

Reconciliation in Cambodia: thirty years after the terror of the Khmer Rouge regime

Estelle Bockers, MA*, ** Nadine Stammel, MA*, *** & Christine Knaevelsrud, PhD*, **

Abstract

During the Khmer Rouge regime one quarter of the Cambodian population was killed as a result of malnutrition, overwork and mass killings. Although the regime ended 30 years ago, its legacy continues to affect Cambodians. Mental health problems as well as feelings of anger and revenge resulting from traumatic events experienced during the Khmer Rouge regime are still common in Cambodia. These conditions continue to impede social coexistence and the peace-building process in society.

Thirty years after the Khmer Rouge regime this article gives an overview on the status of the country's current reconciliation process and recommends potential future steps.

Key Words: trauma, reconciliation, Cambodia, war, Khmer Rouge regime

Introduction

The psychological aftermath of civil wars and violent political conflicts can pose immense challenges for social coexistence in the population. Posttraumatic Stress Dis-

order (PTSD), depression, and feelings of anger and revenge are highly prevalent in postconflict societies such as Cambodia.¹ In villages throughout the country, victims and perpetrators of the atrocities committed during the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979 live side by side. How can social reintegration be fostered under such conditions?

Desire for revenge is a common psychological response to violent events causing harm and loss.² Feelings of anger and the desire for revenge can have the important adaptive function of helping people to cope with their anxiety.³ However, these feelings can also have a negative impact on mental health and interpersonal relationships, thus promoting cycles of violence among individuals and between groups.⁴

The purpose of this article is to analyze the current status of Cambodia's reconciliation process, 30 years after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime. We first define the term "reconciliation" and outline psychological, sociological, and educational measures that may contribute to it. After briefly summarizing the history of the Khmer Rouge era, we then evaluate approaches that have been implemented to promote reconciliation in Cambodia to date and make recommendations for the future.

*) Treatment Center for Torture Victims, Germany, estelle.bockers@fu-berlin.de

**) Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

***) Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, University of Bielefeld, Germany

Reconciliation

Reconciliation and the related concept of forgiveness were originally religious notions. In the wake of the civil wars and human right violations that have recently taken place in countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, and Cambodia, interest in reconciliation as a political, juridical, and psychological construct is growing.

From a psychological perspective, the process of healing traumas and bringing closure to the relationship between victims and perpetrators is essential for reconciliation.⁵ A psychological change has to be effected in the former opponents' beliefs, attitudes, and motivations, namely "a transition to beliefs and attitudes that support peaceful relations between former enemies".⁶

Most definitions describe reconciliation as a reciprocal and gradual process. Crocker⁷ defined three consecutive stages of the reconciliation process: "simple co-existence", developing to "democratic reciprocity," and finally a third stage in which the social bonds between former victims and perpetrators are reconstructed.⁷ Pham, Weinstein and Longman defined reconciliation as a process aiming at community, interdependence, social justice, and nonviolence.⁸ The ultimate goal of reconciliation appears to be that people learn to live peacefully together.⁹ This can be achieved only within a relatively stable social and political order that is robust enough to provide physical security for both former victims and perpetrators.¹⁰

Reciprocity is a crucial aspect in the process of reconciliation, which cannot take place without the perpetrators' cooperation.¹¹ This is in contrast to the similar construct of forgiveness, which is under the victims' control. The establishment of relationships between the victim and the perpetrator is therefore necessary for reconciliation. In contrast to forgiveness as an

intrapersonal process, reconciliation is understood as an interpersonal process.

The definition of reconciliation that has become widely accepted in literature and that is used in this article has five key components: a) a reduction of feelings of anger and revenge, b) the ability to take the opponent's perspective, c) reduced personal avoidance of the opponent, d) openness to positive relationships with the opponent, and e) renunciation of violence.¹²

Several approaches and methods to promote reconciliation are expounded in literature.¹³ In the following, we introduce and discuss the most widespread, appropriate, and target-oriented approaches.

Approaches and methods to promote reconciliation

Retributive justice

The notions of merit and desert are central to retributive justice. This approach focuses on individual accountability and punishment of perpetrators; it can contribute to reconciliation in various ways. First, the fact that perpetrators sentenced to imprisonment after a criminal trial can no longer commit crimes increases the sense of security in society, which is an important condition for reconciliation.¹⁴ Second, retributive justice responds to people's "profound sense of moral equilibrium" and satisfies their need for perpetrators to pay for the harm they have done, thus helping to rebuild an individual sense of justice.¹⁵

Restorative justice

Restorative justice emphasizes the interests of the victims and is less concerned with imposing punishments on the offender. It includes non-criminal measures such as truth and reconciliation commissions, which are tasked with revealing all wrongdoings and human rights abuses in the context of a civil

war or dictatorship. The aim is to establish the truth, to encourage the perpetrator to accept responsibility and express remorse, and to stress reconciliation without the intention of prosecuting or sentencing the perpetrators. This approach has been popularly implemented in South Africa, for example.

