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Modes of identity and belonging among noncitizen Vietnamese children living in Cambodia

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**Modes of identity and belonging
among noncitizen Vietnamese
children living in Cambodia**

By

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*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

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Abstract

This thesis provides an analysis of an understudied area of belonging by studying the lives of those deemed to be doubly marginal: stateless children. Statelessness is an emerging topic of research that so far has been dominated by legal analyses; this thesis proposes an alternative approach to the study of statelessness and belonging that goes beyond legal considerations. It offers a framework to think about belonging as something experienced in a simultaneous and multi-directional way: from above, below and beside. It does this by ethnographically exploring the political and affective dimensions of belonging, through the intimate worlds of Cambodia's *de facto* stateless Vietnamese. Whilst the children in this study might be invisible on paper, or until now have been missing from the scholarship on statelessness in Cambodia, this thesis demonstrates how their daily lives and their active attempts to find meaningful belonging makes visible both their agency, and the restrictions on their agency, to make such decisions.

In demonstrating how meaningful belonging is achieved in spaces of invisibility, this thesis makes evident that statelessness does not equate to ontological dehumanisation, which is often the picture painted by a strict legal analysis of those living without citizenship. Rather, children are able to negotiate problematic social positioning and access opportunities through relationships formed locally, and within transnational organisations that open up new possibilities to belong, albeit in a context of precarity and frequent setbacks and tragedy. As noncitizens, these children are shown to be active agents tactfully negotiating the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. This research therefore fills a gap in thinking around children's statelessness, identity and belonging. It speaks to the burgeoning literature on children's geographies, the sociology of citizenship, rights and belonging and adds to an understanding of the anthropology of childhood. As such, themes in this thesis pertain to a discussion on citizenship, human rights, morality, religious conversion, ethnicity and inter-generational mobilities. Thus, this project is interdisciplinary in nature but has an anthropological undercurrent reflecting my engagement with the literature and approach to the research design.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Sitting in a TukTuk driving through Phnom Penh I felt every bump on the road as I approached my destination. My first visit to Cambodia was in 2012. It was day three of the trip and I was finding it difficult to ignore row upon row of scantily clad girls sat outside large doorways and karaoke (KTV) bars. The evening seemed to birth such sights. I was about to undertake my master's (MA) degree at Goldsmiths College London and had ideas to research the sex trade in Thailand. I knew little about Cambodia or its history. My only reference point was a film I was invited to see the premier of a couple of years earlier called *Holly*. *Holly* tells the story of a 12-year-old Vietnamese girl sold into slavery in Cambodia by her impoverished family and the American expat who tries to rescue her from a life of sexual enslavement. Shot on location, the film grittily depicts the despair and horror the sex industry inflicts on its young victims. Linh Anh,¹ the local contact, and Christian missionary, who I had arranged to meet, drove into the city to tell me about the communities she worked with – which were living examples of the stories of the children represented in the film *Holly*. Children within these communities had historically been sold into prostitution, spurring Linh Anh's decision to open a Christian school offering free elementary education to the affected communities.

Linh Anh explained that the impetus for starting the school came six years earlier when she taught music to children of Vietnamese ethnicity in Cambodia, at the Sunday school of the church where Linh Anh served as a missionary. Over time good relationships were built with children and they enjoyed learning music with her. One girl who attended Linh Anh's classes and of whom she was fond, did not show at the Sunday school for some time. At first Linh Anh assumed that the girl was sick. A while later, she asked the local pastor if they should go looking for the girl. The pastor eventually explained that poor Vietnamese parents were often given an opportunity to sell their children's virginity. Countless children at that time were sold, and then ended up working in brothels. The nature of this account is confirmed by academic (Busza and Baker 2004), non-governmental organisations (NGO) (Lainez 2011) and media (The Economist 2007, Hume et al. 2013, Watson 2014) reports. Linh Anh started to notice that although the church she worked with laboured hard to engage with adults, and offer them alternative routes to work and education, little impact was made in the community and children

¹ Linh Anh is a pseudonym. Chapter three discusses the use of and creation of pseudonyms. Suffice to say that all names and places have been created to protect identity and are not real.

continued to be sold. She told me how ‘rescues’ are possible but expensive and legally complicated. Over time Linh Anh taught more children who also wanted to learn English. Consequently, Linh Anh stopped working for the church and set up an independent school which, as I would later learn, is known locally as the ‘God School’.

I decided to return to Cambodia to spend a month in the community in which Linh Anh worked as the principal of the God School. My objective was to conduct a scoping study as part of my MA thesis on whether the God School, an NGO which works directly with a vulnerable community of children, can build a culture of aspiration as defined by Arjun Appadurai (2004). The findings of my MA research were interesting but inconclusive. At the same time, this period of research also revealed that many ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia are without valid citizenship papers and do not qualify for any government assistance. They are denied basic rights such as education, decent wages and political legitimacy, leaving them on the margins of Cambodian society (Brown 2007). Most Vietnamese are not considered legitimate citizens due to their inability to purchase birth certificates or obtain Cambodian citizenship (Dai 2007), even though some have resided so long in Cambodia that they are difficult to distinguish from ethnic Khmers (IRIN 2013). So, whilst my MA research journey began following a lead looking into the aspirations of children vulnerable to prostitution, what emerged was the risk of inter-generational statelessness among the Vietnamese community. Accordingly, I decided to focus my doctoral research on the understudied everyday lived realities of *de facto* stateless children.

In Southeast Asia, the prioritisation of economics and security over rights (Nishikawa 2009: 226) by States manifests in the plight of stateless children, meaning “children without a state” (Bhabha 2011: 1). The issue of children’s statelessness is one migration scholars have ignored because, according to Bhabha, “states have innocently overlooked the problems of migrant children and their correlative duties because of a dual perception lacuna: on issues of migration, they have focused on adults; on issues of child welfare they have focused on citizens” (2011: 19). The framing of children as ‘baggage’ (Dobson 2009) and their conceptualisation as ‘non-persons’ has limited the study of children’s multiple, diverse and complex lived experiences (Beazley 2015). Thus, shifting the analytical focus away from children as either travelling with adults or being ‘left behind’ (Orellana 2016) provides a lens to view not what children lack but their agency in building belonging. Furthermore, as Allerton (2017a) has recently argued, there is an assumption

that children are migrants themselves but in fact many of Asia's 'impossible children' have been born 'out of place' (Constable 2014). Being 'born out of place' refers to children "taking on the status of migrant even in the absence of migration" (Allerton 2017b: 1084). Ethnic Vietnamese children born in Cambodia are, like their kin before them, characterised as permanently foreign and unassimilable to the nation (Willmott 1967). It is this characterisation that casts them as an unsolvable 'impossible' problem. They experience the multiple mechanisms of exclusion, despite some having eligibility for birth right citizenship.

Much of the in-depth reporting by NGOs on the situation faced by the Vietnamese in Cambodia (Ang et al. 2014, Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012, Frelick and Lynch 2005, Duoos 2012, Jesuit Refugee Service 2013), concludes with policy recommendations for communities to receive birth registration, legal representation, access to public services and ultimately for them to be relieved of their suffering. These reports, sometimes illustrated with images of people in destitution (particularly by NGOs), frame communities that are 'status-less' as facing a legal problem that will be solved when the stateless are legitimised, and in the care of a Nation State. Yet, the situation of not belonging to a political community because you are a refugee, stateless or an irregular migrant is far more nuanced than the binary of 'outsider = problem', 'insider = solution'. This binary simplifies the lives of the communities involved and assumes that the prime obstacle the stateless wish to overcome is their statelessness (Allerton 2014). In her research on statelessness and the lives of the children of migrants in Sabah, East Malaysia, Catherine Allerton found that for some people, "the impulse to escape statelessness is by no means as strong as the impulse to 'hold out' for a preferred nationality that might be gained" (ibid: 32). Studies like Allerton's add a much needed nuance to the study of statelessness, the lack of which has resulted in a call to study statelessness beyond the law (Manly and van Wass 2014).

Theorisations of statelessness have therefore tended to focus on the relationship between bureaucratic labelling and belonging. This is important, yet there is a need to understand children's experiences not just within the framework of what they lack, but rather in terms of how the multiplicity of their belongings are constructed and maintained. The focus on children is important because literature which addresses the stateless Vietnamese in Cambodia to date has focused on the experience of marginalised adults. Research has provided a thorough analysis of the legal context of exclusion (Nguyen and Sperfeldt

2012, Sperfeldt 2017), the discriminatory laws that frame the Vietnamese as ‘unassimilable’ (Berman 1996, Ehrentraut 2011), the consequential impact on livelihoods (Ang and Chan 2014, Ang et al. 2014, Duoos 2012), the varied influences beyond documentation and legal status that combine to impact interaction between communities and the state (Parsons & Lawreniuk, 2018), and the significance of ethno-nationalism in building the Khmer Kingdom (Chou Meng Tarr 1992, Berman 1996, Amer 2013, Frewer 2016, Strangio 2014). But, in-depth ethnographic accounts – given by children – of being ‘Vietnamese’ in Khmer society and their experience and practice of belonging are notably absent.

Children’s accounts differ from those of adults because children are born into a Cambodian context significantly different from the one their parents were born or migrated into. Today, numerous people have not experienced physical cross-border migration, but they have cross-border experiences in their childhood. Examples in this thesis include children born out of Khmer and Vietnamese cross-border marriages. Whilst the children in this study might be invisible on paper, or until now have been missing from the scholarship on statelessness in Cambodia, this thesis demonstrates how their daily lives make visible the choices they make to belong and their agency, and the restrictions on their agency, in making such decisions. In fact, children are fast developing, changing and learning; they represent and are creating the future of the Cambodian society. They are on the streets, in the markets, at home and are engaged in the reproduction of society, despite lacking the access to official structures of care.

In summary, there is a need to study the everyday lived experience of children who live as *de facto* stateless in Southeast Asia, where research has focused largely on issues of migration, children moving with parents, or children left behind. Childhood statelessness has been a subject few have researched in the region because of a focus on adults and citizens. In Cambodia the issue of statelessness among the Vietnamese is being recognised, yet there remains a gap in knowledge regarding the experience of statelessness among children. Therefore, when drafting the research question and aims, moving beyond, albeit not forsaking, a legal analysis was paramount. Accordingly, my research question and aims were as follows:

1.1 Research Question

How do *de facto* stateless Vietnamese children in Cambodia experience and practise identity and belonging?

1.2 Research Aims

1. To understand the official discourse on citizenship and statelessness in Cambodia.
2. To understand the generative socio-political and legal mechanisms of statelessness.
3. To understand to what extent, and how, the conditions of statelessness are resisted, negotiated and potentially ‘overcome’.
4. To ethnographically explore the experience and practice of identity and belonging among *de facto* stateless children living in the peri-urban communities on and along the *Tonlé Sap* River.
5. To explore how hegemonic ideas of identity and belonging in society are reproduced and changed.

1.3 Thesis Themes and Addressing the Literature Lacuna

1.3.1 *The State of Statelessness Research*²

Article 1 of the 1954 Statelessness Convention defines a stateless person as one “who is not considered a national by any State under the operation of its law.” This is legally defined as *de jure* stateless. According to the Institute on Statelessness and Exclusion at least 15 million people face life without a nationality today and another child is born stateless every 10 minutes.³ Statelessness is a global problem. It affects people around the world from the Thailand Hill Tribes in Asia to the Kenyan Nubians in Africa to Dominicans of Haitian-descent in the Caribbean (Open Society Justice Initiative 2013), to the Roma in Europe (Sigona 2016). Whilst some stateless people are refugees, many have never left their country of birth. Even though the problems related to statelessness across the globe may manifest themselves differently, at its core is a group of people who have been denied a legal identity (Open Society Justice Initiative 2013).

² A title borrowed from van Waas and Manly’s (2014) paper.

³ <http://www.statelessnessandhumanrights.org/>

The global picture of statelessness challenges a neat and homogenous categorical distinction of statelessness. The configurations and contours of statelessness change over time and context. Causes of statelessness lie both within and outside the State as sovereignties draw boundaries of inclusion and exclusion according to changing power relations across international and domestic boundaries (Blitz and Lynch 2009, Kerber 2007, Sigona 2016). As a result, there is a lack of international agreement over who is to be considered ‘stateless’ (Manly and van Waa 2014), especially so when considering populations unable to prove their nationality, or notwithstanding having documentation, are denied access to human rights. The definition of *de jure* stateless becomes rather narrow considering there being no universal standard for citizenship or nationality. Furthermore, because discriminatory policies, laws, and practices can mean that citizenship is experienced unequally, even among citizens, citizenship can be experienced in such an ineffective manner that their experience mirrors that of those who are *de jure* stateless. The term *de facto* stateless, therefore, exists to describe the situation of those who fall within the large range of people whose lived experiences are effectively of statelessness, but who do not satisfy the *de jure* definition (Malischewski 2013). Whilst it is difficult to clarify the position of *de facto* statelessness this does not mean it should be omitted as a focus of research. In fact, an appreciation of the phenomenon of statelessness as plural and diverse, gives proper attention to the social condition of statelessness: of its historical specificities as well as its close connection with citizenship and nationalism (Sigona 2016, Parsons and Lawreniuk 2018).

Research on statelessness, which first emerged as the study of nationality law, is only recently expanding into the exploration, interpretation and annotation of international standards and of domestic norms (Manly and van Waa 2014). Drawing attention to the legal anomaly that stateless is, scholars have focused much of their attention on matters of citizenship, rights, and the legal status of the stateless (Blitz 2009, Blitz and Lynch 2012, Gibney 2011, Manly and Persaud 2010, Tubb 2006, Van Waa 2009). Studies of stateless communities in Asia have brought attention to the existing gaps in nationality law that perpetuates the condition of statelessness, and highlight the ethnic, racial and discriminative treatment stateless populations receive. Examples include the Rohingya in Myanmar (Lewa 2009) the Bihari’s in Bangladesh (Fahmida Farzana 2008, Redcliff 2011, 2013a) Indonesian and Filipino refugees and migrants in Malaysia (Allerton 2014, 2017b) and the Bajau Laut in Malaysia (Acciaioli et al. 2017). These studies highlight: the difficulties stateless communities face in gaining access to essential services; the crisis

of identity wrapped up in the procrastination and political ill will of politicians when it comes to repatriation; issues of political belonging for maritime groups who straddle the borders of contemporary Nation States, and the tactics employed to survive living in the grey areas between citizenship and statelessness.

Despite the increase in attention regarding how statelessness is experienced (Redclift 2013a Redclift 2013b, 2011, Sigona 2016) there remains a need to gain a thorough and interdisciplinary understanding on how children experience statelessness. Ball et al. (2014) argue that an obvious oversight in tackling child statelessness is an evidence-based understanding of decision-making by children, their family members, kinship networks, community leaders and middle-men and women regarding birth registration. I would go further and suggest that we need to know more about how these groups, but especially children experience and practise belonging on a day-to-day basis. It is important to consider not just belonging as pertains to the impact of legal status and the ability to exercise rights, although that is a large part of what is and should be researched, but also *de facto* stateless children's experience of belonging in their everyday lives. Ethnographic examples are needed to move on from an analysis of what children lack and draw attention to the lived realities of statelessness. This is especially so in the Cambodian context which to date lacks any ethnographic research on this topic.

1.3.2 *Statelessness in Cambodia*

Cambodia has one of the highest proportions of stateless persons in the world (ISI 2014). Cambodia's Law on Nationality provides scope for *Jus Soli* and *Jus Sanguine* citizenship claims,⁴ and the Law on Immigration provides guidelines for naturalisation (Sperfeldt 2017). Given the country's tumultuous history, characterised by civil war, genocide and the rebuilding of a nation under the assistance of the United Nations (Tully 2005), an uncritical view might herald Cambodia's development of legal frameworks as a success. However, on closer inspection the regimes for defining and administering citizenship are illustrative of the historical conflation of nationality with Khmer culture and ethnicity. The prerequisites and benefits of citizenship in Cambodia have been, and still are, defined and administered as something for 'Khmer' citizens (Parsons and Lawreniuk 2018).

⁴ In Nationality Law *Jus Soli* refers to birthright citizenship that is citizenship being made available to anyone born in the territory of the State. *Jus Sanguine* refers to citizenship not determined by place of birth but conferred on a person whose parent(s) are citizens of a State.

Throughout the Law on Nationality (1996) the interchangeable words ‘Khmer’ and ‘Cambodian’⁵ (Jesuit Refugee Service 2013) and ‘nationality’ and ‘citizenship’ (CCHR 2011) are a pertinent reminder of the boundaries of inclusion. Beneath the smokescreen of a supposedly homogenous Kingdom (Edwards 2007) lies the question of Cambodia’s largest and most vulnerable (Seiff and Chhay 2013) minority group, the Vietnamese. It is challenging to get a clear picture of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, due to a lack of reliable data, and a history of genocide, persecution, forced displacement and discrimination by successive regimes and administrations (Minority Rights Group International 2018).

Estimates on the number of Vietnamese in Cambodia are therefore inconclusive. Official survey data present figures that are mostly considered to be much lower than the community’s actual size. The Cambodian National Institute of Statistics’ *Cambodia Socio–Economic Survey 2013* estimates ethnic Vietnamese at 0.1 per cent of the population in 2013 (14,678). While the UN Population Fund-sponsored *Cambodian Inter Censal Population Survey 2013* estimates self-identified Vietnamese mother-tongue language speakers at 0.4 per cent, researchers working on ethnic Vietnamese issues generally agree that the community numbers at least 400,000, with groups such as the NGO Minority Rights Organization (MIRO) putting them at as many as 700,000 (SNAP et al. 2018: 6, Minority Rights Group International 2018).⁶

Neither Cambodia nor Vietnam are signatories to the two Statelessness Conventions.⁷ However, these two Conventions are not the only basis for protecting against, reducing and preventing statelessness. Many international human rights instruments, which Cambodia and Vietnam have both ratified, contain significant provisions against statelessness. These human rights treaties contain provisions upholding human rights,

⁵ The word Khmer is an ethnolinguistic term used to describe ethnicity, race language, and nationality. In this thesis I use it to describe the majority ethnic group in Cambodia. I use the word Cambodian to describe the national language spoken in Cambodia as some participants who are not ethnic Khmer speak Cambodian.

⁶ Data from this paragraph was taken from a multiagency periodic review on human rights in Cambodia. See also Minority Rights Group (MRG) profile of the group at <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/ethnic-vietnamese>

⁷ The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness are the key international conventions addressing statelessness. They are complemented by international human rights treaties and provisions relevant to the right to a nationality. <https://www.unhcr.org/un-conventions-on-statelessness.html>

which apply regardless of nationality and immigration or stateless status. For instance, Cambodia is signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The number of Vietnamese that are stateless in Cambodia is also unknown. However, the evidence suggests that statelessness is endemic among the population: for example, in two separate studies researching statelessness among ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia in Kampong-Chhnang province (MIRO 2016, Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012), researchers estimated that around 90 per cent did not have birth certificates and/or identity cards – a situation that places them at great risk of statelessness. This is even though many of these ethnic Vietnamese communities, particularly concentrated on the Tonlé Sap Lake and the Mekong River, have been settled in Cambodia for generations. Other such communities are found throughout the country, including Phnom Penh and the provinces bordering Vietnam (Minority Rights Group International 2018).⁸ The Vietnamese living in Cambodia, much like other groups deemed ‘illegal’ migrants, have been “constituted and regimented by the law in specific times and places” (De Genova 2002: 424), as expanded on in chapter four. In order to prove Cambodian citizenship a person must have a national ID card.⁹ The application for one is mandatory¹⁰ from the age of 15. An ID card can be applied for using: (a) birth certificate which proves Cambodian citizenship; (b) a family book which confirms that his or her spouse is a Cambodian citizen; (c) documents, judgements of court evidence that person was born from father or mother with Cambodian citizenship, or (d) a Royal Decree proclaiming the recognition of the application for Cambodian citizenship to the person.¹¹ An ID card is the key to engaging in civic life as it unlocks the mechanisms to enrol in voter registration, enables the holder to work, obtain civil registration, acquire land and property, open bank accounts, receive travel

⁸ <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/ethnic-vietnamese/>

⁹ Sub-decree No. 60 on Cambodian Nationality Identity Cards (2007), signed 12 June 2007. This sub-decree replaced the earlier Sub-decree No. 36 dated 26 July 1996.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Art. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Art. 3.

documents and open a business (Sperfeldt 2017: 15). Research to date has evidenced that securing such documents is difficult.

Without birth certificates, children live precarious lives in Cambodia, often in the shadows of ethnic discrimination, poverty, and violence. For children, their Vietnamese-ness hinders their belonging in a Khmer society, despite most interviewed participants speaking Cambodian as a first language, identifying as being “from here”, being locally born and (some) having one Khmer parent. By providing an ethnographic account of *de facto* stateless children, this thesis offers an analysis of an understudied area of belonging beyond the legal frameworks and integration models in which adults (often framed as ‘illegal’ migrants) are viewed. Whilst accounts of adults might detail and advocate for their legitimate legal claims to access and inclusion as citizens, children do not occupy the same legal spaces and cannot make such claims. Instead, they usually acquire these rights via their relationship with adults, normally parents. Consequently, their narratives are framed as congruent to their parents. Conversely, in considering children’s experiences and practice of belonging we move away from an exclusive focus of a child’s belonging as pertains to their care givers’ relationship to the state.

1.3.3 *Children’s Belonging: A Simultaneous, Multi-directional Experience*

To capture children’s multiple, and often complex, experiences of belonging as defined by the Cambodian State, family, and as well as how children become agents in their own belonging, a conceptual framework is required that acknowledges children’s multiple realities and the structural context through which these are informed. This section introduces the main theoretical, and analytical themes to make sense of children’s experience of statelessness and belonging that form the core of the thesis.

‘Belonging’ is a perplexing term that pervades everyday discourse. It can refer to a place – ‘a place to belong’ – yet can also exist despite the absence of any specific site at all, for example diasporic belonging can be found in relationship to things and ideas, humans and nonhumans (Wright 2015). It can be a feeling (hooks 2009), or a sense and a set of practices (Fenster and Vizek 2006). This thesis explores the idea that “feeling a sense of belonging (or not), being morally, socially or legally recognised as belonging (or not), has the power to change lives, to make communities and collectives, to bring together and to separate in the most intimate, accepting, loving, exclusionary or violent ways” (Wright 2015: 391).

Within a study of the lived experiences of statelessness, children's present-day experiences are influenced by the historical circumstances and relationship to the State they were born into. They are embedded in the cultural milieu of their family and community. Moreover, children have an opportunity to connect with transnational communities resulting in an interface with new worldviews. Taking reality to be something multi-layered, this thesis foregrounds and dovetails the macro, micro and outside structures with children's subjective realities in the analysis of the communities under study. In doing so, it is possible to join the dots to understand belonging as something experienced in a simultaneous and multi-directional way, including coming to understand the causes and experiences of statelessness, identity hybridity, and how and why children may choose to appropriate new forms of belonging.

Following on from writings on belonging, and especially Antonsich's (2010) suggestion that belonging should be analysed both as a personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) and also as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging), this thesis proposes a conceptual development of belonging that adds structure to such a discussion. Consequently, I see belonging as something experienced in a simultaneous and multi-directional way: from above, below and beside. Briefly, belonging from above is something imposed on people, belonging from below is something inherited and belonging from beside refers to the ways that individuals locate themselves within new 'outside' possibilities.

To understand belonging from above, below and beside several aspects of children's lives needed to be considered.

Children's experiences and the mechanisms that generate the exclusionary terms of membership ought to be contextualised. We can understand how children belong from above by paying attention to the historical socio-political and legal milieu that they are in, and, the discourses that frame what it means to 'be' Vietnamese in Cambodia. This provides an important critical perspective on structural inequalities, enabling an analysis of the extent to which these inequalities impact on children's day-to-day experience of living in Cambodia (as shown in chapters four and five).

Belonging from below refers the inherited socio-cultural beliefs and practices that shape group identity. Whilst these identities are not fixed, they are usually identifiable. Within

the context of this research dominant ideals of belonging from below refer to the elements of culture seen worthy of preservation and participation by the Vietnamese community. These include, ethnicity, religious affiliation, the moral framework of the community, and commitment to the family. At times children perform different identities of belonging in order to negotiate inclusion in certain spaces as demonstrated in chapter five.

The mobility of others brings new ways of interpreting the world, children's identity and belonging. Belonging from beside highlights how children locate themselves from beside as they appropriate the 'outside' elements of Christianity as highlighted in chapter seven. Whilst the focus of this thesis is not on the theorisation of globalisation or transnationalism, these are relevant concepts which emerged as significant during fieldwork. I did not expect that these themes or that of religion would be so central to the thesis. Yet participant observation and children's interviews highlighted the significance of the God School as a transnational Christian space in shaping children's identity and belonging. Incidentally, this thesis responds to the call of geographers to link religion and transnationalism (Woods 2012, Kemp and Rajzman 2003). In doing so the links between migration, communication, cultural exchange and subjectivity are revealed (Dunn 2010). As Zeitlyn notes "transnationalism, like the concept of childhood, embodies elements of change. Transnationalism is linked with contacts, flows, groupings and exchanges between people from different geographical locations. Children are the subject of attempts by people to impose, spread and reproduce their worldview, but inevitably they interpret, translate and change these worldviews." (2010: 35) These ways of looking at and understanding 'belonging' are explored further in chapter two.

1.4 Ethnographic Context

The beginning of this chapter explained the rationale for the opening of the God School in *Preah Thnov*. This section explores the particulars of post-genocide Cambodia and the social needs prevalent in the country. These needs have encouraged the operation of many missionary / Christian NGOs that endeavour to meet such social needs, including the God School.

Cambodia's tumultuous modern history is characterised by colonialism, civil war and genocide (Chandler 1996). After the brutal genocidal regime headed by the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia's infrastructures were depleted. The country became a melting pot of crime, poverty, and cronyism and porous borders brought much human trafficking for sex

and labour. International stakeholders have spent billions of dollars on aid, technical assistance and infrastructural investment (Brinkley 2011). Despite years of rhetoric from Hun Sen, Cambodia and the world's longest-serving Premier, that his government desires to democratise and develop the country, reality shows that Cambodia is characteristically authoritarian (McCargo 2005).

In Cambodia there is much of what Banerjee and Duflo (2011) call 'institutional inertia'. The economy is growing rapidly with weak institutions that undermine human rights, education and strong legal systems (Hill and Menon 2013). One third of the population in Cambodia lives below the poverty level (Jammes 2017). Thus, populations that engage with missionary activity, like the Vietnamese communities in this study, have social needs which are largely neglected by the government, and they are at a disadvantage due to the privatisation (and poor management) of social insurance, healthcare and education systems. Many international NGOs came to Cambodia intending to assist its people and help rebuild a country in ruins (Brinkley 2011), bringing mixed results. Included in the list of 'helpers' are Christian missionaries (Choi-Fitzpatrick 2014).

The God School is one of many evangelical Christian NGOs that I encountered in Cambodia. What makes it of significant interest to this study is its focus on serving excluded Vietnamese populations. In a context of weak institutions, unaccountable practices and an inconsistent administration of citizenship regimes, factors such as ethnicity and poverty can override the legal distribution of such documents (Sperfeldt 2017, Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012, Ehrentraut 2011, 2013, Berman 1996, Ang and Chan 2014, Parsons and Lawreniuk 2018). Lack of documentation leaves the Vietnamese utilising informal service provision as demonstrated in chapter four. In response to the struggles the Vietnamese face, Christian missionaries from Vietnam and around the globe have converged on the God School in order to conduct their mission work. 'Mission' is a type of discourse that shapes how evangelical Christians engage the world through ideologies of transformative subjectivity – that is, reconfiguring subjectivity for both the beneficiaries and benefactors of mission as is shown in chapters six and seven.

Article 43 of the Cambodian Constitution states that "Buddhism shall be the state religion." The motto "Nation—Religion—King" is inscribed on the frontispiece of Cambodian official documents. Statistics indicate that Theravada Buddhism is practised by 96.4 per cent of the population. Though, this figure does not accurately reflect the diversity of religious practices in current Cambodian society. Catholicism, Mahayana

Buddhism and Caodaism have grown slightly in Cambodia, changing the religious dynamics in particular sectors, notably the humanitarian sector (Jammes 2017).

Christianity is not a new phenomenon in Cambodia. Evangelical Protestantism was introduced to Cambodia in 1923 (Gospel Press of Cambodia 1963). Closely aligned to royal power, the French colonial regime and local Buddhist presence resisted evangelical Protestantism from the outset. After periods of political turmoil during the civil war (1970–1975), the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979) and the Vietnamese socialist occupation of Cambodia (1979–1989), evangelicalism experienced an exponential growth in membership and development in the early 1990s, facilitated by the evangelising efforts of foreign religious missionaries. Recent field studies and internal reports note the number of evangelical believers rapidly increased between 1995 and 2007. Such numbers represent between 1.3 and 3.7 per cent of the population. However, the number of ‘active’ believers (i.e., baptised believers and those playing a regular role in a church) is projected to be in the range of 75,000–100,000 people (0.5–0.7 per cent of the population) (Jammes 2017: 90). Thus, the spread and significance of evangelicalism in Cambodia or its ‘historical success of conversion’ among indigenous ethnic groups, cannot be ignored (Salemink 2009). Evangelicalism is hard to define and speaks to a transdenominational movement within Protestant Christianity. Evangelicals believe in the divine nature of the Bible, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the atonement for sin and activism in sharing the faith and engaging in social action (Hovland 2016). Chapter seven details the specifics of evangelical place-making and how that creates the milieu for Christian subjectivity.

1.4.1 The God School

The God School is located in a village called *Preah Thnov*, a village made up of predominately long-term residents of mixed-marriage Khmer and Vietnamese households. Housing is mixed: some on land, spread out over two floors with an open space at the front for children to play, whilst other houses are built on the shoreline with floating boat houses decorating the Tonlé Sap River. Children from *Preah Thnov* and other villages attend the God School. *Preah Rotn Phon*, whilst in walking distance to *Preah Thnov*, is very different in lay out. There the residents live in cramped stilt houses, most without electricity, sanitation, or safe drinking water. This village had the worst reputation for crime and violence (although whenever I visited it, I was warmly welcomed). *Preah Rehab* was most notorious for child prostitution, yet by the time I

reached the villages for ethnographic research the sale of children had gone completely underground. The only evidence of its existence was the nearby KTV bars and stories that were circulated sporadically. *Preah Rehab* was mostly made up of floating boat houses. *Preah Rotn Phon* and *Preah Rehab* had the highest concentration of ethnic Vietnamese villagers. *Preah Amnr Sabby* comprised Khmer and Vietnamese residents. A mixture of land-based and water-based housing, elements of the village were spacious and clean whilst paths and surrounding areas were littered with trash filled, narrow walkways. A demographic breakdown of children counted in the God School is provided in appendices 2, 3 and 8.

Students at the school were divided into three sections: kindergarten, middle school and upper school. All children under five were regarded as kindergarten and were washed, fed and napped at the school. Lessons in Vietnamese, English and Mathematics were given to all children in middle and upper school, each child engaging in at least three lessons a day (Rumsby 2015).

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis seeks to understand how noncitizen children experience and practice belonging. In chapter two I start by reviewing and situating children in the literature pertinent to statelessness, citizenship and belonging. I identify how children often sit awkwardly within such scholarship and propose that by moving beyond an exclusive focus on the absence of legal status citizenship and its attendant rights, one can consider the differentiated experiences of noncitizen children. This does not undermine the challenges and inequalities noncitizen children face, however it does not reduce children to being entirely determined by that discourse. In addition, I follow Antonisch's (2010) suggestion to bring together notions of 'place belonging' and Yuval Davis' (2006) 'politics of belonging' as an analytical framework of belonging. I explain both 'place belonging' and the 'politics of belonging' in chapter two and put forward a conceptualisation of belonging that demonstrates how it is experienced in simultaneous and multi-directional ways: from above, beside and below.

Chapter three focuses on the epistemological, ontological and methodological considerations when researching identity and belonging among noncitizen children. In this section I explain and defend the use of critical realism as a research paradigm suited to ethnographic study. To explore children's experiences of living in Cambodia visual

research methods (VRM) were used to encourage and cultivate conversation. For instance, drawings and photography. Chapter three outlines the research approach and process, specifically the methodological and ethical issues when working with children and which methods were used.

Chapter four provides an important critical perspective on the structural violences (Farmer 2004) that define what it means to ‘be’ and ‘become’ Vietnamese in Cambodia, introducing the concept ‘belonging from above’. Drawing on the existing literature of the Vietnamese in Cambodia, the chapter paints the broader background of the communities under study. This shines analytical light on the historical socio-political and legal mechanisms of exclusion and the discourse imposed on the Vietnamese, providing a picture of what it means to belong from above, and contributes an analysis of the hierarchies of power and poverty among Vietnamese adults and children living in Cambodia. In doing so we learn how poverty intersects with ethnicity in such influential ways that the Khmer themselves effectively experience statelessness.

Chapter five explores children’s responses to belonging from above. The focus on children and their accounts is pivotal to understanding the problems ethno-national discourse has on the integration of Vietnamese children in Cambodia. Yet, perhaps most significantly, children’s accounts reveal their varied experiences and responses to the mechanisms by which exclusion is established, namely poverty, violence and language. Of special interest is how children see the need to perform identity tactically to secure education, housing and engage in public spaces such as the market.

The God School is the focus of chapter six, offering a critical perspective on how temporary legitimacy and recognition are created in a context where children are excluded from mainstream education. The intersection of religion and ethnicity with education is shown to reinforce a sense of ‘Vietnamese-ness’. By affirming elements of children’s belonging from below, the God School’s merging of Christianity with cultural concepts of morality and filial duty offers a new ethno-religious identity. Children take on this identity to subvert negative stereotypes from above and be ‘the best of Vietnamese’ from below.

Chapter seven explores how children locate themselves from beside. As ‘emplaced’ subjects, that is, those “whose daily lives become infected with new cultural, temporal and material encounters due to the mobilities of others” (Robertson and Ho 2016: 2266),

children experience belonging horizontally. Children's belonging from beside is revealed, in this case, at a transnational-religious nexus. The introduction of the God School into *Preah Thnov* as a transnational space has brought with it extraneous or outside elements, exposing children to new ritual forms, new sets of ideals, and new possibilities for sociality (Austin-Boos 2003). Chapter seven thus focuses on how children appropriated these outside elements and what this means for their belonging, highlighting the tension between children's adoption of new outside elements that come to replace old signifiers of belonging.

This thesis concludes by reflecting on the aims and objectives of the research, providing a discussion on each. In addition, the empirical, conceptual and methodological contributions of this thesis are summarised. In short, this thesis contributes to the theorisation of childhood statelessness and belonging by providing a conceptual framework of belonging that can be used in other research on modes of belonging among noncitizens. In addition, this thesis demonstrates the strengths of using a critical realist research paradigm when undertaking ethnographic research. Finally, ideas for future research are explored.

Chapter 2 **Situating Children in the Literature on Citizenship, Statelessness, and Belonging**

2.1 **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the main academic debates within statelessness research. Understanding statelessness requires understanding its intimate relationship to citizenship. The idea of citizenship carries two different meanings: the legal and the socio-political-theoretical meaning. The first defines citizenship as a legal status, namely the belonging to the legal order of a Nation State, the second defines citizenship as the social status of a citizen as a member of an organised group (Marchetti 2014). In the Cambodian context the term ‘nationality’ is often used synonymously with ‘citizenship’ in the English translation of Cambodian original texts. The Cambodian language itself does not differentiate between the concepts of citizenship and nationality (Sperfeldt 2017) and as this thesis explores the dual dimensions of citizenship as defined above I will use the term citizenship throughout this thesis to describe the legal confirmation of a reciprocal bond between person and State. The vocabularies of citizenship and their connotations vary according to the political, social, and cultural context and mirror different historical legacies (Lister et al. 2007). Within these differing vocabularies children sit awkwardly. Are children ‘partial citizens’ or are they equal with adults in status? Where do children living as *de facto* statelessness fit into the debate? These questions are the focus of the first part of this chapter.

The lived everyday experiences of belonging among noncitizen children is the central theme in this thesis. To offer an account of children’s lives that promotes their voices, stories, and agency whilst not downplaying the often harsh realities of their multiple exclusions, I will bring together an analysis of ‘place belonging’ and the ‘politics of belonging’ as per Antonsich’s (2010) suggestion. In so doing I offer a conceptual framework for belonging viewed as a something experienced in a simultaneous and multidirectional way: from above, below, and beside. This conceptual framework consolidates aspects of belonging pertaining to the political, participatory, socio-cultural and more affective dimensions of belonging. Literature that has often considered these elements separately will be explored in the second half of this chapter, as will the limitations of viewing belonging as conflated with identity and citizenship or omitting belonging as an emotional feeling of being ‘at home’. Finally, a rationale for bringing together the myriad forms of belonging under one framework will be provided.

2.2 Unpacking Children's Citizenship

The communities of individuals in the villages researched in this study, like many other Vietnamese in Cambodia, are at risk of statelessness (Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012, Ang and Chan 2014). Statelessness is the condition of not possessing recognised citizenship in a State or nation. People are stateless because they do not acquire a nationality at birth, their state of origin no longer exists, or no state will accept them as citizens (Sokoloff and Lewis 2005). This predicament is known as *de jure* statelessness.¹² When a person possesses a legally meritorious claim for citizenship, but is precluded from asserting it because of practical considerations such as cost, circumstances of civil disorder, or fear of persecution, the person can be defined as *de facto* stateless¹³ (Sokoloff and Lewis 2005). The concept of *de facto* stateless has been expanded and used to include additional circumstances for instance:

Persons who do not enjoy the rights attached to their nationality; Persons who are unable to establish their nationality, or who are of undetermined nationality; Persons who, in the context of State succession, are attributed the nationality of a State other than the State of their habitual residence (Massey 2010: 32).

De facto statelessness, whilst not legally specified, best describes the status of some participants in this study. They may have legitimate claim to Cambodian or Vietnamese nationality but currently do not have access to legal protections from either country and are prevented from doing so due to the interplay of exclusionary institutional and economic factors (Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012). Vietnamese communities studied in Cambodia have a patchwork of documentation. For children, their parents' lack of success of securing relevant documents (despite some being long-term residents) and the lack of a birth certificate is what makes them at risk of statelessness (Nguyen and Sperfeldt, Christoph 2012, Sperfeldt 2017, Parsons and Lawreniuk 2018). This 'rooted displacement' (Belton 2016), that is lacking the right to choose to belong to the specific communities within which they were born, is why I use the term *de facto* statelessness to define participant's status.

Traditionally, a Marshallian (1950) view of citizenship (which does not attend to the special context of children) gives people civil, social and political rights. Civil rights are

¹² *De jure* statelessness is recognised by the 1954 UN Convention pertaining to the status of stateless persons and the 1961 Convention on the reduction of statelessness.

¹³ There is no such legally binding regime at the global level for *de facto* stateless who are not refugees.

concerned with matters pertaining to the rule of law and personal liberties including freedom of speech. The political element relates to rights associated with participation in formal political processes, for example the right to vote. The social dimension of citizenship comprises not only the basic issue of economic welfare but the right to share in the full social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the dominant standards in the society (Roche 1999). Marshall defined citizenship as “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed” (Marshall 1950: 28–29). Therefore, to be a ‘non-citizen’ meant to be excluded from a community that secured one with civil, social and political rights.

According to Delanty (2000) citizenship is about *membership* of a political community and it involves a connection between four different components: rights, duties, participation and identity. Three theories of citizenship - liberal, communitarian and republican (which frequently contradict one another and are often incommensurable) – each prioritise different elements of these core features of citizenship (Lister and Pia 2008). In liberal theory, citizenship is essentially fashioned as a mutual relationship of rights and responsibilities between individuals and the State. In republican theories, the political community arbitrates between the individual citizen and the State, and loyalty to that political community, the nation, and its protection and promotion are the primary duties of the citizen. Communitarian theories of citizenship see citizens as owing loyalty to the political community but also as its products, as organic parts of that community, per contra to the classical liberal model of an individualised society (Delanty 2000, Pocock 1995, Tonkiss and Bloom 2015, Joppke 2007). Regardless of which theory is applied, a connection between the people and the state exists.

In this context, the discussion around citizenship and children has been somewhat problematic. Even without the added complication of how *de facto* stateless children might access rights, or feel like they ‘belong’, children of adults with citizenship do not fit neatly into the idealised notion of a citizen. Children are not, for instance, citizens in a constitutional sense because they do not have the right to vote (Roche 1999) and have thus been categorised as ‘semi-citizens’ (Meloni et al. 2014). Tom Cockburn (1998), commenting on Marshall’s (1950) concept of citizenship, notes that children’s full citizenship is prevented by their marginal social status:

According to the notions of childhood that predominate in the world today, children are primarily regarded as potential for the future or as future citizens. Like women in earlier times, and as 'ethnic' minorities still are today, they are considered as 'outsiders' who still fail to possess all the qualities that go to make a 'proper citizen'. Children are almost everything that the non-citizen is: they are irrational, incapable, undeveloped or dependent and are defined in terms of what they are not, that is adult, responsible, rational and autonomous (Cockburn 1998: 107).

The recognition that the construction of children's citizenship has been underpinned by an adult template, or alternatively viewed through an adult lens, which measures children against an adult norm and overlooks the particularities of children's relationship to citizenship (Liebel 2003), has led to theorists concluding that it is not possible to strive for children's citizenship without "in some form addressing the problem of the exclusion of children and adolescents" (Schibotto 2005: 182 cited in Liebel 2007: 48). Accordingly, the 21st century saw a rise in the request that children be included in citizenship and (most) governments have agreed that children ought to be members of society with a legitimate and valuable voice and perspective (Liebel 2007). Children's citizenship has posed important questions regarding what their role is in society. The trajectory of this thought has evolved from framing children as needing to be protected in the domestic sphere to considerations about children's membership in society and their ability to take an influential role in their communities and families (Invernizzi and Milne 2005). Even so, when children are included they are differentially equal to adults. An equal citizenship is difficult since it would load children with the full responsibility of citizenship and would ignore specific peculiarities and needs of children that are founded in human development (Cockburn 1998). Thus, 'child-size', or 'child-friendly' forms of citizenship are supported and as Cockburn (1998) argues children are framed as citizens in waiting. Their participation is preparation for future citizenship, children are simply learning (Roche 1999, Jans 2004). This understanding of 'child-friendly' or 'child-size' citizenship is therefore also critically termed 'partial citizenship' by Invernizzi and Milne (Invernizzi and Milne 2005: 3).

The membership conundrum children face is that they can make their claim as members of the citizen-community only so far as they are accepted as members of the said community. The reality is that children still find themselves outside the realm of political belonging: this is especially true for who are *de facto* stateless. Furthermore, the exclusion of children is reinforced by theoretical notions such as 'semi-citizen', 'non-citizen' or 'partial citizen'. These terms assume an exclusion of membership to the citizenry and no

relationship with the state. *De facto* stateless children would fall into the category of ‘non-citizen’. Without registration at birth children live without a nationality, both crucial elements for the recognition of the child as a citizen (Doek 2008). Yet, as Jaap E. Doek, former Chairperson on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, states: “this recognition must not only depend on these formalities, but also and perhaps even more important, on the opportunities the child is given to become a full and active member of her/his community and society” (Doek 2008: 14). In this vein, whilst there is merit in a discussion and acknowledgement of children as non-citizens, there are problems theoretically in treating ‘non-citizenship’ as merely the negation of citizenship (Tonkiss and Bloom 2015). Tonkiss and Bloom (2015) argue that the category of ‘non-citizen’ is limiting. They advocate dropping the hyphen and instead treat ‘noncitizenship’ as a membership category in its own right. As they helpfully point out, ‘noncitizens’ have varied experiences and belongings that are shaped by intersections with other social divisions. A characterisation of ‘non-citizen’ as a denial of citizenship overlooks these critical subtleties. Moving beyond an exclusive focus on the absence of legal status citizenship and its attendant rights, one can consider the differentiated experiences of ‘noncitizenship’. Therefore, I adopt Tonkiss and Bloom’s (2015) suggestion. Conceptualising the children in this study as noncitizens avoids viewing them as simply those who do not belong. It values their participation in the communities they are located and shines analytical light on how they experience belonging day-to-day. To say that the children or adults in this study have no relationship with the Cambodian State would deny the reality that exclusion is itself a form of relationship. Furthermore, as the empirical chapters illustrate, children are still engaging with structures of exclusion and exploring meaningful membership within the communities they live in.

Amartya Sen (1999) draws consideration to the difficulties related to the lack of citizenship for personal and social development. Sen (1999) argues that citizenship is intrinsically linked with the possible improvement of human capabilities: hence, the granting of citizenship confiscates some of the ‘unfreedoms’ that place people at risk from want and fear. Elman (2001) provides a challenge to Sen’s claims showing that there are complex domestic factors that often undermine human security. For example, in both weak and strong states where political divisions are defined by ethno-national, gender, religious, party and tribal affiliations, discrimination weakens the potency of citizenship by strengthening discriminatory structures (Blitz and Lynch 2012: 11). Sing’ Oei, concluding his research into ‘Citizenship in Kenya: the Nubian case’, illustrates how

Nubians still face discrimination and marginalisation because of their indigeneity. Whilst they are recognised by the state, they are still considered non-indigenous for purposes of political and social entitlements, including education grants or scholarships, public sector employment and land ownership. For Sing' Oei:

While increasing recognition has generated beneficial outcomes to individual members of the community, structural barriers still consign the Nubians to the same state of poverty and destitution that they were seeking to escape through their struggle for citizenship. In this case, citizenship has not brought relief (2012: 61)

We must, then, acknowledge the harsh realities of exclusion noncitizen children face whilst also understanding that being granted citizenship would not automatically provide human security. Moreover, to ignore how noncitizens might find 'freedoms' outside of citizenship is to take a rather shallow look at the lived realities, strategies and meaning-making among the stateless.

2.3 Statelessness and Belonging

The term 'belonging' means to be suitably consigned to something or, in current phrasing, to be rightly placed. Most people in the world are 'rightly placed' from a legal and a statist perspective (Belton 2016) if we think about how states automatically assign formal belonging to individuals through the authorised channels of birth on the soil (*jus soli*) or descent (*jus sanguinis*). We 'belong' somewhere and are officially recognised as having a particular 'national' home through citizenship. However, the reality is millions of people have never been 'consigned' a particular citizenship at birth or have had their formal belonging stripped from them at some point in their life (ibid).

In 2014 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched the "#Ibelong" Campaign.¹⁴ The ambition of the campaign is to end statelessness by 2024, 10 years after the campaign launched. The campaign identifies that those who are stateless are told they do not "belong ANYWHERE". Their denial of nationality comes with the denial of basic rights, prospects and hope. UNHCR's campaign slogan asks the reader to understand statelessness from the perspective of 'belonging' and to think of the abolition of statelessness from the vantage point of the stateless, the individual agent who declares, "I belong" (Belton 2016: 425). The #Ibelong campaign had no noticeable presence in

¹⁴ <http://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/>

Cambodia. The #Ibelong website has a Cambodia section that details the number of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) to contact to discuss a claim for citizenship. The JRS has produced the most in-depth research on the legal status and risk of statelessness among the Vietnamese (Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012). Yet, the work required to register births is complicated and vast. Limited resources and a lack of political will power from the government hinder progress. Moreover, the premise of UNHCR's framing of statelessness is knotted into the idea that citizenship: that is 'belonging' to a political community through nationality, affords people certain protections. It is evident that statelessness, and thus undetermined nationality which breeds the risk of statelessness, threatens human security, and there is clearly merit in the #Ibelong campaign's challenge to see statelessness from the perspective of 'belonging'. Yet, this overemphasis hinders our understanding of forms of 'belonging' among noncitizens including – but not limited to – children who live as *de facto* stateless.

The emergence of a varied scholarship on statelessness complicates Hannah Arendt's insightful characterisation of stateless people as those without “the right to have rights”, and questions the depiction of pure exclusion among the stateless. As Sigona's (2016) study of everyday statelessness in Italy argues, a lack of citizenship does not lead to ‘deny[ing] the fundamental human capacity to act’. Rather, a sociological study of *de facto* statelessness highlights instead “political subjectivity as an embodied and emplaced process, where subjects actively negotiate their position in the world and vis-a-vis the State” (Sigona 2016: 263). Thus, the meaning of membership is being interrogated in a way that earlier writings did not (Lister 2003). Here citizenship is more than the legal or social status people hold (Isin and Nyers 2014), citizenship as status becomes forged with citizenship as practice (Oldfield 1990).

Literature has made it clear that the stateless occupy spaces outside of legal jurisdiction. Consequently, understanding how people inhabit such a position is imperative to any theorisation of the experience of belonging. Agamben's (2005, 1998) work has been widely used within critical migration and refugee studies (Doty 2011, Walters 2008, Fitzpatrick 2001, Prem Kumar and Grundy-Warr 2004) to investigate and draw attention to the ambiguous grey zone or ‘zone of indistinction’ neither inside or fully outside the social and legal order and, as such, always and inevitably both. Yet, one of the criticisms welded towards the Agamben logic, as explored in Redclift's (2013a, 2013b, 2011) work among Urdu-speakers living in camp and non-camp situations in Bangladesh, is the

reductionist outcome of his concept of ‘naked life’ that renders abject subjects without agency. The top-heavy analysis of how the state strips and leaves bare *homo sacer* omits a reading of the camp from below. Her exploration gives a critical assessment of the nature and boundaries of citizenship. Redclift considers the camp in double depiction: first, as an abject space whose subjects are excluded from the ‘formal’ political and legal domain; and second, as a site of claims-making in which the political can be created. Her research suggests that the camps of Bangladesh do not function as bounded physical or conceptual spaces, in which denationalised groups are completely divorced from the ‘polity’. Instead, ‘acts of citizenship’ happen at the level of everyday life, as the moments, claims or contests through which ‘formal’ status is transgressed (Redclift 2013a: 309). Isin and Nielsen's argument that attention should be paid to those “acts” in which “subjects constitute themselves as citizens” (2008:2) underscores Redclift’s argument that “statelessness, cannot be reduced to a singular, or discrete, legal or social form. It is neither bounded or fixed, and does not tell a story solely of exclusion” (Redclift 2013b: 6). This is evident in the examples Redclift (2013a) gives of camp dwellers ‘acting’ as citizens by moving in and outside of the camp, and securing ID cards and even passports by using the address of a family members.

Understanding belonging beyond citizenship reveals that meaningful belonging and access to quality opportunities happen outside of the realms of citizenship law. Consequently, the rhetoric of ‘legal triumphalism’ (Reddy 2015 as cited in Allerton 2017a: 253) that which reduces identity to documentation and is promoted in UNHCR campaigns such as #IBelong is weakened. Unlike Redclift’s work this study is not centred on a reading of the camp. The children in this study are not camp dwellers. Also, In addition, a study of how *de facto* stateless children ‘belong’ is pertinent as it reconfigures what we mean by citizenship as ‘belonging’ to a political community and allows for the exploration of children as active members in their communities. Understanding citizenship beyond political belonging challenges the idea that it is only in having political citizenship that rights of opportunity (if not access) are realised. Children ‘claim rights’ not as citizens but as members who ‘belong’ to communities (Held 1991) where opportunities are made available, even if informally. When we look at modes of ‘belonging’ among *de facto* stateless children it becomes evident that sometimes the ideals of human rights law are often partially realised outside of systems supported by the law. Seeking to understand how children living as *de facto* stateless experience ‘belonging’ inevitably promotes questions of the validity of State citizenship, in securing

or experiencing ‘belonging’. Yet, how one analytically approaches ‘belonging’ determines the answer one might give, illustrating the myriad and complex ways of ‘belonging’.

This is not to deny the significance of citizenship or present acts of citizenship as resolving the issues associated with a child’s noncitizenship. Yet, the agency and opportunities to meaningfully belong in the ‘liminal space between insiders and outsiders’ (Isin and Nyers 2014) must be accounted for. Therefore, I propose a conceptual framework that considers the political, participatory, socio-cultural and more affective dimensions of belonging. Crucial to this framework is the broadening of the definition of belonging so it is not reduced to ‘being rightly placed’ but also underscores the need for children to belong, and the significance of positive relationships characterised by long-lasting affective care for one another (Over 2016, Baumeister and Leary 1995).

2.3.1 *Bringing together the Politics of Belonging and Place Belonging*

The question of state citizenship is undeniably an important aspect of belonging and one that is extensively discussed in the literature as shown in the previous section. Formal structures of citizenship can be a matter of life and death. For this reason, some theorists uphold that the network of entitlements and rights connected to state citizenship (or absence thereof) is the most important existing political project of ‘belonging’ (Yuval-Davis 2011). It is imperative to identify the ways in which existing political projects have excluded the children in this study. Yet, a focus of projects of exclusion alone would omit important endeavours of *inclusion* children undertake. I will highlight the ways that children locate themselves as well as the conditions that make such a location possible.

Yuval Davis has laid out a comprehensive analytical framework on ‘belonging’. In *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (2011), she unfolds a streamlined dichotomous conceptualisation of ‘belonging’, or not ‘belonging’, by asking how neoliberal globalization has opened a space for the development of multiple alternative projects of ‘belonging’ and where carriers of political projects of ‘belonging’ are situated locally, globally and intersectionally (Hoewer 2014, Marfelt 2015). Her chief argument is that the study of formal state citizenship should look at its association with political projects within and beyond the boundaries of the state (Hoewer 2014). Contextualising and drawing attention to various political projects of ‘belonging’ - religion, cosmopolitanism, feminist ethics of care and nationalism - Yuval Davis (2011, 2006)

reveals how these operate and affect individuals simultaneously. In using intersectionality as a tool for analysis beyond the study of gender and race, one can reach a more wide-ranging understanding of the connection between global, national, and local politics of belonging. ‘Belonging’ from this perspective is multi-layered, and constantly shifting.

Yuval-Davis supposes that citizenship cannot be narrowly defined as formal state citizenship: instead she defines it in expansive terms as “the participatory dimension of membership in all political community” (Yuval-Davis 2011: 201). For Yuval-Davis this broader conception, allows us to see that citizenship includes one’s memberships in a diverse set of communities which are intersectional.¹⁵ The behaviours, strategies and negotiations of those living as *de facto* stateless reveals much about the grids of power, resistance and survival, and can be analysed using Yuval-Davis’ (2011, 2006) ‘politics of belonging’. The politics of belonging - belonging as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (Antonsich 2010) - is an indispensable theoretical tool with which to analyse belonging.

For Yuval-Davis (2006) the notion of ‘belonging’ is constructed from three analytical levels: (1) social locations, (2) identifications and emotional attachments (to various collectivities and groupings) and (3) ethical and political value systems from which people judge their own and others’ belonging/s. These different levels cannot be reduced to each other despite being interrelated. This thesis explores these three levels of construction with reference to the experience of belonging among noncitizen children in Cambodia who find themselves outside the entitlements and rights connected to the state.

2.3.2 *Social Locations*

When it is said that people belong to a particular race, gender, class or nation, that they belong to a particular age-group, kinship group or a certain profession, what is being talked about are different social and economic locations, which at each historical moment, have particular implications vis-à-vis the grids of power relations in society (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199).

The participants in this research are situated in various social locations and have a certain positionality along an axis of power, higher and lower than other such social groups. Therefore, when looking at *de facto* statelessness, as one social location, it is vital to

¹⁵ That is “the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage” (Perlman 2018).

consider the intersections with other categories to make visible any inequalities, and axis of power, that uphold social divisions (ibid). A salient social location among participants is ethnicity.

Anthropological writing on ethnicity has subsumed what was once a discussion on tribalism, and now is a popular term used as an analytical tool to discuss social categorisation, minorities and nationalism. Social theorists have sought to define and apply the term from primordial and interactionist standpoints: that is whether ethnicity is something inherent to a group's DNA, to the idea that ethnicity is an artefact created and continued by individuals or groups to pursue a common, usually political, purpose (Eriksen 1991). Theorists (Eriksen 1991, Grace 2008, Yelvington 1991, Rumbaut 1994) have also tried to go beyond primordial and interactionist debates and ask questions about how, when and where do people learn to value the things they take to be important and worth striving for? How do they know that others share these values?

Fredrick Barth's edited collection *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was the cornerstone of anthropological teaching in the 70s and 80s (Banks 2013). Barth's starting point, in his seminal essay, reflects on social anthropology's heavy empirical focus on the differences between cultures, their historic boundaries and connections (Barth 1969). Barth's main contribution was to urge a shift away from discussions of the content of ethnic identity such as ethnic markers such as food, dress, language and so on, towards a consideration of boundaries that mark the restrictions of such contents (Banks 2013). Consequently, he shifts the focus away from an "investigation of internal constitution and history of separate groups to ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance" (Barth 1969: 10), opening the idea that ethnic groups do not exist in isolation but are rather formed in a relational way. For Barth "the ethnic boundary does not bound 'something' off from nothingness, but rather it distinguishes between two (or more) 'somethings'" (Barth 1969: 14–15). The analysis of ethnicity outlined by Barth is an important lens to adopt when considering the Vietnamese in Cambodia. To define ethnic Khmer, an ethnic 'other' is required to compare and contrast against. For the Vietnamese their 'Vietnamese-ness' separates them from belonging in a Khmer society, despite most participants speaking Cambodian as a first language, identifying as being from 'here' and (some) having one Khmer parent.

