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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Witnessing and re-enacting in Cambodia: reflection on shifting testimonies

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Abstract Thirty years after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979) how do Cambodians cope with the traumatic legacy of Pol Pot's reign of terror? What forms does witnessing take on in post-socialist and transitional Cambodia as senior Khmer Rouge leaders await prosecution at the Cambodian Tribunal? The paper examines aspects of witnessing in today's Cambodia, expressing each in its own way the idea of the 'shifting' of witnessing: the transformation of testimonies due to time passing and contrasted systems of justice through a comparison of testimonies in the trial of the 'Pol Pot/Ieng Sary clique' (1979) and the current Cambodian Tribunal; the complex forms of witnessing emerging from participatory projects developed with Western authors in 'We want (u) to know' (documentary movie made by an international film crew with the inhabitants of the village of Thnol Lok in 2009) and 'Breaking the silence' (theatre play realised by the Dutch dramaturge Annemarie Prins that premiered in Phnom Penh in 2009 and toured Cambodia in the following years); the relationship between documentary and legal forms of witnessing through the example of Vann Nath, a survivor of S-21/Tuol Sleng, the prison where the Khmer Rouge tortured and killed thousands of their fellow countrymen. The paper analyses the difficulty Western organisers of participatory projects experienced in applying the hybrid model of transitional justice to sociocultural contexts of witnessing. Nevertheless it points out their contribution to processes of 'recognition beyond recognition' in which cultural differences in coming to terms with historical trauma are expressed and recorded.

Keywords Cambodia · Khmer rouge · Trauma · Witnessing · Participatory · Theatre · Documentary movie

1 Introduction

Witnessing is a shifting category determined by what kind of events are witnessed. This is what the media researchers Ashuri and Pinchevski argue (2009, p. 136) thereby opposing the view held by some scholars in trauma theory and Holocaust studies that witnessing is 'an independent variable'. I will review 'witnessing' as a shifting category at the political, social and ideological level in the context of the Khmer Rouge-led Cambodian genocide. Witnessing is not a static phenomenon, which becomes all the more obvious when observed at a more global level. Testimonies and the cultural forms used to convey them to audiences are part of this. The past decades have been the 'era of the witness'. It was initiated in the Euro-American sphere and spread worldwide thanks to, amongst other factors, the expansion of electronic communication. The rise of civil society and the demise of long held authoritarian doctrines also freed the way for the development of a critical discourse, as in the fields of post-colonialism and post-modernism. This has changed the context of witnessing. The cultural anthropologist Allen Feldman formulates it in this way:

> Human rights testimony and medicalised or psychoanalytic talking cures currently function as Enlightenment stand-ins, morally polarised to the murky density of embodied suffering and institutional

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> indifference and denial, and to the mutation of state apparatuses into de-territorialised killing machines. These technologies of memory, jural reason and psycho-medical therapeusis are expected to rectify, respectively the polluting exposure of the victim and his/her auditors to violence experienced and/or violence virtually witnessed in narrative and other media (2004, p. 168).

Despite the process of standardisation stressed by Feldman, witnessing resists reduction to some universal formula. Contextual and local elements resurface and interact (clashing or combining) with internationalised templates. In their study of possible shared terrains between Buddhism and human rights in Cambodia, Ledgerwood and Un referring to Arjun Appadurai's 'ideoscapes' remind that concepts displaced across borders and cultures exist as different sets of notions. Therefore, they require translation into a local idiom (2003). How does witnessing—thus—translate into the Cambodian context, 30 years after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979)? Lately, in the wake of the establishment of the Cambodian Tribunal, formally known as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC, a.k.a. Khmer Rouge Trial), there has been an upsurge of victims-oriented projects in collaboration with Western partners. What will be the impact on local communities? What forms will witnessing take on in post-socialist and transitional Cambodia? Could witnessing furnish a space where the relationship between Cambodians and Westerners can be redrawn?

The paper investigates a small segment of witnessing in today's Cambodia. It looks at some aspects, expressing each in its own way the idea of 'shifting': the transformation of testimonies due to time passing and contrasted systems of justice; the complex forms of witnessing emerging from participatory projects developed with Western authors in 'We want (u) to know' (documentary movie 2009) and 'Breaking the silence' (theatre play, premiered in 2009); the relationship between documentary and legal forms of witnessing through the example of Vann Nath, a survivor of the prison S-21/Tuol Sleng (the infamous torture and execution centre in Phnom Penh where the *santebal*, Khmer Rouge political police, under the command of Duch, killed about 17,000 people) and a key figure in the remembrance of Khmer Rouge crimes.

