parameters that constrain and enable memories of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. It is on this basis that we consider and situate the films produced by the young people involved as artefacts of memory – both individually and as a suite of texts to be read together – as well as the reflections of students on taking part in the project, as recorded in post-project surveys. In doing so, we explore the ways in which the films produced both reflect and engage with the contextual tensions above, allowing us to examine both the nature of participatory practice as it encounters and calls memory into being within this context and more broadly. This is an important intersection of debates in arts, transitional justice and memory because participatory arts projects often tend to focus far more squarely on the process of participation itself, rather than the nature of the products generated (e.g. the role of the films as documentary texts) or their role in the communication of a given project's research findings (the impact of the medium as the message) (Mitchell et al., 2012: 9). We argue that this has implications for how we understand the role of (participatory) arts in the reproduction of shared memories of violence more broadly.

The article has five subsequent sections. In the next section, we situate the project within debates on the relationships and role of arts – especially participatory arts – in transitional justice, and how these implicate questions of memory. The third section offers an account of, and contextualises the

work of, Changing the Story in Cambodia. The fourth section examines (and, crucially, takes seriously) the 11 documentary films produced through the Peace Tours project as artefacts of memory, the tensions at work in the aesthetic and stylistic conventions that they obey in their insistence on veridictional claims to 'historical truth' and how they convey 'complex' accounts of suffering. We insist that while each individual film in isolation offers often contradictory claims about victimhood and responsibility, taken and read as a whole, we see the contours of 'complex victimhood' in Cambodia that ultimately demonstrates a refusal of straightforward definitions and classifications of either victim or perpetrator, even as revisionist and sympathetic memories of the Khmer Rouge leadership emerged. Such complexity is disruptive of binaries that tend to govern conventional transitional justice advocacy and discourse. The fifth section explores student reflections on their participation in the project as a means to reflect on encounters with claims to 'complex' victimhood. Furthermore, this section allows us to self-reflexively consider how – in the context of an arts-led project explicitly intended to intervene on and through memory for the purposes of transitional justice advocacy – the young people came to understand and account for their roles as agents of memory in uneven ways in an otherwise limiting political space. The final section offers conclusions, with attention to the value of (participatory) arts in transitional justice work, and the implications of complex memory for transitional justice.

Transitional justice, participatory arts and memory

Transitional justice is deeply entwined with questions of memory because it is the dominant field that lays claim over the question of what must be done in societies that have experienced conflict and atrocities. It therefore has the power to call memory into being, adjudicate competing accounts of the past, and it simultaneously locates memory as a key site of social and political renewal for individuals and groups (Manning, 2017). Transitional justice is a rapidly expanding field that encompasses judicial and truth-seeking interventions, reparative and victim-centred initiatives, efforts at institutional reform, and forms of memorialisation. While transitional justice has consolidated as an established field of practice over the past two decades, critics have increasingly pointed to the limitations of narrowly legal, internationally imposed and state-centric approaches to deliver appropriate and meaningful redress for victims of atrocities and conflict (Shaw et al., 2010). Such challenges have grounded appeals to 'localise' transitional justice and offer more holistic responses in transitional justice. This has, in turn, created space for arts-led methods as a response to large-scale violence and harm, and today arts approaches have come to occupy a central role within transitional justice practice (Bahun, 2015).

Art serves multiple instrumental and expressive purposes in transitional justice that intersect with questions of memory: as forms of documentary evidence; awareness raising as a medium around and for transitional justice interventions and campaigns; as a form of justice process, through its affective reach and ability to offer forms of acknowledgement and voice; and as a form of critique that can be directed at attempts in transitional justice to redress experiences of atrocities (Bell, 2011; Garnsey, 2016; Jeffery, 2021). Notably, arts-led approaches have been particularly visible in the Cambodian case as a complement and support to the prosecution of former Khmer Rouge figures at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia over the past decade, and have been central to several high profile reparations projects awarded to victims groups (Jeffery, 2021; Manning and Ser, 2019).

Before turning to our project specifically, we will first discuss the role of participatory arts more widely within the context of transitional justice and memory studies. Participatory art designates a broad set of approaches that centre ownership and control of creative processes within the groups and communities to which they are addressed. Approaches range across the entire landscape of arts

practices, from the use of photography, street art and music, to theatre, graffiti and video. The specificities of an individual project might vary greatly and can be inflected by the medium chosen by a given project – an intensely personal process, such as writing a poem, might produce a very different relationship to a subject than making a video, which tends to involve a group of people working together and requires forms of explicit collective negotiation of the material under discussion (Marynissen et al., in press). That said, however individually focussed a particular art practice might ostensibly be, what links these forms of participatory approaches is an impulse 'towards a process-based approach that is centred around facilitation of dialogue among diverse communities' (Shefik, 2018: 315), with the creation of a piece of art generally providing a space to support a given community, working with a professional facilitator, to reflect critically on a particular topic, the art produced in turn being used as the centre piece of an advocacy campaign to raise awareness of this same topic in a way that participants feel is not present in other media (Ledwith and Springett, 2010: 81–86). Within transitional justice, participatory arts are particularly visible as part of 'grassroots' and civil society-led initiatives that seek to engage experiences of conflict and atrocities (Cooke and Soria-Donlan, 2019). Participatory arts lend themselves to forms of awareness raising and education through the centring of perspectives and experiences that tend to otherwise be marginalised. As a set of practices, participatory arts are therefore thought to offer avenues to potentially challenge patterns and formations of power and control (Zoettl, 2013).