In Cohen's (1969) study *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa*, ethnicity was put forward as instrumental or circumstantial meaning there are motivations for a group to assert and

preserve an ethnic identity, and these reasons are economic and political. Cohen proposes the notion of ‘political ethnicity’ that is, ethnicity not so much as a form of identity as ethnicity as a strategy for corporate action (1969: 27). Whilst Cohen’s ideas and use of ethnicity as a sociological term is interesting, the focus of ‘political ethnicity’ as a group formation leaves out a discussion on the individual and rather forcefully rejects psychological explanations of identity formation. Erikson (1991) rejects a narrowly instrumental approach and asks: how are values learnt, how do people learn what is worth striving for; and how are others identified as sharing those ideals? For Erikson (ibid), this line of enquiry points to cultural negotiations in family and close friendships: personal arenas in which people begin to understand the personal value in the consensual positions they are encouraged to adopt.

For this study the term ethnicity is useful for exploring identity and belonging. This is because in a context like Cambodia the boundaries that separate the Khmer from the Vietnamese in popular political discourse have indeed been along ethnic lines, affirming Cohen’s (1969) framing of ‘political ethnicity’. As a consequence of the politicisation of ethnicity as ethno-nationalism, Barth’s idea of boundary maintenance is observable among some interactions between Khmer and Vietnamese groups. The questions Erikson raises are also important to consider as it provides room for children’s agency in negotiating boundaries when necessary.

2.3.3 *Identifications and Emotional Attachments*

The affinity between citizenship and identity is that they are both group markers. Citizenship marks out the members of a polity from another as well as members of a polity from non-members. Identity marks out groups from each other as well as allowing for the constitution of groups as targets of assistance, hatred, animosity, sympathy or allegiance. As group markers the difference between citizenship and identity is that, while the former carries legal weight, the latter carries social and cultural weight (Isin and Wood 1999: 20).

Noncitizens are marked out from the members of a polity – legally. Yet as this thesis explores there are moments when children identify as ‘being’ part of the ‘Khmer’ the hegemonic ethnic group in Cambodia. Exploring these moments and the identity markers that carry social and cultural weight as pertains to belonging brings to the fore the performative element of identity construction. Identities are descriptions, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are, and are not, and what being in a group or collective might mean (Isin and Wood 1999). Identity narratives are changeable, reproduced in a selective way and often contestable. They are not merely cognitive stories

but illustrate affective investments that might be constructed in response to social locations and positionings or simply a longing to belong (Probyn 1996). Important questions around identity formation explore the influence of internal consciousness and external milieu on how individuals and groups come to be understood. Starting from the basic premise of asking what identities are, how they formed and transformed, early thinkers came to acknowledge that whilst identity can be made by individuals, its construction is not always under the condition of a person's own choosing (Fanon 2008, Du Bois 1903).

Goodenough (1963) makes a sharp distinction between personal and social identity. A personal identity represents the unique way an individual identifies him/herself, or the style with which someone engages in interaction with others. A person's social identity, instead, is an aspect of self that makes a difference in how someone's rights and duties relate to other members of a group or society. Goodenough anticipated the later development of the concept of hybrid or multiple identities. He argued that every individual has several different social identities. Interestingly, he discussed the simultaneous occurrence of several identities in certain interactions, when individuals would select more than one identity to deal with the situation, this point is illustrated by children's performance of identities in chapters five and six. Goodenough named composite of several identities *Social Persona*. In this sense constructions of belonging have a performative dimension (Bell 1999a, Fortier 1997, Clammer 2015) that are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment (Yuval-Davis 2006). For the participants in this study these narratives include stories of belonging to: ethnic, racial, national, cultural religious and kin groups, both as individuals and as part of a collectives.

The relationship between social locations and identifications can become empirically closely intertwined which is why it is important not to conflate the three analytical levels. For instance, gender might be a social location one is born into, but the enactment or identification of gender may differ. Differentiation is important, otherwise we would not understand possible resistance to identity enforcement (Yuval-Davis 2006). As Fanon (2008) argued the possibility of struggle or resistance, moving beyond biology or social location as destiny, requires the oppressed to go against their internalisations of forced constructions of self and identity. It is here that the agency of the oppressed, their ability

to respond to the judgements made of them, can be witnessed. Empirical examples are provided in chapter six.

2.3.4 *Ethical and Political Values*

Belonging, argues Yuval-Davis (2011), consists of more than social locations and constructions of collective identities and attachments. It is about the ways these are valued and judged that we move from the realm of belonging to the politics of belonging. The politics of belonging is about the ‘dirty work of boundary maintenance’ (Crowley 1999) that creates political communities of belonging into ‘us’ and ‘them’. Ethno-nationalism is particularly salient in Southeast Asia and has played a large role in imagining communities (Anderson 1991) that are categorised by perceived common ancestry, history and culture (Lamont and Molnar 2002). The Vietnamese population in Cambodia has experienced a long history of marginalisation. As shown in chapter four, anti-Vietnamese sentiment has been exacerbated at times of political insecurity, and at some historical junctures has been used as a political ideology (by parties with polarised priorities) to reinforce Cambodian national unity and ‘Khmerness’ (Amer 2006, Berman 1996, Strangio 2014, Edwards 2007). The study of the politics of belonging thus reveals “the struggles around the determination of what is involved in belonging, in being a member of a community, and what roles specific social locations and specific narratives of identity play in this” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 205).

Yuval-Davis’ gives an excellent framework to work with, yet her discussion on belonging is limited due to the emphasis on a macro level analysis (Rashid 2013). In fact, Antonsich (2010) argues that whilst her useful tripartite analytical framework for the study of belonging seeks to emphasise belonging as an emotional feeling of ‘home’ and ‘feeling safe’, she ultimately leans towards the politics of belonging, thus overlooking the notion of place, as if feelings, discourses, and practices of belonging exist in a geographical void. Antonsich argues for an analytical framework for belonging that sees it both as “a personal, intimate, feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)” (2010: 644). This combination avoids either a socially de-contextualised individualism or an all-encompassing social(ising) discourse. I take on board Antonsich’s suggestion and seek to analyse the politics of belonging and place belongingness congruently. To do this, I put forward a multi-directional and

simultaneous explanation of belonging, as something imposed from above, inherited from below and appropriated from beside.

2.4 Belonging: from above, below and beside

Whilst the politics of belonging is about boundary creation by hegemonic political powers, these boundaries are also contested. Statelessness breeds an insecure or completely fractured politics of belonging which in turn produces insecurity and a lack of safety. As Belton (2015) points out, being socially excluded, lacking a recognised juridical existence, confronting diverse human rights violations and being denied or deprived of a 'national' home are all substantial barriers to the stateless' ability to fulfil 'key life projects' and be self-determining agents. They are forcibly displaced in situ. Yet, ethnographic examples can bring to life the very existence of communities in situ revealing the ways children experience and resolve realities of exclusion and how they form a sense of belonging to place.

The distinction between the more affective, personal, intimate dimensions of belonging, and the structured, public, political aspects of belonging are recognised by scholars (Baubock 2007, Krzyzanowski and Wodak 2007). Yet belonging as an emotional feeling of being at home in place is not commonly analysed (Antonsich 2010), especially with regards to noncitizen children. Whilst Yuval-Davis' (2006) analytical framework is useful it refers to belonging as something that is conflated with identity and citizenship. Antonsich's (2010) writing helpfully illustrates that there is often an assumption that belonging is something that does not need explanation: which only leaves it vaguely defined or ill-theorized whether that be by cultural theorists (Bromley 2000, Duruz 2002) or geographers (Malone 2007, Schueth and O'Loughlin 2008, Nagel and Staeheli 2005, Winders 2007). For Crowley (1999) belonging is a 'thicker' concept than citizenship because of the complexities of belonging constituted through diverse economic, social, and political inclusion and exclusions, claims to sameness and difference, and forms of attachment and alienation. Belonging is multidimensional in nature. It encompasses citizenship, nationhood, gender, ethnicity and emotional dimensions of status or attachment (Bhimji 2008, Croucher 2004, Hartnell 2006). In order to present a full account of belonging as experienced by those outside the citizenry one must understand the variant 'modes of belonging', that is: the attachment to places, groups, cultures, etc. (Sicakkan and Lithman 2005) and the ways in which 'differential belongings' (Rowe 2005) to these attachments are performed (Bell 1999b, Duruz 2002, Fortier 1997).

Often when discussing what it means for an outsider to become part of society the term ‘integration’ is used. Integration strategies are often used by policy makers focusing on varying forms of belonging that emphasise the benefits of learning the language of the host country, interactions with the majority and over time learning their culture and traditions (Esser 2003, Rouvoet et al. 2017). Yet achieving these forms of ‘integration’ does not necessarily espouse a sense of home as often exclusionary practices still occur, institutionally and at a community level. The feeling of home is not limited to a physical domestic space, as one might imagine. Instead it is an emotional feeling of attachment tied to a place and is better described by hooks (2009) as symbolic spaces of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment. Self-definition – the question of ‘who am I’ – is intimately tied to the question of ‘where do I belong?’ (Antonisch 2010, Loader 2006, hooks 2009). Factors that add to a feeling of place belongingness as outlined by Antonisch (2010) are *auto-biographical* - personal experiences, elations, and memories that attach person to place (Dixon and Durrheim 2004, Hooks 2009), *relational* - personal and social ties that enhance life in a given place; *cultural*– language, traditions, habits and religion (Buonfino and Thomson 2007, hooks 2009, Esser 2003); *economic* – being able to get a job, build a professional life and look after one’s family generate a sense of place belongingness (Yuval-Davis, Kaptani 2008, Chow 2007); *Legal*– (e.g. citizenship and resident permits) and, last but no means least, *length of stay*. Antonisch’s analytical framework for place belongingness as laid out above provides facets of analysis that will be explored within this thesis.

Underpinning children’s social behaviour, analysed as the politics of and place belonging, is the need for children to belong (Over 2016, Baumeister and Leary 1995). Indispensable to fulfilling the need to belong are first, “the necessity for individuals to have relatively frequent, non-aversive interactions with at least a few other people. Second, these interactions must take place within a framework of long-lasting affective concern for each other's welfare” (Over 2016: 2). Baumeister and Leary’s work underlines the importance of community. They point out that a child’s failure to satisfy the need to belong will be marked by serious distress and long-term negative consequences for a child. Thus, the communities which children are in and join are not merely background considerations. As the empirical chapters show relationships are an important, influential context for the ways children adopt identities and modes of belonging. Place belonging, the politics of belonging, or belonging as conflated with identity or citizenship, as explored above, represent something of the plurality of belonging articulated along different scales. The

politics of belonging can suffocate one's sense of a future and give rise to its alternative imagining: through enacting citizenship to claim a future prize, freedom, legal change, or justice. On the other hand, the insecurity of not-belonging is an emotional state that children seek to overcome to make for a better here and now. For that reason, the temporality of belonging, something which can be future orientated or is constructed to live peacefully in the present, ought to be brought together under one analysis to have a full account of belonging. Using the analytical frameworks of Yuval-Davis (2006; 2011) and Antonsich (2009; 2010) this thesis explores how noncitizen children experience the plurality of belonging from three multi-directional yet simultaneous directions: from above, below and beside. This framework assists in bringing coherence to what are otherwise isolated or fragmented analyses of belonging. Incidentally, in the everyday experience of belonging, belonging from above, below and beside are inseparable. However, in order to locate the specific sources of belonging they are distinguished for analytical purposes.

The next section will explain belonging from above, below and beside as it relates to the Cambodian context. The conclusion of this thesis will demonstrate the broader application of the conceptual model. Suffice to say, the model of belonging this thesis presents applies to communities who are noncitizens or who are irregular in some way, be they refugees or migrants. This is because those who experience a fractured politics of belonging usually have their terms of belonging imposed on them from above. These terms are formal boundaries of exclusion that define a person's position in society and tell them who they are, be it with or without rights, irregular or regular. Needless to say, individuals who are citizens and who are included officially in the body politic can, and do face marginalisation and exclusion, yet the pathways of social mobility for them are demonstrably linear in nature and could be explained or investigated using other conceptual models. For instance, Bourdieu's social and cultural capital, has been used when looking at children's transnational identities. Zeitlyn's work (2010) captures children's utilisation of different forms of capital to operate in different social fields in London and Bangladesh. The circumstances of the communities in this study are profoundly different and thus need a different framework of analysis. Acquiring forms of capital does not permit access to formal modes of belonging. Thus, the nature of the investigation at hand is to understand how those outside the citizenry belong. What's more, whilst the context of the God School is a key site for emplaced children to be exposed to outside elements, there is nothing particular about the God School that

qualifies the use of the model. For instance, belonging from beside which is captured at the transnational religious nexus in this thesis could be examined in another context where new outside elements are appropriated. Outside elements can include but are not restricted to religion. The key point of analysis, and how one can identify as belonging from beside, is the demonstrable impact appropriation has. For instance, whether it opens up new possibilities for socialisation, or identity transformation.

As the empirical chapters makes clear, the multi-directional facets of belonging can be in competition with each other. For those outside the citizenry a process of naturalisation is often predicated on accepting the terms of memberships, that is ‘belonging’ imposed from above. If individuals choose to reject the cultural and social norms of the majority to embrace the inherited belonging from below, tensions arise. For instance, if one is expected to learn a national language or evidence a commitment to the majority social and cultural norms as part of a naturalisation process, yet engages in only learning their own mother tongue or chooses to participate in and identify more strongly with a foreign community, then the markers of integration will be hard to prove and could create road blocks towards naturalisation. Furthermore, belonging from below can be at odds with belonging from beside as taking on new, outside identity markers or practices often entails doing away with inherited social and cultural norms. Whilst the outcomes of appropriating new forms of identity and belonging might provide affective feelings of place belonging or even spur on a new engagement with the politics of belonging, the interactions can at best be divisive and at worse break ties with family and community culture.

2.4.1 Belonging from Above

Belonging from above are forces of belonging imposed on a person and involves individual-State relations. Taking a historical look at this relationship exposes mechanisms of exclusion and selective inclusion. Exposing structural violence, that is the systematic ways in which social and institutional structures harm or otherwise disadvantage individuals, lifts the veil on how individual experience is embedded in a larger social matrix. Farmer (2004) argues to discern the nature of structural violence, and explore its contribution to human suffering, an analysis must be geographically broad, and historically deep – joining the dots between, and recognising the role of the powerful in the production of political projects of exclusion. In this context, belonging from above can be defined as the historical socio-political and legal discourse concerning the

Vietnamese and is detailed in chapters four and five. Belonging from above has led to a long-term legal exclusion and has produced a contentious political rhetoric that frames the Vietnamese, as ‘illegal’, ‘dishonest’, ‘untrustworthy’, and interested only in ‘invading’ and ‘taking’ Cambodian land (Edwards 1996, 2007, Goscha 2012). These narratives as shown in chapter four are rooted in Cambodia and Vietnam’s political history.

Belonging from above is not an all-encompassing discourse and those who are marginalised may choose to subvert or resist negative discourses framed from above. Analysing children’s responses to belonging from above we see the ‘politics of belonging’ that is the discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (Yuval-Davis 2006) in operation. According to de Certeau (1984), resistance is inherent in the everyday practices of life and allows a sphere of self-directed action and self-determination even to the ‘nobody’ or ‘other’ in society. De Certeau theorises how a ‘nobody’ – the ordinary, equip themselves for these practices with an armament he calls a ‘tactic’. Tactics manifest themselves in spatial practices and are ways of operating that involve a way of making, thinking and acting that escape or exceed dominant ideologies. Tactics are also ways of being that are capable of constructing an alternative order (De Certeau 1984).

From above strategies refer to the socio-political and legal mechanisms of exclusion that the Vietnamese face. Applied to the everyday lives of participants tactics are the movement on the territory of others by appropriating space and acting within it in ways that are already accepted within the culture, but never acting wholeheartedly according to the cultural rules or norms. Thus, the term tactics, as defined by De Certeau, will be adopted and used as a means of describing children’s response to the dominant strategies of the powerful, and how they subvert discursive representations of the ethnic Vietnamese.

Chapter five highlights how belonging from above impacts children’s experience and practice of belonging. Children’s autobiographical accounts reveal the degree to which participants experience the exclusionary terms of membership imposed from above, and how they negotiate, or tactfully resist exclusion. Moreover, children’s accounts disclose their frustration regarding derogatory discourses that negatively frame the Vietnamese. Children who consider such negative representations of the Vietnamese as inaccurate

respond in varied ways. Chapter five details children's construction of counter narratives about the majority Khmer. Chapter six illustrates how children seek to act out challenge narratives about the Vietnamese by demonstrating behaviours of community servitude. In doing so they hope to present the best of Vietnamese from below.

2.4.2 *Belonging from Below*

Belonging from below refers to the inherited historical socio-cultural beliefs and practices that shape group identity. Whilst these identities are not fixed, they are usually identifiable. Within the context of this research dominant ideals of belonging from below refer to the elements of culture seen worthy of preservation and participation by a community, precisely because they affirm group identity. These include, language, festivals, ethnicity, religious affiliation, the moral framework of the community, and commitment to the family. Belonging from below is identifiable through various forms of Butler's 'performativity' (1990), that is, specific repetitive practices relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behaviour (Yuval-Davis 2006).

Chapter six shows how some elements of children's belonging from below are institutionalised, albeit informally, by the God School. For instance, the school's curriculum being delivered in Vietnamese, children's freedom to publicly speak Vietnamese, and observe important Vietnamese festivals such as *Tết*. Attending the God School daily, and having these parts of belonging from below affirmed, children gained new forms of legitimacy and recognition. From above children are invisible by law, yet at the school they are present, seen and celebrated. Attending the God School validates the existence of children by legitimising their use of time and recognising their achievements. The act of going to school, responding to the registers call, wearing laminated name tags and engaging in education on a daily basis represents what De Certeau (1984) expressed as the everyday ritualized use of space as a way of overcoming alienation and cultivating a sense of place belonging (Fenster and Vizek 2006, Leach 2002).

Other elements of belonging from below observable in the community are abstaining from so called 'social evils' and 'good' behaviour. These relate to avoiding gambling, swearing, fighting and honouring one's parents. These aspects of belonging from below are affirmed and promoted by the school. Chapter six demonstrates how children seek to

show how their group identity, especially belonging to the Vietnamese community is a positive thing. Despite being framed as God's laws the teacher's teaching of Christian values resonate as attributes of Vietnamese-ness which children then publicly perform as a way to subvert negative stereotypes from above. By being 'good' children hope to challenge discourse that frames the Vietnamese as 'untrustworthy', 'thieves' and generally ill behaved.

The God School then is a space where, to a certain extent, children can 'be' Vietnamese. From above children are excluded and represented as 'other' (Barth 1969), yet, in the God School children and their communities are accepted and elements of belonging from below acknowledged and practised. Consequently, children find a space where they can embrace an ethno-religious identity that allows them to subvert negative discourses from above by performing the best of belonging from below. These observations reveal how meaning is produced in informal spaces. Nevertheless, a critical reflection of the God School reveals the drawbacks to engaging a community in informal ways. Chapter six introduces this critical reflection.

The God School is space where two modes of belonging can be observed. Chapter six illustrates how the God School reinforced belonging from below. Yet, it is also a transnational religious nexus where children locate themselves from beside. Just as belonging from above is not an all-encompassing discourse so too do children at times seek to reject elements of belonging from below. As discussed, recognisable elements of belonging from below within the Vietnamese community are notions of morality which emphasise abstaining from social evils, and honouring parents. Whilst belonging from below refers to inherited socio-cultural beliefs and practices these elements of belonging can be, and are, rejected by children who find them restrictive or frightening. Ancestor veneration and the Buddhist practices of going to the temple, offering foods and other material goods to appease dead relatives are specific examples of belonging from below that children explained they rejected. The God School throughout the fieldwork period was a space where it was observable that children were exposed to new modes of thinking referred to as outside possibilities. These possibilities are specific to the practice of and joining a new religious community. Religion as experienced from below is different to religion from beside as religion from below is something inherited. Dominant religious practice in the community did not assert an evangelical notion of God. Yet, from beside the idea of an omnipresent God who did not require offerings was introduced. By locating

themselves from beside, elements of children's belonging from below are interrupted. Chapter seven provides a discussion on children's appropriation of Christianity as a way to locate themselves from beside.

2.4.3 *Belonging from Beside*

Belonging from beside is defined as the ways that individuals locate themselves within new 'outside' possibilities. They are 'outside' in the sense they are brought into the community by foreign missionaries from around the globe, and in the sense that they are new and do not correspond to belonging from above or below. As emplaced subjects the children of this study are influenced by the mobility of others. This is most observable within the transnational religious space of the God School. In the context of globalisation diversity has become more ordinary and the questions "who am I?" and "to what do I belong" may have multiple answers. The answers to these questions are often left to the individual to decide (Bauman 2000). Possibilities must however be made available. Research has shown how a religious community can represent a space the 'undocumented' can gain a sense of belonging in light of their 'liminal', or ambiguous legal status (Kemp and Raijman 2003, Menjivar 2006).

Religious identity in anthropology has often been a discussion about ways of approaching 'difference' (Werbner 2010). Early anthropological discussions on religious identity conflated religion as identity (Durkheim 2001), or religious conversion as something that assists in the emergence of economic or political resistance among the poor (Mosse 2016). These readings of religious identity resonate. Chapter seven demonstrates how children's appropriation of Christianity enables them to engage in an otherwise fractured politics of belonging through prayer. Furthermore, children reposition themselves as having power over the Khmer by praying for them. Yet, to understand the affective forms of belonging and how children try to make for a peaceful present, one must look intently at the ways children reproduce the social world around them. This is a challenging endeavour for a researcher, especially if it involves children's appropriation of an outside religion that reconfigures elements of belonging from below. Whilst children may assert their agency in conversion for instance, one must consider the power relations at play in the process of adopting one worldview over another.

The focus of religious identity and belonging within the thesis is on the intra-subjective experience of conversion and how that influenced the construction of identity and the

experience and practice of belonging. As in Nathaniel Roberts (2016) work, Christian conversion meant different things at different times. It did not bring with it entirely new forms of morality or identity but rather aligned with localised ideas of what it meant to be ‘good’. Following Roberts’ critique that anthropological approaches to religion, identity and conversion need to change if the significance of Christianity is to be properly understood and not bound to a difficult ‘culturalised’ idea of religion, one must move away from the simple conflation of religion with identity. Ania Loomba asks the question “how do people ‘inhabit’ the condition of being rejected?” (2016: 454). This question is asked in reference to Roberts work but again reverberates in the analysis of religious conversion for this study.

Taken as a horizontal view, that is to experience new forms of belonging typically characterised as coming from a different geographical location, we can understand how in belonging from beside noncitizen children make for a peaceful present - a better here and now. Moving beyond the relationship of an individual and the State, what comes into focus is how interrelated, interdependent relationships between people within communities generate belonging felt as home. Religion might be something imposed from above as an institution of belonging, or it might be inherited from below providing cultural guidelines on morality, and religious practice, but it can also be a catalyst through which individuals form new belongings from beside. These new belongings can eradicate certain fears imposed from above, or below, and in turn enable a strong sense of place belongingness in the here and now. Belonging from beside in this thesis explores how children through interpersonal relationships and faith, resolved fears associated with belonging from above and below. These include fears of kidnapping for organ trafficking, the supernatural, horror films and spirit possession.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the literature pertaining to statelessness, citizenship and belonging. Undoing the bounded idea of what makes a citizen has allowed for an opening into the examination of different forms of belonging. It has been suggested that despite wanting to move on from a discussion of the individual’s relationship with the State, even heterodox uses of the citizenship concept (which decouple citizenship from the State) draw their judgement from linkage with the state that reinforces the citizen–non-citizen binary. The debate between more state-centred theories of citizenship and ‘post-national’ theories does, however, evidence the messiness of contemporary

membership, particularly how the boundaries which at times can seem fixed can also be fluid. There is some debate regarding whether being a citizen always affords a person rights, or if noncitizen children can gain meaningful membership and opportunities within their communities. Despite the progress made in the debate around citizenship, there is certainly an absence in the literature of the experiences of belonging among noncitizen children. This is what this thesis seeks to address by combining Yuval-Davis' (2011, 2006) 'politics of belonging' and Antonsich's suggested analysis of 'place belonging' (2010). To add structure to this combination this thesis explores belonging from three levels above, below and beside. Consequently, the pluralistic and temporal dimensions of belonging are examined.

Chapter 3 **Researching identity and belonging among noncitizen children**

3.1 **Introduction**

The research conducted for this thesis concerns itself with understanding how children who do not ‘belong’ formally to Cambodia as citizens, experience and practise identity and belonging. From the beginning of the research it became apparent, after breaking down a drafted research question into its component parts, that multiple levels of investigation would need to take place. Thus, the literature review sought to understand the context in which the population under study are located. This called for reading across disciplines, focusing on history, political science, legal and policy frameworks that could help my understanding of the situation of the Vietnamese living in Cambodia. In critical realist vocabulary, the literature review provides an idea of the *potential* mechanisms active in the empirical domain. Having a background in anthropology, I was committed to an ethnographic approach that considered interactions between people in communities, the construction of signifiers of group identity and children’s hybrid identities. Given the importance of space and place and the embodiment of experiences in understanding any community, I drew on concepts from human geography that emphasise, in particular, the spatial dimensions of belonging and identity. Before, in and after fieldwork the choice between investigating a positivist reality that could only be ‘known’ if labelled (for instance feeling pressured to either define the children as *de jure* stateless, ‘non-citizens’ or not) and subjectively constructed meanings, frustrated what appeared to be a more complex and layered observed and objective reality. I wanted to move beyond the dichotomy of subjectivism and objectivism and critical realism enabled me to do that.

First, I will discuss the use of critical realist ethnography. Ethnography was a central feature of the research design. If ethnography is to be fully effective it ought to be applied not simply as a method of data collection but instead as an anthropological practice of connecting rich observed accounts of social phenomena to layers of context and social structure (Watson 2012), so that social phenomena can be explained and not merely described (Rees and Gatenby 2014). Therefore, to understand children’s identity and belonging I needed to understand the macro discursive and structural frameworks that children were located within, the web of cultural meanings at a local level, and children’s agency and responses to these processes on an everyday basis. Critical realism as an

ontological and epistemological way of viewing and understanding the world served this purpose.

Second, researching identity via a critical realist ‘depth’ ontology provided a convincing alternative to the dominant, but polarised positions in the study of identity – social constructionism and social identity theory – which have limitations because of ontological weaknesses. The second section of this chapter will highlight these limitations and illustrate critical realism’s ability to address them.

Third, this chapter will discuss the methodological choices that underpinned data collection and analysis, paying attention to the process of undertaking ethically responsible, reflexive research with children and the selection of ‘child-friendly’ methods.

3.2 Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

3.2.1 Critical Realist Ethnography

Ethnography in its earliest format very much situated the ethnographer’s authorial position - as scientific fact, with no reflection on their philosophical beliefs they were the all-seeing, all-knowing observer.¹⁶ This was problematic and gave the anthropologist’s voice great power in texts, leading to the subjugation of the voices of those studied. Since then there have been great and lengthy debates about the nature of knowledge acquisition (Geertz 1973, Clifford and Marcus 1986). Overall, the pendulum has swung from introducing and reifying the subjective ‘phenomenological’ experience, to what has been referred to as the ‘postmodern turn’. In summary, phenomenology is a diverse methodological approach (Čargonja 2013), developed over a number of years by authors who have emphasised and developed concepts to assist our understanding of the (inter)subjective (Desjarlais and Throop 2011).¹⁷ Despite the differences in application, phenomenology is unified in its interest in how interactions among people create a socially constructed reality, and how interactions are given meaning through the use and

¹⁶ Early anthropological texts like Malinowski’s detailed study of New Guinea, published as *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) being exemplary of this.

¹⁷ The study of what Alfred Schutz (1974) called ‘life-world’, encouraged ethnographers to uncover the subjective interpretations of individuals without considering the casual effects of the wider social world upon subjectivities (Porter 2002).

interpretations of symbols. Crucially, the ethnographer can make claims about the subjectivities they study, on the admission that these claims are acknowledged to be made through intersubjective engagements with participants (Crapanzano 1992, Desjarlais 2003). The shortfall in a phenomenological account is the lack of attention paid to the contributing effects of the wider social world on subjectivities (Porter 2002). For instance, structures such as ethnicity, gender and class have instrumental powers over such things as resource allocation, punishing and privileging people in ways they do not alone control (Smith and Elger 2014).

Another direction that ethnography has taken, primarily in response to the abovementioned problems of the traditional anthropological texts, is the postmodernist philosophy of science. The 'postmodern turn' has taken the ethnographer from asserting the validity of their authorial position without question, to one in which their ethnographies are no more than the creations of their authors (Gaines 1995). Postmodernism posits caution about assuming that one interpretation of the social world can claim epistemological superiority over another (Rees and Gatenby 2014). Simply put, there is no room for truth claims, that is producing universally valid knowledge (Spiro 2009). This is a helpful warning against falling into the trap of the intellectual tyranny of meta-narratives, or ignorance of the authority of the authorial voice. Nevertheless, as Porter argues:

[t]he difficulty with such a position is that, if ethnographies are simply authorial inventions, rather than reflections, of greater or lesser accuracy, of social reality, then what is the point of ethnography? ... If absolute uncertainty and relativism are accepted, there is little else for ethnographers to say about the social world, for what they say can claim no superiority in terms of adequacy over that which anyone else says (Porter 2002: 59 as cited in Rees and Gatenby 2014: 4).

Understanding the cognitive processing of participants and uncovering their subjective interpretations is something which critical realism shares with phenomenology. Furthermore, like postmodernism, critical realism offers an 'epistemological relativism' which acknowledges that our assumed knowledge and beliefs about the nature of things are socially produced, transitive, and imperfect. Yet, whilst being 'epistemologically relativist', this does not lead to 'judgement relativism'. Whilst avoiding an over-extension about how much we can know about reality, critical realism allows for the possibility for rationally preferring one belief over another (Bhaskar 1986). Critical realism then offers a meta-theoretical paradigm for explaining the underlying 'generative mechanisms' that shape human agency and the social relations that this agency in turn reproduces and

transforms (Reed 2005). As was highlighted in the previous chapter, the experience of the Vietnamese in Cambodia is complex and multi-layered. Thus, to provide a holistic analysis that considers structural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, socio-cultural beliefs, and identity signifiers as well as individual and collective experience, a philosophical ‘middle way’ is required. Critical realism then, an ontological position which accepts that there is a reality independent of the phenomenological account, situates and interprets social phenomena in their economic, historical and social contexts.

A critical realist ethnography seeks to provide a grounded and contextualised account of how the social world works. Starting from the point of view of the subject, its objective is to explain the specific conditional manner in which a certain mix of underlying powers have been fashioned and triggered (Rees and Gatenby 2014). To put it another way, explaining observable events requires a consideration of the conditions that enabled these events (Davies 2008). As Margaret Archer describes, “observing a cherry tree in England depends on its prior importation from China, just as experiencing educational discrimination is posterior to a given definition of achievement being institutionalized” (Archer 1998: 196). Therefore, it is important to realise that social and material structures are ontologically independent and prior to human agency, and as such a socially constructed reality presupposes a non-socially constructed reality (Searle 1995). Bhaskar puts it like this:

people do not create society ... it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity ... Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But ... [neither is it] the product of it (the error of voluntarism) (Bhaskar 1986: 39 as cited in Rees and Gatenby 2014: 13).

Applied to this research project, the goals of a critical realist ethnography are primarily descriptive and explanatory (Morais 2011). The purpose is to understand the human condition and explain social relations and structure more adequately. This is done by observing empirical phenomena and looking for potential general explanation, entities, mechanisms and structures. For instance, if we take the example of a funeral, the generalised explanation might be that a funeral is a social ritual to normalise death. Then potential *entities* could be burial clothing, the deceased, mourners, songs, religious texts. *Mechanisms* could be public grieving, ritualised displays and social norms, and *structures* community institutions, religions or family (Edwards et al. 2014a). Rees and Gatenby (2014) highlight that this presents a challenge to the researcher. Not all structures and mechanisms are directly observable. Hence, a researcher may only know them by their

effects or by theoretical modelling through a process of conceptual abstraction, which critical realists call ‘retroduction’.

Retroduction contrasts with a deductive (positivist) and inductive (constructionist and postmodernist) research strategy and design. The objective is to explain – not predict, describe or deconstruct – the social. A retroductive argument “searches for connections between subjective interpretations, actual events and deeper causal explanations” (Rees and Gatenby 2014: 8). As a result, I approached children as the main informers of their experiences and came to understand their layers of reality through getting to know them well, exploring their everyday lived experiences through interviews, participant observation, and the structural world in which they lived. Regarding the latter, this meant conducting a deep historical analysis of the Vietnamese in Cambodia. I also spoke to adults, and those who work as ‘elites’ within Cambodia on the issues that impact children’s daily lives. Once the data was collected I moved beyond the domain of the actual (Crimson 2007) and drew theoretically deduced categories from existing literature, which could offer a structural context for understanding the discourses of the participants. Once I had data from the field I began the process of retroduction: identifying the grounds and conditions of the findings. To assist in the analysis of data I used NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software package that helped me code and organise interview data, and field notes thematically. See appendix 1 for an example of this.

Researching how excluded communities find ways to belong opens up a parallel discussion on identity. Belonging and identity cannot be conflated with each other yet they are very closely intertwined. Underpinning the epistemological approach of the research is the need to listen to children’s stories, their explanations of their worlds in order to ascertain why they had made the ‘identity-relevant’ choices they had. To avoid taking their stories in isolation, situating them in the broader structural, environmental and community context enabled a critical engagement with the factors that either enabled or suppressed children’s agency or access to the majority community. The next section outlines how a critical realist approach to identity assisted this endeavour.

3.2.2 *Researching Identity: a critical realist approach*

Within identity studies, there exist two dominant ontological positions: constructivism which gives importance to the constructive power of discourse and social identity theory

which explains that part of a person's concept of self comes from the groups to which that person belongs.

Constructivist accounts have done much to reveal the power relationships that maintain social categories and their associated meanings. According to Edwards et al. (2014), the reliance on an ontology that dismisses the possibility of knowledge outside the discursive realm poses three problems. Firstly, constructivist accounts depend on describing discourses, primarily via interviews with subjects. Interviews are taken at face value and the likelihood of subjects giving false information, whether purposively or not, is logically impossible within an ontology that puts terms such as truth, reality or objectivity in inverted commas. Peter Metcalf (2002) highlights that deception in his book '*they lie, we lie*': white lies or big black lies are often part of the power relations between ethnographer and informant. Second, Bhaskar (1986) argues that an explanation that is reducible only to discourse limits the theoretical potential of social constructivism in accounting for how identity is created, altered or destroyed. Thirdly, a strong discursive approach reduces all thinking about the individual to language games. This anti-humanist perspective gives no room for resistance to discourses generated by governments or organisations for instance. Consequently, the emancipatory potential of constructivism is reduced, by omitting to see identity embedded in social structures.

Conversely, social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2001) argues that people possess a personal self, and a social identity which is rooted in a collective idea of self. The latter is viewed as the dominant driver for behaviour. This separates individual behaviour from the subtleties of the social context and thus group membership comes to determine individual identity (Edwards et al. 2014, Wetherell 2010, Wetherell and Mohanty 2010). This overemphasis can miss the influence processes such as globalisation, and transnationalism have on an individual's identity (Brown and Lunt 2002), as discussed in chapter seven.

A critical realist approach to identity research allows for the conceptualisation of different levels or entities which identity may be dependent on but not reducible to, for instance memory or culture. The emphasis is placed on a stratified, emergent ontology (Edwards et al. 2014b). Emergence is important because it avoids downwards conflation that results in collapsing identity to discourse. Furthermore, if identity is just an assemblage of parts and not a distinct entity then concepts like human rights, which stateless people should be protected by, become fantasy suspended betwixt and between subject positions.

Furthermore, through the process of retroduction the divides between disciplines can be bridged, offering a broad range of conceptual tools necessary for the study of different levels of reality as is exemplified in the interdisciplinary nature of the analysis within the thesis.

Depth ontology - the notion that there are “real, generative mechanisms and structures underlying events and our ‘human’ phenomenal experience of events qua mechanisms” (Davis 2011)¹⁸ - allows identities to be researched as rooted in wider class or economic structures. In addition, critical realists distinguish between personal and social identity (Archer 2000). This is a crucial differentiation within this research, as children often displayed and discussed personal identity as something shaped by the experience of being accountable to others. Webb (2004) adds that personal identity is the consequence of cognisant thought and reflection as well as unspoken understanding. Social identity, on the other hand, is a steered position between personal identities and the ways people think they ought to be perceived in a social setting. This includes the embodiment and acting out of categories and roles engendered by social structures (Edwards et al. 2014b), as well as the performative role of identity which is a tactic to secure belonging among children, as demonstrated in chapters five and six. What is important for this discussion is the inclusion of agency as central to a conception of the social world. It is at the point of agency that the “person and social structure, and therefore, personal identity and social identity are reproduced and transformed” (Edwards et al. 2014b: 72). The inclusion of agency provides a rich and broad explanation that a solely discursive account would not. Of course, not all agency is successful as a transformative capacity, thus the interplay of agency with structural powers that might constrain potential identities is important.

In summary, a critical realist ethnographic study of identity and belonging incorporates a multilevel analysis where identity construction and group belonging are understood as an interaction between social structures, people, groups, organisations, and political and economic systems. The interactions are of particular interest.

3.3 Entry into the field, Ethics and Methodology

Research that explores the daily lived realities of identity and belonging among noncitizen children comes with particular ethical and methodological considerations – and

¹⁸ <https://crestondavis.wordpress.com/2011/05/12/structure-part-4-depth-ontology/>

challenges. Before going on to explore these, I want to spend some time discussing my entry into the field site, and in particular how I was able to select participants and form relationships with them, and work cross-culturally. As already explained in the introduction, this research was a re-entering into the field site. After spending a month in the village as part of my Master's thesis research, I already had contact with my gatekeeper Linh Anh, who agreed that I could live in the God School in order to complete the research project. Living in the school meant I did not run the risk of showing favour to any one family, or more importantly, draw any unnecessary attention to the communities under study. However, living at the school I did need to distance myself from being seen as a missionary teacher. How I did that will be discussed later in this chapter.

I slept in the school with my interpreter Kim, and Emily, Natalie, and Paul – teachers at the school. There were times when other missionaries would come and visit for short periods of time. For the first three months, we slept on bamboo mats on the classroom floor. When a Filipino missionary left, I moved into a room upstairs with Natalie. I lived in the school for a further five months and then for the final month of the research I commuted to the school. Whilst in the field, I connected with a British family who rented out a room in their home to me. In month three of the research I decided to not work on Fridays and used the room at the same family's house to rest, transcribe interviews and begin coding.

I took two months to introduce and pilot my research within the community, amongst children, parents and adult participants. During this time, I made decisions about where interviews with children would take place. To an even greater degree than with adults, when researching with children one has to consider relational proximity (Graham et al. 2015, Morrow and Richards 1996, Punch 2002). Considerations about what spaces are safe, open and free for children influenced my decision to conduct interviews in the God School. At the school, I used classrooms for visual research methods (VRM) exercises and was provided with an open room for interviews. In the villages, it was difficult to find a private space that was also open and transparent. By contrast, children were not distracted by the demands of the home or worried about the interruption of adult family members whilst at the school.

Much ethnographic research has been conducted with children in the classroom (Allerton 2014, Zeitlyn and Mand 2012, James and Christensen 2008, Christensen 2004). Given

that I was intending to live in the school and undertake my research there, I offered my skills as an English teacher on a part-time basis, reflecting an ethics of reciprocity.¹⁹ The classroom was used as space to teach, build rapport with the children, learn with them (I continued my Vietnamese language training at the school), observe their behaviour, and conduct research interviews. The time that was not spent teaching provided an opportunity to get to know adults. However, it was not until the sixth month of the research that I began to undertake interviews with them.

Even though I had received Vietnamese language training at the School of Oriental and African Studies before entering the field, I decided to employ a local interpreter, who received a weekly salary of 50\$. This was important because I was working cross-linguistically and only had a limited number of months to conduct the research. Conducting cross-language research is a complex endeavour. I had to consider the logistics and procedures to generate data, and the influence an interpreter could have on participant's answers during interviews (Kushner et al. 2011). Researchers have highlighted the need to work with an interpreter who is seen as credible, trustworthy and can enhance participant's ease and comfort during an interview (Edwards 1998, Murray and Wynne 2007). In addition, the question of whether an interpreter should follow up with probes mid interview independently, or wait for direction from the researcher (Kushner et al. 2011) are decisions that could impact the depth of information.

My interpreter Kim was known in the community as she previously taught at the God School. Given the sensitivity of the 'Vietnamese issue' in Cambodia, it felt potentially disruptive and risky to expose the community to someone they did not know or trust. Despite being a Vietnamese citizen, Kim was from an ethnic minority in Vietnam known as the *Cil* tribe. Ironically, ethnic minorities are marginalised in Vietnam by the dominant ethnic *Kinh* majority: therefore, Kim had no allegiance either to the Vietnamese or Khmer, which was a big help in avoiding ethnic bias. Kim already had strong rapport with the children which had pros and cons. A potential hindrance are the taken-for-granted assumptions shared between research participants and interpreters, which can act as blind spots limiting in depth questioning (Murray and Wynne 2007). To avoid such blinders, I trained Kim before the research began and gave her guidance on the information interview

¹⁹ Ethnography has been criticised for being extractive and benefitting the researcher more than the participant (Pink 2013). Therefore, as part of the reflexive process of carrying out this research I considered the ways I could assist.

questions aimed to elicit. I also explained how to listen out for safeguarding concerns. I gave Kim instruction to probe further without my direction unless the issue at hand was sensitive and could upset the participants. When interviewing adults, Linh Anh acted as my interpreter as she knew them very well and was respected in the community. The same considerations and principles outlined above were applied to Linh Anh.

During interviews I would speak in English which would then be translated into Vietnamese and then answers would be translated back into English. A confidentiality agreement was signed and all interviews were recorded. Interviews were transcribed in the field, and with resources from Coventry University I employed a Vietnamese editor in London to check transcriptions for accuracy, and to assist in my judgement about Kim's influence on the research. This proved a worthwhile endeavour as the transcriber commented on the naturalness and correctness of Kim's translation. All transcribed interviews were edited on return from the field. Having the data edited was helpful to draw out any nuances and inaccuracies that only a native Vietnamese speaker would identify. A confidentiality agreement was signed for this role and participant's real names were not included in the transcripts.

3.3.1 Participants

Over the course of the research I conducted 144 semi-structured interviews with 39 children aged between 6-17 years old. Whilst I counted 92 children in the school, it would have been a challenge to build in-depth relationships with them all, especially as the number fluctuated. Therefore, I made a choice regarding who it would be most viable to work with for the sake of time. The children I interviewed were the most consistent school attendees, which granted me the opportunity to get to know them very well and see the research journey through with them from inception to completion. In addition, the children represented the different demographics within the community. A detailed breakdown of the demographics of all interviewed participants is given in appendices 3 and 8. Towards the end of the research two children who participated in interviews withdrew their consent. Therefore, out of the 37 children who participated in semi-structured interviews, and consented for me to use their data, there were 13 boys and 24 girls.

Age Group	# Child Interviewees
6-8	4
9-11	6
12-14	16
15-17	11

Language	Child Interviewees' First Language
Cambodian	10
Vietnamese	23
Both	
Unassigned	4

Country of birth	# Child Interviewees	Father's Birth	Mother's Birth
Cambodia	29	9	21
Vietnam	8	17	8
Khmer Krom		1	
Unassigned		10	8

Table 1- Interviewed children's age, first language, country of birth

Whilst I could thus have used 37 participants' interview data, only 25 participants are directly referenced in the text due to the limitation of space. However, interview excerpts included provide a rounded and balanced discussion of identity and belonging as told by children. Any further data was omitted from the thesis text to avoid repeating sentiments already made. Interviews were only one part of the research. I built relationships with interviewees and other participants/community members by hanging out with them, eating meals and having conversations about daily life. I observed the rhythms of village life, and went on excursions into the capital city with older participants on a couple of occasions.

I was able to get to know and interview nine caregivers/parents out of the 37 interviewed children, who consented to be part of the research. In total I interviewed twelve adults, eight of whom are directly quoted in the thesis. The reason for selecting these excerpts is because they are illustrative of the themes raised throughout the group. A demographic breakdown of interviewed adults is provided in appendix 4.

I also interviewed four teachers, including the principal Linh Anh. Table one lists the participants as they appear in each chapter.

List of participants per chapter				
Chapter 1	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 6	Chapter 7
Linh Anh (school principal)	Julie	Bao (father of Quoc)	Lucy	Zara Yellow
	Tim	Quoc	Tiffany	Sara Hien
	Gu	Joy (mother of Lucy)	Ngot	Sreya Kevin
		Hoa (mother of Tiffany)	Kevin	Sophia Kirsty
		Hoa's sister	Trang	Peter Tiffany
		Nhi's Father	Emma	Minh
		Chanthou (Mary and Hien's mother)	Natalie (teacher)	Hoa Patrick
		Bopha (Trang's mother)	Paul (teacher)	Sophie
		Violet (Patrick, Xuy's mother)	Emily (teacher)	David Olivia
		Ly (Zara and Olivia's paternal grandmother)		May

Table 2 list of participants per chapter

3.3.2 Stakeholder interviews

I also conducted six stakeholder interviews with representatives from three INGOs: Unicef, UNHCR, and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), two representatives from local NGO Minority Rights Organisation (MIRO), and one representative from the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), in addition to attending a meeting hosted by the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) on the issues of statelessness in Cambodia. Discussing the situation of the Vietnamese in Cambodia with these stakeholders was very helpful, as approaching the government directly to discuss such issues would have been challenging, and may have raised unnecessary attention to

the communities I worked with. Therefore, to understand the official discourse on statelessness, nationality laws and the impact of the 2014 census and registration process described in chapter four, these interviews proved invaluable.

3.3.3 Undertaking Responsible, Reflexive Research with Children

It is important to recognise that the positionality of the researcher impacts research. Moreover, research with children involves ethical risks and reflexivity is a strategy to become aware of and address them. Reflexivity has its origins in critical theory, since to be reflexive hypothetically enables access to inherent and often firmly embedded cultural, social, political and personal attitudes, values, beliefs and assumptions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Schwandt 2006). Reflexivity has two main objectives. The first is to not only reflect on how one might respond responsibly in an encounter with research participants, but to acknowledge that one's beliefs, values, and position in the world will impact knowledge production. Therefore, to be reflexive entails decentring and disrupting belief systems and practices (Schwandt 2006). The second is that reflexivity, when provoked, improves ethical practice in any research, but particularly with research involving children (Powell, et al. 2016). To undertake accountable research, I critically reflected on the influence the research could have on participants and their communities, and on myself. In thinking through the ethical issues and challenges inherent in my research, I made important decisions about how I would participate in the world of my informants.

As a white, married western woman, my presence in the villages was always noticed. However, over time the attention drawn to me whilst eating breakfast on the street or sitting in a person's home seemed to decline. Unlike my interactions with younger participants which were mostly free and easy, interactions with adults – unexpectedly - forced anxieties that over time I realised were rooted in my identity as a middle-class academic researcher. Despite the relative wealth I have compared to the participants, my position growing up on a council estate in the United Kingdom and the marginalisation that came with that, has left me feeling like an outsider in many academic contexts. When I entered the field as a researcher, I was so nervous to act correctly that I forgot that my greatest skill in participant observation, which requires building rapport quickly, was to be myself.

Turning up uninvited to someone's house is something I was used to growing up on the estate where doors were left unlocked. The concept of open living, and expecting anyone to pop in unannounced, was the norm. Since moving to London to go to university I have made a significant cultural shift. Becoming educated and living amongst and around predominantly middle class communities, I have appropriated both social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977) to manoeuvre various social fields, different to my childhood habitus. I have become used to the diarised appointment culture where asking personal questions, especially of people you have never met before, is considered nosy or impolite. For example, in the beginning phase of interviewing adults I was more structured in my approach. I tried to organise a time to pop by, and without articulating it, I wanted the interview to be a private matter to protect my informants. I did not want outsiders to hear what could potentially be personal accounts of participants' lives. This anxiety was quickly dissolved when I realised I did not need to be so concerned. I was quickly able to detach myself from the boundaries I thought were 'ethically' appropriate and relax into something which, to me, felt more 'normal'. Often, I would start an interview with someone in their house and another adult would turn up unannounced, casually come and sit with us - without asking if it's ok - and listen to our conversation. It felt so familiar and once I clocked the cultural acceptance of this sort of interaction I reactivated my habitus (ibid), spoke openly and freely, often building rapport with common shared experiences of life and culture.

Despite feeling at times that I was blending in, every now and then I would have abrupt reminders of my status as a well-off outsider. When talking with Lucy's mother towards the end of the fieldwork period we were comparing family values, in particular the role of a grandmother in raising children. After some time, she asked "can you get my Lucy a western husband?" I joked it off explaining it took ages to find myself a bloke. Yet, I knew that I could be, and probably was seen, as an opportunity for villagers to connect with a western lifestyle. This incident only happened once however, and I was never asked for money. This example and the instances described below do highlight necessary reflections on being an insider/outsider (Ferber 2006), as research, a teacher, and as a Christian.

3.3.4 'Least Teacher' Role²⁰

As a researcher who also taught voluntarily, I had to be reflexive regarding my positionality as a teacher. The Vietnamese pronoun with which children addressed me was 'cô', meaning 'miss', as in teacher, or a respected elder in the social hierarchy. Teaching English to students at the school meant I was considered a member of staff, so culturally it was appropriate for me to address participants as 'con', meaning child. This meant I could not use more informal, less hierarchical pronouns when having day-to-day conversations inside the classroom, despite trying to shake off the linguistically constructed relationship. Incidentally, adults in the community would also refer to me as 'cô' which acknowledged my time spent teaching. Being a teacher was helpful when introducing myself to adults in the community. I could talk to them about their child's progress in learning English as well as the research.

One way to break down the formalised relationship was to share my own personal life experiences during conversations and interviews. This disrupted the dynamic of teacher and student. Furthermore, I did not wear the official uniform for teachers, and did not always challenge what might be 'inappropriate' behaviour in the classroom, taking the opportunity instead to explore young people's experiences. For instance, in one class a student teased another by accusing her of being on drugs, due to her lethargic behaviour. This kind of joke would have been seen as disruptive and potentially immoral and therefore lead to a reprimand from other teachers. Instead, after verifying that the person being teased was not upset or hurt by the teasing, but instead found it funny, I probed with some non-judgmental questions. This way, I was able to learn about the prevalence of drugs within that community, the young people's opinions on drug taking and their level of experimentation.

Despite my attempts of taking on what might be considered a 'least teacher' role, I still had to discipline students. The most 'severe' disciplinary action I took was to make a boy write lines. On the occasion I handed out lines as punishment the participant did stop speaking to me for two days, to then return to the project. Thankfully, I was able to explain my rationale for discipline, and most students accepted this. The most basic discipline in the school included sweeping the classroom floor (which would be done anyway) and

²⁰ Paragraphs in section 3.3.4 were used in a chapter I authored on researching childhood statelessness, see Rumsby (2017).

missing five minutes of break time. Ensuring there were ‘no hard feelings’ was a crucial element, which I learnt to negotiate. On these occasions I worried that it might affect my relationships with the children. This highlights another reality of conducting research in general with research participants – they may not actually like you. Just like a playground situation where children can form cliques and alliances, often I was aware that my behaviour, especially when disciplining, could have produced exclusion.

3.3.5 *Decentring and Disrupting Belief Systems*

During the pilot study conducted in the community, it became apparent that a large percentage of young people in the community professed to be Christians. As I am a Christian, and a Christian school would be the main site where my research would take place, I considered to what extent I would practise my faith publicly and the implications this could have on research participants.

As a Christian school, there were set routines throughout the day which involved the practice of prayer. For example, there were prayers and songs of devotion for teachers each morning before the school day began, and then morning and afternoon devotions for students. In addition, teachers prayed and also encouraged students to pray before lessons. As a participant observer I decided to decentre my faith by drawing the following boundaries. First of all, although Christian religious education was part of the curriculum, I did not teach that module. I chose not to initiate Christian practices with young people who did not profess to be Christians. I did not, except for a few occasions, pray before the beginning of lessons. On the occasions I did, it happened when students requested “let’s pray miss”, or if they were particularly energetic it provided a moment of calm before a lesson. Prayers would be simple and contain thanks for the lesson, friends and family. I engaged in Christian prayer with some participants to understand their reality, much like I played games with students when invited.

I attended the pre-school prayer meetings as was expected of all teachers. The reason I chose to engage in the pre-school prayers was to understand the motivations of the teachers themselves, and understand to what extent proselytisation was intended. Furthermore, these times offered a chance to know Christian terms in the Vietnamese language. Village visits would also be planned in the morning meeting, which enabled me to make time to go with the teachers. This provided a good entry point into the villages, where I could introduce myself and the research.

As researchers we face limits as we enter into social contexts that are different to our dominant reality. Language, climate, culture, wealth, and age distinguished me as someone apart from my participants. Yet, there will be occasions when a researcher shares a social location with participants. These commonalities are not void of power dynamics (Kee et al. 2003), yet, researchers partitioning themselves into separate persons (Green and Haraway 1992) discourages empathy which can be a great tool in ethnographic research (Mccutcheon 2003). Accordingly, whilst I posed limits on myself in terms of how I practised my faith, I also saw the commonalities as positive and was able to understand and participate in activities that perhaps a researcher without a Christian faith might not have. There are benefits to researching in a context where Christianity is prevalent. It meant that I understood the terminology being used when listening to prayer or taking notes of the lessons students received. I did however have to be extra vigilant to not infer meaning when I came across familiar concepts. For example, when participants would talk about God in interviews, I would ask them to explain which or what god. Or if they mentioned the gospel I would ask them what is the ‘gospel’. Disrupting my belief system assisted a critical reflection and analysis of the influence of other teachers, who overtly proselytised their faith to the children (albeit in a non-threatening or forceful way).

3.3.6 *Ethical Considerations*²¹

There is an inherent understanding that ethical considerations need to take place reflexively when researching with children (Morrow and Richards 2007). ‘Situated ethics’ (Ebrahim 2010), often associated with working with children, and the social-relational dilemmas and power dynamics between adult and child, are usual avenues for debate, as detailed in the previous section. This section will explore encounters that raised ethical dilemmas for me in the field.

A common ethical mistake is confusing what ought to be a robust process of protecting children from harm with ignorance about researching with children and their ability to talk about traumatic instances with profound resolve. For instance, I spent much time preparing to be reflexive throughout the research process and not to unhelpfully raise issues that could cause a participant to become upset. However, in hindsight I had instead

²¹ Paragraphs in section 3.3.6 were used in a chapter I authored on researching childhood statelessness, see Rumsby (2017).

needed to prepare *myself* mentally for listening to children's intimate accounts of their lives, often out of the blue and without having built any prior rapport. An example of this happened whilst completing an exercise exploring concepts of time and history, participants drew a timeline of their lives from being born to the present day. Afterwards I proceeded to ask a participant what they wrote as their earliest memory on their timeline:

Charlie: You've started the timeline when you were 7, what happened when you were 7?

Gu: When I was 7 years old my younger sister fell into the water and died.

Charlie: Oh I am sorry to hear that. How old was she?

Gu: 3 years old.

Charlie: Was she on her own when she fell or was someone else there?

Gu: That time I stay at home to do to the housework, I brought for her the life jacket but she took it off.

Charlie: Is this your first memory?

Gu: Yes.

Charlie: What happened in your life from 0-7?

Gu: Nothing happened in my life until I am 7 years old. Then my sister died.

During the interview I asked the participant if she wanted to discuss her sister's tragic death, she did. I felt grieved as she told me her story but found I was able to continue with the interview in the moment. This shocking story was one of many I heard about the vulnerability that living on the river creates. Living in the community and continuing with the research after learning of this unfortunate death, I did not feel the full impact of this story on my own mental wellbeing until I had space to reflect, on my days off during fieldwork, with my supervisory team. Being confronted with the reality and pain of participants is something that we must be prepared to talk about as researchers. Having people to talk to and process emotional encounters was essential for me to complete the research process. Suffice to say, living in a community for nine months one cannot be present without forming meaningful bonds with those we research. I was careful to not become overly attached to any children I worked with, although their stories and life experiences meant it was very easy to have what at times felt like mature conversations.