2 Old and new testimonies

> It is the first time that I appear before a tribunal. I am overwhelmed in turn by painful souvenirs and a powerful desire for punishment and revenge … I give my name. A Khmer lawyer reads a summary of the two- or three-page statement I wrote (for the new authorities) in Siem Reap. Then, I relate my four-year ordeal, name my dead relatives, and end begging the court to condemn the culprits. (Affonço 2005, p. 225)

Denise Affonço was one of the twenty or so survivors of the Khmer Rouge terror who testified at the trial of the 'Pol Pot–Ieng Sary clique' organised by the newly established People's Republic of Kampuchea in August 1979. It has often been called a 'show trial', a rather unfit term for what was intended and actually did happen, but characteristic of the Cold War context of the late 1970s. The trial targeted two distinct audiences. On the one hand, the Cambodians: the new communist regime, backed by the Vietnamese and composed of Khmer Rouge who had defected to Vietnam in 1977–1978, had to differentiate itself from the Communist Party of Kampuchea led by Pol Pot and his comrades. On the other hand, the international community: the idea was to discredit the Khmer Rouge since the latter retained their seat at the UN General Assembly with the support of the Western powers and to challenge the West over its recognition policy.

Interviewed 30 years later in relation to the ECCC, Denise Affonço, who lives in France since 1979, declared that she would not testify in the new trial but would become a civil party. Her lawyer will represent her. After so much time she is afraid to come back to Cambodia, to the 'crime scene'. Asked what she thought about the 1979 trial, she answered:

> [It] meant a lot to me. I was relieved and convinced that the culprits—sentenced to death in absentia—would pay for their crimes and that the dead could rest in peace. I did not know what was happening in the upper reaches of international politics. I believed that justice would do its job. The trial, organised by the book, had juridical value. There were lawyers from various countries and international journalists. Later on I accessed the trial archives. What a disappointment when I learned that the UN never recognised the conviction. Today, I think it was a waste of time and money (Gée 2008).

The trial of the 'Pol Pot—Ieng Sary clique' was not the only attempt of the People's Republic of Kampuchea government to document Khmer Rouge atrocities. In 1982–1983 it launched a petition operation (aka Renakse petition or 'million documents'). Emissaries of the Solidarity Front, the entity in charge of the mission, travelled all over the country to collect signatures of villagers and testimonies about Red Khmer violence. They also recorded the extent of Khmer Rouge destruction: number of people killed and missing, homes destroyed, animals killed and

location of mass graves. The petitions were never sent to the UN as it had been intended, but were stored at the Solidarity Front's office. In 1997, they were handed over to the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (thereafter DC-Cam), an independent research institute compiling and preserving materials on Khmer Rouge crimes. Recently the DC-Cam, whose mission also involves organising information for the prosecution of senior Khmer Rouge leaders at the ECCC, decided to reactivate the Renakse petitions and collect testimonies from the same witnesses anew.

At first sight, the DC-Cam procedure is surprising: 30 years later the memories of survivors might prove even more unreliable, especially if brought into judicial frameworks. It is the political bias of the Renakse petitions (ideological formulation, oath of loyalty to the new government taken by the witnesses) that explains such undertaking. Representatives of the DC-Cam went to villages and met with former signers. The latter were told that—although years ago they had wanted to bear witness to their suffering and Khmer Rouge atrocities—their voice had not been heard because the petitions had been forgotten. Now, they had a chance to be listened to at the international tribunal prosecuting the Khmer Rouge leaders. The DC-Cam proposed to help them become a civil party. The idea was welcomed in different ways. Some survivors were upset and disappointed. They had hoped for trial and punishment then, hence were ready to testify again. Others objected that it happened long ago and life since then had changed and improved. Was it not better, finally, to forget? (Bopha 2008a, b).