The relationship between (participatory) arts and memory in transitional justice is multiple. Further complicating the division between process, medium and product, outlined above, the arts can act to bear witness to memory, as a documentary form that depicts and represents experiences and narratives of violence and harm – either directly or (as in the case of our project) through an interaction between those who were actually 'there' and those who wish to learn more about this experience through the process of making a film. In other words, art has the capacity to augment – or contest – the role of transitional justice in authorising forms of truth about experiences of violence (Bakiner, 2015). Arts approaches further remind us that memory cannot be reduced to 'archival documents or historical narratives' (Till, 2008: 101). In doing so, arts are also affective and normative in providing an injunction and call to remember (Garnsey, 2016). Arts also have further potential to disrupt conventional, linear conceptions of time and memory at work within transitional justice. As transitional justice pivots on an 'illusion of resolution' (Weinstein, 2011: 5–6), assuming a neat sequence of action on past harms to remedy present ills (Mutua, 2015), arts can provide more complex and situated engagements with memory, again contingent on the relationship between those who are generating the creative 'product' at hand and the memory they are exploring. Art allows more self-reflexive, context-sensitive engagements with memories of violence that do not 'limit memory traces and historic sites to their material locations or interpret them as mere palimpsests . . .' but rather '. . . animates the multiple spacetimes of memory through their work' (Till, 2008: 103). Arts can simultaneously refer to past experiences, present contexts and future possibilities (Garnsey, 2016: 473). Bell (2011), for example, highlights the potential for art to 'problematize' transitions because they request 'attention to the foreclosing of the meanings of memory, of past-and-future, of community' (p. 324).

Thus, it is our intention in this article to problematise the intersections of PV, memory studies and transitional justice. We focus particularly on how this is negotiated in the films produced by our case study project. In turning our focus to consider films as artefacts of memory, we explore aspects of such projects that are often ignored in the literature on PV, which is more focussed on the processes than the products of participation. As Mitchell et al. (2012) note, 'this is an area worthy of study but often left out of participatory video studies. The process is of course important, but then so are the producers and their productions' (p. 9). In turn, participatory arts in turn foreground particular questions of relevance for memory studies. The field of memory studies has consolidated

around the consensus that relationships and context fundamentally shape acts of recollection (Campbell, 2008). The recognition that memory retains unfinished (rather than archival) qualities is particularly visible in the context of difficult heritage and questions of political responsibility (Olick, 2013). Participatory arts similarly take relationships and context as the key site of their work, calling attention to the creative value that emerges specifically from situated and collaborative creative practices. As such, the work of participatory arts becomes a significant site of practical concern for memory studies, where arts-led work on and around memory can be seen, first-hand, to navigate, renegotiate and resist broader formations and structures of power and memory. These can include both state-sanctioned histories of political violence that might be at work within institutions (i.e. educational curricula), as well as dominant, state-centric transitional justice efforts that seek to document and redress experiences of violence and harm.

Changing the story in Cambodia

Over 40 years have passed since the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia. Under the Khmer Rouge 'Democratic Kampuchea' regime, 1.7 million people died of hunger and disease or were executed (Kiernan, 2002). A military intervention by Vietnamese forces in 1979 inaugurated a further 20 years of protracted civil war in Cambodia against Khmer Rouge and other insurgent factions. Efforts to redress and engage with these experiences have had complicated effects. From 1979, with the aim of ending the civil war, the Cambodian state mobilised a politics of reconciliation and national unity that, in contradictory and ambivalent ways, sought to demonise the Khmer Rouge as collective entity and experience, absolve former lower level Khmer Rouge of responsibility of blame for the crimes of Democratic Kampuchea, and locate blame solely among Khmer Rouge leaders (Gottesman, 2003; Williams, 2022). While important attempts to represent and engage questions of lower level perpetration have been developed (Ea and Sim, 2001; see Rithy Panh's (2003) *S-21: Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* for an example of such work through film), a narrative of responsibility that omits consideration or an account of the role of lower level Khmer Rouge remains dominant. For example, coverage of Khmer Rouge history was absent in the public school curriculum until only recently, and today is principally focused only on a minimalist presentation of the guilt of the Khmer Rouge leadership, and is presented through (and against) registers of 'historical fact' (Paulson et al., 2020: 442). A similar reading of responsibility is manifest at Cambodia's key transitional justice mechanism, the UN-backed Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), which is tasked with the prosecution of 'senior' Khmer Rouge leaders only and, as a legal mechanism, is predicated on the adjudication of factual evidence to establish truth.