To treat children with the right to be researched also entailed respecting them as individuals who entrusted to me some of their most personal accounts. In turn I too shared with them my own life experiences, even the painful and most difficult as appropriate. When I exited the research, I prepared participants two months in advance, sharing with them the research timetable. On finally exiting, I was expecting a very emotional departure. This did not take place. As someone who had already entered the lives of the community twice this felt like a very normal goodbye. In fact, it was brief and not sensational at all. Reflecting on this I experienced sadness - maybe I wanted a song, a dance? The nine months for me had been enjoyable with many highs but also many lows. The heat, food and distance from friends and family at some points were very difficult. Reflecting on my feelings I came to a realisation that these young people often have teachers, and family members, come in and out of their lives - just as I did. Therefore, they were able to dictate the tone of departure. I am someone who has come and now has gone. They too have boundaries and undoubtedly considered my exit from the start.

3.3.7 *Consent*

The objectives of this research were discussed at length with the gatekeeper and principal of the God School: Linh Anh, and with participants prior to the research. Verbal, informed consent was sought from all participants and caregivers. Consent was verbal in order to conceal identity and participation information sheets were read (in an explanatory way) to participants in age appropriate ways, in Vietnamese, to ascertain a thorough understanding. The participant information sheet indicated that people could decide to stop participating at any time, and could withdraw their data. I saw consent as an ongoing aspect of this project, and as I got to know adults, children and caregivers, I paid close attention to their behaviour in order to assess their continued consent to specific activities and longer-term participation. As ethnography relies on getting to know people well, I constantly tried to give participants space and time to raise any problems. Indeed, one of the great strengths of long-term participant observation is that informants are able to ask questions about the project over a longer period of time as they themselves see the research evolving (Allerton 2016). I regularly explained in detail how what was shared would be used, and asked each participant if they would like to continue with the research after each interview. This consent also included gaining copyright permission for all creative outputs. The ongoing consent procedure proved important as two participants did withdraw from the research: one in the early stages and an additional participant in the exit meeting. As part of the consent process I discussed with participants the use of

pseudonyms to conceal their identity. Children decided to choose their own pseudonyms and some took the opportunity to adopt Western names.

During interviews it was imperative to look out for signs that a participant might not want to participate. This required reading the situation sensitively, not presuming that children who were not so confident simply did not want to participate. Yet it was also obvious that when a participant did not wish to explain their drawings or seemed overly reserved, maybe they did not wish to engage. In this instance, I would reassure them that I appreciated the time they took to draw or produce a creative output, and if they wanted to continue to talk about it then we could, but equally if they had changed their mind about participating then we could end the interview. This scenario happened with one participant. I asked him if he wished to stop the interview: he said he did so I thanked him and explained that if he wanted to talk some more, we could. The withdrawal of a participant from the research did not bring an end to the relationship. I would see these children at school every day and at times teach them. In this case, I continued to work with the participant's brother and sister.

Before I left the field at the end of the research, I provided participants with an opportunity to review the emerging research results. This was undertaken in a focus group. Not all participants were involved: only 70% could make it. The final focus group took place on the last day of term. Over iced Coca-Cola drinks and snacks I broadly outlined the findings of the project. Children wanted to discuss the title of the thesis and again I offered an opportunity to withdraw consent. One participant did so. He decided that he did not want his data to be published, because he was concerned that others would read and know his stories. I explained that strict anonymity would be adhered to, but to my disappointment it was not enough to convince him. Although it was a real shame because his data was so rich, one positive thing about his withdrawal was that it showed that participants had the confidence to not just go on with the research to please me. To publicly withdraw like this showed that the normal cultural practice of saving face, i.e. not to make a scene or disagree with an adult in public, was not so important. I took this as a sign of the trust I had managed to build.

As David et al. (2005) remind us, reflexivity in the context of research involving children challenges assumptions and beliefs about childhood, and about the role and place of children in society. Children's participation and protection are often seen as contrasting or polemical considerations in research. The process of going through and complying

with institutional ethics procedures can, as Allen (2009) asserts, lead to researchers experiencing an uncomfortable paradox between protecting participants but also prioritising the agency and competency of children. However, in a bid to escape polarising the participation and protection debate, Ennew (2002) as well as Alderson and Morrow (2011), point towards the validity in drawing from the rights laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC) to argue for children’s “right to be properly researched” (Powell et al. 2016: 202). Children’s human rights and dignity are thus to be respected and their participation and protection viewed as such that the “competence, dependence and vulnerability of children, do not, in themselves, determine their inclusion or exclusion from research so much as inform the way in which their participation takes place” (ibid).

3.3.8 ‘Child-friendly’ Methods²²

In line with the paradigmatic shift in the anthropological study of children, I entered the research with a commitment to taking children’s agency and voice seriously. This epistemological position shifted the focus from research *on* children to research *with* children (Levine and New 2008). Children therefore must be involved, where possible, in research design and practice. In anthropology and sociology there has been a long debate on issues related to ‘child-friendly’ research and what methodological approach and methods can best capture children’s experiences (Punch 2002). Much literature discusses whether using different methods for children and adults is appropriate (Zeitlyn and Mand 2012, Christensen and James 2008, Allerton 2014). Pia Christensen (2004) has helpfully advocated the importance of seeing children primarily as fellow human beings who, in principle, are not different from adults. In particular she asserts that understanding the ways that children engage with and respond to research includes considering two key questions: “are the practices employed in the research process in line with and reflective of children’s experiences, interests, values and everyday routines; and what are the ways in which children routinely express and represent these in their everyday life?” (2004: 166).

In response to Christiansen’s latter question, I decided to conduct the research in the school setting. This was because going to school was a part of the participants’ everyday

²² Paragraphs in section 3.3.8 were used in a chapter I authored on researching childhood statelessness, see Rumsby (2017).

routine. The school was also a safe space where participants felt comfortable. In the villages, there was not the same level of privacy and most children had to help their parents when at home. I did conduct interviews in the villages with adult participants but to hang out exclusively with children in the village would have been judged as unusual.

To address Christensen's other questions, my research design had two important cornerstones. First, the research was grounded in the idea that children are agents in their own right. They ought to be listened to and taken seriously. As people who experience their world directly, they are the best people to explain that experience – not adults. Second, the research agenda ought to be devised with participants and not be undertaken without their consent and input into the formulation of the research questions. In the context of the research undertaken for this thesis, I pitched the research idea to around 70 children, explained my interests, and asked them whether they thought the research project was worthwhile, getting feedback on what they considered the important issues present in their lives. If research is going to be participatory - and participant's voices really do matter – I had to prepare myself for the possibility that participants might not think the project was worthwhile and therefore would not want to participate. Thankfully the response was positive and the research was seen as a way for children to speak to the world. In the words one informant: “we can share our lives with people who have the same problems.” Evidently, as an outsider and an adult one has to reflect on whether children would seriously question my ‘authority’ or ‘expertise’. The children I encountered were actively engaged in debate about what was worthy of being researched and after concluding to go ahead children got to decide whether they wanted to be involved afterwards. Some children chose not be engaged from the outset.

Using VRM encouraged the active participation of participants, as it was their creative outputs that would lead discussions. My role was to follow their lead and listen with attentiveness, directing the conversation when necessary. Shyness was a factor I encountered among a few participants and creative methods helped with this too, as there was something to talk about from the outset. Some participants were not confident drawers and would prefer to write, whilst younger participants in the 6-10 age range participated more actively in groups.

3.3.9 *Participatory Research Methods*

Through a series of manuals and practical guides, Robert Chambers attempted to build a more concise methodology to participatory research: ‘Participatory Rural Appraisal’ (Chambers 1994). Chamber’s study of participatory rural development asked the question of *who* really counts when it comes to development. Participation in the words of Chambers is when “those who are powerful have to step down, sit, listen and learn from and empower those who are weak and last” (Chambers 1997: 3). For Chambers, through ‘passing the stick’ of authority to those on the ground we attain better results (the supposition being that those on the ground know best). This ‘moralistic’, free, person-centred rhetoric criticised a top down approach and encouraged people to get involved in their *own* development. The techniques that are described here can be traced back to participatory approaches used in development research (Chambers 1994). Whilst the research that was conducted was not explicitly ‘development’ research, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the critique of participatory research methods.

The recent era of development practice has thrown around words like ‘participation’, ‘social capital’ and ‘empowerment’ arbitrarily. Rahnema (1992) asserts that participation is almost automatically associated with positive connotations: it rarely comes to mind that the act of partaking may apply to malevolent purposes. Questions of who holds the power to empower, whether it is, in reality, possible to simply ‘hand over’ power as is often suggested, and for what purpose and for whose benefit, have rightly littered development literature. Cooke and Kothari (2001) advanced the discussion of participation beyond a criticism of technical limitations of the method and/or the workings of the practitioner. Instead, they question the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes and how the language of empowerment masks a real concern for managerial effectiveness.

The criticisms discussed raise issues that were considered continually through the research process. However, given the illiteracy within the community, and language barriers, these techniques were useful because they do not rely heavily on reading or writing skills and place greater emphasis on the power of the visual (O’Kane 2008). Furthermore, although the ‘rapid’ use of participatory research methods in development research could be argued to be its greatest weakness, I was fully present in the community for nine months and had already established contact at an earlier stage for my MA research. The length of the research timeframe and the variety of methods used for this

project mitigated the risks discussed of a participatory approach. Moreover, the participatory approach utilised was combined with VRM. VRM helps in offering a medium of communicating other than talking. What is more, VRM offered an opportunity to comment on the process of producing an image as well as the image itself. In getting participants to produce their own work they in turn got to direct the content of the discussion and explain their own interpretations of their reality to the interviewer (O’Kane 2008).

3.3.10 Using Participatory Research Methods with Children

The use of participatory approaches by researchers in an international context indicates how these methods can be adapted in a variety of situations, enabling greater exploration of the cultural contexts which structure children’s lives (Hart and Tyrer 2006). With an emphasis on enabling conversation about people’s own reality, participatory techniques assist in giving people greater power in defining their own situation and ideas (O’Kane 2008). Whilst participatory research methods have mainly been used with adults in rural contexts (Chambers 1994), Niewenhuys (1996: 54–55) found that the “preferred activities of children such as games, storytelling and drawing may be more effective in bringing out the complexities of their experience than methods and techniques used by/with adults.” Additionally, in an Action Aid research project in Nepal, it was found that drawings:

allowed children the freedom to express views, imagination, and interpretation of the surrounding world in their own terms. Moreover the adult-child power imbalance was relatively reduced by giving full control to the child: this in turn enhanced their confidence (Sapkota and Sharma 1996: 61 as cited in O’Kane 2008: 132).

Veale (2005) describes how drawing is one “method of creating a methodological frame that children could fill with their own meaning”. To enable children to explain their drawings, Punch (2002) suggests that rather than ask children “what have you drawn” it would be more revealing to ask them to explain “what their drawing meant to them and why they decided to draw those images” (as cited in O’Kane 2008: 130). Furthermore, the use of participatory methods breaks down the idea that children involved are a homogenous group. When children of the same age for instance do the same task, the difference in results and approach to the process itself reveals much about how children of the same age experience life differently (James and Christensen 2008).

In preparation for this research, Amanda Berlan's (2009) work on child labour in cocoa production in Ghana has been useful. Drawings produced by children in Berlan's (2009) work enabled children to discuss how they experienced living in the bush and working on cocoa plantations. The accounts of children elicited from their drawings contrasted to the dominant opinion of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) about the purpose and use of machetes. Seen by ILO as a dangerous hazard, the pictures commonly featured the instrument as a source of protection against poisonous snakes and a tool for hunting wild pigs. In other words, the necessity of the machete for farming was understood through children's drawings. This may not have happened if they did not have the time to draw and reflect on themselves and their role as farmers. Banning the use of the machete could be more life-threatening than the use itself. The use of drawing in Berlan's research amongst children allowed them to represent their lives in a way which an adult-led interview would struggle to do.

3.4 Scoping and Pilot study

The first part of the research included a scoping study for six weeks. I then returned to the UK for two weeks before returning to the field site. During the scoping study I spoke to children within the school. Preliminary focus groups explored what participants thought should be included in the research, what questions they wanted to be asked and not asked, and what they wanted the world to know about their lives. Table 3 documents children's responses. After these discussions, I grouped their suggestions into four broad themes. These themes were agreed upon and acted as a foundation to understand identity and belonging. Once the research themes had been decided I also discussed with participants what kind of methods they would like to use, sharing ideas based on other research that had been carried out with children across the world (Moskal 2010, O'Kane 2008, Waterson and Kumar Behera 2011, Bagnoli and Clark 2010, Sapkota and Sharma 1996). During these discussions, it was agreed that VRM were preferred and drawings could be used to enhance conversations during interviews.

Time and Place	Relationships	God	Morality
Play with friends	Friends	Believe in God	Say no bad words
Games	Family	Want to tell others about God	No fighting
Work			Good testimony of life
Study			
Future			
Films			
Care			
Dreams			

Table 3 Themes suggested by children for exploration during the research

Practically, this meant participants would first spend time carrying out a creative exercise (in the classroom) before an interview and I would seek to understand what they found easy or difficult about each task before interviewing, to understand the effectiveness of each tool. As I undertook creative exercises in the classroom, to avoid a feeling of other children missing out, all children in the classes I taught took part. They enjoyed this, and often children would talk excitedly among themselves or ask to take their pictures home. Whilst a creative exercise was taking place, students said it helped them concentrate if they listened to music. Adele’s song ‘Hello’ was very popular among the children, so I purchased her album and would play that in the background. Children commented on how much they enjoyed the ‘relaxed atmosphere’.

During the scoping study I also conducted a pilot study. The pilot study intended to trial ways of conducting interviews, to test working with a dictaphone, and to ascertain what interview style would be best suited for participants from different age groups. I asked participants to draw pictures of what they would do on *Tết* (Vietnamese New Year)

holiday. Initially I fixed a mic onto participants which seemed to make them nervous and created too much of a formal atmosphere. I then tried leaving the dictaphone with a boy: I asked him to ask the other participant about the picture she had drawn, giving him a few examples of what he might ask. For example: whose house is that? Who are those people you have drawn in the picture? I left them to it and told them I would be outside and they could let me know when they had finished. I did this to break down the formality of the device. The giggles from the room indicated the activity brought a light-hearted attitude to the dictaphone, as the boy interviewed like a quiz show host and then other participants wanted to play with it.

The best method was to put the dictaphone in a meshed pencil case so that it would not evoke distraction. I reminded participants before starting that interviews would be recorded and put the device in the meshed case in front of them. Pilot interviews revealed that older children responded more openly when interviewed alone whilst younger participants worked better in a group.

3.5 Methods Used

3.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Structured interviews have a rigorous set of questions that do not allow for diversion, whilst semi-structured interviews are open, allowing new ideas or follow-on questions to be brought up during the interview because of what the interviewee says. As I worked with children and adults with different needs and interests, and interviewed them in different contexts, I used different interview aids to build a springboard for discussion within interviews. These aids will be explained below. Table 4 illustrates the number of semi-structured interviews carried out with children participants based on drawings they produced. See Appendix 5 for samples of each exercise.

Interview Topics	Self Portrait	Timeline Past	Timeline Future	Identity Flower	Mapping Exercise	Family Tree / Quality of Life	My Time	Beliefs Baptisms	Photography
Number of recorded participant interviews	22	14	17	22	22	13	18	11	5
Total									144

Table 4 Visual exercises & number of semi-structured interviews

3.5.2 Drawings

Graphic elicitation tasks used in this research helped participants think in new ways about issues. At the end of the research process several participants said that engagement in the research gave them time to think about things that would have otherwise remained unexplored. Bagnoli (2009) gives some practical precautions pertaining to graphic elicitation as a method that goes beyond the standard qualitative interview. When explaining researching activities to students I had to be careful not to inherently suggest an interpretation. The biggest danger of this happening was during the translation of the task into Vietnamese after I had explained it in English. In normal teaching contexts, the explanation of tasks is heavily loaded with examples and copying the ‘right’ answer from the teacher. Part of the training I delivered to my interpreter was how to avoid that. We would have a pre-and debrief meeting after every activity. The interpreter also wrote down conversations she overheard and any questions. We both took notes during interview exercises that were treated as part of the research interaction.

Drawings worked well as a mode of graphic elicitation, it encouraged participants to reflect, think and go past usual ways of answering questions (Gauntlett 2007). As Prosser and Loxley (2008) argue, images may permit access to different levels of consciousness, communicating more holistically and through metaphors. This was evidenced in the ways that participants used botanical metaphors to represent peace, harmony and their feelings towards their current habitat as demonstrated in chapter 5. All meanings from children’s drawings derived from children themselves. It was productive to consider what was missing from pictures as this sometimes opened up new analysis. For instance, I could

learn much about siblings through their drawings. During a self-portrait exercise (Bagnoli 2009), I learnt how a brother and sister both processed the debt their family was in, which threatened their residency in their current home.

Figure 1 is Julie's self-portrait and Figure 2 is that of her brother Tim. The aim of the self-portrait exercise (much like other visual methods) was to try and understand participants in a holistic way, focusing particularly on the participant in the present. The instructions given in the self-portrait exercise asked participants to draw themselves and the things and people of importance. During Julie's interview, I asked her what she was thinking when she drew the picture, she replied:

The things I really like about this picture is the house. We borrowed money to build the house and if we cannot pay back the money we will lose the house. That is why I drew the people in the house. The house is finished already. Yet, if we don't have money, we must sell the house and it still won't be enough to pay back to the ones we owe the money too; my father will go to jail (*Julie, female, aged 14 years old*).



Figure 1 Julie's self portrait

After identifying herself as the third girl in the picture I asked her why she drew herself like that, to which she replied “I want to draw about myself wearing the skirt for the last time because if I do not have enough money to pay for the house we need to go to another place.” Julie then explained who was important to her and why:

My brothers. My younger brother does not know how to eat vegetables. If we move to the other place, the place where we fish, then we won't have enough money to buy meat so he will only have vegetables to eat. My mother is worried about losing the house. The people who she owes the money to come and sometimes she cries because she does not have enough money to pay. To give back (*Julie, female, aged 14 years old*).

Julie's account was clear and upfront. She often spoke in interviews about the worry within the family about the debt they had, and when I interviewed her mother she explained the same thing.



Figure 2 Tim's self portrait

However, when I interviewed Tim about his self-portrait one of the first things I noticed was that the house was not in his picture. I asked him about his portrait, what he drew and why:

I'm wearing my uniform and drew myself wearing it because my picture is telling a story. From school, I am walking home and my family are waiting for me. I want to tell them that I love them. The other people in the picture are my parents and my sister and my brother. In the picture, I am almost home (*Tim, male, aged 11 years old*).

After some time talking about other things, prompted by his sister's overemphasis on the house I asked Tim why he did not draw his house. He answered, "I do not like to draw it. The page is too small to draw it."

It could have been the case that there was not enough space on his page to draw his house, yet the omission of the house in the picture, and any mention of the family's debt during his interviews, made me think that perhaps Tim did not want to disclose his family's troubles. In his picture, his family were outside the house, the house was not in sight. Yet, in Julie's image all the family are inside and the door is closed.

3.5.3 *Discussing Temporality and Space*

Time as a temporal concept is difficult to discuss in a concrete way with children due to its abstractness. However, drawing on current research with children I discovered aids that produced a basic set of data about how children spend their time and provided a way to concretise what are often rather intangible or implicit ideas about time (James and Christensen 2008). I used a 'My Week Pie Chart' (O'Kane 2008) where participants divided the chart into segments and either wrote or coloured a segment to represent an activity. The chart assisted with the recognition of how children spent their time. Exploring the qualitative aspects of time use, I gained insight into the control and negotiation of time between children and their teachers at school, and their parents and siblings at home.

Past and future timelines (Bagnoli 2009) were used to aid consideration of participant's lives to date, and how they envisaged their futures. To explore family history, migration patterns and family heritage, participants drew their family tree. To understand what places participants spent their time I asked them to draw a map that had the places where they hung out. During the interviews, I discovered what were considered 'safe' spaces, and how children modified their behaviours depending on where they were.

3.5.4 *Identity Flowers*

Identity flowers were used to elicit what constitutes participants' sense of self and belonging. Each participant received instruction on how to carry out the exercise. For example, participants had to think and write down in each petal of the flower what made them who they are. The point of the exercise was to understand how participants constructed their identity and how they experienced belonging. Each petal represented an element of the participant's perception of themselves. Within the flower petal exercise participants spoke about God and their identity as 'good people', a theme discussed in chapter 6. Some participants found the exercise tricky at first, as it was the first time they had reflected on such things in a structured way.

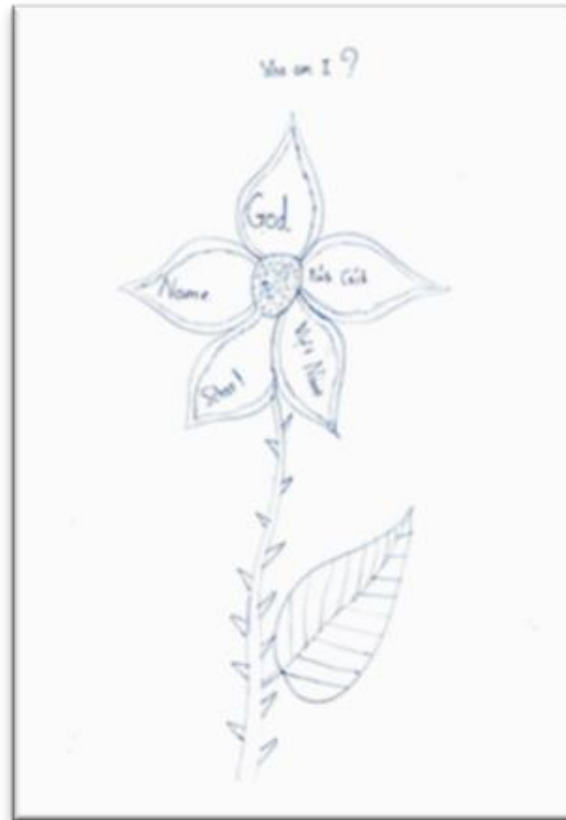


Figure 3 Example of an identity flower, Kevin aged 15

3.5.5 Photography

I had 10 disposable cameras each with 27 images. Only seven cameras returned. Interest in taking photographs was only shown by children in the 12-17 age bracket. Photography allowed participants to own the narratives they wanted to tell (Harper 2002). By giving over the cameras unsupervised, children were free to think about what it was they wanted to show me about themselves, without time pressure and outside the classroom environment.

Some participants showed a keen interest in the creative production of data and this kind of activity, a first for them, aided their creative development. The value of using photography was the way it captured family life. Some participant's photographs illustrated their parents' business endeavours. Kevin, 15, beautifully captured his family's fish business and coffee shop. He had already verbally told me about both enterprises, but the photos added an aesthetic representation that I could now use in a photo essay to disseminate the research results.



Figure 4 Coffee Shop by Kevin

Some materials have been removed from this thesis due to Third Party Copyright. Pages where material has been removed are clearly marked in the electronic version. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

Figure 5 Women Gutting Fish by Kevin

The use of cameras was not enjoyed by everyone. Minh, said he did not know what to photograph and was too busy. However, for the majority they proved a useful documentation of life outside of the school, illustrating work, play and what things held sentimental value to participants (Pink 2013). Copies were made available for the participants after using the cameras. Printing the photos and giving them to children is another principle of the ethics of reciprocity used in the research.

3.6 Research with Adults

Research with adults within this research was unstructured and often spontaneous. Spending time in the villages, visiting children and just being present was an important way of becoming familiar with parents and aspects of village life. I got to witness a cock fight, children preparing meals for their families, gambling sessions and ‘ordinary’ day to day life within the family home. When semi-structured interviews took place, I learnt to be flexible to whatever the change of circumstances might become. Often when I

wanted to talk with someone the only time they had was when they were chopping fish outside their house. Other times, if they were indoors interested parties would join the conversations, often forming impromptu ‘focus’ groups.

On several occasions, I would enter a house for an interview and ask to see family photo albums. Photographs were few but important items within a household and provided a good opportunity to understand family heritage movement and structure. Using photo elicitation (Harper 2002), otherwise difficult conversations about sensitive subjects became easier and less awkward. I also offered to take family portraits for informants to thank them for their time. They appreciated this, especially as I printed out large copies which were standard for family photos hung on walls with pride.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the methodological and philosophical underpinnings of researching identity and belonging among *de facto* stateless children. Framing the research in a critical realist ontology helps explain social phenomena through identifying links between behaviour and underlying structural mechanisms. This ontological and epistemological approach brings into the picture the socio-political and economic context of the researched.

Acknowledging that as researchers we enter the field with beliefs systems, values and a certain position in the world, enables us to be aware of how our standpoints have the potential to influence the production of knowledge. This chapter has thus discussed the process and practice of reflexivity when researching with children. Children’s right to be researched shaped the way they participated in the research process as well as offering inclusion that is non-discriminatory. Ethical considerations, whilst protecting participants and ensuring their voices and agendas for research were heard, also need to be used for researchers to prepare themselves for the ethical bumps along the research road. In particular, I discovered how forming relationships with participants, and exiting the research site can have an impact. Participatory research methods, whilst not providing absolute dissolution of the power relations and dynamic between researchers and researched, goes a long way in involving children in research. Entering children’s worlds and limiting disruption not only aids participant observation but also paved the way for safe and responsible research.

Chapter 4 **Belonging from Above: becoming and being Vietnamese in Cambodia**

“I’ve stayed here, in a foreign country for a long time, but my life here is like a water hyacinth, bobbing on the water without any assets”

4.1 Introduction

In Vietnamese, a water hyacinth is often likened to a life without certainty, floating up and down with the water unable to control anything that happens to it. This allegorical statement made by a man named Bao, who will be introduced later, reflects much of the experience of the participants in this study. Belonging from above has rendered communities to life on the margins of society. The socio-legal and political projects of exclusion that frame what it is to be, and become, Vietnamese in Cambodia are evident when taking account of the historical and structural context in which the communities under study find themselves. Yet, by considering how adults experience belonging from above and identifying the ways that discursive representations are experienced at a local level, we learn how social locations such as gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status are differently weighted in different settings at different times. In particular, we see how poverty intersects with ethnicity in such influential ways that the Khmer themselves can affectively experience statelessness: that is some Khmer are treated as though Vietnamese. This chapter demonstrates how belonging from above is constructed, whilst also shining an analytical light on the ways that adults navigate these ways of belonging. In so doing we can understand what it means to be and become Vietnamese for the participants in this study.

This chapter is structured around three main themes. First, an overview of Cambodia’s history from the time of the French protectorate to present day Cambodia demonstrates how Vietnamese socio-legal and political exclusion is an inevitable corollary of the efforts of political elites to win or keep power. Ethno-nationalism in Cambodia has thus been a unifying discourse against a perceived enemy: the Vietnamese. Second, tracing the journeys of adults highlights the consequences of this history and the inequalities rooted in the practice of exclusionary citizenship regimes. In particular, families are treated as migrants and subject to the administration of immigrant papers and the arbitrary and inconsistent taxation to which they are linked. Whilst inequality can be linked to the

entrenched mobility that comes without citizenship, not all Vietnamese experience the same degree of inequality. The third section underscores the role of poverty and the hierarchies of power that exist on a community level, the prevalence of which cannot be separated from institutions of structural violence.

4.2 Ethno-nationalism as a political project of exclusion

When considering the Vietnamese in Cambodia it is important to think about the ways in which Cambodian governments may have wielded citizenship as a political weapon (Goldston 2006). As Sokoloff and Lewis (2005) suggest, the denial of citizenship is closely linked to state-building and this seems to be the case in Cambodia. Thus, it is important to outline Cambodia's history and look at the nation-building process as well as how domestic political change has shaped the experience of the ethnic Vietnamese.

Many commentaries that reference anti-Vietnamese sentiment throughout Cambodia's tumultuous history from the seventeenth century to the present point to territorial disputes being the undercurrent of Cambodia's nationalist agenda and how the Vietnamese have been perceived as a national threat (Pouvatchy 1986, Amer 1994, Abuza 1995, Berman 1996, Ehrentraut 2011). In the pre-colonial Era (1620-1863), what is now known by Cambodians as Kampuchea Krom ('Lower Cambodia') was inhabited by the first Vietnamese speakers who set up villages on the Mekong Delta in the 1620s. The southward expansion of the territory of Vietnam²³ climaxed in the annexation and occupation of Cambodia between 1835 and 1845 (Ehrentraut 2013) and the failed, but desired "Vietnamization" of Cambodia by Emperor Minh Mang (Gottesman 2004: 160). For Cambodians, the discourse of historical Vietnamese domination is formative. From the colonial to the post-colonial, post war period, the Vietnamese in Cambodia have experienced a long history of marginalisation. Exacerbated at times of political insecurity, anti-Vietnamese sentiment has been used as a political ideology to reinforce Cambodian national unity and 'Khmerness' (Canzutti 2018, Frewer 2016, Amer 2006, Strangio 2014, Amer 2013). The 'Yvon', as the Vietnamese are often pejoratively termed (Oesterheld 2014), have become "the bogeymen of the Cambodian political imagination. Again, and

²³ For the sake of ease I use the terms 'Vietnam' and 'Cambodia' to refer to a long period of time inclusive of the different forms the two states have taken. Vietnam was not a nation state in the colonial era, there were three French colonies: Tonkin (north Vietnam), Annam (central Vietnam) and Cochinchina (South Vietnam) when the French conquest began in 1862. At the same time the French established the French Protectorate of Cambodia in 1863. In 1887 these territories were brought together as French Indochina with the French Protectorate of Laos joining the union in 1893 (Goscha 1995).

again they would resurface as a cruel and rapacious enemy, inexorably bent on ‘swallowing’ the rest of Cambodia’s land, just as they did Kampuchea Krom” (Strangio 2014: 5). The need to regain this territory has been a theme running through the ideology of many Cambodian regimes.

To properly understand ‘nation-ness’ as well as nationalism, a careful consideration of how the terms have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy is particularly pertinent for the South East Asian context (Anderson 1991). Gellner’s (2006) assertion that nationalist thought is important, not because it is novel or illuminating or rational but rather because it is the product of certain social conditions, helps to explain how features of Cambodian nationalism in its state-making have permeated its regulatory and legal frameworks at the exclusion of those deemed non-Khmer. Nationality, nation-ness and nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. Specifically, the distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces transplanted and merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations (Anderson 1991). A look at Cambodia’s changing political climate, from the years of the French protectorate to the current government, shows that the collectivised propaganda against the Vietnamese is very much part of a political project of nationalism.

Overall, Cambodia’s modern history shows that the Vietnamese have been a necessary antithesis to Cambodian identity. Building a Khmer national identity over a period of successive wars, genocide and fractious internal politics required a scapegoat, someone who exemplifies observable signs of “otherness” (Oesterheld 2014: 585). As Metzl observes, it was again anti-Vietnamese sentiments that helped Cambodians “to define themselves as a nation.” Persuasively he suggests that “hatred was not merely the residue of prejudice; it seemed a defining element of Cambodian identity” (Metzl 1995: 275). Thus, as the hallmarks of building a “Khmer” nation and “citizen” are ethno-cultural they correspond to defining what it is to “be” and “become” Vietnamese living in Cambodia.

4.2.1 French protectorate 1863-1954

The period of the French protectorate is said to have been definitive in shaping the main contours of Cambodia's national identity (Sperfeldt 2017), providing the social conditions that would eventually produce nationalists (Edwards 2007). Whilst colonial states were typically anti-nationalist, in the sense that they did not wish to promote an independent

identity separate to the colonial identity for fear of creating a unifying narrative of resistance, if one looks beneath “colonial ideologies and policies” to the “grammar” in which, from the mid-nineteenth century, they were deployed, the lineage becomes decidedly clearer that nation-building policies can be traced back to the colonial State (Anderson 1991: 163–164). Together with Khmer intellectuals, colonial elites formulated notions of cultural identity, historical heritage and religion that are still in motion today. The Khmer term *jiet* (nation) was promoted and re-defined by adopting new meanings. Specifically, it was progressively used to signify both ‘race’ and ‘nation’ as equivalent – ethnicity and the culture of the majority became the primary foundations of a national identity (Edwards 2007: 11–15). This is also evident in the Khmer terms *jiet-kmae* (Khmer nation) and *jun-jiet* (nationality). Whilst the French colonial period was a significant period of time for the development of the idea of the ‘Khmer’ nation and the later local adaptation of the concepts of nationality and citizenship (Sperfeldt 2017), the period also stoked division with neighbouring Vietnam.

The French posited themselves as the protector of Cambodia from extinction (McHale 2013), guarding Cambodia from the ‘Thai tigers and Vietnamese crocodiles’ that surrounded and intended to swallow it (Heder and Ledgerwood 1996). Ironically, despite this negative depiction of the Vietnamese, France’s colonial charge over bordering Vietnamese parts of Indochina saw many Vietnamese speakers being brought into Cambodia to work. Colonial stereotypes defined the Vietnamese as “industrious” and the Khmer as “lazy” and “childlike” (Goscha 2012: 95). Consequently, the Vietnamese felt they were owed for their work towards Cambodia’s development. Per contra, the Khmer dislike of the Vietnamese grew and the apparent divide-and-rule strategy of the French only exacerbated pre-colonial antagonisms between the Vietnamese and Cambodians. This gave rise to Cambodian nationalism which kicked back at the French coloniser for allowing these ‘foreigners’ to administrate and modernise *their* State. The Vietnamese were constructed as ‘outsiders’ by Cambodian nationalists whose quest for independence from the French was dovetailed with a narrative of the Vietnamese as a common neighbouring enemy (Edwards 1996, Goscha 2012). Noticeably, nation-building solidified who belonged to the ‘Khmer’ nation, the 1934 nationality law defined Cambodian nationality on the basis of race/ethnicity (*jus sanguinis*) and omitted to mention the Vietnamese as a recognised ethnic group ‘fixed’ in Cambodia under article 22(6), despite their large presence in colonised Cambodia. So, whilst the French

facilitated and promoted Vietnamese migration they did not address the issue of access to nationality.

At the time of independence from the French the education curriculum, an authorised account of the historical relationship between Vietnam and Cambodia was instituted in the national education system and included state-sponsored justifications for the subsequent racism against Cambodia's ethnic Vietnamese minority (Chou Meng Tarr 1992).

4.2.2 *Independence and the First Sihanouk Regime 1954-1970*

The rise of Prince Sihanouk as political leader after independence from the French in 1953, combined with the advance of print capitalism, consolidated a feeling of belonging and enabled the imagination of 'nation-ness' (Anderson 1991). As part of nation-building Prince Sihanouk introduced a typology of Cambodia's cultural and ethnic diversity. The typology categorised groups that are part of the 'Khmer', for example: indigenous tribes in the mountain areas as 'Khmer Loeu', Cham 'Khmer Islam', and the Khmer minority located in the Mekong Delta region, now part of Vietnam, 'Khmer Krom' (Chou Meng Tarr 1992, Ehrentraut 2011). Notable exclusions are sizeable Chinese and Vietnamese longstanding immigrant groups. Ehrentraut argues that "these categories continue to be widely used today and shape Cambodian thinking about nation and citizenship" (Ehrentraut 2011: 5).

During the years of decolonisation the regime passed laws and introduced policies outlining the requirements and procedures for the acquisition of citizenship and naturalisation of aliens in the newly independent state of Cambodia. The 1954 law on nationality made amendments to the 1920 civil code instituted during the French protectorate (Sperfeldt 2017). Within the law were obvious biases to what was considered to be "pure Khmer": for instance, one had to speak Khmer "fluently" and to exhibit a "sufficient assimilation" of Khmer manners, customs, and traditions (Amer 1994: 214). It became clear that the inability of the Vietnamese to adapt was made difficult by the intentional inability of the Cambodian government to accommodate them. At the 15th National Congress, held in July 1963, an undisputed vote endorsed that naturalisation be refused in principle to all Vietnamese claiming they could *not* be fully assimilated. The Congress also recommended that a committee of inquiry be established with powers to revoke Cambodian citizenship granted to aliens who did not "respect our customs" (Amer

1994: 215). This recommendation applied to all naturalised aliens, but considerations at the Congress showed that it was primarily aimed at the ethnic Vietnamese.

Despite the exclusionary bias and questionable application, the 1954 Law on Nationality incorporated naturalisation provisions into its legal framework previously exempt from the colonial civil code. The amendments²⁴ stipulated that “aliens who had been residing in Cambodia for at least five years – two years if born in Cambodia or married to a Cambodian – could apply for naturalisation” (Sperfeldt 2017: 5). The most significant change to the previous colonial citizenship regime, however, was the introduction of a *jus soli* mode of conferral of citizenship. Under Article 22(2) citizenship is conferred automatically to a person born in Cambodia after 13 November 1954, where one of the parents was also born in Cambodia (ibid: 4). This was especially important for many non-Khmer ethnic groups whose family members resided in Cambodia for generations. No additional citizenship legislation was implemented until the time of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

4.2.3 *Times of War and Change of Rule (1970 – 1993)*

A military coup in 1970 against Sihanouk, signalled the beginning of a period of great instability and civil war marred by mass demonstrations of violence, death and a demise of state structures and laws. As war intensified in neighbouring Vietnam between the two Vietnamese states, leaking over onto Cambodian territory, Cambodia went through a period of state succession that had miserable consequences for Vietnamese residing in the country. With each new government in the Vietnamese were scapegoated as a threat to the Khmer nation and its identity (Amer 2013). What's more, the cold war narrative began to be played out in Cambodia.

4.2.4 *Khmer Republic - Lon Nol era 1970-1975*

Neighbouring Vietnam was divided and at war. Fearful that North Vietnam would colonise Cambodia if it won the war in South Vietnam, American installed General Lon Nol who characterised the war against Hanoi as critical for the very survival of the Khmer race and culture. He called the north Vietnamese cruel and barbaric and spread fear throughout the populace by telling the Khmer people that Vietnam aimed to "systematically destroy our socioeconomic structure and our civilization," and "not

²⁴ Governed through Kram No. 904-NS of 27 September 1954 and Kram No. 357-NS of 26 October 1959

simply to make our people subservient to them but to change our way of life, to modify our way of thinking and abolish our religious beliefs" (Lon Nol quoted in Berman 1996: 830). According to Berman, this "holy war against the Vietnamese" turned into a campaign against all ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia (ibid). Lon Nol's 'neo-Khmerism' continued to exalt the Khmer race and encourage racism and xenophobia (Jordens 1996, Corfield 2009). He accentuated cultural differences between Vietnam and Cambodia to promote nationalism. Lon Nol's new constitutional definition of Cambodians had "Khmer blood, Khmer traditions, Khmer culture, Khmer language and who were born on the territory that is the heritage of our Khmer ancestors" (Edwards 2007: 252). The viciousness of the Lon Nol regime forced thousands of Vietnamese to flee Cambodia. Ethnic Vietnamese fishermen and traders were driven out of Cambodia; thousands of those who stayed were slaughtered, their bodies discarded in the Mekong River. In May 1970, Lon Nol's army rounded up and killed thousands of Vietnamese civilians in and around Phnom Penh. According to official data of the Republic of Vietnam (ROV), between 200,000 and 250,000 Vietnamese fled or were deported to Southern Vietnam in 1970, 28% of whom claimed to hold Cambodian citizenship (Amer 1994: 217, Poole 1974: 328-331, Pouvatchy 1976: 7). Meanwhile, in the northwest of Cambodia the Khmer Rouge with the support of communist China and North Vietnam prepared to overthrow Lon Nol and promote Cambodian Communism.

4.2.5 *Democratic Kampuchea (DK) 1975-1979*

In 1975, Lon Nol was defeated by the Khmer Rouge, despite (or perhaps because of) heavy US air strikes on the latter, and the control of Cambodia was transferred to the Khmer Rouge: who proceeded to roll out an ultranationalist agenda that was routinely xenophobic, promoting a racial purity regime that over time would grow paranoid and result in a horrific genocide (Chandler 1996). In their twisted patriotism, the Khmer Rouge confused race with ideology, concluding that all minorities threatened the regime (Berman 1996). The situation of ethnic Vietnamese did not improve under the new regime: while all ethnic minorities were suppressed amid efforts to build a Khmer nation-state, ethnic Vietnamese were further penalised by the (still) enduring view of Vietnam as a 'slowly eating silkworm' aiming to 'swallow up' Cambodia (Amer 1994). It is estimated that 150,000 – 170,000 Vietnamese were forced out of Cambodia in 1975 and those that remained were systematically killed (Amer 2006: 360). A charge of genocide

against the Vietnamese and Cham came before the Khmer Rouge Tribunal²⁵ and the defendants charged. The impact of the Khmer Rouge's brutality created legacies within Cambodia's social fabric still felt by Cambodia's current political regime (Sperfeldt 2017).

4.2.6 *People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989)*

After the fall of Phnom Penh to the Vietnamese army in 1979 – which Vietnam's Communist Party described as Cambodia's 'liberation', but which subsequently became interpreted by Cambodians as an 'invasion' – the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) came into being. The new regime depended on extensive support from Vietnam, while civil war continued in northern regions of the country (Sperfeldt 2017). The ethnic Vietnamese who fled the country during the Khmer Rouge Regime could return under the Vietnamese-installed PRK government. However, many returning Vietnamese had either lost or had their documents destroyed during the regime and were unable to prove their previous residence in Cambodia. The new flow of immigration from Vietnam during this time meant that numerous Vietnamese who had lived in Cambodia prior to the mass forced emigration of the 1970s (like many of the families in this study) were indistinguishable from more recent immigrants. The PRK authorities regulated and administered policies relating to immigration and citizenship through directives (ibid), yet the question of whether ethnic Vietnamese could become citizens was never resolved (Gottesman 2004). The estimated number of immigrants differs according to the politicised discourses at the time. A reliable calculation is unavailable in the literature. The median range 300,000-500,000 sets the total number at approximately the same level as the Vietnamese population in Cambodia at the end of the 1960s (Amer 1994: 220–222).

4.2.7 *United Nations Transition Authority (UNTAC 1992-1993)*

Following a course towards peace in the late 1980s and early 1990s which led to the signing of the Paris Agreements on Cambodia in October 1991, a peacekeeping process was carried out by the United Nations in Cambodia from March 1992. This is when the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) was officially established, until September 1993 when UNTAC's mandate terminated, following the

²⁵ The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia was established 1998. The charge of Vietnamese genocide refers to case 002 (ECCC 2015).

adoption of a new Cambodia constitution by the Constituent Assembly (Amer 2013). Ahead of the first general election in decades, opposition groups ramped up their rhetoric against Vietnamese ‘immigrants’, and the Khmer Rouge started a campaign of political violence against Vietnamese civilians (Sperfeldt 2017). UNTAC’s two year rule was far from peaceful for the Vietnamese who experienced violent attacks. In the spring of 1992, the Khmer Rouge (still at large until 1999) attacked a predominantly Vietnamese fishing village in Kampong Chhnang Province. Consequently, of the 6,000 Vietnamese settlers acknowledged by the Cambodian People’s Party (Hun Sen’s new political party) governor, 3,000 fled to safety in the provincial capital (Amer 1994: 223). Terror attacks increased after the Khmer Rouge left Phnom Penh and threatened to disrupt the UNTAC-sponsored election in the spring of 1993. Between April and May 1993, 30,000 ethnic Vietnamese fled Cambodia after around 150 Vietnamese fishermen were killed in 32 separate incidents by the Khmer Rouge. These attacks had little military value for the Khmer Rouge, but were popular demonstrations of Khmer Rouge action against a perceived enemy (Amer 2013).

Scarce information exists about how many ethnic Vietnamese were finally registered for the UNTAC elections, but field research points out that a significant number of long-term residents were never registered, which also diminished their prospects to be considered in Cambodia’s new identity management scheme that initially relied on UNTAC voter records (Sperfeldt 2017, Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012). Two decades of war and successive governments has had a long-standing impact on Cambodia’s citizenship regime. Any state that has had to rebuild itself from year zero – the new temporal order which the Khmer Rouge declared upon seizing Phnom Penh on 17th April 1975 (Pilger 1979) - would find it difficult to establish a registration system and citizenship register when many of the pre-war archival and populations records, along with legal and administrative infrastructure were destroyed.

4.2.8 *Kingdom of Cambodia 1993 – today*

An examination of Cambodia’s geo-political history from the time of the French until UN intervention demonstrates the targeted xenophobic behaviours against the ethnic Vietnamese. Territorial disputes, invasions and attempted ‘Vietnamisation’ that characterized the history of Cambodia-Vietnam relations, are at the background of this perennial hostility (Takei 1998). Post conflict Cambodia began the work of rebuilding the country’s citizenship regimes. This process unearthed old discourses about who is a

‘Khmer’ citizen and the extent of Cambodian citizenship which were the subjects of heated political debates (Ehrentraut 2013). This sentiment is evident in political discourse in electoral campaigns and the drafting of three legal texts that are of relevance for Cambodia’s citizenship regime today: the Cambodian constitution, immigration law and the nationality law (Sperfeldt 2017). Consequently, suspicion and confusion surrounding Cambodia’s ethnic Vietnamese persist to the present day, and so does their insecure legal and social position within the State.

Cambodia’s 1993 constitution acknowledges human rights and their place in the newly established Kingdom of Cambodia.²⁶ Yet, on closer inspection the constitution’s honour and protection of human rights as defined by the United Nations charter, United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and all conventions and treaties relating to human rights, women’s rights and children’s rights is limited in practice. The wording of Cambodia’s 1993 constitution suggests an ethnicity-based conception of citizenship. All rights involved in the constitution are provided to ‘Khmer citizens’ only. In contrast to the multiculturalist and civic understandings of ‘Khmer citizenship’, the constitution, “taken at its most literal reading, baldly denies basic human rights to anyone so unfortunate as to be labelled non-Khmer” (Ehrentraut 2011: 788). The 1994 law on immigration similarly generated concern. Long-term residents who have lived in Cambodia for generations based on the law could be categorised as “aliens” and subsequently deported without a just trial (Berman 1996). The law considers an “alien” to be “any person who does not have Cambodian nationality”²⁷ and stresses the importance of residence cards.²⁸

The current Law on Nationality (1996), despite introducing a *jus soli* provision, limits access to citizenship by stating that “[...] shall obtain nationality/citizenship by being born in the Kingdom of Cambodia [...] any child who is born from a foreign mother and father (parents) who were born and living legally in the Kingdom of Cambodia’.²⁹ It follows that ethnic Vietnamese children born in Cambodia could acquire nationality insofar as their parents can prove that they were either born or have lived legally in the

²⁶ Art., 31 of 1993 Cambodia Constitution.

²⁷ Art., 2 of Cambodia Law on Immigration.

²⁸ Art., 14, and 16 of Cambodia’s Law on Immigration. However, despite the significance attached to residency permits in both the 1994 law on immigration and the 1996 law on nationality local authorities met multiyear delays in the administration of cards to “immigrant aliens”, the earliest a person could apply for one being 2001 (Sperfeldt 2017).

²⁹ Art., 4 (2) of 1996 Cambodia Law on Nationality.

country. However, no further explanation was given on the meaning of and the documents related to ‘living legally’ (Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012). Moreover, as most returning Vietnamese had lost their papers after fleeing from the Khmer Rouge, and no documents were given as a proof of residence before the adoption of the 1994 immigration law, their children are not considered citizens (Ehrentraut 2011).

In theory, Cambodian nationality can be acquired through naturalisation. The candidate should present “a paper certifying that such person has her/his residence in the Kingdom of Cambodia and has been living continuously for seven years from the date of reception of a residence card which was issued under framework of the law on immigration”.³⁰ As noted by Nguyen and Sperfeldt (2012) this requirement is problematic in a number of ways: first, as the Immigration Law was only introduced in 1994, applications for naturalisation were only possible from 2001; second, the actual issuance of residence cards by local authorities began many years after the Law was adopted; third, the formality and procedure for applying for naturalisation are still not clear since no sub-decree establishing them has yet been passed. In addition to the aforementioned limitations, the application to naturalisation “can be rejected by a discretionary power” (ibid).³¹

Without Khmer nationality, ethnic Vietnamese are denied access to public services, legal employment, the right to vote³² and stand in elections and the right to own land (Ehrentraut 2011).³³ Furthermore, the difficulty of accessing citizenship means that most long-term Vietnamese residents are categorised as ‘aliens’ and are vulnerable to deportation if found lacking residence cards (Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012). Institutional exclusion of the Vietnamese is dovetailed with scapegoating discourses that frame the

³⁰ Art., 8 of the 1996 Cambodia Law on Nationality

³¹ Art., 7 of the 1996 Cambodia Law on Nationality

³² Recent research conducted by Lucrezia Canzutti (2018) shows that some Vietnamese populations have been brought out to vote by the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). Several of my adult participants also claimed they had voted in past elections; however, this did not make any obvious difference to their citizenship status or livelihoods. More likely, (and a view supported by Canzutti (ibid)) there has been a strategic use of voting by the CPP to gain support. The Vietnamese have historically seen CPP leader Hun Sen as the ‘good guy’ who looks after the Vietnamese by not deporting them. Several of my participants supported this view.

³³ This explains why many Cambodian Vietnamese live on floating villages on Lakes and water courses.

minority group as land grabbers, illegal and untrustworthy.³⁴ The suspected territorial encroachment of Vietnam has also been a cornerstone of Cambodia's opposition party's political strategy. Sam Rainsy and the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP)³⁵ have centred their political rhetoric on Vietnam repeatedly portraying ethnic Vietnamese as untrustworthy 'thieves', 'land swallowing', or 'infectious invading' Yuon 'germs' (Edwards 2007, Hinton 2006). Due to his past role as foreign minister of the Vietnamese-installed PRK government, Cambodian People's Party's (CPP) leader and Prime Minister Hun Sen has been accused by his opponents of being 'Vietnam's puppet' and aiding Hanoi in its expansionist efforts. The main argument in support of these charges has been the steady presence of 'old' and 'new' Vietnamese in Cambodia. Often the implication of Vietnamese logging companies in land grabbing and deforestation (Global Witness 2013, Oesterheld 2014) comes to be used as a political weapon against minority Vietnamese. There is indeed a class of elites from Vietnam who are grabbing land, trading timber and managing rubber plantations on Cambodian soil, but this group shares nothing with the poorer Vietnamese class except their language. Overall, historical discursive framing reflects the widespread perception of 'the Vietnamese' as a homogeneous group of 'outsiders' who do not belong.

Cambodia's human rights activists and civil society organisations (CSOs) have responded indifferently to anti-Vietnamese rhetoric.³⁶ The number of organisations and human rights projects working on Vietnamese communities is very limited: according to Christie (2012), the reasons for this may lie in both the risks related to the sensitive nature of the matter, and a strategy aimed at reproducing the notion that the Vietnamese are not a natural part of the Cambodian State. Among the (I)NGO representatives I interviewed there was a common consensus that the granting of citizenship to the Vietnamese would

³⁴ Particularly contentious are border-related frictions, which started with the annexation of the Mekong Delta region to Vietnam in the 18th century, and have continued until today. In August 2014, demonstrators burnt a Vietnamese flag in front of Vietnam's embassy in Phnom Penh; in June 2015, a conflict erupted between Cambodian activists and Vietnamese Villagers in Svay Rieng province, along the Cambodia-Vietnam border.

³⁵ Following the dissolution of the CNRP in November 2017, Sam Rainsy (as of January 2018) is now president of the Cambodia National Rescue Movement. Rainsy founded the movement in exile. The party is considered a terrorist group by the CPP.

³⁶ An exception is the statement by CCHR (Cambodian Centre for Human Rights) president Ou Virak expressing concern over 'the high number of cases of discrimination and intimidation against Cambodian citizens of Vietnamese origin attempting to cast their votes' (Oesterheld 2014). Mr. Virak wrote another public letter addressing Sam Rainsy's anti-Vietnamese rhetoric in December 2013; as a result, he was attacked on social media with comments ranging from criticism to death threats (*The Phnom Penh Post*, 20 December 2013).

never happen. Lucrezia Canzutti (2018) in her research on the reasons, modalities, and consequences of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, brings a new interpretation to the continued liminality and ambiguity concerning the status and guarantors of the Vietnamese. She shows the Vietnamese to be "inconvenient subjects" (2018: 115) whose presence is of decreasing value to the Cambodian State. Nevertheless, despite the heightened political tension among the Khmer populace pertaining to the presence of the Vietnamese on Cambodia soil, the CPP are sensitively managing their presence at the request of the Vietnamese regime. Canzutti (2018) calls this the *bounded exclusion* of the Vietnamese, who are symbolically kept outside the Cambodian nation and citizenry but allowed inside the territory of the Cambodian State. This argument is compelling. As the empirical sections in this chapter shows, the Vietnamese are kept 'perpetually temporary' (Ehrentraut 2011) by the introduction of initiatives that promise to grant citizenship but actually are administered in a confusing manner and often replicated over time, invalidating previous attempts to regularise, and seek to grant immigration status.

This section has detailed Cambodia's modern history, demonstrating how belonging from above has been born out of historical, social-political and legal circumstances of structural violence. It is not surprising that many ethnic Vietnamese rely upon informal networks in the spheres of work, housing, relations and documents in the attempt to address social, legal and political disadvantages. Tracing the journeys of adults highlights the consequences of the discriminatory social and institutional structures, and how social factors such as poverty and gender come to influence the experience of living with uncertain status and future orientated mobilities.

4.3 The journey of hyacinths: living as 'illegals'

The previous section argued that the building of the Cambodian State included building the boundary markers of who is and can be a 'Khmer' citizen. Notions of 'Khmerness' as something ethno-cultural are the cornerstones of citizenship regimes and public perceptions of belonging (Sokeo and Miletic 2007). Such exclusionary institutional categorisations are reinforced by the clear narrative of who is non-Khmer, being Vietnamese a clear example of this. This section demonstrates the validity of that argument by detailing the consequences of 'being' Vietnamese in the Cambodian context. Despite the majority of participants having long-term residence in Cambodia they are

often treated as recent migrants, the introduction of an assessment for immigrant status supporting this assertion.

During my eighth month of fieldwork, whilst teaching English, my class was interrupted by Cammy, an older student in the school. She informed me that one of the students had to leave the lesson and go and have their photo taken. When I asked why she replied “to have their papers made”. This instance repeated itself over the week with students systematically being called for as they had to go with their parents. In talking through this situation with the parents of the children I was informed that local police had been summoning Vietnamese to get papers made explaining that in seven years’ time this would enable them to have Cambodian nationality. This narrative appeared to refer to a process of naturalisation that requires that an applicant reside in Cambodia continuously for seven years from the date of receipt of a residence card (which were being given out). Yet, the administration of foreign resident documents, ordered by the Ministry of Immigration (MOI) at a time of a national population census in 2014, disregarded the previous length of stay of recipients in the country and effectively restarted the residence clock. Furthermore, many participants being born in Cambodia under Article 9 of the nationality law should have had the required length of stay reduced to three years. The cards did not encourage essential documents like birth certificates to be given to children.

To understand their perspectives on the process of ‘getting papers made’, I interviewed and listened to villagers’ stories of their journeys to Cambodia. Overall, it appeared that the process of ‘paper making’ confused local people and when talking to adults in the villages I heard mixed accounts of what was thought to be going on. The unclear interaction reveals the power dynamics at play between the State and the Vietnamese: as Gainsborough suggests, “[keeping] people in a state of uncertainty about what they can and cannot do is a sure way of exercising power over them” (Gainsborough 2010: 181). It also became clear that the cadres giving instruction to the communities were perhaps ignorant of the laws that govern their explanation of the procedure they were undertaking. There were variations in the stated time until ‘citizenship’ would be granted, and an alarming omission of any other factual requirements for naturalisation being explained:

We must pay a tax Khmer people don't need to pay, only Vietnamese. They [local Cambodian cadre] promised that we would become Cambodian after six years. When you are already a Cambodian you will not have to pay the tax any more
[Vietnamese man, born in Vietnam married to Khmer woman.]

The request for an annual payment was one echoed by other participants. Squatting next to Joy, (mother of Lucy, participant in the study) as she cuts fish on a tree stump, she tells me about the ‘papers’ being made:

The papers being made will acknowledge that we are Vietnamese living in Cambodia and we will not be arrested. This is the first time we must pay a tax of \$75 per year. If we pay the tax for seven years we then become a Khmer citizen [Joy, a Vietnamese woman born in Cambodia].

In reality, the procedure as it was explained to me by Minority Rights Organisation (MIRO) and a representative from UNHCR was an administration of immigration status. Figure 6 is the card Joy had received as an acknowledgement of her assessment being underway. It specifies that “the letter is not for the holder to use as an official document. It only certifies that the working group has completed the assessment”; and that the letter “is invalid when the final assessment and decision are made”. If successful Joy would be granted a ‘permanent resident certificate’ for an immigrant alien as regulated by the law on Immigration: “The recognition of any alien as an immigrant alien, shall be decided by a Proclamation (Prakas) of the ministry of Interior” (article 12 - Law on Immigration of 1994). It means it is given to “aliens who are legally reaching the Kingdom of Cambodia in order to perform their professions or conduct activities relating to the industry, commerce, agriculture or services” (Article 10). With this Prakas they cannot vote and they still need a work permit to be employed legally.

