Post traumatic survival

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A study of Cambodian resilience

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Abstract

Among refugee survivors of war, torture and human rights abuses, the waiting lists for rehabilitation increase daily. How can war-refugees best be assisted? The experience of earlier refugee groups has remained a largely untapped resource in this work. This study sets out to discover what successful survivors of the Khmer Rouge have found instrumental for their survival and mental health. The aim is to make a contribution to the understanding of resilience, here understood as the ability to recover from misfortune or change, and to the psychosocial rehabilitation of survivors of war crimes and other traumatic events.

The research project follows a comparative case-study design based on data from three samples of resilient Cambodians, in all 30 persons selected on the basis of a seven criteria scale. A multi-strategy approach generates theory from participants' biographical narratives and explanations of their survival, using NVivo software for microanalysis, an exegesis or explication of frequently-used Khmer words, and an abductive approach involving participant validation of collective narratives reinterpreted from the data. Finally, a group of international experts in transcultural mental health care are interviewed to triangulate the findings and prepare presentations for other health workers.

The findings suggest that the resilience of the Cambodians interviewed builds on self-reliance, a strong work ethic and social integration, all founded in a pervasive worldview. For these successful survivors, religion and culture have provided a secure 'knowledge', both of how to act and of how to understand the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime. These cognitive and normative devices used by individuals in their subjective ordering of experience suggest the possibility that parallel resources may be available for other post-trauma survivors as well. Psychosocial guidelines for accessing patients' cultural backgrounds are available, but health workers often fail to access the cultural explanatory models used by survivors in building personal and group resilience. Proposals from the project are incorporated in a cultural resilience interview scheme for the use of health and social workers wishing to do resilience work with war survivors.

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Acknowledgements:

Acronyms and abbreviations

CPP   Cambodian people's party

DSM-IV   The *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

ECCC   Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia (Khmer Rouge tribunal)

FUNCINPEC   Royalist party

PTG   Posttraumatic growth

PTSD   Posttraumatic stress disorder

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees

UNTAC   United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

1. Studying Cambodian resilience

Introduction

Some who survive traumatic events recover and thrive. Others do not.

Cambodian refugees in Norway constitute arguably the refugee group with the most severe traumatic experience to have been resettled in Scandinavia. In the 1980s, a few years after the demise of the catastrophic Pol Pot regime, two hundred Cambodian refugees from camps on the Thai border were resettled in four towns in Norway. In the selection process at the time, the Norwegian immigration authorities conscientiously and humanely chose a number of especially vulnerable families. They chose, in other words, the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. Today, 25 years later, most of them have achieved a kind of stability. Marriages take place, children are born, and the welfare state protects and defends. Many of the surviving parental generation, who balanced on the edge of human experience for a decade or more from the early 1970s, seem to have found a kind of peace (Overland & Yenn, 2007:129). The first members of the Cambodian war cohort in Norway – those who came as refugees from the camps along the Thai border, their children and grandchildren – were all settled in the same area in the 1980s, and almost all have remained there. In this population many appear, contrary to expectations, to have regained the ability to lead normal lives.

> One man had a wife and seven children. Like most families, they were separated by the Khmer Rouge and sent to different camps. He managed to escape; his wife and children were executed. Today he has a new family of well-integrated and successful adult children, is a valued colleague in a big concern and is respected and admired by both Cambodians and Norwegians.

> One woman was separated from her family during the Khmer Rouge expulsion from Phnom Penh. Along the road she became separated from the youngest child and lost him in the chaos. Almost 25 years later, she learned that the child had been found by another family who had raised him as their own. Their first meeting was a joyous affair, a meeting between the son and his own family, the

mother and a son from her new family.

One man was a boy of 11 when the revolution came. His father was executed, his brother died of hunger and his little sister was sent to find water and never returned. He was taken away to be executed, but was not executed. Because of the bombings and disruption, he had attended primary school only sporadically for a year or two before Pol Pot. After liberation he went back to school and within a year became a teacher, at the age of 17. He now plays a key role in an international NGO in Cambodia.

How is it that people with experiences like these can have recovered and appear to thrive?

In the late 1990s, this population was the focus for my Master's dissertation in sociology. In a comparative study, matched samples of Cambodian holocaust survivors in Norway and in Cambodia were studied. In spite of their apparent wellbeing and much higher level of material welfare, the group living in Norway showed higher rates of psychosocial problems than the group in Cambodia.

Informants in Cambodia had returned to the remnants of their villages in 1979 and done what they could to reinstate their traditional cultural practices, including arranging frequent rituals for the dead (field notes, 1997/98). Informants in Norway still held to some traditional values, but seemed somewhat unsure of them. These Norwegian Cambodians were motivated to adapt to Norwegian culture, especially for their children's sake. Somewhat surprisingly, the reinstatement in the 1990s of several traditional cultural and religious practices among the refugee group seemed to be a factor in improving their overall life situation and strengthening their perceived group identity. The more active they were in regard to culture and religion, the better they seemed to thrive. It appeared that their culture, practices and beliefs had helped them to recover, but it was far from clear how or why this had worked (Overland & Yenn, 2006/2007).

A larger research project with a multi-strategy methodology was required if this phenomenon, the apparent recovery and normalisation of both groups of Cambodian war survivors, was to be satisfactorily explained. One of the first requirements was to

find a way to step back from earlier observations and address the research as much as possible with previous substantive knowledge and preconceptions bracketed. The purpose of the present study was to find out what some apparently resilient Cambodian survivors had found meaningful for their own recovery, regardless of present context. In addition to the refugee group, a sample of persons was included who had returned to their home places in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge period, and had stayed there. If something could be learnt about the nature of their demonstrated resilience – their ability to recover from misfortune and change – from the experiences of earlier survivors, it might be useful for health workers seeking to enhance the resilience of others.

Ideally such a case study would have compared resilient with non-resilient samples, but this was not possible, because the relatively small size and transparency of the population in Norway raised ethical issues. Scholarly comparisons of samples of resilient and non-resilient survivors are indeed scarce in mental health studies, which tend to focus on the traumatised.[1] Yet non-resilient survivors form the implicit background for this study, as for other studies of resilience. In order, therefore, to better understand the resilient, the findings are contrasted to a comparative background composed of several well-known trauma studies of the same cohort: Marshall, Schell, Elliot, Berthold, & Chun, 2005; Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 2002; and Mollica, Donelan, Tor, Lavelle, Elias, Frankel, & Blendom, 1993. When profiled against the backdrop of the psychiatric disorders and enduring difficulties associated with trauma, findings from the resilient survivors may contribute both new knowledge and new interpretations to the multi-faceted understanding of the nature of resilience, and suggest avenues for further research.

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1 A notable exception is Wingo, Fani, Bradley & Ressler (2010).

1.1. Research questions

The Cambodians interviewed for this dissertation survived the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime, yet appear to be doing 'remarkably well' (Antonovsky, 1987:64). How did they do it? What did they have – within them or around them – that helped them to cope and how did it work?

The aim of this dissertation is to understand and explain how they survived, recovered, and appeared to achieve normality after the Khmer Rouge by gathering and processing new knowledge about resilience, defined as an ability to recover from misfortune and change. This is a theoretical intention. The dissertation also has a practical, mental health aim: to use the knowledge obtained to improve the contact between health workers and war trauma survivors. These intentions will be carried out by attempting to answer the following questions:

Main research question

> What have resilient Cambodian survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime?

Sub-questions that instrumentalise the research question

1. What accounts do informants give of their own survival and normalisation?
2. What qualities or resources did informants have, and how did they work?
3. What assistance did they receive that made a difference for them?
4. How can this information be systematised and made available for health professionals?

1.2. Background and motivation: relevance for policy and practice

Some progress has been made within the Norwegian public health sector in raising competency about trauma and its treatment.[2] However, unlike today's refugees, the first Cambodians received no particular attention from the health services when they arrived in the 1980s. Refugee health care was in its infancy in Norway, which had only a brief history of receiving forced migrants. Even today, the fate of traumatised refugees in Norway still remains far from rosy, according to the grim picture painted in a recent state-funded report:

> Some refugees suffer from trauma and stress reactions after experiences of persecution and flight, including torture and human rights abuses. In addition, life in exile, often accompanied by exclusion and discrimination, exacts a toll. The frequency of mental problems is more than twice as high among minorities in Norway as in the majority population. In addition to trauma, depression and anxiety, many refugees have to cope with unemployment, poverty, loneliness and poor living conditions (HUBRO, 2007 author's translation).

Varvin, one of the authors of the report, notes that the Norwegian health services are still a long way from being able to meet the needs of refugees (*Dagsavisen*, 9 February 2007).

While working as a consultant at the Psychosocial Team for Refugees in Southern Norway, I learned with my colleagues that rehabilitating traumatised war refugees was experienced as a challenge by the health services. To rehabilitate, from the Latin *habilis*, means to give back an ability: to 'restore to privileges, reputation, or proper condition; restore to effectiveness or normal life by training' *(Concise Oxford Dictionary,* 1989). The number of unaccomplished rehabilitations in the region seemed to increase daily. Local health workers met what they experienced as a challenge with courage and creativity, but were frequently at a loss and referred the traumatised to specialists − who were also frequently at a loss. In their handbook for psychiatric and

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2 Participation in a trauma education programme was required of all employees in the mental health department at Sorlandet Hospital Trust in 2008/2009.

psychosocial work with refugees, Dahl, Sveaass and Varvin point out: 'That which seems alien and unfamiliar can create both insecurity and interest' (2006:5, author's translation).

A pilot study of refugee patients in emergency psychiatric wards (Overland, 2004) reveals central dilemmas experienced by personnel and patients in three areas: communication (language), information and attitudes. The three dilemmas reflect and illuminate the contemporary situation for these minorities both inside and outside of the hospital: without language (few interpreters) and information (no registration of refugee-specific factors), there can be little understanding (positive attitudes). These lacks, the study concludes, may cloud health workers' stated ambitions of providing equal care to all patients (Overland, 2004).

In a review of recent research on refugees and the Norwegian mental health services, Guribye and Sam (2008) note a lack of systematic routines for ensuring good communication. The need for professional interpreters can be overlooked, and health workers may interpret the communication problems that arise as insurmountable cultural barriers. A lack of research is reported on how refugees relate to their own problems outside of the official mental health services (Guribye & Sam, 2008). In another study, Guribye (2009) notes a tendency to regard all refugees as similar, without taking into account their different cultural and personal experiences, something which could influence both diagnosis and treatment. These observations indicate some of the challenges met by refugees in need of mental health follow-up, to be further discussed in the present research.

And yet, despite their apparently hopeless situation, many war refugees appear to have found a good life. Why do some survive and thrive, while others do not? How should refugee survivors be received? How may those with grave traumatic experience best be assisted towards normalisation? The project seeks answers to these questions by means of a line of questioning that is salutogenic (health-promoting) as opposed to pathogenic, to use the terminology developed by Antonovsky (1987). Answers to the salutogenic question – not, 'why are people sick?' but 'why are they healthy?' – and clues for health-promoting care of future war refugees were sought from those who

might have insights based on personal experience: the resilient survivors themselves. There is, in general, limited coverage of ethnic minorities' own perspectives in the area of psychological intervention (Singla, 2001).The experience of earlier refugee groups has remained a largely untapped resource in this work.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

This introductory chapter continues with a disposition of the chapters and concludes with a brief philosophy of science reflection.

Chapter 2 presents methods and materials. It opens with a description of the analytical category for inclusion in the study, together with selection and recruitment procedures, followed by the rationale for the design and methods. To encourage people to speak their minds, a grounded theory approach was chosen. In section 2.3, the relationship of grounded theory to existing theory in this project is described. In the next sections, an account is given of how the project was carried out: which methods were used and which ones were discarded, and what problems and challenges arose. The main challenges were related to interviewing trauma survivors, validating language in cross-cultural research and avoiding normativity. From the narratives and other data, theories were systematically developed, using elements of grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), an exegetical explication of words commonly used by the interviewees, and analytical methods from the critical realist school (Layder 1998; Danermark 2002). Several forms of triangulation were used to verify the accuracy of the findings.

In chapter 3, the central terms *trauma* and *resilience* are defined at length, dipping here into the psychological reference literature. For trauma, the standard diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), its causes and symptoms are discussed, and relevant trauma literature and research are presented. Trauma psychologists, from the Holocaust to late modern times, provide first-hand insights: some from their own experiences of the Shoa (Frankl 1971; Levi, 1987; Bettelheim 1960, 1979), others

from their extensive professional experience of working with war refugees (Mollica, 2006; Summerfield, 2002; DeVries, 1996). In section 3.1.3, trauma research specifically related to the Cambodian war cohort is proposed as a comparative background for the resilience findings.

For resilience, relevant research and theories are presented.

Chapter 4 provides a more detailed account of the background context for the cohort from which the samples were drawn. The common historical background of Cambodians of the war generation and the changing contexts through which they have passed are explored in a contextual ethics perspective. The account covers the context of migration, with all the uncertainties this entails, and the different contexts where the chosen samples live today. Section 4.2 describes features of the war cohort from which the informants were recruited. The last section focuses on Khmer Buddhism and its contextual significance for the interviewees. Present-day conditions for the survival of Khmer Buddhism are discussed: was the religion eradicated by the Khmer Rouge? Did it fade away under the influence of migration and secularism? Or does it live on in some way?

Chapter 5 is primarily theoretical, presenting the theoretical and conceptual net chosen for the work of fishing survival strategies from Cambodia's troubled waters. Despite the grounded design, certain bodies of social theory have contributed to the interpretation. Theories about *meaning* and *meaninglessness* are presented, as addressed by several social scientists, including Weber, Berger, Giddens and Durkheim. In spite of falling to both sides of the structure-agent dichotomy, these thinkers continue to be a source of inspiration to new generations of sociologists, completing and challenging each other. In addition to their work on the meaning and construction of reality, both Weber and Berger have written about the differential religious treatment of *theodicy*. A theodicy, a way of understanding and dealing with the problem of evil, was expected to have some significance for survivors. Buddhist studies and doctrines are presented, since the interviewees' religious worldview increasingly emerged as a significant aspect in their explanations of surviving.

In Chapter 6 the microanalysis of the biographical data is undertaken. The

interviewees' narratives are subjected to and coded according to grounded theory principles in NVivo (Version 7). Then the findings are sorted and structured historically. Moving chronologically, the self-reported actions of the interviewees are listed at each historical turning point, together with how they explained their actions. Choices, strategies, resources and qualities referred to in informants' accounts of their survival and recovery are registered. From the forced march out of the cities to the final normalisation – finding stability and security either in their Cambodian village or in a suburb in Norway – the findings address the first three instrumental sub-questions of the project. This chapter constitutes the heart of the thesis from which subsequent interpretation derives.

Chapter 7 includes additional forms of data-gathering and collates the intermediate findings. It opens with a case study of a non-member of the analytical category. As certain key words used by the interviewees gradually assumed unexpected prominence in the research process, an exegetical treatment of key words and sayings used by informants is presented. An intermediate summary of findings based on the microanalysis of the interviews is presented. In a round of interviews, experts in transcultural psychiatry are asked to comment on these findings.

The results should provide categories and hypotheses sufficiently clear to be useable in future research. In Chapter 8 the essence of the discoveries is analysed. The gist of the findings is first retold / recontextualised in a series of collective reinterpretations in new conceptual frameworks. These recontextualisations, which continue the intermediate narrative embarked upon in the preceding chapter, are called here 'abductive reinterpretations'. The reason for using such an analytical approach is that it recontextualises and retells the findings in terms of different theoretical frameworks, revealing new aspects. In 8.2, the first abductive reinterpretation is back-translated and returned to a sample of interviewees for validation and triangulation of the interpretation. Then the three reinterpretations are together subjected to a retroductive process, searching for their common essence. The argumentation of the thesis is then summed up using diagrams relating specific claims to findings of the research, followed by a rhetorical dialogue with some conceivable rebuttals.

What was necessary for their resilience resources to function successfully after the worst traumatic experiences imaginable? Exactly how did their behaviours and explanatory models help the interviewees in their recovery and normalisation, and how did these function?

Chapter 9 illuminates the pathways from the resources found to the resilient behaviour and coping strategies chosen by the interviewees, relating the discoveries to the project's theoretical base. The first section sums up the results and then grounds them in the theoretical point of departure. Resource trajectories are indicated, from the worldview with its codes of moral action, to the forms of behaviour and cognition that were significant for the interviewees – an expressed attention to family and social cohesion and their expressed sense of agency and self-reliance.

In the second section, the implications of the findings for current trauma theory and treatment of post-conflict survivors are examined. The relationship of the results to the comparative background is addressed. The possibility of accessing the cultural and religious resources available to recently arrived refugees is discussed. The final section offers an ethical reflection in a human rights perspective.

In the concluding chapter, 'Legacy of survival', the first section returns to the research questions and suggests how the findings may be used by health and social personnel in their work with new groups of war refugees. The internal trustworthiness of the results developed from the research findings is discussed and implications for further research suggested. The dissertation concludes with suggestions for health and social personnel which may be used in working with new groups of war-refugees (10.2). These proposals are embodied in a cultural resilience interview based on the findings.

1.4. Positioning the researcher and the research

Because of the danger of researcher effects on processes, interpretations, findings and conclusions, it was important to be mindful from the start of how my personal and professional experience might influence the research. In addition to working with Cambodians in Norway from 1989 to 1998 as a refugee officer, I have done voluntary work related to the parts of Cambodia from which many local refugees came, writing applications and monitoring aid projects initiated by local Khmer–Norwegian cooperation. In work-related projects, I travelled to Cambodia in 1993 and 1994 with the first of the Norwegian-based Cambodians to revisit their country since the end of the Khmer Rouge regime. Travelling in a group made the journey possible for them, as it was still a chaotic and visibly war-torn society in 1993. The travellers made energetic efforts to repossess elements of their lost culture. We all shared the weight of 55 kilos of excess baggage when they brought back drums and accoutrements to reproduce cultural performances and ritual ceremonies in Norway (field note, 15 October 1993). As it became more evident what they had lived through, the more noticeable did the apparent resilience and persistence of cultural practices become. This experience led to my Master's dissertation mentioned in the introduction.

In order to clarify the sequence of contacts with the different research samples and contexts, the following timeline is provided. Background contexts related to the Master's dissertation are included because one fifth of the interviewees in the doctoral research were also informants in this earlier work.

Timeline and contexts

Background (Master's dissertation)

1989-1998   Refugee-officer for Cambodian refugees in Norway

1993   Visit to Cambodia with 3 Cambodian refugees; interviews in Norway

1994   Visit to Cambodia with 10 Cambodian refugees; interviews in Norway

1997   Participant observation and interviews in Cambodia ('Phum Puon' village)

| 1998 | Participant observation and interviews in Norway and Cambodia (Phum Puon) |

Doctoral research

2007	Participant observation and interviews in Norway and Cambodia (Phum Puon)
2008	Participant observation and interviews in Norway
2009	Participant observation and interviews in Norway and follow-up interviews in Cambodia (Phum Puon and Phnom Penh)
2010	Follow-up interviews in Norway

With this background, there might have been a danger that sympathy and respect for Cambodian survivors and my own interest in their culture could threaten to skew the research. This could risk obscuring the essential meaning in interviewees' statements. To understand their stories, I needed to put predispositions asides and simply listen. The study of the interviewees' memories, meanings and reflections suggested the need to take a phenomenological stance (see section 2.2 for a discussion of this choice).

From research questions to methodology, the study has been influenced by the philosophical discussion in sociology which since the late 19th century has wandered back and forth along the agent–structure continuum. The perpetual structure–agency dialectics has been famously visualised by Weber's (2003/1922:300) 'switchman metaphor' (see section 5.2.1), later resolved by Giddens (1991, 1997) in his structuration theory with its central 'reflexivity' concept: in brief, he says, we re-construct society every time we reflexively perform it. Even Durkheim (1991/1897:20) states that human thoughts and feelings are internalisations of the collective consciousness in the process of socialisation. Although actors may be strongly influenced by meaning, the meaning must partially stem from the internalised structures, as described in the work of Berger and Luckmann (1991/1966).

Berger and Luckmann provide a useful model for understanding the dialectics between subjective and objective, actor and structure in *The social construction of reality* (1991/1966). This dialectics is viewed as constituted by the reciprocal interaction of

what is experienced as outside and what is experienced as inside the consciousness of the individual. The consciousness of everyday life is the web of meanings that allows the individual to navigate through everyday life. This is described as a sociology of knowledge, concerned not with theoretical knowledge but with the consciousness of ordinary people (Berger, 1974: 18).

In essence, Berger and Luckmann (1991/1966) build an ontological model of how societies are constructed from the ground up. The process begins with how human beings communicate in the reciprocity of face-to-face interaction. The fact that human activity is subject to habitualisation leads to the externalisation and institutionalisation of societies. People first create a human environment: it becomes objectified when they relate to it as something outside themselves, as reality; the human construction then becomes the social and cultural context of future generations. At this point what is constructed makes bridges to structure: actors now appear less to construct society or culture, and more to be influenced by it. A person cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which she has been shaped. One is faced by the obvious, made abundantly clear by Berger and Luckman (1991/1966) and further developed by Berger (1990/1967): society's or culture's power to impose itself on reality. When the existing culture has been internalised through socialisation, in a process in which the culture is not just passively absorbed, but actively appropriated, the individual identifies with and is shaped by it (Berger 1990/67: 12–20). The ontology is thus conceived here as socially constructed meaning.

How then can we interpret the socially constructed meaning in such statements as this one?

> They were tied to that big mango tree, one arm on each branch and beaten, then they were buried in piles under here and a palm tree planted on top of each four… After Pol Pot was driven back, we gathered the children under that big tree and used it for a school. They had stones for chairs.
>
> (man, aged 60 in 1998).

What is the meaning of this statement? The gruesomeness appals, and makes the narrative difficult to grasp. The Khmer Rouge saw a tree, and constructed it as a place

of execution, according to the terms of their discourse. After liberation, the survivors saw the tree and constructed it as a school, a physical reconstruction which gave symbolic expression to other values.

The mango tree, 1 February 1998

What can be learned from such narratives that may conceivably contribute to understanding and assisting new vulnerable groups? This is the research question waiting to be answered.

First, it is necessary to find out what the stories mean. This involves at least three levels of meaning: what they mean, how I interpret what they mean, and how meaning can be known. Weber (1993/1922) has something to offer on all these levels, as discussed in section 5.1.2. How meaning can be known is the main epistemological consideration that informs the methodology used here.

The social scientist trying to grasp the actors' perspectives on their survival and recovery from what they say and how they say it needs a battery of methods to be confident of having read them accurately. What these methods were and how they were carried out are the subjects of the next chapter.

2. The methodological net: methods and materials

What have resilient Cambodian survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime?[3]

Introduction

Memories, meanings and beliefs expressed unsolicited in informants' accounts of their lives were to constitute the central source of data. How to uncover and understand these elements?

The chapter begins with a presentation of the analytical category for the selection of interviewees and a discussion of the choice of design and methods (2.2). Since grounded theory was used here as a methodological process to develop findings from the data, the following section sets out the relationship between grounded theory and existing social theory (2.3). Section 2.4 is a description of how the research was carried out, presenting the different forms of data-gathering and how they were used, including several different forms of triangulation. Problems and dilemmas encountered along the way and how these were resolved are addressed in this section.

In the process of generating and amplifying theory from data, several different and complementary analytical methods were used to mine the narratives for explanations of survival (2.5). Forms of preliminary analysis were used to develop an intermediate formulation of the findings. An abductive approach, a technique for interpreting or re-contextualising the findings within new contextual frameworks (Danermark, 2002: 80), was used for the final analysis.

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3 The research question is repeated at the beginning of chapters 2-7 to anchor the text

2.1. Defining and recruiting: presenting the informants

To define the target population involved establishing an *analytical category* for selection. An analytical category sets out the attributes needed to indicate the shared 'social fate' required for inclusion in a study (Goffman 1967: 83). From the other end of the structure–agent continuum, Durkheim says much the same thing:

> Some common quality must be defined, which is objective enough to be observed by any conscientious researcher – and specific enough not to be found otherwise (Durkheim, 1991 [1897]:24, author's translation).

The analytical category here consisted of Cambodian persons of appropriate age to have experienced traumatic events during the Khmer Rouge regime. Their common quality was that they did not appear to be suffering from symptoms (this is described in detail in the next chapter).

The target population was the cohort consisting of adult Cambodian survivors of the Khmer Rouge period. Three samples of ten persons each were drawn from an analytical category of resilient individuals: groups of persons assembled for the purpose of study who defined themselves and were defined by others as having won over a traumatic past. All had experienced potentially traumatic events in the period from 1970 to 1980 and all had their most traumatic experience in the Khmer Rouge period 1975–1979. All belong to the cohort that experienced the Khmer Rouge period with full awareness of its character. That is, they were at least 45 years of age in 2009.

Recruitment procedures and selection criteria

Interviewees were recruited with the help of reference networks, their official 'gatekeepers' in Norway and Cambodia. In Norway, candidates were referred by a reference network consisting of officers of Cambodian ethnic organisations and local refugee officers from the communities involved. In Cambodia, interviewees were recommended by local school and village leaders or by Transcultural Psychosocial

Organisation (TPO) in Phnom Penh. A letter translated to Khmer explaining the goals of the research invited candidates in both countries to participate (appendix III). To qualify, they had to fulfil the selection criteria for the analytical category (below).

Antonovsky (1987) uses the criterion 'doing well' for the sample in his pilot study of survivors in Israel. His initial 51 interviewees were chosen on the basis of a referral by someone known to the person, and to Antonovsky as well. His interviewees had to meet two criteria: 1) they were known to have undergone severe trauma with inescapable consequences (disability, loss of loved persons, difficult economy, concentration camp, immigration) and 2) they were thought by the referee to be doing 'remarkably well' (Antonovsky 1987:64). Additional indicators that they were doing well were needed here. Frequently used criteria in resilience surveys are the absence of a psychiatric diagnosis, the presence of gainful employment and the person's self-reported functional level (Christie & Waaktaar 2000: 19, author's translation).

In the interests of reliability, these principles were combined for the present study. Candidates had to fulfil a set of verifiable selection criteria based both on levels of traumatic experience and on levels of functioning, resembling those used in resilience surveys. The first four criteria indicate the minimum of traumatic experience for inclusion. The background for the trauma criteria is described in more detail in Chapter 3. Those chosen for interviews:

1. had spent at least one year in a Khmer Rouge work camp
2. had lived at least one year in a refugee camp
3. had lost at least one close family member
4. had witnessed beatings and executions.

The next three are resilience criteria, indicating that they were 'doing well'. The interviewees:

5. had not sought psychiatric help
6. were not dependent on social welfare
7. were said to be and believed themselves to be doing 'remarkably well'.

All interviewees were born before 1965, so they were at least young teenagers at the time of the Khmer Rouge and were at least 45 years old in 2009. All those who were referred by the reference network and who met the criteria above were accepted.

The first two readily verifiable criteria were necessary and sufficient to indicate the experience of traumatic events, because of the incontrovertible documentation of the quality of life in the 'production units' (concentration camps). Resettlement documents from the UNHCR were used as objective markers for specifying types of traumatic experience. Such documents were viewed during my period as a refugee officer in Norway and the information provided was confirmed through verification by reference networks and peer groups. In addition, documentation of the totalitarian nature of the Pol Pot regime indicated that nearly everyone in Cambodia at the time – even Khmer Rouge soldiers towards the end of the régime – had lived in these production units, where they experienced starvation, cruel and inhumane treatment and hard labour. For descriptions of the quality of life in Khmer Rouge work camps see, for example, Chandler 1999, Kiernan 1996, Ebihara 1990, Ledgerwood, Ebihara & Mortland, 1994. As Kiernan relates, 'After 3 years in the *chalat* labouring at various sites around region 5, Sarun says he came across no villages where people were not mistreated'(1996:243). Life in the refugee camps along the Thai border was also dangerous (see for example Mollica, 2006; Mollica et al. 1993; Ledgerwood, Ebihara & Mortland 1994; French, 1994; Berry & Williams, 1990).

This analytical category of 'the resilient' forms a contrast to the implicit background of the clinically traumatised, made explicit in the descriptions of Cambodian survivors suffering from a morbid condition as described in the medical literature and in the PTSD diagnosis (section 3.1.3).

The samples

In order to reveal how the phenomenon of their survival and recovery was understood by different kinds of people in different settings and at different times, sampling aimed for maximum heterogeneity within the limitations of the available contexts: one village in Cambodia, and one district in Norway.

The final samples consisted of 30 interviewees, nine of whom were re-interviewed on two or more occasions, making a total of 40 interviews (see Appendix VI). Three samples of ten persons each were chosen from among: 1) persons who came to Norway as UN refugees from refugee camps along the Thai border in the 1980s and have lived there since (N1); 2) persons who fled from Cambodia after recent political conflict, arriving after 2000 in the same part of Norway as UN refugees (N2); and 3) persons who returned to their home places in Cambodia after the Pol Pot regime and have remained there (C).

The same research instruments were used with all. The disparate contexts through which the populations moved are described in Chapter 4, on the cohort. Despite the contextual differences, the informants were predominantly Khmer Buddhist, sharing a transversal belief system. As this belief system was pervasive in pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, it may also have played a role in the socialisation of the two non-Buddhist interviewees.

The samples included a few of the informants and sources for my Master's dissertation and articles (Overland, 2006/2007, 2010). Their participation constituted a 10-year follow-up that provided a longitudinal status report on six persons who had participated in the earlier inquiries. This offered a certain positive research effect: it emerged that they were still doing remarkably well. Some 30 years had passed, during which life had been lived transparently: in the village in Cambodia, because it was lived outdoors, and in Norway, because it was lived in a circumscribed system of social control. This served to substantiate the observation that they were indeed doing well. In addition to the interviewees, a few expert witnesses kindly granted permission for statements of theirs to be quoted: Youk Chhan, Sotheara Chhim, Sothara Muny, Pen Sivun and Virak Yenn.

By 2009, the average age of the interviewees was c. 56 years. The age range was from 45 to 70. In the samples there were 33% women. Several others were referred and invited to participate, but women proved far more hesitant about being interviewed, particularly in Norway (in Cambodia, half the informants were women). The voluntary aspect was central to the project, so this precluded further attempts to convince

women. As for education levels, 10 were farmers with 0 to 3 years of formal schooling; 8 had from 6 to 10 years of schooling; and 12 had higher education. Although it was not a criterion for selection, at the time of the interview it emerged that all of the 30 interviewees who had been referred to the project lived in a family setting with a minimum of three members and had frequent contact with other family members.

The urban/rural origins of the interviewees, here divided into the samples described above, are indicated in figure 1.

Figure 1. *Informants' urban/ rural places of origin*
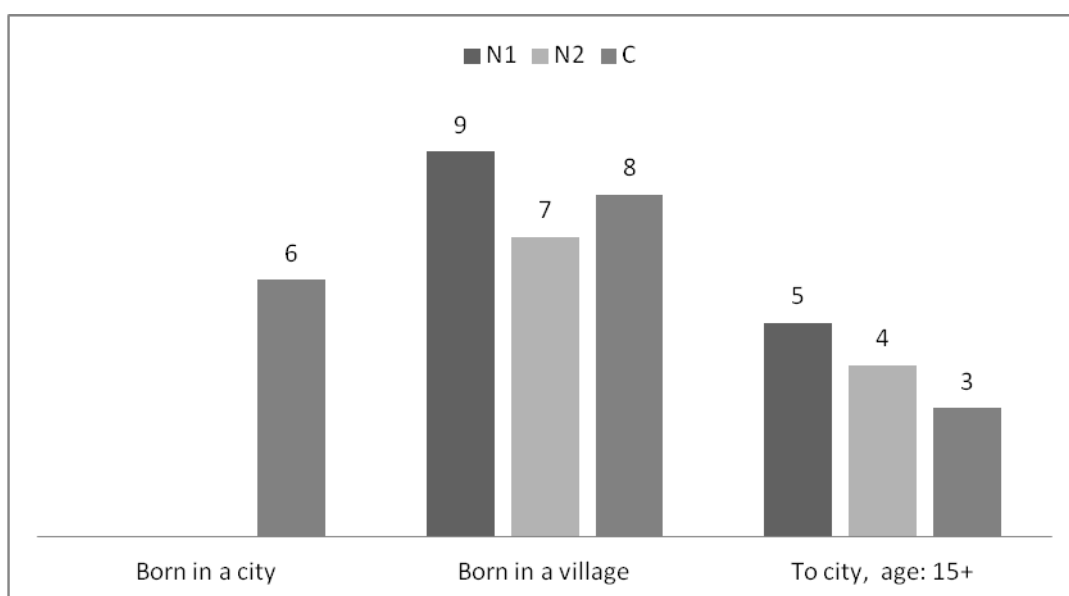
At the time of the Khmer Rouge takeover, 12 of the interviewees had moved to a city because of the bombing and unrest in the countryside. However, all but six of the 30 had grown up in villages and retained close ties to family members who continued to live there.

In some biographical projects, a saturation point is reached. This was not the case here, largely because of the differing background contexts of the three samples. After data from most of samples N1 and C had been analysed, a number of themes were established in the project database. Sample N2 introduced new themes and offered new insights into some of those that had been established.

2.2. Design: a multi-strategy approach to theory generation

The research followed a case-study design based on data gathered from samples of apparently resilient survivors of the Khmer Rouge period – persons who seemed to be 'doing remarkably well' (Antonovsky, 1987: 64). Although it examined features of the case in de-centralised socio-cultural settings (in Norway and Cambodia), the approach was idiographic, concerned with elucidating unique features of the case (Bryman, 2004:53) rather than comparative. Three samples were chosen, not to compare them formally, but to reveal the experiences, behaviours and understandings of persons who had comparable traumatic experience but had been living under widely differing contexts in the years since the potentially traumatic events. Although differences that appeared were registered and considered, it was not the intention to compare, but rather to find all possible elements of resilience that might have transcended context.

Methods are 'closely tied to different visions of how social reality should be studied' (Bryman 2004: 4). Design and methods were chosen on the basis of the ontological and epistemological considerations indicated at the end of Chapter 1: how a world was understood as being constructed and how knowledge could be developed about it. The data collected contained information about how people understood and interpreted their experiences, which was again interpreted through analysis. Although the project set off in a hermeneutical direction, with its concern for interpreting human action and understanding the perspectives of the actors, the study is basically analytical and seeks ultimately to explain rather than to describe.

A way out of this apparent clash is provided by Weber, who describes sociology as 'a science that will give an interpretive understanding of social action and thereby a causal explanation of that action's progress and effects' (Weber, 2003/1922: 192, author's translation). The present study sought to provide a causal explanation of an interpretive understanding of social action – an actor's perspective – rather than a causal explanation of external forces that had no meaning for those involved.

