



CHANGING THE STORY

LEARNING FROM THE PAST WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE, EDUCATION,
AND MEMORY AFTER GENOCIDE

PHNOMH PENH, CAMBODIA
15-17 MARCH 2019

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

- Intergenerational dialogue is essential in post-conflict countries to engage young people and share stories and experiences. Although young people may not have directly experienced the conflict, they will continue to be affected by the legacies of violence and need to be able to have open conversations with older generations. The arts can play an important role in facilitating this intergenerational dialogue.
- With the above in mind, child- and youth-friendly ways of educating about past conflict need to be developed. Educators need to understand why young people may find the topic difficult to engage with and develop accessible ways of discussing the conflict. This can be constrained by social norms and policies within countries, for example teachers being prohibited from discussing politics in a classroom. It can be aided by the use of (participatory) arts methods which engage young people in developing their own narratives through artistic avenues, and by employing technologies that young people use on a day-to-day basis, such as developing mobile apps.
- In post-conflict contexts, art in its various forms creates space for sharing stories, discussions, recognition of individual and collective experiences and the admission and facing of one's own past experiences in a conflict. It allows people to express themselves and their experiences when they have not been able to in the past, either directly through the use of art, or with art as the springboard for deeper conversation and sharing of experiences.
- It is imperative to always consider how post-conflict education – whether formal or non-formal – is being delivered to/with young people, and how they are engaging in this: Are young people taking a critical outlook or taking comments at face value? Is the medium used promoting interest in young people or putting them off? Are young people being presented with different perspectives or just one “truth”? Is the education encouraging understanding or uncertainty? Is the education developing knowledge of the specific conflict or thought and conversation about conflict, peace and society more generally?
- It is important to explore and seek to understand how different parts of a society's heritage are targeted in conflict, ranging from the loss of traditional cultural practice to damage to the natural environment, and how this continues to impact different cultures, cultural identities and inter-generational relationships post-conflict.
- It is important to take a holistic approach to heritage, inter-generational dialogue and education that also understands the economic pressures faced by young people in post-conflict settings. More could be done to explore links between the heritage sector and youth-focused social entrepreneurship.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE WORKSHOP?



From 15th-17th March 2019, 90 people from 16 countries around the world came together in Phnomh Penh, Cambodia for a three-day international workshop “Learning from the past with and for young people: Intergenerational dialogue, education, and memory after genocide”. The event took place just two months after Cambodia marked the 40th anniversary of the fall of the Khmer Rouge, and speakers at the workshop addressed practices surrounding the country’s continued work to redress the violence in its past through, for example, prosecuting senior Khmer Rouge members, commemorative practices, developing new curricula to discuss the genocide and arts initiatives engaging and representing the “victims” or “survivors” of the regime. Related topics and activities taking place internationally were also addressed. Attendees included researchers, artists and civil society practitioners. The workshop drew on the work of Changing the Story; bringing together actors from post-conflict contexts to share experiences and insights across research and practice, develop avenues to enhance impact and provide opportunities for the creation of future international collaborations and partnerships. The workshop especially focused on supporting Early Career Researchers from across the Global South.

DAY 1

The workshop began with opening comments by the Director of the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crime in Cambodia, which is seeking ways to engage young people in the history of Cambodia through their families and schools, and the British Ambassador to Cambodia, who highlighted the importance the UK puts on dealing with the legacy of genocide. In the first panel session, "Learning from the past to better the present: Creative practices from Cambodian Civil Society with and for young people", panelists discussed their ongoing work with young people in the country. A key theme across these presentations was the importance of inter-generational dialogue in post-genocide Cambodia. The Audio-Visual research centre Bophana, for example, run a number of programmes that encourage such dialogue, including their Act of Memory project. Here, the younger generation discuss the genocide with their parents and grandparents, both to learn about their experiences, but also as a way of recoding the memories of those who lived through the Khmer Rouge regime. One of Bophana's key projects is their mobile app on Khmer Rouge history – free and accessible for all – and a way of harnessing young people's use of technology to promote their understanding of the conflict. It encourages young people to compare what they have learnt with what happened to their parents. The panel highlighted how sometimes parental narratives of life under the Khmer Rouge can be prohibitive rather than encouraging and that healthy dialogues about the conflict need to be promoted, with a starting point of talking to survivors.