Reparations

Reparations to individuals or communities who have suffered injustice include monetary compensation for material damage or physical injury. Reparations may also be made in the form of resources for economic development (e.g. building schools or supplying water wells) or community service by the wrongdoer. Although reparations cannot compensate all of the victim's losses, they show that the wrongdoer feels remorse, which can promote forgiveness and reconciliation and help to restore victims' sense of justice.¹⁶

Sites and practices of remembrance

Museums and memorials document and acknowledge the crimes and human rights violations of former regimes. Typical examples are the Holocaust memorials and museums built in Germany and other countries to remind current and future generations of the crimes committed during the Nazi regime. Days of remembrance serve a similar purpose. Etcheson¹⁴ suggests that, if these days are properly designed, "they can bring a nation together as one in remembering shared trauma and loss."¹⁴ Forgiveness and forgetting are often perceived to be similar concepts, and resistance to forgetting past atrocities may lower the readiness to forgive.¹⁷ Therefore, it seems important to offer alternative ways of remembering past atrocities. Both symbolic measures and days of remembrance can contribute to reconciliation by marking, acknowledging, and honouring the victims' suffering.

Educational measures

The way a state educates its young people about its own history reflects how the government and its institutions appraise and reappraise their history. According to Cole, the reform of history education can be understood as a sign of changed identity on the part of the state.¹⁸ The fact that a new regime does not deny past atrocities demonstrates that the state is not an accomplice to past crimes and that atrocities are unlikely to be repeated.¹⁹

Educating the next generation about history can also contribute to reconciliation by serving as an instrument of remembrance. The younger generation's recognition of victims' suffering through this form of commemoration may help the victims to reconcile.

Therapeutic measures

Many people in postconflict settings suffer mental trauma as a result of their experiences.¹ In Cambodia, many are still strongly affected by the aftermath of the genocides.²⁰ As Staub has described, reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing mutually support each other and an advance in each aspect can facilitate advances in the others.²¹ Therapies aimed at healing traumas in individuals or groups include traditional, medical, and public health approaches, as well as counseling, self-help groups, and (trauma-focused) psychotherapy.

Table 1 (next page) summarizes the approaches to promote reconciliation outlined above.

A brief history of the Khmer Rouge regime

At the end of the 1960s, Cambodia was torn by civil war. Bombings by U.S. planes during the Vietnam war in the late 1960s and early 1970s also had a hugely detrimental

Table 1. *Approaches to promote reconciliation in postconflict societies.*

	Primary target group	Level of intervention	Intended impact	Examples
Retributive Justice	Perpetrators	Individual	Instilling a sense of justice and security	Punishing perpetrators
Restorative Justice	Victims and perpetrators	Individual and community	Establishing the truth; encouraging perpetrators to assume responsibility	Truth commissions
Reparations	Victims	Individual and community	Instilling a sense of justice; demonstrating that the wrongdoers feel remorse	Monetary or economic compensation for victims' losses by government or wrongdoers
Sites and practices of remembrance	Victims, perpetrators, future generations	Individual and community	Remembering human rights violations; recognizing and honoring the victims' suffering; establishing sites for grieving; educating younger generations	Museums, memorials, days of remembrance
Educational measures	Future generations and others not involved in the conflict	Community	Showing the government's changed appraisal of the past; recognition of the victim's suffering by future generations and others not involved in the conflict	History textbooks, teaching students about the past
Therapeutic measures	Victims	Individual and community	Healing, psychological wellbeing	Counseling, self-help groups, psychotherapy

impact on the country.²² In the late 1960s Pol Pot, the leader of the Cambodian Communist movement, also known as the Khmer Rouge gained more followers. In 1970, head of state Prince Sihanouk was deposed by the pro-U.S. general Lon Nol. Appalled by the suffering caused by the U.S. bombings, thousands of Cambodians refused to support the American-backed government and followed their revered prince in joining the Khmer Rouge.

However, when the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, Cambodian society was transformed radically. The entire urban population was evacuated; all inhabitants of Phnom Penh and other cities were forced to move to rural areas, with anyone who remained being threatened with execu-

tion.²³ The following years were characterized by mass killings, forced labor, forced marriages, rapes, deportations, separations from family members, torture, and starvation. The Khmer Rouge closed schools, government offices, courts, and embassies. All foreigners were expelled, religious practice was outlawed, the use of foreign languages was banned, and foreign medical and healthcare assistance was refused. Currency and the postal system were abolished; newspapers as well as television and radio stations were shut down.²⁴ In their attempt to establish an egalitarian and agrarian society, the Khmer Rouge presided over the organized killing of professionals and educated persons, especially doctors, teachers, and former government officials.²⁵ Simply wearing glasses or being

able to speak a foreign language was reason enough to be killed.