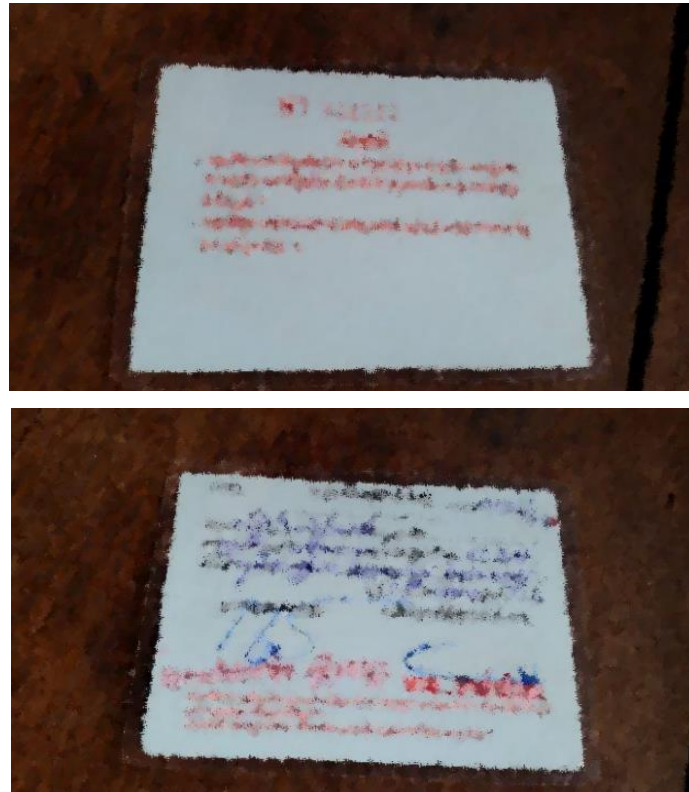


Figure 6 Assessment letter

Joy, a resident of *Preah Thnov*, is an example of someone who is currently being subjected to a process of immigration that is out of kilter with her long-term residence in Cambodia and an official pathway to naturalisation. Born in Cambodia to a Vietnamese mother and Chinese father who both were born in Cambodia, Joy's father remained in Cambodia during the Pol Pot era, whilst she and her mother left Cambodia and went back to Vietnam in 1975 and returned in 1979. On returning to Cambodia Joy's mother searched for her husband only to be told that he had been "killed by Pol Pot".³⁷ Without her father, Joy, her mother and sister moved to different places avoiding the threats of the Khmer Rouge. At 18 Joy married and lived with her mother-in-law until her mid-40s. Her mother-in-law has now died, and she remains in the house with her husband and daughter Lucy. Joy told me that in 1979 Cambodians gave her mother-in-law the land Joy currently lives on as the Cambodian government wanted to repopulate the area. As it is a house

³⁷ It is unlikely that people were killed by Pol Pot himself, rather people referred to Khmer Rouge killings as done by Pol Pot.

connected to the river it was given on the proviso that when the land is needed the family would return it to the government.

Joy would have been eligible for citizenship under the 1954 amendments to the Civil Code governing access to Cambodian citizenship which introduced several novelties in comparison with the previous colonial regime, in particular:

(1) It incorporated *jus soli* provisions under which citizenship was conferred automatically to a person born in Cambodia after 13 November 1954, where one of the parents was also born in Cambodia; and

(2) It opened legal avenues to apply for naturalisation for other individuals who wished to acquire Cambodian nationality³⁸

Many ethnic Vietnamese were granted citizenship under the 1954 Nationality Laws, according to human rights lawyer Lyma Nguyen. After fleeing the Pol Pot regime, they were then denied legal recognition upon returning to Cambodia:

They cannot prove their acquisition of citizenship, in part due to their forced relocation to Vietnam during the Pol Pot regime, after which they returned to Cambodia in the 1980s, without documentation (as cited in Nachemson and Meta 2017).

The 1954 laws were repealed and replaced by stricter nationality laws in 1996, but Nguyen said this should not retroactively revoke citizenship:

Upon their return to Cambodia, their homeland, they were considered by the government as ‘illegal immigrants’ and without a means to prove their previous civil status in Cambodia, they live in limbo (ibid).

Like Joy, many of the adults in the area were also being requested to go and ‘make papers’. Treating families as if they are recent migrants disregards their historical and current struggles and promotes a rooted displacement (Belton 2015). The families in the study are mostly long-term residents and their stories are not of recent migration but (mostly) of generational ties to Cambodia.

An interview with Hoa (mother of Tiffany participant in the study), and her sister, who were both born in Cambodia and fled Cambodia to Vietnam during the Lon Nol period,

³⁸ cited in Sperfeldt (2017: 5)

exemplifies the conundrum of long-term residents, the continued insecurity they face and the complex livelihood strategies that are negotiated on a day-to-day basis. Hoa explains:

My family have been in Cambodia for three or four generations. In 1970 we went back to Vietnam, I was five years old when we fled. We went by plane. That time America still reigned in the south. We went to school in Vietnam, too. The government in the South took care of us for almost one year. It was hard living in Vietnam then. We used to wear tops that were patched with lots of layers. Just after the liberation (end of Vietnam War), the whole country was poor. We came back to Cambodia by boat. Vietnamese soldiers helped us get back here, but it was Khmer soldiers on the border. We paid them to re-enter. We were so poor we didn't have porridge to eat. People who had lands, they would survive, but us we didn't have anything. We did labour work. We worked and lived a day at a time. Because we went to Vietnam as refugees, we were in the camp but when the Americans left we were left with nothing and experienced a hard life. Crossing the border back to Cambodia was dangerous. People made the journey day and night. Soldiers stopped us, there were still many stations then. They chased and fired at us like rain. We moved here [*Phreah Thnov*] around 1979, 1980. They chased us from the other side of the river [they used to live on the adjacent side on the *Tonlé Sap*]. We ran for our lives, so we never dared to go back there. Cambodia is like our homeland, we are used to living here. Grandma and everyone were born here so we are used to it (*Hoa ethnic Vietnamese woman born in Cambodia*).

Like Joy, the sisters are long-term residents who would have qualified for citizenship under the 1954 Law on Nationality. Presently they are being treated as recently arrived. They however, unlike some of the participants, were able to plan ahead and envision paths to navigate and secure a degree of formal education for their children. Continuing the story of the sisters (see below) exposes the differentiation among adults as regards to access to services, and the influence poverty has on the choices that noncitizens can make. The next section illustrates the hierarchies of power and position that exist within the communities and the factors that contribute to them.

4.4 Poverty and hierarchies of power

Examining Cambodia's history and legal institutions in previous sections highlights the background to the structural violence (Farmer 1996, 2004) and terms of belonging imposed from above on the Vietnamese. The generations of nationalism and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion paved the way for the social mechanisms which perpetuate inequality. Exploring the interactions among people and material circumstances directly observable, reveals how voracious exploitation and corruption work to stabilise and facilitate relations of exploitation and make them socially viable. Moreover, this focus reveals poverty to be an effect of direct assertions of power (Mosse 2010). As this section

will show, being classified as ‘Vietnamese’ when already poor encourages a deeper entrenchment of poverty as it traps individuals in informal insecure and underpaid jobs, as well as forcing individuals to gain informal access to utility services such as electricity, water supply and sewerage. Specifically, the judgements of local cadres expose localised forms of boundary making and exclusion, illustrating the particular significance given to the effects of identity and social categorisation within inequality systems (ibid: 2010).

Perched on a small chair talking with Hoa and her sister, I ask the sisters if they have Cambodian citizenship:

No, we don’t, we have something like a temporary residence permit for Vietnamese, and we have a family book. We don’t have a birth certificate, only a piece of paper to say our children were born here in this hospital. Both of us have a family book. We had to go and make our papers recently and were told we would need to pay a personal tax for 5 or 7 years then we can become citizens. I think the reason they are doing it is because they want to know who lives here and for how long. They would not make us Cambodian. They know we are Vietnamese. Of course, if they make the papers for us to be Cambodian, we would like that. We have lived here for so long, of course we’d like it. If we have papers, we can easily travel, going here and there. If we want to cross the border, without a passport we can’t. Before they did not ask for papers, now they do (*Hoa, ethnic Vietnamese woman born in Cambodia*).

Listening to the sisters who have a family book³⁹ I ask their opinion on whether this document provides options for their children’s future mobility. Hoa replies:

Without a birth certificate you cannot see education through. My son was in grade 9, they asked for a birth certificate. He didn’t have one, so he had to stop. With the second one, we had to pay to make a birth certificate, so he could finish grade 12. My daughter [Tiffany] does not have a birth certificate. In this commune they do not use [birth certificates]. We do not dare apply [for her school] here, they know we are Vietnamese. We must go to another commune to apply.

Charlie: So, when Tiffany reaches grade 9, then she’ll have to apply in another commune for it to work?

Hoa: Yes. Schools here only go to grade 9. When it’s grade 10, we move to another commune. When her [Tiffany’s] brother was in grade 9 the teacher helped change his Vietnamese name, taking a Khmer surname. I really try to give my kids a good education and put them through all the grades possible. Education is really important for young people. When the kids have a better education, people

³⁹ Whilst a family book should in theory qualify a person to gain an ID card at 15, this is only if your family book states you are Cambodian.

won't look down on them. We sisters were poor so didn't have a great education, we only studied to grade 5.

Charlie: what about the kids without any papers, what do you think?

Hoa: [They] cannot go to school, don't know how to read and write and can only do labour work. Those who are educated they can read and write, do office work.

Charlie: Who is the worst off, those who are Khmer who have no papers or those who are Vietnamese?

Hoa: Cambodians have a worst situation, it's their country, and they don't have the papers to prove who they are! We're Vietnamese!

Whilst the sisters are not being treated as long-term residents they are part of a group of Vietnamese who have been able to buy documents from local cadres. This comes at a cost that not everyone can afford. The sisters' insistence that their situation, whilst not ideal, is better relative to that of Cambodians who do not have documents, is an opinion I heard from others in conversation. Comparing the narratives of adults' raised factors that differentiate between their experiences, Khmer women who are poor and married to a Vietnamese man share in the restricted mobilities of their husbands, whilst women who are widowed could shun their connection to the Vietnamese or successfully assimilate as Khmer.

Violet, another resident of *Preah Thnov*, is an ethnic Khmer born in Phnom Penh to Khmer parents. She was separated from her parents during the time of the Khmer Rouge and went to Vietnam with her auntie and uncle in 1975, returning in 1979. Violet's husband was born in Vietnam: "he didn't have parents, I didn't have mine, so we were in the same situation and got together" she told me. The interview took place in Violet's home, built part on land and partly erected in the *Tonlé Sap* River. On entering an elderly lady sat chewing the equivalent of 'Khat' in the corner, her baldness resembles the hairstyle of a Buddhist nun. The lady's small frame was noticeable under the baggy clothes she wore, and her thick rimmed glasses were held onto her face by a piece of sturdy string. The elderly lady was talkative and in the beginning of my introduction to Violet, she spoke over me and said "she's poor" referring to the interviewee. It turned out the lady was Violet's adoptive mother. Violet's home was rotting, and she was concerned about the structure. Previously the God School donated money to prevent the wood in the kitchen from decaying.

Occupying the house after her previous house burnt down in a fire in Phnom Penh, Violet had lived in *Preah Thnov* for a long time but has no paper to prove the house belongs to her. She gave birth to her six children in hospital, four of whom attend the God School. Despite her children being born on Cambodian soil and having a Khmer mother and grandparents, they are unable to prove their claim for citizenship due to lost papers and their inability to secure a birth certificate, which Violet said she could not afford. Violet's explanation about her attempts to secure birth certificates for her children illustrates the intersection of poverty and ethnicity:

I only have the paper about them being born in the hospital but not the birth certificate. I have tried to make the birth certificate for the kids, but they say no. I am treated like a Vietnamese. They say you are Vietnamese but living in Cambodia, so you will have to pay \$70 per year for 6 years and then after 6 years you will be accepted as Cambodian. My parents are Cambodian, but I lost my parents and documents (*Violet, Khmer woman born in Cambodia*).

The ethnic categorisation Violet was subjected to and the consequential restricted mobility is an example of the inconsistent implementation and practice of Cambodia's citizenship regime. Violet's example also reveals the abuse of local cadres who use ethnic and national categorisation as a strategy for profit. Mosse (2007, 2010) and Tilly (1998) argue that categorical distinctions have their most powerful effect on the poorest. Thus, stereotypes and us-them categories are secondary developments in the sense that they are used to justify, solidify and protect existing lines of economic inequality. Tilly's (2006, 2001, 1998) work further suggests that among poorer, illiterate and unskilled labour, identity effects operate most forcefully through middlemen who secure employment, and utilities.

Chanthou's story highlights the prominence of her poverty over her Khmer identity, and the reliance on informal access for work and electricity. Chanthou currently lives in *Preah Rotn Phon*. Chanthou's house is located on the outskirts of a built-up slum area closest to the river. A few boat houses are moored on the river. Between the house and the river, a volleyball net is hung and a separate area of small cages where her husband and brother keep and tend the cockerels they are rearing for fights.

Some materials have been removed from this thesis due to Third Party Copyright. Pages where material has been removed are clearly marked in the electronic version. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

Figure 7 Photo taken by Mary outside her house

Chanthou's house is built on tall stilts like the one in Figure 7. After climbing up the wooden ladder to the living room Chanthou takes out her family photo album and begins to share her life with me. She is ethnic Khmer, being born in Cambodia as were her parents. She tells me she was born when the war was continuing. She remembers still living on the side of the river which was occupied by Pol Pot when she was 10 years old and when swimming one day she felt a bomb in the water and her grandfather injured his legs. War and violence propelled the family to go to Vietnam for a short time and came back to Cambodia when it was considered safe. Going through her family album she points to a picture of her husband: "he is Vietnamese and was born there. I met him here where I was born. He came to visit for fun. We met when he was young." The picture is shot near Wat Phnom, an iconic feature of Phnom Penh.

The pressure on the family to make ends meet is clear. Uneducated, Chanthou still struggles financially: "I am poor, I do not have money to buy even rice to eat now, I work hard so I can buy books, food, give them [children] money so they can go to school. I do not know how to read and write so I really want my children to have an education." The cycle of inequality is fundamentally linked to the entrenched mobility that comes without citizenship. Access to utilities, employment and education are things many families struggle with. For example, the families in *Preah Rotn Phon* relied on informal utility access. The electricity is provided by people who are registered with the government and then they sell it to residents, Chanthou explains: "someone gives you access so you get it - 1KW is 500 riel (\$0.12) normally, but if you buy from another person its 1500r (\$0.36). Three times higher. Poor people pay more to live."

Furthermore, the insecurity of informality promotes unequal labour practices. Chanthou talks about scarce employment opportunities for her children, the challenge of paying for birth certificates and the correlation between having a birth certificate and future mobility:

It is so hard to get a job in Cambodia. My daughter is 16 years old. She had casual labour [secured through a middleman] and it only lasted a few days. Sometimes they say they will pay and don't. If she can go to work, it would be better for her. None of my children have a birth certificate. I gave birth to my children at home, you must pay to use the hospital and for the birth cert. If you go to the hospital it is \$400 if you have the baby at home only 25\$ the midwife visits the house. (*Chanthaou, Khmer woman married to a Vietnamese man*).

During the conversation the interpreter asked Chanthou: “why don't you look into how you can get birth certificates for the kids?” Chanthou alluded to the enormity of the task which evidently is financially burdensome: “If I do it, I'll have to pay for all 5 certificates.” Continuing the conversation, the interpreter advised Chanthou to make a birth certificate for her eldest daughter “so she can go to work”, to which Chanthou replied “since they were born, these kids don't have their birth certificates”. The resignation that the situation is what it is, is a common sentiment among adults. Mosse (2010) points to the need to understand power as a constraint on the agency of the poor, perhaps a means to generate acquiescence or compliance. This is what we see in the examples of Violet and Chanthou, their poverty resigns them to paying personal taxes, accessing informal electric grids and prevents them exerting their right for their children to have birth certificates. They go along with what they are told. Whilst this does not strip them of their agency completely, it does reveal the power dynamics within communities and how poverty comes to define them.

Ostensibly, it appeared that Khmer women who are widowed had a better chance of earning more money, and not being associated with their Vietnamese spouse. Widowed, they could embrace or perform their Khmer identity more fully. Trang's mother Bopha, 47 shared her story with me, her experience of war, an arranged marriage and her husband's death:

We [Bopha's family] didn't run during Pol Pot; we stayed and weren't arrested and were able to stay together [as a family]. I was 10 years old during the war, I remember hearing the sound of bombs and the shooting. I worked in a field to cut things and ate only rice porridge and wild vegetables.

I began learning Vietnamese when I was married. When I was 20 years old, I married a Vietnamese man, I can't remember how old my husband was, but he was older. We did not marry for love, my brother brought us together. I just

obeyed my brother's instructions. When married we did not take a house on the land because my husband decided to build and live in a house on the river.

Getting a job after the war was difficult. I sold fish that my husband would catch. After my husband died, there was no income, so I had to work; I started selling breakfast in the mornings (*Bopha, Khmer woman married to a Vietnamese man*).

When discussing her husband's death Bopha told me she "did not remember how he died". Forgetting may have been avoidance of discussing something painful. Yet, it also felt like a severing of the past and any connection to it. Bopha's children had birth certificates and even though she consented to her daughter Trang being part of the research, she evidently did not like her Vietnamese connection being known, as seen in Trang's interviews in chapters 5 and 6. Bopha lived on the river but was keen to sell her house and move onto the land as soon as possible, as she feared Vietnamese communities would soon be moved on from the riverside. She also advised her children not to speak Vietnamese publicly. I asked Bopha about the papers being made and she stressed she did not know anything because "only Vietnamese people here need it." Our discussions were easier when eating breakfast in the morning and not talking personally publicly. All the same, her presentation of herself and history was one that reinforced connection to the Khmer majority.

Ly, the grandmother of study participants Zara⁴⁰ and Olivia⁴¹, was born in Cambodia 50 kilometres away from *Preah Thnov*. Ly's grandparents were already in Cambodia, but she tells me "they didn't work with the French. They came here because there was a lot of fish, but the Cambodians didn't know how to catch fish." I ask her if she can speak Khmer "yes, sometimes I forget Vietnamese! My parents and grandparents went to Khmer school, but I didn't because I had to work really hard, fishing catching fish and then selling them."

Ly grew up and married in the place she was born and when Pol Pot came her family had to escape by boat to Vietnam:

It [time spent in Vietnam] was only 2 years. Back then the Vietnamese government took the land off the rich for those who came. I didn't feel right taking the land, so my husband and I decided to go back to Cambodia. When I first came to *Preah Thnov* it was empty. I chose to live by the river even though there were many houses. I decided to do that because if Pol Pot came, I could run into the

⁴⁰ Zara is introduced in chapter five

⁴¹ Olivia is introduced in chapter seven

river and back to Vietnam. Later, my husband built this house (*Ly, Vietnamese woman born in Cambodia*).

Curious to know where she learnt Vietnamese, I asked if she learnt in Vietnam:

My paternal grandmother did not allow me to learn how to read and write Vietnamese because if I did, I would write love letters to the boys. My whole family spoke Vietnamese even though we lived in Cambodia. We had long hair but when Pol Pot came, he made us cut our hair short. There were many Vietnamese in our village. Those who went back to Vietnam some of them stayed but I wanted to travel back to Cambodia. When I went back to Vietnam people would say, “you are a traitor you went to that land and now they have war you come back here.” When my family heard that Pol Pot was defeated, the next day we travelled to Phnom Penh. At that time, we still used gold and rice to trade. My parents were born in Cambodia a long time ago. They had much land, but they lost it. After the war trade was really slow, yet even though it was hard to trade there was a lot of fish. We had to pray not to catch a big fish or the boat will sink. Cambodians don't know how to clean the fish they don't do anything with the fish so only Vietnamese work with the fish.

I have always seen myself as Vietnamese because I speak Vietnamese and Cambodians do not ask us to be Cambodians, so we are Vietnamese. They recently asked Vietnamese to go make a legal document. Zara and Olivia already have a Cambodian birth certificate, so they do not need to do it, and I am old, so I do not need to do it. I think that maybe they [Cambodian government] want to take the money or maybe they want those [Vietnamese] to be Cambodian, I do not know. We have a document for the land because we've stayed here for a long time but maybe when they [Cambodian government] need the land because it is on the river, they will move us. If they want to take this land back, they will have to repay us and give us another land (*Ly, Vietnamese woman born in Cambodia*).

The thought-provoking thing about the conversation with Ly is that whilst she sees herself as Vietnamese, she often refers to the Vietnamese as “they” interchangeably with “we”. Her position is one of privilege. Her house that doubles as a pharmacy is the largest on her side of the village. Also, when discussing whether she believes in river ghosts (a widespread belief among the Vietnamese I interviewed) she reveals her trust in the omnipotence of the Cambodian King. The King in Cambodia is a priestly figure believed to have supernatural powers. The period of fieldwork was one marred with drought, rains were late in coming and consequently many suffered across the country. Ly tells me of a previous time when there was drought “there was no water in those areas, but the King took the ox and walked on the land to soften it. Then the rain came. If the King was still here there would be no problem.” This is a typically Khmer sentiment. Ly has a picture of King Norodom Sihanouk and Queen Norodom Monineath on her wall. She tells me she respects the King and:

believes that when they burnt him [King Norodom Sihanouk] his spirit flew up to the moon. This hot weather, if he [the King] was still here it wouldn't be hot. Having their [King and Queen's] pictures up is also good because Cambodian people love him so when they come to the house and see his pictures, they say that "she loves the king", so they like me too (*Ly, Vietnamese woman born in Cambodia*).

At Khmer New Year Ly has requests for assistance from Khmer neighbours to help them offer to their idols. The combination of all the factors discussed with Ly evidence a deeper level of integration compared to other interviewees. Taking into consideration the characteristics of assimilation that frame naturalisation and what it means to be "Khmer" Ly is unique among interviewees in both her embrace of, and the receptiveness of the Khmer.

The irony of a situation whereby Cambodians cannot prove their true identities, but others are accepted as such begs the question what factors enable such inclusion. Ly made a distinction between the "old" and "new" Vietnamese and puts forward the notion that those who are "old" have better prospects in the country than the "new" immigrants: "before [war times] so many people died, and the government encouraged people to go to a field, take land, but now there is no more land. People have grown up others are born, and they of course will need to buy land it's not free anymore." When I asked about the future of the Vietnamese in Cambodia, Ly concluded that it largely depends on the person and if they take and make opportunities.

Ly's explanation might be true to a certain extent but the mobilities of the communities were not so straightforward. A factor that differentiated adults is their current relationships to Vietnamese people. Ly is a widow. Many of the adults I interviewed are from mixed marriage households and Khmer women who married Vietnamese men (like Violet) experienced discrimination, insecurity and were unable to secure documents for their children.

Highlighted so far are the structural barriers to, and costly acquisition of, documentation. Consequently, owning land and accessing utilities as well as education is problematic. The time spent in the villages talking with adults and observing the differences between families affirmed the macro mechanisms of exclusion. Moreover, micro-mechanisms of exclusion surfaced, that is social processes embedded in the community that fostered durable inequality and poverty (Mosse 2010). Poverty persists because of document limitation. Equally, identity and social categorisation along ethnic lines are social

processes producing a continuation of poverty and inequality. Just describing the effects of poverty does little to reveal how it persists in the communities studied. Therefore, to work towards an explanation one must look at the logic of social mechanisms and ask what produces and stabilises exploitation and accumulation. Sociologist Charles Tilly (1998, 2001) looks not just at the sequence of exploitation – how people are excluded from the full share of the value added by their labour – but the corresponding process he calls “opportunity hoarding” which involves confining the use of a value-producing resource to members of an in-group. Simply put, within the minority group of Vietnamese some do not experience the full effects of categorical distinctions. This might be because they can perform Khmerness like Ly, or are widowed as in the case of Bopha. However, inadvertently or otherwise, members of the community began to exercise control over access to resources and thus actively participated in the cultivation of systems of social closure and exclusion.

The use of middlemen to secure housing, labour and resources were tactics employed by members of the adult research community to live day by day. This meant that within communities there are those who live above the parapet and broker informal interactions between their neighbours and employers or landlords. Receiving a commission for organising labour, these individuals become embroiled in the production of inequality, and the poverty of the community they come from consequently becomes depoliticised. Rather than becoming active against institutional marginalisation and discrimination they assist in its maintenance by providing the means to continue to live informally.

Bao, 41, a resident of *Preah Rotn Phon* and the father of research participant Quoc, came to Cambodia in 1978 due to a severe flood in Vietnam. He tells me that after living in Cambodia for such a long time he feels it is easier to live in Cambodia than in Vietnam, and how his situation is such that he is not accepted in Vietnam.

Bao explains:

Vietnamese here have different life situations. Some soldiers got married and settled here. Like my father-in-law. He joined the army in 1982 and had his family here. And it wasn't only him, many others as well. When we crossed into Cambodia, we did it with ease, they [Khmer] did not dare do anything to me because at that time there were still Vietnamese soldiers. I have papers to show I am a Vietnamese who has lived here for a long time. All my children were born here. If we have an ID card it's easy to do the birth certificate, we must spend money. We just tell the day of the child birth, so they will do it for us. When Quoc is 15, he can go and get an ID card like me.

I used to fish for a living, but I stopped that because it is not so good anymore. Now I work as a contractor. I get together all the workers to build houses, big and small, all jobs: electrician, plasterer etc. it's important for me to make money as my family need \$20 a day to live (*Bao Vietnamese man married to a Khmer woman*).

Bao's situation on the one hand is understandable. He has done what Ly said is required of a Vietnamese person to survive in Cambodia. He has sought out opportunities and made good of them. Bao's family situation was not easy. In interviews, Quoc told me of his mother's battle with heroin, which she eventually ended up selling and at the time of the research was in prison for. Quoc's mother, a Cambodian, was jailed when his brother was three months old. He had not stopped breastfeeding, so the jailing of his mother worried the family. Quoc explained:

When my mother went to jail, I was so sad, no one looked after my brother, so I stopped going to school [God School] for 1 month to take care of him. He asked for milk (to suck) a lot. I didn't know what to do, so I gave him rice (*Quoc, male, 14 years old*).

Quoc's father did try heroin but then he was determined to stop so he used a chain to bind his hands and feet and stayed in the room for three months until he was drug free. This concerning family situation was not the only tragedy they had faced. During a timeline exercise, Quoc explained to me the death of his sister 4 years ago prior to the interview "she went to Vietnam (by the motorbike). She was too sleepy, so she fell and hit her head on the rock, so she died." Despite the family tragedy, Bao's position is one of privilege. Well-connected, he would organise and set people up for work with both Vietnamese and Khmer. Workers would be without contracts and the vulnerability of working for a middleman was explained by other participants. For instance, Krystal, 16, a former student of the God School, got some work in a factory after leaving the school. Due to her age, employment was an under-the-table arrangement secured through a middleman. She worked 7am to 4pm and earned 4.5\$ per day. She explained how it was not enough money to survive, not even enough to buy food. Eventually her mother asked her to stop working there and train to be a beautician.

When visiting *Preah Rotn Phon* I was able to interview the father of research participant Nhi. In our conversation he gave his opinion about middlemen, the precarious nature of work and getting papers made:

We've been here [Cambodia] for a long time and we've got used to it. I'm without assets. In fact, in Vietnam, people have land, better conditions. If they are patient, they would have stable lives. Here our lives are unstable. Here the rich are rich and the poor are poor. Those who are rich return [to Vietnam] to set up their lives. With land, they live better than here. Here we work and live one day at a time. In general, us Vietnamese cannot work at the factory because they ask for birth certificates and ID cards. I have kids who work in the factory of a Christian, so they can work, but otherwise it would be difficult to get a job. It is hard to find a middleman and you must find money. Those who stay here for a long time and speak Khmer well they can pay for a fake document. Working in the factory is also low income. You get paid 110\$ per month. My daughter works with an NGO here for \$110 per month. She likes that she can earn her own money. I cannot comment about whether it is fair to get the papers made because it is the rule of the country - we live here in Cambodia, but we don't have the legal documents. We've lost our rights as citizens [*mất quyền công dân rồi*]. Only the Vietnamese government can speak up about that - we are normal people – however I do see that ethnicity is an excluding factor. Even if we speak really good Khmer, we are Vietnamese because our parents are Vietnamese (*Vietnamese migrant in Cambodia*).

The villagers of *Preah Rotn Phon* used middlemen to secure electricity, as Chanthou's interview highlights, for more than treble the price of normal suppliers. Employment was secured at a cost and for low wages. Most residents also paid an annual land rental tax of 100\$ which is in addition to the personal tax (the amount of personal tax varied in accounts from \$70-\$100) that people were being told they had to pay. Paying the land tax or even the "personal tax" was not universal. People like Bao, a middleman, would work with Khmer people to bribe documents for themselves despite being what would be categorised as a "new" migrant to Cambodia. Middlemen are another mechanism of inequality the Vietnamese and to some extent Khmer people are exposed to. Mosse (2010) points out that it's the engagement with such relational poverty that makes it tolerable. People accept their poverty, and even Khmer participants, as we have seen, accept the inaccurate judgements about their ethnicity.

By scapegoating the Vietnamese, the Khmer public have an enemy to blame. In communities represented in the research, Vietnamese locals equally see the Khmer as their enemy. Pitted against one another and on a course for survival, there is little time or space to step back and think about the structural inequalities both groups face. This seemed to be an insidious outcome of the corruption of local government. Whilst communities see their opponents being the majority or minority, they in turn think that those people who secure them work or utilities are doing them a favour. When in fact, middlemen are dependent on the continuation of the unequal terms of contract to make a living themselves.

4.5 Conclusion

The historical circumstances of ethnic Vietnamese incorporation into Cambodia shape their contemporary relationship with the State and its majority group (Ehrentraut 2013). This chapter has demonstrated structural violence is revealed in the building of the ‘Khmer’ nation. Cambodian nationalism required a scapegoat, and the Vietnamese since the time of the French have represented a modern antithesis to ‘Khmer’ identity. Ethno-cultural notions of what it means to be ‘Khmer’ have been instituted and permeate Cambodia’s legal framework, excluding the Vietnamese minority and reducing them to a like that of a water hyacinth. At the intersection of social and legal exclusion poverty finds its place, resulting in hierarchies of power that produce durable inequality. Factors that differentiate adult communities, making them less vulnerable political projects of exclusion, include diminished relationships with Vietnamese, and connectivity that allows for documents to be secured. Ostensibly, widowed women are able to earn more money and embrace or perform their Khmerness effectively. Middlemen on the other hand are inadvertent propellers of durable inequality made possible by macro- and micro-mechanisms of exclusion. The next chapter moves away from a direct consideration of adults and instead views the experience of children impacted by the political projects of exclusion mentioned.

Chapter 5 Belonging from Above: Children's Experience and Practice of Belonging

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter established how belonging from above – the socio-political discursive and legal frameworks that generate exclusionary terms of membership for Vietnamese communities – is shaped by the historical embeddedness of ethno-nationalism in Cambodia. This chapter focuses on children's experiences of belonging from above exposed in examples of racism and ethnic exclusion. Children's accounts are pivotal to understanding the problems which ethno-national discourse has on the integration of Vietnamese children in Cambodia, as well as their experience and practice of belonging. This chapter identifies poverty and racist violence experienced in the community as exclusionary mechanisms of belonging, adding to the argument made in the previous chapter that there is an unequal experience of exclusion among wealthier Vietnamese compared to their poor counterparts. In addition, this chapter demonstrates how children negotiate the difficult terrain of exclusion.

First, children's experiences of belonging complicate the apparently neat ideas of integration, revealing instead the paradox of integration, the influence of strong and weak ties, and the importance of environmental factors in cultivating a sense of place belonging. By comparing the lives of Cammy with sisters Huong and Hung, this chapter shows that children experience feelings of dislocation in different ways but often with similar results. Experiences of dislocation, rooted in an underlying nationalism based on ethnocentric views of the Vietnamese, hinders children's integration into Khmer society despite their acculturation. Speaking Cambodia or even being willing to integrate did not necessarily offer children a secure sense of place belongingness. Moreover, children who have had negative experiences of living in Cambodia tended to distrust the majority Khmer and expressed cross-border affiliations with Vietnam.

Second, despite the experience of dislocation children did not, or could not afford to, fully disengage from society. Instead, they became aware of ways to minimise the feelings of marginalisation by effectively co-existing in society. The need to co-exist was not only motivated by a desire for peace, but co-existence was a tactically considered practice that secured residence, education and sometimes economic security. To secure these things

children at times performed alternative ‘Khmer’ identities that enabled some degree of co-existence among the majority.

Third, the experience and practice of belonging among children in this study is heavily influenced by identity politics. There are, however, moments suspended from this. Relying solely on verbal accounts offered in interviews or conversations can restrict the researcher’s analysis of children’s identity and belonging. Conversely, participant observation revealed realities of connection to place and Khmer culture which transcend conventional antagonisms.

5.2 Poverty, violence and local experiences of place belonging

By contrasting the experiences of Cammy, 15, with the experiences of sisters Hung, 14, and Huong, 12, this section draws attention to the ways that children encounter belonging from above, and the factors that contributed to a feeling of dislocation. Varying factors included the village a child lived in and the sense of safety they had living there, the strength of local relationships, and a child’s experience of poverty and violence. Interestingly, this section shows that dislocation from place can occur even when a child has a strong experience of place belonging. For instance, dislocation can be provoked directly as a result of integration, highlighting what is known as the ‘paradox of integration’ (Ghorashi 2010).

Integration is commonly held to follow a linear process of acculturation, positioning, interaction and, finally, identification (Esser 2003). However, sources of belonging are more layered than the often-assumed exclusive identification with national identity. Children who have one Khmer parent, or learnt Cambodian as a first language, did not experience straightforward integration. In addition, in Cambodia’s nationality law cultural adjustment and positive positioning has to be proven in order to naturalise. This usually means that being accepted as Khmer is predicated on being seen to adopt and live out key elements of Khmer culture, religion, and have a command of the Cambodian language. This includes foreigners being able to:

 speak Khmer, know Khmer scripts and have some knowledge of Khmer history, and prove clear evidence that he/she can live in harmony in Khmer society and can get used to good Khmer custom and tradition (Article 8.5, Law on Nationality 1996).

The issue with presenting an outline of belonging based on consanguineal ties or language, is that it omits a reading of integration that in reality is far more complex. Ghorashi and van Tilburg (2006) found that refugee women from Afghanistan and Iran considered the Dutch language essential to obtaining a job in the Netherlands, but even when they were able to speak Dutch fluently employers continued to perceive this as not good enough. This example, and the examples of Huong and Hung in this chapter, demonstrate that speaking a language does not always better one's positioning or experience of belonging. Duyendak and Scholten (2010) argue that following a model of integration, as policy makers tend to, forsakes the multifarious, paradoxical realities of belonging. Thus, questions must be asked of Cambodia's 'integration' (via naturalisation) model. For instance, what causes the fractious positioning among Vietnamese children who live among the Khmer majority whilst speaking their language? How is belonging lived and negotiated within and beyond discursive practices that seek to exclude along ethno-national lines? Moving away from an emphasis on language as the key to belonging, and instead asking how attachment or dislocation from the locale is produced, and given meaning, one can begin to understand how place belonging is achieved, that is 'belonging' as a feeling of community, home, safety, ownership of, acceptance and affiliation in and to spaces and places in and outside one's country in many instances (Hamaz and Vasta 2009).

During the research, when participants spoke of where they were from, often the phrase "I'm from here" was used. It is easy to take for granted what is meant by the response "I am from here" within ethnographic research (Hamaz and Vasta 2009). It is tempting to move on from such a statement and derive some 'implicit' meaning that is considered obvious. Yet, getting to know participants and learning about their lives, and the lives of their families, it became apparent that identifying as being from 'here' said little about belonging. It is often thought that there is a straightforward formula to belonging, that is, belonging is a set of relationships worked out among a dominant place and people. However, Hamaz and Vasta's (2009) research on belonging among migrant and ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom revealed two assumptions. First, that place and the dominant group are synonymous, and second belonging to a place or people can only be formed through a certain personal relationship to the dominant group. Their findings suggest that this is not the case. Instead, people can sustain a sense of belonging independently of personal relationships with any majority group, and also that belonging is often strongest when the majority group is not present in everyday life. These findings

mirror some of the experiences of participants (as shown in chapters six and seven), although, some participants experienced what Edward Said (2003) refers to as the condition of ‘in-betweenness’, being both an insider and outsider simultaneously.

As explained in Chapter one, the God School was comprised of a mix of children. The assortment of young people included families who had been in Cambodia for generations, those who had migrated from Vietnam soon after their birth, and mixed marriage (Khmer and Vietnamese) households. The villages that children lived in varied in terms of housing, income and the strength of local relationships. These factors influenced the extent to which children experienced a sense of place belonging. For instance, the physical layout of each village was fundamentally different. *Preah Thnov* was relatively clean. The community was mainly made up of Vietnamese who had lived two or three generations in Cambodia and Khmer was spoken more broadly. In stark contrast, the cramped housing with narrow walk ways, excessive amounts of rubbish, and wooden stilt housing that characterised *Preah Rotn Phon* and *Preah Amnr Sabbay* appeared strikingly more impoverished compared to *Preah Thnov*. Whilst poverty was probably worse in other villages, many families in *Preah Thnov* also experienced debt, insecure employment, and *de facto* statelessness. Therefore, how other villages came to be seen arguably reflected participants own experience of violence or poverty. For instance, Cammy, 15, a resident of *Preah Thnov*, had a different experience of poverty and violence compared to participants from other villages. Reflecting on the village she is from she explains to me the differences as she sees them:

I live in this [*Preah Thnov*] village which is different from *Preah Rehab* and *Preah Rotn Phon*. My village is quite quiet, not much gambling, fighting or arguing. In the other villages, when I went there I saw they gamble a lot, and swear (*Cammy, female, 15 years old*).

During her self-portrait exercise Cammy talked about her house, family and parents being important to who she is. Her home is secure: “no strangers can come in”. She saw her ethnic identity as mixed; she said that she “felt Cambodian despite her parents being Vietnamese”. Despite Cammy’s parents being Vietnamese, they had managed to secure a birth certificate for her. Over time, Cammy shared how she felt Cambodian because before attending the God School she spoke only Cambodian. Additionally, she previously attended a Khmer school and played with Cambodians. Chapter six will return to this crucial point as it alludes to the ways that the God School can contribute to children feeling/being less integrated into Cambodian society. What is important to note here is

that to some extent Cammy's experience of belonging should tick the boxes of integration models. She can speak Cambodian fluently, and this made it easier for her to interact with Khmer. Yet, ironically, it became apparent that it was precisely her deeper integration and daily interaction with the Khmer majority that eventually stoked a feeling of being an 'outsider'. This is what Ghorashi (2010) describes as the 'integration paradox': the more involved in society the more sensitive to feelings of unfair treatment one becomes (Rouvoet et al. 2017). Cammy's account below highlights the paradox of integration.

As one of the wealthier students, Cammy had the means to pay the bribes required for her to attend Khmer school. Yet her experience of Khmer school provoked a degree of dislocation, being more exposed to the historical charges against the Vietnamese taught in the curriculum than other, less integrated Vietnamese children. She learned an antagonistic history of Vietnam and Cambodia's relationship at Khmer school, consequently she sometimes felt dislocated in Cambodia and during her future timeline exercise expressed a desire to be in Vietnam:

When I am older I will live in Vietnam, I don't like living in Cambodia because Khmer people tell us it is not good that we live here, and they always say we [Vietnamese] are the ones who take their land. They said this from grade 1 to grade 7 - any grade. Every grade they always talked about it. Especially in grade 6 it was in the history books. The books said Vietnamese came to their country and then put the camp in Udon place. It made me feel sad. I didn't tell my parents. They work and live in Cambodia, they know the Khmer talk about this story. In Vietnam, I don't have to think about these things (*Cammy, female, 15 years old*).

Cammy's opinion demonstrates empathy with the Vietnamese who live under the stigma of being 'othered', and a desire to avoid the marginalisation which results from accusatory rhetoric. There exists a tension for Vietnamese-heritage children who are born in Cambodia and want to identify as Khmer, but the process of place belonging is disrupted by being rejected by the society in which they live. This does not dissolve the 'longing to belong' (Probyn 1996), however the internalisation of discourse and the experience of being 'othered' highlights Said's (2003) notion of 'in-betweenness'. The tension of in-betweenness – being and feeling part of the society but experiencing an internal feeling of dislocation – acts as a catalyst for children's construction of the Khmer as morally inferior, as will be shown later in the chapter.

Feelings of dislocation are not produced in isolation from the environment, so an in-depth analysis of belonging must include a consideration of the physical surroundings children live in. Common among the comparisons which participants would make between

Cambodia and Vietnam is the influence the physical environment had in generating different degrees of dislocation. Dixon and Durriheim (2004) argue that in treating the environment as an insignificant setting to, or container of, social relations, or as a behavioural setting that inhibits or encourages interaction, researchers have overlooked what Stokols (1990) refers to as the ‘spiritual’ dimension of human-environment relationships. That is, how people invest everyday environments with richly symbolic, aesthetic, moral, and, above all, identity-relevant meanings.

This is evidenced in the ways that young people spoke of their preference of Vietnam as a place over Cambodia, and the Vietnamese as morally superior people. The physical environment could have contributed towards Cammy’s expressed desire to live in Vietnam. Her village was experiencing noisy ongoing road development all around it, and the record-breaking oppressive heat in Cambodia during the research period made the fringes of the village akin to a sweltering dust bowl. When discussing her opinions of Vietnam and the Vietnamese, Cammy highlighted the differences she noticed:

In my place in Vietnam there are not many people, the roads are quiet, there is green nature and it’s cool, and in Cambodia it is always so noisy. There are differences in people too, Khmer [have] dark skin, Vietnamese fair skin. Vietnamese know how to love, to help, and they are kinder. This is because of the education in the school. I hope that it [Cambodian education] would be better, that teachers will not take bribes from pupils. The teachers do not focus on teaching but are drunk, and gossip (*Cammy, female, 15 years old*).

It might seem the desire to live in Vietnam, the descriptions of its greenness and the perception of Vietnamese people being ‘more loving’ evidence a longing to exit. On the other hand, it could be indicative of a longing for change in the home environment. Interestingly, children often responded to what they thought were incorrect representations of the Vietnamese with counter-narratives about the Khmer as shown here, and in the accounts to come later in this chapter.

In short, there are differing degrees of dislocation that result from an underlying nationalism based on ethnocentric views of the Vietnamese. Cammy’s experience of this kind of dislocation was less extreme. Cammy’s example shows she was able to experience place belonging as she felt a sense of community, home and safety in *Preah Thnov*. The space she lived – the coffee shop was popular and much of community life took place around it. Cammy’s immediate family, her parents and siblings, lived peacefully and securely, and she spoke positively about her future prospects. For instance, she was

confident that her mother would secure her a passport at the age of 18, and rumour had it among other children that is because her parents know the right 'middlemen'. Contrary to this, Cammy told me her parents would buy a passport for \$125 off the police. The quest for documentation and legitimacy is discussed in chapters four and six; however, this information is inserted here to contrast Cammy's experience with Huong, 12, and her sister Hung, 14, who lived with their parents in *Preah Amnr Sabbay* and had very different experiences of poverty and violence compared to Cammy, who did not share any experiences of physical violence.

The first time I met Hung and Huong was when I accompanied Linh Anh, the principal of the God School, to their village to take one of the girls home. After a long absence from the school Linh Anh was keen to encourage the parents of their children's potential and the importance of regular school attendance. The three of us, Hung, myself and Linh Anh, loaded onto a semi-automatic motorbike, the student sandwiched in the middle, all our faces covered with face masks to avoid inhaling the dust from the main road that was undergoing construction. It was quite remarkable how loud the main road was: horns, food stalls, construction and dust characterised a journey that was an assault on the senses despite being less than ten minutes long. Industrial Lorries frequently used the road and often drove at dangerous speeds, seeming not to care about the smaller bikes forced to creep alongside them. As half the road was full of potholes, both directions of traffic used one lane.

Turning off the main road into the village, the dust and the noise settled. Walking through narrow walkways, children ran around whilst adults sat chatting. Navigating our way through the village entailed walking over bricks, mud puddles and rubbish. The noise of the road was replaced by the noise of Khmer music coming from the house of Huong and Hung. The TV that was placed on a large unit, made from mahogany wood in traditional Khmer style, was rigged up to speakers and Khmer subtitles accompanied the song *Karaoke* style. This all gave off the impression of entering a Khmer space. The front of the concrete house was a wide-open square closed by a massive steel door with no windows. On this occasion, the door was open leaving the front of the house exposed and easily seen into. This was not unusual; most people in the villages had an open style front of house that people could easily see into. The concrete house did stand out as many of the other houses were made from wood and sat on stilts.

As we approached the house, the floor was quickly swept. Children hung off Linh Anh and my arms shouting, "teacher, teacher." Removing our shoes and sitting down in the house, the *Tonlé Sap* River was visible, floating houses decorating its surface. Children were running about, many from the school. They followed us into the house and clambered onto our laps only to be ushered out by their parents. The front room that we sat in was bare apart from the TV stand; the floor was tiled and cool. Huong and Hung's parents were open and explained how they worked in the evenings fishing and selling shrimp. They locked up the house, leaving the children unattended at night - this was a regular practice among families. The mother did most of the talking whilst Linh Anh translated my description of the research and explained that I would teach English at the school. The parents gave consent to their daughters being involved in the research if they wanted to. During the conversation, a lady entered the house at which point the girl's mother took a huge stack of 1000-riel notes (at a guess around \$200 worth) from inside the large unit and handed it over. There was no concern passing this money over publicly. The question about whether the family could be money lenders, or whether they had borrowed the money, was clarified during an interview with Huong when she explained her mother was in debt after borrowing money for hospital treatment for her sister:

My mum is in debt because my sister got sick in her stomach so my mum borrowed money so my sister could have treatment at the hospital. When she was better my mum could not afford to pay back (*Huong, female, 14 years old*).

Huong's mother expressed concern about getting their children to school because of transport difficulties and the parents' working hours, yet Linh Anh's talk must have been convincing because the next day both sisters attended school.

I left the house that evening and travelled back to *Preah Thnov* thinking that because of the girls' secure house (built from concrete rather than wood) and the openness of the family, perhaps they lived peacefully within the community. However, later the sisters explained that they had experienced quite fractious local relationships. Their mother is Khmer and the brunt of the violence they encountered from the community came from their father being Vietnamese.

Hung and Huong spoke both Vietnamese and Khmer due to their parent's mixed marriage and living among many Khmer in their village. The autobiographical rendering of their lives unravelled complications and negative experiences associated with their Vietnamese heritage. During her self-portrait exercise Hung did not draw herself as she found it

difficult to do so. As I encouraged Hung to say what she would have drawn if she could, she explained:

I wanted to draw that I really want to study at this school because I really love this school [the God School] and I want to stay here always, because I like my teachers and love God; I believe in God (*Hung, female, 14 years old*).

Given the overt preference for the God School, I wanted to understand if Hung had attended Khmer school and what her experience was. Hung had had two experiences of school. She told me that she and her sister previously attend an NGO school for the homeless and orphaned due to their parents inability to pay school fees, but because she left to visit Vietnam they were not allowed back upon their return. Prior to that Hung had been to Khmer school although she did not enjoy her experience:

It was difficult. Because Cambodian is difficult. When I answered the questions, it was difficult. I can read but when I am asked it is difficult. My teacher was strict and would scold us. They would say “You are a dog, no one [can] teach you” (*Hung, female, 14 years old*).

To call a person a dog is a big insult to Vietnamese children and their parents, as the role of parents in teaching their children is pivotal (Rydstrøm 2001). So to call a child a dog is also an insult to the parents. It is not clear whether the harsh treatment was related to Hung’s Vietnamese heritage: Hung said she spoke Cambodian at school. However, the feelings of exclusion were remembered and came to frame how Hung saw herself in the present especially her preference for the God School. This story was directly followed by another, Hung explained why she doesn’t speak Vietnamese outside:

I do not speak Vietnamese outside as they will call me ‘Yvon’.⁴² It has happened before. My uncle is a Vietnamese soldier and came to visit to my house and some Khmer people came and talked with him, and swore at him, and he got out a gun in front of the village chief’s nephew, and then from that day they drew on the walls of people’s houses and said some words that are not good about the Vietnamese. They used charcoal to write on the wall. They wrote in Khmer: “if Vietnamese people want to remain alive they need to say sorry.” This happened a long time ago. Sometimes for two or three days they threw stones at all the Vietnamese houses, not just mine (*Hung, female, 14 years old*).

The house Hung’s family lived in was built by her maternal grandparents and she spoke fondly about how they planted various trees, including a coconut tree, outside the house. Hung would water the trees and help her grandmother buy rice in the mornings and go to

⁴² A derogatory slur used in Khmer language to refer to Vietnamese people (Oesterheld 2014).

school in the afternoons. Hung starkly contrasted her home, once a place of happiness, status and protection afforded by her Khmer grandparents, to the more recent experience of violence as described above. Unfortunately, Hung's experience of violence was not an isolated account. During the identity flower exercise her younger sister Huong wrote "I love Vietnam." It transpired that she did not want to go and live there, but her experience of violence negatively influenced her opinion of Cambodians. She explained why she loves Vietnam:

I have friends in Vietnam, they are really good, they never swear or argue with me. When I live here I play with Vietnamese because there is this Cambodian who always swears at me and their mum said she will kill me and chop me up. I don't know why, they always say I am 'Yvon', and I got angry and I said, "I am Vietnamese and that's not none of your business", and they went to tell their mum because Phum [the owner of the land] is their uncle (*Huong, female, 12 years old*).

Despite their house being built by her maternal grandparents, the land the family lived on was rented. This brings to life the emphasis placed on the growing of trees by Hung. The description of planting trees, watering them and marvelling at their growth points to a symbolic rootedness, an ability to control the land, and a season of life in which her place belonging was not challenged.

Huong and Hung's fractious relationships had the effect of influencing the extent to which the sisters felt a sense of place belonging. The sisters' stories were embedded with elaborate details and characters that all informed how they belonged. Their stories were illustrated with moral and aesthetic comparisons between the place and people in their current environment and that of Vietnam. Huong moved to Cambodia when she was 3 years old. I asked her if she remembered Vietnam:

I remember it being peaceful, no one argued together. They had green grass and it has storks. Khmer argue and some of them gamble and Khmer people, when they fight together, they use a knife. My auntie's son stole money from his wife (\$400) and went somewhere then came back a couple of days later and she yelled at him. There is not much peace here (*Huong, female, 12 years old*).

Whilst the comparison alluded to a homelier feel in Vietnam, Huong did not have a sense of home there either: "[In Vietnam] I did not feel at home, I just stayed in Vietnam to play with my friend and to visit my grandma and grandpa. Whenever I go hang out with my family, I feel like I'm at home". However, it was clear that Huong thought the Vietnamese to be less confrontational. For example, in discussing Huong's future I asked

her what she wanted her husband to be like. She replied that she wanted him to be “a good man, so we can live and love each other and not argue” I ask her where her husband will be from and she replies “from Vietnam.”

On the other hand, older sister Hung expressed a desire to live in Vietnam. She wanted to go to Vietnam because it is ‘happy and funny’, but she was not sure if her father would let her go. Yet, in her interviews about her future, Hung was invested in remaining with her family and working to provide for them. In the same interview about her future I asked Hung if she has any dreams: “Yes, I have a wish that my parents always stay with me, live with me in my house and that they will love us more, me and my siblings.” Discussing her self-portrait, I asked Hung whether anything other than her family is important to her. She replied, “I don’t want to separate from my parents.” There is a clear sense from both girls that their place belonging is connected to their family.

Given her experiences, it is no wonder Hung wanted to be somewhere “happy and funny”. Much like Cammy’s example, perhaps Hung’s explanations of Vietnam align with how she wanted her present circumstances to be. Notwithstanding negative experiences, their accounts of their past and how they see their present and future contained a strong sense of familial responsibility.

This section has demonstrated the complexity of integration. The paradox of integration is that integration can expose children to situations that make them feel disconnected, which increases feelings of dislocation. The negative portrayals and acts of violence aimed towards the ethnic Vietnamese are also felt by children. In response, they (re)frame the Khmer as morally inferior and imagine a Vietnam that represents a desire for a more settled experience in Cambodia. In their everyday lives, children negotiated the difficult terrain of exclusion, and their presence in specific spaces. The next section will focus on what could be (mistakenly) conceived as mundane, minor everyday happenings in participant’s daily lives yet which are in fact tactics (De Certeau 1984) employed to secure a degree of place belonging.

5.3 Co-existence: the practice of belonging

This section illustrates how to fit in or belong, children would negotiate their presence in certain spaces by learning to publicly perform ‘Khmerness’. Whilst this is at times a strained effort because the child does not speak much Cambodian, at other times young

people's Vietnamese-ness would go completely unnoticed in public spaces. Parents would also at times advise their children to not speak to or respond to people they didn't know in Vietnamese, for fear of being identified as such. Thus, the experience of place-belongingness was at times achieved through a negotiation of belonging. Per contra, some young people, whilst feeling home and a sense of place in their village, refused to speak Cambodian to the Khmer as a tactic of resistance (De Certeau 1984). Others, meanwhile, wanted to assimilate as 'Khmer'.

As discussed in chapter two, the task of investigating the concept of 'belonging' is not straightforward. As Bell (1999) has argued, one does not simply or ontologically 'belong' to the world or to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement of abstraction on several levels. In some instances, participants temporally overcame their marginalisation and nurtured a sense of belonging through specific behaviours, in specific spaces, that were common to everyday life. Daily practices reveal the functioning of power's subjects; the small gambits through which the dominated re-appropriate space (De Certeau 1984). It is what could be conceived as irrelevant, minor daily happenings in participants' daily lives that this section will focus in on to identify tactics of belonging.

Participants' desires to provide for their families or have other opportunities for themselves motivated a desire to perform a Khmer identity or even 'be Khmer'. The discussion about the importance of Khmer names came at a break in the teaching day. Hot weather and a power cut in the village cut short Class 5's English lesson. We took a break, got a drink, and the conversation proceeded in a more casual direction. The previous day the participants in the class wanted to choose pseudonyms for me to use when representing them in the research. During the discussion one boy, Phally, 13, said "I don't want an English name; I want a Khmer name." This sparked a discussion about the importance of having a Khmer name, and it transpired that it was indeed necessary and all students in the class had one. In response to asking why having a Khmer name is important, the class shared the same reasoning:

because when we go outside we need a Khmer name, so no-one will know we are Vietnamese. If you tell them your Vietnamese name, they will know you are Vietnamese. People don't always ask our name, but we must use it if the police come or the paper people.

Khmer names were given to students by different people, mostly Khmer relatives or friends. The importance and reason for being able to speak and act Khmer in public was widely understood. As Zara,⁴³ 16, told me:

If they [Vietnamese children] live here and go outside, you need to know how to speak Khmer. Here in Cambodia some love Vietnamese, they understand, but most of them [Khmer] hate Vietnamese more than love so it's not good for you if you don't know how to ask or say and you just point. They will not understand you; they hate you (*Zara, female, 16 years old*).

During the fieldwork preparation process, I learnt some Vietnamese language to communicate in the school both with students and teachers. I did not realise the extent to which Cambodian was spoken in *Preah Thnov* during my pilot study as I stayed mainly within the school, and the only village I visited at that time was *Preah Rotn Phon* which had a large Vietnamese-speaking population. I had noticed that when parents came to the school they spoke to the teachers in Vietnamese as did some small shopholders. However, one morning whilst ordering breakfast, the shopkeeper, a short woman who dyed her grey hair black, and who had a changeable mood, said to me in Vietnamese “do not order in Vietnamese, either Cambodian or English.” She obviously did not want me to speak to her in Vietnamese in public, although this did not bother the stallholder next to her. When buying from her, the school children would also ask for things in Cambodian (if they could). On another occasion, when the local vegetable seller came to the village – essentially a vegetable stall on a motorised cart – the villagers told the teachers to ask for the prices, in Cambodian. Both these instances confirmed the children’s accounts. Therefore, it was clear that having Khmer names or speaking Cambodian in certain spaces were tactics that children adopted. The below excerpts from Trang, Hung and Huong and Hien all point to different tactics adopted to negotiate space and act within it, whether that be to secure the sale of a house, to trade in the market or gain a desired education. In addition to these examples, the adoption of Khmer names is another tactic used in giving that name to a teacher, police officer, or ‘paper person’ to avoid hassle and even discrimination.

Trang, age 13, the daughter of Bopha introduced in chapter four, sold breakfast at her mother’s stall in *Preah Thnov*. Teachers would often frequent Bopha’s stall for tasty *bánh khọt*, Vietnamese-style crispy pancakes that cost \$0.50. Trang’s father, who was

⁴³ Zara is the granddaughter of Ly.