3 Under the 'eyes of the pineapple' and after

When the Vietnamese army entered Cambodia in January 1979, the soldiers found a devastated country and a shattered population. In 4 years, the Khmer Rouge had destroyed the entire social, cultural and religious fabric of the Cambodian society. Isolation, difficult reconstruction, poverty, refugee flight, ongoing struggle against Khmer Rouge guerrillas formed the background against which survivors tried to grapple with the tragedy of their bitter past. Furthermore, victims soon found themselves forced to live side by side with perpetrators. The People's Republic of Kampuchea, unwilling to recruit pre-revolutionary officials from the Lon Nol and Sihanouk regimes, appointed former Khmer Rouge in the provincial administration (Gottesman 2003, pp. 59–61). The early 1990s marked the beginning of a new era. The Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia (1989), the Paris Peace Agreement was signed and followed by UNTAC-monitored elections. Relationships with the international community resumed, thereby opening the country to Westerners and Cambodian exiles who had longed for home.

This new context affected the politics of remembrance the authorities had developed so far (e.g. establishment of a National Day of Hatred turned into Remembrance Day after 1999, building of memorials, transformation of S-21/Tuol Sleng prison into museum for genocidal crimes). Exchanges with international partners brought new forms of memorialisation, more focused on individuals and healing. About 60% of the Khmer population was born after 1979. Many of the young generation do not believe the 'stories' of their parents—these are lies or at best exaggerations. Indeed the history of Democratic Kampuchea is not taught in schools. Only in the past couple of years has it entered schoolbooks and the curriculum of teachers at the instigation of the DC-Cam. Inter-generational communication clearly proves a matter of concern. Social aspects related to the access to information should not be overlooked either: the contrast between better informed cities and rural areas remains strong.

How does the Khmer Rouge Trial affect Cambodians in such context? On the one hand, it reactivates traumatic memories in the population. On the other hand, it passes unnoticed in some places and communities. It is why a weekly television programme, 'Duch on Trial', was broadcast during the prosecution of Duch, the former commander of S-21. For half an hour, the journalists Ung Chan Sophea and Neth Pheaktra summarised and analysed the testimonies that had been given in the court during the week, and explained the legal framework. 'Whilst such emotionally charged moments provided the catharsis the tribunal wanted to stage, in a country where 90% of the population regularly views television—despite enormous poverty—the tube has proven the most efficient channel for engaging people in the war crimes court' (Brady 2009). Besides communication, one of the key issues faced by the ECCC—a problem shared by other tribunals concerned with transitional justice—is the tension between social cohesion and reconciliation, and justice at the individual level. Cadres and soldiers in cooperatives, villages and districts played a significant role in mass killings in Democratic Kampuchea (Heder 2005, p. 408). Still, as noted earlier, many of them went back home. Should they now all be tried? Indictment is a Pandora box that few wish to open in Cambodia. Yet, what kind of justice is it that leaves so many perpetrators unpunished? The ECCC cannot fight on both fronts: individual and collective closure. Is there maybe another possibility to create frameworks (both outlet and containment) where witnessing might be expressed and bring some sense of relief, social or personal?

4 The projects

It is with such view in mind that my paper considers the projects ‘We want (u) to know’ and ‘Breaking the silence’. They have many features in common. Both unfold in the context of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. Both target the Cambodian rural population. Both seek for reconciliation at the community level. Both have chosen a participatory approach to witnessing.

‘We want (u) to know’ is a participatory documentary movie realised in 2009 by an international film team (e.g. Ella Pugliese, Jens Joester, Judith Strasser) and the inhabitants of the village of Thnol Lok. The team included people involved in filmmaking and visual arts, human rights activists and mental health consultants. The work process was based on two phases: first, the team determined whether the villagers wanted or not to participate in the project; second, the team helped them create the content. The villagers designed, filmed and co-directed the movie. The team members describe themselves as ‘facilitators’ in the process, teaching villagers how to handle video cameras and microphones, organising art workshops (painting, drawing, puppet theatre) as preparatory phase to filming, and giving psychological support. Each evening there was a screening of the filming material made during the day, followed by group discussions on the content and presentation of the material. Since its release ‘We want (u) to know’ has been shown in several venues in Phnom Penh (e.g. Pannasastra University, Metahouse, Bophana, Chenla Theatre) and international festivals and conferences (e.g. Addis Film Festival, Centre for Conflict Studies in Marburg).