Estimates indicate the loss of at least 1.7 million lives, one quarter of the Cambodian population, during the Khmer Rouge regime as a result of malnutrition, overwork, disease, and execution without trial.²⁶

The Khmer Rouge regime ended on January 7th, 1979, with the invasion of Vietnamese forces, but low-intensity warfare continued throughout the 1980s. After a series of complex negotiations, the Paris Peace Accord was signed by all factions (including the Khmer Rouge) in 1991, and the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was established. However, the Khmer Rouge, who backed out of the peace process and refused to participate in elections, continued their guerilla warfare until the movement finally collapsed in 1998.

The impact of the atrocities committed during the Khmer Rouge regime on Cambodia today

Although the Khmer Rouge regime ended 30 years ago, its legacy continues to affect the Cambodian population. Every Cambodian alive during the regime experienced on average 10 traumatic events, such as starvation, lack of shelter, being close to death, forced labor, torture, or witnessing the death or killing of family members or friends.²

In 2001, de Jong et al.¹ found a higher prevalence rate of PTSD in Cambodia (28.4%) than has been reported in other postconflict countries.¹ However, a recent study by Sonis et al. reported a PTSD rate ranging from 7.9% in the younger generation of Cambodians to 14.2% in the older group.²⁷ The difference in the PTSD prevalence rates might be due to different sample recruiting methods and measure instruments or maybe also to a change of the PTSD prevalence over time. The rates found by

Sonis et al. are similar to those found in other postwar societies: 17.1% of Kosovar Albanians suffered PTSD after the war.²⁸ 11.8% of a sample of Guatemalan refugees living in Mexico 20 years after civil conflict were found to have PTSD.²⁹

The prevalence of PTSD also seems to be related to individual perceptions of justice. In a recent study on PTSD and disability in Cambodia, Sonis et al. found that Cambodians with low levels of perceived justice were significantly more likely to present with PTSD.²⁷

In addition to eliciting PTSD, violence and traumatic experiences can also cause other mental health problems. Anxiety disorders and depressive disorders are common in war survivors.³⁰ General social functioning can also be impaired as a result of the traumatic events experienced.²⁸

Man-made traumatic experiences often have devastating effects on survivors' basic psychological needs for trust, esteem, identity, feelings of effectiveness and control, and positive connections to others.⁴ A typical epiphenomenon of posttraumatic stress symptoms is that the victims' central beliefs, such as the belief that the world is safe and people are basically good, are called into question. Victims of extreme traumatic stress feel vulnerable and often perceive the world as a dangerous place.³¹ This may be one of the main psychological causes of political instability in postconflict societies. People who see the world and other people as threatening and dangerous may overreact violently to defend themselves in situations where violence is not provoked or warranted.³² Staub and colleagues⁴ have argued that this self-protective violence is especially likely if victims and perpetrators lived side by side under a chronic sense of injustice.⁴

As noted above, harm and distress can also give rise to anger and a desire for re-

venge. These feelings are common in post-conflict societies.³³ For example, Pham et al. found that most Cambodians who lived under the Khmer Rouge regime feel hatred toward those responsible for the atrocities (84%).³⁴ More than two thirds wished to see those responsible hurt or miserable (72%), and almost 40% would seek revenge if they could. These findings are in line with results of Lopes Cadozo et al., who found strong feelings of hatred (88%) and revenge (43%) in survivors of the war in Kosovo.²⁸ Although the emergence of these feelings is understandable, and although it is important to acknowledge and commemorate the deaths and suffering, such feelings may also have negative consequences.

Inability to reconcile or forgive and feelings of hatred and revenge are associated with poorer psychological functioning and may impede positive interpersonal relationships and social coexistence.²⁷ These conditions can seriously impair the peace-building process in society. In fact, they are a breeding ground for violence among individuals and between groups as well as for domestic violence.⁴

Evaluation of approaches and methods implemented to promote reconciliation in Cambodia

Retributive justice

Immediately after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, a People's Revolutionary Tribunal (PRT) was established to prosecute the genocide and crimes committed. Two symbolic personalities of Democratic Kampuchea, Prime Minister Pol Pot and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ieng Sary, were accused and found guilty of the crime of genocide.¹⁴ However, neither of them appeared in court or were punished for their crimes.³⁵ The tribunal was later denounced as a "show trial".³⁶ As Etcheson noted:

The people of Cambodia were suffering amidst a general climate of starvation and dislocation during 1979, physically and emotionally exhausted after the four brutal years of Khmer Rouge rule. At that time, many Cambodians were wandering the land in search of their missing relatives, while dodging the on-going combat between Vietnamese forces and the rump of Pol Pot's army. One might well wonder how deep an impression the in absentia conviction of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary actually made on the Cambodian people at large under these circumstances, and indeed how many of them even knew about it at all.³⁷

In 1996, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen offered amnesties to several high-ranking Khmer Rouge leaders, including Ieng Sary, who was one of the main architects of the Cambodian genocide.³⁸ The prospect that there might be no future chance to prosecute or sentence those responsible for the genocide must have been unbearable for many victims.