Vietnamese, died a sudden and unfortunate death when Trang was 11. Trang and her family lived on the river in a house boat that was built and bought by her father. Trang learnt Vietnamese from her father but before going to the God School she spoke mainly Cambodian. Since her father's death she discusses the importance of needing to read and write Vietnamese. Her reasoning for seeing herself as both Cambodian and Vietnamese revealed the need to 'be Cambodian' locally but to read and write Vietnamese for the benefit of her mother. Whilst it is true that I heard more cases of participants playing up their Khmer identity, in the case of Trang we see an example of the tactics of performing two identities to achieve belonging and economic security. Trang was able to articulate the rationale for undertaking two identities.

During the flower petal exercise Trang wrote "I am Cambodian" When asking Trang to explain what she meant by this she said:

I know that I am Cambodian. I came to the God School so I can study Vietnamese so when my mum makes the paper to sell the house, because they do it in Vietnamese, I will know how to read it for my mum to make sure that the one who buys the house will not trick us (*Trang, female, 13 years old*).

Trang told me that when her father was alive people would say she was Vietnamese. However now she says she is Cambodian. She explains how she is lucky because she is dark skinned which means Vietnamese think she is Khmer:

Vietnamese say I am Cambodian which is okay, because I am Cambodian not Vietnamese, I'm afraid. Some people say Cambodians don't like Vietnamese so some of the government are trying, or have a plan, to expel them (*Trang, female, 13 years old*).

Trang said she enjoyed speaking Vietnamese in the freedom of the school. Like other participants she was aware of the negative discourse that circulated about the Vietnamese. She was conflicted about her ethnic identity, as the below excerpt reveals:

When my father was alive they said that I am Vietnamese, and when I went to Khmer people they said Vietnamese talked bad about Khmer people. I said Vietnam helped Cambodia a lot, so Khmer are wrong when they think or talk about Vietnamese like that. Khmer people misunderstood Vietnamese for taking the land but it was Thailand that took the land it's not about Vietnamese, but they misunderstood. They talk about Vietnamese taking the land that's why they, Khmer, hate the Vietnamese. When I am outside I speak Cambodian. My mother wants to sell the house because she heard that they will expel the ones who live on the boat house, so she wants to live on the land. My mum said if they speak to you in Vietnamese, or if they speak to us in Vietnamese, don't answer back because they will know, and the Khmer don't like the Vietnamese. I want to be

Vietnamese more because Vietnamese helped Cambodians but if they [the Khmer people] say a bad word about Vietnamese, they talk bad words about my parents because my parents are Vietnamese (*Trang, female, 13 years old*).

Trang is one of the few participants in the research who had documentation confirming that she was Cambodian. However, she still faced stigma and experienced the fear associated with her fathers' Vietnamese identity. Despite this, she was ready to re-identify as Vietnamese and to learn how to read and write Vietnamese for her family's benefit.

Hung, who was introduced earlier, told me that when she is outside she speaks Cambodian because the 'ones who sell are Khmer.' Like her sister, Huong told me that she wanted to make and sell clothes to Khmer to provide money to her mother. The sisters saw a need to interact in the market space as their 'Khmer' selves as this was the accepted norm. They understood that speaking in Cambodian provided the opportunity of trade. However, this did not pave the way for full integration at the time of research, as is evidenced by their accounts of violence noted earlier.

Other participants were aware of the need to speak Cambodian to integrate on a deeper level. Hien, the daughter of Chanthou, lived in *Preah Rotn Phon* and did not have a birth certificate even though her mother is Khmer. Hien's mother gave birth to her children at home and was not able to afford the documents, and her husband was Vietnamese which brought complications. Hien understood that to receive a preferable education she would need to speak Cambodian. Discussing a school near her grandmother's house she wanted to attend, Hien explained 'I want to speak Cambodian because at that place they do not speak Vietnamese, so I need to speak Cambodian to go there.' From Hien's point of view, language was necessary to interact and integrate into new spaces. However, for other participants, refraining from speaking Cambodian was a statement of affinity to the Vietnamese who were seen to be more industrious and collectively capable of survival in a hostile world. Special conditions were necessary for someone who could speak Cambodian and Vietnamese to decide to behave in such a way, as the case of Minh illustrates.

Minh, 15, one of the older research participants, was born in Cambodia. His mother is Vietnamese and he lived with her Vietnamese parents in a house on the river in *Preah Rehab*. Minh's Khmer father had died a few years before for research. The circumstances of his death were only spoken of in passing and Minh did not refer to his father at all in

interviews. Minh worked extremely hard for his auntie on her fish farm which also doubled up as a residence. His village was a community mainly made up of river residents. The layout of the village was a grid of houses on water connected by adjoining planks of wood or boats enabling people to cross over to neighbouring houses. The first time I saw Minh in his home context, I was walking across a plank of wood to his neighbour's house with a few of the teachers from the school who were doing home visits. Incidentally, this was the first time I had walked across such a plank. Children would zip across them effortlessly, whilst in crossing them I truly felt like an outsider. Walking along these connecting planks took balance and confidence, I did not have either at the time. Thankfully I did not fall in the water although I was quite a spectacle for villagers! The planks that provided connection to houses and the land formed a complex, considered system. It had been purposefully built to get stock to and from the main road and across the water. This organised network was open, less cramped and more connected comparative to *Preah Rotn Phon* and *Preah Amnr Sabbay*.



Figure 8 Preah Rehab. Photo taken by Kevin

As I reached the end of the plank I looked to my right and saw Minh pop up through a square cut out of the floor of a floating house. He wiped his wet face with his hand, brushing excess water from his hair when he caught my eye. His warm smile revealed straight bright white teeth. As he hoisted himself out of the hole Minh lifted a net full of fish and began chopping his catch. This traditional way of farming is common along the Mekong Delta region, and many of the houses I visited on the *Tonlé Sap* River were engaged in some kind fishing business. Minh's family were relatively successful from his accounts of the business. He would regularly be out of school assisting with the work that

needed to be done. When not attending school, Minh would work round the clock beginning at 3am to prepare the fish to dry, then working through until 6pm; sleeping at 10pm to begin the working day again. Previously Minh had been to a school run by Vietnamese in Cambodia who employed a Khmer teacher. This school was also a Christian school so going to the God School where I met him was a preference of his family, all of whom were Christians except his mother.

Speaking about his village and home life, Minh explained that despite people in his village speaking both languages he preferred to speak Vietnamese. Seeing himself as Vietnamese, he did not see a reason why he should speak Cambodian and said he would only do so if ‘absolutely necessary.’ It was clear from interviews with Minh that he saw himself living in another persons’ country despite being born in Cambodia. For instance, when discussing his recent baptism, I asked Minh what is like being a Christian living in Cambodia:

In Cambodia, most people are Buddhists, but I follow God. When you're living in another person's country you should believe what they believe which is Buddhism, but because a lot of people in my family are Christian I have listened to what they have said (*Minh, male, 15 years old*).

In discussing his opinions about the Khmer, the phrase Minh used was "not very nice at all". This is because he thought they “easily get mad or angry, like when I or some others just walk past the house, they get mad, and yell at us not to speak Vietnamese”. This kind of behaviour evidently annoyed Minh and added to his determination to not speak Cambodian outside. Minh was in a privileged position compared to others without papers. His family made relatively good money in the fishing business and had recently bought a house in Vietnam. In discussing his future Minh had plans to start his own business after learning a trade and building his own house. He told me he would prefer to live in Cambodia when he was older but his grandmother wanted him to go to Vietnam. He had a clear view of his mobility and told me he preferred being an adult so he could work. His uncle, aged 19, was a casual labourer and he wanted work that was varied and frequent. Minh had planned how much he wanted to earn each month: \$300, so he could give \$100 to those family members he lived with and an additional \$100 for food. \$100 would be saved for his building project. Minh explained the reason he had thought about his future so much was because when he was 5 years old he had experienced poverty. He remembers his family not having enough money to buy rice and he wished at that time he could grow up to earn money for his family.

The simplicity of conventional integration models omits some of the complexities of language use, especially why people may choose to refuse to speak a language or what economic and structural conditions enable such resistance. In Minh's case, his family's financial security afforded him some linguistic freedom of choice. In asking his opinions of the future of students from the school who, unlike his parents, did not have a profitable fishing business, and cannot speak Cambodian, Minh acknowledged the need for communities to work together to improve their life. He said:

I think if they work together their life will be good. If they don't swear, steal, fight or yell at each other then gradually they will be alright. Because when young [Vietnamese] people come to a village, get angry and fight, they fight so much that the locals hate them. So, when they come to their village, the villagers hate them (*Minh, male, 15 years old*).

Minh's description of the behaviours that would provoke villagers demonstrates that even though he decided not to speak Cambodian, and from time to time was reprimanded for not doing so, he also advocated peaceable living alongside a degree of linguistic resistance. This tactic enabled Minh to be rooted in a community locally, away from the majority group but still able to function daily. As with most interviewees, when I talked to Minh there was a strong sense that the relationship between the Vietnamese and Khmer was embedded in a historical identity politics characterised by the appropriation of land. However, for the sake of living peacefully he didn't broadcast his opinions in public, although it was clear he had considered at great length the relationship between the two peoples. Towards the end of the research period Minh explained why he thought there would be continued hostility:

I think if Khmer people are more yielding, then Vietnamese people would do the same. Because when the land was shared, they [Khmer] would not even yield one little bit, like if you are a little bit late, you will be driven out (*Minh, male, 15 years old*).

Minh's reasoning that there is a compromise between to be had among the Khmer and Vietnamese alludes to a contestation over land. It was not clear whether this is a discussion about local land or national border lines, yet the feeling that the Khmer are less willing added to the narrative of 'them' being the problem.

As is highlighted in chapter four, poverty is an important factor in the quality of life and even mobility of participants. Interested to know what Minh thought of the comparative life chances of Vietnamese and Khmer who shared the same level of poverty, I asked him

who he thought would have a better life. He said, “Vietnamese will do better because they have knowledge and wisdom, so they will help each other for the fishing and things like that.” Minh’s opinion resonates with the narratives of the Vietnamese that were prevalent in the period of the French Protectorate. This strengthens the argument that colonial discourses are still prevalent and shape how the ethnic groups view one another.

In summary, the accounts represented in the sections above elucidate how the experiences of being marginalised come to inform the experience and practice of belonging in diverse ways. Despite it being obvious that some participants created an idealised version of Vietnam and the Vietnamese as morally ‘better’, there were moments that were suspended from the realities of experiencing belonging from above. The experiences of dislocation that have been explored present only one side of a complex prism of belonging. Through participant observation the experiential is detected, which sometimes contrasts with that which can be verbalised. Relying solely on verbal accounts offered in interviews or conversations can restrict the researcher’s analysis of children’s identity and belonging. On the other hand, observation revealed realities of uncomplicated connection to place, and Khmer culture.

I first heard the song *រាំញ្ជីកែងជើង, ជីដេវីត* (*Rom Nhi Keng Jerng* by G-Devit), sitting on an overcrowded bus on route to Kep province around the time of Khmer New Year. This fun and popular song became an instant hit with local Khmer, and the unofficial Khmer New Year song. The music video, a low budget production, filled with satirical undertones typical of the emerging Khmer pop scene, is set in the provinces. A typically Khmer scene is depicted: a village with cows, farming taking place in the background, men sitting around eating and drinking, turning into a night-time village party. Khmer and Buddhist flags make up bunting hanging from one hut to another, and lots of young people dance in sequence along to the song. The lyrics to the song encourage villagers to come together regardless of age and dance along copying the foot stomping and shaking as shown in the video:

*This new dance I've created. Quickly begin come shake with me. We shake
giving off clouds of dirt, shake for fun, we Shake all the boys, shake all the girls
Standing here and doing what? Quickly shake straight away, go!
It's excellent inside my village, extremely happy
Dance shaking our heel, young boys and young girls*

Dance shaking our heel, all the uncles and aunties

Dance shaking our heel, all the grandfathers and grandmothers

If you want fun, come enter my village

The popularity of the song was driven by its inclusiveness, as was the dance that accommodated it. It celebrated the time of year where all Khmer would be off work and people went back to their provinces.

On one occasion, Cammy, Lucy, Phally and Mary and I were hanging around in the classroom and they requested I play some songs from YouTube. I gave them permission to choose their own songs from my laptop; this was the first time I observed the duality of their linguistic existence, but I also got an insight into something more intangible. They excitedly chose Khmer love songs to listen to before playing *Rom Nhi Keng Jerng*. I instantly recognised the song as a ‘Khmer’ thing, as it had been on Khmer TV, and all the Khmer friends I knew loved the song and played it as they prepared for New Year celebrations. Watching the students in that moment it could have been a group of regular Khmer kids dancing to their favourite song. They hurriedly wanted to teach me the dance moves and laughed and joked among themselves in Cambodian as they did. Furthermore, the young people spoke of neighbours who had celebrated Khmer New Year and done the dance. Therbon (1991) suggests that language among cultural factors is usually considered as the most important way for constructing a way of making and conveying meaning, and a certain way of interpreting and defining situations. In this instance, the strict dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ was suspended. Language can be activated in the politics of belonging, to demarcate ‘us’ and ‘them’ as seen in Minh’s example. Alternatively, it can also evoke a sense of community, the ‘warm sensation’ to be among people who not only merely understand what you say, but also what you mean (Ignatieff 1994). Language in this sense can be felt as an element of intimacy (hooks 2009) which resonates with one’s auto-biographical sphere and, as such, contributes to generate a sense of feeling ‘at home’. Singing and dancing to that song did not mean students felt Khmer in a political identity sense, however it conveyed a connection to place and people as the song would have its most pertinent resonance in Khmer villages.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the varied responses of different participants to the experience of belonging from above. Interactions among people within communities of difference

can be characterised by positive and affirming or, conversely, fractured relationships. This chapter emphasised the latter, demonstrating how dislocation from place, characterised as weak place belonging, influenced participants' experiences and practices of belonging. Children's accounts, the stories of their lives show how negative experiences of ethnicity give rise to, often metaphorical, cross-border affiliations. The use of botanical images to denote peace, and the portrayal of the Vietnamese as morally superior persons all point to the processing of weak place belonging. Children's connection to Cambodia was most strongly articulated when connected with a duty of care for their families. Participants were willing to tactically remain in Cambodia, by co-existing in certain spaces, utilising language and performing 'Khmerness' to safely belong. In addition, the chapter showed how occasionally, in the moments suspended from the burden of identity politics, we can observe the connection and joy of place belonging, as is shown in children's engagement with Khmer popular culture.

The next chapter will introduce the school as an alternative space of belonging, touching on the rejection of young people from mainstream school and the acceptance to not only learn at the God School, but also to 'be' Vietnamese.

Chapter 6 The God School: informal education and temporary legitimacy and recognition

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how temporary legitimacy and recognition is created for children in the God School in a context where they are otherwise excluded from mainstream education. In the space of the God School we can see children's subjectivities beyond being overwhelmingly linked to the structural limitations of formal access (Koser 2007) and instead appreciate their social agencies as they learn, make friends and gain educational achievements. Whilst the previous chapter identified children's 'coping strategies' as linked to their economic livelihoods, this chapter considers the active appropriation of grassroots opportunities by 'illegal' children and how these opportunities then come to shape identity and belonging in a way that legal identities cannot, for the Vietnamese born 'out of place' (Constable 2014). In assessing the interstitial space of the God School, an analytical light is shone on how a new physical environment implies new ways of interacting with people. Children who attended the God School were involved in new kinds of behaviour in this place, new modes of movement, and new kinds of corporeal experience⁴⁴ which offered temporary legitimacy and recognition and that reinforced elements of belonging from below.

First, the ethnographic evidence presented in this chapter suggests that despite the Vietnamese in this study living precarious, excluded lives on the margins of society, when it comes to education there are shared and common experiences for Khmer and Vietnamese. Drawing on literature that considers the terms of access to education defined by Cambodian domestic laws and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) we see, much like in chapter four, that Khmer citizens can have similar experiences to the Vietnamese. Many Cambodians do not experience the fullness of educational opportunity that domestic law and the CRC aspires to either. In fact, in terms of pupil retention and creating an enjoyable educational environment, the God School as an informal space could be seen as an example of good educational practice.

Second, this chapter demonstrates the ways in which informal spaces like the God School can provide recognition and legitimacy and affirm elements of belonging from below; it

⁴⁴ This point will be covered in chapter seven too.

formalises the passing of time and recognises the use of time in a way that would not otherwise take place; it provides an opportunity for the children to express themselves linguistically, religiously and creatively; it gives students the opportunity to be recognised by their Vietnamese name, and celebrates their achievements which lends itself to children feeling individually recognised.

Third, an examination of the intersection of ethnicity, religion and education demonstrates how children seek to show their group identity, especially belonging to the Vietnamese community, as a positive thing. Despite being framed as God's laws, the teachers' teaching of Christian values became associated with/resonate with certain attributes of Vietnamese-ness which children then publicly performed as a way to subvert negative stereotypes from above.

Fourth, a discussion of the potential problematic consequences of children attending the God School will be offered. This section highlights the limits of gaining an education that is not accredited, and raises the tensions between experiences of belonging. Whilst new forms of belonging can be beneficial, and give children new ways of expressing themselves (as demonstrated in this and chapter 7), the different modes of belonging, from above, below and beside can be in potential competition with each other. This section draws out this conceptual discussion.

6.2 Illegality and institutional exclusion

As noted in chapter two, legal identities provide formal access to institutions such as healthcare and schooling. The importance of children having access to institutions of care, education and social services, regardless of their legal identity, is instituted by the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). Such is the significance of the CRC that it is the most widely ratified Human Rights Convention, ratified by all countries except for the United States of America.⁴⁵ Despite Cambodia's ratification of the Convention, participants in this study have continued to experience the exclusionary terms of membership brought about by their *de facto* statelessness.

⁴⁵ America has not ratified the CRC on the grounds it would curtail American self-government in accord with their constitutional processes. Senators argument that ratifying the CRC would impinge on American sovereignty is dovetailed with the view that parents should not face lawsuits from their children (The Economist 2013).

The absence of citizenship, as a contributing factor to belonging from above, limits official claims on human rights, especially so in Cambodia when the right to receive an education, whilst included in both international law as well as national Cambodian law, is dependent on the premise that one is a Khmer citizen. Article 31 of the 2007 Cambodian Law on Education reads: “Every *citizen* has the right to access quality education of at least nine years in public schools free of charge [italics added].” This restricts the scope of duty that being a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child demands. In theory, Cambodia abides by Article 28 of the convention: “State Parties recognize the right of the child to education”, yet its domestic application refers only to children who are citizens. This means that the ethnic Vietnamese who, usually, do not have birth certificates or citizenship have no guaranteed right to education under Cambodian law, meaning they are limited in their options and assurances of education (Ang and Chan 2014, Ang et al. 2014).

Chapter four of this thesis revealed how the Vietnamese community in Cambodia has largely been characterised in discourse and regulations as ‘impossible’, that is, as permanently foreign and unassimilable to the nation (Willmott 1967). The literature discussed in chapter four detailed the multiple exclusions of the Vietnamese community and the consequential social and physical suffering. The notion of ‘impossibility’ for the Vietnamese ‘problem’ was reinforced in interviews with representatives from local and international NGOs. In three separate conversations, I was told that their situation was “too political”. In response to my explanation of families being denied birth certificates despite being third generation in Cambodia, a Unicef consultant cemented the idea of the Vietnamese as ‘impossible subjects’ (Mar Ngai 2004). I was told, “if the Vietnamese are here illegally then there is no solution.” The consultant’s statement is not quite right; it would be more accurate to say “if the Vietnamese cannot prove they are here legally, then there is no solution” – the problem lies in the burden of proof of legality, rather than legality itself. Proving legal identity for the Vietnamese is near impossible given the history of war, genocide and the UNTAC period where laws were changed, and papers lost (Sperfeldt 2017, Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012). Furthermore, as detailed in chapter four, the murky terrain of acquiring documentation (to make a claim for citizenship) that Vietnamese communities must navigate is often dictated not by laws, but local cadres who request scattered pieces of evidence and impose arbitrary charges for paperwork which is often unofficial and time-bound, resulting in a perpetual cycle of risk to

statelessness (Parsons & Lawreniuk, 2018) or ‘perpetual temporariness’ (Ehrentraut 2011).

Official national discourse and the off-the-record comments of several of Cambodia’s advocacy agencies present a dichotomous experience of identity and belonging as legal and illegal, documented and undocumented. The failure of this discourse is a lack of recognition that these two binaries are not corresponding and should not be thought of as the same thing. As in the previous paragraph, the issue is not legal/illegal for the Vietnamese, it is documented/undocumented or more precisely, documented to the satisfaction of local cadres or not. The Vietnamese embody both negative positions. Yet an investigation into the modes of belonging among Cambodia’s ‘impossible children’ (Allerton 2017a) highlights the significance of activities in interstitial spaces (Redclift 2013a) in shaping identity and belonging. This is particularly apparent within the space of the God School which not only disrupts the realities of non-entitlement that goes with being ‘illegal’, but acts as a liminal space that offers temporary legitimacy and recognition, and reinforces elements of belonging from below.

Despite the uncertain status of children at the God School, some of them were able to complete the first few grades in Khmer school without papers. This access was contingent on paying bribes. However, after grade 7⁴⁶ admissions became stricter and children could not continue their Khmer education without a birth certificate. Very rarely did participants make it to grade 7. The continuous requests at Khmer school for additional payments for things like photocopying, water, and extra classes were costs too burdensome for families. In addition to financial insecurity, complaints were made about teacher absenteeism, drunkenness and unfair treatment believed to be rooted in racism. In contrast, the accounts of children about their experience of the God School, together with the ethnographic observations, point to an alternative experience where children do not face the stress of arbitrary school fees, teacher inconsistency or discrimination.

Taking time to reflect on the experience of ordinary Cambodians demonstrates that institutional exclusion is experienced by its citizens as well as noncitizens. General education in Cambodia includes grade 1-6 of primary education, grades 7-9 of lower secondary education, and grades 10-12 of upper secondary education. Cambodia passed

⁴⁶ Grade 7 is usually around 12 years old.

a law in 2007⁴⁷ that children should have free basic mandatory education for 9 years – grades 1-9. As already shown, *de facto* stateless children are not eligible for this provision, and the limited access they have is costly and fraught with problems. However, these problems are not experienced uniquely by Vietnamese children. School dropout is common in Cambodia among Khmer children too (Zimmermann and Williams 2015, Edwards Jr et al. 2015). Recent research highlights reported reasons for dropout within Cambodian schools, these are: direct costs for going to school in the form of school fees (Edwards Jr et al. 2015; Bray and Bunly 2005); the expense of supplementary tutoring which is known to be necessary for assistance in passing school exams (*ibid*); opportunity costs of children’s time as many children contribute to their family by working (Edwards Jr et al. 2015, No et al. 2012, Statistics 2009, Velasco 2004); school proximity to place of residence; and teacher absenteeism (Edwards Jr et al. 2015).⁴⁸ Whilst improvements have been made in dropout rates in urban areas, rural areas still face challenges due to the underdevelopment of teacher training and school infrastructure (Ogisu and Williams 2015). A study by No et al. (2012) found that student self-confidence and relationships among children in schools was important. Their study reveals that retention in Cambodian schools is not just about economic factors, but also includes friendship and student achievement and parental education. A child’s confidence in their ability and having support from friends and others is significant. The findings from the literature above are consistent with the narrative of exclusion among interviewed participants.

Moreover, the study by Edwards Jr et al. (2015) referenced above recommended solutions for school retention within Khmer school: it suggested that visits to parents by teachers enhances a parent’s commitment to their child’s education and this in turn reduces dropout rates. Ironically, this practice that is being pushed into national policy recommendations is already taking place at a local level, informally at the God School. Whilst there is, like the Cambodian school system, patterns of children repeating years, and of drop out, retention of students at the God School was impressive. I first visited the field site in 2013, and on returning in 2015 and 2016, I learned that most children were

⁴⁷ Cambodia Education Law 2007.

⁴⁸ It is interesting that none of these reasons are related to discrimination based on gender, social class or other divisions within the Khmer community. The education system is heavily stratified and private schooling is very popular for those who can afford it. Anecdotally, friends who taught in private schools explained that they were paid well, schools were supplied and no additional payments were taken from children. Social class does impact the experience of education for poor Khmer students. Whose teachers are also likely to be poor, underpaid and thus make requests for additional funding (Koyanagi 2017).

still in the school. The teachers had a dedicated programme of visiting families of children who had dropped out of school to encourage their return. Sometimes this was successful, at other times not. In addition, despite being an informal institution, the God School had cultivated an environment where parents wanted their children to learn and children too enjoyed learning.

The next section takes a closer look at the God School. Examining the School's activities, what comes into focus are the mechanisms that reinforce elements of belonging from below. This includes celebrating Vietnamese language, cultural festivals and perhaps simplest of all - yet profoundly significant - acknowledging the existence of the Vietnamese. By exploring the symbolic power of these mechanisms, the significance of temporary legitimacy and recognition on children's identity and belonging is highlighted.

6.3 Legitimacy and recognition: belonging from below

The bustling sound of motorbikes, cockerels and children's conversation was amplified through the narrow street where the school is located. At 6:30am schoolgirls in their uniforms would sit gathered around a food stall slurping noodles. Outside the school groups of children talked and ordered each other around excitedly as they play games, skipping over a large elastic band that is lifted higher and higher to increase the difficulty of the task with every successful jump. These were scenes I witnessed daily. A difference between these children and other children who passed them by on foot and push bike is the difference in uniform. Whilst the Khmer uniform is a distinct white shirt and navy-blue skirt, the God School's attire is bright blue embossed with the school's logo and tagline. A passer-by without an understanding of the political context of the Vietnamese community in Cambodia might interpret these children to be 'normal' rather than 'impossible'.

Yet children are excluded from mainstream school because of their ethnicity. Take for example Lucy's experience. Lucy⁴⁹ is 16 and a student at the school. She attended Khmer school (Cambodian public school) until grade 6 before leaving. She told me about her experiences of Khmer school, of her teachers leaving the class for long periods and even returning drunk on occasions. I ask her if this is the reason she left school?

⁴⁹ Lucy's family history in Cambodia is referenced in an interview with her mother Joy in chapter three.

Lucy: no, it is not. I studied until grade 6 because they separate high school and lower school. Grade 7 is high school, so I couldn't go to school because I had no paperwork to show I was Cambodian

Charlie: where are you from?

Lucy: born here. My parents are from here

Charlie: I wonder why you can't get the paper then

Lucy: the face tells you who you are - Vietnamese or Khmer. The name too.

Charlie: But you speak Cambodian as a first language, right?

Lucy: yes. I speak Cambodian better than Vietnamese.

During an exercise young people could produce a creative output to explain their feelings of their life in Cambodia, Lucy drew the following:



Figure 9 Lucy's wants

The text in the drawing translates as the following:

I WANT:

The children here don't have papers, which means that they cannot study and are shouted at by many people, just when walking to a neighbour's house; they are insulted and do not dare reply, but can you imagine how it feels? 😞 I only know that I am a child who really wants papers, so I can go to different places, and work for the LORD. I also want to study and be able to travel and not be afraid of anyone, and have the freedom to do many things and then my dream will become reality. 😊

PRAYER:

O LORD, do you hear my prayer? I ask you for papers, for the many children here. Dear LORD, my wish is to follow your word more. O Lord, I know you are merciful, I know you are always with me, thank you LORD.

These fearful sentiments were echoed by Tiffany,⁵⁰ age 14 years old. Tiffany explains:

When I was small, I was born in Cambodia. My parents are Vietnamese so at my birth they weren't allowed to have papers made.

Without papers, it is very difficult for me to study, and with no chance of success. I am always scorned/despised and hated by Khmer, making my life rotten. Every day I come to God and pray to Him, "Lord please have mercy on the situation of Vietnamese children in Cambodia". We own neither house nor land, just on houseboats, painstakingly searching for each penny in order to worry about every next family meal. Without papers in Cambodia, the Khmer don't welcome us, they force us to return to Vietnam. But without papers the people in Vietnam also don't welcome us. Now my life does not know where to return to, with no homeland and no country. If we cannot study, then our futures will be dark and gloomy. I am afraid and worried, not knowing what I shall do or where I will go in the future. Every day I live in this fear. Please have mercy on me, a child in Cambodia (*Tiffany, female aged 14 years old*).

These excerpts from Lucy and Tiffany highlight a prevalent fear and status frustration among young people: they want to live a normal life yet face restrictions and discrimination. Furthermore, the excerpts reveal a sophisticated understanding of their situation. They are aware of the politics of belonging that results in socio-spatial exclusion. The girl's insights demonstrate the ways the boundaries of the community of belonging are drawn, reproduced and experienced. They both reference the impact of not studying for their futures. Lucy expresses a desire for freedom of movement, and both girls mention the impact being Vietnamese has on the opportunity of access. *De facto* stateless children are evidently vulnerable and their vulnerability is noted and sought to be overcome by international campaigns like the #IBelong Campaign mentioned in chapter two. More generally, there are international conventions that hold aspirations for the wellbeing and promotion children's human rights that seek to safeguard their access to essential services, like education and creating opportunities for children to be free to explore their identities.

In the following paragraphs I aim to make the following points. First, certain opportunities, freedoms and rights lead to (or produce, or permit, or enable) certain modes of belonging. Second, the CRC asks that these rights be afforded to all children, Cambodian law gives rights to citizens, and because Vietnamese children fall into the 'gap' between what international law asks and national law provides we can say that the State is not permitting/enabling the modes of belonging promoted in the CRC. Third, the

⁵⁰ Tiffany's family history in Cambodia is referenced in an interview with her mother in chapter four.

God School fills this gap to some extent, insofar as it enables children to experience modes of belonging similar to what is promoted in the CRC.

Embedded within the CRC are identity-relevant values that promote the freedoms and opportunities needed for children to flourish, find meaningful membership in a community and be recognised as legitimate agents who can contribute to the functioning of society. These include children having the right to express their opinions (and be heard),⁵¹ develop their talents and have an education that respects their parent's cultural values, and language.⁵² Without intending to over-simplify how international law works in practice, I want to draw attention to the ways that children experience, albeit informally, some of the aspirations of the CRC. Of course, I am not suggesting that experiencing something like rights is the same as having rights but it is important that we do not gloss over significant and meaningful modes of belonging that *de facto* stateless children have. Whilst the extension of the rule of law has not reached the children in this study they are not idly waiting to be 'saved' by political solutions. They are living their lives as fully as they are able. By attending the God School, children and their families could experience 'freedoms' that mirror those found in the Convention but are denied to them by the legal structures they live within.

There are limits to the extent to which individuals can experience meaningful and free education informally, after all the God School in theory could be shut down. How then is the education meaningful? The education of the God School provided a curriculum that included families otherwise marginalised. This inclusion was not predicated on financial payments, or inconsistent terms of engagement. Families were accepted as they were, and their children were given opportunities not otherwise available to them. Families acknowledged the benefits of their children going to school,⁵³ in particular how their children could learn in a Vietnamese speaking context. Moreover, as examples to follow demonstrate, the education of the God School is meaningful in the sense it captured and celebrated the time children spent at the school and their achievements therein. Students themselves gained a lot from the recognition of their achievements, the friendships made

⁵¹ Art., 12 CRC.

⁵² Art., 29 CRC.

⁵³ As seen in chapter four, parents affirmed their belief that children who are educated will have better opportunities in the future.

at school and their ability to express themselves in new and familiar ways.⁵⁴ By drawing the parallel between the freedoms outlined in the CRC and the experience of the God School, I aim to illustrate that children, or their parents, were not discriminated against or reprimanded on the basis of identity. Again, this freedom has the limitation of informality, yet this was not feeling I heard expressed once during fieldwork.

Speaking Vietnamese, and celebrating Vietnamese festivals affirm elements of belonging from below. When I interviewed adults, they would tell me how grateful they are that their children had a chance to go to the God School. Some parents were glad their children could learn Vietnamese because if they “couldn’t speak and write some Vietnamese people will laugh at you because you don’t know”. Learning and speaking Vietnamese is not just about knowledge but it is also a freedom which the CRC states ought to be afforded to minority groups. In the previous chapter it was demonstrated how children are acutely aware of the exclusions speaking Vietnamese in certain spaces would entail. This led to children feeling out-of-place-in-place, and consequently children are cognisant of how they come across, as Khmer or otherwise. Accordingly, speaking Vietnamese in the space of the God School is significant because it provides a meaningful education for families and the freedom to identify with one’s roots, community and family.

At the school children were free to speak Vietnamese and celebrate Khmer New Year as well as *Tết* (Lunar New Year), the most important celebration in the Vietnamese calendar. Again, these points mirror that of several ambitions of the CRC:

Children who come from a minority group have the right to learn and use the language and customs of their families. Also, to practise their own religion and use their own language (CRC Article 30).

Children described how they could speak Vietnamese freely without fear of being reprimanded. The school became a domain where their Vietnamese heritage was unproblematic. Patrick, aged 14, explains how speaking Vietnamese at the God School makes him feel accepted “being at the God School feels different. I feel they [friends] are different from the other friends because they do not separate me and ask me if I am Khmer, they accept me.” Sara, aged 11, echoes a similar sentiment “when I came to the

⁵⁴ Chapter seven draws on the new ways children were able to express themselves as they appropriated outside forms of belonging.

God School I feel happy because all my friends play with me like brother and sister. I also like speaking Vietnamese outside”.

Beyond language learning and the celebration of significant festivals, legitimacy was cultivated in the classroom in other ways. In attending the God School children are given a school uniform, a laminated name tag, their names are called and checked during the register and students are publicly dropped off and collected. In the break times children buy from Khmer street sellers and play loudly out the front of the school for all to see. Furthermore, during the school term tests are administered and high scores rewarded. Children would gleefully take home merits and be able to show their parents the work marked in their school books. The process of overcoming feelings of exclusion through attending the God School and gaining legitimacy within the walls of the classroom is made clear by the impact of school procedures and bureaucracy.

The CRC claims that the purpose of education is to “develop every child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities” (CRC Article 29). The students shared that they especially enjoyed their time at the school for the opportunity they had to be musically creative. Dean, aged 14, told me he liked the school “because we can dance and there’s a piano and guitar.” Students looked forward to performing their skills and would often have occasion to do so.

Some materials have been removed from this thesis due to Third Party Copyright. Pages where material has been removed are clearly marked in the electronic version. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

Figure 10 Guitar Lessons

The cultivation of legitimacy was not confined to the classroom. The ritual of formalising an informal experience was solidified through the public marking of key moments in the school's calendar. Creating a legitimate school experience combined with the desire to encourage parents to be champions of their child's education, was reflected in the organisation by the God School of public celebrations to mark key achievements as well as showcasing school activities. Parents would be invited to different events at the school that marked their children's progress, celebrated their success and demonstrated what they were learning. An example of this was the annual graduation day.

Graduation day took place at the end of the summer just as the rainy season was beginning and, with it, the summer break. The day itself takes a lot of planning and significant emphasis is placed on the community coming together to take part in an end of year awards ceremony. Young people display their achievements as well as the values of the school through performing arts during the ceremony.

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Figure 11 Graduation Day - Throwing of Hats.

When I arrived at the school the teachers were busy with last minute preparation of the goody bags that were going to be given out. These included dental hygiene kits, notebooks, stationary, and Christian literature in the Vietnamese language. As I inserted items into brown envelopes with the team of teachers, keen parents had already started to secure their seats located outside in the school courtyard. There was no discreetness about the event which took place in an open space visible to villagers who would stop and watch

the ceremony. Whilst the parents chatted and assembled, the sound system was being set up and the older youth were helping graduates of Kindergarten get into their robes before they put theirs on.

Framed graduation certificates were given in “recognition of [children’s] accomplishment and completion of Kindergarten” and “for completing the required studies through x grade”. In each framed certificate was a photo of the student in their graduation robe holding open a book, certified with a gold stamp. The certificate written in English as well as Vietnamese, would be signed by the principal and had a Bible verse written in Vietnamese at the bottom. Graduation certificates and other school awards recognised and documented the passing of time and children’s achievement. This ultimately gives a marginalised community legitimacy in a way their uncertain legal status could not. For instance, the ceremony gives legitimacy to the students (and indirectly to the parents) through the recognition of them and their achievement. This is demonstrated even more profoundly after the death of a student at the school. Soon after leaving the fieldwork site I learnt that *Ngot*, a student who had graduated from Kindergarten that term, had died. It was thought that *Ngot* was suffering from a common cold by her family; she was then treated in hospital for a fever, got better and was about to be discharged from the hospital before her health turned for the worse. She was in the emergency room for 5 days. Then she passed away. Usually when a person dies, their body is embalmed so family and others can pay their respects. *Ngot*’s family could not afford the embalmment so she was buried the same day. It is said that her school certificate, backpack, and her awards were present at her memorial – a pertinent example of the significance of the tangible recognition of a person’s life the school can provide.

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Figure 12 Ngọt receiving her graduation certificate.

The wearing of the graduation gown holds symbolic significance, resembling a western traditional rite of passage. Students transition from one stage of learning to another. The gown certainly added a certain type of sophistication to the photographs embedded in certificates, and the event itself, essentially enabling a sense of formality to the school despite its informal status.

During the graduation ceremony children of all ages perform a dance, or another activity rehearsed in advance. Whether dance, song or poetry all these activities were accompanied by microphones, speakers and volume. It is not only parents who gathered to observe the open-air event: Khmer neighbours and the kids who were not at school gathered and looked in, curious to see what all the celebrations were about. Mostly it is Christian songs that were sung or danced along to. These songs are not limited to Vietnamese - Khmer and English soundtracks also accompanied activities. Parents who proudly watched their child dance, sing or recite poetry would also straighten their child's robes before the event and queued afterwards for photographs with their children. The sense of accomplishment was tangible in the atmosphere. What this event does is threefold. First, it formalises the passing of time and recognises the use of time in a way that would not otherwise take place. Second, it provides an opportunity for the children to express themselves: linguistically, religiously and creatively. Third, it gives students the opportunity to be recognised by name, celebrates their existence and promotes an alternative narrative for their futures. Nevertheless, there remains a gap between what the

CRC asks for and what the God School can provide, because the God School is not able to enable the modes of belonging promoted in the CRC in the manner envisaged by the CRC, because experiencing something like rights is not the same as having rights. The final section of this chapter will highlight further critical reflections of the God School.

As previously highlighted, belonging from above isolates the Vietnamese from the rest of Khmer society and represents them as immoral people. This experience appears to act as a catalyst for young people to want to subvert what they feel is an incorrect representation. From below, the ideals of Vietnamese morality and a child's desire to be praised by other family members and be a good example to the rest of their community, meant young people took seriously the mantle of being a moral person, and therefore wanted to reflect a positive Vietnamese identity and belonging from below. It is apparent then that a simultaneous experience of belonging, from above and below, is occurring. The context for these experiences revealed a social world that children would describe as precarious and at times contradictory in nature. Berger (1967) argues that faced with the precarious nature of the social world, every society is engaged in building a significant world and that religion plays a pivotal role in the business of constructing meaning. This is illustrated in the example of the God School which is a space where children find community and construct a religious as well as an ethnic identity.

6.4 The intersection of ethnicity, religion and education

The religious element of the school's identity is known to parents who agree to their children receiving a Christian education upon enrolment. What is perhaps not so visible is the significance the education will have on their children's identity as a "Vietnamese person".

Historically, ethnicity and religion have both been understood to inform constructions of identity and belonging. Unless religion is seen as a key element to forming ethnic identity, we will not understand what motivates *de facto* stateless children living in Cambodia, to give up Buddhism, which would more obviously identify them as Khmer or Vietnamese, and take on Christianity - what might be considered a foreign religion. Of course, religion does not always play a role in shaping ethnicity or vice versa: as Kim (2011) argues ethnic religious organisations enable individuals to find community and construct a religious as well as an ethnic identity.

Chapters four and five demonstrate how Vietnamese people living in Cambodia have been confronted with an experience of ethnicity grounded in a historical political discourse framed and asserted from above by a more powerful political elite. The Vietnamese from this perspective are ‘immoral’, ‘untrustworthy’ and ‘illegal’. Children live through and hear the negative narratives about being Vietnamese but have no context or experience of the events associated with it. What does it mean to experience ethnicity? Ethnicity is not static, existing in isolation but can be formed in a relational way (Barth 1969). Ethnicity can be situational (Gluckman 1958), a matter of choice (Mayer 1971) and even instrumental in advancing a political agenda (Cohen 2000). Ethnicity is something which can be negotiated (Eriksen 1991), performed (Clammer 2015), and can concurrently exclude from one arena but not another. Belonging from below for Vietnamese children applies to kinship ties and historical links back to a physical geographical location Vietnam, and its symbolic resources. From below young people have observed, and attempted to adopt Vietnamese views on filial duty, Buddhist and Neo-Confucian practices. They have been left discontented with their inability to uphold these values and the lack of benefits they bring to their life. Possibly to subvert negative interpretations of what it is to be Vietnamese from above, and to fulfil the role of positive Vietnamese identity from below, many young people have appropriated Protestant Christianity. Considering the conversion of children from their parent’s religion to another religion requires a critical reflection of the possibility of coercion or manipulation of children: chapter seven holds that discussion.

In discussing the experience of being Vietnamese there are various considerations that can be made. Already in this chapter it has been demonstrated how children of the God School have gained an opportunity to express their belonging from below through their documented attendance and ability to speak and engage in elements of Vietnamese culture at the School. In this section I want to draw attention to a child’s socialisation experience and the role of the family in instilling a moral code in their children that has roots in Vietnamese philosophies. The family is generally seen as crucial in instilling the sense/level of ‘morality’ of its members (Tuong 1991). Good moral citizens are those who do not contribute to the production of so-called ‘social evils’ (*tê nạn xã hội*) that are thought to degenerate high Vietnamese moral standards. Such citizens do not, for instance, gamble, neither are they addicted to alcohol or drugs (Marr 1981).

Getting to know the participants they would often talk about being a good person as one of the main signifiers of their identity. During an arts-based exercise I asked participants to draw a flower and, in each petal, to write what makes them who they are. Most people wrote ‘a good person’ ‘not a liar’ ‘don’t steal’, as is taught by their parents. The discussion about morality was a frequent topic of conversation. Young people were acutely aware of, and troubled by, the lack of appropriate moral behaviour around them. Despite the community’s apparent disapproval of gambling and excessive drinking, it was rife among both the Khmer and Vietnamese residents. This discontent is exemplified in a conversation with one of the students. I asked them what things are important to them in life. She replied, “my dream is I want to be a soldier in the army.” “Why?” I asked, “I want to go to the ones who gamble and catch them, there are two or three groups either side of my house.” Furthermore, when young people explained to me their reasons for practising Christianity, they would talk about how despite being formerly Buddhist they would often behave in immoral ways. This also led to frustration. Children wanted to fulfil their parents’ wishes to be ‘moral people’ but shared with me that they would themselves gamble, swear and fight. In addition to this, they wanted the Khmer to see that Vietnamese people were not bad or untrustworthy but are respectable.

The God School had a strong and increasingly respected status in the community. Reasons for parents sending their children to the God School were based on the school being ‘good’. Lucy, who was introduced previously, said her father was afraid of her going out, smoking, having a boyfriend and doing the ‘bad things’. As a result, he was glad she spent a lot of time at the school. Helle Rydstrom’s (2003) ethnography on growing up in Northern Vietnam highlights how, along with the family, the education system is crucial for the production of children’s ‘good morality’. Interviews with teachers revealed that one of their purposes was to teach young people what is right and what is wrong, from a biblical perspective. The variant of Christian teaching that the teachers propagated fitted quite closely to the most dominant notion of goodness in Vietnamese society, filial piety, the collective endeavour and abstaining from social evils. Whilst there are elements of Christian teaching which are incompatible with Vietnamese tradition, for instance ancestor worship, discussed in the next chapter, some other prominent markers of belonging from below – for instance, filial duty, living a moral life free from alcoholism and gambling - took a new form as God’s laws and were adopted by students. Young people who appropriated Christianity would often talk of a new-found motivation to abstain from things like gambling, swearing, and fighting. They often contrasted their

experience of being a Christian with Buddhism, and their consequential behaviour change. For example, Emma tells me:

Before I was a Christian and followed Buddha, I would gamble, play cards, and gamble on sports, anything that entailed the exchange of money. I would win money too, because I used to cheat. I don't do that anymore (*Emma, girl, 14 years old*).

In this example Emma is presenting a narrative around religious conversion as a change in who she is both in terms of religion and of behaviour. A great number of students expressed a strong association with the school as part of their Vietnamese-Christian identity. During the flower petal exercise, I mentioned earlier, participants wrote being Christian as part of their identity in addition to being good, truthful, and Vietnamese.

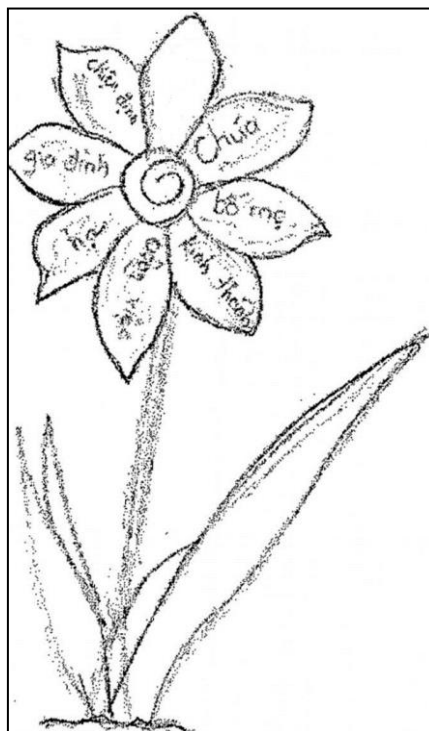


Figure 13 Lucy identity flower

During a conversation with Lucy I asked her: “since becoming a Christian have you felt more Vietnamese?” she replies “yes, because the Church is a Vietnamese Church, I go to school with Vietnamese friends, and I read my Bible in Vietnamese, plus there are a lot of Vietnamese people living in my village, so we play together.” Linguistics, then, also plays an important role in reinforcing an ethno-religious identity. Participants prayed, read their Bibles and sang Christian songs in Vietnamese. Although the majority of

students can speak Cambodian, to practise their Christianity in Cambodian they would have to learn a whole new vocabulary. Therefore, it is their Vietnamese-speaking and thinking self that is Christian.

Going to a Christian school staffed by Vietnamese missionaries, and attended by others with a Vietnamese background, has given participants a confidence to 'be' Vietnamese and a desire to collectively witness their good behaviour to their communities for recognition. An example of this is something called Compassion Day. During the fieldwork period, Compassion Day took place on two occasions. The idea of the day is for students to go out into the community and 'serve'. Around the area there is a lot of trash, therefore as an act of servitude, and collective endeavour, young people take to the streets and pick up rubbish as well as praying for the villages. Children told me they did this exercise so people, both Vietnamese and Khmer, would think they were good. During the activity children openly talk and pray in Vietnamese as they go around the villages picking up rubbish. Everyone wears their uniforms which reads "Vietnamese mission in Cambodia" on the back. The wearing of the God School uniform is a significant identity marker. Participants regularly associated the wearing of the uniform as symbolic not only of their pupillage at the school but also their identity as a Christian. Patrick aged 14 told me "this uniform is the school of God and the one who believes in God is wearing this T-Shirt." This was a common answer I received from children explaining why they drew themselves in their uniforms in their self-portrait.

Compassion Day was met with resistance at first. After the first Compassion Day participants told me how they were ridiculed on the street. Khmer and Vietnamese people in the village shouted things like: "If you were a Christian you wouldn't just pick up the trash one day, you'd do it every day", whilst others would say, "Why are you a Christian, your parents are Buddhist?". However, on the second Compassion Day, which came around six months later, people from the same village, incidentally the village where the school is located, said: "oh you children are so good". This acknowledgement of the group being 'good' is also indicative of their Vietnamese-Christian identity. Children had their desires to be known for being good affirmed when they appropriated and performed their Christianity, which takes a strong Vietnamese form, in public.

6.5 The God School: critical reflections

The benefits of *de facto* stateless children being included in the God School, as described above, are not without their limitations with regard to facilitating belonging when understood in terms of belonging from above. Whilst emphasis is clearly placed on the educational outcomes of children at events like the graduation ceremony, these outcomes do not have roots in any sort of official accreditation. This raises questions regarding the role of the school to secure children a better future, especially when questioning how the school could provide any proof of student attainment. There was an understanding among teachers of the situation faced by the students at the school. Yet in interviews with them, and whilst living in the school, what came through was the significance placed on the present instead of the future. The focus of the school was not to secure children official documentation but rather give them the skills to have a better present which, from their perspective, included having an opportunity to hear the Christian Gospel. The communities that the children of the school came from are varied, and as discussed in chapter one, many of these children are vulnerable to many undesirable situations that provided motivation for the school's opening in the first place. Amid poverty, the sale of children into prostitution was the most dramatic. Families were faced with difficult choices regarding work and providing for themselves. Many families live a day-to-day existence. Teachers knew that children's prospects without papers is uncertain. The vision of the school was to assist children to make, in their terminology, 'good decisions', and basic education is viewed as part of that. When recruiting teachers, Linh Anh (the school principal) would explain the vision of the school in these terms. Another teacher, Natalie, who held supervisory responsibility for the school, explained this to me in the following terms:

Linh Anh said that the school's vision is to teach the children the word of God and besides that general knowledge, how to read and write. Linh Anh said we do not know what the children's life will be like in the future, but at least *now* we can help them to be good (*Natalie, teacher, aged 26 years old*).

When I asked what Natalie what she meant by the children being 'good' her response was one that was echoed among the teachers, and even the students themselves. There was an emphasis on morality and being of good character. Not lying, avoiding gambling and respecting their families are traits associated with good character. There is a belief among teachers that providing education could assist children to avoid debt generated by gambling and live a life more informed of the dangers of addiction, violence and poverty.

It is without question that the God School saw Christian evangelism - that is preaching the deity of Jesus and Jesus' ability to forgive sins and offer an alternative hope for the future - as a core part of its identity. This was believed to be the ultimate narrative, along with biblical living, that could change lives in the longer term for the 'good'. This did not mean that teachers were blind to the broader circumstances or needs of the children. For instance, when interviewing Paul, a teacher from Vietnam, he explained the difficulties the children face:

The difficulties, hmm, some kids do not have a father and only the mother works, and they have many siblings. They are still young. If some are old they can go out and go to work, but here because it is not their hometown is it difficult. They are Vietnamese, but they don't live in Vietnam. They live among the Khmer people, so they are not really welcomed. Most of them don't have citizenship so that is very difficult for them. After they finish class 5 they cannot study any more. That is a very sad thing for them. If they are clever they must pay a lot of money but for many they cannot afford to go to school (*Paul, male, 25 years old*).

Yet, as the conversation continues Paul explained his belief that the Christian education the school provides is likely to be the most beneficial thing for the community:

Charlie: what do you think the school can do in this community?

Paul: [pauses to think] this school, because many kids don't go to Khmer school or have the option to study, is a blessing for them. Not only because they get to learn English, but because it is important that they acknowledge Christ in their life. That is the purpose and the big reason for the school being here. So, children can get saved [become a Christian].

Charlie: when people get saved what difference does that make in the community?

Paul: When they get saved they not only do what they want but they study the word of God and know God more. The people outside can look and see they have Christ in their life, so they see there's a difference. Everything the Bible teaches them, that they need to love their parents or something like that. So, the people, the kids outside who gamble, or do the bad thing, when they get saved and study the word of God and follow God, the people can see that their lives are different and see Christ in them.

Charlie: what about children becoming Christians when they live in a Buddhist society. When some of the kids do Compassion Day and take the trash off the floor some of the adults they said, "why are you doing that your family are Buddhist?" and they say things which make the children feel sad, what do you think about that conflict?

Paul: yea, erm that is... I have heard that for some of the children their family is Buddhist and when they are the only person in the family to know Christ they don't have a choice, so they follow their family, or they have to do something that

makes them sad. But, if they keep God in their heart! We don't know whether the family is going to be strict. So, the children will need to do what they say.

These discussions need to be mentioned here because they highlight the emphasis placed on Christian education as a present intervention into a living situation that is thought to leave children vulnerable. Emily, another teacher at the school, discussed what she sees as the purpose of the school in a similar vein:

Emily: I think as Linh Anh says, the purpose of the school is to evangelise to the children, so they know Jesus, and whilst they stay here they are learning about Jesus and they are changing their lives, and they make a change to their family.

Charlie: and what do you think about that?

Emily: For me, I think as we call this Jesus' school it is important to know Jesus, but it is also important to have knowledge. So, for me no need to have a lot of students here to study but just a few. A small group but we teach them to learn and know more about Jesus, so they can have a deeper relationship with Jesus. Also, so we can do our best to teach them to learn to have real learning and knowledge.

Several problems arise from a programme of intervention that aims to address the here-and-now. The first has to do with language. The school operating in Vietnamese meant that for those who learnt Cambodian as a first language reported a decline in their use and command of Cambodian because they were speaking Vietnamese more often. For those who do not go to Khmer school and live in spaces populated with Vietnamese speakers, they are unlikely to learn Cambodian. This is problematic when considering the process of naturalisation towards citizenship which in Cambodia requires a command of spoken and written Cambodian. Furthermore, not being able to speak Cambodian complicates the possibility of integration or operation in certain spaces. As was highlighted in the previous chapter, not speaking Cambodian is a source of frustration among locals who vilify the Vietnamese. This quandary highlights the potential competition between the different aspects of belonging. Belonging from above, that is belonging that is imposed by defining the legal terms of membership, and social cultural notions of what it means to be (or not be) a Khmer citizen, comes with expectations of assimilation and integration. Yet, children in connecting with their belonging from below could limit the chances of successful belonging from above. As explained in chapter two the politics of belonging is about boundary creation, reproduction and maintenance. It is the politics of belonging that has contributed to children's search for alternative means and modes of belonging. The politics of belonging is also about responding to the exclusionary terms of

membership and children have responded by attempting to subvert negative stereotypes by being the best from below. Yet, whilst this has been fruitful in the sense that children's ethnic-religious identities have been accepted to a degree, the gains are not across the board. The likelihood of a secure future being reduced for a sense of linguistic belonging in the present seems like a bad trade-off, especially if it prevents qualification for naturalisation.

The principal of the school was very much aware of the problems of segregation and did share with me her future endeavour to reintroduce Cambodian into the curriculum to assist the students to learn Cambodian and live positively side by side with Khmer in the community. Cambodian was previously taught in the God School but the teacher moved away, consequently lessons stopped. Yet, now it could be argued that the young people learning Vietnamese and being in a Vietnamese speaking school could increase the divide between Vietnamese and Khmer. The potential perils of not learning Cambodian were acknowledged among teachers and children. For instance, talking to Paul about his opinions on learning Vietnamese he explains:

Paul: Learning Vietnamese because they are Vietnamese is good for them. Because they are Vietnamese they should know how to read and write Vietnamese just in case one day they want to go back to Vietnam they can speak and write Vietnamese and English so getting a job will be better.

Charlie: what about Cambodian, what about living in Cambodia but not speaking Cambodian?

Paul: It depends, if they live in a country and don't speak Cambodian it will be hard but if they don't live in the town say they are a farmer and they don't need to communicate with Khmer then it will be ok. It's a problem if they live in the city because communicating with someone is very important, you can exchange the job or something so if you don't know how to speak Cambodian then it will be very hard for them to find a job.

Another example is from Zara.⁵⁵ In a conversation about what she thinks about Vietnamese children who cannot go to Khmer school, and thus probably won't learn to speak Cambodian, but go to God School as an alternative she explains:

If they live here and go outside you need to know how to speak Cambodian. Here in Cambodia some Khmer love the Vietnamese so they understand, but the majority of them hate the Vietnamese more than love so it's not good for you if you don't know how to ask or say, and you just point. They will not understand

⁵⁵ Zara is introduced in chapter 5.

you, and they hate you. It's good when I came here [the God School], but the other way [formal education] will be good, better, if you live here but you don't know how to read and write Cambodian they look down on you (*Zara, female, 15 years old*).

Zara was one of the participants in the research who had a birth certificate. Yet, despite having some form of documented identity, and thus potentially more security than other participants, she was not optimistic about her prospects. Like many participants I interviewed, Zara only thought about things in the here-and-now. When sharing how she found the timeline exercise that encouraged participants to think of their future she shared “I found it hard and easy. To think about the future is difficult because I never thought about it. It is difficult because we live day by day.” What she found easy to envision is her commitment to helping her mother, whom she did not live with at present, but who she dreamed of being reunited with.

A second issue about the education of the school was the lack of accreditation. Again, this was understood to be a problem among teachers. Emily (the teacher introduced earlier) reflects on the pros and cons of the children attending the God School:

It's good for them to go to school but if there is a chance for them to get accredited education that would be better. If they go to school for 6 or 7 years but cannot prove it, is it a waste of time? Even if they can read and write, if they want to change their life then the best way is through education and if you have nothing to prove that what can you do? (*Emily, girl, 25 years old*).