A concern for speakers and participants throughout the conference was that young people struggle to process and understand the experiences of older generations who lived through the Khmer Rouge regime; this panel highlighted that the more young people hear, the more they believe the experiences of those who lived through the regime. The use of arts to transmit and depict stories and experiences plays a crucial role in intergenerational dialogue; Cambodian Living Arts, for example, run a youth-designed reparation project that responds to the stories of survivors using art, similarly Bophana has hosted memory workshops, bringing together artists who grew up under the Khmer Rouge and young people born after the regime. Bophana and other organisations also regularly use film to encourage discussion of personal histories within a community, through mobile screening programmes in collaboration with the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), the tribunal tasked with dealing with the legacy of the Khmer Rouge. These practices, and the use of art within them, allow spaces for sharing, discussion, recognition and admission of one's own experiences, whatever they may be. This is especially important given that issues are not fully addressed through formal reparations; while widespread experiences of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge have been recognized as a specific harm for formal reparation, experiences of sexual violence have not and so often remain unrecognised and unaddressed in formal reparation practices.

The afternoon of Day 1 was spent exploring the Changing the Story Phase 1 projects, in Cambodia, South Africa, Colombia, Kosovo and Rwanda, more information on which can be [found here](#). The final session focused in again on Cambodia, reflecting on genocide education in the country. Here it was discussed that, although the main motivation of history teachers was to avoid conflict happening in the country again, the teaching of “politics” is still avoided in classrooms. Teachers are told not to engage in politics, and tend to simply follow the government narrative. Only hearing this single perspective in the classroom can make students unsure, or suspicious, of the story they are being told and the conflict can remain somewhat incomprehensible. The use of video, audio and photographs can improve students’ understanding of the country’s past, but a failure to address political issues makes it difficult for young people to understand the roots of the conflict. The Changing the Story project in Cambodia highlights the advantage of using testimonials and heritage sites for (non-formal) education about the genocide for young people. Combining this with participatory arts activities, such as participatory filmmaking, puts learners in control of their own knowledge production. The Changing the Story project purposefully presented young people with multiple perspectives on the conflict, including stories from former Khmer Rouge members and survivors of the regime. Findings suggest that this approach can promote more nuanced ways of thinking about history amongst the younger generation. However difficulties can arise in deciding how to integrate the stories of “perpetrators” into programmes responsibly, and what limits and safeguards should be applied, especially if young people are not critically engaging with the stories that they hear and instead take them at face value.

DAY 2

After an evening reception at the British Ambassador’s residence, Day 2 kicked off with a panel on “Memory and Education: Cambodian Perspectives”. Here a narrative that had cropped up throughout day one was challenged, namely that young people didn’t believe, or weren’t engaged in, Cambodia’s history. It was suggested, instead, that many young people found the past highly difficult to face, and that there is therefore a need to develop child and youth-friendly ways of providing education on the Khmer Rouge history. “Post-memory” (Marianne Hirsch) was considered as being centrally important to the younger generations in Cambodia. Taken from Holocaust Memory Studies, the term “Post-memory” is used to describe the way that the generation after those who witness violence continues to be affected by the narratives of conflict and violence. This was seen to be a useful way into thinking about how young people can be engaged more effectively in a past that they know very little about but that still fundamentally shapes their experience of Cambodia today.

