

***Reconciliation: The Conditions of Possibility That Enable Practices in the Anlong Veng Community, Cambodia***

Sovann Mam, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the conditions of possibility that enable practices of reconciliation in the Anlong Veng community, Cambodia. A qualitative method including secondary data analysis as well as field research interviews is being employed. The practices – i.e. negotiation – have been taken into consideration the discourse of power relations for many years but have not been theorized as elements of reconciliation. Several scholars point out the processes of reconciliation in Cambodia in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime and civil war, emphasizing how the roles of both state and non-state actors rehabilitate the relationships between different Cambodian adversaries, and rural Cambodians (including victims, perpetrators and bystanders) overcome the trauma from the KR period and live peacefully side-by-side in their villages. Relating the practices that enable reconciliation in the context of Anlong Veng, the strongest KR military front and the final KR stronghold in the 1990s, this paper defines the conditions of possibility as discursive practices to dialogue space, collective memory, and truth-seeking/regimes of truth. This paper regards the dialogue space as a central component, which reveals the narratives in reconciliation process. The investigation of the conditions of possibility that enable practices of reconciliation, this paper looks at: multiple negotiations (safety guarantee, amnesty, truth building), forgiveness (apology, acknowledgement and confession, compassion and empathy, forgetting), and Buddhism/belief perspective (self-healing).

Keywords: Khmer Rouge, reconciliation, dialogue space, collective memory, truth-seeking/regimes of truth, discursive practices

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## 1. Introduction

“Khmer Rouge” (KR) or Red Khmer called by the King Norodom Sihanouk<sup>1</sup> in the decade of the 1960s was Cambodian communist movement that actively opposed his leadership in ruling the country (Khamboly, 2007). A consequence of rising communists in Cambodia caused by the ninety-year French colonial control (1863-1953), so that the communists formed resistances to demand the independence from the French (Chandler, 2008). Even though KR had not been supported until the U.S.-backed Lon Nol’s Khmer Republic government overthrew Prince Sihanouk on 18 March 1970. Less than five years during an armed struggle against the Lon Nol regime, KR succeeded its victory and took power in the capital of Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975. The KR government named its regime Democratic Kampuchea (DK), and ruled the country led the death of 1.7 million of the population of 7 million due to starvation; overwork; lack medical treatment; malnutrition and execution (Ciorciari and Chhang, 2005). Finally, the Vietnamese and Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS)<sup>2</sup> deposed the brutal DK regime on 7 January 1979.

After the collapse of its regime, KR cadres, soldiers, and their family members fled and resettled along Thai-Cambodian border. With assistance from China; Thailand; and the United States as well as its Western allies, KR was able to reorganize its armed forces, which continued to fight back the Vietnamese-installed People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) government through the 1980s. When Vietnam completed its troop withdrawal a decade later in 1989, KR was able to capture a number of interior territories, one of which was the region of Anlong Veng, which became the strongest KR military front and the final KR stronghold before being integrated into the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) at the end of 1998 (Khamboly and Dearing, 2015). The emergence of the 1998 reintegration in Anlong Veng was a smart use of the RGC’s “win-win” policy after a failure of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement through the United Nations (UN) to bring the final peace and ceasefire in Cambodia.

The last but not end, reconciliation between the RGC and the KR delivered entirely peace and stability. This meant that the prolonged armed conflict and faction divide were brought an end, and national unity flourished since the success of implementing the policy. However, there are a lot of unfinished affairs of reconciliation in Cambodian in general and Anlong Veng in particular. Hence, this paper extended to examine the processes of reconciliation in the individual and community levels in order to draw an understanding of the “total” reconciliation. Following its extension, the aim of this paper was to explore the conditions of possibility that enable practices of reconciliation in Anlong Veng.

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<sup>1</sup> Prince Norodom Sihanouk, a former Cambodian King, was monarch for more than six decades since his first reign in 1941 and second in 1993 until abdication in 2004. On 15 October 2012, the Prince died of natural causes at the age of 89 in Beijing of China. His son, Prince Norodom Sihamoni, became the new king of Cambodia on 14 October 2004.

