

CAMBODIAN WOMEN & VIOLENCE: Considering NGO Interventions in Cultural Context

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Summary

The issue of violence against women is at the forefront of feminist and development debate in contemporary Cambodia. This, however, does not mean that gendered violence is always considered and handled in ways that are suitable and effective. Violence is a part of the social order in Cambodia at many levels and it is not possible to isolate it easily in terms of programmatic interventions. Cultural and historical meanings of social and gendered violence must be considered and incorporated into the ways that NGOs and development actors seek to address and redress violence against women in Cambodia. This thesis examines NGO considerations of, and interventions on, three manifestations of gendered violence that NGOs and Cambodians identify as the most critical and pernicious - domestic violence, trafficking in women and rape. Based on my fieldwork in Cambodia I consider a range of NGO initiatives aimed at reducing violence against women and the ways in which they fit (or fail to fit) with the lived experience of gendered violence in Cambodia. While the state of play between NGOs activities and the reality of gendered violence is not altogether positive, there are a number of interventions which signal valuable starting points for future interventions. In considering and incorporating the complexity of Cambodian social order and structures, it becomes increasingly possible to identify and promote points of entry for interventions and more finely tuned and firmly grounded NGO initiatives might increase their impact on violence against women.

Acronyms and Terms

ACFOA- Australian Council for Overseas Assistance
ACR- American Catholic Relief
ACR- Australian Catholic Relief
ADB- Asian Development Bank
ADHOC- Association de Droits de l'Homme au Cambodge
ADRA- Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AFSC- American Friends Service Committee
AI- Amnesty International
ARC- American Relief Committee
ARRK- Consortium for Agricultural Relief and Rehabilitation in Kampuchea
ASEAN- Association of South East Asian Nations
CAA- Community Aid Abroad
CARE- Committee from American Relief Everywhere
CAS- Centre for Advanced Studies
CCC- Cooperation Committee for Cambodian
CDP- Cambodian Defenders Project
CDC- Council for the Development of Cambodia
CDRI- Cambodian Development Resource Institute
CEDAW- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CGDK- Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CGP- Cambodian Genocide Program
CIB- Cambodian Investment Board
CMA- Cambodian Midwives Association
CMDC- Cambodia Migration and Development Committee
CNGO- Cambodian Non-Government Organization
CPP- Cambodian People's Party
CPU- Cambodian Prostitutes Union
CRDB- Cambodian Reconstruction and Development Board
CRS- Catholic Relief Services
CSW- commercial sex worker
CWCC- Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre
CWDA- Cambodia Women's Development Agency
CWLD- Cambodian Women's League for Development
DK- Democratic Kampuchea
DPPU- Displaced People's Protection Unit
ECPAT- End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism
EU- European Union
EVP- Especially Vulnerable Person
FAO- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FHH- Female Headed Household
FUNCINPEC- Front Uni National Pour un Cambodge Independant, Neutrel
Pacifique et Cooperatif (National United Front for an Independent,
Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia)
GAATW- Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women
GAD- Gender and Development
GAD Programme- Gender and Development Programme
ICORC- International Committee for Reconstruction of Cambodia

ICRC- International Committee of the Red Cross
 IDEC- International Disaster Emergency Committee
 ILO- International Labour Organization
 IMF- International Monetary Fund
 INGO- International Non-Government Organization
 IOM- International Organization for Migration
 IRC- International Rescue Committee
 IWDA- International Women's Development Agency
 JICA- Japanese International Cooperation Association
 KAP- Krom Akphiwat Phum
 KPNLF- Khmer People's National Liberation Front
 KR- Khmer Rouge
 KWA- Khmer Women's Association
 LICADHO- Ligue Cambodgienne des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen
 MCC- Mennonite Central Committee
 MRC- Mekong River Commission
 MoWA- Ministry of Women's Affairs
 NGO- Non-Government Organization
 NPRD- National Programme to Rehabilitate and Develop Cambodia
 ODA- Official Development Assistance
 OXFAM- Oxford Committee from Famine Relief
 PADV- Project Against Domestic Violence
 PRK- People's Republic of Kampuchea
 PROS- Prostitution Rights Organization for Sex Workers
 PTSD- Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder
 PWDA- Provincial Branch of MoWA
 RWAK- Revolutionary Woman's Association of Kampuchea
 SCFA- Save the Children Fund Australia
 SCF(UK)- Save the Children Fund (UK)
 SNC- Supreme National Council
 SOC- State of Cambodia
 SRSG- Special Representative of the Secretary General (of the United Nations)
 SSWA- Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs
 STAR- Strategies, Training and Advocacy for Reconciliation
 SWOP- Sex Workers Outreach Program
 TPO- Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation
 UN- United Nations
 UNAIDS- United Nations Programme for HIV/ AIDs
 UNBRO- United Nations Border Relief Operation
 UNCHR- United Nations Centre for Human Rights
 UNDP-United Nations Development Programme
 UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
 UNFPA- United Nations Population Fund
 UNHCR- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
 UNICEF- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
 UNIFEM- United Nations Development Fund for Women
 UNTAC- United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia
 USAID- United States Agency for International Development
 USSR- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
 VAW- violence Against women