The second session of Day 2 explored transitional justice with, and for, young people in different settings: Cambodia, Colombia and the UK. In Cambodia, the focus zoomed into the experiences of the Cham group in the country. The genocide resulted in the destruction of Cham cultural heritage. Mosques were destroyed, documents were burned and intellectuals who were familiar with the Cham's heritage were killed. This has impacted intergenerational connections, as young people in the Cham community have limited knowledge of their history (both before and during the Khmer Rouge regime) and tradition, which impacts their sense of identity. Drawing on advocacy work in conjunction with museum staff in Colombia, the potential for young people to engage difficult histories through vernacular and 'everyday' forms of memory was highlighted. This included, for example, the collection of objects and possessions of family members as they signaled or could stand for experiences of conflict. In the UK, connections were made with recent educational practices that have been adopted during the commemoration of the First World War, with its emphasis on peace-building. Ironically, it was found that a heavy focus in the curriculum remained on warfare itself, and almost exclusively in Europe. There has been little discussion of conflicts in other countries or on the impact of colonialism. A large focus of First World War education during the Centenary has been on developing contextual understanding, providing facts about the war and illustrating the use of propaganda. Largely, there was little emphasis on the futility of war, which begs the question whether the centenary, to whatever limited extent, has tended towards the normalization of conflict - especially as the military itself has often been involved in school education on the topic during this period.

The final session of Day 2 turned to address questions concerning how to build effective and equitable partnerships between researchers and practitioners in the context of Global North and Global South collaborations. Three Cambodian panelists offered insights into their experiences working with international partners, especially in relation to research involving the ECCC and Cambodian CSOs, alongside recommendations for the amplification of the voices of researchers in the Global South. Practical and political challenges were noted that might hinder equitable partnerships, including issues of language, research capacity, funding, political risks and job security. The potentially gendered dynamics of these collaborations that tend to remain ignored were also highlighted; in Cambodia, women in research face many problems, including access to higher education in the first instance, and gendered societal expectations when in the field conducting research. The dangers of 'extractive' collaborations were further identified, as Global South researchers might be included in data collection but not subsequent data analysis. Recommendations to mitigate these risks included greater commitment to co-productive approaches to the design of research projects, a commitment to equal ownership of research outputs, and a more long-term approach to building research capacity in Global South contexts.

DAY 3

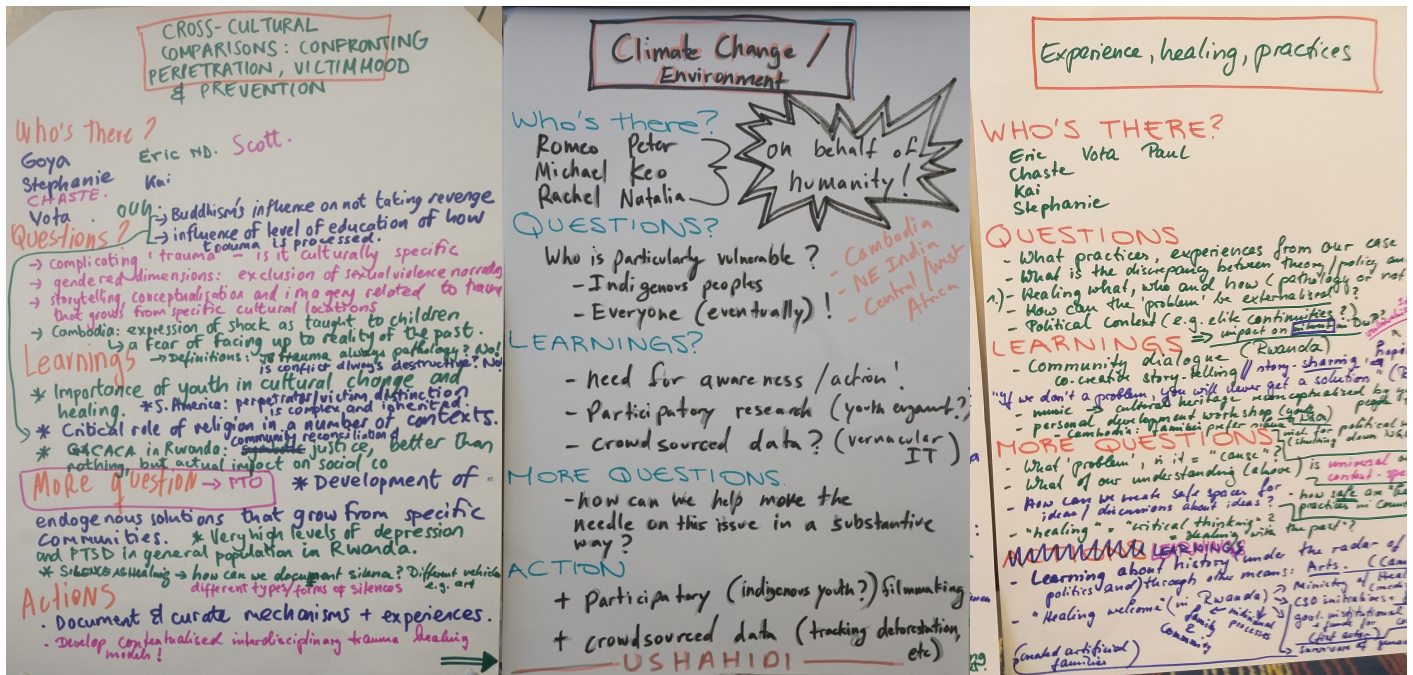
The third and final day of the conference began with a visit to the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes. Tuol Sleng, once a secondary school in central Phnom Penh, became the S-21 interrogation and detention centre under the Khmer Rouge. S-21 was the central hub of a prison system that ran throughout the country, where those deemed enemies of the regime and their families, deemed guilty by association, were detained, tortured into giving false statements admitting their guilt, and killed. The museum has preserved the buildings at Tuol Sleng, allowing visitors to see the conditions that detainees were kept in. It displays some of the extensive records that the prison kept of inmates, including photographs, and has preserved evidence of the violence that occurred during the Khmer Rouge regime. It is a difficult place to visit and starkly highlighted the realities that had been discussed over the last two days.