The legacies of Khmer Rouge rule and the subsequent civil war remain significant. Issues of reconciliation between and across communities remain 'horizontal', in respect of lingering cleavages, grievances and stigmas between often 'complex' victims and perpetrators (Bernath, 2016; Williams et al., 2018), as well as formerly antagonistic political factions (McGrew, 2011). Outstanding questions of reconciliation are also 'vertical' – that is, at work across generations – in respect of often found disbelief among young Cambodians about the veracity of the history of the Khmer Rouge and the experiences of their older relatives. As 40 years have passed since the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia has seen the maturing of its first 'post-memory' generations (Henkin, 2018), that is the generation which has inherited its understanding of the past from their parent's stories about the period, leading to what Marianne Hirsch (2008) identifies as its need to wrestle with the challenges of 'uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture' with the past (p. 106). While survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime are often keen to stress that the acknowledgement of their experiences is a key need and meaningful point of reconciliation, younger

people are often dubious that 'Khmers could perpetrate violence against Khmers' (Manning, 2017: 125). The politics of memory and reconciliation in Cambodia therefore has pressing intergenerational dimensions.

The relationship between intergenerational dialogue, memory and reconciliation within and across stigmatised communities has been central to the work of Changing the Story in Cambodia. In 2018, Changing the Story partnered with the DC-Cam to incorporate PV into an existing DC-Cam programme, the Anlong Veng Peace Tours, with the aim of developing creative practices in transitional justice and genocide education, post-conflict reconciliation and intergenerational memory in Cambodia. A key focus of the project was to centre young Cambodian people in the production of films about experiences of genocide and conflict, especially through the exploration of stories from within stigmatised Khmer Rouge areas around the concept of 'complex' victimhood in Cambodia (Bernath, 2016). Over the course of a week, participants were introduced to key debates about the Khmer Rouge past, while also being trained to the basics of documentary filmmaking. In doing so, the project was deployed as a self-reflective series of interventions on memory that aimed to produce films that could build empathy across formerly conflicted communities but also serve as cues to encourage further intergenerational dialogue between younger and older generations of Cambodians.

The sites of production were particularly important for the project. Anlong Veng is a small town in Northern Cambodia near the Thai border. It is well known as one of the final strongholds of the Khmer Rouge, with Anlong Veng one of the last major battlefields to fall to the Phnom Penh government at the end of the civil war in 1999. The area therefore implicates and anchors a set of both national and localised histories around reconciliation (Manning, 2015). The area remains home to large numbers of 'lower level' former Khmer Rouge, encompassing the families of ex-combatants, with women and children mobilised in a regional war effort throughout the 1980–1990s. North of the town, the terrain rises sharply up the Dangkrek escarpment, upon which key markers and sites of historical significance are dotted, including Pol Pot's cremation site and the 'safe houses' of other senior Khmer Rouge leaders. There, the Peace Tours are hosted in a former safe house of Ta Mok, a Khmer Rouge military commander. Ta Mok is fondly remembered by many of the people in Anlong Veng for his role in the military campaigns against the Vietnamese occupation in the 1980s, and the support and welfare he provided for the Anlong Veng community during the war. In other parts of Cambodia, Ta Mok is remembered as 'The Butcher' for his role between 1975 and 1979 overseeing forced population transfers and purges of less favoured Cambodians under the Khmer Rouge regime. These two periods of conflict and violence, Cambodia's 1975–1979 genocide and the ensuing civil war, are the focus of the Anlong Veng Peace Tours and were at the heart of our PV-based interventions.

Today, further layers of meaning have been inscribed onto the landscape, as key sites have been designated 'Historical Attractions' by the Cambodian Ministry of Tourism. While some commentators have critically reflected on the potential ethical implications of 'dark tourism' that arise, reading the conservation of historical sites in the area instrumentally as a state sponsored bid to develop the area and encourage amnesia (Long and Reeves, 2008), others have cautioned of the potential for the sites to promote memory in less predictable ways, and to be folded into revisionist accounts of national defence and patriotism (Manning, 2015). Other changes in the area have in turn reshaped the landscape and undermined anchoring continuities that make memory possible (Cohen, 2013). These include widespread deforestation, the growth of a localised border economy as markets and casinos have sprung up around border checkpoints, while demining organisations continue to clear the last unexploded ordnances in the area, in order to return contaminated land to farming.

The Peace Tours programme ran bi-monthly over the course of the project. Prior to 2018, DC-Cam conducted the Peace Tours without a filmmaking focus. DC-Cam would work with

provincial authorities across Cambodia, high schools and teacher training centres to recruit young people. The groups would initially attend the Peace Tours to visit sites of historical significance in the area to learn about Khmer Rouge history, take seminars and workshops on the history of the genocide and civil war, before independently interviewing members of the local community for an assignment that entailed writing a news report. After 2018, in partnership with Changing the Story, the introduction of PV allowed students to explore and document the stories and testimony of people in Anlong Veng in video form. Students were trained in camera and sound recording, storyboarding and interview techniques. Following a common PV-methodology (Lunch and Lunch, 2006), the project adopted an iterative 'learning-by-doing' approach, with students initially using their training to reflect upon what they were learning during their programme from DC-Cam staff, before moving on to work with local residents to create a series of short documentaries (each around 6 minutes long) that presented the experience of one or two local community members who had experienced life in and around Anlong Veng during the Khmer Rouge regime. Given the short timeframe available for this programme, students were unable to edit the films themselves. However, to ensure that participants had as much ownership of the final product as possible, they produced a 'paper edit', which colleagues at DC-Cam then used to shape the final cut of the films. While our approach adopted key principles in the tradition of participatory methods, centring young people in the production of films, Changing the Story and DC-Cam recognised that participatory film, led by young Cambodians within Khmer Rouge communities, could itself query the 'emic' and 'etic' distinction of 'insider' and 'outside' implicit in the participatory tradition (Pauwels, 2015). Students were, at the same time, working with stigmatised groups at the margins of a shared national history, and accounting for localised memories and experiences that are largely unexplored in Cambodian public dialogue about the past. In other words, we saw PV as a tool that could illuminate and enable advocacy based on multiple accounts and histories of local and national community in post-conflict reconciliation, emergent through dialogue between young Cambodians and the people of Anlong Veng. At the same time, it was clear that this process would need to be carefully negotiated, so as to ensure appropriate engagement with the inevitably multiple and competing narratives to emerge from a series of individual accounts of the past, particularly if the films were to support the young people's engagement with the wider learning outcomes of the project, and if the films were to be usable as material for further exploration of the past with the school students that participants in the project would eventually come into contact with, an ambition, as we shall see, that was repeatedly mentioned by the young people who engaged in the project.