This chapter explains the methods chosen for data-gathering and analysis in a multi-strategy approach to theory generation (Layder, 1998: 68). To generate substantive theory about the nature of the resiliency in question, it was found most expedient to proceed as follows: first the data were collected. Then they were subjected to microanalysis to identify the essential content, and fundamental themes were abstracted. Then the relations between the themes were reconceptualised 'in a rigorous and reasoned fashion' (Danermark, 2002: 120), in order to arrive at the final interpretation. In this series of processes, certain theoretical approaches are incorporated into the analysis, as described in the next section on the relationship of grounded theory to existing theory (2.3).

The project was originally conceived as having a bottom–up, grass-roots approach: its intention was to be fulfilled by 'gathering and processing new knowledge about resilience' (section 1.1). Findings from the informants were to be used to generate or amplify theories that might contribute to improving psychosocial work with war refugees. Yet, when the observed world is understood as constituting a dialectics between subjective and objective, as described in the philosophy of science reflection in section 1.4, learning from it requires a combination of methods. The complexity of the research object in time and space, as well, indicated the need for a multi-strategy approach to theory generation, where 'using as many sources of data and/or methodological and analytic strategies as is possible … facilitates the process of theory generation' (Layder, 1998:68).

Central here were a constructivist ontology, an interpretivist epistemological position and a qualitative research strategy. While not adopting a critical realist regional ontology, I found many of Layder's and Danermark's ideas and methodological techniques seminal. These late-modern protagonists of critical realism open the way for using their methodological approaches with other ontological suppositions than their own.[4]

All these approaches were needed in a hermeneutical project that sought an

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[4] Layder (1998:6) desires continuity between classical and contemporary theory; Danermark (2002:99) finds that Habermas, for example, has a realist approach in the sense that he claims to lay bare the real deep structures and rules

interpretive understanding of certain patterns of social action (resilient survivor strategies). A battery of data-gathering and analysis methods was brought into play, complementing and controlling each other. The collection of the different forms of data overlapped in a continual interplay, guided by such action research principles as respect for the interviewees and 'a conscious attempt at realizing certain values' (Løchen, 1973). In short, the data collection and analysis, described in greater detail in the next sections, involved 'the simultaneous interaction and interlinking of many different influences and bits of information' (Layder 1998:72).

The interpretation is based as much possible on how the interviewees interpret their own experiences. This in turn has made it essential that the understanding arrived at corresponds to what is meant by the informants. For the sake of the reader, it is also hoped that the route from data to interpretation is demonstrated clearly enough.

Adopting a phenomenological stance

The nature of the data varied from self-reported biographical accounts to participant observation and field notes over many years. As explained in section 1.4, I had been actively involved with Cambodians and Cambodia for more than 15 years when this research began. In addition, ideas developed about the meaning of cultural structures for this population in my past work (see introduction to Chapter 1) indicated the need for precautions. An obvious challenge was to find a way to hear the interviewees' life stories and see their interactions without veils of presupposition: to maintain a certain distance in the midst of a physical closeness. In one way or another, we all construe events from our sociocultural positions – attempting to mediate communicative experience by understanding (Delanty, 2003:96). To make viable a cross-cultural study of this kind (involving a middle-class American-Scottish-Norwegian researcher and a cohort of Cambodians who had survived a holocaust), previous knowledge had somehow to be bracketed.

A study of actors' methods for survival, focused on accessing how people perceived and interpreted their own experience, had to aspire to objectivity in its approach to the interview situation and participant observation. Therefore, to learn about the

interviewees' experiences from their own explanations – how they perceived what had happened and how they had responded – it was necessary to take a step back to see and hear how the interviewees presented themselves in terms of the meaning these experiences had for them. An effort was therefore made to keep substantive knowledge, researcher theories and causal explanations at arm's length in the interview situation.

Such an approach was a prerequisite for grasping what the actors actually said. An added advantage is that 'the best way of helping survivors tell their stories is to have them take on the role of teacher' (Mollica, 2006: 79). This they can best do if the researcher is clear about his outsider role, as a student eager to learn, and keeps his theoretical apparatus and prior experience as much as possible at a distance. To avoid influencing the communication with preconceptions, I sought to maintain the humility of the student or disciple. It would never be possible to have the internalised knowledge of their society that they had. Their past was available to them in memory in a fullness that no one else can approach. My role was to learn. In the end, the solution chosen for this project was to ask as few questions as possible after the initial: 'will you tell me about your life?'

This was not a phenomenological project; however, it employed a phenomenological stance in its approach to the interview situation. The object of research was studied in the manner found epistemologically best suited to an ontology understood as socially-constructed meaning.

Choice of qualitative instruments

What did these people find useful for survival and normalisation? Answering research questions of this kind necessitates access to memories, understandings, intentions, mental conceptions and constructions – cognitive elements, in short. These elements can differ so greatly from person to person, from culture to culture, as to be unidentifiable. Elsass regrets that the instruments used for measuring the effects of psychotherapy among Tibetan survivors of human rights abuse did not give the informants an opportunity to give their own views (Elsass, Carlsson & Husum, 2010).

This point has relevance for the present study, which aims specifically at uncovering interviewees' own views.

Since using a questionnaire restricts the possibility of accessing such subjective, cognitive elements, the opportunity was used instead to collect the interviewees' points of view, analyse them, and then compare the results with existing survey data. I had to be willing to learn, willing to say 'I don't know the answers to complex behaviour that cannot be reduced to dependent variables' (Barbara Paterson, cited in a fieldnote, 4 May 2010). A qualitative approach could also cast light on some of the questions that remain unanswered after trauma field studies.[5]

Psychological screening was considered. On one occasion, as a trial, an interviewee known to satisfy the criteria and to be particularly resourceful was asked to fill out the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, an instrument widely used in trauma studies. He scored exceptionally high on traumatic experiences and just over cut-off for symptoms and was somewhat shaken by the process, although he appeared to recover quickly. Due not least to the experience with this informant, we abandoned the idea of conducting any psychological screening of informants.

In studying survivors of Nazi concentration camps 20 years on, Antonovsky wondered, not why 71% of the survivors had problems, but why 29% of the survivors were in good health at the age of 50 (Antonovsky,1987). I too wondered: why were these Cambodians in apparently good mental health? From their own points of view, what contributed most to their resilience? With this research focus, the epistemological choice was clear. It would contribute little to the knowledge base to gauge the trauma scores of 30 persons. More fruitful would be to go out and attempt to learn something new by uncovering the biographical memories and explanations of their survivals and recoveries.

The multi-strategy approach to theory generation chosen involved a range of data-gathering methods. The biographical interpretive method and participant observation were used to obtain primary data; published and unpublished autobiographies of other

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5 E.g. the observation in one of the Cambodian studies described in section 3.1.3: 'The way people judge the quality of their life is not significantly related to their mental disorders' (Van de Put & Eisenbruch 2002:104).

survivors were used for the insights they provided. Data-gathering thus took place on different levels, described in section 2.4 and performed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Sources used in data-gathering

1. ***Survivors' accounts of their lives and recovery (sub-goals 1-3: micro-level).*** Biographic interviews and personal communications, and participant observation recorded as field notes (1993–2009) among survivors of the Cambodian holocaust in Norway and Cambodia

2. ***Nontechnical literature (sub-goals 1-3: meso-level).*** Published auto-biographies and unpublished autobiographical notes by survivors – primary data used 'to stimulate thinking about concepts emerging from the data' (Corbin and Strauss 1998:35)

3. ***Enquête among experts in transcultural psychiatry (subgoal 4: meta-level).*** Qualitative and email interviews of experts in transcultural psychiatry, asked to comment on the findings and compare their self-reported practice and discourses with results of the research

How the findings were reduced to results by analysis is described in section 2.5 and carried out in Chapter 8.

Data-gathering procedures and challenges met under way are discussed in section 2.4. First, it is important to clarify the relationship of grounded theory to pre-existing theory in this dissertation.

2.3. Relationship of traditional theory to grounded theory in this project

'Grounded theory' is not a theory but a method for extracting or generating theory from data (Corbin & Strauss, 1998: x). The grounded theory approach used in this project draws on a modern interpretation of grounded theory principles (Corbin & Strauss, 1998) as well as on Layder's (1998) adaptive theory. What is its relationship

to existing theory?

Strauss and Corbin's method book from 1998 may be regarded as a further development of the grounded theory perspective. In this late modern version, theorising can also denote building upon, extending, or expanding an existing theory, defined as 'a well developed and related set of explanatory concepts about how the world works' (Corbin & Strauss, 1998:24). Whereas Layder (1998) finds that there is no general theory behind grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin write in the same year: 'There is no doubt that the theoretical perspective of a researcher influences the stance he or she takes toward the study' (Corbin & Strauss, 1998:50). This is where theory makes itself evident in many grounded theory projects. Strauss and Corbin are more open to the use of general theory, especially as a frame of reference for research, than the original presentation of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).[6] In addition, the accumulating findings from the research for this study actualised several of the explanatory theories which are discussed in Chapter 5.

How theory is related to the empirical findings

Grounded theory is used here as the first step in developing theoretical ideas based on what is found in the data. The research began with the process of gathering the words, observing the behaviour of the interviewees and endeavouring to find out what themes concerned them and what was important for them. Relations between their words, the themes they raised and existing theory were first interpreted and developed *a posteriori*, as patterns emerging from the findings were observed and interpreted. Yet, as Layder points out in an exposition of the relationship between the research process and theory, there are often no clear dividing lines between theory as the outcome of data analysis and theory as the outcome of ongoing theoretical reflection which actively influence the direction of the research (1998:68).

The integrative phase progressed from the observation and interpretation of emerging patterns in the data, until the gradual accumulation and emergence of strong tendencies

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6 As I understand it, the rationale for grounded theory developed from the Weberian understanding of the actor's perspective.

in the analysis tipped the scales in favour of a given interpretation. Parallel with these processes, the sociological knowledge base was scouted for theories that could illuminate what was uncovered. At times, a certain theme could be found to be well-explained in a certain theory. Alternatively, the emergent findings could suggest a related but different interpretation than that provided by an existing theory. Empirical discoveries, in a greater or lesser way, opened up given theories for other uses, amplifying, broadening or narrowing them in.

In the final stage of the dissertation (Chapter 9), the theoretical developments are related in particular to the following points of social theory presented in Chapter 5:

- Weber's (1922) hypothesis on Buddhist theodicy and its suggested relation to human coping and resilience
- Berger's (1990/1967) *nomos* concept: the nature of the particular *nomos* and its role in relation to potentially traumatic events
- Berger & Luckmann's (1991/1966) and Berger's (1990/1967) theory about the development and function of language.

In addition, the findings are intended to build on existing models of resilience.

Since the actualisation of social theories is directly related to what is found, the theories are presented in Chapter 5, but first brought into the analysis process in Chapter 8. The project's contributions to the theories (and vice versa) are presented in Chapter 9, in a theoretical grounding of the results.

The next sections describe the slow process of developing the data into findings and results.

2.4. How the research was carried out

2.4.1. How data were gathered: problems on the journey

> *Some people who live through war and terror continue to suffer for many years. They are unhappy and have trouble coping with everyday life. But you have had such experiences and are doing well. So I wanted to ask you about it, because much has been written about why some people manage better than others, but the people themselves are seldom asked. With your help, we can learn something that can help others.*

> *Will you tell me about your life?*

<div align="right">Sample introduction to an interview</div>

Survivor accounts. Biographical interpretive method

This section recounts the process of biographical interviewing used for gathering life-story narratives from survivors of extremely traumatic events who did not appear to suffer from pathogenic outcomes (described in Chapter 3, on trauma). To learn about the challenges they had encountered and how they had coped with them, the research took their life-stories as the starting-point.

Beginning in January 2007, life-story interviews continued in Norway until July 2010. Life stories in Cambodia were gathered on field trips in May 2007 and May 2009.

The introduction to such an interview (above) may be thought a 'leading question' and this is in a sense true: from the beginning, the focus was on uncovering strengths and resources rather than weaknesses and problems. As also explained in the written information to interviewees (see appendix 2, English version), the project was looking for factors that had helped people survive and thrive. Information to the informants was formulated in a way that would acknowledge the person's survival as an achievement and, I hoped, strengthen his or her self-confidence. From the first contact,

it was stressed that informants had been asked to participate because of the resilient qualities they expressed in their lives, because they seemed to be doing well.

At the same time, it was feared that speaking of the informants' resilience might embarrass them. The interviewees are like the rest of us, trying and failing and caught on the wrong day, and might find the approach insincere. Yet in Mollica's view, trauma stories belong to the people and should be returned to the people; they are 'historical accounts by ordinary people who want to heal themselves while also healing others' (Mollica, 2006:47). This idea was apparently shared by my interpreter and expert witness Virak Yenn, who suggested adding the line 'with your help, we can learn something that can help others' to the information to prospective interviewees. This was an appeal which appeared irresistible. A conscious consideration of acknowledging the interviewees' survival as an achievement thus informed the methodology.

To avoid researcher effects on the interviews, as few questions as possible were asked. This was in line with the phenomenological stance adopted and the inductive mode of inference of the microanalysis. After the introduction to the research, informants were asked to tell their life stories, and were then left to formulate and expand upon them as they saw fit.

The project has not aimed, as is common in some forms of biographical research, to generalise from the biographical analysis of a single case (e.g. Denzin, 1989), but rather to examine many individual cases in order to find possible common features – as in the work of Bertaux (1981). In their ground-breaking work, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America,* Thomas and Znaniecki (1920) were the first to use a biographical approach in sociology. It is perhaps no accident that the biographical approach was developed in a study of an immigrant population which provided early insights into processes of migration and identity.

In the interests of anonymity, the informants were identified in the transcriptions by a number, followed by N1 (arrived in Norway in the 1980s), N2 (arrived after 2000), or C (remained in Cambodia). Three of the informants waived the right to anonymity and preferred to be quoted identifiably. These are: novelist Kong Bunchoeun, who has

recently published his autobiography in Khmer (2009); Sivun Pen, who has recently published an account, in Norwegian, of his experiences during and after the Khmer Rouge years (Bromark and Pen, 2010); and Virak Yenn, key witness and cultural interpreter for this project and co-author of two articles (Overland & Yenn, 2006; 2007).

The biographical accounts were recorded in Khmer, together with translation into either Norwegian or English. Transcribing was done by listening to the tapes and writing out the meaningful utterances as they were understood. Transcriptions of interviews from 1997/98 were used as additional data in relation to six informants who had also been interviewed for the Master's dissertation described in the first chapter. In re-reading the narratives, themes were coded as they arose, sometimes in terms of frequently recurring Khmer words. Certain explanations of resilience were familiar from research on resilience (section 3.2). This may have influenced the coding somewhat, but in the interview situation a strict regime kept prior knowledge bracketed.

An interpreter in Cambodia asked, as we drove out to the countryside: 'shall we let them speak freely, not to break the flow?' (field note, 3 May 2007). In principle I heartily agreed, but this proved to be a challenge. Listening to the first tape I realised with some embarrassment my tendency to interrupt, eager to demonstrate familiarity with historical events and trajectories. A firm resolution was made at that point: to ask no questions except to clarify what had been said.

Interpreters vary, however and even with my rudimentary Khmer, I was sometimes in doubt as to whether the communication was being accurately interpreted. This was experienced as a methodological and ethical challenge: how to be sure of the quality of translation in cross-cultural research?[7]

Problems: language and communication in data-gathering

The translated material seemed almost by nature an epistemological approximation,

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[7] The next sections are based on Overland, 2010.

being (at least) four steps removed from the original communication: how did the interpreter understand and translate the researcher's questions, and how did the interviewee understand them; how did the interpreter understand and translate the interviewee's response, and how did the researcher understand it …. The interference of an additional subjectivity between researcher and interviewee adds a further dimension to communication, even communication of the everyday variety. The more I worked with Cambodian interpreters and at the same time studied basic Khmer, the clearer it became that Khmer–English interpretation could be an inexact science, at least in Cambodia at the time (2007–2009). In the absence of a systematic qualification of interpreters, it was hard to judge how good interpreters were, largely because of the quality of their English. Just as teachers who survived the Khmer Rouge had to take over the reins of school administration, it is possible that Cambodia's best English speakers may have found better jobs.[8] Everyone wants to learn to speak English – but unfortunately, there are few qualified English teachers and the quality of spoken English is generally poor. How to be sure, beyond reasonable doubt, of what the informants meant? The burden of proof for the interpretation would, after all, be mine.

To solve this dilemma, the taped interpreted interviews were given to another interpreter for re-translation and control of the reliability of the translation. Because of the strict anonymity required by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services, the interpreter was permitted to know only the identity of the interviewees he had interpreted himself. Therefore the interviews from Cambodia were re-translated from the tapes in Norway, and vice versa. Using this technique as a stop-gap, the question of understanding seemed as well secured as in other communication, considering the hurdles that may also arise between subjects in same-language interviews.

The experience of this research had consequences for my relation to translated material in general, however. I had translated data from one language to another as a matter of course as well as working with interpreters for 25 years in social work, therapy and

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8 In 1998, I used French-speaking Cambodian teachers. French was the 'langue de chaque jour' for people educated prior to the Khmer Rouge regime; they were fluent and inspired confidence. They had also been the focus of the wrath of the Khmer Rouge regime, who saw them as the lapdogs of foreign imperialists. Anyone who could speak a foreign language was in acute danger of being executed. Incidentally, there is no great enthusiasm for French among young people in Cambodia today.

research. It was generally accepted and expected that what was being translated was the message intended by the parts. Now it began to dawn on me that conclusions drawn on the basis of translations and interpreted transcribed interviews may be both invalid and unreliable. The more intimate or controversial the theme, the more inadequate the translation seems likely to be. The least that can be demanded of cross-cultural research is that it raises the question. The solution found was re-translation by another interpreter and close cooperation with what Temple and Edwards call 'key witnesses' (2002) who could verify translations. The key witnesses in this project were close colleagues and experienced interpreters who were fluent in at least one European language.

The method required that full rein be given to the self-expression of the informants in the biographical interview. However, at this point, I had heard many personal accounts of the Cambodian holocaust, read many historical and biographical accounts, and accumulated field notes from participant observation for 15 years. A stringent attempt had to be made to bracket prior experience in order to maintain the phenomenological stance. Bracketing was well served in the interview situation, by having no interview guide and asking no questions. If the life-story narrative stopped, the question would be a simple 'what happened next' or 'what did you mean by that?'

Somehow, particularly in interviews conducted in Cambodia, informants assumed that their traumatic experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime were the main focus of interest. As one woman asked before she began her narrative:

> Do you want to ask me about the background, when I was young, or focus
> on Pol Pot?
> *No, I want to hear about your background and really, about how you*
> *managed to be strong and go on.*
> Do you want to know how I suffered?
> *Not unless you really feel like telling, and want to tell...*
>
> (Informant 23 – C)

This may indicate what other foreigners have been interested in. In almost every case

it had to be repeated: it was their whole life story, from early childhood on and especially how they had managed to cope and go on after the Pol Pot regime that was of interest to the project, not the specific content of their traumatic experiences.

Many informants still told about the traumatic events as a matter of course, however, and I listened to them. Because of the nature of the experience being communicated, this gave rise to another issue: the challenge of communicating with trauma survivors, of absorbing traumatic experience.

Problem: communicating with trauma survivors

How could a person who has never been exposed to traumatic events hope to understand such extreme experiences? The interviewees had lived through things that are hard to grasp for a person whose most dangerous experience has been a minor automobile accident. How to understand what it was like to be beaten, to see your sister executed, to know that to react would be fatal? How to respond? The more empathetic the exposure to such stories, the greater the danger of vicarious traumatisation, which can in turn affect the researcher unawares. On the other hand, if the response is suppressed there is the risk of becoming immunised to the experience. Too much distance can lead to a superficial, behaviouristic interpretation. In meeting the pain of the other, the researcher can become distanced and lose the ability to maintain empathy. In the interview situation, this was partially resolved by the communication style chosen by the interviewees. They gave the impression that they did not want pity, advice, or eyes full of sorrow. They told the stories in a very matter of fact way: they had told these stories before, to each other and where they come from, everyone has them. After hearing more than 50 such stories down through the years and reading a number of powerful autobiographical accounts (Ngor, 1987; Pin, 1987; Pran, 1997; Vann, 1998; Him, 2001; Sonn, 2001), I realised that the narratives had a great deal in common. People seemed to have become inured to the experiences: 'We had all seen death before. In the exodus from Phum Chhleav, the atrocious had become normal', explains Ngor, a former doctor (Ngor, 1987:199). 'If my lack of emotion had not surprised me from the standpoint of professional interest, I would not

have remembered', says Viktor Frankl after Auschwitz: 'Apathy, the blunting of emotions and the feeling that I could not care anymore (1971:21). As Ebihara reports, upon returning after the Khmer Rouge regime to the site of her anthropological fieldwork, she was surprised at the cheerfulness of the people:

> As I said each name, the group responded in unison, calling out either 'Alive!' or 'Dead'(….) The villagers had always lived with hardships of many kinds and endured them with great strength, resourcefulness and fortitude, leavened with an indelible capacity for good humour (….) it is not that one forgets the griefs of the past, but one picks up one's life and gets on with it (Ebihara, 1990:70).

There are Cambodians who take readily to tears, but not in these samples. The biography of a non-member of the analytical category brought this characteristic to my attention: among other contrasts with interviewees, he cried easily (see section 7.1).

There may have been a danger of re-traumatisation after the interview. Although the informants were chosen because they were observed by referents to be mentally strong, vigilance and keen observation of their psychological *status presens* was indicated. However strong these persons might appear, sitting and talking about their past lives for hours could bring up thoughts and feelings. One thing was tears of regret that were dried away. Another and more serious response would have been to learn that the person was having concentration problems, flashbacks, nightmares or other known symptoms of the trauma diagnosis (Appendix V). In the event of such developments, support in Norway was available from a trauma outpatient clinic.[9] In Cambodia, contact was established with psychiatrists at the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) in Phnom Penh. Interviewees were invited to contact me or the interpreter if they suffered any after-effects.

The interviewees told their stories calmly, using few adjectives and showing no emotion. Terse, naked sentences characterised their accounts, and that began to affect my way of writing and speaking when presenting findings. It seemed somehow fitting. The interviewees appeared to have found a middle way between expressing and

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9 Clinic for Psychosomatic and Trauma, Sørlandet Hospital Trust.

suppressing the traumatic experiences. Tersely, they told their life stories, and I absorbed them. Story after story flowed by, each with the same main elements. For the unwitting researcher, there remained the danger of becoming either traumatised or insensitive. In regard to this dilemma, an abductive approach came surprisingly to the rescue, as described at the end of section 8.1.1.

But there was another serious concern: the challenge that researcher sympathies, antipathies and predispositions could become actualised in the processes of data-gathering and analysis. During the interviewing the danger of influencing the narratives by referring to existing empirical work and theoretical positions was avoided, simply by maintaining silence and a phenomenological distance. In the coding process described in section 2.5.1, however, there was a risk of influence from prior theoretical and substantive knowledge, including my experience of working at a specialised out-patient clinic for traumatised refugees.

What with the presuppositions from my previous research and the predispositions described in section 1.4, there was a danger of producing a tautology: research that found only what was looked for. This could seriously affect the analytical processes of theory generation.

Problems with presuppositions and predispositions

A worldview gradually became more and more evident in the accounts, a worldview that seemed distinctly religious. In this quandary Berger came to the rescue, clarifying the necessity of assuming a position of careful *methodological atheism* – the researcher's attempt to remain free of bias and maintain impartiality.

Methodological atheism means simply that 'questions raised within the framework of an empirical discipline… are not susceptible to answers coming out of the framework of a non-empirical and normative discipline' (Berger 1967:179). Berger gives one example of methodological atheism which, slightly reformulated, cut to the core of my research: 'One might feel that it is 'good' that religion protects men against anomie' (ibid.: 180). It is 'bad' if it creates an undemocratic hierarchical society prone to

autocratic takeovers, as in my object of research.[10] This kind of valuation does not belong in empirical work and must be 'kept strictly apart from the theoretical analysis of religion' (idem.). The aim was not to find any normative claim true or false, but to describe it on the basis of the data: how the informants raised, perceived and referred to such themes in their narratives. Trying to keep my own views separate, I set out to study their religion as it was presented by the informants. If the interviewees were normative, it should still be possible to analyse their statements in a non-normative way. Addressing this question led to the use of several different analytical methods which could balance each other (section 2.5).

In addition to biographical interviews there was a wide range of ethnographic data. These consisted of field notes from participant observation during field work and interviewing, retrospective reflections noted down between 1997 and 2009 in homes in Norway and Cambodia, as well as personal observation of meetings, celebrations, religious gatherings, weddings and the like. Field notes were written daily while in Cambodia; in Norway, when something happened that tied up with the research themes. Large quantities of interview transcripts accumulated; there was a stack of published biographical accounts, as well as 15 years of observation, interviewee and otherwise. There were eight field notebooks of memos and annotations (some written in early morning, unvoiced questions arising from deep sleep) and various earlier papers, newspaper articles and pictures. This was an overabundance. How to organise and render this material accessible for the reader? This problem is addressed in section 2.5.2 on biographical-historical structuring.

At the intersection between data-gathering and analysis came various forms of triangulation used to verify the findings.

2.4.2. Intermediate processes and forms of triangulation

As part of the data gathering, several triangulation approaches contributed to

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10 In Berger's example, 'it is "bad" that it alienates them from the world produced by their own activity' (1967:180).

developing the preliminary summary of the data or interim narrative presented in section 7.3.

In order to verify the authenticity of intermediate findings, a form of triangulation was initiated towards the end of the data-gathering. In an email-interview round, health professionals known for their work with war survivors were asked to comment on the findings and to compare their self-reported practice and discourses with interim results of the research. Central aspects of the preliminary findings were posed as questions to this sample of experts for corroboration. The findings from the experts appear in section 7.4. These findings functioned both as a form of data and as an aid in preparing the results for dissemination. If the experts agreed with the results, their insights might help mental health workers with less experience of this field to learn some things that might prove useful. The experts might provide good practical ways of working that could be used to instrumentalise the fourth sub-question: how the information can be systematised and made available for health professionals.

A non-member of the analytical category provided a triangulation that served to affirm the methodological approach. This person's narrative made it clear that being told that one was an example of exceptional resilience did not necessarily make that person respond in a predictable way (see case history, section 7.1). The approach may have encouraged the resilient person, but it did not seem to make the non-resilient appear resilient.

Among triangulative techniques used in the data-gathering phase was one specific to the biographical approach: 'multiple perspectives on the same life experience' (Denzin, 1989: 57). A natural consequence of the local context both in Cambodia and in Norway is that many of the people know each other, having been, figuratively and literally, to Hell and back – sometimes on the same road. Interviewees were never asked questions about other informants, but some information came spontaneously and served to triangulate and verify accounts. 'They had no choice', said one informant, of those who had joined the Khmer Rouge as country boys from eastern Cambodia (field note, April 18, 2007).

Forms of theoretical sampling common to grounded theory were used to triangulate the biographical data. Once categories were generated, discriminant sampling was used. Sites, persons and documents were chosen that would maximise opportunities for individual comparative analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In this research it meant selecting interviewees because they provided background variation: a few more elderly people here, a few more women there, or a few more with little schooling. This was also the motivation for including three distinct samples of interviewees, who had parallel experiences in the 1970s but different experiences in the ensuing years (section 2.1). As mentioned, however, the intention was not to compare the three samples, but to maximise the possibility of finding possible elements of resilience that could have transcended context.[11]

2.5. How analysis was conducted

During data gathering, several interviewees mentioned episodes and dreams connected with the snares that Cambodians lay in streams to catch fish. Perhaps because of this, metaphors related to net-fishing came to mind when I began trying to filter out the essential from the data. In the end, I wished to be able to say, 'In this stream of consciousness, with a material consisting of 50,000 words, not one fish escaped.' Analysis techniques were net-like. The only net fine-meshed enough to be sure of catching the elusive strands of meaning in the text, while not interrupting the flow of the life story, appeared to be some form of grounded theory analysis, because that allowed for an unstructured stream of consciousness in the interview and returned for 'the catch': in this case, bits of information which contributed to explaining the relationship between meaning and action, between beliefs and behaviour. 'Will you tell me about your life? Begin where you like.' The question set the narrative flowing. In the stream, some elements bobbed to the surface and were caught in the nets of analysis. One landmark on the journey to discovery was the emergence of this extended metaphor involving a voyage by water, fishing nets and other metaphors

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[11] Results of the abductive analysis were returned to informants for verification, as described in section 2.5.4.

suited to a country largely covered by water at some times of the year.

In the attempt to catch the strands of meaning, the 'structures of signification in which social discourse is inscribed' (Delanty, 2003: 91) in the narratives and other sources, there was a need for several different preliminary forms of analysis which could complete, complement and supplement each other. The first three are performed on the data to uncover the preliminary findings in Chapters 6 and 7:

1) microanalysis by means of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

2) biographical-historical structuring, based on the idea of the interaction of history and the life course (e.g. Denzin, 1989, 2001; Mills, 1959)

3) exegetical treatment of key words (verbs) used repeatedly by all the informants, to eke out translated concepts into a fuller range of meanings than is possible with one translation or dictionary (e.g. Mollica, 2006)

The analyses proper are abductive and retroductive. These are processes performed on the intermediate findings in Chapter 8, to explain them and to develop the final results and conclusions:

4) a form of abduction, an analytical method developed in the critical realist school but adaptable to other research perspectives (Danermark, 2002; Layder. 1998) and informant validation of such a reinterpretation

5) a retroduction, combining the abductive analyses, to find 'the basic conditions for these phenomena to be what they are' (Danermark, 2002:80)

How these different kinds of analysis are combined is described below.

2.5.1. Grounded theory coding with NVivo (Chapter 6) – microanalysis

The preliminary analysis of the collected interviews was carried out by grounded theory microanalysis because of its inductive mode of inference and intensiveness. The essential function of grounded theory was as a filtering device, a fine-meshed net to ensure that no potentially meaningful utterance slipped through. Findings were systematically developed from preliminary coding or microanalysis based on *in vivo*

themes, words people actually used, to extended memos written as field notes.

For the microanalysis of interviews the qualitative data analysis program QSR Nvivo (version 7) was used for coding text under concepts and categories suggested by the interviews. In Nvivo, these are called 'free nodes' and 'tree nodes'. The program is conducive to microanalysis: no meaningful expression slips by. Codes became concepts; concepts were gradually grouped into or linked to larger categories or themes. The superstructure was the set of historical categories, as described in the next subsection and illustrated in figure 2, Chapter 6.

Although the abductive analysis presented in Chapter 8 bears the weight of the interpretative process, there is inevitably some interpretation involved in the initial coding. Here follows a description of the microanalysis process:

1. The preparation for coding occurred during transcribing, back-translating, reading and re-reading of transcripts, looking for themes or concepts that seemed significant. Coding was done in NVivo during the line-for-line microanalysis of the interviews.

2. *Codes* were often themes that were suggested by the weight of many informant references. Codes were both concepts/phrases directly related to the narratives and categories or themes representing higher-order general structures into which concepts were later grouped. Code names were suggested by *in vivo* codes; or, by finding a concept or category name that was the most logical description of 'what's going on here?' (Corbin and Strauss, 1998:114

3. *Memos* were comments written while interviewing, or written alongside the transcripts of interviews, giving the thoughts, interpretations, and questions of the researcher and sometimes the interpreter.

From the moment concepts began to cluster into categories and patterns, processes of semiconscious interpretation began, into which some thoughts related to the mental health research (Chapter 3) and social theory (Chapter 5) were inevitably drawn. Yet the interviewing continued to be conducted in as stringently phenomenological a manner as possible, with no questions asked.

As new interviews were coded, many concepts were related to what others had said and sometimes a new one would be introduced. The doubt that sometimes arose in this process was that, after the creation of a code, a kind of instinctual or automatic coding took over: could other interpretations have been possible? The process was repeated; interviews were checked again, to catch references that might have been missed, to seek for undiscovered themes, to check them against the growing list of themes. The Nvivo program simplified this process. The program provides a colour code to keep track of how much of each interview has been coded and of how many informants have made how many references to each code. Thus a rather quantitative-looking list was the first to emerge. In the beginning it was unclear what these concepts would illuminate, but interpretations began to form as themes 'joined up' in categories. The more often the interviews were reviewed, the clearer what interviewees had meant became. The 50,000 or so words of the narratives were on an average 85% colour-coded. This indicated that at most 15% of what informants had said was not coded, not covered by the themes described in the preliminary findings presented in the next chapter. From a fine-meshed net, the weave tightened into a reassuringly strong fabric, a fabric strong enough to support an emerging interpretation.

For an interpretivist project, this procedure may seem unnecessarily meticulous. It felt important at the time, because so much of what was uncovered was based on such a wide and long range of experience, as mentioned in section 1.4. The careful approach to the ground-theory analysis provided concrete evidence that what had been said, spontaneously offered, was the basis for the interpretation.

At the end of this procedure, there were large quantities of quotations and annotations, sorted into concepts and categories, then clustered chronologically, producing the tables shown in the preliminary summary of findings (section 7.3). These do look rather quantitative. One of the objections to NVivo is the temptation to quantify, leading to the colonisation of qualitative by quantitative research (Bryman, 2004: 419). In the presentations of the key themes, some simple arithmetical percentages are given: e.g., 'More than 80% of the informants were separated from all or part of their nuclear family.' These simple 'quantitative' tendencies are not intended to be representative of the entire cohort – only of the 30 interviewees.

In terms of possibilities for generalising from the final interpretation, the reliability of the various analyses rests largely on the selection process: the analytical category with its stringent criteria, over and against the comparative background of the traumatised. The interviewees are 30 persons who are 'doing remarkably well' (Antonovsky, 1987: 64) despite their traumatic experience and rather different contextual backgrounds after Pol Pot.

What they say may well be representative of others who satisfy the selection criteria, but the project did not set out to make such a prediction.

2.5.2. Biographical-historical structuring (Chapter 6)[12]

> No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of
> history and of their intersections…. has completed its intellectual journey
>
> (Mills, 1959:6)

Following C. Wright Mills' understanding (above) of human experience as a series of meeting points between history and biography (Mills, 1959), the biographical approach in this project was attentive to meeting points. The idea that such meeting points, 'epiphanies', or moments of crisis may 'alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person's life' (Denzin, 1989:70) has been adopted into biographical method by, among others, Denzin (2001; 1989). History was expected to be found crossing and re-crossing the life stories of the informants, whose stories were played out against a turbulent historical background, and this proved to be the case.