Now, 30 years after the genocide in Cambodia, and following lengthy negotiations between the government of Cambodia and the United Nations, a new court called the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) has been established. It started its work in July 2006 and became fully operational in June 2007.³⁹ The ECCC is known as a hybrid court because it applies Cambodian and international law and employs a mix of Cambodian and international judges. The decision was made to limit prosecutions to five of the senior leaders of Democratic Kampuchea, namely those who gave orders and those primarily responsible for the most serious crimes committed. The ECCC is the first war crimes tribunal in which the role of victims is not restricted to that of a witness. All individuals who have

suffered physical, psychological, or material harm as a result of a crime investigated by the court have the opportunity to participate as complainants or civil parties.³⁹ The first trial began on 17 February, 2009.

The ECCC has been met with both hope and criticism in Cambodia. There is controversy over the decision to hold just five individuals responsible for the entire genocide. Furthermore, there is concern that it took almost 10 years from the start of negotiations until the court started working: the defendants are now elderly and may well die before being sentenced. The lack of publicity surrounding the tribunal has also been criticized. According to Pham et al., 39% of Cambodians have no knowledge of the ECCC, and 46% have only little knowledge.³⁴ Yet people are more likely to have positive attitudes toward the tribunal if they feel informed about its work and involved in the process.⁸ Initiatives such as increased outreach activities in the villages and greater media coverage might increase public awareness of the tribunal.

There is general mistrust of judicial and government officials in Cambodia. With a Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of 1.8, Cambodia is one of the most corrupt countries in the world.⁴⁰ The Cambodian judiciary is widely considered to be corrupt, dependent, and untrustworthy.⁴¹ For this reason, some people in Cambodia “would prefer that no trial be conducted at all rather than having the country undergo a substandard judicial process”.⁴² However, more than 50% of Cambodians who lived under the Khmer Rouge regime want those responsible to be put on trial. Additionally, one third of Cambodians identify punishment of the Khmer Rouge’s top leaders as an important precondition for their forgiveness.³⁴ A majority of Cambodians expect the ECCC to have a positive impact on victims of the Khmer

Rouge regime and to promote national reconciliation.²⁷ As Staub has argued, justice is an important need for survivors of violence, and finally seeing the former Khmer Rouge leaders sentenced may reflect the official acknowledgment of the harm and suffering caused to the victims.⁴³

Restorative justice

Although former victims are able to participate as complainants and civil parties in the ECCC, the tribunal’s role seems to be predominantly retributive. Given the large numbers of victims and perpetrators in Cambodia, it is impossible for all of them to participate in the tribunal. Consequently, it may be important to promote reconciliation by emphasizing restorative ways of justice. To date, however, attempts to establish a public truth commission in Cambodia have been opposed by members of the current government who were previously Khmer Rouge officials themselves. In 1979, the Cambodian government established a Research Committee on Pol Pot’s Genocidal Regime. Information about killings, mass graves, and crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge was collected from victims and perpetrators.¹⁴ Unfortunately, with the exception of a single report published on the commission’s findings in 1983, no information about the commission’s work was made available to the general public. As Etcheson pointed out, “truth commissions cannot work well if their findings are not widely publicized to the people.”¹⁴ The Research Committee thus contributed little to reconciliation in Cambodia.

In the absence of a public truth commission, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) is an independent research institute that collects, archives, and publishes data on the Khmer Rouge regime and provides objective information about the geno-

cide to the public. Its two main objectives are to preserve the history of the Khmer Rouge regime and to compile evidence of the Khmer Rouge's crimes, both being foundations for reconciliation.

Reparations

According to the United Nations list of least developed countries, Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world.⁴⁴ During the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia's public property (e.g., social and technical infrastructure) was destroyed and individual property was seized. Many people were forced to leave their houses and had to give away their livestock and other resources. Today, many Cambodians still live in poverty. The many negative effects of poverty include the experience of injustice, which increases the potential for anger and violence.⁴⁵ According to Staub, Rwandans perceived economic support to be a means of restoring justice that would help to promote reconciliation after genocide and mass killing.²¹

Of course, money cannot replace loved ones lost in the conflict, but material compensation of material losses may give victims a sense of justice. To date, the Cambodian government has planned no monetary compensation for victims of the Khmer Rouge regime, and the prospects of reparations being made are small.