Present pasts: Participatory videos as artefacts of memory

Over the course of six iterations of the project, the Anlong Veng Peace Tours produced 11 short films[1] with pre-service trainee teachers from across the country. The format of the films tended to follow the same structure, a product of the short-term nature of each group's engagement with the PV process, and the fact that groups would be shown films from previous iterations of the project. In each film, one or more of the young participants would introduce themselves and their intentions to explore the legacy of the Khmer Rouge past in a particular part of Anlong Veng. The film would then move to a series of intercut interview sequences, punctuated by illustrative cutaway shots that allow the spectator to reflect in various ways on the material presented in the interviews.

A strong sense of place emerges across all of the films, reflecting the located nature of the Peace Tour programme as a whole. The opening sequence, during which the students introduce their project, tends to be punctuated with low-angle establishing shots emphasising the colours and sounds of village life, taking as their centre point the single-track road around which villages in the region are built. We see families being transported on tractors and motorcycles, cows being

herded, chickens and dogs crossing the frame, the deep red hue of the local mud and the green of the surrounding forest dominating the colour palette. This opening sequence, which emphasises a sense of place as well as the everyday reality of present life in the village, is then set against the interviews, which take us into one of the individual homes of the villagers, invariably a stilted property set at the side of this same road, the interview frame filled with further artefacts from the interviewee's everyday life, from cooking utensils and drying washing to farmyard machinery and animals.

The 'normal', everyday, nature of the villagers' experience contrasts strongly with their accounts of the extraordinary nature of past life working under and for the Khmer Rouge. We hear, in particular, about the lack of food: 'there was no rice . . . we only had porridge', we are repeatedly informed. A picture is painted of regular arbitrary violence punctuated by hard work, with no space for normal human interaction. In particular, the experience of forced marriage stands out in the villagers' accounts: 'They would only arrange a wedding if there were 20, 30, 50 couples to be married. Don't think you can get married by yourself' one man from Kauk Som Por village tells us. 'You just have to stand and swear that you take her to be your wife', another woman from the village insists, unable to stop herself descending into fits of laughter. 'Everyone was wearing black. It was hard to recognise who you were married to'. The films tend to highlight a visceral, deeply emotional connection to the past, the frequent use of close ups of the interviewees facial expressions emphasising the affective power of the medium.

That the interviewees were, themselves, former members of, or supporters of, the Khmer Rouge illustrates the 'complexity' of victimhood (Bernath, 2016). At times the interviewees seem overwhelmed by their recollections of the past. A sense of pain and loss is clear, expressed in their eyes, often failing to be covered up, as we can see in the woman's recollection of forced marriage, by a nervous laugh, or a dismissive hand gesture emphasising the stupidity of 'Angkar's' ('the Organisation' – how the Khmer Rouge referred to itself) draconian rules. Yet there is a strong sense throughout that the interviewees do not wish to dramatise their past experience. Again, their personal 'normality' is emphasised in the film, along with their straightforward connection to the place where they live (and where the films are located), a normality that emphasises the power of these films as a means of communicating the surely traumatic nature of the life under the Khmer Rouge, even among those in support of, or treated more favourably by, the regime (as the residents of Anlong Veng overwhelmingly were, relative to, for example, former residents of urban centres or ethnic minorities). The ostensible disconnect between the stories we are told and the understated nature of their delivery and setting seems to foreground their affective potential as accounts of under-explored experiences of suffering, accounts that are inescapably tinged with difficult questions regarding the context of delivery in an area with formerly high levels of support for the Khmer Rouge. The emotions triggered by these accounts are left unresolved on the screen, forcing the spectator to undertake the resolution of affect into an emotion for themselves (Deleuze, 1986: 68).

At the same time, the connection created between the experience of the interviewee under the Khmer Rouge and their lives today, as it is presented in the films, in particular through the use of 'cutaways' to punctuate the interviews, also creates a very material link with the past that again emphasises the complexity of suffering and harm. Many interviewees emphasise how young they were at the time: 'I was still at that age that the gun they gave me to carry dragged along the floor', a villager from Romchek explains in one of the films, the villager's testimony interspersed with pictures of his own children. This is a common trope in the films, when they present the experience of young people during the Khmer Rouge regime. In the process, the films create a strong sense of continuity with the past. Children have always grown up in these villages, and they continue to do so. Here the films speak to the need for what we define above as 'vertical' engagement

with historical trauma and reconciliation. The use of children growing up in the villages today as a visual counterpart to the childhood experiences related by the interviewees testimony further roots the experience of the interviewees in this particular location, and also emphasises a need for intergenerational dialogue.