The reason for gathering biographical narratives here was not to make sense of an individual life, but to learn about responses to a lived common experience. Such cataclysmic events as the up-ending of an age-old culture in the course of a few days (the Khmer Rouge coup of 1975) might be expected to be accompanied by major changes, turning points, epiphanies, or moments of revelation in the individual lives of the informants.[13] These meeting points of biography and history could have been

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12 This subsection is based on Overland 2010.
13 Denzin compares them to Turner's (1995/1969) liminal phase of experience.

connected to a sharpened, self-reflexive awareness, could have made them look at things anew, and could have offered insights not available to others. It seemed that the cataclysmic quality of these historical periods was one of the reasons why informants remembered at all what they did and were able to describe and explain it.

A tendency to reflexive insight in times of tribulation has been widely noted. Rabbi Blech has stated that a 'pane of insight' can sometimes emerge, when 'human needs and human knowing are stretched to their outer limits' (in Schwarcz, 1997:127). In periods of transition or crisis, 'generative structures, previously opaque, become more visible to agents' (Danermark, 2002:104). When phenomena become more visible, they will be thought about, talked about and remembered – and will turn up in biographical narratives. In the common experience of the informants, certain meeting points of biography and history, critical periods in recent Cambodian history, were shared by all. Whether or not these moments of crisis altered the fundamental meaning structures in the interviewees' lives was a question that remained to be answered; we return to it in the final chapters.

The biographies of this Cambodian cohort had certainly been interrupted – or intercepted – by the inexorable march of history. If the consciousness of history, biography and their intersections were to inform the study, it was unsure at first how this could be done. But some means of simplifying and sorting the multitudinous data was sorely needed. Everyone had had to find a way to live through three dramatic upheavals. This suggested a useful structuring device. The confusing multitude of data was ordered into the three historical periods shown below:

a. ***April 1975 - Dec.1978***   *Khmer Rouge coup and regime*

b. ***January 1979***   *Vietnamese liberation / invasion*

c. ***1980 to the present***   *Normalisation: Camps / home-coming; going to Norway*

In each period, codes for 'what they did' are arranged in order-of-mention frequency, followed by interviewees' explanations of the form their resilience took in the varying situations ('How and why they did it'). This gives an overview of the qualities or resources they said they had at these times, as understood and inducted from their

accounts by means of microanalysis. The historical structuring device gives, in addition, an opportunity for comparison of the different kinds of mechanisms at work in these three different historical situations (see introduction to Chapter 6 for more on the rationale).

It is interesting to note that Frankl uses a similar structuring device in his account of inmates' experience of Nazi concentration camps: his three phases are 'the period following admission; the period when he is well-entrenched in camp routine; and the period following his release and liberation' (Frankl, 1971:6).

2.5.3. Exegesis – a question of meaning (Chapter 7)

The positive result of coping with the translation dilemma mentioned in section 2.4.1 was that it led to an 'exegetical' approach as an element in the analysis. A process of multiple re-translation necessitated by these language troubles – uncertainty about the quality of translation when out travelling – gave rise to the question of the precise meaning of words to the surface. During a re-translation session one interpreter, in double-checking the work of another, revealed some of the layer-upon-layer meanings and associations of a double handful of seemingly simple Khmer concepts: it meant this, but on another level, it meant that. Having a grasp of the complexity of the terms in question was essential if they were to be used to understand the deep processes of resilience. Meaning was after all central to the approach, so it would have been meaning-less not to fully understand these terms that were used so frequently.

These extra rounds of translation were particularly useful for someone with only a rudimentary understanding of Khmer. A kind of word-analysis process, described in the work of Mollica (theologian as well as psychiatrist) as exegesis, satisfied the need to make as explicit as possible the precise meaning of a passage:

> This uncovering process and seeking of the historical origins and meanings
> of words and phrases that can bring [us] closer to the world of the actual
> storyteller (Mollica, 2006:17).

Also Victor Turner describes himself as an exegete. As a matter of course, he performs

analyses of 'exegetical materials' to get to the bottom of terms used in the Ndembu rituals he describes (Turner, 1995/1969: 11). In Mollica, the focus is on the meaning of terms used to describe traumatic events; in this project it was on words used to describe actions and values – not only in traumatic situations, but also in periods of recovery. The terms were analysed to uncover the levels of cultural meaning. It seemed that certain words and their multiple meanings could be significant for the research; but, uncertain as to how to approach this language issue, I made a foray into the field of linguistics to search for theory about the meaning of words (see section 5.2.5).

As a form of analysis, the exegesis of key-words involved close co-working with several interpreters and discussions about the different meanings of particular words or expressions repeatedly used by all informants. The findings from the key-word study are presented in Chapter 7, while what this eventually had to say for the results of the project is presented in Chapter 8.

But discoveries cannot be merely lists of categories, concepts and words. The problem of finding the essential meaning of the accumulated themes was solved by processes of abductive thinking.

2.5.4. Abduction (Chapter 8)

> Traumatised persons are not usually emotionally hardened by violence but
> are, in contrast, delicately attuned to the nuances of human interaction....
> Traumatised people are extremely sensitive... also because they may have
> gained important insights that they realise are barely holding them together
> (Mollica, 2006:47).

The sensitive insight that Mollica notes above may be one of the reasons for a certain impression of strength in the successful survivor that may make other people feel insignificant by comparison. There the researcher stands on a hilltop of Western excess, imbued with a Western life-view, grounded in Christianity, humanism, Freud and human rights. These people appear over the horizon, tackling their extraordinary hardship and loss in their own way, disregarding our point of view, sometimes not

even understanding the questions. And yet their answers make sense. To these answers, what could be the appropriate question?

The stories were shockingly unnatural. Informants used various forms of expression: some had a practical conceptuality, while others were more philosophical. In attempting to understand the unusual, as opposed to the everyday, an abductive mode of inference proved useful. Abduction is a way of asking the appropriate questions of the data. A classical abduction consists of 'redescribing and giving meaning to events, taking one's starting point in a theory' (Danermark, 2002: 120). Following the preliminary analyses of narrative content, abductive reasoning informed the theoretical analysis in this study.

In abductive reasoning, developed from Peirce's theory of abduction, the researcher puts forward a methodologically controlled hypothesis in reconstructing or retelling the story (Danermark, 2002: 91). Abductive techniques have been developed in critical realism, but Danermark's formulation may also be read as a description of social science procedure that transcends the notion of any particular school.

In 'abductive reinterpretation', the technique developed here, composites of common features of the narratives are retold from different theoretical perspectives. Seeking and evaluating different hypothetical explanations helps to re-construe obscure phenomena. The process of making the abductive reinterpretations here, a modification of Danermark's process, is described in Chapter 8, with the re-interpretations to which it led.

The first reinterpretation abducted from the findings was translated to Khmer and presented to interviewees for feedback. In follow-up interviews with the sample of interviewees in Cambodia, they were asked to comment on an abductive re-interpretation of a composite narrative based on tendencies in the interview-data. Their comments were then incorporated into the interpretation. Results of this triangulation are discussed in section 8.2, informant validation.

Following this, the results of the abductive reinterpretations were pondered in a retroduction, a search for the essence of the abductions taken together (8.3). What was necessary and sufficient in the structures or mechanisms found to be active here?

What made resilience to extreme trauma possible for these individuals?

But the answers to these questions must wait. First, it is essential to prepare the ground by presenting relevant research on the central themes for the study, *trauma* and *resilience*. To this research, largely from the mental health sciences, we now turn.

3. Research on trauma and resilience

What have resilient Cambodian survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime?

Introduction

This chapter describes relevant parts of the trauma and resilience research from the mental health field. The material will be reflected over from the viewpoint of critical sociology.

Since World War II, an understanding of the responses to potentially traumatic events has evolved. Parallel with this, a comprehensive body of human rights law has developed. These two developments have converged in a medical rights-based approach, where mental health professionals document and promote the civil and political rights of patients whose distress is related to human rights violations (Steel, Steel & Silove, 2009; Silove, Steel & Watters, 2000). Health professionals find, for example, that they can contribute to ensuring that the right to rehabilitation provided in human rights instruments is actually provided for their patients (Sveaass, 2011).

Psychosocial resilience is viewed as a protective quality, a resource in and after potentially traumatic events (e.g. Borge, 2003; Watters, 2001; Christie & Waaktaar, 2000; Rutter, 1990; Antonovsky, 1987). Antonovsky marvels at the ability of Holocaust survivors, 'To have gone through the almost unimaginable horror of the camp followed by years of being a displaced person… and still be in reasonable health' (1987: xi). Among those who survived the Khmer Rouge are many who are in reasonable health while some do appear to be doing 'remarkably well', to use the phrase of Antonovsky (1987: 64).

A good deal has been written on the nature of resilience and coping from a Judeo-Christian cultural perspective (e.g. Frankl, 1971; Bettelheim, 1979). Very little has come from the accounts of the survivors themselves, with the exception of those developed by survivors of the Jewish holocaust, the *Shoa*. I have not succeeded in

finding work focused on resilience from the perspective of a Cambodian cultural tradition. Discovering the nature of the resilience and coping resources is part of the intention of this study (section 1.1).

A substantial body of research on refugee psychiatry exists internationally – from the work of Holocaust survivors like Bettelheim (1979) writing about their own experiences, to contemporary psychiatrists and psychologists who have written about the mental health of survivors of war-related traumas (e.g. Danieli, 2009; Elsass, 1997; Van der Kolk, 1996; Jaranson, 1998; Silove, 1999; Van der Veer, 1994). Traumatic experience is endemic among war survivors. In the 1990s, epidemiological studies in diverse cultural contexts documented high levels of trauma exposure in displaced populations. The evidence is also strong that trauma exposure is a predictor of poor long-term mental health (Silove, Steel & Watters, 2000:605). The usefulness of assessing the mental health needs of war refugees upon arrival in resettlement countries has recently been indicated in the first prospective longitudinal study of a refugee cohort more than 10 years after arrival (Vaage, Thomsen, Silove, Wentzel-Larsen, Ta, & Hauff, 2011). The presence or absence of psychological distress upon arrival is found to be an indicator of mental health as much as 23 years later (ibid.). These findings have relevance for the present research, where a third of the interviewees arrived in Norway 25 years ago.

The chapter proceeds with a section on historical and topical understandings of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In this study, the trauma diagnosis as formulated in the DSM-IV, the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), is chosen to represent the pathogenic outcome. A review of trauma research related to Cambodians follows (3.1.2). A selection of epidemiological studies among Cambodian populations is then presented as part of a comparative background for the data from resilient informants (3.1.3). In the second section, *resilience* is addressed as a protective factor conducive to salutogenic outcomes after potentially traumatic events. A selection of frequently mentioned resilience resources, viewed from mental health and sociological perspectives, is discussed (section 3.2).

Because of its interdisciplinary character, the thesis may be read by scholars of mental health as well as sociology. For this reason, it has sometimes been found necessary to belabour points that may be self-explanatory in one discipline but relatively unknown in another. The reader is referred to the glossary for unfamiliar terms, where section numbers for the main discussion of the terms are provided.

3.1. Central concepts: trauma

In commenting on trauma and resilience, I have chosen from the wealth of literature on the subject only those theories and studies which are relevant for the project. The references here are largely from the mental health sciences. Rather than being viewed as a dichotomy, trauma and resilience are regarded here as two ends of a continuum: from trauma (in the sense of a pathogenic reaction) to resilience (in the sense of a salutogenic reaction [Antonovsky 2001/1987]) to traumatic stress.

3.1.1. Trauma diagnoses: historical and topical understandings

The development of the trauma diagnosis

The development of a trauma diagnosis as such is said to have begun with the work of Pierre Janet (1859); it died out for a few decades, and reappeared with the observations of acutely traumatised combat soldiers during and after World War I. Then it was forgotten, reappearing with observations of acutely traumatised combat soldiers during and after World War II; it re-emerged again with observations of traumatised soldiers during and after the Vietnam War (Van der Hart & Nijenhuis, 2008:453). These observations apply only to men: traumas resulting from the abuse of women and children entered the public arena through the efforts of women's movements rather than through psychiatry. Trauma diagnoses are still being developed. Work is being done, for example, with regard to the complex traumas resulting from childhood abuse and neglect, the so-called developmental trauma disorder (Van der Kolk 2010). In

Nijenhuis' view, persons suffering from such traumatic backgrounds are especially predisposed to develop PTSD from war traumas (Van der Hart & Nijenhuis, 2008; Nijenhuis, 2010).

Through the personal accounts of eloquent Holocaust survivors (Bruno Bettelheim, Primo Levi, Eli Wiesel, Jean Améry and Viktor Frankl, among others), some of whom were psychoanalysts, concentration camp survivor syndrome (KZ) was conceptualized:

> The most severely affected have consciously concluded that the reintegration of their personalities is impossible, or pointless, or both. Life has become so fragmented that it is impossible to piece it together again.... These survivors suffer from a psychiatric disorder, which has been named the concentration camp survivor syndrome (Bettelheim, 1979:29).

Of his experiences at Buchenwald, he says, 'it was to teach me much; so much that I am not at all sure I have even now exhausted all that was implied in that learning experience' (Bettelheim, 1960:12).

For this sociological project the work of the Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1971/1946) was particularly helpful. Frankl developed his ideas on the centrality of meaning for mental health through first-hand experience of the Shoa. The particular relevance of such documentation is that the experiences of inmates of the Khmer Rouge production units bear a likeness to those from the Nazi concentration camps, transposed to the tropics. In Cambodia, the heat, brutality, hard work and starvation replaced the cold, brutality, hard work and starvation of the Nazi concentration camps. A survivor of Auschwitz, Frankl states with startling clarity and authority his own hard-won perspective on meaning: 'to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in suffering' (Frankl, 1971/1946: xi). He goes so far as to say that 'suffering gives a unique opportunity for development, a task on which we did not want to turn our backs' (ibid.: 78).

Through the traumatisation of American Vietnam soldiers and the need to give them a medical diagnosis and compensation for their distress, trauma pathology gained formal recognition as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). La Mothe (1999), following

Herman (1992/2001), distinguishes between natural trauma, caused by earthquakes and other natural disasters and malignant or 'betraying trauma', caused by other human beings. He argues that malignant traumas – including torture, rape and childhood sexual abuse – can never be fully healed because they contain certain core experiences that cannot be articulated (LaMotte, 1999:1196). The experiences of survivors of the Khmer Rouge certainly fit the betrayal category, sharing the explicitly malignant qualities described by Jean Améry: people heard their cries, but there was no one to help them; they lost control over the integrity of body and self; and they were intended to lose interpersonal and basic trust (LaMotte, 1999:1196).

In addition to the Shoa survivors, this study has had frequent recourse to the work of Mollica, a modern humanistic psychiatrist with many years of professional experience with Cambodian survivors. Mollica's cogent observations about healing, recovery and the importance of the trauma story as a legacy for families and societies (Mollica, 2006:37) have proven particularly salient for this study.

On PTSD

The usefulness and heuristic value of the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis in clinical practice and in research are undisputed today (Maier, 2006). In the diagnostic manual for mental health, the *DSM IV,* PTSD is presented as one of a number of anxiety disorders where the primary feature is abnormal or inappropriate anxiety (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). It is closely related to the diagnosis for posttraumatic stress disorder in the *ICD 10,* the *International Classification of Diseases*, which covers both physical and mental disorders (World Health Organisation, 2007).

PTSD is only one of the possible mental health outcomes after potentially traumatic events, however. Also other outcomes are associated with potentially traumatic events. Comorbidity with PTSD is found with, for example, anxiety, depression (e.g. Marshall et al 2005), somatisation (e.g. Avdibegovic, Delic, Hadzibeganovic, & Selimbasic, 2010; Hoge, Terhakopian, Castro, Messer, & Engel, 2007; Dahl, Dahl, Sandvik & Hauff 2006) and the eventual transition to an enduring personality change (Beltran,

Llewellyn, & Silove, 2006). Some war-survivors also suffer from pre-existing psychiatric conditions (Hauff, 1997).

The PTSD diagnosis in the *DSM IV* is emphasised in this project for two reasons:

1) Despite highly variable rates of PTSD in a global review (Steel et al., 2009), PTSD is the outcome commonly associated with potentially traumatic events by the media, by the general population and by primary health workers.

2) It is a discrete category: the symptoms are clearly described, distinguishing them from symptoms of the comorbid disorders.

For these reasons, the symptoms of the PTSD diagnosis in the *DSM IV* have been chosen to represent a pathogenic outcome after potentially traumatic events in this study. The description of traumatic experience in the diagnosis (criterion A1, below) fits the events experienced by the informants. It was essential for the project that candidates had indeed had the type of experiences described in the diagnosis. If they were to qualify as interviewees, they must have:

1. Experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.
2. The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror (American Psychiatric Association, 2000:439).

This part of the diagnosis is called Criterion A. It is a formal description of the nature of the experiences that can trigger the psychological disorder PTSD in the *DSM-IV*. The description goes on to list such examples of traumatic events as military combat, violent personal assault, torture and incarceration in a concentration camp. It concludes with the warning that 'the disorder may be especially severe or long lasting when the stressor is of human design' (American Psychiatric Association, 2000:437). Man-made stressors may lead to a loss of interpersonal trust (see e.g. Jaranson, 1998:17). Such stressors include torture, sexual abuse, family violence and the kinds of long-lasting uncertainty and violence that can be implemented by a totalitarian régime like the Khmer Rouge.

To meet the criteria for the diagnosis, however, a person must also exhibit symptoms, such as re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli associated with the event; symptoms of hyperarousal, intrusive thoughts, constriction or numbing (Herman, 2001:33); and significant distress or impairment over time. Such a person can be said to be *traumatised*. The symptoms of the disorder are listed in their entirety in Appendix V.

For the purposes of this study, a distinction is maintained between, on the one side, having traumatic experience (exposure to potentially traumatic events) and on the other, being traumatised (pathogenic outcome after traumatic experience). Persons chosen for this study have had traumatic experience. They 1) were exposed to the kind of traumatic events described in Criterion A, but 2) did not develop the symptoms or were able to overcome them. This does not mean that the interviewees never had any distressing emotions or intrusive thoughts; but they were chosen for the study because they did not appear to have become debilitated by them. They had managed to find ways of dealing with the past that appeared to have enabled them to live apparently happy and successful lives in the 30 years since Pol Pot. Together with characteristics attributed to the traumatised in medical research, the listed symptoms of PTSD from the *DSM IV* are used as a comparative background against which to compare the findings from those selected in this project for their apparent resiliency (see section 3.1.3).

The conceptual debate on the trauma diagnosis

The trauma discourse in transcultural psychiatry has been debated on several fronts, with particular reference to the PTSD diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). There are discussions about the appropriateness of the discourse for survivors from non-Western societies; about the medicalisation of war and human rights abuse; and about the over-use of the term trauma in the public discourse, to the extent that war refugees are popularly assumed to be traumatised.

Among the discussants, Summerfield is critical of some of the cultural assumptions involved in the PTSD discourse. Bracken, Giller and Summerfield find the following

'universalist assumptions' in the western biomedical approach to illness: 1) the notion of individuality, which is by no means universal; 2) the supposed similarity in response to trauma between cultural groups; and 3) the misconception of individual psychotherapy as the best approach for non-Western societies (Bracken, Giller & Summerfield, 1999: 2).[14]

Summerfield maintains that in some non-Western societies, the physical and the mental are more integrated with each other and with the spiritual realm. 'In short, the cosmological and ontological focus on the individual which is the underlying philosophy of biomedicine is not universally endorsed' (Summerfield, 1999:3).[15]

Another discussant is Eisenbruch, who bases his commentaries on professional experience of Cambodian survivors. Eisenbruch decries the 'culture-free' *DSM III* as 'illusory and damaging both to clinical practice and research' (Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 1992:8). In particular he finds that the PTSD-diagnosis is often based on an ethnocentric view of how refugees should express distress and how the distress could be addressed. Eisenbruch develops a culturally determined clinical complex (rather than a diagnosis), *cultural bereavement,* which he describes as 'a normal, even constructive, existential response' in circumstances of up-rooting, rather than a psychiatric illness (Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 1992:9).

In terms of the medicalisation critique, 'The medical discourse dominates the discussion on trauma and refugees. Trauma as a social experience and as a permanent indictment of injustice is transformed into a psychiatric disorder' (Vervey, 2001). Christie and Waaktaar point out that critics from countries that have been or are at war ask how it can be ethically or politically defensible to brand understandable reactions to human rights abuse as individual illnesses (Waaktaar & Christie, 2000:30, author's translation). The political aspect of Cambodians' potentially traumatic experience is evident when one considers the fact that the Khmer Rouge regime consistently violated all 30 human rights in the International Declaration. Kleinman also laments

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14 Summerfield agrees with Geertz (1973) that the Western conception of a person as a bounded individual 'is a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures' (Summerfield 1999:3),
15 Transforming this critique into practice, Drozdek suggests a contextual approach to trauma, learning by listening to clients how they define their own problem, rather than using a 'mechanistic, Western approach' (Drozdek, cited in a field note, 17 March 2010).

'the moral consequences of political violence recast as Posttraumatic stress disorder' and in general disavows the process of medicalisation which has 'transformed ordinary unhappiness and normal bereavement into clinical depression and existential angst into anxiety disorders' (Kleinman. 2006:9). More recently, Moghimi (2012) notes that although PTSD is a useful construct for conceptualizing the experience of those who have suffered traumatic events, it does not lend itself to universal cross-cultural application and should be cautiously applied in post-conflict societies (Moghimi, 2012:29).

In regard to the overuse of the diagnosis, it has been said that 'trauma seems to be replacing hunger as the issue of concern among the public' (Summerfield, 2002: 1106). Lie points out that the reactions of war survivors are not automatic, but a function of the kind and degree of the trauma, the individual's mastering strategies and the life now led by the survivor (Lie, 2009, author's translation). The inevitability of PTSD after traumatic events is counter-indicated by research as well as by the diagnosis itself: reported prevalence rates of PTSD after potentially traumatic events have been shown to vary widely across nations and contexts (Steel et al., 2009).[16] Yet still the label 'traumatised refugees' is unreflectively applied to all survivors from war zones.

In spite of this critique, the PTSD diagnosis is one of the best conceptualisations of a pathogenic development after potentially traumatic events. DeVries points out that the recognition of trauma as a reaction to events renders its members' experiences and emotions meaningful and legitimises them. The PTSD diagnosis takes into account the context of an event, thus creating a different ontology for the diagnosis. It serves as a model for 'correcting the decontextualized aspects of today's taxonomic systems, bringing us back to the person's experience and the meaning he assigns it' (DeVries 1996:399). This is a positive aspect of the medicalisation of trauma: the diagnosis has changed the public perception of this form of suffering from criminality to sickness.

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16 The Cochrane review of psychological interventions used in treating traumatic stress symptoms applies only to acute traumatic stress reactions and has therefore less relevance for treating enduring reactions over time (Roberts et al. 2010). Kruse and colleagues (2009) find the fact that traumatised war refugees usually experience numerous highly stressful war-related events affects the ability to generalise intervention-results. The confrontation with traumatic memory as an indispensable part of the treatment is questioned (Kruse et al. 2009:586).

In the past, the situation was worse for traumatised survivors. During and after World War I, for example, Europe was full of shell-shocked soldiers. No one has better described the mixture of shame and anger experienced by the war-damaged than poet-veteran Siegfried Sassoon in his 'Survivors', written at a military hospital in 1917:

> No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain
>
> have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
>
> Of course they're 'longing to go out again'
>
> These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk
>
> They'll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed
>
> Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died
>
> Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud
>
> Of glorious war that shattered their pride...
>
> Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;
>
> Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad

(Sassoon, 2011/1919)

The existence of a diagnosis has legitimised the suffering and may thus to a certain extent have helped traumatised survivors to accept themselves.

3.1.2. Brief review of literature on Cambodian survivors' mental health

In the Thai border camps, where the Norwegian Khmer lived for an average of seven years in the 1980s along with nearly a half million other displaced Cambodians, a study of mental health status was carried out in 1989/1990. The research showed moderate rates of PTSD (14%) but high rates of depression and flashbacks (Mollica et al., 1993; Mollica, 2006). This study will be described in more detail in the next section, as it forms part of the comparative background against which the resilience of members of the same cohort of Cambodian survivors will be viewed.

Alarmed by their findings Mollica and his colleagues appealed to the international

community to deal with the mental health needs of this population after repatriation. They warned that such exposures may produce serious long-term social and psychological effects. 'The data from our survey do not support the assumption that most camp residents will be able to resume lives of good health and economic self-sufficiency after going home to Cambodia' (Mollica et al., 1993: 584). This was the cohort from whom my interviewees were selected, the source population for the Khmer who were resettled in the 1980s in Norway, as well as in the USA, Canada, Australia, France, England and other countries. Mollica's research and its message have undoubtedly improved the chances for many Cambodians to receive mental-health follow-up in resettlement countries.

In receiver countries, however, reports vary as to how Khmer survivors have fared. In neighbouring Finland, where the Khmer population numbered about 150 individuals in the late 1980s:

> They never developed the critical mass to have a very vibrant community…. Many have had very serious problems of integration to work through, possibly because of the lack of supports and the desperate state of the society from which they came (Kathleen Valtonen, cited in a field note, August 27, 2004).

Canada received about twenty thousand Cambodians in the 1980s. According to one report, they were offered neither government service/support nor post-trauma treatment, and they encountered profound difficulties after their traumatic experiences because of the lack of a unifying and encompassing structure (McLellan 1999:134). A decade after resettlement in the USA, a study of Cambodian survivors showed that, despite having been vetted for mental health prior to being granted residence, members of this cohort showed an incidence of mental suffering six times higher than the national average (Meinhardt 1992:45). Almost 20 years later, 'Even with a comprehensive, continuous treatment over a period of 10 or more years, a substantial minority was still impaired' (Boehnlein et al., 2009).

Several recent studies have focused on the children of Cambodian survivors, where the effects of the trauma are seen in a generational perspective (e.g. Rousseau, Drapeau &

Ruhimi 2003; Berthold, 2000). These studies assume to some extent a trans-generational transmission of the trauma from the parent generation, as conceptualised by Danieli (2009). Studies of the children of survivors are not included here, however. To answer the research questions, it was essential to learn from people who had been fully able to understand what was happening and who were now able to conceptualise how they had responded during the acutely stressful Khmer Rouge period. Despite the very real possibility of trans-generational trauma effects, those who were teenagers in the 1990s would have had little or no memory of these earlier traumatic events. They would not have been born then, or would have been very young.[17]

As mentioned in section 2.1, this dissertation focuses exclusively on survivors of the war cohort, the parent generation who were at least teenaged during the Pol Pot era. This was done in order to make a meaningful study of persons with comparable traumatic experience and, in particular, of their resilience in the face of such experience.

3.1.3. The PTSD diagnosis as a comparative background

As Durkheim points out, a social science that wishes to understand how social phenomena are related cannot build on the vague definitions of everyday speech. 'The scientist must build up the categories he or she wishes to study, making them as unambiguous as possible' (1978: 23, author's translation). For a sociologist, in an outsider position *vis à vis* mental health, it is therefore useful that a formal diagnosis has been created for trauma. The trajectories of the interviewees' lives, charted in a traditional Khmer cultural setting, were severed by events which fit the PTSD understanding of potentially traumatic experience. In the years from c.1970 to 1979, all Cambodians experienced, witnessed, or were confronted with events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others, and their responses involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror (Criterion

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17 Eng Bo, a 39-year-old teacher, told the Phnom Penh Post that he had been separated from his parents and ordered, at the age of 5, to retrieve clothes from the dead bodies of cadres. But he had been unable to relate to those experiences: 'I was very shocked to learn about all of the people that Pol Pot killed' (Phnom Penh Post, 8 January 2010).

A, PTSD diagnosis, Appendix V).

As a comparative background for the apparently resilient, the study is embedded in large-scale field studies that document high degrees of traumatisation continuing over time in the same cohort. Three well-known studies of the source population in Cambodia and among Khmer refugees abroad have been chosen as part of a comparative background against which findings from the resilient are presented. In the present study, explanations are sought for the non-concurrence of resilient survivors with the characteristics of traumatised survivors suggested by these now classical studies, which describe their results in terms of e.g. PTSD rates in their samples.

Ideally there would have been a control group in this study: not only resilient but also non-resilient samples. This was, as mentioned, impossible because the small size of the Cambodian population in Norway made anonymity problematic.

Instead, the comparative background is made up of the descriptions of symptoms and traits of traumatised members of the same cohort described in three landmark studies: Marshall et al., 2005; Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 2002; Mollica et al., 1993. These studies are chosen because they present the Cambodian war cohort in three different contexts: 1) in Site Two, one of the refugee camps on the Thai border (Mollica et al., 1993); 2) in rural locations in contemporary Cambodia (Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 2002); and 3) in a contemporary Western resettlement context (Marshall et al., 2005).

The findings from this medical research literature are, in turn, based at least in part on identified symptoms of the PTSD diagnosis, as presented in the *DSM IV* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). That is, those who are represented in the studies have been tested and found to carry symptoms listed in the diagnosis (see appendix V). All the studies used the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) and the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL-25) as instruments for measuring trauma. The samples in the three studies described below had all experienced the Khmer Rouge regime and had trauma exposure commensurate with that of the analytical category for interviewees chosen for this project.

   1) At Site Two, one of the camps in Thailand from which refugees were chosen

for resettlement, 993 adults were interviewed by Mollica and his colleagues in 1989-90, using the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire and the Hopkins Symptom Checklist. Of these, 55% had scores correlating with major depression and hopelessness; 70.9% had recurrent memories and nightmares; 74.8% had 'thoughts or feelings that they associated with hurtful or terrifying events'. Remarkably enough, only 14.7% had symptom scores 'above a value that correlates with *DSM-III-R* criteria for PTSD' (Mollica et al., 1993: 583).

2) In Cambodia, Van de Put and Eisenbruch found in a sample of 610 randomly selected Cambodians aged 15–65 a 'lifetime prevalence of PTSD at 28%' (Van de Put & Eisenbruch 2002:104), while 71% regarded nightmares as a common occurrence. The group in which prevalence of PTSD was highest corresponds to the present age of my informants (average age 56 in 2009). The prevailing idioms of distress in Van de Put & Eisenbruch include 'tiredness (*ahkomlang*), thinking too much (*kit chraen*) and flashbacks of past traumas in the form of dreams and imagery which spill over into waking life (*sr amay*)' as well as what was termed depression or *pibak cet* (Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 2002:106).

3) In the Cambodian refugee population in Long Beach, California, Marshall et al. interviewed 486 persons in the same age range as the interviewees in this study (aged 35–75 in 2003) and found 'high rates of psychiatric disorders associated with trauma' more than two decades after their arrival (Marshall et al., 2005:571). Of these, 62% met DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for PTSD in the last year and 51% major depression. The high co-morbidity of PTSD and major depression raised questions for the team as to whether they were 'manifestations of a single continuum of posttraumatic distress'. Older age, unemployment, poor English-speaking proficiency, being retired or disabled and living in poverty were associated with still higher rates (ibid: 571–575).

This cursory review does not do justice to these landmark studies, but is included to illustrate the background for the object of study from a trauma perspective. Again, it is not claimed that none of the interviewees ever had any symptoms. For this study, the

central criterion was that each interviewee was judged and judged him or herself to be doing remarkably well at the time of the interview.

In the theoretical discussion in Chapter 9, a comparison will be drawn between the findings from the informants and this comparative background and key features of the PTSD diagnosis (Appendix V). For, instead of developing disabling symptoms, the chosen interviewees demonstrated a remarkable resilience.

3.2. Central concepts: resilience

The focus of this study is resilience rather than trauma. The exposition of trauma in the last section may therefore seem to have been given disproportionate focus in relation to the resilience section. The rationale for this choice is that, despite the growing interest in resilience, the focus on trauma still dominates the mental health discourse on war refugees.

Resilience – the ability to 'bounce back' or regain form after great strain, to recover from misfortune or change – is a human capacity that may make the difference between integration and disintegration for trauma survivors. Resilient persons show an ability to withstand, overcome and recover after serious, even life-threatening events (Masten, 2001). Coping skills are resilient ways of behaving, of adjusting to the demands and challenges of stress (Wind and Marshall, 2008). Coping and resilience are used interchangeably in popular parlance. In the thesis, a distinction is maintained between resilience, as the immanent capacity and coping, as the operational, behavioural term. Interestingly, while resilience is borrowed from physics, where it indicates the inherent ability of metals to regain form after bending, coping borrows associations from architecture. A coping stone, or keystone, is the central, topmost stone which locks in place the wedge-shaped stones forming an arch, holding the entire structure together.[18]

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[18] The etymology of 'coping' can however be related to the Norwegian *'kåpe',* a coat.

What seems clear is that resilience is multi-faceted. A Google search for 'resilience' yielded 332,000 references in 2002; by 2010 the number had risen to 6.5 million. In the exclusively medical research literature, the number of articles found by PubMed / Medline was 4012, of which a third referred to psychological resilience (accessed 17 November 2010).[19]

A field of study that intervenes on the continuum between posttraumatic stress (PTSD) and resilience is Posttraumatic growth (PTG). The struggle with emotional distress is seen, in this view, as essential for cognitive processes leading to growth. PTG is the individuals' experience of significant positive change arising from the struggle with a major life crisis (Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi, & McMillan, 2000:521). PTG is not a resilience trajectory, but a change to a higher level of functioning detected in some survivors of traumatic events. Changes are noted in philosophy of life, interpersonal relations and self-perception. Interesting as these observations are, it seemed more consistent with the aims of this research to seek conceptual support in relation to resilience among perspectives which focus on self-healing or natural remission (e.g. Mollica 2006; Borge, 2003; Waaktaar & Christie, 2000) rather than on posttraumatic growth, which presupposes a PTSD as a point of departure.[20]

Antonovsky's concept 'salutogenesis', health-promoting practice in public health services (Antonovsky 2001/1987), has been an inspiration for this study. In *Health, Stress and Coping* (1979), Antonovsky reviews psychological literature and research to establish a *prima facie* basis for a hypothesis about the meaning of a sense of coherence (SOC) for healing (Antonovsky, 2000/1987:15). Through his literature study, he finds factors that determine resilience or 'tension management' as he conceptualises and develops a theory and an instrument to explain and study the phenomenon. Antonovsky adopts a salutogenic rather than a pathogenic orientation to health: he is interested not in why some people are sick, but in why others are healthy. A Sense of Coherence (SOC) distinguishes the successful survivors in his material.

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19 A search for 'resilient non-resilient comparison' in PubMed / Medline produced six articles, mostly related to cancer.

20 Other interesting perspectives are found in the positive psychology of Seligman (2004) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990), which declares its indebtedness to the humanistic psychology of Maslov and Carl Rogers (Peterson & Seligman, 2004:275) and aims to advance research on positive emotion, the positive traits 'foremost among them strength and virtue' and positive institutions 'democracy, strong families and free inquiry' (ibid., xiii).