<sup>2</sup> KUNFS officially established on 2 December 1978 in the eastern area of Cambodia was a core group of former KR cadres who fled the killing and massacres and another was a key group of Khmer communist members who were living in Vietnam (Hinton, 2013). After the victory of 7 January 1979, KUNFS named its government, People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) 1979-1989. PRK changed its name to State of Cambodia (SOC) 1989-1993. Since 1993 until now, the government names the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) ruled by Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodian People’s Party (CPP).

This paper will not, and indeed cannot deal with all the aspects that are part of reconciliation; it will however, focus on the theme of emerging the 1998 reintegration under a framework of political negotiation of the policy, a sticking point to the process, and practicing to restore the broken relationships between victims and former KR members (perpetrators and bystanders). With this theme, the investigation of this paper primarily based on qualitative study including secondary source analysis and individual interviews during field research for two months (June-July, 2016) in Cambodia, as well as unpublished interview transcripts (2012-2014) of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam).

## **2. Literature Reviews on Reconciliation in Cambodia**

Several scholars have sought to examine the processes of reconciliation in Cambodia in the aftermath of the KR regime and civil war. Cambodian peace scholar Sok-Kheang (2014) looks at the dynamics of reconciliation processes in Cambodia by emphasizing the roles of both state and non-state actors in rehabilitating the relationships between different Cambodian adversaries. In examining the Cambodian reconciliation processes, He uses theoretical models based on principals such as forgiveness, peaceful coexistence, justice seeking, and acknowledgement, which were achieved in different stages over a long period of time beginning in 1979. Likewise, McGrew (2011) looks at the Cambodian reconciliation processes by focusing on how rural Cambodians (including victims, perpetrators and bystanders) overcome the trauma from the KR period and live peacefully side-by-side in their villages. She describes on a number of concepts as theoretical frameworks for her analysis. These concepts include coexistence, the development of trust, rehumanization, healing of heart and minds, compassion, acknowledgement, apology, forgiveness, and forgetting. For Ciorciari, he notes the Cambodian reconciliation processes that ‘Cambodians have wrestled with tensions inherent in reconciliation and the need to sequence and prioritize various aspects of the processes’ (Ciorciari, 2011: 438).

As an attempt to restore peace and stability in the region, as well as promote coexistence and reconciliation effort under the rule of the King of Cambodia, Prime Minister Hun Sen commenced ‘win-win policy’ in mid-1995 and implemented the policy to finish the long-time war and serious conflicts, and to integrate the KR group into mainstream Khmer society (Sowath, 2012). In a reference to Sok-Kheang (2014), the policy offered three main concessions in return for the forces’ disarmament and reintegration to the Hun Sen government. First, the policy allowed former KR military cadres to maintain their military ranks within the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF). Second, the policy ensured that no KR private property would be confiscated. Third, and last, the policy protected the personal safety of all KR armed forces.

According to the RGC’s policy, under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen, the win-win policy played one of the most important roles in bringing about coexistence and reconciliation in Anlong Veng. In his keynote address 2008 Cambodia Outlook Conference, Hun Sen said:

The threat of Khmer Rouge eroded and disappeared following the ‘win-win policy’ that I initiated in 1996-1998, leading to the rooting up of their military and political organisation. Again, the sweeping change in politics, social and

economic development leads Cambodia to be an oasis of peace, security, stability and development (Sok-Kheang, 2014: 213).

This policy, it seems, has had a positive effect to some degree scholars have noted and can be seen as a process in the national level, which was prioritized some mechanisms of integration and reconciliation to bring the KR group into multiple negotiations.

### **3. Multiple Negotiations**

#### **3.1 Safety Guarantee**

Negotiating ceasefire between the KR and the RGC had been initiated a safety guarantee – which sprang out from the implementation of Hun Sen’s win-win policy in mid-1995 – on return of all former KR members. Therefore, the safety guarantee could be thematically seen as a component of reintegration that the KR armed forces were encouraged to return and integrate into the national military forces, well known as the RCAF. By that time the “safety guarantee” component of reintegration soon became a favorable condition of negotiations, which convinced the KR cadres, soldiers, and their family members to defect to the government in Phnom Penh.