The fact that these stories need to be communicated to the next generation is something that is repeatedly emphasised in the final section of the films, when the young participant filmmakers invariably re-enter the frame in order to thank the people they have interviewed and to reflect on what their stories mean for them and what they intend to do with this knowledge now. The films reflect the essentially dialogic nature of their creation. They are the product of an encounter between these young filmmakers and specific actors who were present during this period of history. Their function is to communicate this encounter to other young people who were also not there but who feel the need to understand this past. The films capture and reflect, primarily, the young filmmakers' first reactions to the interviews and their experience of visiting the sites of historical memory over the course of the previous week. Such sections are tethered to and reproduce the wider discursive terrain of transitional justice and civil society interventions in Cambodia that assumes, as an axiom, that memory enables the further prevention of future violence. Their gratitude to the villagers for teaching them more about a history they knew little about is emphasised, as is their professional role as future teachers and their responsibility for communicating the lessons to be learnt from the period to the next generation, using the films to explain the past to their students so as to avoid it ever happening again. 'We will share this knowledge and this experience with the next generation of Cambodians, so that they can learn the personal and social issues during the regime'; 'as the youth of Cambodia, we will preserve this peace and prevent the genocide regime ever happening again', are typical of the closing statements presented by participants, on a number of occasions tellingly choosing to shoot this sequence in front of a local primary school, at setting which further emphasises the need for these stories to be communicated to future generations. Here we might return to the points made by Garnsey and Till above. Clearly the teachers are intent upon presenting their films as artefacts of memory that can simultaneously refer to past experiences, present contexts and future possibilities (Garnsey, 2016: 473), the films activating their settings as 'palimpsests', that can also transcend the specificity of their setting to become active tools in the individual memory work asked of the nation as a whole (Till, 2008: 103).

We must still ask: how effective are these deeply personal, and inevitably partial, individualised accounts of the past as material for a pedagogical programme that can really move beyond the specific to undertake this broader project of memory work? The partial nature of the individual stories, while reflecting a strong sense of individual authenticity, also have the potential to present a problematically revisionist image of the past. These are accounts and memories drawn from milieus with a complex relationship to – and often affection for – the Khmer Rouge movement and are made possible and memorable because of a wider national politics of reconciliation that has largely omitted attention to the experiences of lower level Khmer Rouge and their experiences of conflict and civil war after the regime ended. Here we begin to see the need for careful curation of the types of products that participatory projects often produce, a point often made in the literature (Cooke et al., 2019). Working against the presentation of the hardships of life under the regime, other films focus on the experience of living under the protection of Ta Mok. We learn of his generosity to the local people at the time, how he helped to develop the local infrastructure, particularly a dam and a local hospital, and how he built bridges that allowed families to reunite. Interviewees present themselves as being in awe of him, continuing to see themselves as 'Ta Mok's soldiers'. While one film does bracket the presentation of Ta Mok as unambiguously 'good', with a side highlighting the accusation that he was responsible for the death of 30,000 people, the final caption, nonetheless, rests on an image of his grand burial stupa and the final statement he gave to

his lawyers, in which he states, 'Please inform the whole world that I never killed anyone during that period'. 'The Butcher', we learn from his own words, was more concerned with keeping chickens than murder.

Watched individually, each interview presents a highly personalised, and often quite one-dimensional image of the period, focussed entirely on the recollected individual experience of each participant. However, when watched as a collection a more complex image of the past begins to emerge that one does not find in other public discourses about Khmer Rouge history. Competing images of the past are laid side-by-side, with little contextual commentary which the spectator is forced to engage with and process. As we can see from the film about Ta Mok discussed above, at times, the potential for revisionist readings stirs discomfort. However, the sections of films that present participant suffering – with which the films' spectators at their screenings are also presented, and with which they also much engage – are ultimately equally problematic. Thus, through their collective juxtapositioning in their curation, the audience is ultimately prevented from taking any of the testimonies in these films simplistically at face value. It is notable, for example, that the films that focus on the experience of hunger, or forced marriage, make no mention of the fact that the interviewees themselves might well have been low-ranking members of the regime, reflecting the ambiguities and ellipsis produced by both state-level and broader transitional justice efforts around the question of experiences of lower level Khmer Rouge. Nonetheless, through the aggregation of the narratives, the tensions between the interviewees more one-dimensional accounts of history are themselves foregrounded and problematised. Together, this becomes the key collective theme expressed by the films. The multidimensional complexity of the individual's experience of the past in which people ultimately refuse straightforward definition as either victim or perpetrator, is revealed as the key lesson to be learnt from the young people's engagement with the inhabitants of Anlong Veng. The power of the films not only lies in the sense of authenticity they generate – whatever their perspective on the past – but also the conversation they potentially facilitate that challenges the very definition of victim and perpetrator in this context. Here the common format of the individual videos is an important strength, ultimately allowing this work to be presented as a unified, portmanteau product that forces the spectator to negotiate competing subject positions for themselves. In this regard, the films speak to the need identified at the outset of this article for community voices to be read 'horizontally', that is in dialogue with one another, as well as 'vertically', or as an instrument of intergenerational communication, emphasised, as we have also discussed, within the films' visual grammar.