‘Breaking the silence’ is a collaboration between the Dutch playwright and dramaturge Annemarie Prins; Amrita Performing Arts, a production company based in Cambodia with United States non-profit status; and Theatre Embassy, a Netherlands-based theatre organisation that initialises theatre projects all over the world, especially in developing countries (Chng Ching Ying 2010, p. 9). ‘Breaking the silence’ was born in 2004 when Fred Frumberg, the executive director of Amrita, invited Annemarie Prins to give a workshop to theatre teachers at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. In 2005, she developed with three Cambodian actresses—she had met there—the play ‘3 years, 8 months, 20 days’. Prins decided to create a performance intended for Cambodians rather than expatriate or international audiences. In 2008, she travelled again to Cambodia with Nan van Houte (currently director of the Frascati Theatre, Amsterdam). The DC-Cam made contact on their behalf with individuals (both victims and former Khmer Rouge) who lived in the provinces and agreed to be interviewed for source material. Back in the Netherlands, Prins wrote the play on the basis of the taped testimonies. The rehearsal started in January 2009 with four actresses (Morm Soky, Kov Sotheary, Chhon Sina, Pok Savanna), a dancer (Kiev Sovannarith), a singer (Yin Vutha) and a musician (Ieng Sakonna) (Chng Ching Ying 2010, pp. 61–64). The group had to give a performance for the minister of culture and other officials. The ministry censored four lines of the text (literal quotes from Khmer Rouge songs). Prins, who thought it was more important to present the play to Cambodians, agreed to the cut (Gottlieb 2009). ‘Breaking the silence’ premiered in Phnom Penh on February 21, 2009. A mobile theatre stage was built so that the play could be presented all over the country. It toured in Cambodia twice, at the end of February 2009 and in November 2009. The second tour was recorded for radio and broadcast by Voice of America on April 18–24, 2010 and a second time on weekends in May 2010 (press release of VOA). ‘Breaking the silence’ has been presented for the first time out of Cambodia (Singapore) in September 2010.

5 Said, not spoken and inaudible

Annemarie Prins declares in a leaflet on the play that: ‘the main goal of this production is to find a way out of trauma’s silence, contributing to open dialogue is part of the process of reconciliation’. Judith Strasser, one of the mental health consultants for ‘We want (u) to know’ states similar objectives: talking is the path to healing (Gée 2009a, b, c). That talking about the Khmer Rouge for Cambodians is difficult, painful, even dangerous, no doubt about that. Yet, does it mean that ‘silence reigns’ in that country? For Father François Ponchaud, one of the best experts of Cambodian history and culture, there is no such thing as silence on the subject of the Khmer Rouge. Villagers talk about it all the time (Hertzog 2010). How could it be otherwise when the Angkar has left such a deep a mark on the countryside? Dams and bridges built at that time are still in use today. There is no forgetting, everybody knows everything about the neighbours, but it is not expressed directly in daily life. The coexistence of victims and perpetrators covers a variety of situations, ranging from ostracising criminals to re-integrating them (those who showed some mercy when they were in power) within the community. There are obviously pathologies and post-traumatic disorder syndromes, underlying violence (especially with people who, as children, have been ‘educated’ by the Khmer Rouge). Still communities have found ways to deal with such awkward situation. Villagers have knitted a delicate web, crucial in a context where food supply and survival override many other issues, a web that can easily be torn.

Ponchaud points also to the importance of Buddhist beliefs and rituals in providing frameworks for making

sense of the events (Hertzog 2010). These are principles that ground the 'testimonial therapy' developed by the NGO Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation, established in Phnom Penh in 1995. The approach takes into account the cultural dimensions of mental health in Cambodia. A survivor talks about what was his or her ordeal in the hands of the Khmer Rouge. A counsellor helps turn the testimony into a written document. The latter is read aloud to other survivors and/or community members during a Buddhist ceremony. The 'testimonial therapy' has three objectives: to express the traumatic experience; to honour the spirits of the dead; to document human rights violations. The French psychiatrist and anthropologist Richard Rechtman, who started working with Khmer refugees in Paris in the mid-1980s, considers that there is no silence, but a communication problem. People have some difficulty in listening to what victims say—a way to suggest that responsibility lies also, maybe more, with the addressee. In the Khmer Rouge era, Rechtman argues, 'people could not say what they had in mind. It was believed that one could prevent people from thinking by preventing them from speaking. It is not possible. Yet, it has some effects: after a whilst, people keep on thinking but they do no longer know what to say.' It leads him to replaces the idea of 'unspeakable' with that of 'inaudible'. People continuously talk about what is unbearable but nobody hears it (Gée 2009a, b, c).