WAC- Women's Association of Cambodia
WCC- World Council of Churches
WFP- (United Nations) World Food Programme
WGWRC- Working Group on Women's Rights in Cambodia
WHO- World Health Organization
WID- Women in Development
WMC- Women's Media Centre
WV- World Vision
YWAM- Youth With A Mission

Glossary

achaa- religious/spiritual leader or specialist
angka- organization
barang- western/ foreigner
barp- sinful; act of demerit
boang-paoun bangkeat- blood relatives
bombak muk muot kruasar- the face of the family
bon- merit
bong- older (sibling)
bongruebbongreum- reunite
chao mahaa- marriage officiant
chbaps- traditional codes of behaviour (i.e. chbaps srey- woman's code)
chomneur akrupey- supernatural beliefs
cmap- midwife
dan bhlan- soft
doi moi- Vietnamese economic policy of liberalization
doon cii- Buddhist nun
hop- to eat (verb used for younger people)
kaa ta sou flaate- to struggle for an idea (advocacy)
kam- karma
kam tro- to support
kanlan joen mepa- to act outside the authority of the ancestors
keeteyooh- honour
khan aubuk- father's family
khan mtay- mother family
khmas ge- to be ashamed before the ancestors
khmoch (or kmauit)- ghost spirits
khos silatur- morality
khoch- nasty
khoot chit- damaged heart-mind
khum- commune
kouc- 'broken'; sexually spoiled; not a virgin
krom- group
krom samaki- solidarity group
kru khmer- traditional healer
kru tuos teay- fortuneteller
louk achar (or louk taa achar)- Buddhist layperson
meebon- brothel owner
meekchal- informal leaders; act as patrons for others
meekcol- recruiter; leader
meekhum- commune chief
meemay- widow
meephum- village chief
meesrok- district chief
memot- spirit medium
mepa- ancestor spirits
neak bonghchuon arakse- spirit medium
neak ta- guardian spirits

nyam- to eat (verb used to the elderly)
 pdung torvar- 'to sue the case'
 phqaem ihaem- sweet
 phum- village
 pi'sa – to eat (verb used for younger people)
 p'oun- younger (sibling)
 pracheathipodei- democracy
 preah san- Buddhist monks
 prei- wildness; disorder
 proh- man
 propun chong- second wife
 propun luochlak- secret wife
 provas dai- 'to give an alternating hand'; traditional mutual assistance
 psapsaah- traditional reconciliation
 ramloup (or cap ramloup)- rape
 riel- Cambodian local currency
 robab rap roy- clearing; well- arranged order
 romoah- itchy for sex
 saa rociety- in their nature (i.e. it is said to be in some women's nature to be CSWs)
 samrohsamruel- mediation
 saen phtac mepa- ceremony of appeasement to the mepa (ancestral spirits)
 sangha- Buddhist monastic order
 sangkum- society
 sasna- religion
 sne'har- 'sexual love'
 songsar- lover; boyfriend/girlfriend
 srey- woman
 srey grap lakkhana- virgin and loyal wife
 srey kanchoe thluh- virtuous woman
 srey kogncheu thlus- unvirtuous woman
 srey krup lakes- good woman
 srey kuoc- prostitute
 sproch tik- traditional cleansing ceremony; literally 'to spray water'
 srok- district
 towaa- fictive kin relationship

NB: There are a variety of different Khmer spellings used in the various ethnographies and documents on Cambodian society. For example, 'woman' is spelt alternatively as 'srey', 'srei' and 'sri'. Likewise, the traditional codes of behaviour have been spelt alternatively as 'chbap', 'cpap' and 'chbabb'. I have used translations according to my own Khmer language training.