Intergenerational dialogue around 'complex' histories: Youth perspectives

The reflections of the students who participated in the peace tours were recorded before, during and directly after the Peace Tour, as well as through a small number of follow up qualitative interviews in 2021. We attend to these because they show how the student filmmakers navigated and renegotiated the competing tensions at work as they encountered Khmer Rouge testimonies and perspectives within the wider landscape of memory in Cambodia, including the limited (and limiting) lack of Khmer Rouge history in the public school curricula, the background work of Cambodia's transitional justice process at the ECCC and the immediate rationale for the project work on cultivating dialogue between and across communities and generations.

The students' reflections evidenced the ways that participatory arts can serve multiple purposes in transitional justice work specifically in the name of memory: documenting evidence, creating a medium for awareness raising and as a form of 'participatory' justice process that enables more

forms of acknowledgement of different experiences through the affective dimensions allowed through film. Yet it is notable that the young filmmakers gravitated towards rationalisations of their work as a veridictional exercise. As a creative intervention on and in memory, the young filmmakers both documented evidence and used the process of doing so in the name of truth-seeking; this was particularly focused around the granular details of realities of life under the Khmer Rouge:

> What interests me the most is when I met victims of Khmer Rouge regime because this was the chance for me to ask them the questions that I want to know for a long time. Because they have gone through it so they can show us the truth such as the state of living, society, jobs, food, freedom, discrimination, torture, killing, and some other problems that happened in that regime. (September 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey)

> What interesting the most are the interview with victims . . . The interview is really important to us because it makes us understand the lives and hardships in that regime. It also pointed out whether what we learned in textbook is true or not. (September 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey)

The young filmmakers appraisals of their own work were pulled towards registers of truth, accuracy and verification. The belief that first-hand experience of interviewing lower level Khmer Rouge cadre enabled them to uncover the truths of life in Democratic Kampuchea, and in turn query the veracity of what they were taught in school is symptomatic of a tension arising from the context and as our starting point for this work: that, on the one hand, there remain currents of disbelief among young Cambodians about the truth of the history of the Khmer Rouge and the experiences of their older relatives, while, on the other, state-level narratives of the Khmer Rouge have been articulated and authorised as a principally state level story, and on the basis of their 'factuality'.

It is striking that the student filmmakers, visible in their reflections, were renegotiating how to fill in these 'gaps'. As we reviewed, the young filmmakers chose to focus on testimonies of day-to-day experiences of the time; the daily hardships and the situation of society. The dissonances between past and present, captured in the films, seemed to reflect the perspectives of young filmmakers situated within a 'postmemory' generation, navigating an 'uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture' with the past (Hirsch, 2008: 106). Many expressed feeling disconnected from the history of the Khmer Rouge. One student, for example, stated,

> I first thought it is just one story that happened a long time ago, but upon an arrival here . . . I feel very regretful and know what happened here is real through my field interview with those living through the war. (April 2018 Peace Tours Post-Tour Survey)

Yet the 'pull' of truth-seeking, veridictional registers for appraising their own work, while clear, did not displace or attenuate the other criteria and ways of thinking about the past. Throughout the films, and in the young filmmakers' reflections, contradictory impulses were visible. The students sought to both augment and decentralise the (contradictory) dominant public narratives of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia – that the leadership were to blame alongside a generalised demonisation of the Khmer Rouge as a collective group (Williams, 2022), and that no account of the lives of lower level Khmer Rouge is needed – by setting out to understand how people experienced the time. For the students, this enabled them to acknowledge and recognise the realities of those who lived through the regime beyond verifying its truth, making the history more 'real'. The students described their interviewees as 'important witnesses' and 'a source of truth about the human right violation and the genocide in Cambodia' (September 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey).

A number of students noted that 'there remain many stories unknown' (April 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey), highlighting the importance of creating the films as a means to create space for multiple experiences to be acknowledged. In other words, the student reflections on filmmaking insist on the potential role of film to ask questions of memory in ways that the conventional repertoires of transitional justice (i.e. school curricula, prosecutions) might not.

The affective dimension of the films as texts is visible in the affective impact the process of creating the films had on the students, who reported feeling 'shocked' at the stories they were told. While, as noted, the young filmmakers were pulled towards an understanding of the initiative as a truth-seeking exercise, initially as a form of historical scientism or forensic engagement with memory as evidence, the process of participatory filmmaking appeared to re-centre affective and ethical questions. Students reflected on feeling empathy and regret about the experiences of their interviewees. One student stated 'I feel like I could see what happened when they told me' (September 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey). Another noted,

> I feel as if I have gone through the period. He narrated the hardship and starvation. I am so shocked and regrettable for the family separation and overwork . . . the losses of family members and the brutal killing. (December 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey).