The SOC is a sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, 'a pervasive, enduring though dynamic, feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected'. Antonovsky finds 'generalised resistance resources' common to successful survivors, such as money, ego strength, cultural stability and social support that facilitate making sense of stressors and thus generate a sense of coherence in life (Antonovsky, 1987: xii-xiii).

Antonovsky's theory was further developed in a pilot study of 51 persons who had experienced major traumas and were reported to be doing 'remarkably well' (1987:64). He formed an impression of how the informants were coping based on their positive or negative descriptions of their lives. He then gave them the SOC-scale to test the correspondence between how they were describing their lives and their SOC scores. He remarks that many of those who referred the informants to him were not fully aware of 'how moderately or marginally many of the informants were coping, as evidenced by our classification of a number of them into a moderate or weak SOC' [sic] (1987:66). The SOC scale is a quantitative tool frequently used in quality of life research (e.g. Langeland, 2009).

In spite of Antonovsky's innovative power, neither his theory nor his scale seemed suited to this project. Although finely conceptualised, the SOC scale is a method for checking a hypothesis. Such a procedure would have been epistemologically inappropriate here: this study sought new explanations and new substantive information about the nature of resilience by means of the inductive and abductive approaches described in Chapter 2. As the SOC scale had no clear usefulness, the use of Antonovsky's work is confined to three important concepts: salutogenesis, sense of coherence and the evaluative phrase 'doing remarkably well,' which is used as one of the selection criteria for the analytical category (see section 2.1). In addition, Antonovsky's remarks that 'there are many cultural roads to a sense of coherence,' and that he would be 'delighted to see grounded theory applied to the salutogenic question' (1987: 64-65) are met by this research. The project examines the resilience of persons on another cultural road and uses grounded theory as an analysis tool to search for

salutogenic resources.[21]

In the interview process, I did not ask about specific resources (there was no interview guide). Certain explanations of resilience are well-known, however, and could have influenced the analysis and interpretation. In the next subsections, we take up some of these frequently mentioned resilience factors: basic trust / sense of coherence; social integration, culture, religious beliefs and work or meaningful activity.

3.2.1. Basic trust

Basic trust and ontological security are developed through the reliability and loving attention of early caretakers. When at an early stage a person has acquired a set of stable representations of safe relations established in interaction with early caregivers and maintained in continual interaction with others, he/she can be said to function with basic trust or with a 'background of safety' (Varvin, 2000:5). Basic trust can provide an 'emotional inoculation against existential anxieties…. a sense of invulnerability which blocks off negative possibilities in favour of a generalised attitude of hope' (Giddens, 1999: 39–40). The development of basic trust is part of the formation of the secure attachment relations associated with healthy development in childhood (Nijenhuis, cited in a field note, 25 May 2010). Basic trust is the basis for ontological security and interpersonal trust. Interpersonal trust is threatened by traumatic human rights abuse and indeed, it is one of torture's goals to destroy it: 'the real purposes are to humiliate, weaken and destroy the personality' (Jaranson, 1998:17). The aspect of intentionality that distinguishes such traumatic experience undermines the basic trust that is conscientiously built up by most parents in the course of child nurturing.

The presence or absence of basic trust established in infancy is thus linked to resilience, but whether or not a person had it established in infancy cannot readily be discovered in a biographical interview. Nor would this information be useful for improving the chances of future survivors, as it is uncertain whether basic trust can be restored to a traumatised adult. It may be within the scope of psychotherapy to restore

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21 'Sense of coherence' was once translated for me as *karma*

it, but is beyond the scope of this inquiry. It will therefore be assumed that, because they seemed to be exceptionally resilient, these survivors had probably been fortunate with regard to developing basic trust and secure attachment relations in infancy. Therefore basic trust is not a part of the conceptual framework, although its importance for resilience is acknowledged.

3.2.2. Social cohesion / significant others

In the development of the psyche, relationships with significant others influence who a person becomes. When under stress, such relationships play an important role in determining how one copes with stressful situations of both mind and body. Memories of past relationships have been seen to emerge as a resource during traumatic experience. As Varvin reports, 'Modern neuropsychological research has shown how feelings, especially the negative or difficult ones, may be soothed by .... inner dialogue with safe persons from our past'. Often unconscious, this can be the memory of a mother who comforts, or a father who cheers us up (Varvin, 2006:3). The aptness of this observation became apparent in the analysis of survivor accounts.

Among veterans of recent wars, the perceived lack of social support has been found to be a significant predictor for PTSD, while social support structures and communities and being able to talk to 'someone who knows me' were found more helpful than treatment in the case of British veterans (Wesseley, 2009). Kleinman states that most therapeutic activity takes place between the patient and his/her family and friends, in the 'popular sector of health care' (Kleinman, 1980:134).

The presence of a family can help in crises as a potential forum for the expression of feelings. Lie, Sveaass and Eilertsen (2004:327) studied the effects of traumatic experiences on two refugee populations in Norway, one clinical and one non-clinical (N=900). The presence of a family had a mitigating influence on the long-term effects on mental health of low and medium trauma exposure for both populations.

3.2.3. Culture

Studies where individuals strongly identify with cultural values (are culturally assimilated) show that, in addition to benefiting from social support, they are buffered by their traditional culture from the profound impact of stressful experiences. Culture's ways of 'furnishing social support, providing identities in terms of norms and values, and supplying a shared vision of the future' can act as a buffer against potentially traumatic experiences (DeVries: 1996:400). The social and religious rituals surrounding loss and disaster can also have an important healing role (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996:xv). In the traditional Cambodian society in which the interviewees grew up, birth, marriage and death were surrounded by ritual practices. The youngest interviewees in my earlier research had described these as providing meaning and stability to their lives (field notes, October 1997–February 1998).

When things go right, culture provides support; but it is believed that 'traumatic events can profoundly alter the basic structure not just of the individual but of the cultural system as a whole and that social upheavals create a discontinuity in the order and predictability that culture has brought to daily life' (DeVries, 1996). The changes that took place in Cambodian lives after the Khmer Rouge took control on 17 April 1975 were an example of such discontinuity. Virtually imprisoned in harsh re-education work camps, where they were denied recourse to family, home and traditional ways of being and coping, it is difficult to understand how the interviewees can have found much support in their culture. The international journal *Transcultural Psychiatry* has published original research and review articles on the interaction between culture and mental health since the 1950s. In recent years, several articles have brought resilience into discussions of adapting clinical and social services to accommodate the needs of refugee populations (e.g. Kaczorowski et al., 2011; Gunnestad, 2006).

3.2.4. Religion / beliefs

In psychological coping theory, it is considered important to consider the degree to which people's constructions of the world equip them to deal with reality. An analysis of coping activities, which the present study aims to provide, can make clear how

people sustain themselves psychologically, socially and spiritually in desperate conditions (Pargament, 1998:14). Pargament presents summaries of over 250 studies of the relationship between various measures of religious orientation and the outcomes of negative events. Pargament's research (1998) is based largely on studies of adherents of the Abrahamitic religions.[22]

DeVries finds, surprisingly, that 'no information is available as to how religious beliefs shape responses to healing' (1996:399). Mollica, Cui, McInnes and Massagli (2002) note, however, that refugees involved in religious activities were one-third less likely to meet criteria for PTSD than informants who participated in few or no religious activities. Elsass ascribes the resilience of Tibetan survivors of prison and human rights abuse largely to their beliefs in Tibetan Buddhism (Elsass 2003:241; Elsass, Carlsson & Husum 2010). Recently, in spite of poor health, Elsass has published a chronicle entitled 'Buddhism in the treatment of stress' (Elsass, 2011). Recent literature also links, for example, Christian beliefs among Black American homeless women to successful coping strategies and re-integration (Washington et al., 2009; Quinn & Guion, 2010). In *Mental health, religion & culture*, Anand's findings showed that faith in the karma doctrine 'facilitates acceptance of a tragic situation' (Anand, 2009: 818). Hussain and Bhushan ascribe the success of Tibetans in coping with refugee life to their devotion to Buddhism, which has exerted a strong influence on their lives and culture (Hussain & Bhushan, 2010). A review of spiritual assessment in health-care practice notes a recent surge of interest in links between spirituality and health (Rumbold, 2007: 60; D'Souza & Kuruvilla, 2006).

That not only religion but also other beliefs help people through traumatic experience seems to be an article of conventional wisdom, but the phenomenon has also been observed in the testimonies of survivors of the Shoa (Bettelheim, 1979; Frankl, 1971). Findings in late modernity suggest the same. One of Basoglu's first major studies involved testing a sample of 207 politically active torture survivors for PTSD. They had 'remarkably low' trauma scores. 'Their ideological reference point made it easier to gain control of fear' (Basoglu cited in a field note, June 4, 2009). The project went

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22 The widely differing perspectives of these religions and Theráváda Buddhism render these interesting studies less relevant for the present project.

on to test a corresponding group of non-politically active, where the rates were high. Agger's Testimonial Therapy was developed to help survivors to find meaning in suffering, to positively reframe it (Agger, cited in a field note, 4 November 2011).

3.2.5. Work

That work is a principle source of identity for most adults has been confirmed by labour market-studies examining the impact of un-employment on mental health (Tausig, 1999:255–256). In a cross-sectional study of 226 highly traumatized civilians, both resilient and non-resilient, the non-resilient group is found to have a higher percentage of unemployment (Wingo et al., 2010). In a stratified random sample of the German male population (N = 2144), Beutel et al. (2010) find that life satisfaction is strongly associated with resilience, lack of non-employment, the presence of a partnership, positive self-esteem and a good household income.

Unemployment and low income are found to be mediators of psychological distress for migrants in Oslo (Dalgard, Thapa, Hauff, McCubbin & Syed, 2006). Mollica, Cui, McInnes and Massagli (2002) find a significant relationship between work status and depression, and suggest that providing employment in refugee camps could reduce rates of depression.

In a study of war refugees in Norway that includes clinical and non-clinical samples (N=950), Lie, Sveaass and Eilertsen (2004) find indications that regular activity 'outside the home' may serve to confirm the capabilities and agency of the refugees and have a beneficial effect on symptom levels, regardless of traumatic experience. They find it plausible that inactivity, on the other hand, contributes to increased distress and see in this some implications for the long-term support of refugees (Lie, Sveaass & Eilertsen, 2004:343). Refugee programmes taking this factor into account would take pains to provide meaningful employment for the most vulnerable.

3.2.6. Summary of resilience resources

Exactly what the components of resilience are remains subject to discussion and research. Ebert investigated the recovery of refugees exposed to multiple and severe

trauma who had not received formal assistance, learning 'what helped' from survivors who had received no interventions (Ebert, 2011). To my knowledge, Ebert's research and my own are the only two studies with this focus. They share the question: 'how did they do it?'

The contrast between a trauma focus and a resilience focus was demonstrated at the first international conference on coping and resilience, held in Dubrovnik in 2009. Forms of social resilience such as reconciliation between groups; pro-social value orientations; supportive, loving relationships before, during and after trauma; altruism born of suffering; and a 'moderate respect for authority' were suggested as resilient approaches (Staub, 4 October 2009). Just such a 'moderate respect for authority' was illustrated in the narrative of an elderly man who had been interned at the age of 14 with his mother and little brother when the Ustasha killed his father. 'I can only say what helped me. It was my mother, saying to me and my little brother: "I don't want other people to decide the future of my children. I am going to join the partisans. Do you want to join me?"' (Goldstein, 5 October 2009).

Like other research projects on resilience, this dissertation is concerned with finding out more about 'human beings' natural ways of getting on with life' (Waaktaar and Christie, 2000:17, author's translation). Continuing this tradition, the study set out to uncover, understand and explain new aspects of resilience found in selected members of the Khmer Rouge war cohort. What was found is described in Chapters 7 to 9.

The choice of resilience resources presented in this chapter is determined by what, based on prior substantive knowledge, seems relevant. These are not theories, but research findings. In Chapter 5, some of the themes presented here as resilience resources are raised again as the subjects of sociological theorising. In the latter case, little attention is paid to possible relations between the themes and mental health. Both aspects of this double conceptualisation are useful for the study, however, and contribute to the final discussions and conclusions.

4. Context and cohort

What have resilient Cambodian survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime?

Introduction

Cambodian refugees are not simply bi-cultural, people who come from one culture and now live in a second. This way of thinking needs to be exchanged for 'a perspective that sees war, flight, camp life and resettlement as a series of distinctive cultural experiences that have a far-reaching impact on refugees' (Ebihara, Ledgerwood & Mortland, 1994:19).

This comment serves as a reminder of the complexity of the contextual shifts through which the Cambodian war cohort has passed. Forms of behaviour, attitudes and motivations always exist in some sort of setting or context and the influence of these settings on the interviewees needed to be registered and understood, as informants' movements were followed from setting to setting. Understanding the cultural, religious, social, geographical and economic context of interviewees from the start involves describing them, preferably with 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973:10). Context is understood in this project not as an outer framework to which individuals related dualistically, but as a series of sets of relationships between interviewees, events, practices and language. To describe and understand the informants' experience and behaviour in contextual rather than essentialist and static terms involved describing the changing contexts in which they have participated.

After a brief historical sketch, which includes a reminder of the events of the Khmer Rouge period (4.1), the shared background context for the cohort is sketched. The pre-1975 culture with its culture and religion are presented in some detail in order to give insight into formative contextual elements in the cohort's childhood (4.1.1). The experience of migration is also viewed as a contextual factor for the cohort (4.1.2), whether they were 'only' displaced persons in Cambodia for four years, or whether

they ended up in a resettlement country (4.1.3).

Section 4.2 describes the shared background of the cohort from which samples were chosen for this project.

In examining contextual factors that might have an impact on processes of recovery, religion should be considered (section 4.3). Since 94% of the informants and about the same percentage of the Cambodian population, shared a transversal belief system and cosmology [Khmer Buddhism] this brief cultural analysis of the research object considers the possible effects of changing contexts on their religious beliefs and practices. Were the religion and ethics of moral action in the interviewees' background purely contextual – were they contingent on a given cultural context? Is it possible to transplant a locally rooted system of moral ethics from one place to another, once it has lost its underlying dialectics? By that I mean the dialectics between the changing social and cultural context of the informants. How this change affected their ethical reflection and constructions in the present is problematised. Can such a religion or system of ethics live through such radical contextual change? Can a religion still be 'alive' after all that has occurred?

Ethnographic research and participant observation of the cohort in Norway and Cambodia are used to illuminate and reflect upon the question of whether Buddhism is dead or alive for these present-day Cambodians.

4.1. Historical context

Understanding the common background of the interviewees means not only knowing about the Khmer Rouge regime, but also about the decades of war and conflict preceding it. The cohort for this study of trauma and resilience consists of adult survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime, 1975–1979, which the most reliable figures estimate as have cost 1,700,000 lives (Yale Holocaust Study, 1997). But it must be remembered that Cambodia was not a peaceful place when Pol Pot staged his coup.

The Khmer Rouge regime was one of a series of conflicts, disruptions and dislocations which Cambodia experienced.

In the mid-1800s, 'A self-image was born of the Khmer, after centuries of greatness becoming... the innocent victims of predatory neighbours' and meriting protection from friendly powers (Kent & Chandler, 2008:5). It was at this point that the French took over, modernising the political structure, the bureaucracy, the education system and the *wat* (temples) under a protectorate that lasted almost a hundred years (1863–1953). The oldest of the informants remembered the final days of the protectorate, the conflicts, dangers and subversions inside and outside of the *wat* (pagoda) (see also Ngor, 2003/1987). Kent and Chandler, however, describe the period following independence as a relatively harmonious time, which came to an abrupt end in 1970 when the Vietnam War spilled over into Cambodia (Kent & Chandler, 2008:6). General Lon Nol, often described as an American puppet, then formed a government noted for its corruption (Ngor, 2003/1987:25) and was thus commander-in-chief for several of the interviewees, who barely escaped execution after the Khmer Rouge takeover.[23]

Eastern Cambodia was carpet-bombed by the US forces in the early 1970s in an attempt to eradicate the Ho Chi Minh trail, used by the Vietcong to pass undetected from north to south Vietnam. It was from this region that Pol Pot gained most recruits. 'They are using damage caused by B-52 strikes as the main theme of their propaganda... [resulting in] the successful recruitment of a number of young men' (CIA report from 1973 cited by Kiernan 1997:22). These bombings, pitched battles, migration and corruption led to mass flight into Phnom Penh that swelled the city to more than twice its former size.

The forced march out of Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975 has been described, recorded on contemporary newsreel and dramatised (in the film *The Killing Fields*, for example). Despite the ongoing military build-up, the coup caught many unawares. At first, many greeted the Khmer Rouge as liberators. In a published account, one woman describes the scene outside her home:

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23 The French practice of shaking hands permitted the passing of money from palm to palm – ergo *bonjour* meant corruption in Khmer slang (Ngor, 2003/1987: 25).

> Neighbours and relations gathered to celebrate and sing for joy and offer
> the soldiers fruit, cakes and cigarettes. The rotten Khmer Republic was
> finally at an end! (Huor, 2008:126, author's translation from Norwegian)

Many had been attracted to the Khmer Rouge for a period at the beginning of the 1970s when Khmer Rouge's then ally, the god-king Sihanouk, exhorted people to 'go to the jungle and join the *maquis*'. Khmer Rouge appeared at first to represent a righteous alternative to the corrupt government of Lon Nol and the continual bombing by the Americans as they pursued the Vietnamese up the Ho Chi Minh.

When Pol Pot seized control the entire urban population was driven at gunpoint out of the cities and into the production units established by the Khmer Rouge, in their attempt to turn Cambodia into a hard-working army of subsistence workers.[24] The Khmer Rouge made an ideologically fundamental distinction between those that dwelt in the country, 'old people' (farmers, *mulethan* or base people) and 'new people' (city dwellers and the educated). Khmer Rouge cadres landed on the physical evidence of wearing glasses or being able to speak French as indications that someone fancied himself an intellectual – and these persons were treated particularly harshly.

In the Khmer Rouge period,

> Property was collectivised, people were reorganised into communes and
> work teams, labour requirements and discipline were severe; family and
> kinship ties were ruptured; Buddhism was abolished; malnutrition and
> illness were rampant; deaths, including executions, were commonplace
> (Ebihara, 1990:69).

After three years, eight months and 20 days of this experience, history continued as follows. When Cambodia was liberated – some say invaded – by the Vietnamese in December–January 1978–79, nearly a half-million Cambodians ended up in refugee camps in Thailand. Here the first Khmer were selected for resettlement in Norway by a commission from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration in the 1980s. In Cambodia there followed more than a decade of Vietnamese rule. It was authoritarian,

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24 In addition, minority populations like the Cham were singled out for systematic persecution (Taylor, 2007)

but there was more to eat, and, in comparison with what had gone before, less violence.

In the following sections, the cultural and social background-contexts through which many Cambodians moved in the 1970s and 1980s are described: 1) the villages that were a common origin for most; 2) the migration that was a common contextual fate; and 3) resettlement in a third country. In this case, Norway is presented as the resettlement country which is the current context for two-thirds of the informants.

4.1.1. Context 1: the village in the lowlands

As Erikson remarks, 'Former environments are always with us and since we live in a continual process of making the present 'former' we never... meet any environment as a person who never had an environment' (Erikson, 1978:24).

The memory of a village appears to be ever-present with most Cambodians, whether they left it long ago or still live there. Historically, Cambodians did not live in villages, but in extended family groups scattered about the countryside. The French colonial administration had relocated these compounds into larger village units, and then the Khmer Rouge regime (DK) further re-organised public space (Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 2002:108).

Even today, city dwellers in Cambodia return to the villages their families come from to celebrate Cambodian New Year. 'Phum Puon', the Cambodian site both for this research and for field work in 1998, will therefore be described in some detail as an example of a village archetype. My first description of the village was written during the 1998 fieldwork and updated during field trips in 2005, 2007 and 2009.

Phum Puon village is by Cambodian standards a rather poor village lying about eight kilometres from the market town along a clay track. As of the latest census, 180 families lived in the village (interview with village leaders, 2009), 716 people, in houses of palm-leaf-covered frames or wood on pylons, at intervals of 10 to 50 meters.[25] The villagers are ethnic Khmer rice farmers. Under the houses, between the

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25 In 1998 there were 197 families, roughly 1000 people (interview with village leaders, 1998)

pillars that support them, are big wooden beds on which people eat, work, talk and sleep. The space is typically shared with of pigs, chickens, dogs and, sometimes, one or two oxen which pull cart and plough.

As the main track from the village rolls out into paddy-land and grazing fields, it arrives at the pagoda, with its cloister school for the religious training of teenage boys and school buildings. The scene seemed rather idyllic in 1998, even more so in 2009. During the years 1975–78, the school site was off-bounds under pain of death. School and temple were razed and the site used as a torture and extermination centre. 'This area was one of the killing fields. When we excavated to build this school, we found two mass graves; the pagoda was the first thing they rebuilt' (headmaster, cited in a field note, 9 May 2009).

Returning in 1989 to the village where she had done fieldwork in the 1950s, for the first full-length monograph on Cambodian society, Ebihara noted that people who had before lived in 'comfortable wooden houses' now lived in small thatched dwellings built directly on the bare ground (1990:69). By 1998, the thatched houses in Phum Puon were gradually being replaced again by wooden houses on pylons, and by 2007 the process was complete (field notes, February 1998/ May 2007).

To a Western observer, Cambodians in the village do not seem concerned with privacy. Life is marked by a pronounced sociability, making it impossible to maintain the anonymity of a 'Western' interview situation. A person's home is part of a public world. To the under-house area and its big wooden bed frame flock children and adults within hearing distance, as a matter of course. The area under the house is an important gathering place, a part of the public sphere: neighbours seem to take it for granted that they can join in any activity that is going on there. This may be an example of 'public time', which promotes the establishment of human contact and draws people together (Zerubavel, 1981: 144). I have seldom been in such a setting more than five minutes before the neighbours have assembled. A person can become a witness, giving evidence to the crimes of the Khmer Rouge that he has personally experienced, a palpable history book for a crowd of silent children listening to his stories – stories that cannot be learned in school books, but in this way only (field note,

9 May 2007).[26]

Gwyn Øverland, RVTS Sør / UiA   25

 History lesson, May 2009

An important aspect of village life noted during field trips in 1998–2009 was the activity that emanated from the pagoda. This spanned from providing schooling to ceremonies, rituals, rites of passage, commemorations, a place of retreat, and for the elderly, an opportunity to give service. The religious aspect of village life is presented in section 4.3, contexts for the practice of Khmer Buddhism.

4.1.2. Context 2: the migration process

The migration process is a contextual shift, a disembedding from social and cultural bonds. In a sense the continuing forced migration after the Khmer Rouge regime extended Pol Pot's strategy, the wilful stripping down of culture amounting to intended anomie. After the four-year internal forced migration imposed by the Khmer Rouge on the entire population, some returned to their villages and towns; some made

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26 The first history textbooks that pay appropriate attention to the Khmer Rouge period were introduced by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) in 2009.

for the Thai border. Some also made their way at great cost over the other border, to Vietnam where they were regarded by the authorities as the enemy and treated accordingly (imprisoned).

A good deal has been written about living conditions in the refugee camps where many Cambodians were interned for years – Site 2, Site 8, Khao I Dang (KiD) (Kiernan, 1996; Ledgerwood, Ebihara & Mortland 1994; Berry & Williams, 1991; French, 2000/1994; Mollica, 1990, 2006). Danger, hunger, sickness and death continued to be a part of everyday life. Mollica, who visited the camps with a relief and research team in 1989, relates how he looked out over the refugee camp at Site 2. Faced with the monumental task of bring relief in a desperate situation he writes, 'I felt myself slip and saw myself fall out of the tree and down to my death, engulfed by despair' (Mollica, 2006:93).

As has been observed, the refugee experience is extended liminality, a limbo of betwixt-and-betweenness (Turner, 1995/1969:viii; Ebihara, Ledgerwood & Mortland, 1994). The informants in Norway have shared this experience. Like the candidates in a rite of passage, they had been stripped of the symbols of their identity. They had been subject to traumatic dispersal, moved by events wholly outside of their control, 'events in which the suddenness, scale, and intensity of exogenous factors unambiguously impel migration or flight' (Cohen, 1997:180). A Bosnian woman once told me, 'Ever since I became a refugee, I've felt like a package, to be sent here and there' (field note, 17 March 1995). The sky is different – the stars are different, even the shapes of clouds are somehow different. Trees, plants, and fruits are different. Food is different. The length of the day, of the night, of the seasons is different. If one wished to brainwash someone – to depersonalise him, so that he felt estranged from his body and his thoughts, so that his actions and relations became confused and unclear – one could hardly do better than to give him this treatment: tear him out of his accustomed gestalt, transport him halfway round the world in a mystical machine and dump him down in upside-down land (field note, 27 March 1997).

4.1.3. Context 2: the suburbs on the hills

Several hundred thousand Cambodians became refugees and have lived in diaspora since the decade after the Pol Pot regime. In this section the context that applies to those who were selected for resettlement in Norway is described.

In contrast to the village life described in section 4.1.1, which is still the context for most of the Cambodian population, Cambodian refugees in Norway now live in small detached homes, flats, or semi-detached houses on the outskirts of small and medium-sized towns. In a context of global poverty, they are far from poor. Concerted attempts on the part of the local housing authority have made these neighbourhoods relatively homogeneous, even classless. The Norwegian immigration authorities resettled the first Cambodian refugees in the same part of the country in order to foster mutual support within the group. This intention was somewhat undermined by the local housing authorities, which preferred to scatter them to avoid ghetto formation. Abruptly thrust into the intimacy of the nuclear family after the enforced 'solidarity' of the Khmer Rouge and almost ten years in the enormous gregarious and dangerous tropical camps, the first Cambodians were relatively isolated from the rest of their group, compared to the traditional lifestyle in rural Cambodia. They found themselves restricted by unaccustomed weather, architecture, residential patterns and de facto segregation to the four walls of their homes (fieldnote, 1997). Yet there were opportunities for social contact, because they were placed in the same local communities.

The communitarian culture, religion, and ethics that formed so central a part of the Cambodian context was consciously recreated in Norway. Because they were all resettled in a handful of neighbouring towns, there was extensive social contact, organisations, meetings, house-to house fund-raising in support of private aid projects in Cambodia, New Year celebrations, religious gatherings, and high attendance at weddings and funerals. These increased social and cultural opportunities were expanded by the influx of the 150 or so new refugees who arrived after 2000. The cultural context in which Cambodians in Norway pass their everyday lives is certainly different from that of a Cambodian village, however.

4.2. Shared life experience of the cohort

The cohort for this project consists of persons that experienced the Khmer Rouge period with full consciousness of its character. That is:

> They were born in Cambodia before 1965

> They were in Cambodia and were at least 11 years old on 17 April 1975

> They now live in Norway or Cambodia.

This is the cohort from which research samples for this project were chosen, according to a set of criteria described at the beginning of the method chapter (2.1). All members of the war cohort experienced two violent transitions: April 1975, when the Khmer Rouge assumed power; and January 1979, when the Khmer Rouge were ousted by the Vietnamese. When the Khmer Rouge evacuated the urban population to the countryside, people were told to go back to their ancestral villages (see e.g. Ngor, 1987; Pin, 1987; Pran, 1997; Vann, 1998; Him, 2001; Sonn, 2001). Youk Chhang, a city boy who had been separated from his family during the evacuation, recounts: 'I remembered the name of my mother's village in Takeo and just began walking that way, asking where it was. It took 3 to 4 weeks to get there. People recognised me: "Oh, your parents are so-and-so" and put me to work' (Youk Chhang cited in a field note, 26 September 2008).

All (including, in the end, Khmer Rouge soldiers) then experienced almost four years of Pol Pot's work-communes, hard labour and hunger, flight through mine-studded jungles, loss of close family members, including husbands, wives and children. After three years, eight months and 20 days of this, some struggled and fought their way to the border camps. Some escaped from the Khmer Rouge production units before the fall of Pol Pot and joined various military factions in the forest. Some straggled back to their villages, starved and exhausted, displaced persons who sometimes took many months to arrive in the places where their homes had been. Many remained in their villages, reconstructed their homes and livelihoods and continue to live in a village

like 'Phum Puon' (section 4.1.1).

As indicated, two distinct groups of UN refugees came to Norway at different points in time. Those who came straight from the border camps in the 1980s (sample N1, section 2.1) had spent 5 to 10 years in the enormous and dangerous refugee camps along the Thai Border. The largest, Site 2, had an official population of 175,000. For over 10 years, food and water were set at emergency survival levels. Life in the camps was marked by suicide attempts, domestic violence, apathy, hopelessness, depression, anxiety and in general characterised as a major mental health crisis (Mollica et al., 1989, Mollica et al., 1993). In addition, they were frequently caught in cross-fire. With this historical experience in their baggage, some 200 Cambodians arrived in the quiet, prosperous and rather complacent small towns of southern Norway in the 1980s, often wearing plastic sandals (field note, November, 1996). The parents are now in their fifties and sixties, the oldest children around forty.

Another group of UN refugees (sample N2), who came to Norway after 2000, had the same background from the Khmer Rouge years but a different context in the intervening years. Many had returned to their home places in Cambodia after liberation in 1979. A number of these new refugees had belonged to different military factions. In July 1997, there was a power shift, variously described as a military take-over by Co-Prime Minister Hun Sen (Cambodian People's Party, CPP), or as the quelling of an attempted military take-over by Prince Ranariddh (FUNCINPEC Party) allied with remaining Khmer Rouge factions. Forty had lost their lives at the time. Among the late arrivals to Norway were some people whose names appeared on a certain list of what the CPP called opposition leader Sam Rainsy's 'shadow army'. The term seems to have been quite misleading, because these members were non-combatants, but the tight rein of the strongman meant that it could be just as dangerous to be on an apocryphal list. These individuals were given refugee status by UNHCR in Thailand and were resettled in Norway in 2003–2008, indicating that international authorities have regarded the present regime in Cambodia as oppressive. Like the first Cambodians and indeed all other refugees in Norway, the later arrivals were required to attend language courses, job training and immigration counselling and expected eventually to work – but were supported if they could not.

Cambodians in Norway are aware of the political situation in Cambodia and many care deeply about it. They are also sharply divided politically, with one group supporting the Western-oriented opposition leader, Sam Rainsy (who drew a large crowd of Cambodians in Norway during the run-up to the 2007 elections [field note, 19 November 2006]); one group refusing to be drawn into politics, declaring that they came to Norway to 'find peace'; and a few still supporting Hun Sen. In Norway the political disagreement is passionate, occasionally leading to confrontations and schisms in the Cambodian community (field note, 30 August 2008).

4.3. Present contexts for the practice of Khmer Buddhism

Religion plays a role in all the contexts mentioned. For this reason a contextual perspective is also brought to bear on Khmer Buddhism, described as 'endemic' in Cambodia (Keyes, 1994). There is also an indigenous Muslim population in Cambodia, the Cham, who were relentlessly persecuted during the Khmer Rouge period (see e.g. Taylor, 2007). To my knowledge there are no Cham among the refugee population in Norway, however.

In the common background of the informants, Khmer Buddhism with its worldview and codes of conduct was a community practice with its own framework and discourse. These elements taken together formed part of an unconscious environment for socialisation. In the migration phase, the religion was challenged, but could prove a resource. In the resettlement phase it appeared, for some at least, to have become a resource for the reconstruction of normal life, an instrument for coping. Ledgerwood cites a common saying in Cambodia: 'To be Cambodian is to be Buddhist' (Ledgerwood, 2008). Khmer Buddhism still remains unequivocally a central part of the Cambodian context which the social scientist should take into consideration.

Members of the cohort described in section 4.2 were representatives of the last Cambodian population that received the transmission of Khmer Buddhism in a

traditional context. They were at least 45 years of age in 2009 and had spent their childhoods in the kind of society conceptualised by Mead as 'post-figurative' (Mead, 1978:39), where existential questions were thought to be answered by the culture itself (see also section 5.2.7).

But were they not context-dependent, the religion and ethics of moral action professed by the interviewees – were they not to some extent contingent on their original context? Surely Buddhism was eradicated by the Khmer Rouge? The existence of a dialectics between the religious-cultural ethics and the changing social and cultural context of the informants has been problematised.

It has been said that previously active Buddhists rapidly and completely abandoned any semblance of the religious life under the Khmer Rouge (Harris, 2007) and it would perhaps be natural to expect that this disavowal continued. Since not only individual lives, but also cultural practices were subjected to a radical change of conditions, the perspective of contextual ethics brings this question to the foreground. Could the religion and ethics still be 'alive'? Could it really have been possible to transplant a locally rooted system of moral ethics from one place to another in a process of migration, after it had lost the dialectics that presumably presupposed it, and after all that had occurred? If this religion was still active in the minds of the interviewees, perhaps it was simply nostalgia for a 'community of memory' (Henriksen and Krogseth, 2001:20). Such nostalgia might arise as a reaction to a Late Modern and Western background, where normativity has become an article in short supply.

Certain beliefs are inculcated in childhood and then go on to provide believers with an unfailing guide to living and an inner certainty about an ethic of moral action. Such belief systems are both unattainable and unfathomable for many, including myself. In my earlier observations of this population, I had found it striking how much concrete advice was given for dealing with life's difficulties – something which contrasted starkly with my own agnostic/Protestant upbringing. I was interested to see what relevance this aspect of the religion might have had for people in extremely difficult situations and wondered if any of it had survived. Taken together, these were good reasons for maintaining both a methodological atheism and a phenomenological

distance.

To help clarify this issue (whether the findings expressed a simple nostalgia or a living tradition), the next sections describe the present-day context for the religion. These sections, based largely on ethnographic research and participant observation, describe this common formative element in the informants' background and the conditions for its survival in the resettlement phase in Norway.

4.3.1. In Cambodia

Recent anthologies on Khmer Buddhism have been produced by Cambodian and Western Khmer-speaking anthropologists, philosophers, ethnologists, historians and psychologists (Kent & Chandler 2008; Marston & Guthrie, 2004). Among the over 20 scholarly contributors to the two books, only a handful have a background from religious studies. The authors cast some doubt on the notion that Buddhism suffered a decline in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge. Marston remarks that Durkheim's expectation of an increasing tendency to separate religion from other fields of activity is disproved by Cambodian society of today, 'where the spiritual is often not regarded as a separate sphere' (2004:7). Another scholar remarks,

> It has become commonplace in scholarly and popular works on Cambodia
> to place Buddhist definitions of self and community squarely at the centre
> of what it means to be Khmer
>
> (Hansen, 2004: 40)

Hansen relates how a Khmer national identity associated with its own language, ethos, culture 'and particularly with a distinct way of being Buddhist', developed in the 19th century, well aided by the French colonial power (Hansen, 2004: 41). This would be roughly parallel with the growth of National Romanticism in Europe. Anthropologist Alexandra Kent (2007) has focused on the revival of Buddhism in Cambodia in a series of articles and books. Kent places the pagoda at the centre of Cambodian sociability in her useful review on the topic and finds that many Cambodians look to

Buddhism as a 'cherished storehouse of power to recreate order in their splintered, shared world' (Kent, 2007:12). Didier Bertrand describes what is essentially a revitalization of Khmer Buddhism through the increase in numbers and activity of the Gru Parami (mediums) who perform many kinds of healing rituals. The increase is interpreted by some as the Buddha's wish 'to pacify and educate all the souls of the dead killed under Pol Pot who continue to roam and disturb people… [The mediums] have come to make order among the living and the dead and to repair a collective trauma' (Bertrand, 2004:166).