6 From oppression to repression: creating hybrid witnessing

Could 'silence', as mentioned in the two projects, be rather a reference to the concept of 'culture of silence', central to Paulo Freire's seminal 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1970)? Silence inhibits a person's ability to reflect and act on her society. It is only through 'conscientisation', outcome of a joint process through which teacher and student teach each other, that the person becomes able to intervene against oppression (Byam 1999, pp. 21–24). The work of the Brazilian educator has provided the ground for many community participatory projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America from the 1970s onwards. Although the authors of 'We want (u) to know' and 'Breaking the silence do not mention him—nor his friend Augusto Boal', another key figure in such movement—it is nevertheless such 'lineage' that lies at the core of the two projects. With a major difference, however: 'Conscientisation' is no longer to be achieved against a dominant class controlling education and culture but against a far more pervasive—and elusive—enemy, the repressed. One foresees the issues that such shift from the field of class struggle and anti-imperialism to the field of psychoanalysis raises. It implies a leap between individual memory and memory as collective and social consciousness. Personal healing and social reconciliation are made the two faces of the same coin. It downplays political and ideological contextualisation at the profit of cross-cultural depiction. Is it not like forcing the witness on an unfitting Procrustean bed: too specific for global consumption, too universal for local reception?

Western authors walk a thin line. De facto, collaborative undertakings such as 'Breaking the silence' and 'We want (u) to know' try to address different audiences at the same time: villagers, culture/art professionals and human rights activists; local audience and international spectators. How to come to terms with these differences? 'Breaking the silence' looks for a concept that marries the two cultures, Khmer and Western. It revives *Lakhaon Niyeay*, a Western-style spoken theatre introduced to Cambodia during the French colonial period. Promoted as 'national theatre' it was mostly reserved for the privileged class (Chng Ching Ying 2010, p. 18, p. 24). In this framework, Annemarie Prins juxtaposes Western theatrical conceptions with elements proper to classical Khmer performance (e.g. traditional music and singing styles; figure of the monkey as familiar cultural anchor for villagers, comic relief and appeal to children). The play has a Brechtian approach with a 'focus not on a realistic representation of actions, but instead the use of symbolism to economically depict events without literally acting them out' (Chng Ching Ying 2010, p. 68). It includes seven vignettes telling stories of victims and perpetrators. One for instance presents a woman who stopped talking to her son because she suspects him of having been a Khmer Rouge soldier. Another shows a former Khmer Rouge nurse apologising to a woman because she left her father unattended to die. These vignettes have limited references to time and place: 'each story taking place in the general present… and could apply to anyone in the audience' (Chng Ching Ying 2010, p. 72). Prins shapes actual testimonies into archetypal witnessing of suffering. It allows villagers to identify parts of their own stories in the one the actors play. Yet, is this approach not too abstract? Jennifer Ka, reviewing 'Breaking the silence' for the DC-Cam publication Searching for the Truth, praises the cleverness of the play, but finds it too subtle for a 'less-educated audience' (2010). Chng Ching Ying conducted interviews with people from the village of Khum Thean after the play. They expressed their preference for a more realistic depiction of Khmer Rouge violence because it would corroborate their own experience and better convince young generations (2010, p. 83).

The attempt of Westerners to give Cambodians agency of their past is fraught with a danger… appropriation. Is it not remembering that 'seems to be done for Cambodians by foreign performance practitioners' (Chng Ching Ying 2010, p. 5)? Hijacking memories: as Western rewriting of Cambodian history; as turning painful testimonies into

performance or video material, through selection of interviews or final cut of the movie. In these conditions, who then is the actual witness? Do outsiders work with the people themselves instead of speaking to them about them, as Annemarie Prins argued years ago?

> A witnessing text is one whose structure interacts with the audience to create not just an imaginative experience regarding the subject of its discourse… but also the conjecture that this text is a witnessing text, that the event described really happened, and that the text was designed to report it … Therefore, under (certain) circumstances … texts produced by people who were not at the event can pass as texts produced by people who were at the event, because the emphasis is not on the 'origin' of the discourse but on the experience of the world we imagine through the text and the signs it gives of its own status as the world's witness (Frosh 2009, p. 61).