One of the attractions of participatory arts for advocacy in transitional justice processes is the ability to create affective responses both in the process of creating the art, and in the artistic product itself. The notions of 'shock' and 'regret' demonstrate how the use of PV in the Peace Tours created spaces of acknowledgement for the experiences and memories of Anlong Veng residents. For the students, these affective encounters were addressed to both 'horizontal' and 'vertical' cleavages in memory: between young Cambodians, who were previously fearful of Khmer Rouge communities, as they encountered the voices and experiences of otherwise unknown localised memories, and as channels for the acknowledgement of broader shared experiences of older generations. Indeed, many students stated in the pre-tour surveys that they felt fearful and angry about meeting former members of the Khmer Rouge but, in the post-tour responses, highlighted how their perceptions had changed. As one student explained,

> For me, from the beginning, and before meeting with the Khmer Rouge soldier, I think that he perhaps, is the extreme cruel person who had killed the people without compassion. But, after asking and talking with him, then I understood that in reality he is the same as the common people who survived in Khmer Rouge regime, living under the conveyance of the leader that having no freedom, do anything by appointing and by order of Angkar only. (June 2018 Peace Tours Post-Tour Survey)

The participatory nature of the project, adopted with the intention of creating spaces for discussion, empathy and reconciliation, must be treated as an intervention on and through memory. As students encountered the complexity of accounts of suffering from Anlong Veng residents, they themselves began to blur the distinction between victim and perpetrator; a complexity that is reflected in the films themselves. Students explained in the post-tour surveys that the Khmer Rouge cadre suffered themselves during the Democratic Kampuchea, were unable to say no to carrying out tasks and were protecting themselves and their family. One student noted that it became

> hard for me to separate these two groups of people (victim and cadre) because they are friendly and live together in the same region. More importantly, they want [the] young generation [to] help to prevent this regime from recurrence in Cambodia. (September 2018 Peace Tours Post-Tour Survey)

Highlighting that, through their in-person conversations, empathy and dialogue were built.

The risks of a participatory approach – devolving creative control as far as possible to the young filmmakers – remain pronounced in such contexts. This is especially the case where, as an intervention on and through memory, an explicit aim is to create intergenerational dialogue and destigmatise otherwise marginalised memories. As above, where treated individually, there are elements of the films that risk overly sympathetic engagements with the testimony of lower level Khmer Rouge, particularly as this aligned to stories of the seeming generosity of local Khmer Rouge leaders. Inevitably, these aspects of the films followed from student filmmakers accepting and treating potentially revisionist images of the past at face value. Some students, for example, shared that they thought Ta Mok was a 'good leader and ruled very well' (July 2018 Peace Tours Post-Tour Survey) and 'a good person who was easy-going towards his followers' (April 2018 Peace Tours Post-Tour Survey 0921), reflecting that, in Anlong Veng, Ta Mok 'is still widely remembered as the benevolent leader who brought much-needed improvements to the lives of his followers' in contrast to his reputation as 'The Butcher' (Mayer, 2017, p.2).

Yet here, read alongside the suite of films as a piece, we see again an important lesson of the initiative: the key collective theme expressed by the films and at play in their production is the spectrum of complexity of lived experiences of genocide and conflict, which are remembered and contested in multiple ways and at multiple levels. As transitional justice more broadly demands neater forms of moral resolution to complex experiences, art – and particularly participatory arts – allows space for more uneven, open and unresolved (or unresolvable) lessons. Other young filmmakers questioned the contradiction presented by more hagiographic accounts of the Khmer Rouge leadership, and Ta Mok in particular, asking 'Why did he build such things when we know that he wanted to abolish schools in order to prevent education?' (September 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey). Another noted that 'He who wanted to abolish education, built a school' (September 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey). Many of the students seemed unsure about how these contradictory images and memories fit into the wider picture of Cambodia's history.

A central plank of the participatory tradition is that it confers a sense of ownership on participants. For the young filmmakers, the experience of interviewing and filming the residents of Anlong Veng, and in particular their encounters with complex stories of suffering, notably engendered a sense of obligation and duty of memory. While we can read this impulse within a wider national – and indeed global – landscape of transitional justice work that is predicated on a universal injunction of memory in the name of prevention and redress, these instances point to the active and textured ways that such ideas can be reproduced and complicated. As in the end of the films, the young filmmakers frequently stated that they would 'share with others the information we obtained, disseminate the information, stay in touch with others to enrich our knowledge, be friendly to each other and unite, and not to discriminate against one another' (November 2017 Peace Tours Post-Tour Survey), demonstrating a desire to contribute to dialogue about the past. Indeed, the fact that the students who took part in the project were trainee teachers further offered the opportunity for lessons to be disseminated to a wider, and younger, audience. In the post-tour surveys, the young filmmakers often stated that 'As a teacher I will try to teach this history to my students' (September 2018 Peace Tours Daily Reflection Survey). One student noted that 'I will tell my students about what happened here. A reconciliation effort . . . is educating the young generations to learn about the history' (April 2018 Peace Tours Post-Tour Survey). In follow up interviews, the young filmmakers, themselves then embarking on teaching careers, actively connected their work on the Peace Tours to the potential to elicit an affective response in younger students, enabling a connection with Cambodia's 'living history'. One explained that 'if we don't learn about history we will repeat the bad things again' (February 2021 Follow-up Interview) and that they wanted students to understand the processes that lead to genocide to understand that 'a piece

of an idea killed millions of people' (February 2021 Follow-up Interview). Outstanding and complicated questions remain here in regard to how these imperatives are reproduced within the silos of national histories, or as bearing lessons for other contexts.