Organisations Consulted

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Australian Catholic Relief (ACR)
Cambodian Cooperation Committee (CCC)
Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP)
Cambodian Midwives Association (CMA)
Catholic Migration and Development Committee (CMDC)
Cambodian Researchers for Development (CRD)
Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC)
Cambodian Women's Development Agency (CWDA)
Cambodian Women's League for Development (CWLD)
Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS)
Church World Service (CWS)
Community Aid Abroad (CAA)
Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC)
GAD Programme
Handicap International (HI)
Human Rights Vigilance
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)
IYC- Private Japanese Humanitarian Agency
Khemara
Krom Akphiwat Phum (KAP)
Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF)
MEDiCAM- Medical Consortium in Cambodia
Mekong River Commission (MRC)
Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)
NGO Forum
Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV)
Strategies, Training and Advocacy for Reconciliation (STAR)
Save the Children Fund- UK (SCF-UK)
Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO)
United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDs (UNAIDS)
United Nations Centre for Human Rights (UNCHR)
United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)
Women's Media Centre (WMC)
World Vision (WV)
Youth With a Mission (YWAM)

Introduction: Gendered Violence & Development in Cambodia

Violence is an ever-present aspect of the human social order and one that is critical in shaping social identity. Not surprisingly then, it has become a major preoccupation and favoured topic of debate and discussion among academics, journalists, politicians and health professionals. In a world increasingly shaped by global communication, experiences, testimonies and images of violence pervade and inform our discussions of world politics, development issues, current affairs, health policy, gender relations and popular culture.

Given its primacy in social and public discourse, the need to come to terms with violence is compelling. This in turn necessitates a finely tuned understanding of the interplay between social structures, subjectivity and violence in order to even consider the formulation and implementation of interventions to combat its essence. Thus, to apprehend violence is to study the praxis of everyday life and the challenge is to imagine means to affect change. As Kleinman notes, these are not always the most obvious: “the ethnography of social violence implicates the social dynamics of everyday practices as the appropriate site to understand how larger orders of social force come together with micro-contexts of local power to shape human problems in ways that are resistant to standard approaches of policy and intervention programs” (2000: 227). My argument is that in locating these more diffuse elements that promote and perpetuate violence against women in everyday life, we can recognize appropriate points of intervention. The task, however, is far from straightforward.

In considering violence, we must contend with two significant (albeit antithetical) trends, which characterize the reporting (and underreporting) of violence. These are silence and sensationalism. Through these contrary dimensions experiences of suffering are either robbed of visibility or diluted by overstatement. On the one hand, a common response to violence (both political and everyday violence) is silence, that is, the failure to report on and include the violence in the 'public' and 'everyday' arena. This silence masks not only the individual experience of violence but also the social structures that permit and encourage the articulation of violence. It is in their lack of visibility that violence and suffering find space to flourish (Kleinman & Kleinman 1996: 17). The result is a distorted understanding of social reality as well as the way in which violence and non-violence forms and functions within this reality.

Silence is an especially salient trend in terms of the various forms of violence perpetrated against women. This gendered suffering has only recently formed a part of public consciousness after decades of feminist activism and agitation to 'break the silence'. Significantly, many women continue to cope with and mediate experiences of violence through silence because of shame, fear and the lack of legal and social intervention. More and more there are efforts (academic, developmental and journalistic) to make this gender violence visible and vocal. But vocalisation in and of itself is not the solution.

This leads us to the attendant problems of the other extreme - sensationalism - in publicising violent experience. Here the reality of violence is camouflaged in a flurry of emotional overstatement and trite commentary. Thus social structures

and the local context are inadequately appreciated as contributors to, and mediators of, violence. Rather, through the mediated and sensationalised representations of suffering, people's experiences are transformed and diluted (Kleinman & Kleinman 1996: 2). Our ability to grasp the complexity and respond in meaningful ways is eroded by this distortion. Development discourse and agencies are also culpable of this trend, boiling down complex social structures and manifestations of violence to simple templates. Significantly, a number of academic studies of this formulaic/sensationalistic coverage highlight that this trend is more common in representations of developing countries than of the developed world (Moeller 1999: 24). And, as we will discover, it is far from uncommon in discussions of, and interventions on, violence against women.

Silence and sensationalism together create and aggravate the lack of nuance and depth in our vision of everyday violence. A poignant illustration of the tension between (and prevalence of) these two trends comes from one woman whose father was brutally killed. In her retelling she grappled with the need to vocalize the violence (make it real and visible) and the need to protect the dignity of her father against the sensationalism of representation common to the reporting of such events. Daniel describes her dilemma:

A daughter who had witnessed her father's murdered body being dragged away by an army Jeep to which it was tied said at one point in her interview with me, "you are a man who has seen the world, please take this story and tell the world of what they did to my father, how they treated him." And at another point, in the same interview, she pleaded, "Please don't tell anyone else this story. My father is such a dignified man. He never comes to dinner without bathing and without wearing a clean white shirt. I don't want anyone to remember him the way I see him, with his clothes torn off his body (2000: 334).