In 2003, Ledgerwood led research teams of US and Khmer students that examined the present role of religion in six village and temples (Ledgerwood, 2008: 157–158). This recent study largely supports Ebihara's observations made 50 years ago (Ebihara 1968). Ledgerwood and her mixed teams discovered that the focus on merit-making that Ebihara had observed in 1959/1960 was still central to lay people. Cambodians still say, '*twer bon baan bon, twer baap, baan baap*' – if you do good you receive good, if you do evil, you receive evil. The good karma accrued by merit can be manifested in this life as well as the next (Ledgerwood, 2008: 149). As in the old days, 'Religious persons go to the *wat* to ask respectfully to receive the holy precepts' (Ebihara 1968: 178).

In light of the Cambodian regard for Buddhist tradition described in this recent literature, many visitors to Cambodia are surprised to see young monks or novices talking on a cell phone or smoking a cigarette. Ebihara noted the surprisingly informal attitude to Buddhism during her fieldwork in 1959/-60. She says simply that the Cambodian religious ceremony is 'free of solemnity' (Ebihara, 1968:399). In contrast, Western ideals of religiosity are often more formalised, as in the ethereal representations of piety in European Renaissance paintings.

4.3.2. In Norway

In a migration context, refugees from traditional agricultural societies who end up in post-industrial societies on the other side of the globe often lose their access to rituals, elders and other resources used in healing, as well as their social networks. The older

refugees, who would traditionally have been ethic-bearers, had traversed centuries in 30 years: from what Margaret Mead calls a post-figurative culture (section 5.2.7) to what Arne Martin Klausen calls the exponentially developing complexity of a modern Western society, where there is not much use for what the elders can teach. Late Modern context influences all, 'sneaking up on us in a kind of cybernetic ambush' (Klausen, 1995:25–28, author's translation). What did it mean for these elders to find themselves in a 'prefigurative' culture (Mead, 1978), where the young are experts? How have their ethics fared here?

Norwegian Cambodians used visits to the homeland to get hold of the equipment necessary for the practice of rituals. The travellers attended and themselves arranged many religious ceremonies, services of gratitude to parents, ceremonies for the dead (field notes, 1994–1998). The clothing, instruments, platters, booklets and recorded instructions they brought back with them from these first visits to Cambodia were used to recreate ceremonies in Norway.

A system of ethics can be contingent and lose its meaning when de-ontologised, or uprooted. This could be the case for the Norwegian interviewees after all the radically changing contexts they have traversed. They appeared, meanwhile, to have at their fingertips the norms of the traditional codes for everyday behaviour. It seemed as if they would have me know that they believed absolutely in these norms (see also Overland & Yenn, 2006; 2007). Participant observation at religious gatherings in Norway also indicated that those over the age of 45 knew by heart the rather long prayer-sequences and the movements and gestures used in common religious services: the frequently-held memorial services, marriages, water-blessings, thanksgivings, funerals, Cambodian New Year, Buddha's birthday and so on.

On the way to offer rice at a Buddha's birthday celebration, Norway, May 2009.

For the celebration of the Buddha's birthday in 2009, a fairly young monk had been invited to Norway. This had become a yearly tradition since the Khmer Buddhist Association had, after many trials, found a way of getting a visa and bringing a monk to Norway for their religious holidays in April and May. A woman cried as she knelt in front of him; a young father guided his daughter through the steps as they put a spoonful of rice in each of the three bowls placed in front of him – 'one for the Buddha, one for the Dharma and one for the sangha'. Before the monk ate his meal he called the congregation forward and counted, so that they could all chant in unison: 1 – 2 – 3 (field note, 9 May 2009).

The following is the text for a speech held at the Cambodian New Year celebration in 2010, for 400 or so invited guests – Norwegians, Cambodians and other refugees. These sat in mixed groups at long trestle tables in a large sports hall, circulating sociably among the tables between the food and the entertainment.

> Holy monks,
>
> Like our fellow human beings around the world, we Khmer refugees in Norway are rooted in our homeland, its nature and its forefathers' cultural

heritage and especially in its religion, Buddhism.

After a long period of war, Buddhism was paralysed in the country. [but] Khmer refugees all over the world had escaped from their country and taken with them its beliefs and its cultural heritage.

In the Norwegian multicultural society, Khmer Theráváda Buddhism was reincarnated. The only strategy for achieving our common Buddhist goal is to cultivate an understanding of the Three Jewels, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path. These theories can give our fellow beings a peaceful heart and change the today's world to a more peaceful place to live.

That is why we from Denmark, from Oslo, from all the southern communities have gathered under one roof to celebrate our New Year's day.

According to our tradition we celebrate the New Year for three days every year, beginning on the 13th of April when the rice season ends. This is the year 2554 in the Buddhist era and the year of the Tiger, a symbol of strength. During the three New Year's days, the Buddhist temple is a central place where we gather to celebrate sacred ceremonies.

On the first day of the New Year, we decorate our homes with sacred things to receive the new spirit. The spirit from heaven brings happiness, peace and prosperity to the Khmer people.

On the second day we make offerings to our parents, our teacher, our poor neighbours and so on; and we make a 'mountain of sand' as a symbol of the stupa where the Buddha's ashes lie and express our gratitude to the Buddha who shows us the way to peace. The 'mountain of sand' also represents a message to Evil, not to take the precious lives of our fellow beings before all the grains of sand have been counted.

The third day marks the Buddha's purification and gratitude to the Buddha and to all who do good deeds. May the unruly mind, wickedness and

barbaric action disappear from humanity. On this day the monks hold services and bless us.

Noble monks, ladies and gentlemen,

In Norway the Khmer people do not gather in the temple, but in Vennesla Hall. Last year under this same roof, 300 pairs of eyes witnessed the Khmer New Year's celebration as a symbol for bridge-building, between the different immigrant groups and between immigrants and Norwegians. Understanding, love, tolerance and harmony were achieved in this way.

This present meaningful gathering has great significance for us. Through the Khmer New Year's celebration, may our fellow human beings' understanding for each other, love, tolerance and holy bands live on, in order to create peace for our next generation.

Finally we wish you all long life, beauty, good health and strength.

Text for New Years speech, Virak Yenn, 17 April 2010

Nothing was said about the fact, but that date was also the 35th anniversary of the Khmer Rouge coup. I began to wonder if memories of the fateful New Year's days in 1975 arise in the minds of older Cambodians at this time of year. If so, perhaps the contrast between their memories and their present situation contributes to the apparent joy and delight they communicate to their guests (field note, 20 April 2010). What the content of some of those memories might be appears as glimpses in the life stories presented in Chapter 6.

Understanding the historical contexts and experiences of the cohort provides essential background for understanding why certain social theory might be relevant for interpreting the data. This is discussed in the next chapter.

5. The theoretical net: making sense of life and death

What have resilient Cambodian survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime?

Introduction

A leap will now be made, from these concrete observations of context and cohort, to the questions. How did they tackle their traumatic experiences? How did they – and how can I – make sense of them? With the open-ended research quest of the main research question in sight, equipped with the historical and contextual background of the cohort and a rudimentary understanding of trauma and resilience, I set out on a voyage of discovery. What kinds of social theory could help in understanding and illuminating the interviewees' narratives?

Many projects seek new knowledge of mental health. Unlike more traditionally structured research, however, this study started without any predetermined theory, setting out rather to generate new theory from what could be learned from the informants. The first section below is about the choice of the theory to which the project relates. It explains how theories and concepts were chosen and the reasons for choosing them. One type of theory, theory about *meaning,* forms the general theory basis for the epistemological position taken and is therefore drawn into a philosophy of science discussion (5.1.2). Section 5.2 then presents themes and concepts chosen for illuminating the research, as touched on by different theorists.

How theories that were eventually chosen are built upon by the research is indicated in the last paragraph of each theoretical theme. The new theoretical developments are discussed in chapter 9.

Since over 90% of all Cambodians and 94% of the informants are Buddhists, section 5.3 provides added insight into the form of Buddhism practised in Cambodia, based on information from interviewees and participant observation, as well as on Buddhist and Khmer Buddhist source materials. In section 5.4, the theoretical framework is summed up with indications of the uses made of each source.

5.1. Principle bodies of theory

5.1.1. Theory in the service of interpretation

As noted in the method chapter (2.3), the data-gathering commenced without a preconceived notion of what theory might best illuminate the findings. Beginning without a theoretical hypothesis is not the same as having no theoretical frame of interpretation, however. A sociologist will have read a good deal of theory, even despite a conscious effort to keep theory and other preconceptions bracketed at the outset. As the research proceeded, the subject matter and substantive knowledge, coupled to the preliminary findings, suggested a number of questions. The questions actualised different theories that might be interpretively useful, depending on the nature of the findings that emerged. These questions are indicated below, followed by the related theoretical themes. Which social scientists have touched upon these questions in ways that might be relevant for interpreting the findings?

1. How do people make sense of their lives? Do religions and other belief systems play a role?

    > Theme: religion

2. What role do specific ways of understanding and explaining evil play in human abilities to meet and cope with it?

    > Theme: theodicy, the problem of evil

3. How do people actually survive periods of normlessness: how can it be dealt with?

    > Theme: nomos and anomie

4. What role do human relationships play in the ability to survive and overcome traumatic events?

    > Theme: solidarity and social disintegration

5. What is the relationship between meaning and language, the thread of

communication that holds it all together?

> Theme: language and meaning

6. How do the interviewees understand their individual identity?

> Theme: identity and threats to identity

7. What about culture and processes of acculturation into new contexts, what role do they play in relation to traumatic events?

> Theme: culture, acculturation and deculturation

These issues raised by the research questions, by my substantive experience of the cohort and its context, and by the accumulating data, have been addressed by different social theorists and empiricists. Those found appropriate are presented in section 5.2, together with the reasons for the choices. The project landed on theory that seemed most appropriate for describing and understanding cognitive elements: thoughts, memories, ways of thinking, and feelings; but it also found some functionalist ideas useful when describing the publicly observable hard facts and extreme experience related by the interviewees.

If such a combination of theoretical approaches seemed potentially fraught with difficulty, it was helpful to find that Berger has argued for the advisability of using Durkheim and Weber together. He points out that they are complementary. Too much Weberian subjectivity brings an idealistic distortion; too much Durkheimian objectivity leads to reification: 'The two understandings are only correct *together*' (Berger 1990/1967:187; emphasis in the original).

In addition to finding theories that facilitated an understanding of emerging phenomena, general level theory also had to be chosen, determined by epistemological considerations and reflecting the ontological perspective chosen: how the researcher conceived the world under study and how it could best be known. The central theme in regard to these epistemological considerations was the large, vague *meaning*. This seemed to be what it was all about: what the informants meant about their lives, what meaning they found in their experiences. Meaning is a highly imprecise concept, largely because of its everyday usage. But it is also the concept which both sums up

the general theory perspective and has most implications for the epistemological approach to the research. The next section focuses on clarifying its use.

5.1.2. General level theory: Meaning, construction and epistemology

The research asked what Cambodian survivors had found useful for their survival, recovery, and normalisation after traumatic events and human rights abuse. How had people made sense of and what meaning had they found in the presence of suffering and in its aftermath? How could we learn about this?

Meaning-making was done on three levels:

1) particular level: meaning-making in regard to marginal situations

2) general level: meaning-making as discussed by Weber and Berger

3) researcher level: philosophy of science choices for knowing meaning

These three ways of making sense are discussed below.

Meaning-making in regard to marginal situations

As described on the first pages, the focus on traumatic experience and resilient survival began with the observation of apparent resilience in a group of Cambodian survivors of severely traumatic events. As interview data accumulated, it provided information about how interviewees had acted during and after the Khmer Rouge period and how they had understood their actions and their experiences. In my view, how they understood, interpreted and explained their behaviour and experience was an expression of *meaning*. These apparently successful survivors of the Khmer Rouge period seemed to have found some meaning in their experiences, with various kinds of beliefs providing such meaning. For many of them, Khmer Buddhism, the national religion of Cambodia, seemed to have been the source of meaning / beliefs. Further on in the research process, several informants emerged for whom not religious meaning but patriotism and 'freedom' had been the guiding light, motivation and mainstay

throughout an armed struggle that continued along the Thai-Cambodian border for over 15 years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. Each of these sets of meanings involved beliefs, values and codes of behaviour.

This is, perhaps, not so surprising. Many have noted that, in a marginal situation, being able to find a personal meaning in a situation has emerged as a way to cope (Bettelheim 1960, 1979; Frankl 1971; Levi 1987; Kleinman, Das & Lock 1997). Having a deeply-felt political ideology can make the pain of torture supportable and meaningful; a traditional religion may supply a reinterpretation of the situation where the road to salvation is seen through adversity, even martyrdom. For examples of the significance of the meaning which individuals invest in their suffering, we need look no further than the mitigation of the effects of torture on the mental health of survivors who are politically active – to say nothing of the histories or legends of those who have been martyrs for their faith. As an intellectual in a Nazi concentration camp whose own survival strategy was to observe and remember the behaviour of his fellow prisoners, Bettelheim noted, for example, that political prisoners seemed to have their own inner protection. They were 'psychologically prepared'. Moreover, Jehova's Witnesses 'kept their integrity' (Bettelheim, 1960): their beliefs appeared to give meaning to their experiences.

Much has been assumed about beliefs. It is widely held in the West that people who believe in something have an advantage in traumatic situations. The meaning aspect helps people to tolerate the experience. No explanation is given of how this mechanism, if there is such a thing, actually works. Rather like an inverted taboo, the workings of beliefs are acknowledged but not explored. There was an opening for this research to establish an empirically-based foundation for evaluating such claims on behalf of meaning/beliefs, by pursuing the role and impact of meaning in the informants' lives through a deeper probe into their narratives.

The persistence of the meaning dimension in the findings had to be understood and interpreted. In addition, a certain approach to meaning gradually assumed the role of providing the general theory frame of interpretation for the study. Meaning was a signpost to an interpretivist approach.

Meaning-making as discussed by Weber and Berger

As a theoretical framework, an interpretivist approach was chosen. Weber is one of the earliest and most influential proponents of such an approach. In the following reflection, into which Berger and Luckmann are also drawn, the particular understanding of the term 'meaning' in this project and its relationship to the actor-structure continuum in social theory will be clarified.

Weber's notion that coherent systems of meaning (*Sinnzusammenhänge*) define the situation for individuals and are linked with their motives (Weber 1993/1922: xxiii) provides the general theory basis for this study as well as for the development of the social constructivist perspectives of the latter half of the 20th century. This philosophical tradition enables the departure from the positivist tenet that human science should strive to approximate natural science. Weberian ideas are developed by a succession of thinkers (e.g. Schütz, 1999; Strauss, 2008/1959; Berger & Luckmann, 1991/1966, Goffman, 1967). Berger and Luckmann (1991/1966) are among those who developed Weber's theories and approaches in the second half of the 20th century, building them into the social construction of reality.

Weber's style belongs to the German tradition where sentences are 'gothic castles with mental balconies and watchtowers decorating the main structure' (Gerth & Mills, 2005/1946: x). I have used five different translations of the parts of Weber relevant for this project, the essays on religion and method: Fischoff (Weber, 1993/1922); Roth and Wittich (Collins, 2000); Gerth and Mills (2005/1946); Bøgeskov (Weber, 2003, Danish) and Engelstad (Weber, 1999, Norwegian).[27] The Scandinavian translations are etymologically closer to the original and have the added advantage for me that I understand them.

To approach Weber's 'meaning', however, required assistance. In a standard German–English dictionary, *Sinn* is translated as the senses, the mind, a taste for, an interest in, the meaning (etymological), the basic idea, or the purpose (*Taschenwörterbuch* 2002).

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27 Collinson prefers e.g.. Fischoff's translation 'elective affinity' for describing the relationship between ideas and social action. (1999: 166).

In the social sciences, *Sinn* has different usages in logical pragmatism, in symbolic interactionism, and finally in Weber's *verstehende* ('understanding') sociology. Weber defines sociology as a science that tries to understand the meaning of social action in order to explain it. In his methodology essays, he describes society as a product of meaningful human action and argues that the correct sociological method is *verstehen*: one can understand and explain an event only by putting oneself in the place of those who experienced it and seeing it with their eyes. The motives for action may be understood and explained, and this is what makes empirical *verstehende* sociology methodologically possible (Fuchs et al., 1975: 612).

Sinn, or 'meaning', remains a slippery and confusing word for a non-German speaker. None of these 'meanings' quite approaches the English 'what it means to you' with its suggestion of personal interpretation and significance, memories and emotional associations. The German intentionality of *Sinn* is easily lost in the English 'meaning', which has a more interpretive quantity and a conceptual proximity to 'belief' and 'caring' ('what it means to me'). Yet since I am not in a linguistic league to engage in what Collins calls 'the translation wars' (Collins, 2000: 152), I have left aside the myriad possible interpretations which give rise to endless controversy.

The interpretation of Weber's *meaning* (Sinn) in the thesis is limited to how Weber's ideas are understood and used in this project. Actors' meanings indicate here the way actors understand, describe and explain phenomena for themselves. Their understandings may be rooted in a coherent system of meaning, a *Sinnzusammenhang* such as a worldview, or they may be individualistic. These two positions may be imagined as opposite ends of a meaning continuum or dimension. At one end an actor is embedded in a religious worldview and interprets all phenomena in terms of it. At the other end an actor has a modern/post-modern belief in the centrality of freedom and autonomy.

The way the interviewees interpreted and the meaning they read into their experiences could have given them significances, understandings, interpretations, opinions and reasons for acting. This combination of aspects constitutes the use of meaning in these pages and is what the project was seeking to know. Part of my self-appointed task was

to uncover and understand their meanings – find out how they interpreted their experience, what it 'meant' for them; the other part was to explain how their meanings related to their actions, their behaviour. The meanings thus invested might or might not have given them a way of understanding their own motives, their behaviour, their fate; they might or might not have protected them from psychological disintegration. That remained to be seen.

Parsons comments that Weber's 'cultural complex of meanings', in one respect a system of 'ideas', was an instrument for the understanding of the action of individuals. In this respect it was mirrored by Thomas' conception of the definition of the situation (Weber, 1993/1922: xxxiii): 'If men define those situations as real, they are real in their consequences (Thomas, 1966:301).[28] While the Thomas theorem lies at the roots of a nascent social constructivism, I think Weber's meaning falls closer to the worldview, the 'idea' end of the meaning continuum. He acknowledges that both material and ideal interests directly govern human behaviour, but emphasises in the following much-quoted passage that:

> The worldviews that have been created by 'idea' have, like track switches, determined the tracks along which conduct has been pushed by the dynamics of interest. It is the worldview that determines from what and to what one wants to go and – not to forget – where one may be redeemed (Weber, 2003/1922: 300, author's translation from the Danish).

A person's interest may be to survive and achieve some form of salvation, but it is his or her worldview that determines what kind of salvation is sought and how that person would try to achieve it. In this view, there can be no getting around the influence of societies, cultures and beliefs on the interpretation of experience.

Philosophy of science choices: how can meaning be known?

As an epistemological consideration, how others' meanings may be known, it was

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28 The quote continues: 'The total situation will always contain more or less subjective factors and the behaviour reactions can be studied only in connection with the whole context, that is, the situation as it exists in verifiable objective terms and as it has seemed to exist in terms of the interested person' (idem)

therefore necessary to take into account the double aspect of human experience described above: both that people construct – or construe – their experience; and that their constructions are strongly influenced by their socio-cultural backgrounds.

An attempt to understand the motives of the actor by putting oneself in the actor's place (*verstehen*) provides the basis for much of qualitative method; the best way to understand their reality is to ask persons with the given experience to explain it to you – to give them voice. This is particularly true when they come, as in this case, from populations disenfranchised by high rates of illiteracy. An explanation of the situation is obtained when an understanding of motives is seen in connection with the situation in which the act is performed and the causal connections of which it is a part (Weber, 1999/1922:14, author's translation).

In Weber's methodology, the social scientist chooses and concentrates on special patterns in a selective way, and these patterns are determined by the categories of the researcher's own analysis (Collins, 2000: 38, author's translation). As the approach here is problem-driven, looking for answers to questions, the plan was not to develop categories *a priori*, but rather to develop them *a posteriori*, through analysis of the data. The process used for developing categories and themes was described in section 2.5.

Weber maintains, however, that a sociologist's task is to reduce collective concepts 'to "understandable" action, that is, without exception, to the actions of participating individual men' (Gerth & Mills, 2005/1946:55). This was the project's intention in regard to the collective 'resilient war trauma survivors': to study the actions and explanations of individuals in this particular collective, to find the meaning they ascribe to their experiences, and to try to understand what, if anything, this meaning had to say for their resilience. Weber's focus is often thought to be on collectivities, yet his 'point of departure and ultimate unit of analysis is the individual' (Garth & Mills, 1991/1946: 55). The task of *verstehende* sociology is the interpretation of participating actors who make up collectivities. It is the actors' subjective understandings and explanations of their resilient survival that are the focus of this study. Starting here, the philosophical tracks led to: a theoretical frame of

interpretation, and a *verstehende* sociological approach as basic to understanding how people understood their experiences.

Weber's concept *Sinnzusammenhang* (Weber, 1993/1922: xxiii), a coherent system of meaning, is the first piece of theory on which the project builds. Investigating how it related to the meanings expressed by persons with extensive experience of suffering was the main theoretical aim in relation to Weber.

5.2. Theories addressing forms of meaning and meaninglessness

5.2.1. Religion

The theme of religion is addressed by Weber (1993/1922), Durkheim (1995/1912) and Berger (1990/1967). It has also been touched on by many others social thinkers, directly and indirectly, but here these three perspectives have been chosen. A religion is 'a set of symbolic forms and acts that relates man to the ultimate conditions of his existence' (Bellah, 1976). This ad hoc definition (Riis, 1996) covers the kind of Buddhism practised by most Cambodians (section 5.3). Although a worldview without formal reference to a supernatural power, Khmer Buddhism still relates man to the ultimate conditions of his existence, by means of a belief in a self-maintaining ethical universe, and may therefore be approached sociologically as a religion.

Weber never defined religion, but Durkheim did. His definition begins with a substantive description (a sacred/profane dichotomy) but ends up with a social function, that of uniting a group into a moral community. According to Durkheim, a religion is:

> A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things… beliefs
> and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church
> all those who adhere to them (1995/12:44).

Durkheim formulated his definition in this way, without a deity, in order to make room

for the Buddhist, who 'has no god to thank, just as in his struggle he calls upon none to help' (Oldenburg, cited in Durkheim, 1995/1912: 28). The Buddha is not believed to be divine, but his doctrines are held sacred. What makes Durkheim's definition interesting in regard to Khmer Buddhism is the emphasis on religion's social function, a 'moral community' with a basis in society's needs. At the same time that the religion may unite Cambodians into a single moral community, it provides the basis for a general sociability.

In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Durkheim argues that 'the God and the society are one and the same' (1995:208). Perhaps for some people – for others, the strength and clarity of such belief systems and the close-knit societies that support them may seem remote and unfathomable. The more the interviewees' narratives seemed to refer to a religious worldview and social integration, the more of a mystery it seemed to me.

Weber

Although he never quite arrived at a definition of religion, Weber presents religion as 'a humanly constructed universe of meaning' (Berger, 1990/67:175). The fact may be at issue, but according to Fischoff, Weber not only coined the term *Religionssoziologie* but also 'with his friends Ernst Troeltsch and Werner Sombart actually created the discipline' (Fischoff, in Weber, 1993/1922: xx). Whatever the case, Weber certainly practised an analytical sociological study of religions, comparing common religious elements across different religions in a large tract of his *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (1922).

Basic principles of Weber's methodological individualism are used in this project as a guide to understanding religious behaviour. The same rule is applied here as to understanding behaviour in general: it can be done only from the viewpoint of the individuals concerned. To understand religious behaviour, we must understand the viewpoint of the religious practitioner.

Berger

In Berger and Luckmann's *The social construction of reality* (1966), the actor's point of view has become so central that the world can no longer be taken for granted. As

Goffman (1967:72) says, it is not to 'the unshaking character of the external world that we owe our unshaking sense of realities': the world is intersubjectively constructed. But after an existing culture has been internalised through socialisation, in a process in which the culture is not just passively absorbed but actively appropriated, the individual identifies with and is shaped by it (Berger 1990/67: 12–20). Despite the importance of the actor's point of view then, the society or culture in question shapes and sustains the actor's interpretation of the world and thus imposes itself on reality, *becoming,* to a certain extent, the actor's interpretation of the world. Reality maintenance, world maintenance, becomes a central issue.

Because the reality of the world must be maintained and cultural elements produced and reproduced, all forms of legitimisation, ways in which the world is explained and justified in a given society, may be described as reality-maintenance (Berger, 1990/1967:32). By means of a religious reality-maintaining instance that relates humanly defined reality to ultimate, universal, and sacred reality, 'the inherently precarious and transitory constructions of human activity are given the semblance of ultimate security and permanence' (ibid., 1967:36).

Religion, like society, is a construction, a human product that acts back on its producer in a reciprocal interaction or dialectics. In contrast to Durkheim's religion, it has an apparent basis in individuals' need for meaning. A sociology-of-knowledge approach offers the possibility of describing these structures of consciousness 'from within' and linking these structures to the objective meanings of institutional processes 'from without' (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974:24). This approach is useful for interpreting individuals' understandings of their own behaviour and relating these to existing cultural structures.

Yet structures of consciousness, such as religious definitions of reality, are held to be plausible only in particular social circumstances, in plausibility structures (Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1974: 21). In modern social life, because of discrepant meaning systems in circumstances of rapid pluralisation without, 'the plausibility of religious definitions of reality is threatened from within, that is, within the subjective consciousness of the individual' (ibid., 75). This might have relevance for the uprooted

traditionalists in this project, a question raised in the previous chapter (4.3).

5.2.2. Theodicy: the problem of evil

In their work on the sociology of religion, Weber (1993/1922) and Berger (1990/1967) compare different forms of theodicy (how the problem of evil is handled in different religions), and both find Buddhist theodicy the most rational explanation of the problem of evil. Their use of this classical theological concept added useful insights to the process of knowledge production in interplay with emergent findings. Populations that have been exposed to extended periods of cruel and inhuman treatment, as Cambodians were during the Khmer Rouge period, must be understood as having to deal in some way with the problem of evil. This makes theodicy relevant when addressing the research problem.

The term *theodicy,* while indicating in Judeo-Christian theology the problem of the existence of evil in a divinely created world, is also in general use in studies of comparative religion. In the study of religions, it is a term for a theory that explains why the assumption of a just God is not contradicted by the existence of evil in the world. But theodicy has also been discussed as a thoroughly secular phenomenon by Herzfeld, who suggests that a secular theodicy provides people with social means of coping with disappointment (Herzfeld, 1992:7). The concept *sociodicy* has also been suggested, to signify a way of reconciling normative ideals with reality, of rationalising social injustice and inequality (Morgan & Wilkinson, 2001). The relevance for this cohort of a theodicy, a way of understanding and coming to terms with evil, would appear self-evident after their experiences of the Khmer Rouge regime.

In general, Weber's analysis of Buddhist thought, although perhaps imperfect and dependent on the partial source materials of his time, appears to grasp something of the essential perspective of the original doctrine that is often missing in general religious studies. His representation of the karma theodicy exemplifies this cogency. In Weber's words, the karma theodicy solves the problem of evil by viewing the world as

'a completely connected and self-contained cosmos of ethical retribution' (1993/1922:38).

Weber's comments on Buddhist theodicy are equally recognizable in the Mahayana and Theravada traditions (see section 5.3); he makes no distinction between these two major traditions. Weber calls the Buddhist theodicy the most complete formal solution, a system where guilt and merit are 'unfailingly compensated by fate' (Weber, 1993/1922:145). This suggests that a belief in *karma,* that life itself will take care of the world's imperfections by punishing the guilty and rewarding the good, will affect a person's approach to life. By rational means, by logic, Weber foresees a trajectory where the karmic form of theodicy would have a strong chance of exerting a 'practical influence'. This would be when a religious motivation is linked to 'a systematisation of practical conduct resulting from an orientation to certain integral values' (Weber, 1993/1922:149) that paves the way to salvation. Exactly how the worldview is linked to a system of practical conduct for this object of study is examined in section 5.3.1. In my view, Weber's intimation of what the theodicy may mean for the lives of those who believe in it makes these observations sociological.

Both Weber and Berger express admiration for the 'rational' aspects of Buddhist theodicy. Weber finds the karma theodicy a most rational solution to the problem of evil – rational 'in the sense of logical or teleologically consistent' (Gerth and Mills, 2005/1946:324). The doctrine of karma and reincarnation delivers a perfect theodicy: it both 'explains why there is evil in the world and shows a way out of it' (Collins, 2000:141, author's translation). We are all ultimately responsible for our own actions (whatever the cause) and there is no forgiveness in sight if we renege on that responsibility.[29]

Berger follows Weber in his discussion of the way the problem of theodicy is handled in Buddhism. He points out that everyone has to face the problem, because everyone has to face death; and he agrees with Weber that the Buddhist solution is the most radical and rational one, in the sense that there is no 'individual soul' to save (Berger

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29 From a doctrinal point of view, it is unacceptable to be pleased if the wicked behaviour of others reaps retribution (their own *kamma).* Khmer Buddhists are only human, however, and it might be understandable if they felt some satisfaction when the wicked Pot (A-Pot) got his just deserts.

1990/1967:185).

In dealing with the problem of evil in the way suggested, how might the theodicy work to generate and modify behaviour, 'exert a practical influence' (Weber, 1993/1922:49), and influence resilience and coping? Through the data-analysis and theoretical reflection, I have sought to illuminate Berger's and Weber's theoretical explanations of Buddhist theodicy by empirical study. To my knowledge, no empirical study of the consequences of the specific theodicy for survival has previously been undertaken.

5.2.3. *Nomos* **and** *anomie*

Another theoretical theme, addressed by Durkheim and Berger, is the *nomos/anomie* nexus. Durkheim uses the term *anomie* to describe a social state where norms are lacking; Berger uses the term the *nomos* to describe a social state with well-established norms. According to Berger himself, nomos is an antonym that he 'appropriated from Durkheim's anomie' (1990:189).

Societies have been objectified after they have been externalised and then become internalised in the process of socialisation – becoming part of a nomos, which encompasses the whole 'cognitive and normative edifice that passes for knowledge in a society' (Berger, 1990:20-21). When the nomos is taken for granted, it is endowed with a stability deriving from more powerful sources: 'It is at this point religion enters significantly into our argument' (Berger, 1990:20).

In Berger's view, a society with its religious nomos is the guardian of order and meaning and for this reason a state of anomie, an absence of the fundamental order in terms of which he can make sense of his life, would constitute a real threat to the individual (Berger 1990:23). This is an apt description of what happened in the Khmer Rouge period. In addition to starvation, brutality, and random killings, the people were wilfully subjected to anomie: denied family, religion, social norms and the rest of their nomos. It was anything but everyday, and truly 'a fit topic for nightmares' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:98). While life in the Cambodian village had been regulated by the

traditional religious nomos, life in the Khmer Rouge production unit was ruled by an intentional anomie: the aim was to strip away all the trappings of society and culture in order to produce perfect equality in the 'year 0'.

Durkheim's *anomie* is a state in which there is a breakdown of social norms; these are absent, confused, or unclear. Individuals no longer have clear rules to guide them, and this can result in dissatisfaction, conflict and deviance. Anomie can result both from catastrophe and from abrupt changes for the better – the essential factor is that people lack rules for behaviour and experience this as a dilemma (Durkheim, 1991: 142, author's translation). Few concepts can be better than anomie at capturing the essence of the Pol Pot experiment, which threatened Cambodian culture from 1975–78, when deliberate attempts were made to break down social norms as well as social bonds. It might be argued that the Khmer Rouge regime had its own nomos – but the Khmer Rouge system was so hierarchical that its basic tenets were known only at the top of the pyramid, whereas a nomos is the cognitive and normative edifice that passes for 'knowledge' in a society as a whole. It is what everyone knows, the soil in which the members of that society are rooted. The fact that the existing nomos was deliberately suppressed shook people, leaving them to a certain extent without rules for behaviour that were acceptable for the new power structure. This was part of the specific traumatic experience to which informants refer and to which they had to find their own ways of responding.

In Christie's (1972) study of anomic responses of Norwegian prison guards in Nazi concentration camps in Norway, an eye witness describes among the prisoners 'a deculturation of the personality on a massive scale' (Niremberski, cited in Christie, 1972: 38). The younger guards accepted the camp's definition of the situation: the prisoners were not quite human and therefore did not need to be treated as human. Older guards had lived long enough to see the universal in the particular – the person, in the being who was treated as an animal. This helped them to maintain their values and codes of behaviour, their nomos.

Although a nomos can appear to be a very solid construction indeed, a 'cognitive and normative edifice', it must be continually produced and reproduced and is dependent

on perpetual affirmation by its adherents. There is no harm if a sociologist deals with such systems (like religions), unless he speaks of them as 'entities existing in and for themselves' (Berger, 1990/1967:8), as detached from the living beings that continue to create them in their daily lives. This serves as a useful warning against essentialising and reifying a nomos.

The horizon opened up by the nomos concept, embedded in its own fully explicated ontology, is the most conceptually helpful contribution of Berger for this project. After the objectified nomos is internalised in the course of socialisation it is seen as being appropriated by the individual in his own subjective ordering of experience, it helps him to 'make sense' of his own biography (Berger,1967: 21). Berger's statement suggested to me that studying biographies might be a way of accessing an internalised nomos with its unique frames of interpretation. As data-gathering progressed, it also began to seem likely that some clues to the interviewees' resilience might be found in the form of a socially and religiously legitimated nomos rather than as a list of individual mechanisms. The theoretical usefulness of this theme was to illuminate the specific role that can be played by a nomos in periods of anomie.

5.2.4. Solidarity and social disintegration

After social and collective dimensions of their lives began to emerge as having played a part in the interviewees' ability to survive the Pol Pot regime, useful approaches to the subject were also found in Durkheim. In his definition of religion, as shown, he uses the phrase 'a single moral community' (1995/1912:44), a phrase which emerged as applicable to the object of study.