Conclusion

In this article, we have reflected on the Anlong Veng Peace Tours PV project as a series of interventions on and through complex 'perpetrator' memories of past violence in Cambodia. We have seen that these could in turn be productive of new ways of thinking about the past, analysing the films as texts and artefacts of memory that reposition and augment existing (and neglected) accounts of the past, and gauging student filmmaker's reflections on their own involvement in the project and why it mattered to them. As an advocacy project that was rationalised and intended to promote intergenerational dialogue between and across divided communities, we have, throughout, attempted to self-reflexively delineate how we see arts – and specifically PV – as a set of intermediations between layers of memory: practical interviewing (on film) that asks questions of memory; the production of films that mediate and construct artefacts of memory as texts; and the wider discursive social and political landscape that constrains creative filmmaking – but can allow ruptures with – dominant narratives that shape memory, that is, state-level narratives, or the discursive terrain of national and international transitional justice efforts. We can draw three substantive lessons from these reflections.

Arts have come to occupy an important part of the toolkit of transitional justice practice and advocacy. This is often deployed within initiatives that see art as an expressive medium for the acknowledgement and reparation of harms after violence. We have highlighted in turn how arts are reproductive and cue new ways of thinking about memories. PV initiatives lend themselves to this work because they centre creative ownership and authorship of stories of harm in the hands of the groups that are often most directly affected by harms and their legacies. For our immediate purposes, we witnessed creative PV products that could engage both 'horizontal' and 'vertical' cleavages in Cambodia. That is, the production of films exploring the past that could speak across divided communities and across intergenerational dissonances in terms of the acknowledgement of past harm. In the context in which we have worked, we have shown how the 'emic' and 'etic' insider/outsider tradition in participatory art can be disrupted, because the films illuminate specific local stories, implicating specific Khmer Rouge perpetrator memories, that in turn can ambivalently obey and elude dominant national narratives of the past. We would suggest that, as a technique of memory, PV allows this because it is a distinctive mode of communication that has the power to resist and exceed the constraints placed on it.

Our analysis proceeded with a close rereading of the corpus of 11 films produced on the project. Individually, we see these films tending to obey a set of conventions in terms of presentation, style and content, particularly around the juxtaposition of past harms and a situated and place-based aesthetic of present 'normalcy'. Moreover, the films tend to be organised around and addressed to a register of truth-seeking and evidence. When taken together as a whole, these films illuminate significant lessons about the case and the place of 'perpetrator' memories within transitional justice more broadly. We see the contours of 'complex' victimhood implicated in competing, sometimes complementary and often conflicting claims about suffering and responsibility. We noted the risks at work in elements of the films, where more hagiographic readings of the Khmer Rouge leadership emerged (and were sought to be 'contained' through contrasts to evidential supplementary information about their responsibility). Such elements only problematise, conversely, the more singular claims to suffering and victimhood at work in each film individually. As a piece, the films demonstrate the impossibility of straightforward definitions as either victim or perpetrator. The

role of the young filmmakers in navigating such complexity is expressed, when read as a suite together, in the tensions and ambiguities at work in the films, which will, recue new – and we hope – more complex ways of thinking about past harm in Cambodia and beyond.

In our surveys and interviews with the young filmmakers, we saw the strength and presence of wider rationales for doing transitional justice in the name of memory. Students rationalised their involvement in the project on the basis of establishing historical truth, learning to prevent and deter future atrocities, and in the name of reconciliation. The participatory nature of the project was particularly powerful as an avenue for the latter, as the act of accounting for the experiences of the Anlong Veng community was seen to generate sympathy and empathy for people previously feared and demonised. Such accounts, as represented in the films as tools to further recue and rethink memory elsewhere, cannot be separated from their 'present' contexts. Memory is constantly made and remade with new meanings but, as we have seen, there are immanent tensions and risks at work in these processes, where competing and contradictory understandings of suffering and responsibility come into play. Here is the contribution and challenge of the participatory (video) approach for conventional and dominant advocacy in transitional justice. Where transitional justice promises an 'illusion of resolution' (Weinstein, 2011: 5–6), with clear victims and perpetrators, our work has shown, in productive ways, that transitional justice should embrace the arts-led approaches to the ambiguities and complexities of experiences of harm, and resist any impulse to 'settling' a single history.

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Note

1. The films produced and that are available online via DC-Cam's YouTube channel are listed here:Forbidden Love: Khmer Rouge Crimeshttps://youtu.be/9-5jJkg4e0cA Khmer Rouge Messengerhttps://youtu.be/dvw86hKDxvMLeader with Two Faceshttps://youtu.be/F99XpuyKb2sIf We Unitedhttps://youtu.be/byal-PKE80ekA Memory of Romchek Villagehttps://youtu.be/P-j7VP_fUWU40Anlong Veng: The Shrapnel Still in My Bodyhttps://youtu.be/m3b2bHL8_jIThe Least Survivalhttps://youtu.be/401eG87NS1MA Shattered Life Experiencehttps://youtu.be/VbXGFpOo_98

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