These are pressing concerns not just for the bereaved woman but for all of us who would seek to engage in this world. We must urgently consider how it is possible to negotiate these two types of representation and appropriation that signify the extreme ends of the continuum of ways of knowing about violence (Kleinman & Kleinman 1996: 17). Anthropology as a discipline must grapple with the scientific and moral imperatives to 'get the violence right', to appreciate its reality and the meaning (Scheper-Hughes 1996: 891). It is incumbent on us to find ethical ways of knowing about and presenting violence, of moving from these extremes of appropriation and portrayal.

The necessity of this is two fold. First, sensitive portrayal addresses the silence and sensationalism that all too commonly masks certain forms of violence, factors made all the more tangible by the profile certain forms are given. In challenging these trends we take the step toward understanding violence for the importance of knowing. Second, and equally important, we must apprehend the complex nature of violence as a first step toward remedy, for more sophisticated and appropriate interventions to redress this violence. Representing violence is critical as a precursor for action. Only with a realistic conceptualisation and appreciation of violence can we locate points of intervention for programmes. In order to pursue these goals, I have chosen to consider everyday life and violence against women in Cambodia. Accurate and appropriate representation in the Cambodian development arena is particularly urgent given the pervasiveness of violence, the lack of open-ended research on the subject and the pressing need for prevention and remedy.

The violent and tragic events of modern Cambodia, most particularly the Khmer Rouge genocide, are a source of fascination, consternation and extensive exploration among Cambodians and non-Cambodians alike. From an academic perspective, most intriguing perhaps is the extreme violence of these events virtually unique in severity and scale. That personal and political conflict continues in Cambodia means that the topic of violence is a favoured one of study and discussion. That the world over violence (private and public) is informing all manner of social and public relations reinforces this already strong focus.

Arriving in Cambodia for fieldwork it was precisely this topic of violence that I was determined to study, with attention to the ways in which it informed and shaped development discourses and activities in the country. As a Western feminist and anthropology student, I was particularly interested in the various manifestations of violence being perpetrated against Cambodian women and its 'management' by the aid industry. And as a student embarking on my first fieldwork research, I even thought I was being mildly original. Upon arrival in Phnom Penh, I quickly learned that I was not.

Violence in Cambodia is a popular topic and an ever-present reality. A perusal of the *Phnom Penh Post* over coffee my first morning in Cambodia in March 1998 made this abundantly clear. Kidnapping, rape, and murder are among the numerous violent attacks perpetrated daily throughout the country. And within the aid community, attention to this pervasive violence is significant, an attention that forms a major focus of this thesis. Demining activities and prosthesis workshops seek to redress (in part) the ongoing damage caused by the civil war and its landmine soldiers. Civil disarmament is a contentious but high profile concern of

both the government and international agencies. Numerous human rights agencies seek to inform people of their rights and freedoms, enabling them to speak out against official and unofficial abuses. And the rebuilding of a judiciary and development of civil society aims at curtailing the climate of impunity that tolerates and reinforces this pernicious violence.

Attention to violence directed against women is equally striking. Violence against women has become a high profile issue throughout the world, and no less so in the NGO/development discourse of Cambodia. Trafficking in women, domestic violence and rape are particularly popular topics amongst the international and local NGOs working in the country. That shelters, counselling, advocacy initiatives and various other programmes seek to address this gendered violence is evidence of this focus.

With so much international attention to the topic of violence against women in Cambodia and so much expert work underway, I was impressed by the convenience of my choice of research focus. That is, until I began to meet and talk with Cambodian women and men, as well as local and international NGO staff. In discussing with them issues of development, gender roles, violence, NGO activities and daily life I began to question the primacy of certain hegemonic representations of violence in the daily lives of Cambodian women. I was consistently struck by the selective NGO focus on certain manifestations of violence against women as well as the inconsistency of attention to various dimensions of this gender-based violence. The lack of divergent discourse in any discussion on violence against women was equally compelling. And I began to

query the dominant representation of Cambodian women (and men) in the numerous NGO and donor reports and studies. My concerns were crystallised in the sentiment expressed to me by Cambodian anthropologist Dr. Chou Meng Tarr: that she hoped I would not dwell too heavily on the notion of all Cambodian women “withering under the mantle of male domination and violence” (fieldnotes). And so I began to think more about violence in Cambodia and more about violence against women in Cambodia. This thesis reflects my attempts to develop a more carefully derived picture of gendered violence and the means by which Cambodian society deals with and perpetuates this violence.