From the standpoint of a defector, former KR commander who dropped out of school because of the 1970 coup and joined the KR revolutionary at the end of 1971, and went on 20-year-fighting against the government’s forces, but became a key defector in leading the KR forces to defect to the government in the middle of 1998, described further:

In general, when [the Socialist Republic of] Vietnam completely withdrew its troops in late 1989, I thought our will was the same. Some dare to talk [about negotiation and defection] and some hesitated because of being afraid that they could be brought for execution. But for me, I tried to persuade them to look for a way of ending the war. ... [Because our] soldiers had no will to struggle against Khmer anymore. We [, all the soldiers,] had no longer desire to continue the fight because we wished to end the war. We had lost our opportunities for a long time [in building the country and economic development]. My military position was only vice chief of division, but I dare to speak the truth [about ending the war and defection] even at the training session. When I spoke out the truth that other could not speak, we all cried sometimes (interviewed by Dany Long and Kosal Phat, February 2012).

It is clear that the safety guarantee attracted the former KR members who are tired and exhausted of fighting against the government – the fighting that they referred to “between Khmer” – and accepted the government’s policy through political negotiations given a way for return and defection.

While the safety guarantee enriches the sphere of KR defection, the amnesty is also seen as a segment of pulling them out to abandon their faction and defect to the government that is discussed next.

### 3.2 Amnesty

Instead of prioritizing justice, granting amnesty to the former KR administrators, military cadres and their family members dramatically increased the number of defectors and returned to civilian life. The amnesty was seen as ‘a positive, snowballing effect on other hesitant KR leaders and soldiers who wanted to integrate, but who were not yet confident enough to do so. ... Such an amnesty also brings peace, which would facilitate tourism, socio-economic development and the rehabilitation of infrastructure (Sowath, 2012: 130). These reasons helped KR guerrilla forces received a green light on their return and defection. To do so, the Prime Minister Hun Sen announced that Cambodian people ‘should dig a hole and bury the past’ (Ciorciari, 2009: 66; Strangio, 2014: 241). By reading between the lines, the past – he referred to the tragedy and mass violence caused the death of 1.7 million innocent men, women and children under the DK regime between 1975 and 1979 – was replaced by the terms of ‘forgetting’ and ‘[national] reconciliation’ (Hammarber, 2000 cited in Persson, 2008: 37), in order to fully obtain peace and stability.

A former KR battle-weary soldier, who was brought by his male cousin to join the revolution in 1970 and was moved to guard the DK’s northeast territory nearby frontier with Vietnam after the victory over Lon Nol’s government in Phnom Penh, recalled his decision in accepting the policy:

I observed that the government encouraged [us to defect] and most defectors were not executed [or punished]. I believed if I integrate with the government, I would survive. [Later on], when I listened to a radio, I heard the statement of the government that announced to guarantee [for return of KR armed forces, such as:] position, property, living life, [and amnesty]. I thus felt released [my worries] because of the win-win policy. [At that time, exactly,] our living condition faced many difficulties, so we always thought of [defection] (interviewed by Bunthorn Som and Khamboly Dy, 18 December 2013).

Next discussion focuses on – trust building – how the KR group trusted in a sense of security and agreed to defect to the Hun Sen government.

### 3.3 Trust Building

Prior to the momentum of the defection movement in 1998, former KR military cadres emphasized their personal safety – fearing for punishment and imprisonment – before making any decision for their defection. The guerrilla men and women who aimed to leave their faction and wished to return to their communities seemed to be hesitant about interacting with the government’s inside officials, while some were unsure whether or not the reconciliation program would secure their personal security. Their overall concerns, according to defectors’ interviews that untrusted the government’s unity policy and lack of courage to receive integration, revealed that:

‘No dare! [I] always worried [about defection] because I was a soldier. [I] feared that I would not be kept for alive or I would be regarded as a prisoner of war (interviewed by Bunthorn Som and Khamboly Dy, 18 December 2013). ‘[When I] escaped the fighting to [Dangrek] mountain, Ta Mok (Grandfather Mok, who became a powerful leader in Anlong Veng between 1979 and 1998)

said that [you] escape for what [and] why don't you stay at home. ... [You can] tell them that you are ordinary people and [you] know nothing. That is, [you] will defect safely. ... But I do not dare to defect [to the government] (interviewed by Khamboly Dy, 25 June 2012).