Sites and practices of remembrance

In 1984, Cambodia's government declared May 20 a National Day of Hatred to commemorate the crimes and the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime and to give people an opportunity to vent their anger. It seems that the scope of the day of hate has changed over time. The Day of Hatred was initiated while the Khmer Rouge was still active. Originally in 1984 the objective of the day was to mobilize international public opinion

against the Khmer Rouge, their allies and their foreign backers.⁴⁶ In 1990 the stated aim of the Day of Hatred was to "make people realize the current crimes committed by the Pol Pot clique, and be dedicated to the prevention of the return of the regime".⁴⁷ Until today, each May 20 the crimes of the regime are remembered in public meetings and ceremonies at village cemeteries and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. The ceremonies all include wreath laying, songs, prayers and other religious offerings to the dead, and speeches by official representatives.⁴⁸ Some of the activities involved in the Day of Hatred seem therapeutic, with victims recounting and re-enacting their personal experiences of Khmer Rouge crimes. Traumatic memories are invoked in a protected environment, in the same way as trauma confrontation in cognitive behavioural therapy. Learning to express one's emotions, especially anger, can be a useful therapeutic tool for dealing with chronic pain and depression.⁴⁹ In a Buddhist-coined society it is less esteemed to display anger. The Day of Commemoration provides a culturally accepted space for Cambodians to express their anger and pain at the crimes of the Khmer Rouge regime and can thus contribute to healing and coming to terms with the past. In 2001 the Day of Hatred has been renamed the Day of Commemoration, which might characterize another important scope of the day – to not forget about the past.

There are memorials commemorating the Khmer Rouge genocide throughout Cambodia. The Choeung Ek Memorial on The Killing Fields, where the Khmer Rouge executed an estimated 17,000 people, is probably the best known. Mass graves in this area contain a known 8,895 bodies, but many mass graves remain unopened. Today, Choeung Ek is marked by a glass-sided

Buddhist stupa filled with over 5,000 human skulls. Choeng Ek and other memorials serve as symbolic sites where Cambodians can grieve and commemorate the deceased and so reconcile with their own losses.¹⁴

Cambodia has two museums documenting the terrors of the Khmer Rouge regime. The best known is the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, which was built in the former Security Prison 21 (S-21). An estimated 17,000 to 20,000 people were imprisoned, interrogated, and tortured in S-21 during the Khmer Rouge era. There are only 12 known survivors. Today, the Tuol Sleng buildings are preserved as they were left in 1979. It is possible to visit the prison cells and see photographs of former inmates as well as paintings by the artist Vann Nath, who was held there. The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum serves as an important site of remembrance, preventing past cruelties from being forgotten. The individual stories and photographs presented in the museum give the younger generation an opportunity to recognize and honor the suffering of the Khmer Rouge victims. Additionally, museums like Tuol Sleng serve to educate young Cambodians about the horrors of the Khmer Rouge years.

Educational measures

Most young Cambodians know little about the Khmer Rouge regime. According to Pham et al., more than 80% of those who were not alive during the regime describe their knowledge of the period as poor or very poor.³⁴ With two thirds of the Cambodian population aged 29 years or younger, the number of people with limited knowledge of the Khmer Rouge regime is high. Scholars attribute the limited awareness of the younger generation to a lack of public education.⁵⁰ Although the Cambodian constitution guarantees a nine year basic edu-

cation as a right, the access to educational services, especially for remote populations, is deficient. A report by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport in 2000 indicated that in Cambodia 45.1% of women and 24.8% of men are illiterate.⁵¹ However even for young people with a better access to education, being informed about what happened in the past is not common. Cambodia's history between 1975 and 1979 is rarely covered in the country's schools. Only 6% of randomly sampled young Cambodians learned about the Khmer Rouge in school; 85% stated that they wanted to know more about the regime.³⁴ The first textbook about the genocide, developed by the government in collaboration with the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), was issued in 2009. This development might be interpreted as the first sign of a greater willingness to teach Cambodian school children about the genocide. Heightened public awareness of the Khmer Rouge atrocities may also promote dialog between the generations and help Cambodians to come to terms with the past.

In addition, the Youth for Justice and Reconciliation Project run by Youth for Peace (YFP) organizes workshops on the history of the Khmer Rouge era and the psychological and cultural factors behind collective violence. It initiates dialogs between villagers with the aim of facilitating open discussions between the younger generation and older Cambodians who experienced the regime.