Durkheim points out the possibility of explaining individual actions through aspects of society, such as social integration or 'solidarity'. Groups can be more or less integrated according to the degree to which members support common goals and concerns. Solidarity or concord is a source of vitality, a life-giving force for a society. This 'collective spirit, a collective joy of life or discord … comes to expression in distinct manifestations – collective rituals and symbols' (Durkheim, 1978 [1897]: 9–10, author's translation). Suicide is viewed by Durkheim as an expression of a lack of

solidarity: either the suicide's relation to the life-giving force of society has been disturbed, or the society's vitality itself has been disturbed. It may be thought that the vitality of Cambodian society would have been so disturbed by the Khmer Rouge experiment, and some have claimed this to be the case: 'Khmer Rouge had destroyed the system of social relations which had bound people together' (Cambodian cabinet minister Cheng Phon, cited in Ledgerwood, Ebihara & Mortland 1994:2). During a period of field work in 1998, I was told that solidarity, now lacking in the community, had been a hallmark of the Khmer people. 'You could go anywhere', said an informant, 'and stay there. After a few days you would have everything you needed to live', (man, 44, cited in Overland, 1998: 86).

The research was attentive to this dimension. The social group can also be considered a necessary condition for the survival of a religion, its plausibility structure. The problem of the plausibility of religious definitions of reality revolves around the dialectical relationship between meanings and the broader sociocultural context within which these meanings make sense or are plausible. It is thought that believers require social support, usually in the form of a religious community or congregation. Rituals are seen as important means for expressing, sharing and internalising beliefs (Berger, Berger & Kellner 1973; Swatos, 1998). It is language that mediates the communication that permits social communion.

5.2.5. Language and meaning

An interest in language was fuelled by the observation, in the course of transcribing interview data, not only that several central terms appeared to have several meanings, but also that the words might serve some special function. Weaving around and through the communications that constitute the data is the question of the role played by language in sustaining cultures. Seeking an approach to the meaning of words, I made a brief detour into the field of linguistics proper.

There I found that the 'meaning' of a word is a synonym or a paraphrase that any native speaker might give, a question of translation practice. An alternative notion of meaning, from Wittgenstein, is that it is the way a word is used, which may involve

technical knowledge that ordinary speakers do not have and may never appear in a lexicon or be given as a translation (Putnam, 2004:41). This seemed slightly more relevant for the project, but it only seemed to scratch the surface of the meaning of words. Chomsky goes further and distinguishes between the 'problems' (which may be solved) and the 'mysteries' (which remain as obscure to us as ever) of language. In the latter category he places *causation of behaviour,* why human beings make the choices they do. The answer to this mystery, this missing link, was precisely what was sought in this project, but here 'some fundamental insights are lacking' (Chomsky 1975:138). And there the linguistic trail ended.

Yet Berger and Luckmann had earlier made the following useful observations: language develops as a social stock of knowledge, supplying on the way 'schemes' for the routines of everyday life. Language is a system of vocal signs which can become the repository of 'vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations' (Berger & Luckmann, 1991/1966: 52; see also Berger 1990/1967:20).

Berger and Luckmann's conceptualisation of the objectification and internalisation of language in primary socialisation emerged as a significant theory on which to build the project. The dissertation returns to the significance of language in the theoretical grounding in Chapter 9.

5.2.6. Identity and threats to identity

Identity and threats to identity are usefully addressed by Giddens and Berger. The project tried to steer clear of psychological identity concepts, a quagmire in a cross-cultural meeting between a Western researcher and these Southeast Asian research interviewees, as illustrated below:

> 'When we say personal identity, he says he thinks of attitude, or character, or reputation' *(translated the interpreter). It seems that even in communication with an educated person, the concept of personal identity is going to be difficult to use. The words he thinks of suggest to me something*

one does, a way of behaving (field note, 24 May 2007).

Giddens' definition of identity as 'the persistence of feelings of personhood' (Giddens 1991:55) is helpful because it bridges the gap to cultures in which the idea of an individual self is understated. 'The persistence of feelings of personhood' is as close as the project came to a definition of identity – that which has been bent, but apparently not broken by the interviewees' encounter with traumatic events. The study sets out to uncover, understand and explain what furthered the continuity of the social reproduction of identity, 'the persistence of feelings of personhood' (Giddens, 1991:55), at moments when this could reasonably be expected to have broken down. Giddens' self-identity is devised and understood in a context of late modernity as a reflexive project, something one does and then re-does. The self is reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography, 'the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' (1991:54). Self-identity can thus be the story a person tells of himself. This suggests to me that anyone giving an autobiographical account of herself, as in the narratives of the interviewees in this research, will be practising self-reflexivity.

Also useful is Giddens' concept of ontological security. He builds on the developmental psychologists Erikson and Winnicott and their explorations of the formation of basic trust, secure attachment and the individual ontological security this provides (Giddens 1991:38–39). Giddens describes high modernity as being characterised by doubt. Doubt is institutionalised and knowledge is always hypothetical, always open to revision and paradigmatic shifts (ibid.:3). In the post-traditional world, doubt has replaced the certitude that traditional societies provided. The presence or absence of ontological security from a traditional childhood in Cambodia may or may not have had relevance for interviewees in their meetings with traumatic events and their recovery from these. In general, 'ontological security' was found more applicable to the project than 'personal identity'.

5.2.7. Culture, acculturation and deculturation

'Culture' is another quagmire of definitions, but like most studies dealing with the lives of migrants, this one had to position itself in regard to it. Geertz and Giddens provide the understanding of culture that informs the dissertation, but the section also takes note of other theoretical resources.

In the area between identity and culture comes the study of acculturation. A contextual view of acculturation differs from linear models (e.g. Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1996). In a recent study of immigrants in Australia, for example, an onion-like model is used to describe their sense of identity. There is a core identity in the centre surrounded by layers of situational identities which are emphasized or de-emphasized according to the context in which they find themselves. This contextual view is cognizant of transnational and post-modernist theories of identity that recognise that immigration and integration occur within the context of two or more locations and that identities are forged across this space (Sherrell, 2006; Valliapan, 2011). Since the first visits home in 1993, Cambodians living in Norway have intensified their transnational contacts, both by frequent visits and voluntary welfare activity in the home country (Overland & Yenn, 2006/2007) and by extensive use of Cambodian internet sites.

Among structural-functionalist theories, certain perspectives can be helpful for illuminating social expressions. In the 'post-figurative' cultures conceptualised by Mead, existential questions are expected to be answered by the nomos itself. Members of the culture know 'in which gods I shall believe, how should I speak and move, eat and sleep, make love, earn a living, become a parent, meet death' (Mead, 1978:39, author's translation). Although Mead's assumptions concerning a cultural entity is at loggerheads with later more dynamic definitions of culture, her comment is a telling description of a context – an imagined community perhaps – in which what is known appears not to be questioned.

But to place the project in its native environment: it shares the perspectives on culture and tradition of Geertz (1973) and Giddens (1991). Geertz defines culture as 'a system

of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life' (1973:89). Believing also, with Weber, that:

> man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical (ibid: 5).

For Giddens, tradition promotes a sense of the solidity of things, because it combines cognitive and moral elements: 'the world is as it is because it is as it should be' (Giddens, 1991:48). Cultural settings can bolster the faith in the coherence of everyday life through providing symbolic interpretations of existential questions. Culture provides rules and values, as well as both practical and symbolic means to carry them out – rather like a nomos. Within the culturally prescribed social and community structure, life cycle roles and the emotional management of transitions from one role or relationship to another are believed to be facilitated and ordered (LeVine, 1973).

But the Khmer Rouge ostensibly carried out a wholesale de-culturation, a deconstruction of cultural values and practices. The experiences of survivors of the Pol Pot regime took place in this nexus of culture, acculturation and de-culturation.

This brief reflection on culture, life cycle roles and transitions, coupled to t he place occupied by rituals in Cambodian life (see e.g. section 4.2.3), brings us back to religion.

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As the role of religion became increasingly apparent in the explanations of the interviewees, the list of theoretical sources would not be complete without a closer look at Khmer Buddhism. The understanding of Khmer Buddhism that informs this thesis is derived primarily from interviews and participant observation among the

interviewees and Cambodian monks, and to a lesser extent from Buddhist texts. [30]

5.3. Khmer Buddhist thought and practice in a popular perspective

This section provides a sketch of the religious teachings, the Dharma *[Pali: Dhamma]*, or doctrines, of Khmer Buddhism. How these operate in society and what they may mean for persons as social beings, relative to their society and to their relations with the other, had to be dealt with in the course of the research. The section is not intended as a philosophy-of-religion analysis based on systematic study of Khmer Buddhist literature and doctrine. It builds primarily on participant observation, oral explanations by informants, published autobiographical accounts (Ngor, 1987; Pin, 1987; Pran, 1997; Vann, 1998; Him, 2001; Sonn, 2001); conversations with Cambodian monks and lay religious leaders; and a small book in a popular style by the patriarch Preah Maha Ghosananda (1992), who was a frequent visitor to the Norwegian Cambodian community until his death in 2005. In addition, writings of the Dalai Lama are occasionally used to explain points of doctrine. Although he belongs to another Buddhist tradition, his rather academic style makes his work useful in the context of a thesis. A Cambodian monk invited to Norway to conduct religious ceremonies declared himself certain that whatever the Dalai Lama wrote would be acceptable to a Khmer Buddhist scholar (field note, 13 May 2009). Buddhist texts and textbooks are referred to in order to clarify and contrast basic doctrinal points with the way these are expressed in the everyday knowledge of the interviewees. Occasionally they serve as a reminder of the existence of parallel, alternative and sometimes strikingly different discourses.

What does it mean to be a Khmer Buddhist? A form of Theravada, Khmer Buddhism is an 'endemic religion, a kind of minimal religious practice' that everyone participates in (Foard, 1994:10). As Foard says of Japanese religion, it is not 'the frozen artefactual stuff of museum displays and cultural performances', but a living tradition

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30 Doctrinal explanations are not necessarily familiar to the Khmer Buddhist man-in-the-street. Theravada monks with whom Terwiel trained in Thailand knew little of the written doctrine (Terwiel, 2012/1975).

saturated with associative meanings that combine remembered personal experience with shared cultural imagery (Keyes, Kendall & Hardacre, 1994:10). After an introduction placing Khmer Buddhism in a wider Buddhist context, this section is organised under three aspects: moral teachings (5.3.1), teachings on salvation (5.3.2) and teachings on theodicy (5.3.3). These aspects are discussed in relation to the sociology of religion perspectives offered by Weber and Berger.

Khmer Buddhism in the wider context of Buddhist thought

'About all Buddhists, few valid generalizations are possible' (Gombrich, 1988:2). Still, there is basic agreement – what Gombrich calls 'Doctrinal diversity and moral unity' – about the Dharma, between the two major subdivisions, Southern (Theravada or early Buddhism, as followed in Cambodia) and Northern/Eastern (various forms of Mahayana) (Gombrich, 1988:2). Formerly the term *Hinayana* (the little vehicle) was used, paired with *Mahayana* (the great vehicle). Hinayana is now regarded by some as a potentially pejorative term. Strangely enough, the only person to use 'Hinayana' in conversation with me was a Khmer Buddhist abbot, who spoke of the 'narrow way of Hinayana' with what I experienced as a certain pride in his own expression of humility (field note, 5 February 1998). A mutually respectful tone is more apparent among religious leaders from both schools of Buddhism these days, especially perhaps among those who like Ghosananda have sat at the Pope's ecumenical table.
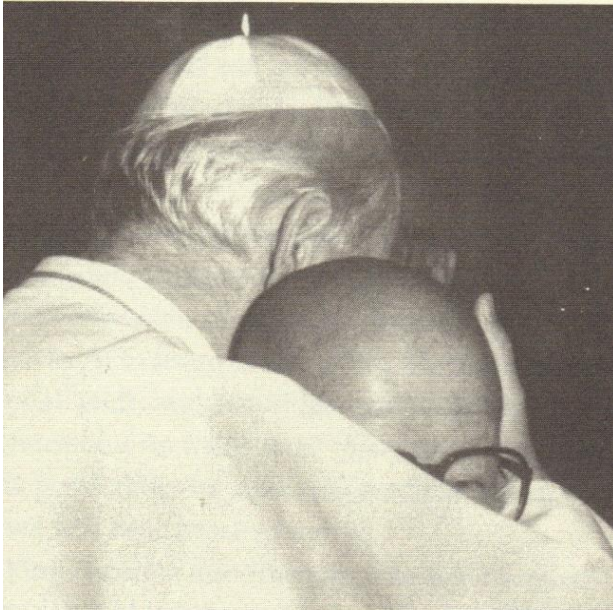
Ghosananda in the embrace of John Paul (Courtesy of Parallax)

Recent scholarship now places the birth of Siddharta Gautama, the historical Buddha, closer to 400 BCE (Kværne, 2004) in Lumbini, on the Nepalese side of what is today the Indian–Nepalese border. He was born into the warrior caste (*ksatriya*), the son of a king whose seat was in modern Kapilavasthu. As the legend goes, his father, wishing to protect him against the dark and difficult sides of life, tried to hide from him sickness, old age and death. When as a young man he first discovered their existence, he was overwhelmed. He left his palace, wife and child to pursue an ascetic life. 'He cut off his hair and beard, swapped his warrior garb for the rag robes of a religious mendicant and began his search for truth and liberation' (Kulananda, 1996:3). After six years of struggling with these troubling questions, he believed he had found the answer: the nature of suffering, its cause and effect, what leads to suffering and what leads to freedom from suffering.

Having found it, he set about teaching it. One might say he had researched suffering and wanted to share his findings. The students for his first teachings were the ascetics to whom he had attached himself on his quest. 'The Buddha preached his first sermon, thus setting in motion the wheel of law, in the deer park of Sarnath outside Benares' (Gombrich, 1988:60). The first turning of the wheel of Dharma, as this first sermon is called, was 'the very essence of the Buddha's enlightenment' (ibid., p. 61). In it he presented the four Noble Truths, which were his diagnosis and prescription for all

human ills. These are:

1) There is suffering in human life;[31]

2) The suffering has an origin (attachment, ignorance of the true nature of phenomena);

3) It is possible to end suffering (to be free of attachment);

4) There is a way to end suffering (the Noble Eight-fold Path, a guide for spiritual progress).

The early or Theravada Buddhist teachings as followed in Khmer Buddhism are based largely on the first turning, together with the Vinaya, which teach discipline, and the Jataka, the stories of the Buddha's past lives. A typical Khmer Buddhist devotional practice, a monk explained, begins with taking refuge in 'the Three Jewels' (the Buddha, the teachings and the community of believers).[32] This is followed by a recitation of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eight-fold Path ('right' understanding, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration) and the Five Precepts (Pali: *pañca-sīlāni)*: to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication. Then the interviewees bring offerings of food for the monks and bless it, then the monk eats (field note, interview with monk invited to Norway by local Cambodians, 11 May 2009). The Four Noble Truths became the basis for subsequent Buddhist doctrines. In the absence of a divinity, they were also chosen by Durkheim to represent 'the sacred' in Buddhism (1995/1912: 35).

The second and third cycles of the Buddha's teachings, or 'turnings of the wheel of Dharma', are more central to the Mahayana. The second turning clarified the *anatta* or not-self teaching, arguing against the existence of a lasting self, although not denying that there is a continuity of character in a lifetime and 'to some extent from life to life' (Harvey, 1990:51–52). The third turning purported then to give the full explanation and understanding of this doctrine – the emptiness or insubstantiality of self and

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31 The origin of suffering is variously translated as 'thirst', desire, craving, attachment. Gombrich points out 'suffering' is not a very exact translation for *dukkha,* which he places closer to 'unsatisfactory'(1988:62). Sometimes *dukkha* is etymologically linked to the idea of an ill-fitting cartwheel – bumpy and uncomfortable (Kulananda, 1996:19). The origin of suffering is variously translated as 'thirst', desire, craving, attachment.
32 A plausibility structure, if you will

phenomena. The Dalai Lama explains emptiness as follows: emptiness does not mean non-existent, but empty of intrinsic existence, which actually means that things arise in dependence on causes and conditions. The way of understanding emptiness in this system is referred to as *knowledge* or *wisdom* and is related to the causes and conditions of the karma theodicy and reincarnation. One who is ignorant will take rebirth in *samsara* – the cycle of birth and death. Here, ignorance is the opposite of wisdom or knowledge, 'referring specifically to the wisdom understanding that there is no self, no independent existence' (Dalai Lama, 1998: 209).

The notion that all is empty or insubstantial is a prominent feature of the Mahayana, but it is expected that 'a proper understanding of the early scriptures leads inevitably to seeing everything as empty' (Harvey 1990:196). Weber also understands that the complete elimination of the soul had already happened in early (Theravada) Buddhism (2003/1922: 368). Later scholars puzzling with this question have arrived at the same answer: clear indications that the Buddha taught the absence of inherent existence in *dharmas* as well as persons (Williams, 2004:47).

In spite of the insubstantiality and impermanence of persons and things, which are all contingent and subject to change, people in their ignorance (*avidya*, Skt.) nonetheless strive to hold on to that to which they are attached. Because all things are impermanent, they suffer. Attachment and the mistaken belief that it is possible to hold on to anything – loved ones, riches, youth, life itself – is compared to a sickness, the root of suffering (*dukkha*), and the Noble Eight-fold Path is a part of the 'prescription'. Awareness of the suffering of others should give rise to the compassionate motivation to help them to find the way out of ignorance. This motivation is the background for the practice of transferring *merit* (for one's good deeds, spiritual practices, wealth and so on) to all sentient beings, a standard part of Mahayana practice. Merit is also transferred in Theravada practice, but to specific persons (Williams, 1989:208), as, for example from surviving family members to one who has died. This is the motivation for the many ceremonies for the dead that continue to be held in Cambodia: merit will help the dead find the way to a better rebirth.

Examples of the significance of karma for practitioners abound in this predominately

Khmer Buddhist society. Skeletal elderly ladies with shorn heads sprinkle water on hot dusty roads for the benefit of travellers who hasten by in their cars: to serve others, to earn merit in the hope of a rebirth to a higher station, as it was explained (field note, 30 December 1997).

A Cambodian monk visiting Norway, who had evidently been told about this research project, began his teaching to me by talking about 'ignorance', which leads to misunderstanding, which leads to doing wrong. The Khmer Rouge, he said, in spite of having done wrong, could have intended it to turn out well, '*un beau jour*'. 'Concerning karma, the focus is the individual. If we do something wrong, it will have negative consequences for us. But others will also be influenced by it.' This was understood at the time as a clerical reminder that I should watch out for my own behaviour and not be led into complacency by a focus on the misdeeds of others (field note, 11 May 2009).

5.3.1. Ethics

In addition to the doctrines it shares with other Buddhist traditions, Khmer Buddhism is related in everyday life to existing codes of conduct. It is perhaps not unusual that such a religion should be linked to a kind of pervasive ethics of moral virtue. Life in a Cambodian village before 1975 was marked by what Weber would have described as 'a systematisation of practical conduct resulting from an orientation to certain integral values' (Weber, 1993/1922:149). The conduct of everyday life for the cohort of the informants (>45 years old in 2009) in the village before 1975 was influenced by a formalised system of written rules of behaviour and comportment for men, women and children, the *Chbabh* or *Cpap*. The French colonial administration contributed to the implementation of these traditional codes by publishing them in the early 20th century. Although syncretic rather than Buddhist, the Chbabh were also associated with religion in people's minds, much as the *hijab* and female circumcision are believed to be Islamic by many Muslims. Sung to a folk music melody, the Chbabh supplied strong and clear codes of conduct in metaphorical language as in the following example:

There is a sort of fruit, the *knau* (jackfruit), they are rough on the outside, but the flesh is sweet. One compares it to the *ontier* fruit, which looks delicious, but when you open it, it's full of lice. A person of rough words whose heart is sound is better than a person with a smooth exterior whose heart is bitter.

Informant 3 in 1998

The Chbabh formed the basis of the curriculum for those who went to school before 1975 and were an integral part of child-raising practice for others, quoted by parents in interviews on the everyday processes of socialisation (field notes, 1997/98). The Chbabh may be characterised as a code of moral conduct. It resembles what Geertz calls an *orthopraxis,* governing 'the outer surface of social behaviour, over virtually the entire range of daily life' (Geertz, 1973: 380–81). As Geertz sees it, this kind of calculated politeness attempts to block more `creatural´ aspects of the human condition – individuality, spontaneity, perishability, emotionality, vulnerability – from sight. Politeness has 'a normative value that we can no longer appreciate, now that Jane Austen is as far from us as Bali'. In addition to securing harmony, politeness provides codes for maintaining order and hierarchy (Geertz, 1973:399). Part of that hierarchy in Cambodia was undoubtedly a gender role hierarchy, where women's delicacy, femininity and modesty should be such that she should move without making her silk *kampot* rustle (field note, February 1, 1998) and 'Even in the case of a violent husband, who beats her in his rage, the woman dare not answer him' (Pou, 1988, *Chbabb Srey* [*Cpap Sri]* verse 150, translated from the French). In this respect the Chbabb enforced a form of emotional regime, as conceptualized by Riis and Woodhead: 'shaping what they can feel, how they can feel it… the forms of social relationship and courses of action that are open for them (Riis & Woodhead, 2010: 10).

In 1998 I went through the textbooks for 7th and 8th grades with several Cambodian teachers, comparing them with the French translation (Pou, 1988). Of the *Chbabb Prus* or Code for Men, only 42 of 98 verses remained (taught only in the 7th grade), while the *Chbabb Srey* had been cut from 227 to 36 strophes and was taught only in the 8th grade. All of the fire-and-brimstone passages had been omitted (field note, 21 January 1998).

The influence of the Chbabh as a contextual factor is undoubtedly on the wane; but because the interviewees were born before 1965, it would have been a contextual factor in their upbringing. Although no longer 'politically correct', the Chbabh had a residual effect on parents' and grandparents' child-rearing practice and some key words were quoted by teenaged informants in Norway in 1998, although they had not been raised in a Cambodian village. Most informants in 1998 used Chbabb concepts and metaphors in their explanations of culture (Overland, 1998:53).

The roots of such an ethic are found in a given community, such as 'the village' described in Chapter 4. MacIntyre holds that today's moral and ethical problems in the West come about because such systems of ethics are 'de-ontologised' in a pluralised world and can only be understood as 'a series of fragmented survivals' (in Henriksen, 1997: 221–225).

Yet both the Chbabh and the folk religion still seem to be linked in the popular imagination to the doctrine of karma and reincarnation. The accumulation of merit, within a lifetime and from lifetime to lifetime, is seen as the way to gain a more fortunate rebirth and advance up the hierarchy of beings.[33]

5.3.2. Soteriology (doctrine of salvation)

Khmer Buddhism seems a rather undogmatic religion. The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path are its foundation, but in Weber's understanding, this is 'for the sake of their practical consequences' for the believer (Weber, 1993/1922:72): i.e. rewards for righteous deeds – just deserts for the unrighteous. For a Khmer Buddhist, the way both to the good life and to eventual, ultimate salvation is attained through good deeds and acquiring merit. Accumulating merit in this belief system is the way to salvation (Bunnang, 1984; Harvey, 1990; Gombrich, 1988). The practice of generous deeds such as donating to the temple, giving alms to monks – even buying freedom for a caged sparrow – are everyday ways of earning merit. A person can also acquire merit

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33 Hansen ascribes this to the '19th century millenarianism reflected hierarchical and cosmological assumptions…. that linked individual social standing and circumstances in life at least in part to one's moral virtue and religious practice in past lives (2008:53)

after death if surviving relatives have provided for the appropriate funeral rituals. Yet: 'In the narrow way of Hinayana it is not expected that everyone will arrive at Nirvana. It is a question of amassing merit, which can take thousands of years' (abbot, cited in field note, 27 January 1998). In the humble Theravada, enlightenment or Nirvana is seen as almost unattainable, a question of countless lifetimes. In Cambodia it is popularly believed that only monks can consider the possibility, whereas all others must concentrate on the possibilities of improving their karma in order to advance infinitely slowly up the levels of being.

The nature of salvation in the Theravada is to arrive at Nirvana: not a heaven with a personified god presiding, but a state of mind that is blissful, shining and empty. But the many stages on the way are understood as providing higher status and a better standard of living.

The central motif when it comes to achieving progress towards salvation seems to be to benefit others through good deeds and otherwise to accept what life has to offer. As an example of compassion, the Cambodian patriarch Ghosananda quotes Jesus: 'Whatsoever you have given to one of my brothers, you have given to me as well.' He continues: 'Great beings maintain their mental balance by giving preference to the welfare of others, working to alleviate the suffering of others, feeling joy for the successes of others and treating all beings equally' (Ghosananda 1992:61).

With the ultimate goal of gaining the ability to control cause and effect and exert a conscious influence over one's karma, control of actions and mind (the vagaries of which are seen as an obstacle to enlightenment) is emphasised. This conscious influence should be based on an awareness that happiness is the result of actions done with a virtuous motive [i.e., to benefit others] and suffering the result of non-virtuous actions (Yeshe & Zopa, 1984:30). Thus salvation is inextricably linked to karma – to the karma theodicy.

In the popular understanding, reincarnation is supposed to refer to the rebirth of the person in another lifetime and the merits of good deeds, good karma, determine if the next life will be better or worse – in terms of opportunities for advancement. Extremely non-virtuous actions lead to rebirth in the lowest realms, *narak* or the hell

realms, which may be extremely cold or extremely hot, and which last for 9 billion years. Some contemporary Buddhist writers have pointed out that these realms can also be viewed as psychological states in this life (see e.g. Traleg, 2001:63).

5.3.3. Theodicy (the problem of evil)

In a Khmer Buddhist context, the solution to the problem of evil is the doctrine of karma, *kamma* (Pali), or *kampal* (Khmer). Karma is action, good or evil, that has consequences for later lives. As Ghosananda writes, 'each of us is responsible for our own salvation. This is self-determination in its purest, most essential form,' (1992: 66). Through right action one gains merit and a chance for a more fortunate rebirth; but it is also popularly believed to improve one's chances in this life. In the village, right action seems to be manifested through conformity to standards of appropriate behaviour, like those promulgated by the Chbabh. Various popular Theravada texts spell out the requirements:

> '[A person] with the moral virtue, or *manussa dhamma* [qualities that make one human], who can rightfully be called civilised, conducts himself as follows… He abides by the noble qualities by practicing properly according to the 10 courses of wholesome action'

> Payutto, 1997:21).

These courses are divided into *body, speech and mind.* Those of 'body' are close to the Ten Commandments, including the injunctions against killing and stealing. Under those of speech, there are four courses of action that are weighted equally with lying. Under those of mind, there are three courses of action: 'not being greedy... making the mind munificent'; not thinking hateful and destructive thoughts; and finally, cultivating Right View – 'understanding the law of kamma, that good actions bring good results and bad actions bring bad results' (idem). This example from the popular religious literature of Theravada Buddhism emphasises aspects of behaviour often considered private and subjective. The grassroots understanding captured in the data placed more emphasis on actions, the visible, outward manifestation of behaviour –

like the old ladies sprinkling water.

5.3.4. Parallels between constructivist and Buddhist texts

In reviewing literature relevant for this project, statements like this were encountered. On the one side: 'All we are is a result of what we have thought.... we live in a world of hard facts, but in a more important sense, we live in a world of thoughts' in a central Buddhist text (Dhammapada, 2004:58). On the other side, statements like: 'The perceived world is held together by the common will to maintain the illusion... Any accurately improper move can poke through the thin sleeve of immediate reality,' in a social constructivist text (Goffman 1967:72). On the one side, statements like: 'Every single phenomenon has countless aspects. Much depends on what angle you view it from'; this also includes the nature of suffering, which changes 'depending upon your way of viewing it' (Dalai Lama, 1998: 174). On the other side, statements like: 'The term "world" is here understood in a phenomenological sense; that is, with its ultimate ontological status remaining in brackets' (Berger, 1967/90:187). The opening verse of the *Dhammapada*[34] proclaims, 'Natures are the result of what we have thought, are chieftained by our thoughts, are made up of our thoughts' (Dhammapada, 2004).

In both traditions, phenomena have countless aspects – much depends on which angle you view them from. The social constructivist approach provides a cognitive perspective that expresses with ease the inexpressible and undefinable. These similarities make a constructivist approach appear culturally appropriate for studying Buddhist informants with their alternative perspectives. What is lacking in the constructivist paradigm, as befits a scientific approach, is the normativity of the religion. What is lacking in the religion, as befits a religion (from the point of view of the religious practitioner), is the awareness of the religion itself as a social construction.[35] Yet both approaches open for a veritable infinity of perspectives, multiple realities, where an Abrahamitic, rights-based Western perspective or discourse is only one of many. Western values are not taken for granted by other

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34 Part of the Khuddaka Nikaya of the *Sutta Pitaka*. (1st introductory note, Dhammapada, 2004).
35 Buddhism has integrated this self-effacing attitude in the *Heart Sutra*: 'There is.... No suffering, no origin of suffering, no cessation of suffering, no path'

peoples of the world who have their own taken-for-granted values. Like the blind men viewing the elephant: one perceives a tree trunk, one a snake and so forth. This teaching fable pinpoints the importance of context and perspective for the relativity of perception. It may help to illustrate why, for an object of study such as this, a social constructivist frame of interpretation is found appropriate.

As I see it, such an approach does not impinge on the hardness of the hard facts of life or the brutality of extreme experience. In Buddhist doctrine, the hardness and brutality of *samsara* remain; control of thought is a tool, a part of the didactics of 'the way' to escape it, the way to salvation.

5.4. Summary of relevant theory sources

A theoretical frame of interpretation was slowly gathered and drawn as needed into the interpretation – a frame consisting of a cluster of theories and concepts that could serve to illuminate incoming data. Some theory is used as a foundation for building new theory, as explained in the section which set out the relation between theory and grounded theory (2.3). Some theory is found irrelevant. An interdisciplinary selection of theories, research and perspectives provided strands for a conceptual net where the social philosophy of Weber provides the frame of interpretation. Theoretical perspectives that facilitate the interpretation of meaning/beliefs ranged along continua or dimensions between agent and structure, between subjective experience and objective trauma, between anomic and nomic. These criss-crossing dimensions contribute to the theoretical net used in fishing for survivor strategies.

The epistemological and general theory basis for the research has been provided by Weber, with his theoretical and methodological foci on the centrality of meaning and understanding (e.g. Weber, 1999; 2003/1922). As we shall see in the final analysis and the theoretical grounding (Chapters 8 and 9), Weber's and Berger's studies of theodicy in a comparative religious perspective are found relevant for understanding the life experience of the object of research. It was thought that the interviewees might have

need for a way of understanding evil (Weber, 1993/1922; Berger, 1990/1967). Other useful contributions from Berger include his understanding of the social construction of society (Berger & Luckmann, 1991/66) and his nomos concept, which seems well-suited for describing the religio-cultural worldview and codes of conduct of traditional Cambodian society. The significant contributions of Giddens are his down-to-earth conceptualisation of self-identity and his notions of self-reflexivity and ontological security. The tools borrowed from Durkheim were his anomie and social solidarity concepts. In addition, mental health studies (Chapter 3), ethnographic area studies (Chapter 4), and religious studies have been drawn in.

Some historical knowledge of what actually took place in Cambodia is also essential. In order to understand actors' perspectives, sociology needs to know something of the contexts and conditions in which events took place.[36] I sought a general understanding of Cambodian history from the works of historians (e.g. Chandler, 2000; Chandler & Kent, 2008; Hansen, 2004; Kiernan, 1996; Porée-Maspero, 1969; Porée, 1938) and published autobiographical accounts of events of the Khmer Rouge period (Him, 2001; Sonn, 2001; Ngor, 1987; Vann, 1998; Pran, 1997; Pin, 1987) as a preparation for hearing the narratives.

These theories and perspectives are joined together in a coherent frame of interpretation that conforms to the requirements of the research questions and the pre-eminence of meaning in both theoretical and methodological approaches.

Although it uses an historical framework, the project makes no claims to an historical method; although central mental health issues arise, it is not a psychological project; and while beliefs and meaning lie at its conceptual core, it is not a religious studies project. This study aims to be a constructivist, interpretive project in the sociology of religion. What distances the project from the disciplines that dig deepest in Cambodian history and context (area studies) is the one-pointed task of following the thread of the main question: to learn more about the resilience of some survivors in order to contribute to improving the care of others. This is also the task for which my personal

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36 The quantity and quality of Weber's historical knowledge, building on the sources to which he had access (Troeltsch and Sombart, for example), is surprising. As Collins remarks, we should be ready to admit that this is Weber's strength and our weakness – not the reverse (Collins, 2000:58, author's translation).

and professional experience of refugees and mental health is best suited.

The thread snakes across the various disciplines on its grounded route, locating religion in social and collective practices, but studying these practices through individual biographies. Starting from the meanings expressed in and interpreted from the biographies, the project ends by examining the sociological role and impact of meaning on the resilience of actors making up a given society. Uncovering, understanding and explaining the meaning of the interviewees exposes the role and impact of such meaning. This is what, I believe, makes it a suitable sociology of religion project.

The accumulated meanings will be used to build an understanding of systems of meaning and the relationship of such meanings to survival. Likewise, the methodology chosen aims to build substantive theory on the basis of individual data. The resilience of the informants is sought with the aid of their voices and their participation. What the interviewees perceive, how they understand their resilience and survival, is influenced by their context, including their worldview. Yet only they are able to describe and explain their experiences from their own perspectives.

Taking the Weberian net in both hands, I cast it on the sea for survival strategies.

6. Findings crossed by time: uncovering what they said

What have resilient Cambodian survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime?

Introduction

Chapter 6 is the first stage in the process of developing new theory from the data obtained through narratives and conversations with survivors. The content of the coded data is presented in this chapter. In terms of methodology, the aim of this process is to provide categories and concepts clear enough to communicate the content of the biographies, and to be useable in further analysis. This chapter, a description based on the roughly 50,000 words of 40 interviews with 30 informants that were subjected to microanalysis through a combination of biographical and grounded theory analysis, constitutes the heart of the thesis from which the subsequent interpretation derives.

However, this procedure, reducing so much narrative material to a matter of themes, categories and concepts, risks losing the narrative context, especially because the life stories themselves were so terse, so understated. Perhaps because of having told the story many times, or because of the moral desirability of modest behaviour, the interviewees appeared to have found a middle way between expressing the events and suppressing them. In sharing experiences with each other – as they said they had done – they may have developed a form of expression suited to exchanging stories with people who were familiar with the context, who could supply the feelings, sounds, scents and kinaesthetic and experiential knowledge of the uncontrollable social context of the time. Between people with a common experience and intimate knowledge of a common trauma context, a few words may suffice.[37] Whatever their reasons, the interviewees were terse.