It is precisely these issues with which I grappled during my six months of fieldwork in Cambodia (March to October 1998). In that time I met with and spoke to a large number of Cambodians and expatriates from the NGO community as well as individual Cambodian women and men. The bulk of my research was conducted in the city of Phnom Penh and towns of Battambang and Siem Reap. This is where the majority of international NGOs (INGOs) and Cambodian NGOs (CNGOs) are based and operate. I interviewed NGO workers with a range of orientations and agendas from large, foreign NGOs to human rights agencies, religious organisations to locally initiated NGOs. Many of the agencies with which I met had a ‘women in development’ (WID) or ‘gender and development’ (GAD) component or were so-called ‘women’s NGOs’. Many of these agencies were dealing with manifestations of violence against women in some capacity.

I met with approximately 40 agencies, a list of which appears under Organisations Consulted. Topics of inquiry ranged from their attention to, and activities on, WID/GAD; human rights; advocacy; capacity building; relations between NGOs and with the government; and cultural understanding. At each agency I spoke to at least two staff members (one Cambodian and one international) and in many of the women's agencies I spoke to four or five staff (both local and international). Interviews were open-ended, usually one hour or more in length. In the case of women's NGOs, especially those dealing with violence, wherever possible I conducted follow-up interviews with the staff. As well, when possible I met with women clients of these NGOs, speaking both generally about their lives as well as their specific experiences of violence.

In addition, I travelled to various villages in the provinces of Kompong Speu, Takeo, Battambang and Siem Reap where I met and spoke with rural NGO staff, women clients of NGOs as well as women with little or no exposure to the NGO community and programmes. With many women (clients and non-clients) I spent time in their homes, met their families and discussed a myriad issues including, but not limited to, gender relations, violence and violence against women.

My approach is loosely based on what has been termed a 'feminist participatory research methodology' (Kirson 1995: 2). This is premised on the belief that women's experiences, knowledge and ways of being have been marginalized and made invisible by dominant methodologies and that gender must be at the heart of all research and inquiry. This approach recognizes that, through participation, it is possible to transcend traditional, positivist methodology such that the interviewer

is as engaged as the interviewee and, in addition to providing answers, the interviewee can ask questions and guide the discussion along her own trajectory of experience and agenda. It empowers women to find and use their individual voice and to share and stress their ways of knowing and seeing (Kirson 1995: 2).

I am aware that this thesis represents a very specific type of research - that of practical or applied anthropology. It is a form of analysis which incorporates into ways of knowing the goal of addressing and remedying, in some way, the experience of gendered violence in Cambodia. There is necessarily a tension in anthropology between academic exploration and practical applicability, a tension manifested (at least in part) by the "exasperation among the international elite of policymakers and bureaucrats who demand that social scientists should be able to suggest solutions rather than go into the minutiae of the lived experiences of people caught up in such violence" (Das & Kleinman 2000: 16). It is this tension, which I feel very deeply in the study of violence against women and gendered suffering, that I am seeking to negotiate here. Some issues - and certainly this one - require more than a recognition and exploration of their prevalence, presence and meaning, although this depth of analysis is a critical starting point. There is, in addition, a need to point to action. Or as Scheper- Hughes argues most saliently, "anthropology must exist on two fronts: as a traditional disciplinary field and as a force field, a more immediate reactive site of struggle and resistance" (1996: 892). As such, I address my research and discussion to multiple audiences, not the least of whom are the Cambodian women and men who use and experience gendered violence, the social scientists and scholars who study and seek to understand it and the development practitioners who aim to remedy and

arrest the perpetration of violence against women (cf. Scheper-Hughes, 1992b: 230). In a more subtle articulation of cultural and specific dynamics of violence against women in Cambodia, we can apprehend, to some degree, the meanings and significance of gendered violence in Cambodia. This in turn facilitates our efforts in pinpointing points of intervention for NGO programmes and flagging already successful points of entry and programmes.

There can be no dispute that violence and violence against women is a commonplace substrate of social interaction in Cambodian society. No Cambodian woman or man would deny that domestic violence is an occurrence within many homes, perhaps even their own. Rape, while not widely studied or publicly addressed, was a far too common occurrence in the border camps and remains a regular occurrence in Cambodia in the present. And the trafficking of women is, according to NGO sources, alarmingly pervasive. What can perhaps be disputed, and most certainly discussed, is the extent of this violence, the exact nature of violence perpetrated, the representations of violence against women in public and development discourses, and the meanings surrounding this violence that serve both as source and product of these representations. The value of such an exploration is not merely for the development industry and attempts to alleviate pernicious violence, but also for Cambodians for whom it is an everyday lived experience.

Fascination with violence in Khmer society is far from a new trend among scholars of Cambodia. An entire programme - Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Program (CGP) - was created to record the Khmer Rouge atrocities.