Therapeutic measures

The approximately 30 years of civil war destroyed Cambodia's public health infrastructure.⁵² During the Khmer Rouge regime, the two psychiatrists practicing in the country were killed and the only mental health hospital was shut down.⁵³ With no conventional

psychiatric or psychological care, people had to rely on traditional healing. Cambodia's mental health system is still significantly underdeveloped, particularly in view of the high prevalence of trauma and PTSD in the country.⁵⁴ Several studies have found that poorer mental health is related to unforgiving attitudes and a lack of willingness to reconcile.⁵⁵ This seems to apply to postconflict settings across cultures. Pham et al.⁸ found that Rwandans who met the PTSD symptom criteria "were less likely to support the Rwandan national trials, to believe in community and to demonstrate interdependence with other ethnic groups."⁸⁹ Likewise, Lopes Cardozo et al. argued that mental health problems related to the war in Kosovo needed to be addressed in order to re-establish a stable environment in the territory.²⁸

Despite the availability of effective approaches for treating postwar mental health problems, there have been few attempts to implement treatment for Khmer Rouge victims in Cambodia or to evaluate the efficacy of such treatment.⁵⁶ In one Cambodian study by Leang, Andeth, Seang, & Chhim, participants showed reduced PTSD symptoms after receiving a form of cognitive behavioural psychotherapy.⁵⁷ In addition, their attitudes toward former perpetrators became more positive and forgiving, and the tendency to take revenge decreased.

The provision of treatment for Cambodians with mental health problems is still very limited. Currently, there are only 32 psychiatrists working in the country.⁵⁸ One well-known organization where people with mental illness can seek help is the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO). It offers psycho-social education, self-help groups, counseling, and psychiatric treatment. To our knowledge, trauma-focused psychotherapy is not currently available in Cambodia.

Staub et al. developed and evaluated a psycho-educational group intervention for use in the context of genocide and war, with the aim of promoting healing, reconciliation, and prevention of violence in Rwanda.⁴ After the intervention, participants showed reduced trauma symptoms and a more positive orientation toward members of the other group. Similar approaches may help to promote reconciliation in Cambodia.

Additional factors challenging the reconciliation process in Cambodia

How soon a postconflict country is able to reconcile and reconstruct depends on various factors, including the nature of the conflict, the present-day situation of the society, and the manner in which the society deals with its past. As noted above, poverty and corruption in present-day Cambodia may fuel a sense of injustice and mistrust in the current government, thus hindering reconciliation. A society's ability to deal with the wounds of the past may be characteristic, having evolved from its unique historical and cultural development. Cambodia was occupied and oppressed by its neighbour countries at various times over the past centuries. Nearly all artists and intellectuals in the country were killed during the Khmer Rouge years; critical thinking and asserting one's rights were life-threatening undertakings.⁵⁹ To date, none of the perpetrators of the Khmer Rouge genocide have been sentenced. Leuprecht has described the Cambodian situation as a "persistence of impunity."⁶⁰ After the UNTAC era, hundreds of nongovernmental organizations came to Cambodia trying to provide aid, but also creating a culture of dependency.⁶¹ Against this historical background, it seems plausible that Cambodian society lacks the self efficacy-beliefs and intellectual resources needed to restore justice with the aim of

coming to terms with the past. Cultural issues also influence how individuals in a society cope with adverse feelings such as anger. In Buddhism, displaying anger and expressing private thoughts and inner feelings openly means loss of face. It is thus desirable to avoid anger.⁶¹ Yet, not being able to express anger can delay the grieving process. Murrell (p. 148) points out that the decades-long Cambodian reluctance to hold a war crimes trial may be related to the “fear of unleashing so many memories with the result that many of its peoples would lose face.”⁶¹

Conclusion

The process of reconciliation in postconflict countries such as Cambodia requires action on several levels. An important challenge on the political level is to combat poverty and corruption, which can fuel a sense of injustice and mistrust in society, potentially giving rise to violence. On the legal level, the establishment of the ECCC represents a first step in paying public tribute to the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime. To instill a sense of justice to the Cambodian people and to foster reconciliation, the tribunal’s work must be fair, transparent, and accessible to the public. Community-building on an individual basis is equally important for social healing and reconciliation in society. It is thus vital to further promote history teaching in schools. Rituals, ceremonies, and memorials help individuals to deal with the losses of the genocide and should be cultivated. Finally, concerted efforts should be made to increase the provision of therapeutic approaches focusing on trauma reprocessing and the activation of future-orientated resources. The integration of interventions such as the one developed by Staub et al. to target both healing and reconciliation in regular health care provision can be expected