In this case, 'measures were taken to build mutual trust or confidence before coming to a ceasefire agreement. ... A mixture of policy with military forces and soft power ... was worth a try. However, [the government] focused more on trust building in its role as a lawful government with all means and privileges to implement its [win-win] policy' (Sowath, 2012: 212). Therefore, the guarantees – for instance, amnesty, rank and position, and private property – that are discussed above are the most important to build trust between the KR and the RGC. These guarantees 'also created very strong confidence right up to the isolation and break up of internal forces in the [KR faction] (Sowath, 2012: 213).

In spite of finishing the war and instability is peacefully achieved, although the practices – the conditions of possibility – that enable total reconciliation have to reach another step at the grassroots level rather than depending only on the national level. This grassroots level is revealed – the practice of reconciliation in achieving forgiveness – in another possible ways to build or restore contentious relationships in a post-conflict community like Anlong Veng.

## **4. Forgiveness**

### **4.1 Apology**

The first of these favorable conditions views the making and hearing of apology. Apology is an expression of regret and remorse, and perpetrators feel sorrow for what they have done wrong. In a few cases most respondents expressed that if apologies are made and heard, the victim may lessen a feeling of anger and resentment. A NGO deputy director, who have closely worked with many former KR victims, offered a similar example:

Now if he (the perpetrator) says apology to me, I may feel better a little bit. ... [Because] it was the past story. There is no benefit if I am still thinking of it. He already said apology. ... [Even though] I still want to know the truth why he did like that [in the regime] (interviewed by author, 4 July 2016).

In a similarity, a female respondent victim recounted that the perpetrator's apology is the recognition of guilty, which can be part of minimizing her anger:

[We knew] he (perpetrator) had committed atrocities [in the regime], but he already apologized us. How will we think of him? And what will we do to him? If [we] want to kill him, [we] will receive only his death. If [we] want to take revenge him, [we] will receive only vengeance. Is there anything [beside killing and vengeance]? ... [But] I want to ask [him] that: "why did you kill my father? What kind of mistake caused you kill him?" ... I did not know whether what my father had done wrong that led he to bring my father for execution (interviewed by author, 22 June 2016).

While saying apologies is the act of expressing regret and remorse of the perpetrators, the victims seems to have a curious interest in seeking to understand the truth: why and how did these things happen to them, their family members, their loved ones, or their friends? Was there any specific reason that encouraged the perpetrators to involve in atrocities and inhuman acts?

By telling the truth is to turn to the discussion of the issue of acknowledgement and confession, which draws the issue of admitting one's wrongdoing or accepting guilt engaged in the general Cambodians' views.

## 4.2 Acknowledgement and Confession

Acknowledgement and confession 'are all related terms referring to perpetrators facing up to, and being honest about, acts they have committed in the past (McGrew, 2011: 67). It means that acknowledgement or confession is the acceptance of guilt by the perpetrator had harmed or hurt the affective party. To do so may reveal the perpetrator's wrongdoing as the way that most Cambodians are individually and publicly hesitant to deal with these costs. In Khmer society when children made a mistake, parents will tell them not to repeat but often do not tell them to admit the wrongdoing of their actions. The general people believed that admitting or acknowledging guilt leads them to encounter public embarrassment and 'loss of face' (*kar bak muk*) (Hinton, 2001: 27).