Historical accounts necessarily highlight past violence, vacillating in their representations between images of a calm and gentle people and a people of extreme barbarity.¹ For those working in the development arena, the issue of violence factors heavily, if not predominantly, into typical rhetoric and planning. And NGOs, whether or not they are centred on women's issues, face this problem at some point and in some capacity. As one NGO worker told me, "Violence is normalized here... there's a really strong overlap between military, civilian and interpersonal violence".

In spite of this primary status - or perhaps because of it - the issue of violence remains a little understood topic in the Cambodian context. Some say that violence has been alarmingly high since the war (see Ovesen et al. 1996: 41); other informants with whom I spoke argue that it is no different than elsewhere (fieldnotes). While all concede it is a critical issue, the quantity of open-ended research is small and the environment of debate is limited. Rather, there appears to be *de facto* consensus on the causes of violence. While, increasingly attention has been paid to a variety of factors, the favoured causal contributor, among Cambodians and foreigners alike, remains the Khmer Rouge years.

It is a simplistic explanation and a dubious assertion that the violence experienced under the Khmer Rouge regime is the primary cause of the pernicious violence that informs every manner of life in Cambodia today. Some scholars and

¹ Ledgerwood notes the stark dichotomy in representations of violence in Cambodia observing, "Either Khmer are a gentle people who somehow went berserk (due to American bombing, or Chinese cultural revolutionary influences or evil Vietnamese tricks or some other factors) or Khmer society contains some sort of critical flaw which predisposes them to violent behaviour (a culture-wide inferiority complex,... political structure, even a kinship in inherent internal tensions) (1990: 183)."

researchers argue against this standardised explanation asserting instead that the violence can be attributed as much to more common and international factors like unemployment, low wages and a shortage of money, best called 'structural violence' (Kleinman 1997: 227). Further, Tarr asserts that Cambodia is not the only country with violence, or even disproportionate violence. She argues that there are so many factors that lead to violence, "even the process of modernisation uses violence as a means" (fieldnotes). It can also be argued that the development process itself is an act of violence, that development does damage to people's sense of subjectivity. That is, "as places of encounter and suppression of local cultures, women, identities and histories, these regimes of representation are originary sites of violence" (Escobar 1995: 214). As one prominent Cambodian scholar pointedly observed to me, "violence is not just from Cambodian men but also from the development workers and agencies who work here. They use violence in their representations of Cambodians. I feel more violence from them" (fieldnotes).² Perhaps most succinctly, anthropologist Dr. van de Put of Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) in Phnom Penh stressed, "Pol Pot was an episode in a entire series of traumatic events" (fieldnotes). Specific or general explanations aside, certainly there can be no question that violence has seeped, or rather barged, into Khmer consciousness and interaction over the past decades. Violence now, and has for some time, permeates Cambodian social structures, consciousness and the local development arena.

² In this vein, Kleinman & Kleinman argue that policymakers and programme builders must recognize that they can, and frequently do, cause harm, albeit often unwittingly, that "the potential for harm lies latent in the institutional structures that have been authorized to respond to human problems, that work behind even the best intentioned professionals, 'experts' must be held responsible to define how these latent institutional effects can be controlled" (1996: 18).

Of particular concern and interest to me is the violence perpetrated against women in its various manifestations. We must first consider its uniqueness in this sphere. That is, violence against women is not a phenomenon specific to Cambodia. Around the world, across the political, cultural, social and economic spectrum, women suffer alarmingly high incidences of violence. Global statistics demonstrate the necessity for concern and action on this subject. In 1993 the World Bank highlighted that violence against women was a serious cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age, accounting for more incidences of ill health than traffic accidents and malaria combined. Equally compelling is a World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that at least 20% of the world's women can expect to be physically or sexually assaulted at some point in their lives (UNIFEM 1999: 2). Recent studies and reports indicate that Cambodia is no exception to this trend.

There has been a growing sensitivity to, and recognition of, the problem of violence against women in Cambodia in recent years. Certainly this is true of the NGO community, which has been keen to support reports and agencies that seek to address (and redress) these crimes. The proliferation of women's shelters in Phnom Penh is but one evidentiary example of this trend. Equally indicative is the widespread acceptance of the topic among local agencies and their staff. Many Cambodian female and male NGO staff stress that the issue of violence against women is of huge importance.

What then, if anything, is unique about the way in which violence against women is manifested in the Cambodian context? What is new and what is old about this

gender-based violence? How has Cambodian society traditionally conceptualised and mediated manifestations of violence against women? What does the expression of violence against women, both past and present, seek to achieve in Cambodian society? How do Cambodians gain and use meanings surrounding this violence against women? And what does it do to Cambodian women's sense of subjectivity? These are some of the questions I will address.