'Breaking the silence' and 'We want (u) to know' elaborate upon such 'hybrid witnessing'. Boundaries get blurred both between categories—such as eyewitness, mediator and audience—and between narrative forms. This fits into the hybrid model that has become a privileged mediation between Cambodia and the West and is best embodied by the ECCC tribunal. Indeed the connection of both projects to the Khmer Rouge Trial constitutes one more expression of hybridity. The team of 'We want (u) to know' describes the film as a 'tool for NGOs and for the civil society in the framework of the outreach activities around the Khmer Rouge Trial'. The presentation of 'Breaking the silence' in villages is the occasion for launching debates about the ECCC. Facilitators from the DC-Cam invite villagers to come forward, tell their story and ask questions about the proceedings. A booklet 'Who are the senior Khmer Rouge leaders to be judged' is distributed (Keo 2010). Youk Chhang, the director of the DC-Cam, declares: 'This is something for them in the village. This is their stage and their court.' (Mac Grane 2009). One might be disturbed by the different levels of instrumentalisation which such relationship involves: of Cambodians; villagers and their sufferings; of testimonies; and of artistic forms as well. Yet, one must keep in mind that the presence of foreigners also 'opens up' new paths for remembering and transmitting. It bears recalling that also the Khmer Rouge organised performances (plays and songs) during their 4 years of rule and that they were making movies (which we tend now to dismiss as 'propaganda movies'). Khmer language has been contaminated by the introduction of 'Democratic Kampuchea newspeak'. How to bear witness with those words, with those cultural forms? To resort to other—less tainted—theatrical and cinematic references and language slippages inhering in translation provides some space for formulating (a) new stories.

7 'Moving above the stream rather than losing oneself in it': how participatory is 'participatory'?

'Techniques will never make a testimony, testimony is pure of any techniques… and yet it already implies the appeal to techniques', Derrida argues (2002, p. 95). The sentence reads in several ways in the context this paper tries to draw. Participatory approaches emerge as reaction to the 'distant others' that techniques—electronic and digital media—have multiplied (Frosh 2009, p. 50). They claim for closeness against remoteness and its possible effects (indifference, desensitisation). They pit emotions born out of proximity with victims against techniques that 'dematerialise' suffering. At the same time, Derrida's comment also points to the apparatus (camera, stage) that represents witnessing. Is such apparatus rendered visible (as it was done to some extent in 'cinema vérité') in 'Breaking the silence' and 'We want (u) to know'? Do they unravel the narrative techniques used for organising biographical fragments and arousing emotions?

'We want (u) to know' goes by the book of 'participatory approach'. It focuses on learning by doing, places the experience of the participants at the centre of the project, tries to create a safe environment (the process is monitored by mental health consultants), and the team members call themselves 'facilitators' more than teachers (Epskamp 2006, p. 46). Yet, there is one problematic aspect: simulation. At some point, the inhabitants of Thnol Lok decide to film scenes of killing and act all the parts, including that of the murderers. Re-enactment is to be based on their imagination since none of the villagers attended executions. The filmmakers seem to be overtaken by the process they initiated. Emotion, yes, but not that kind: it clearly appears that some 'cultural clash' is at play here. The foreigners are confronted with some side in the victims they would perhaps prefer to avoid. Furthermore, it reveals Western reluctance towards more physical memory forms that might be more familiar to Cambodians (scenes of beating were re-enacted during the National Day of Hatred) but are alien to the more intellectualised Freudian Western mindset. 'Acting out' does not fit the 'working through' conception of trauma recovery paramount in the West. 'I never imagined that anyone would voluntarily choose to re-enact such horrific and traumatic moments, but I can only hope that through such participatory action, the villagers found closure in acting out their stories as a community', one of the member declares.

That participatory projects are no smooth process is clear. The story of re-enactment also shows the limits of