The afternoon of the final day took a different format to that of previous days, and the workshop became an “Un-conference”. Un-conferences have no pre-planned agenda and instead participants propose and convene sessions on subjects of their choosing. This allows participants to take control of the conference, facilitates peer-to-peer learning and collaboration and encourages a diverse range of topics to be included. At the workshop, 10 sessions were held encompassing the following topics:

- Memory and Pedagogy
- Economics, Heritage and Entrepreneurialism
- Community healing through mobile exhibitions
- Climate change, Heritage and the Environment
- Cross-cultural comparisons (perpetration, victimhood and prevention)
- The role of universities in peacebuilding
- Methodological problems of inter-country comparisons
- Experience-healing-practice
- The context of disability
- Using dance to create a communal story.

OUR PROGRAMME

	SESSION GROUP 1	SESSION GROUP 2
TABLE 1	Bringing groups together in a post-conflict context through income generation project	The role of universities in peace-building and serving society
TABLE 2	Pedagogy of memory	Methodological problems of inter-country comparisons and analogies
TABLE 3	Community healing through mobile exhibitions	Experience-healing-practice
TABLE 4	Climate change & environment	THINKING CIRCLE ON FOCUSING ON DISABILITY IN OUR PROJECTS
FREE SPACE	CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS (CONFRONTING PERPETRATION - VICTIMHOOD AND PREVENTION)	USING DANCE TO CREATE A COMMUNAL STORY (eg of our experience at the museum)



FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

The workshop as a whole received positive feedback from participants, who found it a respectful and open avenue for sharing experiences, promoting collaboration and providing inspiration for future work. The content of the workshop was positively received, with a focus on learning in Cambodia and further afield, a high level of intellectual engagement and a good mix of pragmatism and activism. Importantly, given the focus of the workshop, ECRs found it empowering to learn from such a wide range of case studies. Participants felt that the workshop provided excellent networking opportunities with people from across the world and with a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds, yet common interests. Indeed, participants highlighted the diversity of participants and the different cultures represented as one of the key positives of the workshop. Participants did, however, highlight the need for more indigenous voices to be represented in workshops. They would have also liked the opportunity to present, or at least share their own projects in more detail. Participants called for deeper discussions and reflections on the topics discussed, and an exploration of theory for doing this. There have been calls for follow ups from the conference, for example with webinars, which the Changing the Story team is currently looking to develop.