In spite of the numerous agencies and programmes dealing with the issue of violence against women, what struck me as compelling was the selective nature of services dealing with this violence as well as a remarkably unanalytical understanding of the topic, manifested in Cambodian mainstream development discourses. Domestic violence is extensively discussed and has received concrete and specific action. Nevertheless, it is seen in isolation from systemic violence and imagined instead as a specifically gendered issue. Trafficking, like everywhere in the world at present, is an intensely popular topic and favoured focus of formulaic newspaper reports. At the same time, it is understood in its narrowest and most sensationalist sense - trafficking for commercial sex work - and employs a discourse characterised by 'victimization' and simplistic gender constructs. In marked contrast, rape is significantly under considered and under addressed. Attention to rape, both in terms of research and intervention, is glaring in its absence. Further, far too frequently these three manifestations of violence against women are explained away by reducing them to their lowest common denominator - 'patriarchy' or 'gender subordination' - in spite of significant complications for this gender reductionism at either the level of the Cambodian social order or individual subjectivities.

The debate, then, is not whether violence against women is a problem in Cambodia. It clearly is. Nor is it a question of whether funds should be allocated to address these issues of violence against women. They most certainly should. Instead what I argue for, and attempt to address in part, is the need for exploration of precisely what violence against women is manifested, how it is mediated and addressed both in the past and the present and what are the social and political meanings and implications of this gendered violence. In other words, we need an examination that seeks a clear delineation of the ways in which violence is endemic and at the same time expressed in ways that emerge from particular cultural, social, political and economic structures. That is to say, if violence is everyday, it is this everyday that we have to understand in all its multi-faceted complexity. Other pertinent questions are manifold. How and why (and where) are development issues and agendas chosen? That is, why does violence against women feature so prominently on the development agenda? And what are the implications of this in the Cambodian context in terms of the ability of Cambodians (in government and non-government agencies) to own their own development, shape their own debate and form their own alternatives and options?

To my mind, in many cases there is no easy fit between what NGOs are doing and the situation on the ground. We must be wary of the “premature acceptance of meanings that culture has to offer, or the ready-made solutions the social scientist comes up with” (Daniel 2000: 360). It is often this end result that development experts and donors realize in their demand for explanation, clarity and immediacy. That is to say, while a significant number of NGOs are programming for

alleviating violence against women, there is inadequate attention to the complexity of gendered violence in the formulation of interventions and representations.

One facet of this emerges in the divergence of perceived importance in addressing violence in the first place. Studies and assessments of the needs of Cambodian women (and society more generally) show that women themselves and NGO workers do not always cite the prevalence of violence as the most pressing concern in their day-to-day lives. One aid worker observed, “just because donors decide that violence against women shouldn’t be allowed and throw money at it doesn’t mean that it is women’s greatest concern. Donors and NGOs focus on topics or a certain agenda not on the real situation in Cambodia” (fieldnotes). This is not to say that violence against women should not be considered and addressed. Rather, it must be considered as a significant but not exclusive component of Cambodian women’s lives. Increasingly, therefore, there have been efforts to forge a fit between academic analysis and development programming. While this fit necessarily involves tensions (cf. Van Esterik 1995, Mueller 1991), it is imperative that development and the associated discourses be examined in terms of how these shape what we see, know and speak of. This is crucial in the conceptualisation of ‘reality’ and issues as well as in the formulation of interventions. There are four critical problematics which must be considered.

First, it is imperative that we understand violence as both gendered and systemic. It is ‘gendered’ because it is an act committed against women, precisely because they are women and in spite of all other forces that structure identity. Likewise,

this violence is tolerated and not punished because it is perpetrated against women, which further informs how the violence manifests. At the same time, the violence is 'systemic' in that it occurs to women as a class, as it does to other 'less equal' or 'less enfranchised' social identities/classes, within the greater framework of pervasive violence in Cambodian society. It is a product of social inequality of which gender is one factor. As we shall see, there has been a general failure among agencies to situate and conceptualise violence against women within the broader context of conflict in Cambodian society. Violence cannot be viewed as separate from the greater social environment in which it occurs. Cambodian women are potential victims of violence in social as well as in gendered terms.

Second, in both our understandings of violence against women and in our efforts to address it, we must grapple with notions of agency and victimisation. While traditionally feminism has seen categories of victim and agent as mutually exclusive and in opposition to one another, this has increasingly been challenged and supplanted. Women do not inhabit a category of 'either/or' but rather move and negotiate along a trajectory between agency and victimisation, incorporating both to varying degrees in the disparate aspects of their lives and identities. We should flag the various ways (subtle and overt) in which women demonstrate agency while, at the same time, experience violence. Agency and its ability to negotiate, mediate and manipulate are critical features in people's identity and far too often have been ignored in the discourse and action on violence against women. Finding the appropriate means of portraying and empowering various attributes of one's subjectivity is the issue at hand.