the collaboration between the international team and the villagers. The scenes of executions are not included in the movie's final cut. The filmmaker Ella Pugliese explains: '[W]e chose, after long debates on the matter, not to show the killings, only to suggest them' (Gée 2009a, b, c). The movie only depicts the villagers preparing the re-enacted parts: drawing storyboards, blackening sandals with coal to make them look like the Pol Pot's time rubber shoes, putting on the *krama* (traditional scarf) … There are scenes of escorting prisoners, arrests. To Carole Vann (also a filmmaker) who attended the presentation of the movie at Bophana Centre, such decision is disturbing. She recounts: 'the filmmakers are careful to inform the audience that they reacted to the villagers' proposal'. Did the movie team debate the matter with the villagers and suggest them other visualisations? Vann wonders. It is not said. The mass argument is that it was the villagers' spontaneous idea and it made them feel good. It sounds to Vann as if the filmmakers were 'putting themselves out' of their own choice. Nonetheless, the fact remains, it was their choice and the villagers are not even credited as co-directors. One might regret that moments when the team decided not to keep the scenes were not recorded: what arguments structured their discussions? Rather than disclosing relationships and conflicts between cultures—the very basis of participatory projects—we get edited perceptions of it. Emotions are filtered away at a twofold level, by removing both scenes that might have allowed viewers to relate differently to Cambodian memories, and clues how the whole team felt being so close to witnesses emotionally.

8 A Cambodian witness

Confrontation is the structure of Rithy Panh's movie 'S-21 the Killing Machine of the Khmer Rouge' (2003). The Cambodian filmmaker brings together survivors of S-21 and some of their former guards. About 17,000 people were tortured and killed at the Phnom Penh-based S-21/Tuol Sleng prison. Only few survived, mostly thanks to their painting and sculpting skills as they were recruited to make portraits of Pol Pot. One of them, Vann Nath, accepted to meet with the guards. He is an emblematic figure amongst survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. His paintings, based on what he saw himself in S-21 and what other people described, are displayed at the Tuol Sleng museum. Locating the guards was not so difficult, Rithy Panh explains. He found biographical information in the Tuol Sleng archives and traced them back to their home villages. The fact the whole movie team was Cambodian proved crucial. The perpetrators, who were not eager to talk, understood that they would not be left alone and the team would come again and again (Hervieux and Devanne 2004). Striking sequences of 'S-21' show the guards re-enacting their work routine: walking through the cells, shouting at the prisoners, fastening handcuffs and shackles. For Rithy Panh, re-enactment is not conceived within an emotional framework. He considers that body memory completes and extends the spoken word. These are learned, instilled gestures, 'one does not do anything no matter what … because otherwise the machine would not work' (Hervieux and Devanne 2004). Watching them thus helps clarify the functioning of the killing machine, the way it de-humanised victims and perpetrators. 'S-21' contributes explanatory and documentary material on Democratic Kampuchea, and affect must be kept at distance: 'Contrarily to psychoanalysis, I did not want feelings. Above all I do not want to introduce feelings that could bias the movie. My film is only a cinematographic work, yet it produces witnessing' (Deslouis 2004).

Producing witnessing: it was what Vann Nath did again at the ECCC trial on June 29, 2009. Whilst he was testifying, images of his paintings were projected on screen. The judge Lavergne emphasised the outstanding work of memory accomplished by Vann Nath (paintings, book on S-21, participation in documentaries and workshops) and asked why it was so important to him to testify in court. In his answer, Vann Nath stressed that he had decided not to follow the path of civil action, the only way in his view to retain the power of testimony: 'I think it is not a only a personal issue, all Cambodian are concerned. Thus, I did not want to institute a civil action. However, if the court wants to listen to me as witness, I am ready to testify. Often people who institute a civil action seek for compensation. I do not seek for any.' (Gée 2009a, b, c). What did Vann Nath seek, in his paintings and in court? For Rithy Panh, 'Nath wanted to bring the other to testify so that facts are not misinterpreted or erased. The work of memory is not complete until the perpetrators take part in it… What Nath wants from the perpetrators is not that they rot in jail but that they tell S-21. He needs the speech of the other so that the memory of S-21 is complete' (Bopha 2008a, b). For Richard Rechtman, it is such attempt that certainly makes Vann Nath the first witness who does not bear witness from the place of the dead, but leads the 'other' to speak: the perpetrator. The psychiatrist sees in such endeavour a new path for victims in Cambodia. The survivors may finally talk about themselves and the defunct (i.e. peaceful memory of a person remembered as she was when she was alive). And it is now to the perpetrator, not to the victim, to bear witness to the crime.