Despite the God School encouraging the use of Vietnamese and not providing any formal accreditation Zara, Lucy's and Tiffany's accounts remind us of the issue of institutional exclusion and accessibility. Even if children wanted to access Khmer education there are restrictions. Furthermore, the realities of educational completion or excellence in mainstream education is far from universal in Cambodia, a country known to have weak institutions (Hill and Menon 2013). Therefore, whilst the ideals of integration into local school and receiving an accredited education hold true, it is the schools who demand money and local governance operatives who refuse to issue birth certificates that make this problematic. Many of the participants spoke Cambodian as is detailed in appendices 2, 3, and 8. This was helpful in some situations, yet it did not secure them long term enrolment in education, only papers and money could do that.

Third, even though Christianity is growing as religion in Cambodia, as explained in chapter one, the conversion of children to the faith could create a situation that makes the

converts doubly marginalised as both an ethnic and religious minority. Conversion would provide further difficulty if a process of naturalisation was ever to present itself as knowledge of Khmer customs and culture, which is firmly grounded in Buddhism, is required in theory. On an everyday level, the God School separates the children as Vietnamese and Christian. This perhaps is not such an unusual thing for the Vietnamese teachers who have experienced not only growth of Protestant conversion in their country of origin in more recent times and have a history with French colonial Catholicism. However, Christianity can indeed be divisive in family life if a child chooses to convert against the will of the family, or as we see in the next chapter choose to reject elements of belonging from below as a result of appropriating Christianity.

As Rachel Burr (2006) argues it would be a mistake to assume that only internationally driven agendas change lives. This chapter has shown that the Cambodian government's failure to formally implement agendas like the UNCRC has not cut children off from opportunities to engage with issues of identity which are outlined in the CRC. Rather, in the absence of State-sponsored support local, informal and unrecognised frameworks like the God School have partially provided the means of legitimacy and recognition from below. What does this tell us about belonging? From above the possibilities of belonging and participating in formal institutions like education are limited due to lack of citizenship. This fractured politics of belonging is temporally transformed by the intervention of a transnational local Christian school that challenges non-entitlement and affirms elements of belonging from below. Children belong to communities who experience marginalisation because of their ethnicity and status. Yet, the God School disrupts this marginality by including children and families in an alternative community whereby they are free to identify as Vietnamese, speak their language, and practise their customs. Attending the God School, as well as being around people living in similar circumstances consolidated a sense of togetherness and commonality. Moreover, as the school is in a village where most residents identified as Khmer, over time the presence of a Vietnamese school, and thus the presence of a Vietnamese community became normalised. This is an unintended but significant consequence. When I first researched at the school in 2013, I was told how the Khmer neighbours would tip rubbish over the wall into the school and complain about the school being "Vietnamese". Yet, years of repeated activity and resilience to threats made the God School a recognised space of Vietnamese education. Children would turn up at the school from such far distances that the school had invested in a school minibus to transport children to and from school. In addition, a

new school site was built and about to open 5km away to meet the rising demand. These developments were taking place as I was finishing the research. Yet, they are illustrative of how word had spread about the school.

Children themselves during the period of fieldwork often spoke of how going to the school provided them with a rich sense of freedom, fun and an opportunity to learn. In engaging in the God School children who would have otherwise been marginalised came into a community. They were told that they were worth something and that they could participate in their local communities positively. Burr, Montgomery, and Woodhead point out that “the risk of adversity will be amplified by social attitudes that stigmatise the adversity and the children affected” (Burr et al. 2003: 12). The God School did not judge based on the adversity children faced but rather promoted the good of the children, their talents and abilities to the wider community through events like Graduation Day. As argued, the daily experience of the God School mirrors the goals of the CRC. This is not to argue that the God School becomes a replacement or alternative to rights: States have responsibilities and obligations to legally protect children. However, by making a distinction between education as an official human rights mechanism and the God School as an informal space where education can be accessed, the complexities of navigating opportunities are revealed. It discloses how communities who are in a context of very few rights or opportunities leverage what opportunities there are with different consequences. Understanding what conditions can predetermine a person’s capacity to access opportunities draws out the importance of social locations, networks and geography that enable people to take advantage of opportunities.

6.6 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter shows that sometimes the ideals of human rights law are often realised, in part, outside of systems supported by the law. It has been shown how the everyday ritualised use of space (De Certeau 1984) has become a way of for children to cultivate a sense of belonging. I came to understand the ways in which the God School - through its ritual and symbolic practices - provided legitimacy and recognition to children and families. Furthermore, in attending the school children who did not enjoy rights associated with citizenship had elements of belonging from below affirmed. Being aware of children’s fractured politics of belonging when observing their tactics, I could see how they were able to get a sense of belonging through the conduit of God School, through

mundane things like name tags, to the celebration of their advancement from one stage of education to another.

Secondly this chapter has shown that the intersection of religion and ethnicity with education has reinforced a sense of ‘Christian Vietnamese-ness’ among marginalised Vietnamese children living in Cambodia. The school that the participants in the research attended acted as a space where young people have been able to take stock of, and adapt, what it means to be Vietnamese. Through learning Vietnamese language and culture in the classroom young people have been able to construct a new ethno-religious identity. This identity, in part, exists in tension with the old ethno-religious identity as is shown in the next chapter, yet it is one which seeks to subvert negative stereotypes from above and be the ‘best of Vietnamese’ from below. This new articulation of belonging from below allows young people to establish community and belonging whilst also being socialised as people who are known to be ‘good’.

Chapter 7 **Children’s belonging from beside at the transnational-religious nexus**

7.1 **Introduction**

The chapters so far have demonstrated how forms of belonging and identity that are informed by socio-historical discourses concerning the depiction of the Vietnamese from above have impacted on interactions among people within communities at a local level in different ways. These discourses, which often serve to exclude and marginalise, are internalised and at times countered by children’s experiences of belonging on the ground or from below. For children in these communities, a sense of belonging and identity reflects both the forming of ‘Vietnamese-ness’ by the dominant powers, socio-cultural beliefs, and identity signifiers from the family and the majority Khmer. Whilst appropriating these identities to different degrees, children find other ways to locate themselves from beside. As ‘emplaced’ subjects, that is those “whose daily lives become infected with new cultural, temporal and material encounters due to the mobilities of others” (Robertson and Ho 2016: 2266), children experience belonging horizontally. Children’s belonging from beside is revealed, in this case, at the transnational-religious nexus. For instance, the introduction of the God School into *Preah Thnov* as a transnational space brought with it extraneous or outside elements, offering children new ritual forms, new sets of ideals, and new possibilities for sociality (Austin-Boos 2003). This chapter will focus on how children appropriated these outside elements and what this means for their belonging.

First, to make the connection between children’s appropriation of outside elements and the space that makes this possible, I will draw attention to the particulars of Christian place-making and specifically, the politics and poetics of space. The politics of space refers to the production, practice and representation of space, whilst the poetics of space draws on the phenomenological experience: that is how aesthetics and the sensory mediation of place make spaces and the practices within them meaningful (Knott 2010).

Second, the God School reveals the possibilities of resistance when transnationalism and religious practice overlap. Children’s appropriation of outside Christian elements resulted in the formation of Christian subjects which enables new possibilities of enactment. How children enact their Christian subjectivities clearly illustrates how they locate themselves from beside. As a transnational space, children are frequently exposed to the mobilities

and experiences of others at the God School. Consequently, children gain new understandings of themselves and the world that are articulated in Christian speech and thought. Through the Christian practice of prayer children can enact themselves as ‘citizens’, having their voice and opinion claimed as meaningful. Furthermore, children acted out their belonging to a Christian community by identifying with others’ experiences of the world and responding with ‘activist-like’ behaviour: voicing their political desires through the use of prayer. The enactment of ‘citizenship’ I observed may not immediately secure ethnic Vietnamese children the durable solution of a formal ‘legal’ bond of nationality as citizens. Nevertheless, the acts of citizenship I observed could in the future lead to further acts of successful claim making⁵⁶ (Rumsby 2015).

Third, and corresponding to place belongingness⁵⁷ (Hamaz and Vasta 2009), this chapter looks at children’s practice of Christianity outside of the God School. Children who were once afraid of kidnapping, ancestral possession, river ghosts and horror movies articulated a new sense of safety as a result of faith in the Christian God.⁵⁸ I will argue that both individual belief as an ‘embodied practice’⁵⁹ – the way religion is experienced at the ‘micro’ level (McGuire 2011, 2007) – and the collective affirmation of faith – the use of the body in prayer and Christian worship – creates an affective form of belonging that ameliorates present fears. Whilst this chapter uses the language of appropriation of Christianity by children, the final section will utilise the notion of conversion to critically assess the agency of children as they re-orient their individual beliefs, as well as the process of change that involves the (re)definition of self and other. Kling argues that “conversion is not only a word but a concept a tool of analysis” (2014: 599). Conversion in this chapter is a word used to describe children’s embrace of Christianity. The results of appropriating Christianity are different for children, for some children it has moral connotations, others psychological and for some a combination of both. Given the power

⁵⁶ This argument for this section in this chapter was drafted and published as a working paper for the Institute of Statelessness and Inclusion.

⁵⁷ Refers to ‘belonging’ as a feeling of community, home, safety, ownership of, acceptance and affiliation in and to spaces and places in and outside one’s country in many instances.

⁵⁸ The Vietnamese when they refer to God or some force much bigger and more powerful than they are, will use “Trời Phật” (literally, “sky Buddha”). Yet, when referring to the Christian God the word “Chúa” or “Chúa Jesus” is used. In the text I use Buddha, God and Jesus when each term is used

⁵⁹ By embodied I mean to give a tangible or visible form to belief.

dynamics present during the conversion process, I conclude by discussing the power dynamics present in the school and broader community.

7.2 Christian place-making: the politics and poetics of space

Erected outside the God School, on the edge of the forecourt, is a gold post with a house seated on top. I spoke to Linh Anh⁶⁰ about this during the fieldwork and enquired as to its purpose. Unbeknown to her the location of the school, which is now a converted Khmer house, was previously believed to be the resting place of dead spirits. We both learnt about this history during an interview with Hoa Tiffany's mother who was explaining to us the development of *Preah Thnov* since the time of the Khmer Rouge:

before the School, there was a big tree, a big Buddha tree but it was chopped down, now it's a lamppost. That was where the ghosts were. That tree had spirits live in it, so that's why there's a small temple there. The ghosts would frighten you. I was always scared to death when passing it at night. They invited monks when they chopped the trees down to send the spirits away (*Hoa Vietnamese woman born in Cambodia*).

Hoa's surprise that teachers, including myself, slept peacefully and without fear in the school was expressed during our conversation. Listening to Hoa describe the school site - previously a place she would run past out of fear and dread - was fascinating. The period of fieldwork demonstrated that the school is obviously a different space, offering as we saw in the previous chapter new forms of legitimacy and recognition. Moreover, the school was also implicated in religious meaning-making, legitimating, maintaining and enhancing, but also challenging traditional religious life, beliefs, practices and identities. These facets highlight modes of Christian, specifically evangelical, place-making that require further analysis. Place-making is a central activity for Christian groups (Hovland 2016). Ethnographic literature details recurring features on evangelical place-making, some of which are relevant to the observations of the God School namely: temporal, and transnational elements.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Linh Anh is the principal of the God School.

⁶¹ Other modes of evangelical place-making are: linguistic concerns which are illustrated in Jeanne Kilde's (2002) account of an evangelical amphitheatre in New York; material concerns covered in Hovland's (2003) archival research on the Norwegian Missionary Society; concerns of personhood covered in Luhrmann's (2012) study of the Vineyard evangelical congregation; translocal concerns covered in Elisha's (2013) work that describes how evangelical leaders of a number of churches in Knoxville, Tennessee, collaborated to organise a city-wide 'prayer month'; transcendent concerns that often manifested as a tension between "the world" and what is "not of the world" (Hovland 2016: 345); and worldly concerns

Temporal features of evangelical place-making refers to the attentiveness to questions of time. Sunday as a day set aside for Christian communion is perhaps the most obvious example of what could be considered as ‘Christian time’. The majority of evangelical communities organise their community gatherings on Sundays. The overall temporal pattern is consistent and for some Christians committing to such temporal continuity means planning their working hours around a Sunday gathering (Webster 2013).⁶² Evangelicals do not just want to be ordered by Christian time but they also want places that can assist them in creating time in a Christian way. Alain Badiou (2005) highlights the evangelical emphasis placed on discontinuity, that is, causing ruptures in the established order through producing certain events that will not only impact both individual lives but also the world around them. Graduation and Compassion Day⁶³ are examples of events that rupture the established order. As public events, they provided an opportunity, for those who wanted to, to publicly demonstrate their commitment to Christian service but also created an opportunity for the God School to publicly share their values. The central location and physical layout of the building with the front courtyard enabled by-passers to observe public events. This is a key part of the school’s witness strategy to the community.

Graduation and Compassion Day are obvious examples of ruptures to the established order. Yet, the ordering of the school day itself contained mini events of rupture that fostered reflection on the God School’s Christian beliefs and ultimately created a new order for some children. For instance, the beginning, middle and end of every day included a time of sung worship and prayer. The whole school would gather for these events in the largest room in the school. The space is used at certain times of the day as a classroom, dining room and for extra curricula activities, as well as a space to welcome God’s presence by engaging in periods of worship, characterised by intimate songs of praise and prayer. The multiple use of the space revealed much about the politics and poetics of place-making, especially if we compare the God School with another place of religious meaning making, the Buddhist temple. Children in interviews would often share

and the evangelical tendency to cultivate places as “counter-spaces” (ibid). An example of this is Engelke’s (2013) ethnography of the Bible Society and their intentional reworking of the secular public-private distinction.

⁶² As is shown in Joseph Webster’s contemporary accounts of Brethren fishermen from the town of Gamrie on the Scottish coast who plan their fishing trips around Sunday worship.

⁶³ Discussed in chapter 6

their observations about Buddhism and Christianity and make comparisons regarding the practice of each:

In Buddhism they burn incense, pray to idols. That is different to following Jesus because when you follow Buddha people still smoke, take drugs, and drink. Following Jesus people's behaviour changes. When I believed in Christ, I noticed the change in my life but the people who follow Buddha are still worshipping pictures but still have a hard life (*Zara, female, 16 years old*).

When you are a Buddhist you fight a lot, curse a lot, you still hurt one another. When you're a Christian you don't do those things as much and you're more forgiving (*Minh, male, 16 years old*).

The difference between Jesus and Buddha is, Buddha allows you to swear, you are free to do anything you want to do, and you just need to make the offering. When you are offering you can pray to them [the ancestors], but whenever I pray to them they never answer my prayers (*Patrick, male, 13 years old*).

They [Jesus and Buddha] are different because of Jesus. Jesus died for us and he loved us so much. God [Chua] always helps us and he always goes beside us. Buddha is just on one place and doesn't move (*Sophie, female, 12 years old*).

In comparing Buddhism and Christianity children noted the differences in moral behaviour. The quotes above pointedly reveal children's observations of what they deemed to be distinct and inconsistent behaviours of people in and outside the temple. According to children the temple-goers they know make material offerings, burn incense and pray yet, when outside continue to swear, drink and hurt each other. Obviously, this is not true of all Buddhists, and neither are all professing Christians upstanding moral people, but it does reveal something of the effects of the ordering of time at the School. During daily interruptions to commune with God, children are taught of his omnipresent nature. Thus, the disciplining effect of always being watched (Foucault 2004), albeit by a God considered as loving, and who is not confined to 'special' places, may have had the effect of children's behaviour changing when they internalised these beliefs as shown in the quotes above. However, as the next sections show faith was much more than behaviour management.

The dichotomous message of good and bad behaviour is one noticeable discourse within the God School.⁶⁴ Yet, considering how religion is 'lived' (McGuire 2011, Orsi 2003) or practised, in the everyday lives of children in the God School reveals other modes of

⁶⁴ As demonstrated in the previous chapter

contestation. I want to suggest that the use of space and time at the God School influences children's identity and belonging. By going to the God School children are offered regular opportunities to reorient themselves and the world around them. The physical layout and structure of the school day evidences how this comes about. In the multi-purpose room there are no shrines or other Christian icons. Unlike the temple, no focal point or place is regarded as sacred. The classroom is decorated with children's drawings and has a sink and shelf at the back of the room where cutlery is kept for dining. The only notable Christian things are two banners with illustrated Bible verses on,⁶⁵ but these were mostly covered by movable partitions throughout the day. During the fieldwork period no attention was ever drawn to the posters with the verses on nor did children mention them. Without any obvious religious iconography or symbols, what is the contribution of a spatial analysis?

The multiple uses of the classroom reinforced the idea that God could be accessed anywhere at any time, in any circumstance. The regular interruptions in the day for prayer and praise served as a constant reminder of this. Moreover, the teachers and visitors to the God School from America, Vietnam, the Philippines, Korea and Europe, were of an evangelical background which did not require any material sacrifice or preparation before prayer or worship. Children did not have to offer any food or burn any incense before engaging with God, nor did they have to offer anything material in order to appease Him. This contrasted with the widely held belief in ancestral spirits which will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. Instead, children could switch from breaktime activities such as eating lunch, group card games, joking and hair braiding to speaking to a God that would always listen - no matter what they had done - in a matter of seconds. Moreover, the God School acted as a space for group sociality where children's interaction with teachers and visiting missionaries gave rise to new forms of thinking and speech.

In discussing the political production of place-making at the God School, attention has been drawn to the temporal structure of the day and the physical layout of the main hall. In addition, the transnational nature of the school offered possibilities for new types of socialisation as children spent time building relationships with foreigners whilst

⁶⁵ Romans 12:1 New International Version (NIV). A Living Sacrifice.12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

appropriating their religious practices. Within this framework the practice of prayer or worship, and the efficacy of the temporal, alludes to the poetics of place-making. The combination of these things proved a powerful propeller for children's enactment of Christian subjectivity within and outside the school - as the next two sections will discuss. First, I would like to discuss the detail of the poetic and then children's Christian place-making.

Mornings would begin with collective times of worship where children of all grades would gather and sing Christian songs. Afternoon worship times would include songs and prayer for different things each day. Songs would often be accompanied with dance and whilst not all children enjoyed dancing, the daily ritual of enthusiastic singing, clapping, music and collective effervescence seemed to set the tone for the distinct school atmosphere and culture. Singing was a chance for children to speak out Christian beliefs and ideas about the nature of God.

The overall purpose of the school could be classified a project of evangelical Christian mission. Mission is a type of discourse that shapes how evangelical Christians engage the world through ideologies of transformative subjectivity – that is, reconfiguring subjectivity for both the beneficiaries and benefactors of mission (Marshall 2014). The common missionary narrative of going to the 'darkness' to bring the 'light' requires there to be certain subjects who are trapped in the darkness, usually the unbeliever. Talking with teachers, it is evident that they seriously saw themselves as 'sent by God' to 'help' and 'serve' the community.⁶⁶ These discursive narratives brought in by the missionaries, of being bearers of God's light in a dark world, were new for the children, as was the possibility of having the opportunity to personally know and serve God. Loving God and loving the broader community were all sentiments that made up the lyrics of songs sung. For some children singing was an exercise they had to get through. They lip synced the words or fumbled around with their backpacks. Yet, for others the act of communal prayer was presented as having a distinct power to facilitate God's action in the world, as well as being a key medium for reimagining one's sense of place, against the disorientation and marginalisation associated with their legal status.⁶⁷ An illustrative example of the

⁶⁶ As noted in the previous chapter

⁶⁷ The idea of prayer serving as a tool of re-imagination is taken and adapted from Elisha's (Elisha 2013) study of an evangelical Church in US Tennessee. In this case prayer was a medium for believers to situate themselves meaningfully in urban life when often it caused feelings of estrangement.

internalisation of this discourse is the organisation by a group of older youth of prayer evenings “for Cambodia, the city and themselves”. The following example demonstrates children’s independent and active engagement in Christian place-making.

Light flickers from the wicks of candles organised in the shape of a heart. Within the luminous assortment lays a Cambodian flag. Children gather together to pray for the country they live in. The symbolism in the construction of the visual prayer aid is imbued with meaning. The love heart illustrating their Christian love for Cambodia - that love being demonstrated through the light of Christ in a dark world. In lighting the candles children would pray “I light the candle to say, ‘God I want to be the light of the world’. ‘To commit my life to you in any way you want me to be, in my school, village or workplace’”.

Some materials have been removed from this thesis due to Third Party Copyright. Pages where material has been removed are clearly marked in the electronic version. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

Figure 14 Prayer evening for Cambodia organised by teenage youth

Noticeable, and common within evangelical discourse are articulations of a different world being possible (Robbins 2006). Typically this is expressed as looking forward to a world that transcends the current reality, for instance heaven (Hovland 2016). Yet for children who are marginalised, gathering around a Cambodian flag and praying for the country reflects children’s repositioning. Children convey a different dynamic in the relationship between them and nation. In praying for Cambodia, children are exercising a different power, an influence where they are not momentarily subjugated to the discriminatory will of the dominant powers, but rather can call upon another power and petition that power to change the status quo. Moreover, their articulations reveal how they conceive of God changing the position of the Vietnamese in Cambodia. Lucy who is one of the leaders of the prayer meeting gives people instructions. She asked that young people “pray for Vietnamese people here in Cambodia because they don’t have legal

documents, it's not their country and Vietnam does accept them either. They [Vietnamese people] have difficulty getting jobs, and their futures are challenging." She asked people to light a candle and walk around and "if you are not Vietnamese, if you are Khmer - please pray for your Vietnamese friends that they will be accepted, that like Khmer they will be able to go school and have a better life in Cambodia." Khmer people present were young residents of *Preah Thnov*, invited by the students or observers who came to have a look at what was going on.

Whilst I argue that prayers illustrate a repositioning and reimagining by children of themselves and their fate in Cambodia, it could be argued that these prayers will of course not dissolve national differences, no matter how meaningful. As O'Neil asserts in his study of Christians in post-war Guatemala, evangelicalism may feature as a neutralising opium, preventing adherents from more 'militant' social and political engagement. The connection of children with other Christians creates a form of what O'Neil (2010) calls "Christian citizenship". Christians act when given an opportunity, but the action is limited to prayer. Whilst O'Neil's argument provides necessary critical reflection, Christianity can nevertheless play an effective role in creating modes of contestation not previously available to children. By making speech meaningful in the God School, children demonstrated that speech can lead to action. This is an important addition to the discourse on statelessness, as children's examples reveal that statelessness does not always render acts as meaningless. Over the fieldwork period, the confidence children had to speak publicly within and outside the school was striking. In school, often leading prayers on a microphone or praying in small huddles, the articulation of children's Christian subjectivity gave rise to new possibilities of enactment, an opportunity for children to locate themselves from-beside. This next section illustrates this point.

7.3 Becoming Christian subjects: new possibilities of enactment

By appropriating Christianity, children experienced new possibilities of meaningful expression. The juridico-philosophical discussion regarding statelessness identifies it with voicelessness (Arendt 1951, Tubb 2006, Hayden 2008, UNHCR 2014). Populations who face either *de jure* or *de facto* statelessness are 'dehumanised' and denied supposedly inalienable rights (Arendt 1951). Perceivably rendered to 'bare life' (Agamben 1998), stateless populations lack access to rights, therefore legal advocates work towards the durable solution of creating a legal bond between a person and a State. Ensuring citizenship as legal status is often seen as an essential element to ensuring meaningful

enjoyment and inclusion in other distinct dimensions, for instance citizenship as rights, political participation, and as identity (Bosniak 2000). Exclusion from this legal experience of citizenship, it has been argued, reduces any actions taken by individuals to be included as meaningless. The rationale behind such arguments stem from the idea that the stateless without ‘protection statuses’ not only lack civic rights, but the ‘right to have rights’ (Arendt 1951) - “the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (Arendt 1951: 296).

What makes speech and actions meaningful are their ability to make a difference (Isin 2009), and in order to make a difference one must have an ability to be heard. Following this rationale, citizenship as legal status enables political participation and a claim to rights which are reserved for those who belong as citizens. As explained by Parekh (2013), the logic then follows that without the capacity to form meaningful opinions, one cannot be part of the political realm. For Arendt, this is to be deprived of one’s very humanity. Speech, action and opinion are closely bound up with not only our humanity, but also with the constitution of ourselves as individuals. In the discourse surrounding statelessness, meaningful speech is usually identified by its overt political nature - speech that is recognised by authorities who then answer and act upon what has been said in an equal manner (Isin and Nielsen 2008). I want to suggest that only attaching significance to this kind of speech and action overlooks alternative ways of claims making, as political acts, which sit outside of normative practices but can nevertheless be interpreted as acts of citizenship. Isin and Nielsen's (2008) concept ‘acts of citizenship’ provides an alternative way to investigate citizenship in a way that is irreducible to either status or practice, while still valuing this distinction, acts of citizenship requires a focus on those moments when regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens. Acknowledging acts of citizenship is important when thinking about the impact of the appropriation of Christianity among *de facto* stateless children as they point towards tactics of resistance (De Certeau 1984): creative and innovative deeds that increase the possibility of people being able to constitute themselves as citizens who are heard in public, and provoke dialogue on issues (Oosterhuis 2009).

Ethnographic observations reveal how the God School became a new site⁶⁸ of contestation and belonging. The scale⁶⁹ of this contestation stretched across global boundaries and both the new site and the scale of contestation were produced by acts of citizenship. During my fieldwork I observed children performing scripts they had written, so to speak. These performances were intersubjective, local, global and dialogical in nature - all the characteristics of acts of citizenship. For instance, through the practice of prayer, children at the God School were able to create a scene and enter it as actors. They acted out their belonging to a Christian community by identifying with others' experiences of the world and responding with 'activist-like' behaviour, voicing their political desires using prayer, as seen in the youth prayer evening. From the visits of international English-teachers and missionaries to the school, children were able to learn of world affairs and see beyond their own geography. Ideas around good governance were exposed to the children as volunteers and visitors openly discussed situations of life at home or war or political discord in their own country. During these discussions which children listened to and participated in, the liminal space of the classroom was claimed as political, which gave rise to further acts.

As outsiders in Cambodia, children who live on the margins largely lack interconnectivity. However, in this context they are given opportunities to interact with others and reciprocated an affinity with them as Christians. Through daily prayer the children prayed for themselves, each other's needs, their country and families. Building a daily dialogue with a God who they believed listened to them seemed to give children freedom and confidence to speak. On one occasion at the end of school time, a 12-year-old boy led the other children in praying for the Vietnamese and Cambodian governments, that they would not be politically corrupt that they would pursue justice and their people would be protected. Another girl who had heard from an international visitor about the political upheaval in Ukraine prayed for the conflict to end with Russia and peace to exist between the two nations. Children's convictions were legitimised by hearers who through the use of the Hebrew word '*amen*', meaning 'so be it', created an intersubjective union,

⁶⁸ "The fields of contestation around which certain issues, interests, stakes as well as themes, concepts and objects assemble" (Isin 2009: 370).

⁶⁹ "The scopes of applicability that is appropriate to these fields of contestation. When we use already existing categories such as states, nations, cities, sexualities and ethnicities, we inevitably deploy them as 'containers' with fixed and given boundaries. By contrast, when we begin with 'sites' and 'scales' we refer to fluid and dynamic entities that are formed through contests and struggles, and their boundaries become a question of empirical determination" (ibid).

and arguably allowed a moment where children could subvert their uncertain status and belong to an alternative citizenry where their speech was meaningful.

Whilst voicing their political desires, children were developing a consciousness that could later translate into political action to challenge their own marginality and status. An observation that further supports this possibility is a conversation I had with Olivia, 13. Olivia is a gentle and placid girl, the sister of Zara.⁷⁰ I was genuinely moved as someone who was unassuming and graceful told me with tears in her eyes how she wishes she could make papers for children who do not have them:

Charlie: What do you think happens when the children have no papers?

Olivia: The Khmer will send them back to Vietnam. I do not think this is fair because they were born here but they push them back to Vietnam that is not fair.

Charlie: How do you think we could make a solution to the problem?

Olivia: I don't know because I am still young compared to the Khmer.

Charlie: You can be young and have an idea. If you could help children who were born in Cambodia have a better life how would you do it?

Olivia: (she has an answer immediately and speaks for longer than usual) If their [the children's] parents allow me to lead them to make the papers I will lead them, if my grandma allows me to. If they have the paper the Khmer will not send them back to Vietnam.

Charlie: what do you want to be when you grow up?

Olivia: I want to be the servant of God, the one to do the papers for the children, make the papers for the children and like the teachers here to teach them. I feel really sad because some children they don't have papers, so they may go back to Vietnam and I cannot help them, and I am sad about that.

Charlie: what makes you happy?

Olivia: when I serve God and help the children I will feel happy.

Olivia's sense of justice and desire to act to seek fairness is conceptualised as a service to God. She had considered the plight of paperless Vietnamese children and wishes to act, making the link pointed out earlier between an alignment with the Christian God, speech and future action.

⁷⁰ Introduced in chapter five.

The way children displayed confidence to speak about their beliefs outside of the school further revealed how prayer is being used as a tool to challenge disharmony and declare a desire for a change in circumstances. What is important to note here is that children were not merely praying but acting. They disrupted the existing order of things and articulated a vision of a new order, often seeing results. For example, when the team of teachers visited *Preah Thnov* to speak to parents about their child's progression in school, one parent was evidently anxious and restless about personal circumstances. In a dramatic reversal of traditional hierarchical power structures, the child wanted to pray for her mother who agreed. The child prayed for her mother to have peace, wisdom, help and protection. This account shows that children had new influences in the domestic realm and at times were able to disrupt practices foundational to belonging from below.

For evangelical Christians baptism is a significant decision-point in life, it signifies conversion, as well as marking 'belonging' to the world wide church. At the God School baptism was a voluntary decision. It clearly had significant identity rich meanings. Emma explained to me what she saw as the meaning of baptism: "baptism means to go with God. If you are dunked in the water, you will leave your old body, you have a new body. When you go under the water your old self dies and when you are raised up from the water then your new self / being is alive." Emma used the phrase "*con người*" which literally means "body", but the meaning implied here is close to "one self". If the meaning of self is partly tied to identify signifiers inherited from family from below, then volunteering for baptism is another way for a child to act their new identity and mark themselves as belonging to a new community which differentiates them from their Buddhist upbringing. For instance, Trang⁷¹ was baptised during the fieldwork period. Witnessing her make the decision to be baptised and then the way she was able to influence her household demonstrates how belonging from beside affects belonging from below. Trang lived with her mother and four siblings in a floating house; the main area that doubled as a living room and play area was adorned only with hammocks and the main feature: icons (*hình tượng*) and pictures of the deceased. When discussing her baptism with me Trang explained that her mother often allowed her to pray for her and recently, on agreeing to permit Trang to be baptised, Trang was also able to persuade her mother to take down the icons in the house. Trang shared this story at her baptism. She framed icons as mute, powerless idols. To my

⁷¹ who was introduced in chapter five.

surprise Trang's mother agreed to the arrangement on the condition that the icons were put back up when her uncle came over, who would not be best pleased.

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Figure 15 Trang's Baptism

Whilst there are evident limitations to the influence of Trang's negotiation of the removal of icons in the house, the impact of Trang's Christian beliefs on the re-framing of local spiritual practices is something that repeatedly revealed itself when talking with children.

Children explained their frustration with, and derision of, the muteness or inaction of their ancestors or idols, in stark contrast to testimonies of answered prayers when in dialogue with the Christian God. Moreover, children attributed their faith in the Christian God to an ability to have a peaceful present. Analysing a child's faith discourse reveals how belonging from beside, namely, the appropriation of new ritual forms, new sets of ideals, and new possibilities for sociality, encouraged children to reframe local belief regimes. The injection of the God School and the specifics of Christian place-making provided a critical space for emplaced subjects to be exposed to, and connect with, the mobilities of others. At this transnational religious nexus, children's appropriation of Christian practice and belief gave rise to new forms of affective belonging. Appropriation of Christianity was said to resolve fears related to horror, like movies and ghosts, in addition to societal threats like kidnapping. The next section discusses the effects of children's Christian practice outside the school.

7.4 Belonging from beside: the reframing of fear through faith

For three days the funeral music had been playing. The high tones foreign to the western music scale are tinny, and (to my ears) sounded like they would be fitting in a horror movie, at least at first. But soon the music became an identifiable sound of mourning. Paying respects to the dead is a village affair and on one occasion I was invited to attend the funeral ceremony of an elderly lady who lived in *Preah Thnov*. The visit to the family of this lady (whom I had never met before) included sitting at a round table among many set out in a marquee, and eating some biscuits offered to us. Children ran around us and from time to time grabbed handfuls of sweets from the bowls on the centre of the tables. The younger grandson of the deceased had his head shaved to signify a period of mourning. The teachers and I put some money together for the family and handed that over in an envelope as is the custom. A large picture of the deceased was displayed, and incense is lit and left nearby with friends and relatives offering gifts of different kinds. Ancestor veneration is a common feature of Vietnamese culture. The religious motive behind offering material goods such as food, cigarettes and other desirable items, is to contribute to the continued well-being and positive disposition of ancestors towards the living. In addition, requests can also be made to relatives who live beyond the grave for special favours and assistance (Rambo 2005). The social or non-religious function of ancestor veneration is to encourage kinship values, such as family loyalty, filial piety, and continuity of the family lineage (ibid). Whilst ancestors are commonly remembered through the placement of their pictures around an altar in the house, the day of their death is specifically remembered.

Zara explained the dynamics of ancestor veneration:

some altars have pictures, some don't. Like my great grandparents, I don't see their pictures, only an altar with a joss stick bowl. My grandfather's altar has his picture. Every day, you burn joss sticks and bow to them [relatives]. Each person has a kind of altar. When their [the deceased] day [anniversary of death] comes they [relatives] will worship and burn incense for them. For my father's grandparents we have the picture on the tomb. My grandma also put the picture in the house. For those [dead people] that no-one worships, for whom no-one takes care of, they go to the temple. Some people wear an amulet. They make an amulet so if you like someone and they don't love you, or if you like someone and they don't like you, they make amulet for that person and then they fall in love with you (*Zara, female, 16 years old*).



Figure 16 Altar. Photo taken by Kevin age 15

Belonging from below is tied to the belonging to the dead, that is, to family ancestors. Yet, this element of belonging from below and the practice of ancestor worship is disrupted by children's belonging from beside. It is noticeable from children's accounts that since attending the God School and appropriating Christianity their perceptions of the spirit worlds changed. Though some children changed their opinions of the spirit world, this did not lead to a re-orientation of all kinship values. In fact in appropriating Christianity children showed that their preference for Christianity was, in part, based on an assessment of what belief would be most beneficial for their families. Classic conversion narratives often affirm a person's choice to replace beliefs in spirits with more rational ones (Hefner 1993, Weber 1963). In the Cambodian context such an oversimplification glosses over relationships that still exist with spirits (Jammes 2017). Many children continued to believe in spirits, only now they considered the Christian God to be a more powerful and responsive force than their ancestors. Before appropriating Christianity children did - as part of their belonging from below - engage with the religious practices they were raised in, in the hope that they could receive assistance in family situations. Often, the disappointment of an ancestor's lack of answers when requests were made led them to seek an alternative avenue of hope.

For example, when asking Trang if she worshipped her ancestors she explained:

I don't but my mother does. The reason I do not is because when we offer dead people food they cannot eat, they only smell it. So, it is a waste. Ancestor worship is something people do when they are afraid. They ask them [idols] to do something, but they just stand there and do nothing. They do not answer the prayer (*Trang, female, 13 years old*).

It is clear that this experience of disappointment and others like it came from the children themselves. Teachers believed that the dead are dead. Yet as we see in Trang's explanation she discusses and distinguishes what she sees as the abilities of the dead "they cannot eat [food], they only smell it". Teachers did not share this belief.

One commonality between the Khmer and Vietnamese rituals of death is the idea that the deceased live on after death, have power and their spirits must be appeased. I found it very difficult to differentiate the spirit worlds children described to me and the broader Buddhist worldview. Children's stories of spirit possession, amulets, and ancestor appeasement were told in tandem with discussions of Buddhism. Davis' (2016) book *Deathpower* challenges the idea that Theravada Buddhist practices throughout Southeast Asia, such as spirit worship, were 'accretions' or additions to 'real' Buddhism, and based on a strict adherence to original Pali scripture.

Trang's explanation reveals the combination of praying to Buddhist icons and the practice of offering to ancestors. Her pragmatic answer regarding the waste of food lends itself to rational thinking. Why give food you do not have an abundance of? Likewise, why give food to ancestors who do not give what you ask for? Whilst at face value it appears that her analysis is about rational choice, locating her views in a context of status insecurity and a fractured politics of belonging, another possibility arises – children's resolve to avoid rejection. Turning to one's own family for protection, and assistance, seems a normal step to take. However, not receiving an answer from ancestors creates yet another form of rejection. Facing rejection from the State and from family children search for alternative avenues of assistance, and this is when the discursive narratives proclaimed at the school become viable.

Theravada Buddhists who dominate the religious makeup of Cambodia, as well as the Vietnamese living in the field-site, do not believe in a 'personal' and 'intimate' omnipotent God (Cassaniti and Luhrmann 2014: S336). Evangelicals consider God to be a close, personal, and intimate father-figure God who wants to be in relationship with his creation (Luhrmann 2004, Luhrmann 2012). Tanya Luhrmann explores the phenomenon of how God is made real and intimate for the American evangelical. For example, once the believer understands his or her mind to be no longer a private space outside of the world and where God can infiltrate his or her thoughts, he or she develops a new 'theory of the mind' where God is able to hear his or her thoughts and speak to him or her (Luhrmann 2012: Chapter 2). As a result of learning about God in the transnational space

of the God School, children can collectively affirm their new beliefs through speech. Luhrmann's study illustrates the ways in which evangelical spaces are set up to aid the interplay between individuating and socially embedding members.

In the previous section we saw how children engaged in prayer as a communal activity that socially positioned children in their societies. Prayer was presented as a transformative practice to society's structures. Whilst prayer could be a collective endeavour it was also an intimate, private conversation with God. The examples children gave of unanswered prayers (or requests) presented to the dead and/or idols, and the contra answered prayers children received from the Christian God, is underpinned by the belief that children have a relationship with an active God who intervenes in their worlds. Susan Harding defines Christian conversion as a "process of acquiring a specific religious language" (1987: 169). People learn this language through "witnessing" (ibid), listening to testimonies from others and articulating their own about the power of the Holy Spirit: "Listening to the gospel enables you to experience belief, as it were, vicariously. But generative belief, belief that indisputably transfigures you and your reality, belief that becomes you, comes only through speech: speaking is believing" (ibid: 179).

Harding's insight is helpful to understand how the speech of teachers and children in the classroom transfigures reality and personhood. Children began to expect responses from God as they heard this was possible through testimonies. The descriptions of the muteness of the idols and ancestors was often countered by accounts of the activeness of God. Zara, in a similar vein explains why she doesn't worship the ancestors "I go to Christian school and whenever I ask to God he answers my prayers but whenever I ask to ancestors they never answer my prayer." In the previous section we saw how children engaged in prayer as a communal activity presented as a transformative practice to society's structures. Whilst prayer could be a collective endeavour it was also an intimate, private conversation with God. This assertion was recurrently confirmed as the examples of Kirsty, 15 and Linh 15 below demonstrate.

During Kirsty's timeline past exercise she told me how she ended up attending the God School: "some friends asked me, invited me to play and then they asked me if I want to go to this school to study and I went back to my house and asked my father and he allowed me to come to this school." I asked Kirsty if she believed in God, and she said she did. She proceeded to explain to me why she did not worship her ancestors anymore:

Charlie: and what about your ancestors, do you worship them?

Kirsty: no, because before I went to this school I kneeled and prayed to them, and asked them to keep my parents healthy, and that my grandma would recover from her sickness. I asked them, but they did not answer my prayers. I asked and asked, and I asked but they didn't let Grandma recover from the sickness.

Charlie: and what about when you pray to Jesus does he answer your prayers?

Kirsty: Yes

Charlie: do you have an example?

Kirsty: [continuing on from the story about her sick grandma] I slept in the afternoon and I had a dream where God came to me and said Kirsty wake up I will heal your grandma. When I woke up I didn't know anything but the next morning my grandma was healed. I asked her if that was God and she said yes, because I know it.

Charlie: which God was it?

Kirsty: Jesus

Linh, 15, tells me about how appropriating Christianity changed her behaviour and worship of the ancestors:

...before [attending the God School] I liked to play, to argue and swear. When I came to this school teacher My Len taught me how to pray, and after that I liked to go to this school. I don't like to play and only stay at home to help my parents. I changed a lot. I believe in the Lord.

Charlie: some people say they worship the ancestors, do you worship the ancestors?

Linh: Yea, my parents do.

Charlie: what's the difference between worshipping God and worshipping the ancestors?

Linh: When we worship idols and wear the amulet they [people] still swear. They burn the incense yet, when they say something they will gossip. The difference is, when believe in God we don't need to do it, wear the amulet, burn the incense.

Charlie: do you think believing in God, the Lord, helps you think about the future more?

Linh: helps you to think about being good, helpful. We can know more about God, worship God and wherever we go God will send his angel to protect us.

Charlie: do you have any stories of prayers that have been answered?

Lin: When my grandma got really sick she called every grandchild to say goodbye. I remembered then I needed to pray. I prayed for one hour, after half an hour I saw my grandma sit down and be healed, she spoke to her grandchildren and until now she still does it with strength.

Charlie: that's amazing! Or is it normal for you?

Linh: [smiles].

Did God heal the people children referred to? Did Jesus speak to Kirsty and tell her to wake up? Whilst these questions are legitimate, the point of ethnography is not to empirically test the stories of the children. Analysing discourse allows us to move around the validity of belief and enables us to understand the social implications for how people talk, describe, and frame certain things (Hall 2006: 167). Giving attention to the embodied practices of children in the everyday and ordinary makes known how religion is experienced at the 'micro' level (McGuire 2011, 2007). For instance, how the collective affirmation of faith: the use of the body in prayer and Christian worship in the school, creates an affective form of belonging from beside beyond the school. Straus's recognition that "it is not so much the initial action that enables the convert to experience a transformed life but the day-to-day actions of living it" (Straus 2007: 163) is a prompt to seek to understand how children's belonging from beside, expressed as belonging to a new community of transnational Christian believers and to God himself, affects the individual. Of interest is how Christian discourse enabled children to reframe things in their immediate worlds that made them fearful.

Children's accounts made it obvious that their collective participation in prayer and worship at the school would then become individualised and used outside the school to resolve some of the daily fears they faced. Fears of ancestral possession, river ghosts, and kidnapping all signify uncontrollable elements in children's worlds. By applying their practice of Christian prayer at home, children can project alternative realities. Take Yellow for example. I ask Yellow about whether she listens to Cambodian or Vietnamese music she replies:

My favourite to dance to is the school songs. I like them because they're about God. When I am cooking and feel sad I sing by myself. When no one plays with me or helps me I sing to God who strengthens me (*Yellow, female, 11 years old*).

In another conversation David aged 15, talks to me about his personal prayer life:

When I talk to God I feel happy. When I am not praying I feel so uncomfortable in my heart, I mean when I am not talking to Jesus. I pray at home, when I wash

the dishes or when I feel afraid of ghosts I pray. Sometimes I feel really scared of ghosts and I pray and sing, and I forget about it and go to sleep (*David, male, 15 years old*).

May, one of the youngest participants aged 7, explains why Phia is her best friend:

She goes to this school she sits next to me. She is my best friend because I go to her house to watch movies, always. Ghost movies! I am afraid of ghosts. I am afraid of cats too, because of their eyes in the evening. When I am afraid I pray and sleep. I pray the cat will go out of my house, she stays in our house and poops everywhere (*May, female, 7 years old*).

This is not the first time I had heard about May's fear of the cats – one of her earlier drawings hinted at this (see figure 3). At first, it appears that May has drawn pretty lanterns in the house. I ask her to confirm what the decorations are to be sure, May answers "It is a bomb (grenade) to kill the cat because the cat poos everywhere I want to kill the cat. I saw the bomb in Phnom Penh in a movie."



Figure 17 May's House

Fears are prevalent and serious things for children. May's drawing reflects the embodied experience of fear she had at home. Her use of prayer to remove fear helped her achieve a basic but fundamental need: sleep. Whilst the abovementioned examples might appear trivial, they exemplify the ways in which children's place belonging is disrupted. David and May's accounts of singing and praying (activities learnt in the school) when afraid illustrates how the embodied practice of faith, expressing out loud their knowledge of, and belief that God hears them resolves fears at home. This demonstrates the efficacy of faith made possible by belonging from beside for creating a peaceful present. Children's

everyday feelings of safety were often interrupted. Modes of interruptions discussed were things like ghosts, spirit possession or kidnapping. The next section will illustrate the impact of faith as children processed their precarious relationship with water.

7.5 The Power of Water

Living on the river posed severe risks to children and their families. Many children drowned, often relatives of the participants. Trang's older brother and cousin died on the water: "they took a shower and went to swim and they held hands together and jumped at the same time, and both of them died", she told me. She evidently carried a concern for the wellbeing of other children who bathe in the water. Her caution is unfortunately underpinned by being a regular witness of this kind of avoidable death:

Every year I see a lot of people die in the river, especially the little ones. So, when I see them I want to shout at them "be careful!" Sometimes I do not dare to shout at them because I am afraid that they might let go of what they hold onto. I run, and I hold their hands to keep them safe. Experiencing these deaths, I look, and I feel like the parents are really pained, crying for many days. For me I am afraid about my brother and sisters that they will fall into the river too (*Trang, female, 13 years old*).

When I ask Trang about the sense of responsibility she carries for her family and if that is a tiresome burden she replies, "no because I'm sure that God will be with me and... and he tells me: 'don't be afraid, I am with you'. If anything happens I will pray to God and He will answer me." Like May, Trang's certainty that God is with her also aided her sleep. She told me that despite all the things she thinks about daily she sleeps soundly knowing God gives her His strength. Restless sleep evidences psychological stress. The internalisation and proclamation of the narrative that God is omnipresent and accessible, attributes produced in Christian place-making at the God School, have efficacy at home.

River ghosts are a common narrative that children and adults discussed. It is widely believed that the dead lurk in the river and especially among the children it would cause some inner fear. Some fear is rooted in a natural happenstance like Trang's worries about the safety of children in the river, whilst for David and May ghosts are what make them afraid. May told me she saw a river ghost once: "the son of my uncle was caught, he didn't die though. I know it was a water ghost because when I swam at that time I saw in the trash clothes and some hair, so I was afraid and ran to the land to tell my mother." Younger children drew snakes and told me that they were afraid of them, whilst

for others swimming in the water was disconcerting because of river ghosts. Tiffany explains what river ghosts are:

They [river ghosts] are the ones who have fallen in the water and they then become river ghosts. A friend of my father one day when he was drunk felt sick on the boat house [of his relative]. He put his leg in the water and he felt like someone pull his leg into the water, so his brother came to help him up. Then he sat again and felt it again, this time it was not his leg but his head that was pulled down fast, people tried to get him out but failed so he is still there until now. He died. They found the body but could not pull it out. People think a river ghost did it (*Tiffany, female, 14 years old*).

The malicious nature of ghosts is not limited to river ghosts, ghosts who possess also can have wicked intentions as Hien's⁷² story reveals. I ask Hien during an interview whether she thinks it is true that spirits possess people, she goes on to tell me of an incident she witnessed:

...one of the ladies and she was sleeping, and some ghost strangled her and then possessed her. Then she broke everything in the house and some people said "get out of this lady or else we will kill her" then they tried to kill her, but the spirit would not get out and they [villagers] could not kill her, they could not kill her, and she ran away. After that in the evening the lady was really afraid of that [the spirit], so she killed herself. The next morning, people could not find her in her house. They found her body in the backyard where she hanged herself. This was three years ago. I was 6 years old. I saw it. The lady lived in *Preah Amnr Abbay* village and my parents brought me there to eat and we saw her hang herself and my father went to take a look and then he fainted because he was afraid. He was taken to the hospital. When my father woke up he said we need to offer the money to the lady. So, we took the money. That lady lived alone. So, people said poor her and helped contribute to her funeral. I was afraid, I was shaken (*Hien, female, 13 years old*).

Children's experiences of ghosts are not limited to the river or other people's houses. I was quite surprised by the candid way children spoke of ancestral possession. I asked Sara aged 11, and Sreya aged 9⁷³ what kind of God they believed in, they replied in unison "Jesus the Lord." Sreya told me she likes singing school songs and when she wakes up she thanks God. When I asked Sara why she believes in Jesus she told me: "because before I knew about God a lot of people attacked me and someone tried to kidnap me but when I knew about God and I prayed he didn't allow anyone to attack me." Sara tells me the teachers taught them about God and whilst her parents don't believe in him she

⁷² Hien was introduced in chapter five.

⁷³ Sreya was introduced in chapter five.

continues to pray for them. The conversation moves onto her family's belief in ancestors and how the ancestors sometimes possess family members:

Charlie: What about your ancestors, do you worship them?

Sara: Yes, sometimes my parents force me to go to the temple to do things I do not like. They put the ancestors' pictures in the house and no one can take them anywhere.

Both speaking together and taking it in turns they tell me a recent experience of spirit possession:

If they [the dead spirits] don't like what you offer, their soul will go in you, possess you and they will talk to the people who are alive. It just happened yesterday to my Auntie and brother. My grandpa come and spoke to them. He came to my sister and then spoke to the parents (*Sara and Sreya, females, aged 11 and 9 years old*).

I asked the sisters how the experience made them feel. Sara, the older sister replied, "I was very scared but now I believe in God, so I will not be afraid anymore." With Sreya chipping in, "because he is the highest."

Given interviews were conducted in the God School, children could have given me what they thought were 'correct' and 'Christian' answers. Observing children's behaviours and speech outside the School helped in the analysis of whether participants were just saying 'the right thing'. There is a difference between a simple phrase like, "oh thank God for that!" and a description of a feeling of safety that leads to new behaviours within and outside the school. For instance, children's belief in the Christian God as a protector gave them confidence to make the journey to school, a journey that in and of itself is a vulnerable path. During the research, I was surprised by the prevalence of kidnapping stories told by participants. One boy, Peter, 13, told of how his friend was kidnapped by a man known to his village, neither of whom ever returned:

After school about 11:30am I went with my friend, and my friend got kidnapped, not me. At that time there was a motodup [motorbike taxi] man. He lived near my house. He said that my mum told him to come to pick us up. I called for my mum but she said she had not [told the man], so I told him, but my friend had some money and he went with that man. His house is in front of my house. My friend asked me to go with him, but I said no and walked home to play with some friends. So until night-time my friend did not come home. One week later I haven't seen him until now. My friend's mum waited for him for one week. She cried a lot and did not want to eat anything.

When I was in grade 3 in my village a lot people were kidnapped, about 4 of them. And because usually my mum would come to pick me up but on that day she did

not come, so when he said that, I thought it was true. But I had a phone so I called my mum, and my mum said no that's why I did not go with him. Because I had to be really careful, everybody in my village was careful because of the incidents that had happened. And we know that man. He used to bring my mum to the market, but from the day he drove that boy no one has seen him anymore. About the other three who were kidnapped, they were small like boys like my nephew. They [kidnappers] gave them candy and asked them to follow, the kids follow that one then they were gone, and did not come back (*Peter, male, 13 years old*).

The common reason given for why people might be motivated to kidnap was for the trafficking of organs. Some participant's family members sometimes kept their children from school because they could not walk the children themselves. In a group interview of three girls Sokhipa, one of the participants whom I had not seen for a while at school, told me that her friend's uncle advised her to not go to the God School. He was concerned that she could be kidnapped after he saw the news warning of kidnapping in the area on Facebook. The uncle could have been particularly protective because his other niece was nearly abducted a year before the interview. I wanted to understand why Sokhipa, 12, had not taken her friend's uncle's advice. She told me that "at that time I spoke to God and said, 'God please, send your angels to protect us', and I felt safe." The God School did provide some more practical protection for children against kidnapping by dropping some children to and from school. Sokhipa did not live that far away so did not take this offer up. Yet, I would suggest from the examples given that the uncertainty and fear which pervades children's lives makes them more likely to turn to Christianity.

Children's conversion narratives and children's embodied practice of faith are pertinent examples of how they choose to locate themselves in order to experience the world in ways that disrupt the undesirable realities belonging from above and below. The structural marginalisation children face on the surface can seem to be the most influential factor in interrupting a feeling of place belonging. Yet, the unsettling and unpredictable occurrences of the spirit realm are just as significant in disturbing a sense of place from children's perspective. Children are haunted by the inequalities faced by their community. Living on the water is a source of life as many families made a living from fishing, and potential death. Simple yet imperative tasks like bathing are interrupted by the pervasive reminder of those who have tragically fallen. Similarly, children belong to, and have a duty to look after the dead as an inherited practice. Children who appropriate Christianity choose not to continue such practices and in doing so interrupt a normative part of belonging from below. In its place, children choose to join a community of believers who confirm their belief in a benevolent God who gives them power, previously missing (in

their view) from their lives, to enable upright behaviour. The Christian God listens and apparently answers prayers in ways ‘mute idols’ cannot and is present and powerful in the darkest moments when fear threatens to steal peace.

7.6 Are children agents of their own conversion?

It is important to critically assess children’s agency in their conversion. This section examines the power relations within missionary activities, caregivers’ restrictions on a child’s practice of Christianity, and the opportunities available for children to critically discuss their choice to appropriate Christianity. Anteriorly, I want to add a caveat that whilst children appeared to have converted at the time of the study, it is hard to know how concrete this conversion is. Rambo (1989) asserts that conversion should be treated as a descriptive, rather than a normative enterprise. Conversion is itself a discursive construct that adopts different forms and meanings over space and time. Therefore, children’s experiences of faith are likely to change over time, hence the preferred use of the term appropriation. Nevertheless, I take as primary evidence for conversion a child’s articulation of changing religion or beliefs.

Conversion, in this context, can be used as an analytical tool to understand a process of change that involves the (re)definition of self and other in accordance, or discordance, with a religious schema (Woods 2012). I have suggested in this chapter that children are not merely passive subjects of indoctrination but have actively appropriated - that is taken for their own use - outside Christian practices in their daily lives. Thus, they have converted from local Buddhist practices to evangelical Christianity. Religious conversion is the acceptance of new religious beliefs that are different from the convert's previous beliefs. Conversion involves an internalisation of a new belief system which can be observed as a new religious identity, or a change from one religious’ identity to another.

We have seen how a child’s exposure to Christianity at the transnational-religious nexus has led to new modes of contestation, within and outside the God School. Conversion takes place in a “dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations and experiences” (Lamb and Bryant 1999: 24) therefore attention must be paid to where, and not just why and how conversion takes place. Considering the spaces wherein conversion occurs provokes a consideration of the external conditions that can determine conversion processes and outcomes beyond the discourse of the individual (Woods 2012). The relationship between young people and religious choice offers an

immediate entry point into the spatial politics of religious conversion. Embedded in all forms of social and cultural change are highly complex power relations (Crang et al. 2003, Mahler 2019, Mitchell 1997).

Within anthropological writing, the missionary is seen as a paramount figure who subjugates local religion and its practices with Christian ones. This process has been labelled a ‘colonising of consciousness’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 2001) and is rooted in a concern with Christian mission and imperialism, the potential interference of Christianity with the culture it enters into, and a secular liberal worldview born out of modernity (Roberts 2012). These apprehensions and analyses usually describe the conversion of adults and its (predominantly negative) consequences. One would expect then, that these anxieties will be even more prevalent when discussing the religious conversion of children.

Missionary activity among the Vietnamese communities in this study arose from the concern for the welfare of the communities the school served. Without citizenship and papers, families have social needs that are largely neglected by the Cambodian government. Their status and poverty mean they are at a disadvantage due to the privatisation of the social insurance system, poor management of healthcare, and education (Jammes 2017). There is an uneasy interconnection in development scholarship between proselytising groups and ameliorative activities which could be predatory in nature. Given the informal setup of the school it could be described as an ‘illegitimate’ space of conversion because the Cambodian government has not formally sanctioned their activity (ref). Consequently, there could be a charge of allurements as in other contexts like post tsunami Sri Lanka where international religious NGOs were condemned by academics and local actors for mixing aid distribution with Christian proselytisation (Owen 2007). In Malaysia, the spaces of the school and university have become strategic sites of some of the most vigorous religious experimentation, competition and membership “poaching” (Nagata 1995, Nagata 2005, Hopkins 2011), making mission-based schooling a contentious site of study. It seems likely that the circumstances of poverty and inequality within the community paved the way for the God School to meet the need for free education. Furthermore, the school’s moral discourse spoke to elements of Vietnamese identity making and thus are seen to partly, cultivate a belonging from below. Accordingly it speaks to the moral and economic logic of conversion (Jammes 2017). That is being able to access education for free whilst also

affirming positive identity signifiers of the Vietnamese. However, one must ask: did this result in a predatory exercise of power that exploited the interconnection between welfare provision and social marginality? To answer this question one must consider the terms of education provision given by the school, in addition to taking a critical look at whether children had an opportunity to critique the Christianity they were presented with. In particular, could they discuss their decision making with caregivers and friends?