Clearly, the Cambodians value the importance of "face" (*muk mout*); losing face is thus equivalent to "loss of honor" (*kar batbong ketteyos*). To be lost honor, your dignity and reputation, it seems, are "being destroyed or stepped on" (*bam phlanh/choan chhli*). This issue the KR perpetrators probably choose expressions of regret rather than admitting particular wrongdoing.

One example, after the fall of the Pol Pot's regime more than thirty years ago, former KR perpetrators feel regretful for what they had committed offences, but remain avoidance of acknowledgement of past wrongdoing because of being afraid of revenge killing. In addition, while the ECCC trial is seen as Cambodians' ultimate hope 'to receive formal acknowledgment and recognition of the grave injustices and losses they have suffered' (Pham *et al*, 2009: 8), some former senior leaders and most responsible of the DK regime – for instance, Chief Ideologist Noun Chea and Head of State Khieu Samphan who are now standing at the trial – have denied their responsibility for the tragedy that caused the death of 1.7 million people under the DK regime between 1975 and 1979. There was only one exception that Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch, a former director of S-21 Prison, was willing to take responsibility for his actions. In his public court-hearing at the ECCC in the capital city of Phnom Penh, Duch said:

No single image can illustrate my remorse and suffering. I feel so much pain. I will never forget. I always say that a bad decision can lead in the blink of an eye to a lifetime of grief and remorse. I defer to the judgment of this tribunal for the crimes that I have committed. I will not blame my superiors. I will not blame my subordinates. I will not shirk my responsibilities. Although these crimes were committed under the authority of my superiors, they fall within the purview of own role at S-21 [security center]. On the ideological and

psychological levels, I am responsible. I carried out Party policy and I regret it (Cruvellier, 2014: 128).

This exceptional case is reflected that if perpetrators are willing to acknowledge the guilt and accept past mistakes for what they have done, victims may likely minimize the mentality of revenge.

Another step of restoring unhealthy or broken relationship is to rely on confession regarding as a sticking process of apology and acknowledgment. In citation of Etcheson's work (Etcheson, 2005: 218-219), McGrew briefly concluded, 'if perpetrators were willing to confess they would be accepted by their communities' (McGrew, 2011: 213). There is no doubt whether or not confessions made by the perpetrator would lessen the feeling of the victim's past suffering. Almost four decades in the aftermath of the KR regime, most of the victims 'want to understand how the violence unfolded, why the crimes were perpetrated, and to hear confessions from the perpetrators, rather than to simply see punishment meted out to the authors of the violence' (Etcheson, 2005: 219). One key informant described further:

How can I believe you (the perpetrator) if you have done wrong but refused to confess the wrongdoing? In this case, how can I forgive you? And how would reconciliation emerge if you denied your [responsibility]? I cannot accept your [unwillingness] and extremely hard to move on. I think confession is part of comforting the feeling of the victim's suffering. It would make victims to recognize their past things and encourage them to move forward the confrontation of experiences they have had in the past. Confession is thus an essential ingredient in building mutual understanding (interviewed by author, 4 July 2016).

As the above respondent expressed trust and accountability if perpetrators deny their will to confess wrongdoings, the mutual understanding will be unable to emerge – leading to the development of compassion and empathy, which is explored later discussion – and victims' ability to move from past suffering is likely to be achieved.

### 4.3 Compassion and Empathy

The development of compassion and empathy is very important to the process of reconciliation, particularly in the level of individual reconciliation. Both compassion and empathy, which are generally seen as the overlapping conditions, 'involve the process of being able to see the perspective of the "other" or to walk in someone else's shoes' (McGrew, 2011: 65). At about this point, the possibilities of compassion and developing empathy would vanish victims' feeling of "*kum*" (grudge) and a desire for revenge, and thereby open their hearts and minds to accept a new start to renew or make better of communication inside their communities with perpetrators.