to have major benefits for social co-existence Cambodia.⁴

References

1. De Jong JTVM, Komproe IH, Van Ommeren M et al. Lifetime events and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in 4 postconflict settings. *JAMA* 2001;286:555-62.
2. Field N, Chhim S. Desire for revenge and attitudes toward the Khmer Rouge tribunal among Cambodians. *J Loss Trauma* 2008;13:352-72.
3. Lane RC. The revenge motive: a developmental perspective on the life cycle and the treatment process. *Psychoanalytical Review* 1995;82(1):41-64.
4. Staub E, Pearlman LA, Gubin A et al. Healing, reconciliation, forgiving and the prevention of violence after genocide or mass killing: An intervention and its experimental evaluation in Rwanda. *J Soc Clin Psychol* 2005;24:297-334.
5. Galtung J. After violence, reconstruction, reconciliation and resolution: coping with visible and invisible effects of war and violence. In: Abu-Nimer M, ed. *Reconciliation, justice and coexistence: theory and practice*. New York: Lexington Books, 2004:3.
6. Bar-Tal D. Conflict through conflict resolution to reconciliation: Psychological analysis. *Polit Psychol* 2000;21:351-65.
7. Crocker DA. Forgiveness, accountability and reconciliation. *Perspectives on Ethics and International Affairs* 2000;2(7):13-4.
8. Pham PN, Weinstein HM, Longman T. Trauma and PTSD symptoms in Rwanda. *JAMA* 2004;292:602-12.
9. Lederach JP. *Building peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997.
10. Rasmussen JL. Negotiating a revolution: toward integrating relationship building and reconciliation into official peace negotiations. In: Abu-Nimer M, ed. *Reconciliation, justice and coexistence: theory and practice*. New York: Lexington Books, 2001:101-27.
11. Stoop D, Masteller J. *Forgiving our parents, forgiving ourselves. Healing adult children of dysfunctional families*. Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1991.
12. Stammel N, Knaevelsrud C, Boettche M et al. Reconciliation and mental health in traumatized victims of human right violations. Presentation at the International Congress of Psychology, July 2008, Berlin, Germany (unpublished).
13. Crocker DA. Reckoning with past wrongs: a nor-

- native framework. *Ethics & International Affairs* 1999;13:43-64.
14. Etcheson C. Reconciliation in Cambodia: theory and practice. Study guide accompanying the 2004 Reconciliation Workshop series. Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University, 2004.
 15. Jacoby S. *Wild justice: the evolution of revenge*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.
 16. Allan A, Allan M, Kaminer D et al. Exploration of the association between apology and forgiveness amongst victims of human right violations. *Behavioral Science and the Law* 2006;24:87-102.
 17. Tutu D. *No future without forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
 18. Cole EA. Introduction: reconciliation and history education. In: Cole EA, ed. *Teaching the violent past: history education and reconciliation*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007:1-28.
 19. Digeser PE. Forgiveness, the unforgivable and international relations. *International Relations*. 2004;18:480-97.
 20. Hinton A. Terror and trauma in the Cambodian genocide. In: Kirmayer LJ, Lemelson R, Barad M, eds. *Understanding trauma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007:433-50.
 21. Staub E. Genocide and mass killing: origins, prevention, healing and reconciliation. *Polit Psychol* 2000;21:367-82.
 22. Askin DA. Prosecuting senior leaders of Khmer Rouge crimes. In: Humphreys S, Berry D, eds. *Justice initiatives*. New York: Open Society Institute, 2006:72-3.
 23. Short P. *Pol Pot: anatomy of a nightmare*. New York: Henry Holt, 2005.
 24. Kelly G, Fitzduff M. Government strategies on victims in post-conflict societies. United Nations University/University of Ulster: INCORE, 2001.
 25. The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association. Report on ECCC7ICC Training Sessions. Phnom Penh: ADHOC, 2007.
 26. Kiernan B. *The Pol Pot regime: race, power and genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge 1975-1979*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
 27. Sonis J, Gibson JL, de Jong JTVM et al. Probable posttraumatic stress disorder and disability in Cambodia. Associations with perceived justice, desire for revenge and attitudes toward the Khmer Rouge trials. *JAMA* 2009;302:527-36.
 28. Lopes Cardozo B, Vergara A, Agani F et al. Mental health, social functioning and attitudes of Kosovar Albanians following the war in Kosovo. *JAMA* 2000;284:569-77.
 29. Sabin M, Lopes Cardozo B, Nackerud L et al. Factors associated with poor mental health among Guatemalan refugees living in Mexico 20 years after civil conflict. *JAMA* 2003;290:667-70.
 30. Vinck P, Pham PN, Stover E et al. Exposure to war crimes and implications for peace building in Northern Uganda. *JAMA* 2007;298:543-54.
 31. McCann IL, Pearlman LA. Vicarious traumatization: a framework for understanding the psychological effects of working with victims. *J Trauma Stress* 1990;3:131-49.
 32. Staub E. Breaking the cycle of genocidal violence: healing and reconciliation. In: Harvey J, ed. *Perspectives on loss*. Washington DC: Taylor & Francis, 1998.
 33. Bayer CP, Klasen F, Adam H. Association of trauma and PTSD symptoms with openness to reconciliation and feelings of revenge among former Ugandan and Congolese child soldiers. *JAMA* 2007;298:555-9.
 34. Pham PN, Vinck P, Balthazard M et al. So we will never forget. A population-based survey on attitudes about social reconstruction and the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. Paper presented at the So We Will Never Forget Conference and Workshop, January 2009, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
 35. Public Affairs Section of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. An introduction to the Khmer Rouge trials. Phnom Penh: Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, 2008.
 36. DeNike HJ, Quigley J, Robinson KJ, eds. *Genocide in Cambodia: documents from the trial of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
 37. Etcheson C. Reconciliation in Cambodia: theory and practice. Study Guide accompanying the 2004 Reconciliation Workshop Series. Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University, 2004:Part 3, p. 10.
 38. Mydans S. Cambodians to seek amnesty for Khmer Rouge defector. *New York Times*, August 24, 1996. www.nytimes.com/1996/08/24/world/cambodians-to-see-amnesty-for-khmer-rouge-defector.html.
 39. Public Affairs Section of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. An introduction to the Khmer Rouge trials. Phnom Penh: Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, 2008.
 40. Transparency International. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2008*. 2008. www.transparency.de/uploads/media/08-09-23-CPI2008_Pressematerial.pdf.
 41. Center for International Development & Conflict Management. *Polity IV Country Report 2003*.