On registering their child into the God School caregivers are made aware of the religious education their child would receive and it is required that they consent to their child taking part in Christian education alongside other subjects. As already explained in the previous chapter the school's activities are very transparent and often adults are invited into the school's public ceremonies, Sunday services and celebrations. Semi-annual events like Compassion Day are not compulsory and many students chose not to be involved. Non-involvement had no observable repercussions. Furthermore, there is no clause in the school registration form that students need to convert to Christianity, and many did not. Whilst registration included consent of receiving a Bible-based Christian education, teachers did not sit parents down and explain what the result of children appropriating Christianity might be. For instance, they did not explain that children might choose to prefer Christian practices over local beliefs. From the point of view of teachers, they believed in the superiority of the Christian discourse they taught, and they did desire children to know God as father, as they told me. However, I did not observe any obvious case of coercion. This does not mean that there is no deductive explanation. Structural inequalities presented an opportunity for the Christian message to be heard, albeit with the consent of caregivers. Yet, as per a critical realist approach to ethnography, one must consider the extent to which children exercise volition pre- and post- conversion.

Children's agency is exemplified by their rejection of the Christian faith. Yet for those who appropriated Christianity, their agency in practising their new faith was not limitless. Caregivers often set the parameters of their child's practice of Christianity, often against the wishes of the child. When asking Tiffany, 14, if she believed in the Christian God, she shared with me her parents and family's response to her faith:

I don't believe in Buddha, I believe in the Lord, our father in heaven. Jesus can help me with everything I need, he can do a miracle. This school [the God School] taught me that God can help us, Khmer school teaches us Buddha can help but I don't see how he can help. My parents are Buddhist. I feel confident talking to them about my faith. Once I watched a Christian movie with my mother and she said she could not understand, we were talking about it and then my brother came

down and yelled at me. This is difficult because I want my family to believe in God but when I share about God they yell. I wanted to get baptised, but my parents do not allow me to (*Tiffany, female, 14 years old*).

For Tiffany, her parents allowed her to go to the God School. Tiffany's parents⁷⁴ ran the local shop a few doors down from the school that students would buy snacks from. They could see she had good friends there and they wanted her to learn Vietnamese. Like other children, Tiffany's example shows both her agency and the parameters of her outward practice of faith.

Conversion is a process of change that involves the (re)definition of self and other in accordance, or discordance, with a religious schema. Yet, it is not just the converted who reposition but the world around them; repositioning is a reciprocal process, as Woods (2012) notes:

Invariably, a space of negotiation prevails through a child's transition, given that conversion engages with, informs and ultimately disrupts existing notions of meaning and identity, and impacts individuals, families, communities and the religious groups that represent old and new affiliations (Woods 2012: 449).

During interviews children would share their journey of appropriating the Christian faith. This allowed me to understand the degree to which children could evaluate their faith-based choices. Hien's⁷⁵ story reveals the ways in which some parents would restrict their children's engagement in normative practices, like going to the temple, that add to belonging from below. Furthermore, children's belief in the Christian God was often challenged by friends as well as family:

I do not know if my parents believe in God or not, they have not told me. They do go to the temple though. I don't go because my parents said I believe in God already, so I am not allowed to go to the temple. I am afraid to go to the temple too. I am afraid that my parents will spank me because they know I believe in God. So, if I go to the temple they will spank me! I must look after the house when my parents go to the temple. I started believing in God when I went to this [the God] school and some of my friends who believe in God told me that God loves us and makes us happy. I do not know the differences between God and Buddha, some friends say God and Buddha are wife and husband and they have separated that is why some people believe in God and some Buddha. What is different is they [friends] say whoever believes in Buddha will go to the heaven but whoever believes in God will go to hell. Yet, I want to go to this school, I want to believe

⁷⁴ Tiffany's mother and auntie's interviews feature in the chapter four and explain their journey to Cambodia, their struggles obtaining birth certificates and their opinion on the future of Vietnamese children and the registration of Vietnamese that was being rolled out at the time of research.

⁷⁵ Hien was introduced in chapter five.

in God because I am a child of God. Some of my friends they do not like to go to this school because they say to believe in God is bad. They hate God (*Hien, female, 13 years old*).

Hien's parents took her faith claims seriously and that limited her going to the temple. This reciprocal repositioning reveals the agency of children and its limitations. The referenced discussion between Hien's friends shows how they challenged her beliefs and this enabled a critical continuation and reflection on her decision to follow the Christian God.

These examples offer a critical reflection the agency of a child in their own conversion to Christianity. I concluded that the marginal context the communities of children live in offered an opportunity for the God School to provide Christian education and that in turn exposed children to new ritual forms as well as new possibilities of socialisation. These opportunities were made possible by the consent of caregivers who also provided limits on the extent to which children could practise Christianity. Whilst children repositioned themselves from beside, repositioning is a reciprocal process as Hien's story demonstrates. Moreover, children engagement in critical conversations with their peers about their conversion to Christianity exposed them to opposing opinions about Christianity. Children's continued friendship with nonbelievers points to the probability that these discussions may well continue.

7.7 Conclusion

By focusing on the interplay between mobility and religion, and the associated networks of religious believers and organisations, we learn how local contexts like the God School expose children to alternative religious beliefs and needs. As emplaced subjects, children who attended the God School were able to meet voluntary teachers and missionaries who shared their faith and experiences of the world. The mobility of others brought new ways of interpreting the world, which impacted children's identity and belonging. Belonging from beside as described in this chapter highlights how children locate themselves from beside as they appropriate the 'outside' elements of Christianity. Seeking to understand the impact of Christian place-making on children's appropriation of Christianity, this chapter detailed the politics and poetics of the structure of time and space at the school. To understand the implications of conversion on the daily lived experience of children, attention has been given to the various scales of contextualisation of religious practice. Becoming a Christian subject enabled new possibilities for children as they enacted

themselves as ‘citizens’. The practice of Christian prayer as shown in the first section is embedded with potential political and symbolic ramifications. Gaining a voice, and the confidence to use it, children reveal their capacity to act.

Religious change had further ramifications for aspects of children’s everyday feelings of safety, whether that be safety from ghosts, kidnapping or spirit possession. Unlike the common division of the spiritual and secular in Western society, children engaged with the spiritual or supernatural regularly. There were no obvious boundaries between the two. Participants would explain how they arrived home in the middle of someone being possessed as if it was a normal activity. Thus, children’s appropriation of the Christian faith - the practice of prayer and songs learnt at the school - aided their ability to resolve any fears, whether that be in the moment or before sleeping. This made for a peaceful present and had a profound impact on creating a positive affective form of belonging. Children can regain some power and agency in otherwise uncontrollable circumstances.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Academics detailing the situation of the Vietnamese in Cambodia have pointed to the many struggles they face as a perpetually temporary population (Ehrentraut 2011). Vietnamese children in Cambodia have received attention in the past, their vulnerability and experience of prostitution has been documented (Lainez 2011, Hume et al. 2013, Busza 2004). In fact, it was this issue that first caught my attention regarding the minority group. This thesis could have been centred on that. Yet, I found the problem of *de facto* statelessness to be the underbelly and barrier to decent, fair well-paid jobs, education and housing. Very little has been written about the issue of statelessness in the Cambodian context. The most detailed research has provided an important legal analysis that supports the right of long-term residents, those who have lived in Cambodia for up to three generations, to be granted citizenship (Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012). This thesis explores the issue of statelessness from another, understudied angle: how *de facto* stateless Vietnamese children living in Cambodia experience and practise identity and belonging.

In summary, bringing to the fore the everyday lived reality of *de facto* stateless children undermines the assumption that children's experiences of statelessness are congruent to their parents. Children also engage in informal systems of segmented and differential access to rights and entitlements, but from different positions and with different outcomes to their parents. Moreover, children engage with the conditions of statelessness, by negotiating and at times resisting boundaries of exclusion. This thesis has traced the intimate worlds of children, demonstrating how they make choices regarding their religion (chapters six and seven), and how they negotiate and experience belonging as an ethnically marginalised group (chapters four, five, six and seven). These narratives are thin on the ground within statelessness literature, consequently this contribution is timely and advances the literature on children's belonging, citizenship and statelessness. I have explored questions relating to how children build their everyday lives, experience identity and view themselves in relation to hegemonic State discourse. The omission of these questions from current scholarship provided an impetus for the research question and aims of this thesis. In this concluding section, I want to draw attention to empirical contributions this thesis makes.

First, this thesis provides an understanding of the official discourse on citizenship and statelessness in Cambodia, and the generative socio-political and legal mechanisms of statelessness. In chapter four I demonstrate how the official discourse on citizenship and statelessness is rooted in Cambodian nationalism which has resurfaced and been propagated by the Cambodian political elite since the time of the French protectorate (Canzutti 2018, Edwards 2007, Goscha 1995). This correlation has been made before, yet this thesis takes this analysis a step further by illustrating the intersection of ethnicity and poverty and the affective experience of statelessness among adults. It is important to understand the experience of adults to make clear the different experiences of children. Moreover, if any solutions to the conditions of statelessness are to be found, “they must attend to the historical specifics of statelessness as well as its intimate connection with citizenship and nationalism (Manly 2007: 257)”.

Second, this thesis adds to the theorisation of childhood statelessness. As will be expanded on in the second section of this chapter, this thesis argues that statelessness is a plural and diverse experience (Sigona 2016). Moving away from a legal debate that seeks to rigidly define statelessness, this thesis adds to our understanding of *de facto* statelessness, that is the experience of those not neatly defined as stateless but those who experience life as if they are. Rather than defining children as ‘demi’, ‘semi’, or as ‘non-citizens’, I advocate using the term noncitizen (Tonkiss and Bloom 2015) to theoretically consider children as active members in their communities who also have a relationship with the State. This opens the possibility to see to what extent and how children negotiate or even resist the conditions of statelessness.

Third, ‘belonging’ is a term that provokes many meanings and, as laid out in chapters one and two, it pervades everyday discourse. This thesis set out to demonstrate that “feeling a sense of belonging (or not), being morally, socially or legally recognised as belonging (or not), has the power to change lives, to make communities and collectives, to bring together and to separate in the most intimate, accepting, loving, exclusionary or violent ways” (Wright 2015: 391). To capture belonging as described by Wright (2015), and to understand the influence of State exclusion, local and transnational relationships, and how identities and belongings are collectively and individually formed required a comprehensive understanding of the multiple layers of children’s realities. Consequently, aligning this quest with a critical realist approach to research, as described in chapter three, I combined the analysis of place belongingness and the politics of belonging to

provide a conceptual framework that captures belonging as something simultaneously imposed from above, inherited from below and appropriated from beside. This analysis contributes to scholarship regarding the lived experience of statelessness, children's geographies and the ethnographic literature among the Vietnamese in Cambodia.

Fourth, a crucial element of the methodology of this research is that it is informed by a critical realist research paradigm which considers the historical casual factors as well as considering how the underlying socio-cultural and political structures shape how a social phenomenon like statelessness is experienced. Going beyond an isolated account of how interactions among people creates a socially constructed experience of reality, this thesis has extended such a reading of identity and belonging by including an analysis of the contributing effects of the wider social world on subjectivities. This conceptual model can be utilised and applied to other studies of belonging among noncitizen groups. In addition, this thesis has argued that personal and in-depth accounts are absent from isolated statistical and legal assessments of stateless in Southeast Asia. Ethnographic accounts of the children's experience of statelessness are completely absent in Cambodia, this thesis fills that empirical void.

Fifth and finally, this thesis makes recommendations for future research, as detailed below.

8.2 To Be a Hyacinth

This thesis argues that there are generative mechanisms at play that lead to the cyclical experience of statelessness. To understand the generative mechanisms of statelessness a critical realist research paradigm that considers historical circumstances, linking them to the current conditions of statelessness was utilised. Joining the dots between historical socio-political encounters and current lived experiences exposes forms of structural violence (Farmer 2004).

Chapter four traces the trajectory of Cambodia's political history since the time of the French Protectorate and highlights how the historical circumstances of ethnic Vietnamese incorporation into Cambodia shapes their contemporary relationship with the State and its majority group (Ehrentraut 2013). Structural violence is revealed in the building of the 'Khmer' nation. Cambodian nationalism required a scapegoat, and the Vietnamese since the time of the French Protectorate have represented a modern antithesis to 'Khmer'

identity, much like, as Signoa (2016) points out, the stateless are seen to be in opposition to the citizen. Ethno-cultural notions of what it means to be ‘Khmer’ have been instituted and permeate Cambodia’s legal framework, excluding the Vietnamese minority as unassimilable.

Chapters one and two covered Cambodian citizenship, the possibilities of naturalisation and the law on immigration. In summary,⁷⁶ without citizenship and other documentation for themselves, it is extremely difficult for ethnic Vietnamese parents to secure Cambodian nationality for their children based on Cambodia’s Nationality Law (1996). For instance, despite introducing a *jus soli* provision, ethnic Vietnamese children born in Cambodia can acquire nationality only insofar as their parents can prove that they were either born or have lived legally in the country.⁷⁷ However, most Vietnamese who returned to Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge period lost their papers and cannot prove their residence before the adoption of the 1994 Immigration Law, therefore their children are not considered Cambodian citizens (Ehrentraut 2011). For children to be considered Vietnamese citizens, their parents would have to apply for naturalisation (Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2012). However, most Vietnamese who are long term residents see Cambodia as their home and do not wish to leave. Furthermore, it is not guaranteed that the Vietnamese authorities would recognize them as eligible for citizenship (ibid). Cambodia is currently not a signatory of the Statelessness Conventions but is a signatory to other conventions with provisions to protect against statelessness. For example, Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that every child shall “be registered immediately after birth” and shall have “the right to acquire a nationality”. Moreover, Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that “everyone has the right to a nationality” and that “no-one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality”. However, this does not seem to have made a great impact on the lives of Vietnamese people in Cambodia who cannot claim citizenship rights and consequently face vulnerabilities in every area of life (IRIN 2013, Ang et al. 2014).

The generative mechanisms of statelessness extend beyond the law and include racism, economic exclusion based on the ethnicity and exploitation of undocumented residents. It is these socio-political mechanisms that renders the lives of the Vietnamese in

⁷⁶ Paragraphs in this summary were used in a working paper that was published to work out some of the arguments made in chapter 7. See Rumsby (2015)

⁷⁷ Art. 4(2) of 1996 Law on Nationality

Cambodia (as characterised by Bao) to the existence of a hyacinth. These mechanisms are observable in the judgements made by local authorities regarding ethnicity and at the intersection of ethnicity and poverty. These mechanisms exclude and silence legitimate claimants (largely ignorant of the law) from registering their children's births, and their noncitizenship forces them to rely on informal networks for documents, work and utilities resulting in the perpetuation of their *de facto* statelessness. To this end even poor Khmer living in Vietnamese-inhabited villages experience the conditions of statelessness as they become as though they are Vietnamese. Most obviously by having their Khmer heritage denied when they seek birth certificates for their children. Yet, just describing the effects of poverty does little to reveal how it persists in the communities studied. Therefore, to work towards an explanation, this thesis reveals the logic of social mechanisms by asking what produces and stabilises exploitation and accumulation. This analysis reveals the hierarchies of power within communities.

Utilising the scholarship of Tilly (1998, 2001) and Mosse (2010, 2007) to analyse ethnographic data, we see that within the minority Vietnamese community some individuals do not experience the full effects of categorical distinctions. This might be because they can perform Khmerness like Ly or are widowed as in the case of Bopha. However, inadvertently or otherwise, members of the community began to exercise control over access to resources and thus actively participated in the cultivation of systems of social closure and exclusion. Many of the poorer participants in this study accessed and used informal utilities to power their homes and brokered work informally using Vietnamese middlemen. This means that within communities there are those who broker informal interactions between their neighbours and employers or landlords. Receiving a commission for organising labour, these individuals become embroiled in the production of inequality, and the poverty of the community they come from consequently remains depoliticised. They assist in institutional marginalisation and discrimination by providing the means to continue to live informally.

Moreover, this thesis found that there are shared mobilities between poor Khmer women who married into Vietnamese families and their Vietnamese counterparts. Chapter four argues (along with Mosse (2007, 2010)) that injustice and exploitation persist because of the effects of power within political systems that render them invisible, and which keep the interests of the poorest out of politics. By categorising Khmer wives so that they 'become Vietnamese', their plight is made invisible and the corruption and arbitrary

taxation that cultivates poverty continues. This highlights the problem of poverty as a project of inequality and most strikingly, how poverty renders even Khmer citizens to the mobilities of noncitizens. For instance, considering the intersection of poverty and ethnicity this thesis shows how Khmer women who are poor and married to a Vietnamese man share in the restricted mobilities of their husbands, whilst women who are widowed could shun their connection to the Vietnamese or successfully assimilate as Khmer.

In summary, considering the experiences of adults, how they negotiate the boundaries of exclusion and seek to provide for themselves and their families, this thesis demonstrates on how adults encounter and respond to the conditions of statelessness. Research participants' reliance on informal networks and institutions for work, education, electricity and the purchasing of various documents for employment, to rent land, in addition to paying personal tax for residence, were all documented tactics. These tactics may be modes of everyday resistance. A refusal to ignore what Scott calls "bread-and-butter" issues are the essence of lower-class politics and resistance" (1985: 296). Informal modes of acquiring opportunities for work, residence and the wellbeing of family members indicate a refusal to sit back and accept the circumstances as they are. Yet, as Warman (Warman 1980) argues in reference to the rural peasantry in Mexico, resistance can sometimes serve to reinforce one's subordinate one's position, as 'rituals of rebellion' (Gluckman 1953) acquiesce and reinforce the practical acceptance of power relations. As argued in chapter four, the unintended consequences of securing documents off middle men, or accepting informal modes of utility acquisition, results in durable inequality – particularly in Cambodia where the regime thrives off corruption. Additionally, as poor Khmer are characterised as 'being' Vietnamese by cadre and denied their rights as citizens, and as both groups (Vietnamese and Khmer) blame each other for their poverty, we see an example of a political disarticulation of inequality. Poor governance, that is governance that is not accountable and known for corruption, suppressed democracy and an unfair application of the law leaves a situation where authentic citizens have fake documents and fake citizens have fake documents and authentic claims for citizenship by citizens and noncitizens are ignored (McCargo 2011).

8.3 Theorising Childhood Statelessness

Chapters one and two highlight the gaps in research on statelessness and belonging. Statelessness research has shifted from an overt legal and rights-based focus (Blitz 2009, Blitz and Lynch 2012, Gibney 2011, Goris 2009) to detailing the lived experience of

statelessness (Redclift 2013a, Acciaioli et al. 2017, Sigona 2016). Despite the shift, given the reality that millions of people are - or experience life as if they are - stateless, there exists a need for a more nuanced understanding of statelessness that sees it as a plural and diverse experience. This thesis responds to that need by providing an understanding of contemporary manifestations of statelessness in Cambodia, including an in-depth investigation into its political roots and the everyday lived experiences of stateless individuals, specifically children, whose stories are told (or ignored?) almost exclusively by policy reports and anecdotal testimonies.

Given that there are various causes of statelessness including the context in which national policies are designed, interpreted, and implemented as well as direct discrimination on a population that includes the deprivation, denial and loss of citizenship, we must expect the experiences of stateless populations to be plural and diverse (Sigona 2016). Categorising the stateless as a homogenous and an easily identifiable group limits an understanding of how statelessness is experienced, and leads to a one-dimensional theorisation of statelessness that largely focuses on what people lack. The narrow definition of *de jure* stateless as defined by Article 1 of the 1954 Statelessness Convention omits a legal definition of those who are unable to prove their nationality or, despite documentation, are being denied access to many human rights. Consequently, the expanded categorical expansion of *de facto* statelessness seeks to address the experience of those who cannot be neatly defined as stateless. Accordingly, theorising statelessness not as the philosophical embodiment of total exclusion of the polity, as per Arendt (1951) definition, but rather as a form of contemporary political membership which is an embedded and emplaced condition, is a foundational theme of this research. Utilising the term noncitizen (Tonkiss and Bloom 2015) to view *de facto* stateless children as having a relationship with the State, and as active members in their communities, I have been able to consider children's varied experiences and belongings that are fashioned by intersections with other social divisions.

Statelessness can only be legally overcome by the bestowing of citizenship from a State to a person or people group. Yet the conditions of statelessness, the mechanisms of exclusion which result in restricted access to social services, political and community participation are indeed resisted, negotiated and in some ways, albeit momentarily, 'overcome'. The question of resistance among marginal, undocumented and disempowered groups has captured the attention of scholars. Particularly as theorists who

have addressed the discourse surrounding citizenship since World War II have argued that the globalisation of universal human rights has advanced the meaning of citizenship to transcend that of the nation State. The ability to make claims to, and access rights in, contemporary Western States is said to be based on personhood rather than nationality (Jacobson 1996, Soysal 1994, Benhabib 2004). Accordingly, non-citizens make claims to inclusion, belonging and recognition in their State of residence (Isin and Nyers 2014) through protest, strikes and public advocacy (McNevin 2006, 2011, Walters 2008, Larkins 2014). Thus, the difference between having and not having citizenship is said to become blurred (Ong 2006). Whilst this may be true of some Western States, as shown in chapter two authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia that appeal to the ‘Asian Values’ understanding of citizenship, namely placing economics and security before rights, have like Cambodia retained an understanding of citizenship along ethnonational lines (Leng and Yeoh 2012). In addition to this, the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) have suppressed overt challenges to its regime for instance when protests have erupted following charges of electoral corruption (Hodal 2013, Human Rights Watch 2014). Therefore, when looking at the question of resistance, especially in Cambodia where citizens are not supported by current traditions of active citizenship, it could be said that noncitizens - those who do not belong to the nation - are in no position to demand justice from the State (Weekley 1999).

Whilst active citizenship may not transcend Cambodia’s authoritarian State, this does not lead to an outright conclusion that tactics of resistance cannot be observed. To conduct an analysis of children’s politics of belonging: the actions children take to locate themselves in such a way as to challenge and resist hegemonic discourses from above and below, and how children develop a sense of place belonging when faced with exclusion, I employed De Certeau’s (1984) definition of resistance⁷⁸ and his concept of ‘tactic’. Much like Isin’s theorisation of ‘acts of citizenship’ which is used in chapter seven, tactics entail the everyday expressions and contestations of the stateless. Examples of negotiating and resisting the conditions of statelessness are detailed in chapters five, six and seven. I

⁷⁸ Michel de Certeau think of resistance as inherent in the everyday practices of life. De Certeau theorises how a "nobody" – the ordinary – through the everyday practices of life is capable of becoming a producer of a given order. According to De Certeau (1984) tactics operate inside the grid of panoptic power, tricking it, causing disorder when least expected, and effectively escaping without leaving. Examples that De Certeau gives of such a conceptualisation of tactics include dwelling, walking, shopping, cooking, speaking and reading.

will take each in turn.

In chapter five children's responses to belonging from above were explored. Understanding how the exclusionary mechanisms of poverty and violence are encountered at a local level and the ways that children respond to the experience of dislocation revealed their awareness of the exclusions they face. Children construct their identities momentarily at a given time to co-exist in a specific place for a specific purpose, these are signs of what De Certeau (1984) called everyday resistance. Children are using imposed systems of language and ethnicity (the latter to a small degree, a Khmer name is a subtle reference to dominant hegemonic notion of ethnic identity) to insinuate themselves into the other's place. Children detailed their awareness of needing to perform 'Khmerness' in certain spaces. Adopting Khmer names and being able to speak Cambodian in specific locations at specific times, in the market, and particularly when spoken to on the street were tactics to go under the radar, to fit in and co-exist daily. Yet, whilst it may appear that the performances of 'Khmerness' could point to resistance, I want to suggest in line with Abu-Lughod (1990) that one must be careful to not romanticise resistance, thus I do not correlate non-conventional behaviours with resistance wholesale. Instead, if we ask what these specific examples reveal about the grids of power experienced by children we can question the extent to which the conditions of their *de facto* statelessness are 'overcome'.

Chapter five illustrated examples of children being aware of the dominant expectations of 'Khmerness' and children's partial articulation of them in order to secure things like food, an income or education. Children's often stated awareness of the expected behaviours and identity signifiers, exposed the politics around their belonging and how children discern what responses will minimalise confrontation. Thus, the often-contradictory nature of tactics is that whilst certain performed behaviours may allow you to enter hegemonic spaces, the extent to which one has been successful in re-appropriating that space ought to be questioned when there has been an extensive suppression of another identity, in this case Vietnamese identity signifiers. In chapter five, the articulated tactics of identity performance point to conformity of the hegemonic ideal. Hien, Hung, and Huong all discussed the need to be 'Khmer' for certain gains. Yet their accounts of experienced violence reveal that being accepted as 'Khmer' requires more than just having a Khmer name or speaking a moderate amount of Cambodian. This is not to suggest that children lack agency in choosing certain behaviours in order to negotiate

entry into certain spaces, or that there are no benefits to be gained from acting ‘Khmer’. Children noted that being able to give a ‘Khmer’ account of oneself could even redirect the attention of the police who they feared would deport them if they were to be discovered as Vietnamese.

The example of Minh refusing to suppress his Vietnamese identity in chapter five is perhaps a more compelling example of rejecting pressure to conform. Yet, as discussed, Minh’s resistance to speaking Cambodian was aided by a relative position of power. If the conditions of statelessness are to be overcome, there needs to be a broader acceptance of and integration of a Vietnamese history and thus heritage which includes language and culture in Cambodian society. This calls for both individual acts like Minh’s and collective forms of tactical resistance that challenge narratives regarding the Vietnamese, and express discontent with the fractured politics of belonging. These forms as shown in chapters six and seven may be expressed both in surreptitious and overt ways.

Chapter six demonstrated instances of such tactics of resistance. The daily act of going to school, responding to the registers call, wearing laminated name tags and engaging in education, affirmed children’s ritualised use of space. Within this use of space children spoke and sang in Vietnamese loudly, played publicly, and wore the uniform of the God School which marked them as distinct from attendees of mainstream Khmer school. Yet, perhaps most significantly, children’s engagement in volunteerism, such as the example of Compassion Day, amplified resistance to negative stereotypes from above. In observing tactics such as walking around villages and picking up trash, children were able to be the best of Vietnamese from below and change the opinions of some previously hostile members of the Khmer community. Illustrative of this was the public acknowledgement of children previously perceived as bad being affirmed as good.

In chapter seven the focus on children’s Christian subjectivities revealed two things. First, children are able to articulate their political preferences through prayer, and second their practice of Christianity has potential to reconfigure the world around them. On the latter point, this reconfiguration applies to how they reposition themselves towards the Cambodian State and how they reconfigure themselves in relation to the hegemonic practices of Buddhism. When we see children as noncitizens who have the capacity to act, negotiate and tactfully resist the conditions of statelessness, the possibility of their acts igniting into overt forms of political resistance becomes clear. For instance, in paying attention to the script’s children create, and perform in their practice of Christianity,

prayer reveals the inner cognisance of children. Prayers articulated political preferences. In the example of the prayer evening organised by youth at the God School their direct request for the Vietnamese to have the same status and opportunities as their Khmer counterparts highlights their awareness of the unequal status they have inherited. In praying for Cambodia, children are exercising a different power, an influence where they are not momentarily subjugated to the discriminatory will of the dominant powers, but rather they reimagine themselves in relation to the State, calling on another power (God) to change the status quo. The argument is that the culmination of practices like prayer, articulating and imagining another world being possible points to the potential for children to take action for an alternative order.

Everyday practices of the “microbe-like” unrecognised people, asserts de Certeau, create resistances that threaten the dominant order (De Certeau 1984: 94). It is because of their ability to shape spaces that everyday practices have been called “spatial practices” by de Certeau. Spatial practices like speaking, reading, and writing, walking, cooking, dwelling and travelling also organise an ensemble of possibilities. While making possibilities “exist” as well as “emerge” and moving them about to create other possibilities, spatial practices carry out a process of reorganisation and redistribution (De Certeau 1984: 98). In moments like the prayer evening children are still located within the panoptic power of the State, yet interview data revealed their confidence to take the tools of prayer and worship outside the school walls, to their homes and villages. These behaviours could evolve into other forms of spatial practices.

8.4 Belonging: A Simultaneous, Multi-directional Experience from Above, Below and Beside

We can understand more about how children experience belonging by moving away from a narrow discussion on what they lack and instead viewing their experiences of belonging as multi-directional. This thesis argues that belonging is something experienced in a simultaneous and multi-directional way: inherited from above, imposed from below and appropriated from beside. The formulation of this conceptual framework of belonging took its inspiration from Antonisch’s (2010) call to bring together an analysis of place belonging and Yuval Davis’ politics of belonging. Belonging from above involves individual-State relations. A historical analysis of this relationship discloses the mechanisms of exclusion and selective inclusion. Belonging from above for the participants in this study refers to the historical socio-political and legal discourse that

scapegoats the Vietnamese and posits them as the ‘other’ who cannot assimilate into Khmer society as seen in chapters four and five. Belonging from below refers to the inherited socio-cultural beliefs and practices that shape group identity, identifiable through the specific repetitive practices relating to the particular social and cultural spaces which link individual and collective behaviour, as exemplified in chapters six and seven. Belonging from beside is defined as the way individuals locate themselves within and appropriate new outside possibilities. In this study, belonging from beside is discernible at the transnational religious nexus where children are exposed to new modes of Christian thinking which they then appropriate, as shown in chapter seven.

This framework sets out a relational model of belonging that details how people navigate and negotiate spaces of exclusion, experience life as a member of a community and appropriate other outside elements that reorders current life worlds as they are known. As noted in chapter two there is not anything particular about Vietnamese children that enables the use of the model put forward. The only qualifying use of the model is that it is beneficial when seeking to understand belonging among noncitizens, those for whom access to formal modes of belonging are out of reach. This is because belonging from above, below and beside exposes how individuals and groups of people have arrived in a state of irregularity and operate within the boundaries of exclusion. This is important because it is those who live in spaces of indistinction whose belongings are ill theorised. Applying this framework to the lives of children in this study has provided an empirical account of the multiple levels of reality that shape children’s experiences of belonging. This analysis is important in this case because we see that belonging is not experienced neatly. Using a model of belonging that is not only relational but can explore how hegemonic ideas of identity and belonging in society are produced, and the way in which social change happens, reveals the intersecting and often competing experiences of belonging.

Social change could be evidenced among children in the ways they exchanged their inherited modes of belonging and appropriated new forms. Chapters six and seven discussed hegemonic ideas of identity and belonging from below. Notions of morality, religion and filial ties in this life and beyond the grave combined to present themselves as notable signifiers of Vietnamese identity. As children attended the God School their reluctance to speak Vietnamese in public was dissolved. Children actively played, sang and celebrated elements of Vietnamese heritage like *Tết* (Lunar New Year). Going to

school every day did to a degree cultivate social change. Not only did Khmer neighbours begin to accept the children's presence at the God School, they keenly observed events that publicly recognised school attendance, achievement and the lives of children.

Feeling a sense of place belonging is as much to do with feeling safe from the threats of State authorities as it is about feeling safe at home or doing daily tasks. Of course, they are not the same thing, but belonging as an emotional feeling of being at home in place is an important need for children and should not be overlooked. In chapter seven the efficacy of Christian prayer and worship in overcoming feelings of isolation, and fear of ghosts is observable in children's accounts of Christian practices learnt at the God School being used at home. Whilst these are examples of children formulating a sense of place belonging in the here and now they also point to changes in the social order. These changes, whilst seemingly small had profound results for participants who shared how these practices improved their sleep, reduced their anxiety and gave them new confidence to walk to school. Children's experience of Christianity encouraged their decision to pray to the Christian God and in some cases convert to Christianity. Consequently, an observable change in the inherited way of practising religion could, if continued, spark long term social change as it reconfigures the practice of ancestral worship.

8.5 Methodological contribution

This thesis has made two methodological contributions. First, a vital characteristic of the methodology of this study was that it was informed by a critical realist paradigm, drawing on the significance of exploring and analysing historical causal factors as well as considering how underlying socio-cultural and political structures shape how a social phenomenon like statelessness is experienced. Critical realism as laid out in chapter three provides a holistic analysis that considers the structural mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion, socio-cultural beliefs, and identity signifiers as well as individual and collective experience. To answer the research question and aims, taking a multi-dimensional approach that considered the different layers of reality: structural exclusion, familial expectations, and children's phenomenological experience was crucial and enabled the analysis of an under-studied aspect of belonging among *de facto* stateless children. To focus solely on children's individual accounts without also considering how these accounts are historically grounded would have avoided a contextualised account of how the social world works. Situating and interpreting social phenomena in their economic, historical and social contexts as well as considering the phenomenological

accounts of children, has provided robust and structured account of the complex layers to belonging. By foregrounding and dovetailing the macro, micro and outside structures with children's subjective realities this thesis has critically engaged with and offered a multi-layered analysis of belonging. Critical realism has assisted in bringing together and structuring a discussion on belonging as something experienced in a simultaneous and multi-directional way. By doing so in this thesis I have made a conceptual contribution to the theorisation of statelessness and belonging.

Specific methodological choices aided this journey for instance using visual research methods (VRM). Drawing on literature that detailed cross cultural research with children, I was able to enter the field with a tool box of options for VRM. Using drawings, timelines, my time pie charts, self-portraits, identity flowers and photography enabled me to understand how children saw themselves, their communities, as well as discover who and what things are presently important to them and their past and future trajectories. Drawings assisted reading between the lines in children's accounts. Chapter three explained how drawings revealed how differently siblings processed family debt, with other empirical examples across the thesis showing how participants used metaphors to communicate their experiences. The use of drawings affirmed what Prosser and Loxby (2008) argue, that drawings may permit access to different levels of consciousness. Exploring temporality through time lines gave participants license to tell me what their most significant and identity-shaping experiences have been. I learnt much about the precarity of living on the water, negative and challenging encounters when trying to access government provision of education, and more presently the process of trying to get 'papers' made. Spending time in the villages and taking an interest in family history through photo elicitation meant that what could have been clunky and awkward conversations about movement, experiences of war and marriage was made easy.

Second, extending the use of critical realism to ethnography I make the case for an ethnographic approach to statelessness research that adopts an 'epistemological relativism'. That is, acknowledging the imperfect, transitive and socially produced nature about our assumed knowledge and beliefs about the nature of things. This thesis throughout the empirical chapters points to the underlying 'generative mechanisms' that shape human agency and the social relations that this agency in turn reproduces and transforms (Reed 2005). Children's personal and in-depth accounts are often missing from isolated statistical and legal assessments of statelessness. Understanding belonging

requires using methodologies that unearth that which is directly observable and that which requires understanding individuals, their motivations, desires hopes and disappointments and their choices regarding group identity. Thus, the use of ethnography: having a long-term presence in the community of study, is imperative in getting to know children by building rapport and patiently discovering their life experiences.

8.6 A Note on Positionality and Ethics

I do not claim to give children a voice. Their voices have always been present. I have listened to their perspectives and this thesis attempts to share what I have heard. Of course, as I am the one telling the story, my position in relation to that story will shape how it is narrated and framed. Chapter three details reflections on this reality. However, often, the story of the stateless is a singular story (Allerton 2014). Stories can either rob or repair dignity. This thesis celebrates the resilience of children of the God School; points to their strength and resolve to find meaning within uncertainty; and importantly, listens to what they had to say.

The conversion of children away from the religion of their parents promotes a change in local forms of identity and belonging that ought to raise a red flag. Are children free in choosing their changes? Considering the power dynamics and children's already vulnerable position in society one must ask if they are being manipulated, or feel indebted to the teachers they respect so much that they conform to their beliefs. Chapters six and seven raised and answered such questions. Given that not all children converted Christianity and for those that did the degree to which they could practise their faith was restricted at times by their parents showed both the limits of, and their agency in, choosing Christianity.

Chapter six draws attention to the challenges that come from children receiving education in the Vietnamese language that could potentially further marginalise them in the future and hinder an application for naturalisation. I have presented this as a limitation of the God School but did indeed consider whether it is a major ethical issue. I came to the conclusion it is not for three reasons. First, the God School did previously have a Khmer teacher who had to leave the job, and the God School endeavoured to find a replacement. Second, data (referenced in Appendix 2) showed that 30% of 92 students who attend mainstream school were forced to stop due to an inability to pay bribes, fees or they were not able to progress to a higher level of education because of their ethnicity. 36% of

children still attended Khmer School, whilst 34% have never attended. This data, and empirical examples in chapters five and six shows the institutional marginalisation children face. Therefore, without another option available, and considering the positive experiences of the God School, I hold that there are problems in learning the Vietnamese language only but conclude that it's the best option available given the present circumstances. Third, even when children were able to complete a Khmer education, they still experienced the paradox of integration. Assimilation does not necessarily secure the benefits of citizenship. Therefore, I am hesitant to believe children would have an easy pathway to citizenship even if they can speak Cambodian for the reasons outlined in chapter four.

8.7 Future Research

The empirical findings in this thesis contributes to the enhancement of the theorisation of childhood statelessness, including the provision of a conceptual framework for the study of belonging.

The themes of this research could be followed up and provide a springboard for future research. A longer term longitudinal study would provide an interesting extension to the judgements made. Following up with children as they graduate from school would one could trace and document the impact of the modes of resistance and social change documented in chapters six and seven. Moreover, the Vietnamese in Cambodia reside in areas outside the communities documented in this study, therefore making a comparative analysis of belonging among other Vietnamese children living in Cambodia would add to the account provided in this thesis, and aid a deeper understanding of the minority group as a whole.

Chapter four referenced the introduction of the 2014 foreign resident document which participants in this study were requested to make, and which disregarded previous length of stay in the country. In April 2017, interior minister Sar Kheng and director-general of immigration Sok Phal publicised that they planned to “retroactively strip citizenship from children of immigrants who they say were mistakenly awarded Cambodian nationality as long as 30 years ago” (Phnom Penh Post, 2017). This policy was enacted in August 2017 along with a sub-decree that the ordered the annulment and seizure of all ‘irregular’ Cambodian documents held by foreigners. As Canzutti (2018) asserts, these announcements are recent reminders that the length of stay does not make much

difference when it comes to the Vietnamese gaining citizenship status. Yet, as these policies will have impacts on the communities in this study, further research is necessary to assess the effect of implementation, especially what this means for children's present and future mobility. In addition to this, I recently heard through my gatekeeper that the communities in this study have been told they will be forcibly displaced in the coming years and relocated to make way for developments in the area. Whilst this is a preliminary insight, moving off the river onto land and the dismantling of entire villages (which would not be a first in the Cambodian context) increases the risk of internal displacement. This provides another avenue for further research.

The conceptual framework on belonging provided in this thesis is an applicable and useful tool for migration and refugee studies, including work with stateless populations. There are many comparative projects that could be suggested, either comparing this research with other contexts of *de facto* statelessness or two new case studies. Nevertheless, the utility in seeing belonging from above, below and beside is its ability to see populations and individuals in their complexity and move away from homogenising discourses, or reducing the study of the noncitizen to what that lack. Instead, opening up the parameters for demonstrating the causality of their situation, how they interact, negotiate or resist the imposed politics of belonging to make for a sense of place belonging.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Nvivo Codes

Appendix 2. God School Demographic Data

Appendix 3. Interviewed Participants Demographic Data

Appendix 4. Interviewed Adults Demographic Data

Appendix 5. Visual Research Methods Examples

Appendix 6 - Map

Appendix 7 - Ethics Certificate and Ethics Application

Appendix 8 - Original God School Participant Data

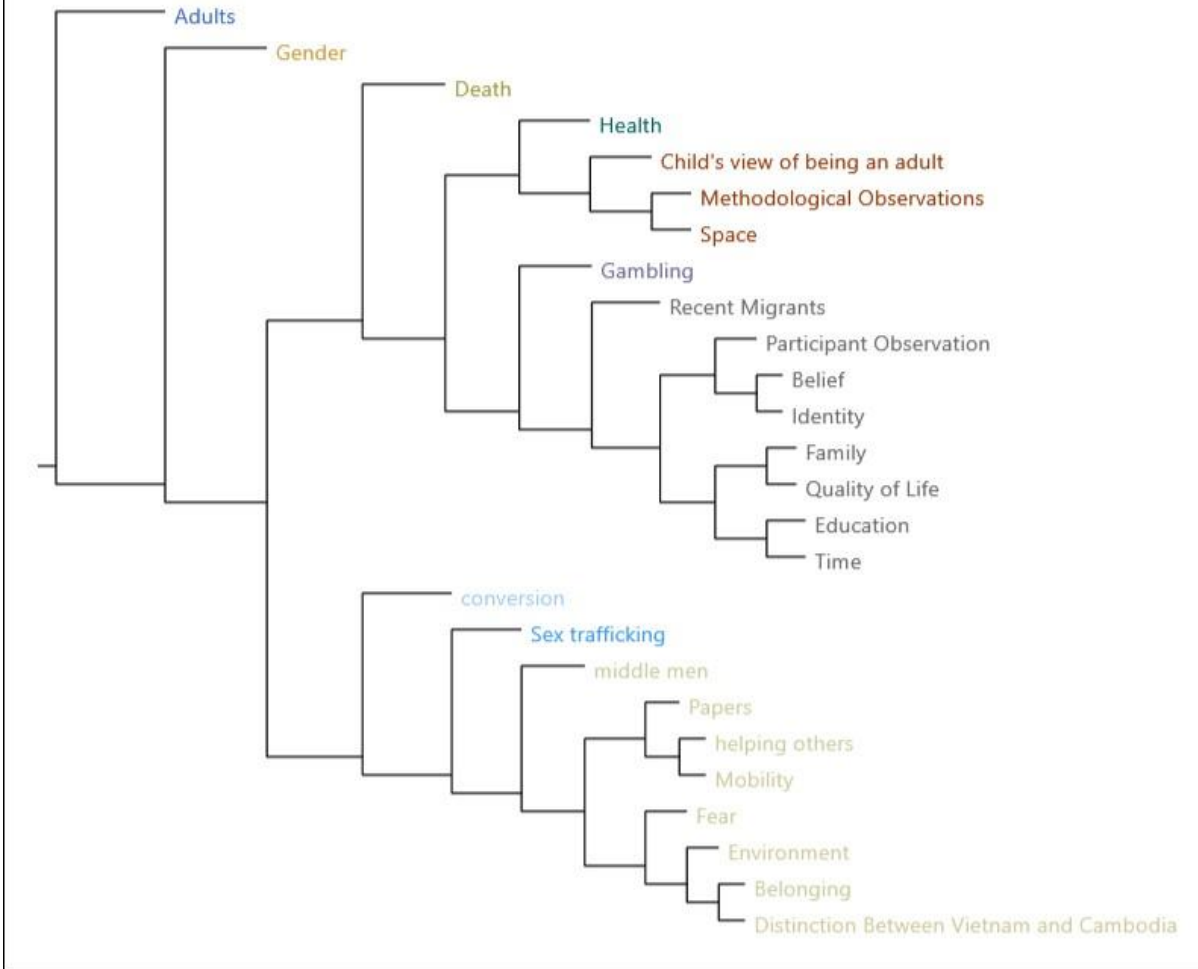
Appendix 1: PhD Thesis NVIVO Codes

Using Nvivo I generated over 100 codes with subsections. The table below shows the main code groups.

CODES			
Adults	Education	Identity	Methodological Observations
Faith	Time	Mobilities	Fears
Language ethnicity	Belonging	Papers	Education
Family	Field notes	Conflict	Home life

The example below is a cluster map generated by Nvivo

Items clustered by word similarity

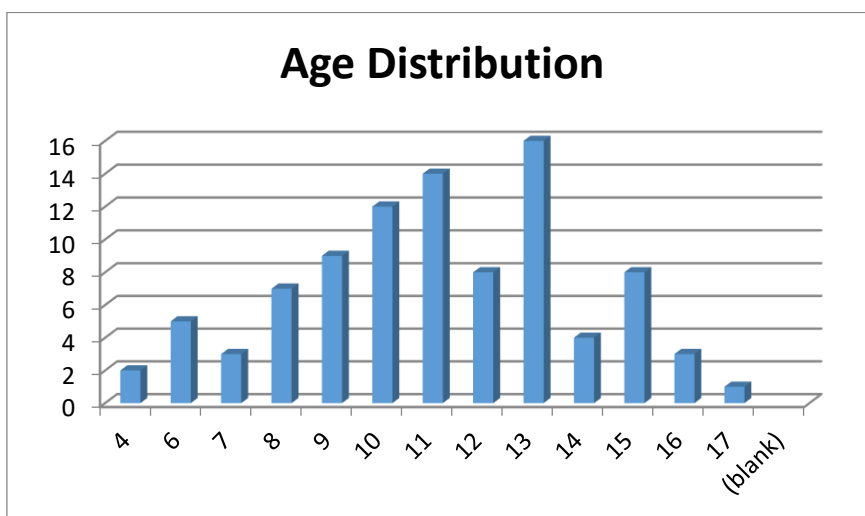


Appendix 2: Summary of God School data

School students and ages

92 students with ages as follows:

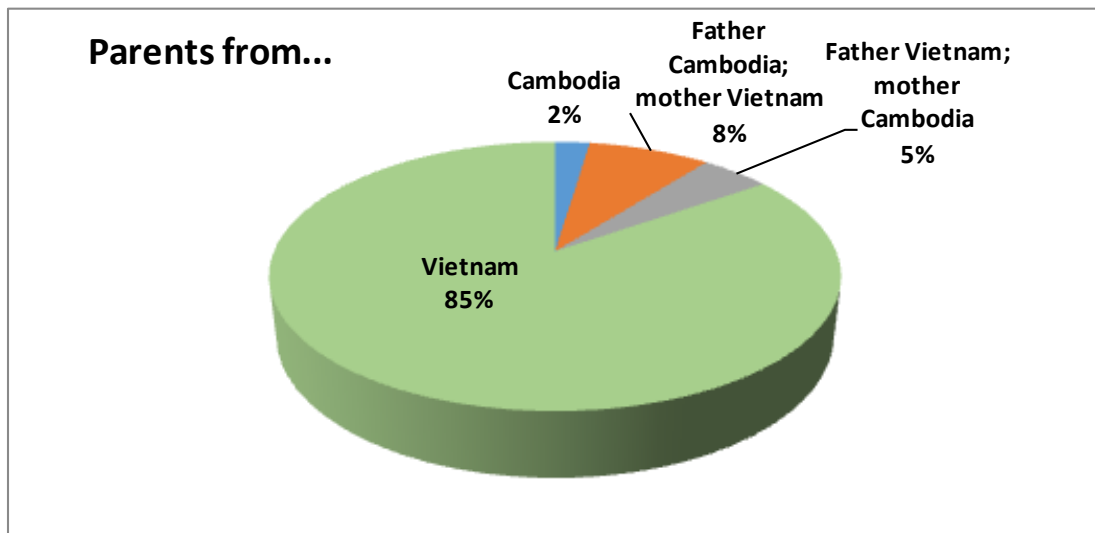
Age:	Number of students:
4	2
6	5
7	3
8	7
9	9
10	12
11	14
12	8
13	16
14	4
15	8
16	3
17	1



Background

Country children said their parents were from:

Parents from...	
Cambodia	2
Father Cambodia; mother Vietnam	7
Father Vietnam; mother Cambodia	4
Vietnam	72
Unassigned	7



Student's descriptions of their parents' occupations:

Father's Occupation		Mother's Occupation	
builder	14	builder	6
business	1	cut frog	1
cargo worker	1	died	1
carpenter	3	Farming	1
cut frog	1	Fishing trade	26
died	8	helper	1
Farming	2	Housewife	1
Fishing trade	27	nails	1
in jail	1	no work	2
lead chi pha	1	Selling	25
no job	1	washing cloth	1
no work	6	workhouse	21
play game	2		
Repairs	10		
Selling	8		
work im cp	1		
Unassigned	5		

Education

92 students were asked about their experience of Khmer School.

Khmer School:		
Never Attended	31	34%
Attended but Stopped	28	30%
Still Attend	33	36%

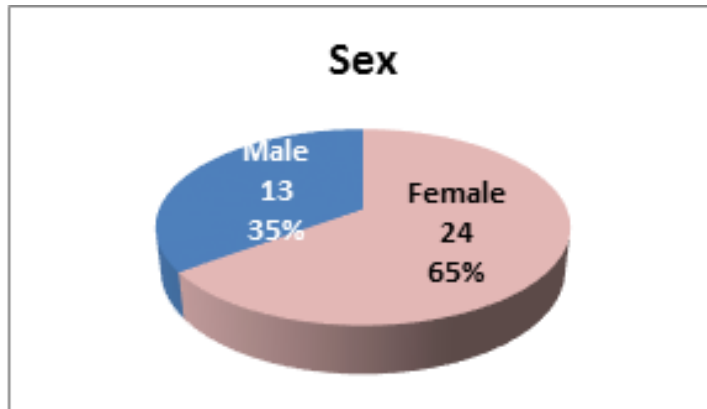
In the God School, the children were in 5 educational sets:

Class	# Students
One	23
Two	28
Three	16
Four	15
Five	10

Appendix 3: Analysis of Interviewed Participants

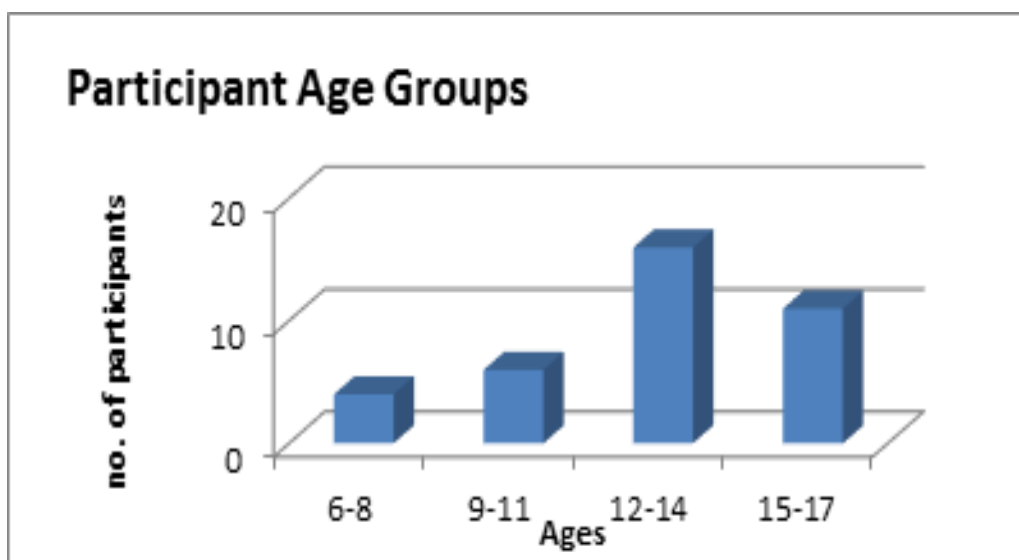
Number, gender and ages

37 children participated in interviews: 13 (35%) boys and 24 (65%) girls:



Their age groups were as follows:

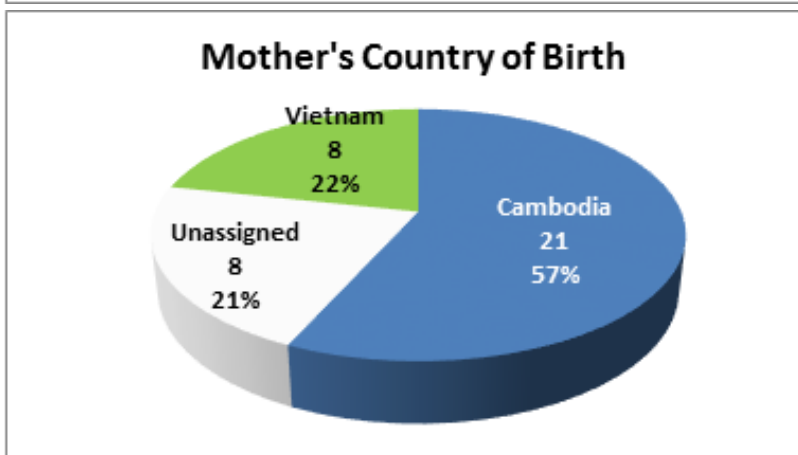
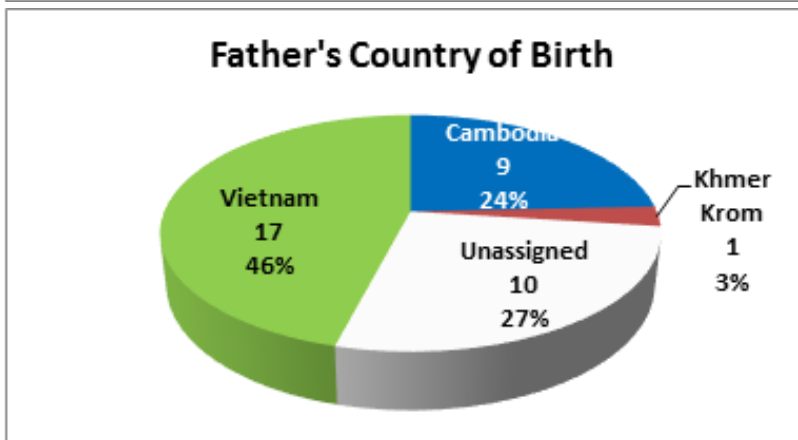
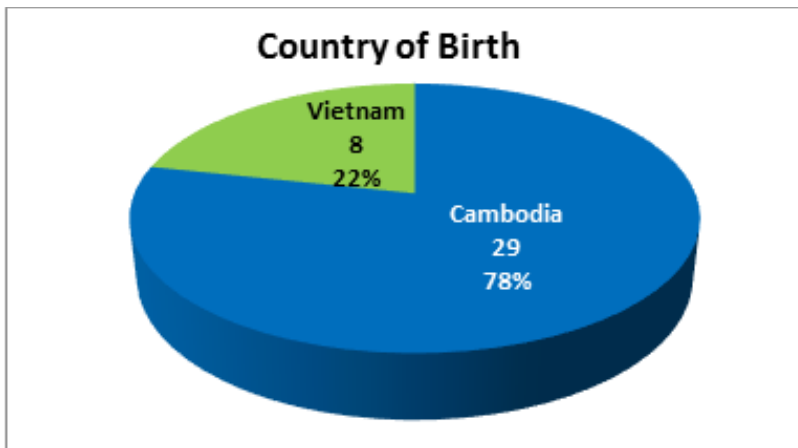
Age Group	# Participants
6-8	4
9-11	6
12-14	16
15-17	11



Background

Interviewed participants' country of birth and their parent's country of birth:

Country	Of Birth		Father's Birth		Mother's Birth	
Cambodia	29	78%	9	24%	21	57%
Vietnam	8	22%	17	46%	8	22%
Khmer Krom			1	3%		
Unassigned			10	27%	8	22%



Status

Interviewed participants' papers:

Papers	
Birth certificate & Family Book	3
None - recently registered as immigrant	16
Not Applicable	1
Paid for Birth certificate & Family Book	6
Unassigned	11

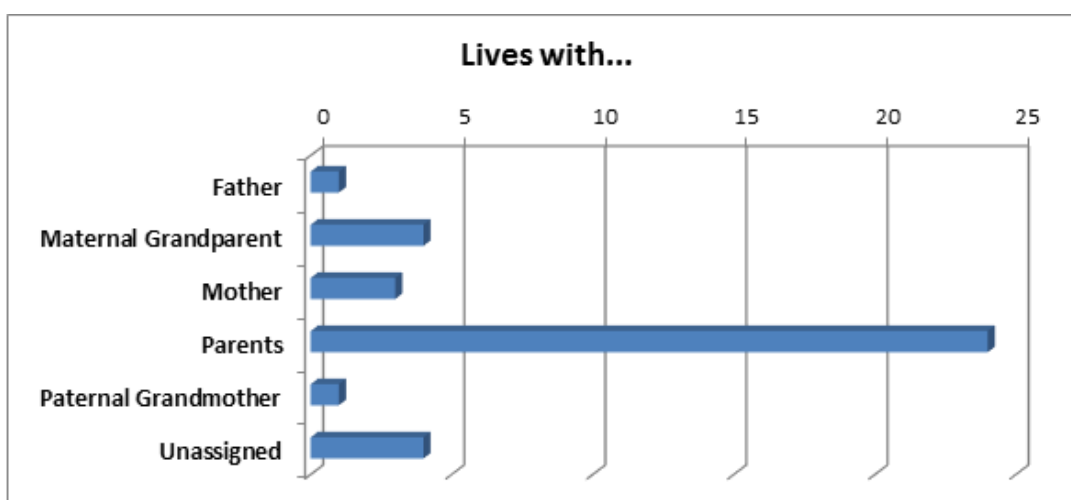
Home situations

Interviewed participants' parents' occupation:

Father's Occupation		Mother's Occupation	
Builder	1	Beautician	1
Carpenter	2	Business Selling Food	4
Confectionary Shop	4	Confectionary Shop	5
Dead	4	Housework / Housewife	3
Fisherman	11	No Work	2
Fixes Fans	4	Not Applicable	2
No Work	2	School Employee	1
Unassigned	9	Sells Coffee	2
		Unassigned	7
		Sells Fish	10

Interviewed participants lived with the following relatives:

Lives with...	
Father	1
Maternal Grandparent	4
Mother	3
Parents	24
Paternal Grandmother	1
Unassigned	4