9 Conclusion

Globalisation transformed Western conceptions of witnessing and bearing witness to gross violations of human

rights. It prompted the development of hybrid forms deemed more likely to bridge between Euro-American humanitarian discourses and cultural specificities. It is a model that transitional justice epitomises in Sierra Leone, East Timor, Kosovo and Cambodia. To what extent can it be exported into other realms? Participatory projects such as 'Breaking the silence' and 'We want (u) to know' show how difficult the application of 'hybrid' forms might be when it comes to socio-cultural contexts of witnessing. The reflection of Kelly Oliver on the notion of 'recognition' encapsulates the traps such collaborative endeavours of Westerners and local communities run the risk of falling into. First, who is conferring recognition? If these are the Westerners—that is, the 'dominant group'—the process simply repeats old hierarchies (often colonial) and oppositions between subject and object-other (2004, p. 79). Then, what is recognised? According to Oliver, these are often the elements familiar to the subject (2004, p. 80). As a result, the latter will hardly be able to listen to and look at what is different or will tend to turn it into sameness. Such 'levelling' is indeed what happens when Annemarie Prins selects, rewrites, translates parts of the testimonies she gathered with the help of the DC-Cam staff or when the team of 'We want (u) to know' removes from the final cut disturbing (in their view) sequences in which Cambodian villagers re-enacted Khmer Rouge killings. Does it make these two attempts false witnessing for all that? Questions as to the involvement and agency of the Khmer participants in the projects, or the empowerment and relief brought to Cambodian audiences are all legitimate, but can hardly be answered in univocal ways. There is one field, however, in which the contribution of the two projects—the actual witnessing they perform—might undoubtedly be emphasised. What 'Breaking the silence' and 'We want (u) to know' document is not so much a process of bearing witness and healing in Cambodians communities as a particular phase of Western engagement in the construction of Cambodian memory (e.g. the trial; the involvement of Westerners in the collecting and preservation of testimonies; attention paid to post-traumatic syndrome). In this respect, the two projects form the counterpart to the documentary work of Rithy Panh and the testimony of Vann Nath. They produce knowledge from 'the other side' and thus should be considered historical documents on the relationship between Cambodia and the West at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Both projects record, even if it was not their original aim, situations of cultural confrontation around notions of memory work. Doing so they might well be a first step towards what Kelly Oliver calls 'recognition beyond recognition': the recognition of difference in mechanisms of coping, remembering and witnessing. This is not to say that local forms are 'better' or more adjusted to the Cambodian situation than Western participatory projects. Rather it is to point that bearing witness in today's post-colonial and multicultural environment takes on many forms of which people in the West, are not necessarily aware, or part. The example of the *Dhammayietra* ('pilgrimage of truth', peace walk) is particularly cogent in this context. The first walk took place in 1992 with the repatriation of Cambodians from the refugee camps on the Thai border. The monk Maha Ghosananda (1929–2007) decided to enter the country with them. It was then held every year, passing through war-torn areas and Khmer Rouge strongholds, more and more people joining the monks and nuns. The *Dhammayietra* provides recovery at many levels. Of movement: 'After nearly 30 years of war and a long legacy of border conflicts, Cambodians have a highly developed sense of the violability of borders and the danger of trespass' (Poething 2002, p. 25). Mobility, associated for so long with a wide range of traumatic experiences (i.e. forced evacuation from cities and relocation in the countryside during the Khmer Rouge era, refugee flight after 1979, but also internal displacement during the 1970–1975 civil war), is converted into a positive movement, a movement towards peace. It is also a recovery of the land where landmines turned walking from a familiar daily act into dangerous act. Last, it is a psychological recovery for many villagers who reconnect with meaningful ceremonies and rituals. *Dhammayietra* is able to 'create new cultural memories and collectively share the painful experiences of surviving and witnessing' (Skidmore 1996, p. 542). So what could be the role of Westerners in such context? Concluding an article on 'S-21 the Killing Machine of the Khmer Rouge', the journalist Pilger (who covered the 1979 trial and helped launch an aid campaign for Cambodia in The Daily Mirror) writes: 'Thank you, Rithy Panh, for your brave film; what is needed now is a work as honest, which confronts 'us' and relieves our amnesia about the part played by our respectable leaders in Cambodia's epic tragedy' (The Guardian 2004). Leaders … and journalists (starting with Pilger who had not been very vocal against Democratic Kampuchea in 1975–1979), progressive intellectuals, leftists and others who did not say a word against the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s and even supported Pol Pot's regime. Is it not that 'silence' which decades later should be broken? To produce witnessing on political engagement in those years and its simplified ways of looking at things could well be indeed 'our' task in the West.

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