In doing so, compassion towards those who had done grassroots violence of inhuman acts as well as savages, which is also important in Buddhism<sup>3</sup>, lights the beginning of an understanding through dialogue. When the dialogue is able to be sustained from

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<sup>3</sup> The principles of Buddhism included mercy (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*) are the basis for promoting peace and reconciliation. These appear on all human being (and those who have hurt), and are the path of non-violence (*akhoengsa*) as tolerance and forgiveness can be absorbed.

time to time and day to day, it also extend to promote empathy, which ‘comes with the victims’ willingness to listen to the reason for the hatred of those who caused their pains and with offenders’ understanding of the anger and bitterness of those who suffered’ (Huysse, 2003a: 21). One key respondent explained further,

Empathy is a stage that we understand and put ourselves in another one’s stance. ... As example, if the victim can move another stage, he or she is able to understand: “if I were a perpetrator at that time [and] if I refused to do, [I and] my family members would be executed. So what should I do?” [For this reason], victims can perceive a connection of ruling strictly under the KR regime. Therefore, if the victim understands a root of causes, he or she can put himself or herself in the issue of the perpetrator, [or] in the situation of the perpetrator. ... [For the perpetrator], “if I were a victim who lost his or her family members, of course I also hold angry [against the perpetrator]”. Perpetrators thus feel sorry and say apology. ... [Overall,] I think [individual] reconciliation may be likely occurred unless both victims and perpetrators have empathy, they begin to understand each other. Hence, it could make them to walk together in the next day and heals their broken relationships (interviewed by author, 4 July 2016).

As clarified above, developing empathy turns the divides between victims and perpetrators to healthy relationships that they would be free from the traumatic memories, and begin a start to communicate each other. The next discussion turns to look at forgetting in the context of reconciliation processes.

#### **4.4 Forgetting**

While the tendency to forget what happened after genocide or mass violence displays against all the above processes in this second section (apology, acknowledgment and confession, compassion and empathy), the matter of “forgetting” also contradicts an effort to promote awareness as well as remembrance of the past in Cambodia. Many local NGOs<sup>4</sup> – for instance, Youth For Peace (YFP), Kdei Karuna (KdK), Women PeaceMakers (WPM), and Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) which frankly told and privileged me individual discussions about unfinished business in Cambodia to achieve genuine reconciliation after the fall of the KR regime since 1979 – are playing an important role in implementing their projects to unveil the past, encouraging young and old people to engage in discussion, and/or bringing victims and perpetrators into dialogue sessions within communities.

At the same time forgetting – imposing on amnesia as well as amnesty – is another reconciliation process, which has drawn attention to many researches on peacemaking and transitional justice. In a study case of Zimbabwe, as Huysse cited Robert Mugabe, first post-colonial leader after an end to white Rhodesian rule: ‘if yesterday I found you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national

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<sup>4</sup> For references to understand the affairs of restorative justice in promoting collective memory and reconciliation in the community level through local NGO’s projects, please visit some selected webpages; Youth For Peace (YFP): <http://www.yfpcambodia.org>; Kdei Karuna (KdK) or in English “compassionate action to heal”: <http://www.kdei-karuna.org>; Women PeaceMakers (WPM): <https://womenpeacemakers.wordpress.com>; Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam): <http://www.d.dccam.org>

interest, loyalty, rights and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that blinds you to me and me to you. The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten' (Huyse, 2003b: 34). In Burundi, Uvin also noted: 'most people seem to prefer to forget, to be silent, to draw a veil over the past ...' (Uvin, 2009: 168).

In the context of Cambodia, McGrew referenced Etcheson's three-Cambodian-commune study by giving a brief understanding to interpersonal relationships between KR victims and perpetrators: "collective voluntary amnesia" may be the best way for villagers to be able to live side-by-side and start to rebuild broken relationships' (Etcheson, 2005: 203-220 cited in McGrew, 2011: 225). Indeed, Ciorciari and Sok-Kheang also invoked that forgetting could be a possible way to shield from the re-arrival of war and revenge killings: they quoted a Cambodian interviewee: "united, we survive; divided, we die" and "blood needs to be washed by water, if blood is washed by blood, it will remain tainted" (Ciorciari and Sok-Kheang, 2009: 336).