Village Interviewed Participants were from:

Village	
Namdo	3
Preah Amnr Sabby	2
Preah Rehab	7
Preah Rotn Phon	11
Preah Thnov	12
Touel	2

Religion

The participants identified with religions as follows:

Religion	of Parents		of Participants	
Buddhist	26	70%		
Christian	1	3%	26	70%
Not Applicable	1	3%		
Unassigned	9	24%	11	30%

Education

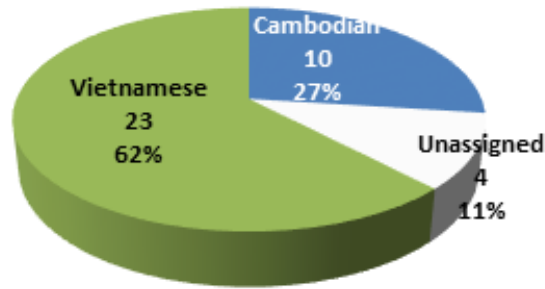
As well as the God school, some interviewed participants attended other schools, as follows:

School(s)	
Both God School and Khmer School	10
God School	16
Private and God school	3
Went Khmer school now God school	8

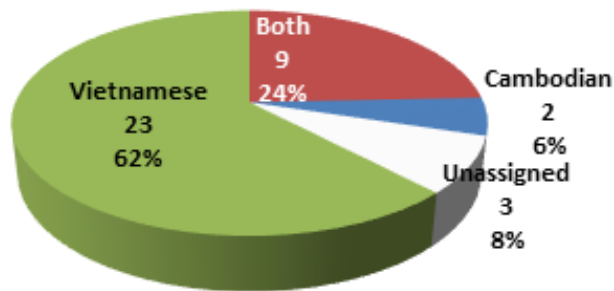
The participants' language abilities are summarised as follows:

Language	First Language		Spoken at Home		Can Speak		Outside Home	
Cambodian	10	27%	2	5%	1	3%	22	59%
Vietnamese	23	62%	23	62%	8	22%	11	30%
Both			9	24%	20	54%		
Unassigned	4	11%	3	8%	8	22%	4	11%

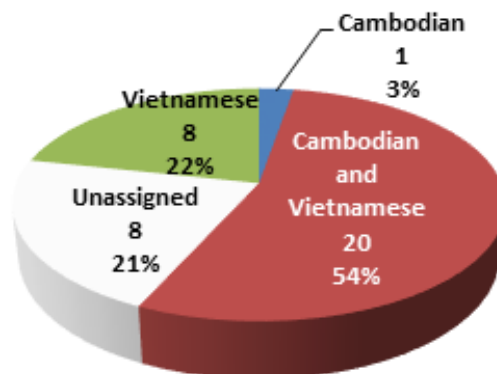
First Language



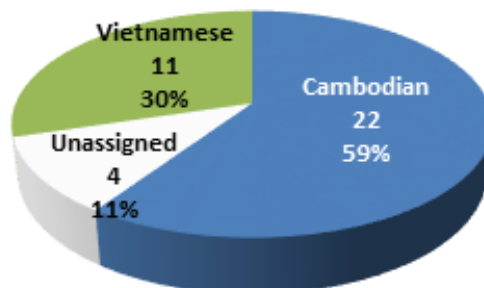
Language spoken at home



Speaks



Language spoken outside the home



Appendix 4: Interviewed Adults' Demographic Data

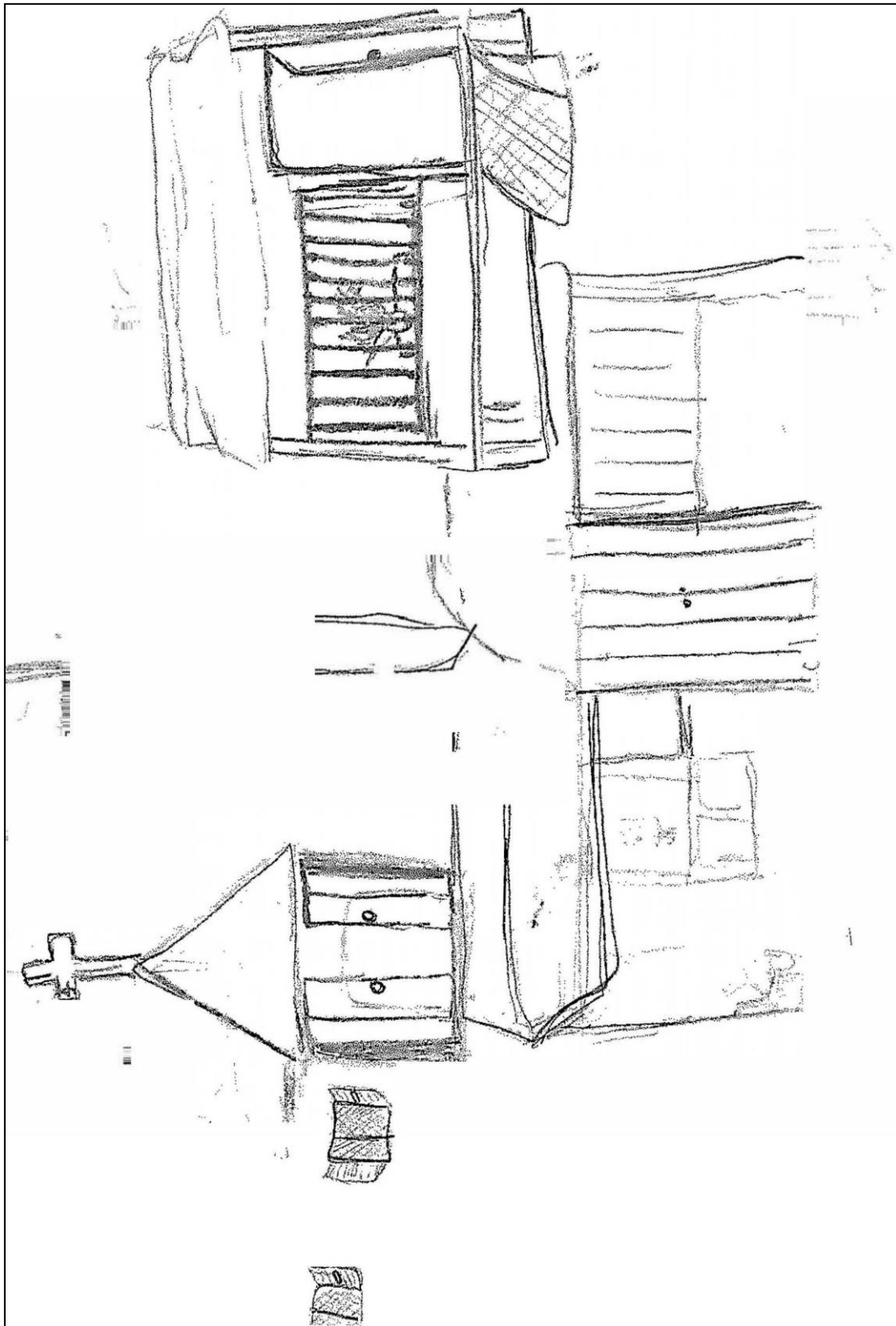
Adult Interviewee	Parent of / Cares for	Ethnicity as described by participant	Marriage Status	Village	Born	Parents Born in	Arrived in Cambodia	Documents	Job
Bao	Quoc	Vietnamese	Married Khmer Woman	Preah Rotn Phon	Vietnam	Vietnam but live in Cambodia	1981	Paid for a family book. Paid for resident permit. Land Docs received from the Vietnamese army	Contractor Middle man
Joy	Lucy	Khmer	Married Vietnamese Male	Preah Thnov	Cambodia	Cambodia	Left Cambodia to Vietnam 1975-1979	Re-registered as immigrant of foreign residence in Cambodia during research. Lucy had no b/c	Fisherperson
Violet	Patrick, Xuy	Khmer	Married Vietnamese Male	Preah Thnov	Cambodia	Cambodia	Left Cambodia to Vietnam 1975-1979	Re-registered as immigrant of foreign residence in Cambodia during research. 6 children none have b/c	Unemployed
Chanthou	Mary, Hien	Khmer	Married Vietnamese Male	Preah Rotn Phon	Cambodia	Cambodia		Re-registered as immigrant of foreign residence in Cambodia during police census during research. 5 children none have b/c	Fisherperson
Bopha	Trang	Khmer	Married Vietnamese	Preah Thnov	Cambodia	Cambodia		Had documents. Trang has b/c.	Sold <i>bánh khọt</i>

			Male (now deceased)					Lived in property owned by Vietnamese	
Ly	Olivia and Zara	Vietnamese	Married Vietnamese Male (now deceased)	Preah Thnov	Cambodia	Cambodia	Left for Vietnam during Pol Pot era for two years. Grandparents came to Cambodia during French Protectorate	Ly has not been asked to register as an immigrant as she is too old. Olivia and Zara have b/c	Sells medicine and small goods
Hoa	Tiffany	Vietnamese	Married Vietnamese Male	Preah Thnov	Cambodia	Cambodia	Left Cambodia 1970-1979	Temporary residence permit and family book (latter paid for). Re-registered as immigrant of foreign residence in Cambodia during police census during research. 2 children only one has bribed b/c	Sells confectionary and small hot dishes / drinks

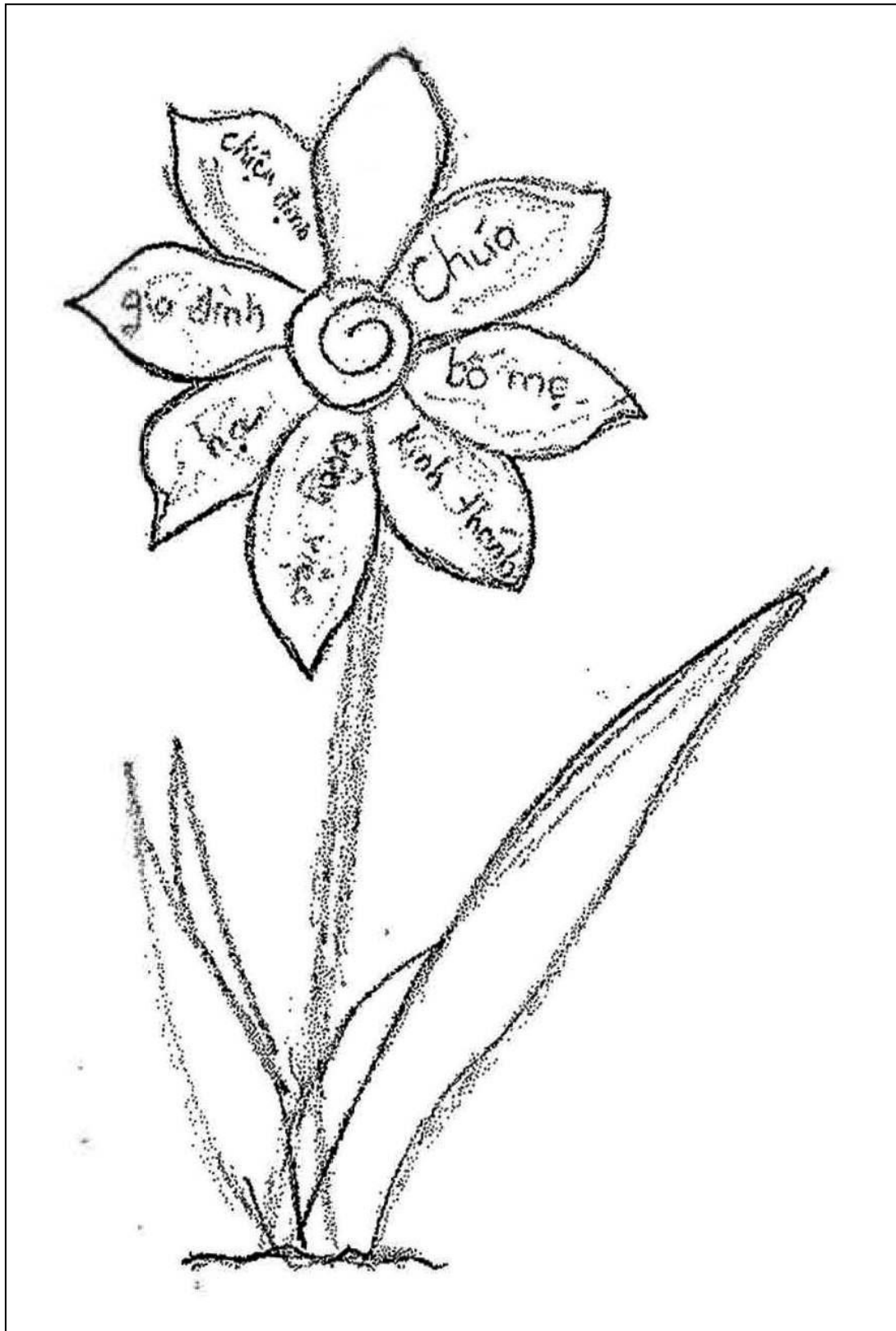
Nhi's Father	Nhi	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Preah Rotn Phon	Vietnam	Vietnam	Came after Cambodia – Vietnam war (as he referred to it in 1982	Registered as immigrant of foreign residence in Cambodia during police census during research. 9 children only 2 have b/c	Secures work through a middle man
Julie's Mum	Julie and Tim				Cambodia	Vietnam	Parents came to Cambodia during French protectorate	Does not have a birth certificate for herself. Purchased birth certificates for children. Had land ownership documents	Used to secure work through a middle man, now sells confectionary and fishes

Appendix 5: Visual Research Methods Examples

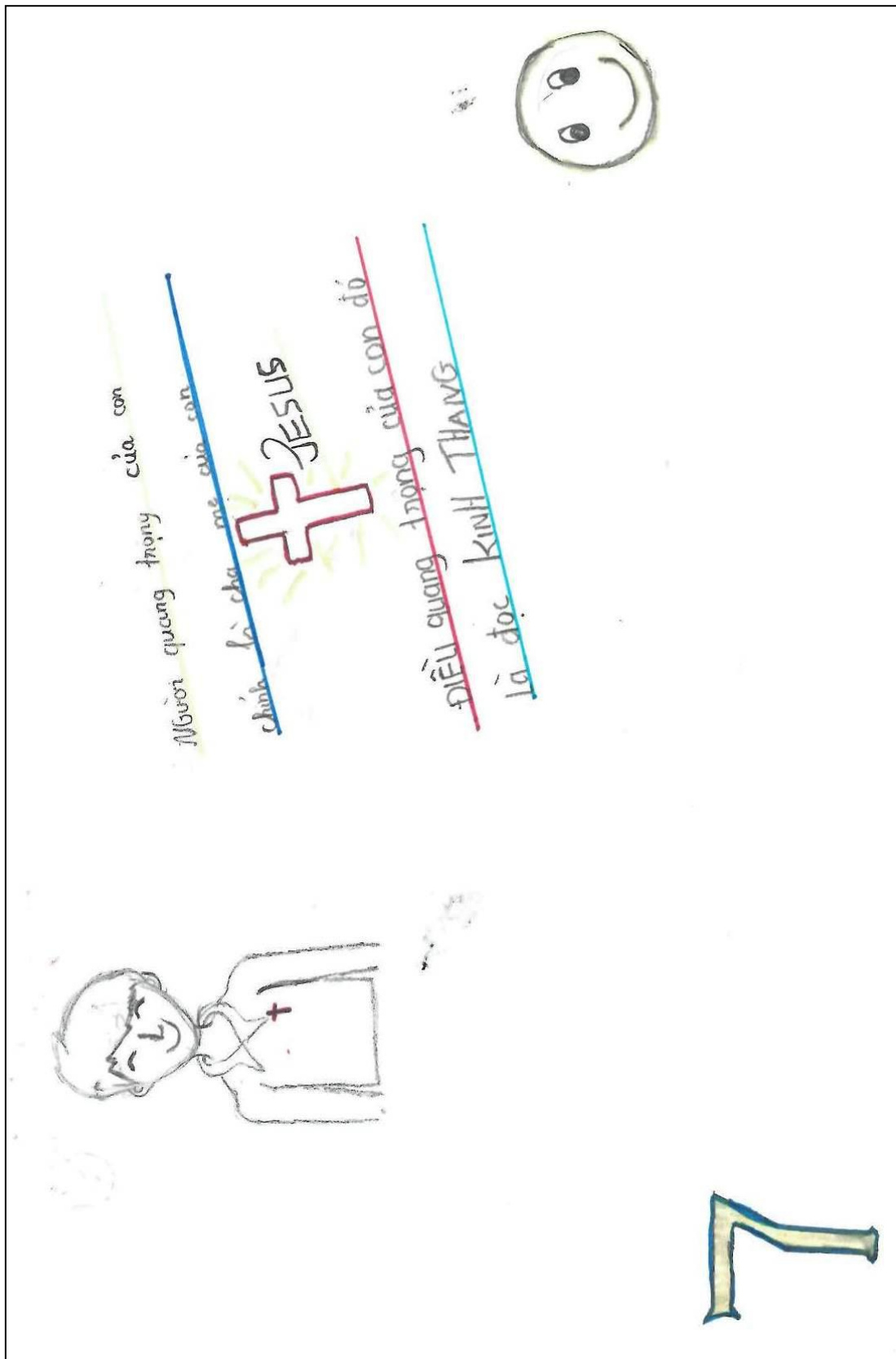
Map Exercise



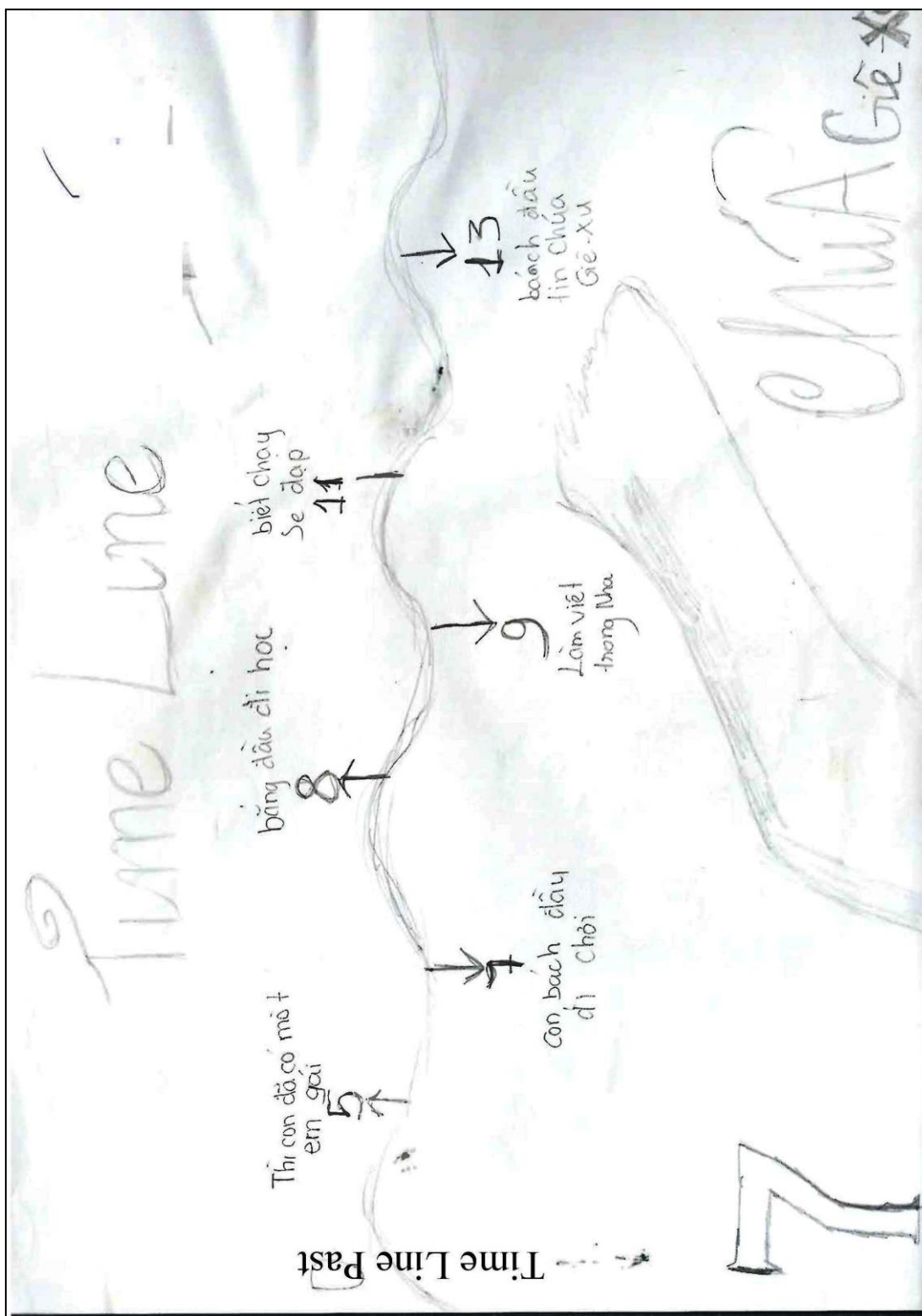
Identity Flower



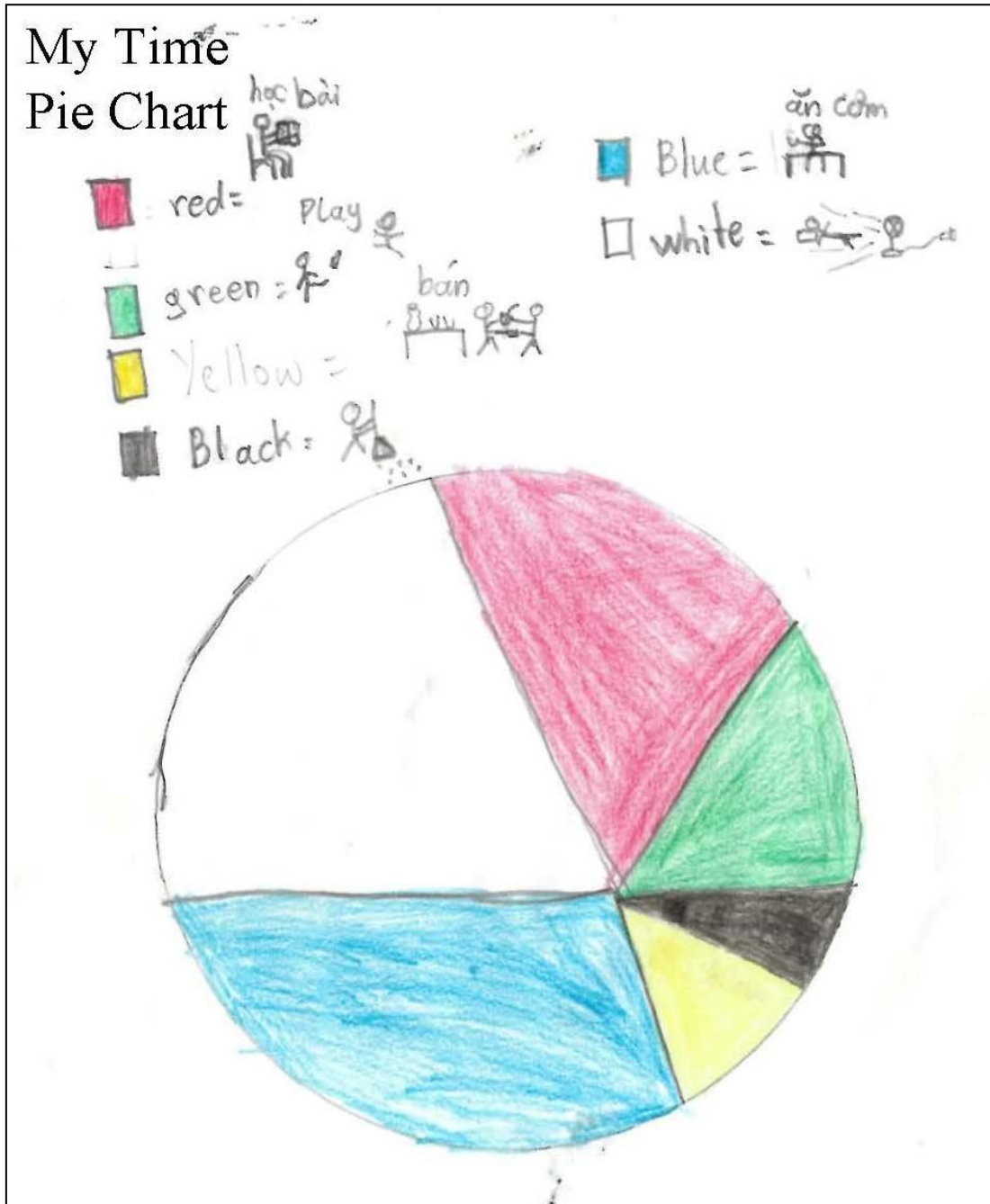
Self Portrait



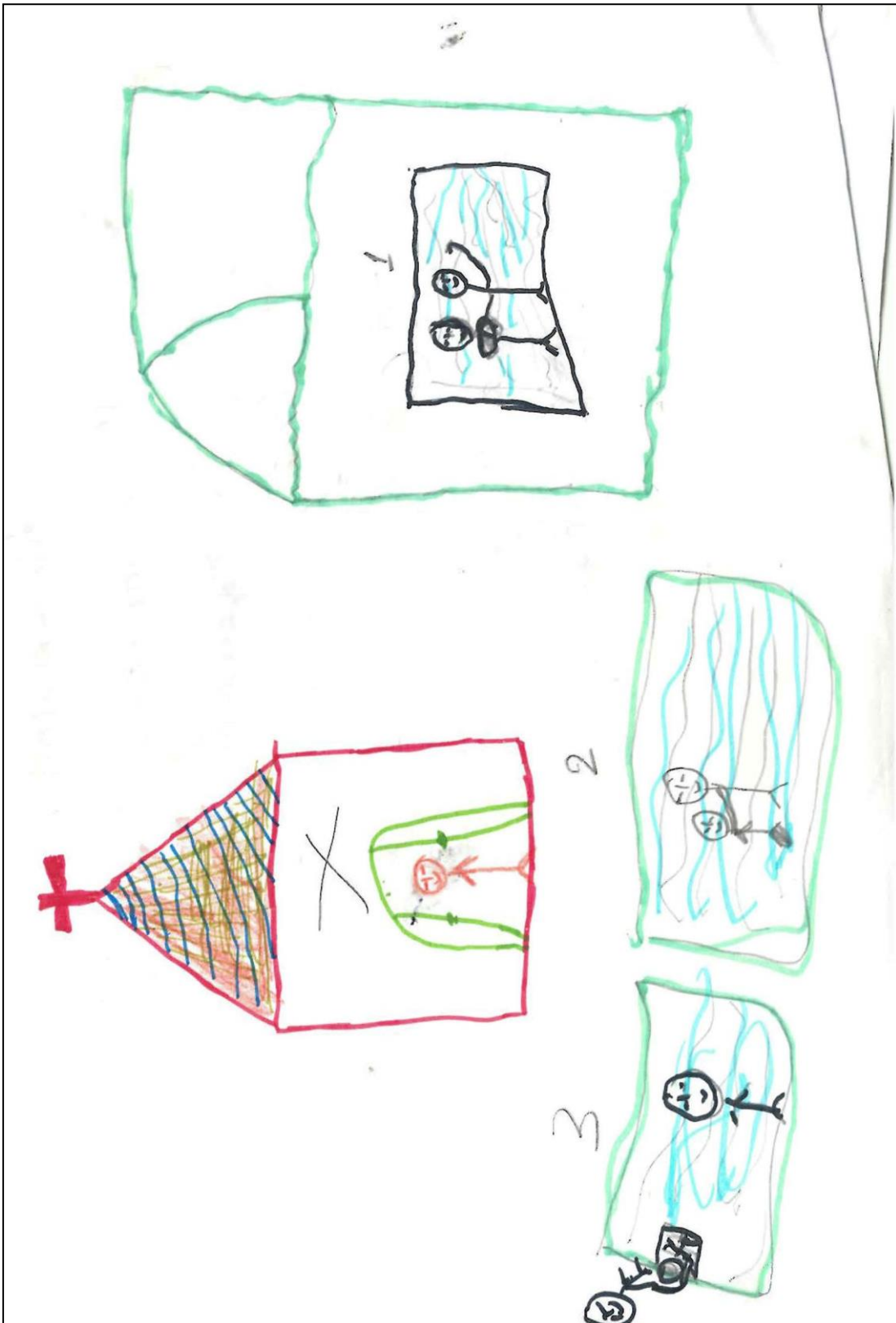
Time Line Past



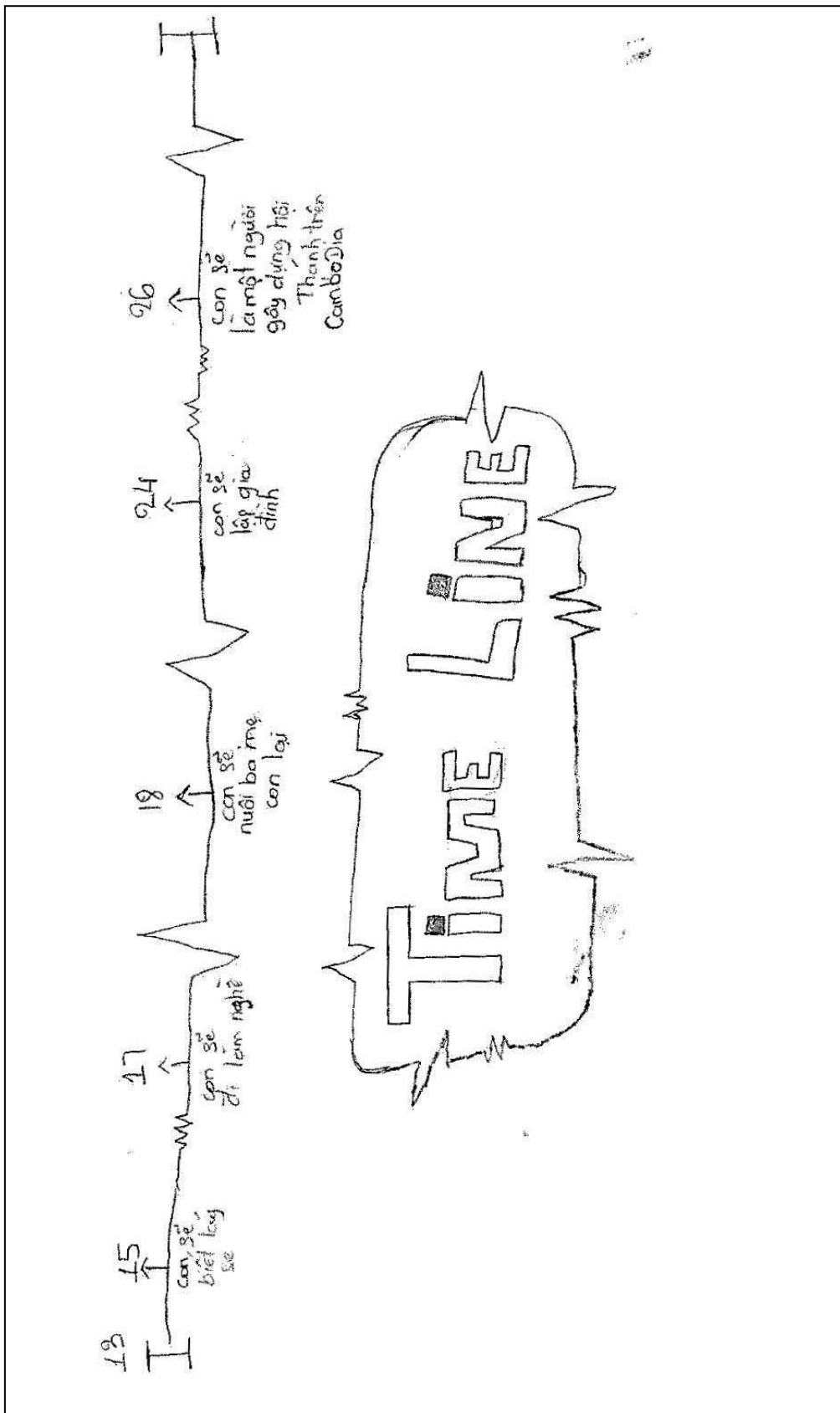
My Time Pie Chart



Baptism



Time Line Future



Photography



Appendix 6: Map

Some materials have been removed from this thesis due to Third Party Copyright. Pages where material has been removed are clearly marked in the electronic version. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

Appendix 7: Ethics Certificate and Ethics Application



Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:

Charlie Rumsby

Project Title:

Research in Cambodia

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Medium Risk

Date of approval:

26 April 2016

Project Reference Number:

P27876

Ethics Application Amendment

Project ref	P27876
Full name	Charlie Rumsby
Faculty	[URC] University Research Centre
School/FRC	[AA] Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations
Supervisor	Mike Hardy
Project Title	Research in Cambodia
Project Dates	25/10/2015 - 31/08/2016
Date Created	21/10/2014 15:39

In the original ethics submission I described the participatory and emergent nature of data collection. I proposed that this approach would use articles like objects and photos to elicit conversation if participants found that easier. I also said that I would take pictures of significant events as they happen (see section *project details* below). Since beginning the research and working with participants, who are aged between 6-16, the use of creative methods, such as drawings, has affirmed the effectiveness of the visual in encouraging conversation and empowering young people to lead the conversation. Khmer New Year is fast approaching so young people will have time off school. I was planning on photographing the holiday myself, however the participants have shown an active interest in taking the pictures themselves. Therefore, I would propose a slight change to the ethics application and make an explicit case for young people to use disposable cameras to document their world outside the school.

I have 10 cameras each with 27 images. As young people live in close proximity to each other I intend to give one camera between two to participants aged 8 and older. I have selected this age group based on interest from participants. The idea will be to give participants the opportunity to take pictures of whatever they wish with the proviso that any activities that convey harmful or illicit behaviour will not be used and followed up

with caution. When printing the images copies will be made for the participants and we will use them to elicit conversation during an interview.

The use of cameras will produce the following expected outputs:

1. Allow participants to own the narratives they want to tell. By giving over the cameras unsupervised they will be free to think about what it is they want to show me about themselves in a way that isn't time pressured and outside the classroom environment.
2. Participants have shown a keen interest in the creative production of data and this kind of activity will be a first for them, aiding their creative development.
3. Participants can show each other their outputs which will be a great opportunity for focus groups and *show and tell* presentations.

The use of cameras could induce the following risks and how they will be mitigated:

1. The cameras *might* inspire harmful behaviour to be recorded or acted out purposefully. To mitigate this risk I will explicitly explain the implications of taking such images; that they will not be shared and the content will be followed up with the giver of consent if evidence of a harmful content is apparent.
2. Sharing a camera *could* cause friction and arguments between participants if one person is more controlling than the other. To mitigate this risk I will only allow participants to use the cameras if they agree on giving the camera to their partner after a certain number of pictures have been taken. In so doing, participants will have full control of the device one at a time. To date I have observed the caring nature of the children but also their ability to follow instruction so I am confident that no major discord will come of this suggestion.
3. Pictures of people may be taken who do not want their picture taken. To mitigate this risk I will ask all participants to ask permission to take a picture of a person before doing so.
4. Places and people could be identified. This risk as described previously, in the section *participant information and informed consent* in the primary application, I now can identify as not a serious risk. People who live in the communities live openly and have been granted the permission of the village chief to live where they do. Participants without documents are not living in hiding so an image taken of them outside their house will not be revealing of something not already known.

I already have consent for the participation of young people in the research from their parents or care giver. Furthermore, consent has been ongoing with the participants themselves. They have been given the opportunity to exit the research regularly and this opportunity will also be afforded to them through this process.

Section: Project Details Box 4

I will conduct interviews with local (I)NGOs to understand the 'official' discourse on citizenship and statelessness in Cambodia. The research with the community will be ethnographic and my principle method participant observation. I will be socially and physically immersed in the community to accumulate local knowledge. Using field notes, research and data collection will take the form of diverse experiences, encounters, relationships, observations and conversations. Whilst I broadly know the issues to be answered, it is only as conversations and semi structured interviews progress the next question emerges. Articles like photos and objects may be used to elicit conversations if participants find that easier. I will also take pictures (with consent) of significant events as they happen (of festivals for instance). I will be constantly self-critical and reflexive to ensure an accurate analytical description and interpretation of data and ethical issues. I will employ a local interpreter who will sign a confidentiality agreement, contract and will be paid fairly. A colleague from SOAS will sign a confidentiality agreement and transcribe voluntarily. All documents are attached.

Section: Participant Information and Informed Consent

Yes. My own pictures will be taken of key events that happen in the community, like festivals. As explained above, all data will be anonymised, stored securely and verbal consent will be acquired prior to taking pictures and regarding their use. My responsibility as a researcher commits me to only using visual data that adds something very specific to a text based write up. I will avoid taking pictures of any identifiers e.g. place names, faces. The potential use of the data: in my PhD thesis, for publication, teaching purposes, and potential public exhibitions, will be explained and discussed with participants regularly.

Diasporas in Cambodia
Những người di cư tại Campuchia

Other Ethical Considerations

Other:

Visa Requirements: Under the Cambodian rules for entry visas into the country there are two types given on arrival but develop differently. A tourist visa is granted for one month and you can continue to extend a stay by crossing the border and re-entering to extend. Secondly a business visa can be secured on arrival and it covers an entrant for one month. During that month the onus is on the entrant to apply for a 6 or 12 month extension. Business visas are for people who are working in the country but are not being paid by any organisation in the country. If you have paid employment one needs to get a work permit. I will get a business visa, as advised in recent communication with the Cambodian embassy, which will cover me for 12 months. Volunteers at the school also use business visas so I will be following their protocol. As the school has volunteers regularly my presence should not produce any additional risk to the community. In communication with the authorities I intend to be clear about being a researcher *if asked* and have acquired a letter from my DoS to take with me on research to prove I am researching on behalf of CTPSR at Coventry University.

Does the Interpreter need a local equivalent to a DBS?

No. A local equivalent does not exist. However, I see no foreseeable circumstance where I or the interpreter will need to be completely alone with a child. All interviews and research based activity will take place in an open space with easy access. Furthermore, I will be vigilant in securing the safety of all participants and report any complaints to my gatekeeper.

Does the local school I will be attached to require me to apply for ethics approval in situ? No.

**Diasporas in Cambodia
Những người di cư tại Campuchia
Interpreter Confidentiality Agreement**

I have read and retained the Participant Information Sheet concerning the exploratory research project on Diasporas in Cambodia being conducted by Charlie Rumsby. In my role as interpreter for Charlie Rumsby, I understand the nature of the study and requirements for confidentiality. I have had all of my questions concerning the nature of the study and my role as interpreter answered to my satisfaction.

A. Maintaining Confidentiality

I agree not to reveal in any way to any person other than Charlie Rumsby any data gathered for the study by means of my services as interpreter.

B. Acknowledgement of My Services as Interpreter

I understand that Charlie Rumsby will acknowledge the use of my services in any reporting on the project. I have indicated below whether I wish that acknowledgement to be anonymous or whether it may recognise me by name.

I do not wish my name to be associated with the acknowledgement of the use of an interpreter in data gathering for the project.

OR

I agree that Charlie Rumsby may associate my name with the acknowledgement of the use of an interpreter in data gathering for the project.

C. Signature Indicating Agreement

Name: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____

Should you require further information please feel free to contact me rumsbyc@coventry.ac.uk +44 7708262554

For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study please contact Professor Mike Hardy, Executive Director of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University ab0974@coventry.ac.uk, +44 (0) 24 77655765.



Diasporas in Cambodia
Những người di cư tại Campuchia
Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

I have read and retained the Participant Information Sheet concerning the research project looking at the everyday lives of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia being conducted by Charlie Rumsby. In my role as transcriber for Charlie Rumsby I understand the nature of the study and requirements for confidentiality. I have had all of my questions concerning the nature of the study and my role as transcriber answered to my satisfaction.

A. Maintaining Confidentiality

I agree not to reveal in any way to any person other than Charlie Rumsby any data gathered for the study by means of my services as transcriber.

B. Acknowledgement of My Services as Transcriber

I understand that Charlie Rumsby will acknowledge the use of my services in any reporting on the project. I have indicated below whether I wish that acknowledgement to be anonymous or whether it may recognise me by name.

I do not wish my name to be associated with the acknowledgement of the use of a transcriber in data gathering for the project.

OR

I agree that Charlie Rumsby may associate my name with the acknowledgement of the use of a transcriber in data gathering for the project.

C. Signature Indicating Agreement

Name: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____

Should you require further information please feel free to contact me Charlie Rumsby rumsbyc@coventry.ac.uk or +447708262554.

For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study please contact Professor Mike Hardy, Executive Director of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University ab0974@coventry.ac.uk, +44 (0) 24 77655765.



Diasporas in Cambodia
Những người di cư tại Campuchia
Consent Form

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I understand that this research is being conducted by Charlie Rumsby from the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University in the UK to investigate diasporas in Cambodia.

I understand and confirm the following by initialling each that applies:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet for the above mentioned project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. _____
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. _____
3. I agree to the interview being audio recorded and my name and all personal identifiers to be anonymised. _____
4. I would like to see a copy of any written reports and articles prior to publication. -

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications. _____

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Complaints? Please contact Professor Mike Hardy, Executive Director of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University ab0974@coventry.ac.uk, +44 (0) 24 77655765.

Further questions? Please contact me, rumsbyc@coventry.ac.uk +447708262554.



Diasporas in Cambodia
Những người di cư tại Campuchia
Participant Information Sheet

I Charlie Rumsby am a researcher from Coventry University and I will be living in Phnom Penh for 9 months. During my stay I would like to get to know your community more and learn about your lives. In particular, I would like to know how your community experiences different life stages. I am interested in knowing whether children see their futures different to adults and if so what factors shape perceptions and aspirations.

In order to collect the data required for the investigation I would like to involve participants from the age 6 onwards. I will mainly be observing day to day life to learn and understand how the community experiences and celebrates festivals, weddings or funerals, education, family life and employment. Primarily, the information I will get will be from conversations with participants and by taking part, when invited, in the abovementioned life experiences. From time to time I will conduct semi structured interviews to ask questions. These will be conducted in a relaxed manner and there will be an option for participants to use photos or objects to discuss specific subjects. Everything created in this process is the property of the producer.

Children under the age of 18 will need approval from a caregiver to participate in the research. Consent can be given verbally after some time to reflect on the research aims. Adults can also consent verbally. There will be the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative repercussions before January 2017. All conversations, interviews and information collected will be anonymised and kept safe. I will not identify people by name or place as this is not relevant to the research. I will securely store all files from the research and destroy them after 7 years. I will make available to all participants a copy of any publications I write before it is published for your feedback and comments. The greatest benefit from the study will be to me as a researcher. But I promise to acknowledge your help and support and I hope you will benefit from having a document that reflects the life within the community.

I have taken Vietnamese lessons whilst in London at university. But, as I am still learning the language and intend to carry on my learning whilst living in Cambodia, I will be using an interpreter to help me with unfamiliar terms. The interpreter will sign a confidentiality agreement and will be bound by contract to not share any of the information with anyone else other than myself.

Furthermore, whilst I stay in the community and conduct my research I would like to offer my skills as an English teacher on a part time basis.

Do you have questions now? Can we meet at another time to discuss the research once you have thought about it?

Complaints? Please contact Professor Mike Hardy, Executive Director of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University ab0974@coventry.ac.uk, +44 (0) 24 77655765.

Further questions? Please contact me, rumsbyc@coventry.ac.uk +447708262554.

Những người di cư tại Campuchia
Thông tin cho người tham dự

Tôi tên là Charlie Rumsby. Tôi là nghiên cứu sinh tại trường Đại học Coventry, Vương quốc Anh. Tôi sẽ sống ở Phnom Penh 9 tháng để thực hiện một nghiên cứu về những người Việt Nam sinh sống ở Campuchia. Tôi thích tìm hiểu về người Việt Nam vì tôi đã du lịch ở Việt Nam, có bạn là người Việt ở Anh, và tôi đã từng làm tình nguyện viên cùng chồng giúp một trung tâm trẻ em do những người Việt di tản đến London sau chiến tranh làm quản lý. Năm 2014, tôi đến Campuchia để giúp dạy tiếng Anh tại trường CGC và thấy rất thích thời gian ở đây.

Khi trở lại Anh, tôi viết thư cho trường đại học và nói tôi muốn quay trở lại Campuchia, giúp dạy tiếng Anh ở trường CGC và tìm hiểu thêm về cuộc sống của người dân trong cộng đồng của anh/chị. Trong thời gian ở đây tôi muốn biết thêm về cuộc sống của người Việt ở Campuchia. Cụ thể hơn, tôi muốn biết trẻ em và người lớn sống như thế nào ở Campuchia. Để làm nghiên cứu này, tôi muốn mời người lớn và các em nhỏ từ 6 tuổi trở lên tham gia. Tôi sẽ chủ yếu quan sát cuộc sống hàng ngày để học hỏi và hiểu xem cộng đồng của anh/chị trải nghiệm và ăn mừng các ngày lễ, đám cưới, đám ma, quan điểm về giáo dục, cuộc sống gia đình và việc làm như thế nào. Đa phần thông tin tôi thu thập sẽ từ các cuộc trò chuyện với những người muốn tham gia phỏng vấn và bằng cách tham gia vào các hoạt động cộng đồng khi được mời. Thi thoảng tôi sẽ xin gặp người tham gia và hỏi câu hỏi phỏng vấn. Những phỏng vấn này sẽ được thực hiện một cách rất thoải mái, và người tham gia sẽ được sử dụng ảnh hoặc đồ vật để bàn luận về các vấn đề cụ thể nếu muốn. Tất cả những thông tin được tạo ra trong quá trình này sẽ thuộc sở hữu của người phỏng vấn.

Tôi rất muốn mời các em nhỏ tham gia nghiên cứu này và dự định sẽ thực hiện việc này thông qua các giờ học trên lớp và bằng cách nói chuyện với các em. Tuy nhiên, các em nhỏ dưới 18 tuổi cần sự đồng ý của bố mẹ hoặc người chăm sóc để được tham gia nghiên cứu. Bố mẹ/người chăm sóc có thể đồng ý bằng miệng, không cần phải ký giấy tờ gì cả. Người lớn cũng có thể đồng ý bằng miệng. Những người tham gia được thoải mái rút khỏi nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào mà không chịu bất cứ hậu quả tiêu cực nào. Tất cả các cuộc nói chuyện, phỏng vấn và thông tin thu thập được sẽ được ẩn danh và giữ an toàn. Tôi sẽ không chỉ đích danh ai hoặc địa điểm nào vì điều này không liên quan đến nghiên cứu. Tôi sẽ dùng thông tin để cố gắng viết một quyển sách về cộng đồng của anh/chị. Sau khi đã hoàn thành cuốn sách tôi sẽ giữ gìn cẩn thận tất cả các tài liệu thu được từ nghiên cứu và hủy tài liệu sau 7 năm. Trước khi tôi rời Campuchia, tôi sẽ cho tất cả mọi người biết tôi đã viết gì và sẽ tìm cách giữ lại một bản photo cho mọi người ở đây. Với tư cách nghiên cứu sinh, tôi sẽ là người hưởng lợi ích lớn nhất từ nghiên cứu này. Nhưng tôi hứa sẽ ghi nhận sự giúp đỡ và ủng hộ của anh/chị.

Tôi đã học tiếng Việt ở một trường ở London. Nhưng vì tôi vẫn đang học và định tiếp tục học tiếng Việt khi ở Campuchia, tôi sẽ cần một phiên dịch hỗ trợ để phỏng vấn và hỏi câu hỏi. Người phiên dịch sẽ ký một thỏa thuận bảo mật và sẽ bị ràng buộc trong hợp đồng để không chia sẻ bất cứ thông tin nào với ai ngoài với tôi.

Anh/chị có câu hỏi nào bây giờ không? Liệu chúng ta có thể gặp lúc khác để bàn về nghiên cứu này sau khi anh/chị đã suy nghĩ xong không ạ?

Anh/chị có muốn phản nản điều gì không? Xin hãy liên hệ với Giáo sư Mike Hardy, Giám đốc Điều hành Trung tâm Lòng tin, Hòa bình và Quan hệ Xã hội, Đại học Coventry ab0974@coventry.ac.uk, +44 (0) 24 77655765.

Appendix 8: Original God School Participant Data

Participant	Age Group	Country of Birth	Educational Set	Father's Country of Birth	Father's Occupation	First Language	Language Spoken Outside the Home	Language Spoken at Home
Cammy	15-17	Cambodia	Class Five	Cambodia	Fisherman	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Both
David	15-17	Cambodia	Class Four	Cambodia	Confectionary Shop	Cambodian	Cambodian	Both
Hien	9-11	Cambodia	Class Two	Vietnam	Fixes Fans	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Hung	12-14	Vietnam	Class Three	Vietnam	Fisherman	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Huong	12-14	Vietnam	Class Two	Vietnam	Fisherman	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Itay	6-8	Cambodia	Class One	Cambodia	Unassigned	Cambodian	Cambodian	Both
Julie	9-11	Cambodia	Class Four	Cambodia	Confectionary Shop	Cambodian	Cambodian	Both
Kevin	15-17	Cambodia	Class Four	Cambodia	Fisherman	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Kirsty	12-14	Vietnam	Class Four	Vietnam	Fisherman	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
L2(M)	9-11	Cambodia	Class Two	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
Li	12-14	Vietnam	Class Three	Vietnam	Fixes Fans	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Linh	15-17	Cambodia	Class Four	Khmer Krom	Unassigned	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Lucy	15-17	Cambodia	Class Five	Cambodia	Fisherman	Cambodian	Cambodian	Both
M1(F)	6-8	Vietnam	Class One	Unassigned	Dead	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Minh	15-17	Cambodia	Class Five	Cambodia	Dead	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Nin	6-8	Cambodia	Class One	Vietnam	Fixes Fans	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Olivia	12-14	Cambodia	Class Four	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
Patrick	12-14	Cambodia	Class Five	Vietnam	No Work	Cambodian	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Piccie	12-14	Cambodia	Class Five	Unassigned	Unassigned	Cambodian	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Quoc	15-17	Vietnam	Class Three	Vietnam	Builder	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Both
Sara	9-11	Cambodia	Class Two	Vietnam	Fisherman	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Sophia	12-14	Cambodia	Class Three	Vietnam	Fisherman	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Both
Sophie	12-14	Cambodia	Class Five	Vietnam	Unassigned	Cambodian	Cambodian	Both
Sreya	9-11	Cambodia	Class Two	Vietnam	Fisherman	Cambodian	Cambodian	Vietnamese
T4(F)	12-14	Vietnam	Class Four	Unassigned	Unassigned	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Thom4(M)	12-14	Cambodia	Class Five	Unassigned	Carpenter	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Tiffany	12-14	Cambodia	Class Five	Unassigned	Confectionary Shop	Unassigned	Cambodian	Cambodian
Tim	9-11	Cambodia	Class Four	Vietnam	Fisherman	Cambodian	Cambodian	Both
Tina	12-14	Cambodia	Class Four	Cambodia	Fisherman	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Trang	12-14	Cambodia	Class Three	Vietnam	Dead	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Cambodian
TU4(F)	12-14	Cambodia	Class Four	Unassigned	Carpenter	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
VU4(M)	15-17	Cambodia	Class Four	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
XT1(F)	6-8	Cambodia	Class One	Vietnam	No Work	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Zara	15-17	Cambodia	Class Four	Cambodia	Dead	Cambodian	Cambodian	Vietnamese

Participant	Lives with	Mother's of Birth Country	Mother's Occupation	Papers	Parents Recently Registered as an Immigrant
Cammy	Parents	Vietnam	Sells Fish	Bribed documents	Unassigned
David	Parents	Cambodia	Confectionary Shop	Unassigned	Unassigned
Hien	Parents	Cambodia	Sells Fish	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Hung	Parents	Cambodia	Sells Fish	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Huong	Parents	Cambodia	Sells Fish	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Itay	Parents	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
Julie	Parents	Cambodia	Confectionary Shop	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Kevin	Parents	Cambodia	Housework / Housewife	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Kirsty	Parents	Unassigned	Not Applicable	None	Unassigned
L2(M)	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
Li	Parents	Unassigned	Unassigned	Bribed documents	Yes
Linh	Parents	Vietnam	Business Selling Food	Not Applicable	Mum has to register as immigrant
Lucy	Parents	Cambodia	Sells Fish	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
M1(F)	Mother	Vietnam	Unassigned	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Minh	Maternal Grandparent	Cambodia	Business Selling Food	Bribed documents	Unassigned
Nin	Parents	Vietnam	Housework / Housewife	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Olivia	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
Patrick	Parents	Cambodia	No Work	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Piccie	Maternal Grandparent	Cambodia	Works at the School	Paid for Birth certificate & Family Book	Unassigned
Quoc	Father	Cambodia	Not Applicable	Bribed documents	Unassigned
Sara	Parents	Cambodia	Sells Fish	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
Sophia	Parents	Vietnam	Sells Fish	Unassigned	Unassigned
Sophie	Parents	Cambodia	Housework / Housewife	Birth certificate & Family Book	Unassigned
Sreya	Maternal Grandparent	Cambodia	Sells Fish	None - recently registered as immigrant	Unassigned
T4(F)	Unassigned	Vietnam	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
Thom4(M)	Parents	Unassigned	Sells Fish	Unassigned	Unassigned
Tiffany	Parents	Cambodia	Confectionary Shop	Family Book	Yes
Tim	Parents	Cambodia	Confectionary Shop	Bribed documents family book	Unassigned
Tina	Maternal Grandparent	Cambodia	Housework / Housewife	Unassigned	Unassigned
Trang	Mother	Cambodia	Business Selling Food	Birth certificate & Family Book	Not Applicable
TU4(F)	Mother	Vietnam	Sells Coffee	Birth certificate	Unassigned
VU4(M)	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
XT1(F)	Parents	Cambodia	No Work	None - recently registered as immigrant	Yes
Zara	Paternal Grandmother	Cambodia	Business Selling Food	Birth certificate & Family Book	Unassigned

Participant	Parents' Religion	Participant's Religion	School	Sex	Speaks	Village
Cammy	Buddhist	Christian	God School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Thnov
David	Buddhist	Christian	Went Khmer School now God School	Male	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Rehab
Hien	Buddhist	Christian	God School	Female	Vietnamese	Preah Rotn Phon
Hung	Buddhist	Christian	Went Khmer School now God School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Namdo
Huong	Buddhist	Christian	Went Khmer School now God School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Namdo
Itay	Unassigned	Unassigned	God School	Male	Unassigned	Touel
Julie	Buddhist	Christian	Both God School and Khmer School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Thnov
Kevin	Buddhist	Unassigned	Private and God School	Male	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Rehab
Kirsty	Buddhist	Christian	God School	Female	Unassigned	Preah Rehab
L2(M)	Unassigned	Unassigned	God School	Male	Unassigned	Preah Rotn Phon
Li	Buddhist	Christian	God School	Male	Vietnamese	Preah Rotn Phon
Linh	Buddhist	Christian	God School	Female	Vietnamese	Preah Rehab
Lucy	Buddhist	Christian	Went Khmer School now God School	Female	Unassigned	Preah Thnov
M1(F)	Unassigned	Christian	God School	Female	Vietnamese	Preah Rotn Phon
Minh	Christian	Christian	God School	Male	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Rehab
Nin	Unassigned	Unassigned	God School	Female	Vietnamese	Preah Rotn Phon
Olivia	Unassigned	Unassigned	Both God School and Khmer School	Female	Unassigned	Preah Thnov
Patrick	Buddhist	Christian	Went Khmer School now God School	Male	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Thnov
Piccie	Not Applicable	Christian	Both God School and Khmer School	Male	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Touel
Quoc	Buddhist	Christian	God School	Male	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Rotn Phon
Sara	Unassigned	Christian	Went Khmer School now God School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Amnr Sabby
Sophia	Unassigned	Unassigned	Private and God School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Rotn Phon
Sophie	Buddhist	Christian	Both God School and Khmer School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Thnov
Sreya	Buddhist	Christian	Went Khmer School now God School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Amnr Sabby
T4(F)	Unassigned	Unassigned	Both God School and Khmer School	Female	Cambodian	Preah Thnov
Thom4(M)	Buddhist	Christian	God School	Male	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Namdo
Tiffany	Buddhist	Christian	Both God School and Khmer School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Thnov
Tim	Buddhist	Christian	Both God School and Khmer School	Male	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Thnov
Tina	Buddhist	Unassigned	Private and God School	Female	Unassigned	Preah Rehab
Trang	Buddhist	Christian	Both God School and Khmer School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Thnov
TU4(F)	Buddhist	Christian	God School	Female	Vietnamese	Preah Rehab
VU4(M)	Unassigned	Unassigned	God School	Male	Unassigned	Preah Rotn Phon
XT1(F)	Buddhist	Unassigned	God School	Female	Vietnamese	Preah Thnov
Zara	Buddhist	Christian	Went Khmer School now God School	Female	Cambodian and Vietnamese	Preah Thnov