Third, while violence against women is universal it is also specific and, as such, must be understood in its cultural particularity. Cultural sensitivity is vital to apprehend social mechanisms in terms of how and why violence is perpetrated and mediated. Traditional means of resolution and structuring forces must be profiled in order to gauge 'ideal' social behaviour, how violations of this social ideal are punished and what is sought and achieved through these structuring forces. Understanding the cultural context in which violence against women occurs allows us to comprehend in greater depth the surrounding meanings so as to assist in locating interventions which are able to respond to cultural as well as human rights needs. That is, "the focus on local worlds enables us to examine the social processes that underwrite the targeting, implementation and response to violent actions" (Kleinman 1995: 187). Significantly, in reading violence 'culturally', there emerges a tension between international and local ways of knowing and acting, as well as tension between ever-present oppositional discourses within the local culture and society.

Finally, in this light, we must consider and work against the process, which Escobar (1995) calls the 'politics of representation' through which local identities and issues are created and dispatched from above and abroad. This trend - the extensive role in and control of the Cambodian development process by outsiders - is what the Venerable Moneychenda calls 'conceptual colonisation' (Shivakumar 1996: 52). These representations directly impact the development stage. In recent years, donors have been increasingly inclined to support interventions on violence against women. And, "Cambodians have often felt

compelled to accept whatever aid is offered even though it may not correspond to their own development objective” (Mysliwiec 1994: 124). As such, donors (and INGOs) have dictated the ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘to whom’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ of aid delivery to Cambodia, based on the popularity of ‘issues’ and their organizational agendas. Funds available for violence against women initiatives are one in a string of foci of these development practitioners and agencies. We must highlight the power dynamics which underpin this process (central in the development industry) and work consciously against the production of these representations, not only in terms of violence against Cambodian women but also in our representations of gender more generally. As one local anthropologist observed, “it is true that aid workers work with specific groups of women who really are victims. But it doesn’t mean you can generalize about Cambodian society” (fieldnotes). To do so falls prey to the politics and discursive power of representation.

Attention must be paid to how women (and men) are represented in Cambodian development discourse such that they are not reduced to singular identities tied to the violence perpetrated against them. As Mohanty argues,

Although it is true that the potential of male violence circumscribes and elucidates women’s social position to a certain extent, defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into ‘objects-who-defend-themselves,’ men into ‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence’ and (every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people. Male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies, in order both to understand it better and to effectively organize to change it (1991b: 58).

Of course I am not disputing that violence against women exists and is pervasive in Cambodia. I do, however, assert that this is not necessarily the dominant factor in all women’s lives and that their identity cannot be subsumed by how they, as

women, do and do not experience violence. It is of critical concern that the identity of Cambodian women is not turned into a corollary of 'victims of violence' in the development discourse of Cambodia.

Each of these four themes will be discussed in turn and explored in the context of the three manifestations of violence against women so frequently flagged by the Cambodian NGO community - domestic violence, trafficking and rape. It is my intention to unpack the violence against women discourse in Cambodia and, in so doing, highlight areas where inadequate understandings and misrepresentations have distorted an appreciation of, and intervention on, violence against women. In the examination of images, representations and broader development discourse, it becomes possible to find alternative interventions, strengthen existing efforts or explain the success of effective programmes such that violence against women is conceptualised and approached by NGOs in a more meaningful, effective and constructive way. That is, attention to these four issues provides a springboard for appropriate ways of seeing, knowing and intervening.

I began by saying that structural violence is a consequence of everyday life and, therefore, one might add that all development programmes operate within a realm of violence. That is, development by its very nature looks at structures and the ways that violence plays out within and through these structures. Likewise, given the significance of NGOs and development interlocutors in all manner of life in Cambodia, all realms of violence are necessarily realms of development attention. As such, NGOs are major players in the adjustment of social structures and social order and, by implication, central mediators in both changes to violence/structures

and efforts to address these. The embeddedness of these two is such that even NGOs that do not address violence in their programmes work with social structures that challenge and/or accept social violence. Manoeuvring to make change in social structure is what development (and NGOs) aim to do. Thus, we need to think about development at large both in terms of its specific attempts to deal with violence but also with attention to the broader manoeuvres used to deal with social structure and conflict. To approach an understanding of violence and violence against women in Cambodia it is critical to appreciate the specific context of development and NGOs in Cambodian society. It is with this subject that I will begin.