Most research participants who interviewed for this study they also privileged forgetting as a reconciliation process. This aspiration to forget past wounds referred straight at lower-level perpetrators on the grassroots level, upon whom they were able to restore broken relationships. Certainly they were aware of ignorance or orders from high-level administration that the lower-level perpetrators confronted dilemma circumstances in that time. Instead of forgetting the past wrongs of the lower-level perpetrators, they reversely turned to blame the leadership of the DK regime referring to senior leaders and demanded to put them on trial to bring justice for the death of their family members or loved ones. In addition, they also desired to understand the root of mass violence what happened to them and whether: why and how it happened?

The next and last discussion of this paper draws a practices of Buddhism tied up with the process of reconciliation in Cambodians' belief as a self-healing way to comfort and alleviate emotional suffering of the past events from the brutal regime.

## **5. Buddhism or Belief Perspective as Self-Healing**

A significant of the Buddhist practice is also vital to reconciliation process in Anlong Veng as the KR victims (and direct perpetrators) come close to the faith in a way of comforting and lessening their emotional sufferings from the past. Buddhist practitioners (especially elders starting from the age more than 50 years up) perceive the law of *karma*: the people have begun to be aware of loving kindness or good deeds, and determine to make "merit" (*bon*) in order to advance a good life in the next birth – the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. This is the rule of cause and effect (or action and result) and the people are informed to carry responsibility for their actions. Two major concepts of Buddhism taught indeed old and young followers: (1) do good receive good, do bad receive bad and (2) revenge should be melted without taking revenge each other.

Nowadays former KR perpetrators are being let to pay back bad deeds with the law of *karma* and some chose to become already Buddhist laymen (*achar*) to launder their own crimes, while another some engage in Buddhist ceremonies as an attempt to express the recognition of past mistakes and pay respect to victims and spirits of the

hundreds of thousands of innocent dead (including their parents and siblings as well). A Buddhist monk respondent in his orange robe sat in front of a cement-built Buddha statue in a compound of pagoda (*wat*) remarked the religion by giving an example:

[If] an individual hit [a person] and he or she was unable to hit back by that time, but in the mind of his or her idea thought that “I will hit you back in one day”. When there is no law of nature [in helping to] control him or her [anger], he or she will follow to harass and interfere [that individual] until the end of his or her life. Grudge-holding, suffering, and harassment between each other will hence take turns without endless. But if he or she is controlled by the law of nature or rule of religion, he or she will be able to think that “relinquishing [vengeance] to forgive another one is also part of relinquishing to gain self-happiness” (interviewed by author, 24 June 2016).

Through the rule of religion, this above monk respondent manifested relinquishment and forgiveness are the fundamental to reconciliation. Without these concepts, direct victims still live in traumatic events and a cycle of vengeance is a hardship of ending contentious relationships.

## **6. Conclusion**

Surely achieving reconciliation in Anlong Veng was an initiative of the Prime Minister Hun Sen’s win-win policy after UN through the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement failed to bring the final peace and ceasefire. In that time the implementation of the policy became a process of attracting and convincing the remaining KR guerrillas to abandon their faction and return to civilian life. By granting political concessions to defectors, the Hun Sen government reached its attempt to receive the complete collapse of the KR movement as a way of allowing peaceful coexistence – no war and bloodshed – in the country. This meant that the success of finishing the last breath of the KR movement in Anlong Veng intervened by the government’s policy pulled off the curtain of the long-time war and generated national unity in Cambodia.

In this case I am not opposite about reconciliation through the RGC’s win-win policy, and I am not optimistic about the privilege of prioritizing only the policy in achieving total reconciliation. While reconciliation is also a personal thing, I thus believe that building or restoring broken relationships between victims and former KR members (perpetrators and bystanders) is another step to go beyond reconciliation that links with a political framework of negotiations. Hence, the possible conditions of advancing forgiveness and Buddhist perspective are Cambodian ways of healing past wounds in the aftermath of the KR regime and civil war. These are unfinished affairs of achieving peaceful coexistence in Anlong Veng.

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**Contact email:** [mamsovann85@gmail.com](mailto:mamsovann85@gmail.com)