In order to recapture the narrative context of the interviews, verbatim excerpts from four of the biographical narratives are therefore presented as a prelude to the findings from the microanalysis. The excerpts differ in their focus – from early life and

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37 The autobiography of my Khmer teacher Sivun Pen is written in just such a style (Bromark & Pen, 2010).

background, to the Khmer Rouge period, to the recovery. They come from two women and two men: one from an eastern village, one from a western village and two from Phnom Penh. One of each pair represents 'old people' (farmers, *mulethan* or base people) and one 'new people' (city dwellers and the presumably educated).

Life story one (man, 70)

There is an almost tangible continuum in some of the stories, a chain of hardship linked by the apparent will not to yield. Early hardship has been captured in the autobiography of the popular Cambodian novelist Kong Bunchoeun, narrated in three interviews. I enclose the following excerpt from his early life, with the kind permission of Kong.

> After an early childhood living in a boat on the Sangkat river, my father died – probably poisoned – and my mother and brother and I were left homeless. Trying my hand at a film manuscript at the age of 17, I won 1,000 riel (now less than a dollar), which went to pay medicines for my mother, who was dying. When my money was used up I could no longer pay the rent and we had to leave the house, but fortunately were allowed to live next to the house for free. At the same time that my mother died, my brother was sent back to Battambang by the police, because many were looking for work in Phnom Penh at the time and some had ID cards and some didn't and the police were supposed to clean up, find people and send them back to their village. So it was like – yesterday my mother died, today he was being sent home. He sent a message to us through a neighbour that, if they saw mother, if she could help him out. But mother was dead…. There was an old man, an achaa (lay monk), who helped out at the pagoda and he said 'you are poor and have no parents – just become monks'. So he took contact with the local head monk and he taught us dharma. The reason that we didn't become monks at that time is that a friend came and said that an elderly teacher who was about to retire wanted someone to come and help with the teaching. The teacher had problems with his eyesight, so he

wanted someone to help him and he would share his salary with that person. That friend asked me to do it, so I spoke to my brother that evening and asked if we should give up becoming monks. He said that if I became a monk I'd have to give up writing. So I said, you can be a monk and I can be a teacher. And he said, if you're not going to be a monk, I'm not either. So we decided to run away from the house where we were staying. So at 12 o'clock we packed and moved to another house…. I worked as a teacher for two years and while I worked I wrote songs and stories and sold them, so I earned a little money to support my family ...

On the 17th of April, lots of people were moved out of Phnom Penh to Kandal province, a place called Champa pagoda. Everyone gathered there. The Khmer Rouge promised that it was just for three days, because American soldiers were going to bomb. But after a while we heard that it was a Chinese order. After we had lived at Champa pagoda for about 2 weeks we were told that those of us who had been born in a province, had to return to that province. There were four main ports of exit: to Kandal, to Takmao, to Pochentong and to Battambang. So we who had been born in Battambang had to return to Battambang.

Life story two (woman, 55)

I was born in an Eastern province in a very poor family. We lived two kilometres from the nearest water and had to carry it in wooden buckets. There was frequent cholera. When I was nine, my father moved the family to a village in another province so we could have a better life and I could go to school. And I did, all the way to high school in Phnom Penh. I got married and by 1972, when the bombing had got quite heavy and I was frightened all the time, we moved into the city.

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge came. On the way out of town we didn't have anything with us, but we were together. We drank ditch water. I got dysentery and thought I was going to die. We got hold of a boat and crossed

the river (Tonle Sap).The local leader of the Khmer Rouge was a friend and helped us to change our names... Khmer Rouge handed out 200 grams of rice per person every day. In '75 we were still free to find extra food, fish for example. In the middle of 1976 Khmer Rouge began to move us to Battambang. We waited a month at the station in Kampong Chhnang for a train. No shelters, very hot, no water. There were many waiting. When the train finally came, everyone ran to get on it. It was an animal transport train, dreadful....The last leg was in ox-carts, about 3 hours. It was called Dumray slap (dead elephant), Steng Sankay.

That's where the tragedies began. At the end of '76 they took my children (10, 8 and 6) to a labour camp and my husband to work another place. They made the children glean the rice paddy for about a month. They showed us where we could build a hut of straw. The hunger had come. Every person got a soupspoon of rice. After a month of this I could no longer walk. Only two of the children could still walk. They found aquatic plants we could cook and that helped. It wasn't so very strict yet, we were allowed to do that. Then my children began to be sick, swollen legs (oedema), lost energy, blood in their stools. Once when they were using snares to catch fish in the river, they caught my husband, tied his arms behind his back and took him away to Angkar. Luckily he was released.

After the rice season was over in 1977 Khmer Rouge began to distribute rice – enough to live on. Then I began to work again. I had to make those dikes around the paddy fields. They had to be 1.5 metres wide, 70 cm. high and 3 metres long – every day. The earth was like stone. Because of the hard work I fainted. Khmer Rouge took me to a hospital and there I was so lucky I met a health worker I knew from before. Khmer Rouge said I had cancer and had to be operated, but I refused, because I had seen the way people were operated. I ran away from the hospital and went home. The mekonn (group leader) came every day and told me to work. My husband was moved to another labour camp where he was supposed to catch fish for the Khmer Rouge. He had to stand in the water all day, cutting those water

plants they use to make ropes and hammocks. He looked terrible –the water had eaten the ends of his fingers and toes. We were again far from each other and the children were in another camp.

I was beaten. They said I was a thief and my husband CIA! It was once when I was sick with swollen legs, I went to the Khmer Rouge and begged for rice husks to make medicine. He said I could come and get some. When I came back and was taking a bit in the corner of my krama, they said I was stealing, they said I was the wife of a CIA and beat me. I sat and chanted the opening of the Dhamma aloud in Pali. He hit me and hit me, after a while he got tired and stopped… if I had said 'Stop' I wouldn't have got out of there.

At that time, I didn't know what meditation was, just tried to say what I had learnt. I thought, if I'm going to die, I'm taking the Dharma with me.

Life story three (man, 46)

Narrated to me in English, this excerpt begins in the middle of the Khmer Rouge regime.

And I think 2 or 3 weeks later I was arrested. Because I stole corn. We were asked to plant corn. And when we were through we could eat. So we went to get our food and I was arrested and taken to the prison… maybe three hours walking. And one day about 4 o'clock – they took me to kill I think. There were 4 people, one buffalo driver, one guy with a long machine gun sitting with the driver in the front and one guy sitting in the back. I was in the middle. And the biggest guy he was the prison boss, but no real prison, just tied up under a tree... and then I knew. I think, they are going to kill me... so I thought about what would happen – what is the meaning of, you know, dying – and then I tried to decide and I decided – I want to run and let, you know, this guy shoot me from behind. It may be easier, you know, to die like this may be easier. I didn't know what would happen, because I

was beaten, you know, by them many days. And then I said to myself, 'ok – just sit – don't think anything' and the birds were flying. So it was afternoon, evening, the sun set and we can see a lot of birds flying. Very sentimental I feel at that time. So they took me three hours and reach to a small place and they just stop.... And I just waited. When I was waiting, I fell asleep. I woke up. Only the buffalo driver. The two guys with guns disappeared. I don't know. And he also slept. And I don't know, if I remove the ring from my foot... I want to run away! – the problem is if I run maybe I will be attacked by the wolf, the wild dog – too many wild dogs. I had only white clothes we had from home, my mother cut it to make it look like a local boy, a farmer. Then I saw a soldier with a horse, talking with the ox-driver and then he took me about 2 kilometres to the camp. It was called youth camp 33. Teenagers they collected from families and put in that place, isolated from the community.

What year was this? '77/78. it was cold, about 15 degrees or so. And we do not have proper clothes, we do not have enough food, so tired and cold and I just follow them. Muddy water, we had to work in the water. But then I have no choice, because I am a person who already died, I think… In the morning, work, in the afternoon, work, more than a month and … I was so scared because the guy came and was looking at me and then 'You – you must look after everyone'. So, I had more rice to eat. Two weeks later, I go to my family, I go to my mother… At 6 o'clock, getting dark, I just walked to the bush so they think I'm going to the toilet and then I run... I walked the whole night, you can imagine, no one, water, I had to swim across the river and I reached home about 9 o'clock in the morning. I find mother, she did not say anything – 'oh you have come back?' And I said 'Yes'. That was it. Difficult to describe about the hard life, you know. We had no feelings, no sensitive feelings. It's lost when the friends disappeared. You know, sometimes I thought, you know, I'm away from her for maybe a half year and when I come back, she asks in unimportant words – you come back? At the time I felt not happy with her, but later on I tried to understand

– hard life, lost sentiment, no feelings about care, this is what I learnt.

And when Khmer Rouge lost the war, I lost my mother again. They separated us, we were grouped like material, ok? 40–45 years old one group, 5–7 years old one group, 11–13 one group, mobile group. Like material... And then I just walked. After Khmer Rouge, Vietnamese government took over Battambang and we heard the fighting, far away. I didn't know where my mother was. I just walked alone. And people were, you know, moving to Phnom Penh, to Battambang. And everybody asking each other, 'Where are you going?' 'I'm just trying to find some people', thousands of people, didn't know what to do. Just walk. I walked about two weeks and I met one guy used to stay in my village and he said 'your mother's looking for you!' just walk back about 15 kilometres… finally I reached the place and found my mother. Very happy. And she realised I was strong at that time, to carry things back. And we walked from Mong Russei to Pursat, one month. And along the way I picked up fruit, mangoes, collected things to sell, saw families, fell into a mass grave – whooh, crazy. But we didn't... We were not scared at the time.

When we got to Phnom Penh we were not allowed to enter because it was occupied by soldiers.... Then one day – we lived in the 100-houses area – in 1979 I wanted to go to school, I had forgotten what it was like, but some went to school, so I went with them. I was placed in grade 7. After three months, I passed the grade-school exam…. So one day I went to the municipal education office and said 'I want to become a teacher'. They asked me when I was born. I said I didn't know, it was not something we kept track of, before the war. So I said a birth-date. She said, 'You cannot be a teacher at that age. You can change it.' So I have three birthdays. I got two months of teacher training – two months and 15 days pedagogy and was sent out to teach in Phnom Penh. I was 16. Some of the students were older than me. My class was grade 4E: all the students who were repeating, who had trouble learning, who couldn't read or write – were put in my class, because I was the youngest. Some of the pupils were 23–24 years old

– 40% were older than me. Many of these students were satisfied with a 0 score! …. everything I've learned about pedagogy later – I knew it! At the end of the year, the class did well. I was accused of inciting the students to bribe the examiners, but I wasn't afraid of them, they were just jealous. For three years I went to Teacher Training College in the long vac. After the first year the head teacher didn't want me back because I talked back. After three years in-service training I was sent to work at Teacher Training College. Twenty years old. Sometimes I taught 500 teachers.

How did you do it? I have a strong belief in doing, doing makes people develop: working with the students. When I work, I learn. If I don't work, I don't learn. If I work, I don't feel tired, I feel joyful! I feel proud because I help the others. At my job, I have the right to take leave – never do. Five days of leave in 16 years. I'm drunk on this! Give them money or rice, they eat it up. Water the brain! Make people able to solve their own problems. My projects train people to improve the quality of life. They want me to be an administrator – I want to empower my people.

Life story four (woman, 50)

My mother died when I was little and I lived with my father and his new wife. I lived with them, but like a step-child. And I struggled with living alone and struggled to study, and after I finished secondary school my stepmother asked me to stop studying

When she asked me to stop studying I left home and studied teaching for two years. Then I got married and moved to .... to work as a teacher, during the Lon Nol regime. After that I moved back to the city. And in 1975, like other people, I was also expelled – to Kampong Cham. I lived there, separated from my husband. At the time I discovered I was a month or two pregnant. It was reported that I was a teacher and that my husband was in the military and they interrogated me about my background.

Did you tell the truth? At te [not at all]. I think I had a hard life when I was

young, until I got married, so in the Khmer Rouge regime I knew how to adapt to the situation. I lied to the Khmer Rouge and they set me free. It was very difficult to live in the Pol Pot time; like other people, they forced us to work very hard, build dams and waterways. It was hard for me, I had a new baby and they forced me to reap and cut grass they used for the roofs of houses. As a mother I was always thinking of my baby and ran from the work site to breast-feed my baby. At that time my step-mother lived with me and she was swollen [*oedema*]. I gave her an infusion of tree bark to cure her. I weighed only 45 kilos, I was very skinny. And they forced me to work hard, driving a cart, harvesting the rice, constructing a house. I cut bamboo and made a house like the men, it was the rainy season and if I didn't do that they would get wet, my step-mother and the children….

I was able to survive because first: I had mental strength. Second: I was waiting to see my husband again. Third: I hoped that one day others would help the situation; one day there would be another regime. Yes. I hoped that the situation would change, [because of] the fact that they used undernourished people's labour instead of machines – it's not the nature of human life.

My friend and I always met and talked about hope. But then she died. Along the road she got dizzy and died. At that time I always thought of the possibilities, thought of a song and sang it in my heart. It's a song about hope... one day... A meaningful song, I think. It motivated me to get up, to study or work. My father said to me before he died, smile to yourself because it can make you hope.

After liberty in 1979 I lived in Kampong Cham and waited to find my husband. I still had hope, always thought of my husband, waited to meet him. Then the family was reunited. The trip back was very hard, as hard as when we left. We had no money left, only three kilos of rice. No home, because the house was occupied by others, so we lived under the trees at kilometre 9 for a while, around half a year.

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After these excerpts from four of the narratives, we turn to the microanalysis of the interview data from all the interviewees. The findings which form the main part of this chapter are the reported behaviour (what they did) and explanations (how and why they did it) of these persons who have fared well in spite of their experiences.

The summary of the findings is arranged into three historical periods:

a. **April 1975–Dec.1978**   *Khmer Rouge coup and regime* [section 6.1]

b. **January 1979**   *Vietnamese liberation / invasion* [section 6.2]

c. **1980–present**   *Normalisation: Camps / home-coming; resettlement in*

Norway [section 6.3]

Again, the interviewees were asked, 'Will you tell me about your life? Begin where you like.' They had received information about the aims of the research in the invitation (Appendix 1) and the oral introduction. In line with the inductive intention of the grounded theory approach there was no interview guide, although sometimes follow-up questions were asked, to clarify the meaning of what was said.

From the forced march out of the cities to the final normalisation, with stability and a kind of peace – whether in their Cambodian village or in a small town in Norway – the findings from the microanalysis of narratives directly addressed the first three sub-questions of the project:

1. to register and analyse informants' accounts of their own survival
2. to identify qualities or resources they had and how they worked
3. to identify the assistance they received that they see as having made a difference

This was done in order to move towards the main research question: to uncover, understand and explain what these survivors found useful for their survival and recovery after traumatic events and human rights abuse. The narratives were searched for self-reported actions at each historical cusp, together with the interviewees' reflections and comments on how and why they had behaved as they did.

Interviewees described their physical and mental survivals along a kind of cognitive continuum, between behaviour and thought. In spite of the information they had received, informants associated 'survival' primarily with physical survival, mastering the struggle for existence. Gradually, it appeared that the ways of behaving they had chosen might indeed have saved their physical lives. Their explanations gave clues that helped to interpret what had saved their psychological lives. In this chapter, the focus is on disentangling physical from psychological survival, the behavioural (actions) from the cognitive (reflection and explanation), to provide a clearer overview.

Each section is introduced by a thumbnail description of the historical situation. This is not derived from the narratives of the interviewees, but is a skeletal reconstruction of historical highlights reported in other accounts of the period (e.g. Chandler, 1999; Kiernan, 1996; Kent & Chandler, 2008) and in published autobiographies. The purpose is not to provide an in-depth historical account, simply to offer a reminder of the historical events through which the informants moved and despite which they survived. The situation is the historical context; the how's and why's of the feat of survival are the focus.

For each historical period, a subsection on action themes or coping strategies frequently mentioned by the interviewees ('What they did') is followed by a subsection on 'How and why they did it'. Explanations about why they behaved in a certain way are interpreted by the researcher as attributes and qualities. In line with the earlier-mentioned distinction between coping as behaviour and resilience as the immanent form (section 3.2), the two subsections in each historical section belong to the first two sub-questions. These are, respectively: 1) What accounts do informants give of their own survival and normalisation? (What did they do? [coping]); And 2) What qualities or resources did they have and how did they work? (How and why they did it [resilience]). Each subsection begins with a keyword list of frequently occurring themes. Each theme is introduced by a representative quote and explained by a summary of the remarks coded under it, to give insight into the theme and to show how the concept was arrived at. It may be helpful to remember that while slightly less than half of the informants had at least 12 years of education, the majority had from 0

to 7 years; this may explain the differing forms of expression of the quotes.

Through the process of re-translation and explication described in section 2.5.3 (exegesis of key words), it emerged that certain Khmer terms were used by all informants. These are indicated by a highlighted transliteration of the Khmer word, following the simple phonetics system described in Seam and Blake (1991). The signification of these terms in the summary and exegesis of the words is taken up in section 7.2, as the interpretive significance gradually emerged.

After the transcribed and interpreted interviews were imported into NVivo, they were read line for line and coded as descriptions and explanations of the behaviour and thinking of the interviewees. Codes accumulated into categories. After most of the coding was completed, it became apparent that the program routinely counted up the number of references coded under each theme. This automatic quantification was useful, as it provided an indication of what, taken together, the informants were talking about – what themes were presumably central for them collectively. The narratives demonstrated what themes were shared. This is not to say that the most frequently coded themes were singularly important: rather, that the themes taken together were explanations typically suggested by informants. In the list of themes and concepts coded from the data in figure 2, 27 references were made, for example, to 'caring for each other' during the Khmer Rouge years. This was the most frequent description of how or why the informants behaved in a certain way during this period. It also offered surprising evidence of something that had not been expected.

Figure 2 gives an overview of the categories and concepts coded from the data as they appear in NVivo, version 7. In NVivo, categories are called 'tree nodes'. In this project, tree nodes are built up from codes interpreted as belonging together. In the left-hand column are the tree nodes: the three historical periods. In the second column the number of occurrences of each theme is listed. In the third column are the categories, 'what they did' and 'how and why they did it'. In the fourth column, concepts belonging to the appropriate mode in each historical period appear as individual themes or concepts, sorted in frequency of their order of mention.

Historical period	References	Category	Concepts
1. 17 April 1975: *Khmer Rouge takeover*			
	17	*What they did*	1. *Starved*
	16		2. *worked hard*
	15		3. *lost family*
	14		4. *experienced brutality*
	7		5. adapted
	5		6. escaped to the jungle
			7. (gave/received help)
		How and why they did it	
	27		1. social solidarity/caring for others
	21		2. adaptation
	12		3. religious worldview
	4		4. perseverance
2.1979.*Vietnamese invasion/liberation*		What they did	
	22		1. tried to find family
	16		2. worked, persevered
	15		3. talked about it
	4		4. struggled, fought
		How and why they did it	
	13		1. struggling – fighting for freedom
	7		2. working to eat
	6		3. adaptation
	4		4. caring for others-social cohesion
3. Normalisation after 1980		*What they did*	
	23		1. worked hard
	22		2. gave / received help
	17		3. held family /community together
	16		4. did ceremonies / religious practices
		How and why they did it	
	19		1. Religious worldview
	16		2. Learning by hardship
	15		3. Agency, self-reliance
	9		4. Understanding the situation

Figure 2. *Tree nodes*

6.1.Historical transition: 1975-1978 Khmer Rouge regime

On 17 April 1975, Pol Pot assumed power in a sudden and dramatic coup d'état. Residents of Phnom Penh and the other cities were driven out into the country to work in 'production units' (forced labour camps).

The Khmer Rouge continued systematically controverting the traditional values of society for the three years, eight months and twenty days of the Pol Pot Regime, or the reign of 'Angkar' – the organisation.

This section presents the actions and coping strategies and the experiences mentioned by interviewees during the first of three historical periods, the Khmer Rouge regime. On 17 April 1975, the Khmer Rouge announced that Phnom Penh was being evacuated for three days due to an imminent US bombing raid. Some people camped outside the city for days, expecting that there would soon be a chance to return home. But they were driven on. Some wandered towards their ancestral villages, others were driven along the routes chosen by the Khmer Rouge for the evacuation of the cities (see map opposite). A corresponding exodus took place in all the cities of Cambodia.

In the first days of this period of radical contextual change, the data say more about what people had to do, or face, than what they did of their own volition. The first four experiences on the list in figure 2 (in italics) are traumatic, life-threatening experiences, as defined in *The PTSD Diagnosis in DSM IV* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and thus provide the basis for exploring the resilience demonstrated. If the experiences had not been so traumatic, these survivors would not have been considered examples of resilience and they would not have qualified for the analytical category. These were the common experiences of all informants, including former Khmer Rouge. The experiences were verified by other travellers' 'multiple perspectives on the same life experience' (Denzin, 1989: 57) as well as by historical documentation of the nature of life in the production units (e.g.Kiernan, 1996; Chandler, 1999).

Khmer Rouge plan for the expulsion from the cities (taken at Toul Sleng, 9 March 2009)

In their narratives of the period 1975 to 1978, people told of being driven out of the city at gunpoint, losing partners and children along the way, witnessing the execution of close family-members, the slow deaths of children by starvation, floating down rivers with barrels to escape, being shot at. Some managed to escape and lived in the woods.

6.1.1. What they did

Key themes:

- ***Starved***

- *Worked hard*

- *Witnessed, experienced brutality*

- *Lost family and friends*

- **Adapted –** *som rap klouen ruh*

- **Escaped to the jungle**

- **(Gave / received help)**

Starved

> The organization (*Ankar*) would tell me to do something, I just did it. When we were tired, we did not say anything. Even though we're tired, we don't say that we are tired. When the food isn't good, we don't say it's not good. We just keep working hard. If they asked us, 'is the food delicious?' we would say 'yes'. We couldn't complain – we had to just carry on, even though the food was bad and I was hungry I'd say – Oh, good food – oh, I'm so full! If not, we would be killed.... Many died of starvation. Most people had too little to eat. Some died of disease and overload of work. Many were killed because they were accused of being the enemy.
>
> Informant 7 C

The interviewees remembered the hunger, and talked about it. Starvation was a universal category of experience. Although not strictly speaking something they did, it was something that all experienced – even the Khmer Rouge experienced it in the end. The situation grew worse year by year. Especially in 1977 after the crops failed and the daily quota was reduced from a tin of rice a day for 4 persons to a tin of rice for 10, there was widespread starvation. In the Nazi concentration camps, a similar daily diet was noted: '10½ ounces of bread and 1¾ pints of thin soup' (Frankl, 1971: 26). No matter how hard you worked, you stayed hungry.[38]

Everyone spoke of the hunger, many at length, some more briefly: 'It was really like starvation, only the skin', said one woman. Interviewees explained how they would do anything to get more to eat: steal, eat leaves, bark, insects, parts of plants and

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38 Old condensed milk tins were used to measure out the rice.

vegetables normally thrown away.

They worked until they dropped, digging, planting, harvesting. As the rice was harvested, they watched incredulously as the sacks were taken away in trucks, while their own rations were further reduced. An aching hunger was perpetual, and particularly dangerous for small children, who died by the thousands while the rice was driven away, sold to China.

Worked hard – *Dto su*

> My uncle was a medic in the Lon Nol militia... he was put to carrying things with a yoke. People that had been connected to the Khmer Republic were slaves. They were used as oxen. I was a child, so I was put in a young group and made to make fertilizer out of human and cow manure. In '77 I became a youth and had to work like an adult, only a little easier: they had to get up at 3 AM, we could sleep until 4. My only possessions were a spoon and a plate. Precious! If we lost them, we weren't allowed to eat. I had grown up as a farmer so I could work and I got a little positive encouragement.
>
> Informant 5 C

The work day began early, even for children. A 16-hour day of hard work was normal. The slogan-like cry **Dto su!** (struggle! Work hard!) was used by the Khmer Rouge to drive them harder, so that it rang daily in their ears in the Khmer Rouge years. 'If we didn't work well, we would be taken out and shot dead. We had no free time. We worked from early morning to late evening' (Informant 9 N1). Familiar from the early encouragement of industriousness in the family, this **Dto su** drove them to work. At the same time, they had to work in a certain way, said one woman: 'we had to **prang praeng**, (to persevere, to try again and again), in order to not attract attention to the fact that we needed food... Yes, we had to **Svae hott lang** (be active), **homlaeng** (work harder and harder) (Informant 19 N2).

The writer Kong Bun Choeun observed drily, 'If we compare the Pol Pot and the Lon Nol regimes, we think the Lon Nol didn't quite make the grade as far as ditch-digging

was concerned' (field note, 23 August 2009).

Lost family and friends

> The family was separated after a short time. I lived one place doing building work, my wife in another place and the children were separated from their parents. They had to work for Angkar and make fertiliser out of cow manure, and my wife had to work in the rice fields.
>
> Informant 3 N2

This concept includes both separation from significant others and their irreparable loss. More than 80% of the informants were separated from all or part of their nuclear family in the course of the 3 years, 8 months and 20 days of the Khmer Rouge. In many production units, families were separated according to the kind of work demanded of them, husbands from wives, children into children's groups (krom), and youth into mobile youth brigades which were sent from place to place.

By the end of the Khmer Rouge period all but two of the informants had lost several members of their immediate family, and 30% had lost the major part of their nuclear families – to starvation, sickness and execution. Some were fortunate and found surviving relations after the Khmer Rouge regime, others did not; some knew where their family members had been executed and buried, others did not.

Among the thirty interviewees, there were three parents who had been separated from their babies on 17 April 1975. The evacuation plans of the Khmer Rouge made it impossible for couples who had been in different parts of the city, going about their daily business, to find each other. Each of the lost infants had been taken care of by some passing family and was found again as an adult, more than 25 years after the event.

Experienced, witnessed brutality

> What I remember from that time I remember as a child (13 years old). I remember that once in 1978 my friends in the reserve children's group were taken out and killed. At that time they were killing the Chinese and

Vietnamese families… When Vietnam came and invaded Cambodia the Khmer Rouge were angry. And the Khmer Rouge just killed everybody, including infants.

And they would often use an expression that says: if you want to dig up a tree, you also have to dig up the roots. So if a family was taken out and killed, then the whole family was gone. No one survived from that family.

Informant 15 N2

Cruel and inhuman treatment, whether experienced personally or witnessed, was also mentioned frequently. In addition to death from starvation, there were frequent summary beatings and executions. No one could live in a Khmer Rouge production unit without at least being witness to brutality (see e.g. Kiernan, 1996: 411–421). Interviewees – women and men, educated and illiterate, former Lon Nol soldiers and former Khmer Rouge soldiers, those who later came to Norway and those who returned to their home places – all agree in their condemnation of the behaviour of the Khmer Rouge cadre.

Some saw close family relations executed. Everyone experienced the disappearance of others.

My brother was shot by Pol Pot [*sic*] right in front of me – with a pistol, right in front of me and my other brother. Another brother disappeared, we never found out what happened to him.

Informant 10 N1

The threat of violence hung over the dikes and the paddy fields, patrolled by the young Khmer Rouge soldiers with their 79-mm. rifles. The threat to life was also present at night, when spies (*chlops*) hovered in the darkness around the leaf-covered huts (see e.g. Ngor, 2003/1987), hoping to pick up some words of complaint or criticism, some insurgent revisionist talk, the smell of secret food and forbidden cooking fires, plans of escape, the sound of a radio.

Adapted – *som rap klouen ruh*

> I attended all the groups. I understood the situation– I was an intellectual, so I dared not protest. They held meetings and they'd ask things and some people would answer – but I understood the situation, so I kept quiet. I *adapted* myself (***som rap klouen ruh***) to the situation to survive at a time when it was difficult to survive..... I thought that, if they had any sense, they wouldn't be using engineers and doctors to dig (*informant's emphasis*)
>
> Informant 20 C

Both 'old people' and 'new people' did things that they would not normally have done to survive. The new people, also called 17th of April people, had to adapt in one way or another, to keep their heads down. But also old people adapted. Like new people, they began to steal as the hunger grew; they began to find potatoes, they began looking for leaves they could eat, to fill their stomachs.

It was not straightforward to weed out acts from attitudes, behaviour from explanations, in regard to the ability to adapt. As one man said, in this period it meant breaking the rules, lying about one's background, or playing crazy. Somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, the focus in this subsection is therefore on informants' brief descriptions of what they actually did to avoid being singled out. Under the corresponding theme in subsection 6.1.2, Adaptation, the focus is on their explanations of how and why they adapted to survive.

Those who had worked in professional or semi-professional positions tried to conceal it as best they could. Wearing glasses was suspect, for that was taken as an indication that they could read. Teachers and other professionals were especially suspect. Such interviewees said they worked as hard as they could, so that other people would not know. 'Then they would give me something to read, like in French or English and I would say 'no, I don't understand, I can't read that at all' [*mimes holding a paper upside-down*](informant 6 C). A common strategy was to keep silent: 'I never protested in the meetings. I never said anything. Some teachers were killed because they showed their opinion. I didn't do this' (Informant 20 C).

Some pretended to be 'crazy', or retarded. Hiding the truth was a way to survive

physically. Several informants said baldly that they had learned to lie. Others – 'old people' from the villages – insisted that they had never lied, but maybe they did not have to. Although perhaps no less traumatic in the end, their situation was somewhat different during the Khmer Rouge regime, as they were 'old people' or *mulethan* (base people), the kind of people that Pol Pot wanted everyone to become.

Escaped to the jungle

> My brother came and helped me escape from prison, in the middle of the night. We had… the tide was high and we stole a boat, little boat, hidden under the trees. First along one river and then all the way to the Mekong. But lots of strange things happened on the way. We picked up my sister, with her husband and three children and then we rowed to a place that was not so far from where we were born and my sister and the kids got out and we three rowed on. Then we lost the boat because we couldn't pull it up on land and we had to cross the river like – with a barrel. And we floated down the Mekong, all the way to Vietnam. My brother-in-law was killed, a little past the border – they just shot, they couldn't see us because we had some bushes over us... we got there... and we got food, and they sent us on to another place. Then they put us in prison

Informant 13 N1

For a smaller but significant group, surviving meant recognising the danger and taking action. Since there were 15,000 Cambodian insurgents who participated in the Vietnamese invasion/liberation in 1978/79, despite the heavy losses incurred getting across the Vietnamese border (Kiernan 1996: 441), there were presumably many more in eastern forests, including civilians. Among interviewees who came to Norway after the year 2000 (N2) were several who had remained in the wilds or been active in the military until the late 1990s. Some had escaped from the production units where they were being held. They lived in the forest and had to leave their families behind. The situation was chaotic, with mistrust spreading among the Khmer Rouge themselves as the hope of a successful uprising began to dawn.

Gave / received help

> I didn't know how to plough, because I wasn't born a farmer. I couldn't plant rice, couldn't chop wood. I couldn't work as hard as a farmer. A farmer helped me; but the farmer had a healthy appetite, while I had always been a light eater. So the food in the Pol Pot regime, let's say it was 50% of a person's needs. But I felt full, or almost…. So I gave a bit to the one who helped me.

<div align="right">Informant 10 N1</div>

This was a case where assistance was reciprocal, but most mentions of help during the Khmer Rouge period were of help received. Although not one of the most frequent categories in this historical period, this theme is included here because it contrasts with the belief that, during the Khmer Rouge period, Cambodians lost the traditionally-esteemed quality of caring for each other. A few interviewees had received help from others, sometimes from total strangers. A young boy who had lost his family after being released from prison where he was being held for stealing food was taken in by a countrywoman. 'I was hungry and she was cooking corn. She was very kind and asked me in and gave me food. I was starving because in prison I had got very little' (informant 16 N2). Later she informed the *mephum* (village chief) that her son who had been missing had come home, so that this young boy could stay with her family.

6.1.2. How and why they did it

How and why did they behave as they did? How did they explain their behaviour? What resources, attributes, or qualities did they employ? What form did their resilience take at this time? These are the explanations on which later interpretations in this study are based.

In this period, from Pol Pot's coup until the end of 1978, explanations given by interviewees often described forms of pragmatic survival strategies, ways of staying alive. Many seemed prepared for hardship because of past experience: 'We had always

been poor'; 'My parents taught us to work hard'; submission, learned in the hierarchy of the old society and bone-hard endurance. Reminiscing about a childhood long before Khmer Rouge, one teacher said, 'Every year we ran out of rice. We ate too little, no vitamins, much sickness, a hard life. We lived in a little house with the animals, there was no furniture. We studied by the light of tiny kerosene lamps. No books, no pencils' (Informant 3 C (in 1998).

We now turn to the prevalent themes or categories coded from informants' ways of explaining what they did in the years 1975 to 1978.

Key themes:

- **Social solidarity / caring for each other**
- **Adaptation** (*som rap klouen ruh*); **understanding the situation** (*jull sa priep ka)*
- **Religious worldview**
- **Perseverance** (*prang praeng* – **effort, exertion**)

Social solidarity – family and community

> We ate everything that could crawl. Insects, mice – we fried grasshoppers and shared them – one to husband, one to each child, one to me. We held together and showed our love to each other. If I had something to eat, I saved something for my husband and children. If the children got something, they saved something for us. We shared our feelings with each other.

> I had a sister that was so pessimistic. She just sat like this (*she hunches over, like she's downcast*). She died.... My sister – her husband didn't show her any love. He went to the *mekonn* and got cooked rice. He saved only the rice water for her.

> Informant 14 N2

The data show numerous expressions of solidarity and care for others. Some risked their lives to sneak food to their families at night. Interviewees held together with the family member or friends they had, even if it was only one surviving relation. Another woman seemed to have forgiven her step-mother, who used to treat her badly, nursing the woman back to life with an infusion of tree bark.

The lucky ones could return in the evening to some kind of fellowship. There was a wife, a brother, a friend who, although unable to do anything about the situation, was able to succour them, albeit wordlessly (field note, 9 March 2009).

In contrast to the next theme, 'adaptation', there was not much explanation of the grounds for social behaviour in the first period. The behaviours appeared to be offered as self-evident, as if with an understanding of a taken-for-granted knowledge ('human beings should help each other') that they assumed was a shared value.

Adaptation /Understanding the situation (som rap klouen ruh/ jull sa priep ka)

For adult members of the middle class, survival involved retreating into the self. They explained that they had 'understood the situation' and adapted to it: the situation was extraordinary and the ordinary codes of conduct were no longer applicable. This was not *understanding* in the Weberian sense. This kind of 'understanding the situation' (*jull sa priep ka)* was rather a way of intuiting the situation including its dangers, putting two and two together, and adapting one's behaviour accordingly.