- Cambodia, 2003. www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity/report.htm.
42. Galabru K. Reconciliation in international justice: lessons from other tribunals. In: Humphreys S, Berry D, eds. *Justice initiatives*. New York: Open Society Institute, 2006:151-9.
 43. Staub E. Reconciliation after genocide, mass killing, or intractable conflict: understanding the roots of violence, psychological recovery, and steps toward a general theory. *Polit Psychol* 2006;27:867-94.
 44. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. UN list of LDCs after the 2006 triennial review, 2007. www.unctad.org/Templates/Page.asp?intItemID=3641&lang=1.
 45. Staub E. Notes on cultures of violence, cultures of caring and peace, and the fulfillment of basic human needs. *Polit Psychol* 2003;24(1):1-21.
 46. Fawthrop T, Jarvis H. Getting away with genocide? Cambodia's long struggle against the Khmer Rouge. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005:73-4.
 47. Instructions to organise May 20, 1990. DC-Cam Doc 1990;(331).
 48. Day of anger, May 20 1991, Stung Treng. DC-Cam Doc 1991;(498).
 49. Graham JE, Lobel M, Glass P et al. Effects of written anger expression in chronic pain patients: making meaning from pain. *J Behav Med* 2008;31:201-12.
 50. Linton S. Reconciliation in Cambodia. Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2004.
 51. Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. National EFA 2000 Assessment Group. *Education for All 2000 Assessment: Country Report: Cambodia*. Bangkok: UNESCO Proap, 2000.
 52. Gollogly L. The dilemmas of aid: Cambodia 1992-2002. *Lancet* 2002;360:793-8.
 53. Somasundaram DJ, van de Put WA, Eisenbruch M et al. Starting mental health services in Cambodia. *Soc Sci Med* 1999;48:1029-46.
 54. Stockwell A, Whiteford H, Townsend C et al. Mental health policy development: case study of Cambodia. *Australas Psychiatry* 2005;13:190-4.
 55. Kaminer D, Stein DJ, Mbanga I et al. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa: relation to psychiatric status and forgiveness among survivors of human rights abuses. *Br J Psychiatry* 2001;178:373-7.
 56. Schauer M, Neuner F, Elbert T. Narrative exposure therapy. A short-term intervention for traumatic stress disorders after war, terror or torture. Göttingen: Hogrefe, 2005.
 57. Leang L, Andeth KS, Seang L et al. A trauma and reconciliation project in Cambodia. *Transcultural Psycho-Social Organization*, 2005 (unpublished).
 58. Kunthea M, Shay C. Few resources for mentally ill. *Phnom Penh Post*, July 23, 2009. www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2009072327334/National-news/few-resources-for-the-mentally-ill.html.
 59. Poeuv S. Memory, justice and pardon: what does it take to heal? In: Humphreys S, Berry D, eds. *Justice initiatives*. New York: Open Society Institute, 2006: 47-52.
 60. Leuprecht P. Continuing patterns of impunity in Cambodia. Phnom Penh: United Nations Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2005. <http://cambodia.ohchr.org/Documents/Reports/Thematic%20reports%20by%20SRSG/English/242.pdf>.
 61. Murrell A. Reconciliation and healing of a nation. *Med Confl Surviv* 2001;17:146-50.