Since the Khmer Rouge clearly had no sense, it could be risky to tell them the truth. Of those who did not understand the situation, one informant said: 'We never saw them again. We only saw their clothes. The clothes that person had used, were used by someone else.' People learned to lie, regarding it as a necessary although ethically regrettable survival strategy in times of war. One man explained that they had learned this in the years of the war of independence against the French colonial power.

> To survive, people had to learn to lie. Everything we learnt from religion about how to have a good character – 'honesty' for example. We couldn't keep it.

Example: the French police ask 'Have you seen the guerrilla?' 'No – I haven't!' The guerrilla ask: 'Have you seen French people?' 'No – I haven't!'

<div align="right">Informant 3 N2</div>

Some had protected themselves by 'understanding the situation' in advance. One man said he had worked in a government department during the Lon Nol regime. He had been asked to take responsibility for five provinces. 'I said – yes, I can take it. The only condition is that I can wear civilian clothes' (informant 10). He had a feeling that wearing a uniform would be dangerous, because he believed that the war would end in a coup. He explained that he had understood the situation. High-ranking military of the former regime were lured, in various ways, into turning themselves in, and were executed in groups.[39]

As one informant assessed it, one did not risk getting bad karma by lying to the Khmer Rouge. After all, *Angkar* had lied, had built the organisation on a lie, when they recruited young boys to fight for 'freedom'. Those who survived came to realise that one does not tell the truth to such an organisation (field note, 30 May 2007).

The two categories *adapted* (in the last subsection) and *adaptation,* as a way of explaining how or why they acted in a certain way (in this subsection), were the first of a series of pairs of congruent themes: adapt / adaptation. They did what they said, and could explain their reasons for doing what they did.

Religious worldview

One interviewee figured out how to escape from prison in a vision:

Once I was arrested. We were a row of prisoners with these iron rings on our ankles and links on each ring that were strung on a long bar. I sat there in the evening and thought, 'how can I manage to escape?' You know, in Cambodia there's a tradition that when a child loses a tooth, they can take it

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39 Phnom Penh in 2009 was full of tailors whose main business seemed to be to make uniforms for people who work for the government, from top to bottom of the hierarchy (field note, 2 March 2009).

to a sculptor and get a little Buddha figure carved out of it. I had received that kind of Buddhas from my parents, from uncles and aunts. They were sewn into my collar. So I sat with this around my neck. You could say that I meditated for three hours and suddenly there came an idea, just like light streaming into my head: that's how I can do it! In the evening, the rings were taken off the long bar so we could to the river and wash. When they were going to be strung on again, I hid one link in my hand and made a ring with my fingers which I strung onto the bar. Then I had one foot free, which I hid under my *krama* (scarf). The other ring was a bit looser and at night I escaped.

Informant 1 N1

Picture of leg irons at Toul Sleng, March 2009.

Religious worldview and beliefs emerged as explanations of survival in anecdotes of occurrences, dreams and visions. Some expressions in the material described what might be called religious experiences. Several informants appeared to find inspiration to act in visions that occurred in periods of concentration or prayer.

Some interviewees explained that they had survived because of their observance of their traditional virtues, in particular, *respect* – as a way of acting, a form of behaviour rather than a subjective attitude. They saw behaving respectfully as the prime reason for their survival: they humbly took orders, worked as hard as they could, didn't rock the boat, didn't stick out their necks. Respectful behaviour and respect as a moral precept were another congruent pair: respect / respectful.

Acting according to the traditional worldview had been under heavy duress during the Khmer Rouge regime, grounds for the death penalty in some production units. Yet small acts of kindness had continued in secret, like the exchange of services between the city boy who didn't need so much food and the country boy who knew how to chop down trees.

*

In 1979, the situation changed abruptly:

> In 1979, after the first invasion by the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese were in retreat and we followed the army, my wife, my children and I. I was carrying a shoulder-board with two baskets. In one was my little boy who was four, in the other some vegetables for our trip. The army of Pol Pot was following and they shot over us and behind us, over and behind, so we were surrounded by fire. We walked for days and nights. Near the border of Vietnam there was a lake. We hid and I went down to get some water for my kids. As I was filling water my neighbour said, 'Brother, look! The bottom is full of mines!' I looked and saw all those blue wires. I walked on tip-toe backwards, trying to find my footprints. And I made it. I threw myself down and cried to my wife, 'I walked over death! I walked over death!' I thanked my parents, my ancestors and all gods that are. A little while later a flock of cows went to drink and they tripped the mines. Five were killed. We got a big piece of meat to take with us.
>
> Informant 3 N2 (1998)

How and why they acted in this new historical period is presented in the next section.

6.2. The historical transition: 1979 – Vietnamese invasion / liberation

The uprising against the Khmer Rouge in the eastern zone (bordering Vietnam) was documented historically by Ben Kiernan through interviews with rebel leaders. In September 1978 they 'went and made contact with Vietnam' (interview with Heng Samrin in Kiernan, 1996: 441). Driven before Khmer Rouge forces, tens of thousands of insurgent soldiers and civilians who had been hiding in eastern forests were helped over the border by the Vietnamese, suffering heavy losses.

From 21 December 1978, a massive invasion was mounted by 150,000 Vietnamese troops and 15,000 Cambodian insurgents, from 30 December with Vietnamese air support (Ngor, 2003/1987: 435). By mid-January 1979, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge had fled to the forests of the northwest, where they continued to wage guerrilla warfare.

Informants and interpreters laid out maps, lined up pens and salt cellars on tables to indicate borders and battle lines and show their movements in this chaotic and explosive historical period. By that time, some had already escaped into the jungle and joined other insurgents. As the Vietnamese offensive began in December/January 1978/79, production units were suddenly abandoned, and people were either executed or escaped in the chaos. In a dramatic historical transition, the 3 years 8 months and 20 days of repression and starvation came to an end – not like lightning from a clear sky, but like heavy rain that comes after a long period of 'thunder without rain' (Kiernan, 1996: 386).

I was moved by Pol Pot to Takream in Battambang. It was January 20, not January 7. On January 7, everybody in Phnom Penh was liberated and everybody was happy, but I got moved. About 3 PM I understood that they planned to kill us all that day. It was about 3 PM and Vietnamese soldiers came and the Khmer Rouge regime soldiers and we were together. The Vietnamese soldiers tried to shoot so the Khmer Rouge soldiers would run

away. They shot from the south and we ran to the north. And when we came north we were unlucky because there were more Vietnamese soldiers sitting there and they took our shoes. They were collecting shoes for their soldiers in the east and our shoes made of car tires for the ordinary people.

<div align="right">Informant 5 C</div>

Of those who were free to move in the north-western region, some tried to return home, while others made for the Thai border – a very dangerous area by all accounts, with survivors hiding from each other in the woods, Khmer Rouge snipers, mine fields, trafficking in contraband, robber bands who detained, robbed and raped those trying to flee, and pitched battles (Ngor, 2003: 408-409). But on the border there were the refugee camps and the dream of food and safety and resettlement in another country, so some took the chance, even though they knew that many that set out never arrived.

In this section, the experiences of the three samples (N1, N2 and C) began to diverge: those who remained refugees and were eventually resettled in Norway from the camps in Thailand; those who returned to their razed villages; and those who joined the military factions along the Thai border. Nonetheless, all experienced the turmoil, and all had to find ways of coping with it. What were their coping strategies during the transition from the Khmer Rouge to the Vietnamese regime – what did they do?

6.2.1. What they did

Key themes:

- **Tried to find family**
- **Worked (*rok si*); Persevered, tried again and again (*prang praeng*); struggled to survive (*dto su*)**
- **Talked about it**
- **Struggled, fought for freedom (*dto su*)**

Tried to find family

When we got to Phnom Penh we were not allowed to enter because it was occupied by soldiers, had to stay in the countryside 3–4 months. One day we had a chance to visit our house. Every house in the neighbourhood was standing except ours. Felt pretty hopeless – probably Khmer Rouge destroyed it because they knew it was a military house. My mother talked to the old neighbour lady. That was what everybody asked: first question: how many survived? What about you, who's alive and who dead? My mother told her story: lost my father, sister and brother. She asked her, if you see any family member come to the house, please say that we have survived. I went back many times. We had been 15 family members, with uncles and aunts. There were only the three of us left, one sister, my mother and I.

Informant 24 C

Of the interviewees, almost all attempted to return to their home places to look for surviving family members. Others knew they had lost their nuclear families. Some doubled back behind the Vietnamese lines, to the remains of their old villages. Those whose homes lay in the northwest, near the Thai border, gathered any family survivors they found and returned to the border – there was word of international support and, not least, food, on the Thai side.

Those who returned to their villages had to face the meeting with their former neighbours. When they got back, people from the village came to see them, because many had been driven out and had not returned. 'We left together, but only I returned,' (informant 14, N2). People came to ask about their relatives who had disappeared.

Work (Rok si), Persevere /try again and again (prang praeng), struggle (dto su)

After the Pol Pot regime, we tried to work hard to make a living according to our physical strength and individual abilities (***roksi dtiang-dtro!ng***)**.** We didn't compare ourselves with other people, just according to our abilities and not jealous of other people. I tried to survive by being a teacher and

farming. I raised animals… This was a learning experience for me. When it comes to teaching and farming, it is difficult for me, but I… We lived in the countryside. We were not rich, we were poor. But I was determined and committed to study hard, so I could get a job. My parents did not have much experience either, but had told me to do good things.

Informant 4 C

I used my strength, I carried. I used a net and fished. I mixed cement and worked at building; I carried iron, timber. I did what they asked and got 1.5 kilos of rice. That was enough to feed the whole family.

Informant 16 N2

The houses were ruined or occupied, there were no roads, no infrastructure, no money or schools at first. Everyone had to build or find a house, or make a camp and find a way to get food. One woman told how she and her sister had turned over the top layer of soil where their house had been and picked out the grains of rice that were stuck in it to make soup (informant 26 C, February1998). To survive, they had to work in ways that many had never done before Pol Pot. The quotes are chosen as examples of this use of **Rok si** (work for the daily food), **prang praeng** (persevere, try again and again) and **dto su** (struggle).

I taught the children to **prang praeng** (to persevere), try as hard as they could (*éforcer tout*)… Pol Pot had burnt all the houses. We didn't have tools, didn't have things. We had our hands and we had to **dto su** (struggle) to survive.

Informant 3 N2 (1998)

In the cities, one midwife pierced ears for a living, other middle-class women began to sell and swap by the roadside. Many worked for the Vietnamese in the reconstruction effort. A former teacher listed all the different jobs he had been assigned, from teaching under a tree (there were no tables, chairs or buildings), to various departmental jobs, to digging, to an activity called 'propaganda for teaching' (Informant C 20). In the country, they pieced together their homesteads and returned to

the work regime they had had before Pol Pot: getting up at 4 AM to farm, then going to paid work if they could get it.

Talked about it

> We spoke about it together many times and I talked to my brother, because we had also been separated – but we didn't speak for very long. It was the first year after we met each other again that we talked a lot. After that we stopped; we tried to forget... We talked until we were through with all the points. We asked each other questions. Then – done. Finished with it, we didn't want to dig it up.

> Informant 10 N1

The quote above expresses a coping strategy described by many. After they were re-united, especially in the beginning, many talked with each other about what had happened. This talking did not seem to be an attempt to understand the meaning of suffering, or to make sense of what had happened. That is more the intellectual venture of the puzzled social scientist. For the interviewees, what was involved was simply a pragmatic presentation of what had happened: 'What about you – who alive, who dead?' (Informant 24, C).

Struggled / fought for freedom (dto su)

> A lot happened after the Vietnamese soldiers entered Cambodia. Life was difficult at that time. We couldn't stay in the country because I was accused of belonging to the ****…. We were told to return to our village. But we weren't able to stay long because they wanted to arrest us, so we fled to the Thai border. I took up work as a paramilitary around the camps along the Thai–Cambodian border.

> Informant 17 N2

Several interviewees struggled in a different way after the Vietnamese invasion/

liberation. They chose to join various politico-military organisations and continue the armed struggle, instead of opting for the refugee camps with the aim of resettling in the West.

Most of the former officers in the material belonged to the group that came to Norway as refugees after 2000. Some of them had remained in various fighting units along the Thai–Cambodian border until long after 1993, when the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia arrived, the border camps were emptied, and the process toward democratic elections began (UNTAC, 2009).[40]

6.2.2. How and why they did it

How and why did our interviewees behave as they did after the invasion/liberation by the Vietnamese? How did they explain their behaviour? What resources, attributes, or qualities did they employ? What form did their resilience take in this period? Again, explanations found in the interviews later provided material for interpretation.

Key themes:

- **struggling to survive, fighting for freedom –** *dto su*
- **Work, perseverence–** *roksi dtiang-dtro!ng, prang praeng*
- **Adaptation –** *som rap klouen ruh*
- **Social solidarity, caring**

Struggling to survive – fighting for freedom – dto su

> In 1978 there were revolts all over the country between Khmer Rouge soldiers. They didn't trust anybody, they began to kill each other and that made it dangerous for us. So we ordinary people, we began to rebel too and to believe that we might survive. It began with someone who had a little radio hidden and could share the news, while others kept guard in case of

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40 UNTAC; February 1992–September 1993, established to ensure implementation of the peace treaty signed in Paris in 1991

Khmer Rouge soldiers. We heard from the Voice of America radio that Vietnamese soldiers were going to come and liberate us. In those days we began to fight the Khmer Rouge. We heard that they had weapons hidden west of Knong Som Po, and we went there and took the weapons. We stopped pretending to be crazy and started thinking of our nation, and we *dto su* (fought) for our nation.

Informant 19 N2

The word *dto su*, to struggle or fight, was used both of the daily struggle to survive and of the military struggle against the Khmer Rouge, against the Vietnamese and, for some, against other military factions along the Thai border, some of which became political parties. This was the case for some of the N2 group who remained in Cambodia after Pol Pot. Those who had chosen armed struggle, to *dto su* with arms, gave as their reasons a combination of patriotism, the desire for freedom, and loyalty. When they realised that everything was falling under the control of Vietnamese soldiers, they wanted to fight them. They deserted the Vietnamese army and went into the jungle.

Some sacrificed family life to the cause. The interviewees who had chosen to fight did not necessarily have military backgrounds. They explained that the choice was motivated by frustration – after almost four years of Pol Pot, to be ruled by another autocratic regime. Some in the N2 group appeared to have begun to substitute love for country for love for family.

Work, perseverance (roksi dtiang-dtro!ng / prang praeng/ dto su)

I had begun in first grade under Lon Nol Regime, but there were continual interruptions. Now I was 18. School went faster because I was older. I finished high school in 1985 and began at the information office in the provincial administration. Then I was sent to Hanoi for three years. I was sent back in 1989 because of the Paris peace agreement. Afterwards I worked in different offices: culture and then education.

In 1988 it was easy to get a job teaching. What's important is self-confidence and willpower – and solidarity from the family. No matter how hard you try, without *someone* to back you up… Firstly, we were a very poor family. When you just keep studying and studying and your family is not rich but has to work in the rice paddies to support you... So I had to work very hard to try to support them. Try.… you have received a lot of help from the family and succeed at school. I would really have liked to go on with my studies, but it was completely impossible.

Informant 5 C

For the majority, the struggle continued in civilian life in Cambodia, and they ***rok si*** (worked to live) in a great variety of ways. But an important modifier for their behaviour was that they ***rok si dtiang-dtro!ng***, worked 'truthfully, honestly' (interpreter 1). In addition, they were willing to do anything – however menial – and do it as well as they could. They were glad because they now received enough rice for a day's work to feed themselves and their families.

Informants in the camps were active as well, but the camps were also frequently under fire, so only a few managed to create a livelihood through smuggling or barter trade. In the camps they wanted to get chosen for repatriation in the West, and struggled to obtain that. For most of those who returned to their home places in Cambodia, however, swapping what they had for what they needed was in 1979/1980 the principle means of livelihood. The women in our Cambodia sample seemed to be particularly good at this.

Those who were resettled to Norway were soon put to work in industry and agriculture. Most of them remained in the job placement they received until retirement, even those who were over-qualified. ***Rok si dtiang-dtro!ng*** (working in an honest and upright manner) is another of the concepts where there was congruence between behaviour and explanations. It was something they did, to work to live, to hustle and trade, but also 'How and why they did it'. 'You just have to ***prang praeng*** (persevere – not give up).'

Adaptation – som rap klouen ruh

> At that time it was very hard to live on just three kilos of rice and when I met my husband I…I got pregnant again (*laughter*). One day I took salt to sell, to exchange to the Vietnamese troops for chickens and I exchanged the chickens for oil and I exchanged the oil to get gold. I took the gold to exchange for rice and took the rice to exchange for gold. So at that time, even though it was a very hard time, I understood the situation (***jull sapriep kah***), I adapted to the situation (***som rap klouen ruh***).
>
> So I exchanged. I got a lot of gold, around 20 *dumlaeng* – around 1 kilo of gold, then I bought a house, then my husband worked as a security guard at the port of Phnom Penh, but I didn't work again, I didn't trust them, was afraid to work as a teacher. So I was a business woman until the UNTAC in 1993, then I worked with them as a group leader and got a salary of 800 USD, which was a lot of money at that time….
>
> Informant 22 C

The ability to adapt to the situation was also a common trait for survival during the Vietnamese occupation. Under extraordinary conditions, extraordinary adaptation skills were employed. This also applied to people's existential choices, including choosing new partners. As one woman explained, her husband had been taken away by the Khmer Rouge. She could not know if he was dead or alive, but he did not return. Finally she remarried, because life was so difficult after Pol Pot and she was alone. One week later, her first husband reappeared. 'I said, 'it's been such a long time… I decided to get married. Now he's a teacher at a secondary school and also he has remarried. We met a few years ago – can still be friends.' (Informant 6 C)

Social solidarity – caring for others

> My parents taught me to be a good person and to behave well and do what's right.
>
> *What do you mean by a good person?*
>
> It means that we who are good must think of those who have a hard time,

must help the others who are poor.

<div align="right">Informant 17 N2</div>

Social solidarity or cohesion was again a category, but in the period after the Khmer Rouge, caring for others was less frequently mentioned than in the previous period (6.1). The active individual survival strategies of the previous themes (struggling and adaptation) were more frequent in this period.

In the refugee camps where many stayed for over five years, informants confirmed that danger, hunger, sickness and death continued to be a part of everyday life. However, reunions, taking care of others and arranging traditional ceremonies with whatever was available were now permitted and flourished:

> When I got to the border in '79 this lady who'd been travelling with me – she wanted to live with me and I said, 'I have a wife and children' and she said, 'What are you going to do about that? You can find a man for me, so I can have a man again.' I met a friend and he was about 35 and she was about 25 and I found a little cloth to sell, got about 200–300 *baht* and talked to him and talked to her and – got them married.
>
> I got a few vegetables, a little meat, bananas and they were married so quietly, only 5 or 6 guests. I helped four like that, was like the father, helped them in the refugee camp in Thailand. But must ask the girl first, will you have him?

<div align="right">Informant 8 N1</div>

Interviewees had focused on finding their families, but had consistently refrained from giving an account of the meeting. Question: *What was it like? [when you were reunited as a family]* Answer: 'At the time we couldn't go to school, I had to go up to Kratie and find a brother who was separated from us' (Informant 16 N2). Informant 24 C volunteered, 'Found my mother. Very happy. She realised I was strong at that time, to carry things back.' In this period freedom was regained, but the impression was that people were thrown back into an independent subsistence modus, wholly reliant on their own resources to ensure survival for themselves and those nearest. There was no time to be sentimental.

6.3. The historical transition: normalisation and recovery

In Cambodia they searched for survivors, rebuilt razed houses and began to rebuild communities, pagodas and schools from scratch. As stability returned, civil servants could again receive a small salary. In the early period everyone was paid in rice.

In the refugee camps – Khao i Dang, Site 2 and the rest – they waited to be chosen by a national commission for resettlement in a receiver nation.

In Norway, some were set to work at menial tasks, in order not to risk being 'coddled'.

And some stayed along the border, continuing to fight for freedom, far into the 1990s.

In her published autobiographical account, Chanrithy Him, now a health worker in the USA, explains how she came to sit down in front of her computer and write the story of the painful years. 'I know this: As a survivor, I want to be worthy of the suffering I endured... I don't want to let that pain count for nothing, nor do I want others to endure it' (Him, 2001: 20).

What was the coping behaviour of these resilient survivors in the period of normalisation – what did they do? This section presents their actions and coping behaviour during the last of the three historical periods, the period of recovery and normalisation.

6.3.1. What they did

> If I could survive that, I could survive anything.
>
> Informant 6 C

Key themes:

- **Worked –** *roksi*

- **Gave / received help**
- **Held family/community together**
- **Performed rituals and practices**

Worked – *rok si*

The most frequent category in the normalisation phase was ***rok si***, 'work to eat'. In Phnom Penh, some people who had been brought up to expect middle-class life trajectories with professional careers ended up selling along the road.

> It's like we did business in the informal sector along the road and we had bottles to keep the gold inside and if our bicycle was broken, we shared the gold with each other in order to solve the problem. If not, we had rice. Rice we also exchanged with each other. All of us had to do business in order not to starve. So since I wasn't working [***tveu kah,*** work for the government, for example], I did business [***rok si***].
>
> Informant 23 C

This was a city version. In the Cambodian countryside, *rok si* or work to eat meant finding the food for the day. The climate is conducive to this. Cambodia in peacetime is a country of natural abundance. A lot of fruit grows wild. Small fish estivate in mud puddles, so that small boys can 'go fishing' with their hands and bring back the daily protein. Working to eat, living from hand to mouth, is possible (field note, 1 February 1998).

Work had a high standing for our informants. This proved useful for them in Norway, where they were valued for their industriousness. The first group (N1) was soon put to work in unfamiliar surroundings – clearing snow, planting unfamiliar crops, cutting wood outdoors in freezing temperatures. It was not easy:

> First I got practice at a plant centre. The immigration office said you can plant yourself and sell it, no more money from us! They sent us to cut wood at the dump with a motor saw – it was freezing cold. The police came and asked, 'Is that your saw!' I said no, it belongs to the immigration office.

Then I began to work two days a week at the plant centre and they said I could try to go to agricultural school. I tried agricultural school but I can't read and write. But I had two years' work practice – and finally I said, am I going to practice until I die or can I earn a little money? And the boss says 'we can talk about it on April 4' … and on April 4 he fires everybody else and gives me a job, and I've been there since 1994.

Informant 8 N1

The willingness to work hard and fast soon gained them recognition in the strawberry fields of the Protestant ethic. Norwegian farmers marvelled at the ability of some Cambodians to plant five thousand strawberry plants a day, using their rice-planting skills (field note, March 1994). One informant linked this to the fact that he had learned from his parents to help others: 'Just like when I work at the plant. It's me that works there. The Norwegians were big and strong, but they couldn't manage alone, it was me. I'm just that way. I like to help people.' (Informant 13 N1)

The few with higher education could have had other options, but often preferred to work with their hands. All preferred to be independent of the welfare system.

Gave / received help

Even those of us who have been selfish in our hearts, we who have survived must open our hearts a little. Because those who died under Pol Pot – they didn't take anything along with them. When we are there *[in Cambodia],* no matter how much money we take with us, we use it all up giving to the poor.

Informant 1 N1

Although only a few mentioned helping others during the Khmer Rouge period, informants in Norway now emphasised the importance of helping others and of showing generosity on their visits to Cambodia when meeting other survivors who had not fared as well. They spend large amounts of modest resources of money, time and energy in building houses, roads, temples and schools thousands of miles away:

We cultivate it. In the association we talk about it, about trying to help our homeland – both in fellowship and individually…. We have tried to cultivate a sense of generosity to our homeland. If we do good deeds, we hope we'll have a good life.

informant 17 N1

The Khmer Buddhist Association (KBA) in Norway said they began to collect money for good causes after the first post-1975 visit of a group of Norwegian Khmer to Cambodia in 1993. They reported that they were shocked by conditions there and readily collected $10,000. Since that time, they have contributed to the building of temples, roads and schools in communities to which Norwegian Khmer are connected by family or birth. Some live on disability benefits, but still give generously by collecting empty bottles, acorns, strawberries. 'The plate goes round: Norwegians give 10 dollars; Cambodians give 100' (field note, 18 April 2004; see also Overland & Yenn, 2006; 2007).

One of the first to arrive in Norway said he was ready to help when the refugees arrived in Norway in the 1980s, 'because I knew, I had experienced it myself and when they came from Thailand, it meant they had had a tough time. And therefore they needed help – all of them' (Informant 13 N1). Even though he had had many dreadful experiences, said another, he had learned so much. 'My father was always helping people. During the Pol Pot period, I began to understand and to be like that myself. Even if your heart is empty, it gets bigger and bigger' (Informant 10 N1).

In contrast to the Khmer Rouge period, few in Cambodia mentioned receiving help from others in the post-war period ('no one helped me!'). It was taken for granted, however, that surviving family-members would help each other: 'my sister and I' or 'my mother and I' were a self-sufficient unit rather than individuals that helped each other.

In Norway, general gratitude was expressed for help from the UN, the Red Cross, Norwegian friends and neighbours and the welfare system. In addition, some looked back on help they had received during the Khmer Rouge period and tried to do what they could to repay it.

Held family and community together

> I came back to visit my village first to make sure that it was secure and I decided we should come back. In 1981, I remember that when we came back, the houses were broken, but we were happy that we came back because we knew each other. It was a sign of stability. 'Please come back… we know each other'. It was the system of security in the whole village.
>
> <div align="right">Informant 7 C</div>

All the interviewees had found a family and held it together, although this was sometimes not the family they had had prior to the Khmer Rouge. In Cambodia, returning to the home village or neighbourhood, or what was left of it, was the primary goal for most.

Although that had not been a selection criterion, when all the interviews were collected it emerged that none of the informants lived alone. Interviewees had an average of five blood relations living in close proximity. All had made attempts to keep contact with their extended families, often scattered around the globe. Families in Norway used all available resources, human and material, to trace other family members and try to bring them to Norway.

For those who waited in the camps in the 1980s for resettlement, some bizarre situations arose. One family whose child had a serious kidney ailment was told by a national commission that they could not be resettled now, but to come back again after the child had died and try again. Desperate, they asked if there was any country that might be willing to take a child in need of an operation. Someone suggested Norway. The child was operated twice in the first year and is now a well-established young adult.

Did rituals and practices

> Over there is where they killed people, that was the killing field. My younger brother was killed over there. That's why I tried to stay here, I had memories and it's easy. When we make traditional ceremonies we go there. We have memorial ceremonies on for example Khmer New Year or the

Buddha's birthday (....)

My father died before I was capable of supporting him, of paying him back. He travelled a lot to different places – but when he died we could only wrap him in a sheet and bury him… no funeral. But in '79 we dug up his bones and had a memorial ceremony for him. But we couldn't do anything for him, he had already passed away.

What does the ceremony mean to you?
We don't think much about it, but it's a traditional thing – so we just follow it and do it. It's the older people and we just follow it as a tradition, to show thankfulness to them [*the dead*]. We don't know if what we do is received or not, but we just do it.... We feel so much pity for him. If he died now we would have a good funeral for him, but not then.

<div align="right">Informant 6 C</div>

In Cambodia there are still opportunities for honouring the dead and a sense of nearness to those who died in the war. Another action theme was the practice of religious rituals and ceremonies and of Buddhist precepts. Personal commemorative rites are frequent occurrences. Ceremonies for the dead also appear to serve as important social events that constitute one of the main hunting grounds for possible mates. 'The young men were picked up in an open lorry and driven off in high spirits to a ceremony for the dead for a distant relative in another province, which was to last all weekend' (field note 27 January 1998).

In Norway, such opportunities were few and far between, but Norwegian Cambodians said that, on their visits to Cambodia, they did arrange elaborate ceremonies for their deceased relatives.

One person who talked about funeral rites had in fact become Christian, but this did not seem to make him regard such ceremonies in another light: 'It's a tradition that when we celebrate religious ceremonies, we send *kosal* (good deeds) to mother and father' (informant 18 N2).

6.3.2. How and why they did it

Key themes:

- **Religious worldview**
- **Learning by hardship**
- **Agency – self-reliance**
- **Understanding the situation, knowledge**

How and why did they behave as they did? How do they explain their behaviour? What resources, attributes, or qualities did they make use of? What form did their resilience take at this time?

We now turn to the prevalent themes or categories coded from the interviewees' ways of explaining what they did after 1980, in the period of recovery and normalisation. Their explanations will in turn form the basis for interpretation.

Religious worldview – *(kampal; kosal)*

> If you sit by the river long enough, your enemy's corpse will float down it
>
> Japanese proverb quoted by Informant 30

> Through the experience I learned to do good. To do good always wins. I believe in *kosal* (good deeds). Pol Pot regime was a regime that killed people, but if we did good deeds it could keep us alive. Buddhist dharma is right.... So I did good deeds. When I came back and it was over, I continued to do good deeds. So I got my good deeds paid back. They didn't want to kill us, because of our good deeds… I survived because they knew my background. I survived because I hadn't harmed anyone.
>
> Informant 20 C

For some, the meaning of religion was linked to *kosal* (good deeds, or acts that benefit others, both the living and the dead), as expressed with some conviction by the informant above. Interviewees expressed a belief that they could control their destinies

by following some relatively simple rules – work as hard as you can, don't blame others, keep your head down, try to do good deeds (field note, 5 May 2007).

Worldview expressed in references to behaving correctly and getting what one deserved (karma) was a frequent theme in the accounts of this period. One person lamented the retributive focus of the Khmer Rouge tribunal (the ECCC) because it disrupted the processes of slow healing: 'Are we saying that you can't have that [forgiveness], you have to live your life full of anger and hatred, in an inferno of unresolved issues and anger? Buddha will tell you, revenge begets revenge and continues the cycle of suffering' (Informant 30). Ordinary believers did not claim to know what kind of karma might have been accumulated for them in previous lives. They said they believed nevertheless that they could influence the future by their actions and attitudes. This view was expressed with some embarrassment by one interviewee, to explain how she had survived:

> It's hard to answer. But... we're Buddhists, isn't it and maybe we've done
> good deeds? Maybe it can be like that, we've done good deeds in the past
> and in the future we hope we will do only good deeds.
>
> Informant 9 N1

Religious gatherings were also mentioned. A woman reflected over what they meant for her life in Norway: 'There's a big difference between when we're at home and when we're out. When we celebrate Buddhist ceremonies, for example, we're out, talking to people, watching the party and the ritual, then we're happy, no?' (Informant 9, N1). In general, it was women who mentioned the social aspects of religious gatherings.

Hardening – Learning from hardship

> During the Pol Pot regime, I had felt that I would be killed someday, did not
> know which day. We work hard every day. They did not give food to us, ate
> *bobo* [watery rice gruel]. They asked us to dig canals. So we felt that we
> were going to die or be killed. There was very little food, there were a few
> grains... So even with such conditions, I could survive!

Comparing how much energy I use right now, if compared to the Pol Pot regime, it was less than one tenth of the energy spent then. Right now we work hard, but we still have something to eat and we have freedom.

Informant 4 C

The narratives made links between hardship experienced, on the one hand, and self-reliance or agency, the ability to adapt, persevere and struggle to survive, which is the next category. While caring for others was emphasised, survival was also an important task for each of the interviewees. This comes clearly to the fore in the autobiographical account of my Khmer teacher, Sivun Pen, with its telling title *Survive!* (Bromark & Pen, 2010).

Interviewees described early experiences of hardship in explaining their survival – it was not such a radical change at first. But they had learned and always expected that if they worked very hard, they would get something to eat. This did not happen under Pol Pot and things were difficult. And then, with the return of freedom, it worked again, and somehow they landed on their feet. One informant said it was actually the return of freedom that had meant most for her return to normality. It had been one of the hardest things to learn under the Khmer Rouge, that you didn't get what you deserved after you had worked so hard. With the return of freedom, 'things just got better' (Informant 3 N2). Efforts were gradually rewarded by having more to eat for oneself and family and there was again a relationship between how hard one tried and how much one got to eat.

With some interviewees, it sounded as if they had made an almost seamless transition from the childhood hardship and ethos of poverty and hard work, to the even greater poverty and hard work of the Khmer Rouge work and indoctrination camps, and then back to the poverty and hard work of building a new life from absolute scratch after the war.

The bottom line seemed to be 'If I could survive that, I could survive anything'.

Agency, self-reliance *(dto su / prang praeng)*

In the end, it doesn't matter if we are high class or have a good standard of

living, we still have only one life. So what can we do to make our life meaningful? To make life meaningful: like in Khmer Rouge, I was a victim. But if I think 'I am a victim' I can't get out of the situation. I think, the meaning of life – I always think the meaning of life is that you always can hope… You can wait for support from family, government and so forth or you can make a choice to face the problem yourself and find a solution.

<div align="right">Informant 22 C</div>

In the absence of a cultural emphasis on individual identity, it may seem paradoxical that self-reliance and agency should emerge as salient themes in the stories of the informants. This proved to be the case for women as well as men, for civilians as well as combatants. Self-reliance had many aspects, according to context and situation. In Norway: 'As I said, we had learned self-reliance. When I came to Norway I wanted to be economically independent and my job meant a lot to me…. The most important for me as a refugee in a big firm was to build bridges. I had to behave myself! I felt like a representative for my homeland'. His theory was that self-reliance developed because the poor in Cambodia had to be self-sufficient. In the village, children must take care of the oxen, carry water for the house, go out and find food, and they learn to be self-reliant and self-confident. 'You're given a task, given responsibility. Learn to survive in rain and storm. We were superstitious, so we were afraid of the jungle, but we had to be strong. You get to believe in yourself.' (Informant 17, N1)

Among those who arrived in Norway after 2000 as political refugees who had been in opposition to the ruling party, there were two groups: one group had become soldiers toward the end of the Khmer Rouge period and remained so; the other were civilians who had been attracted to the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) because it seemed to promise a turn toward democracy and human rights. Both groups made independent choices, which in the end had led to escape from Cambodia toward the Thai border and political asylum.

Understanding the situation *(jull sapriep kah)**; knowledge** (chum neh dang)*

> I would say that those who did such things, they had no knowledge [***ah!k-vi!j-jie***].
>
> *You mean those who worked for the Khmer Rouge?*
>
> Yes. He's finally dead. In the Pol Pot time, I knew many who had no knowledge and they have it worse than I [*today*].
>
> *Is that a way of describing the Khmer Rouge?*
>
> Yes, those who were 'village chief', they had really no knowledge [***ah!k-vi!j-jie***].

Informant 16 N2

This interviewee reflected over the lack of knowledge demonstrated by the Khmer Rouge. The accusation of being without knowledge, *ah!k-vi!j-jie* (ignorance), was the strongest criticism of the Khmer Rouge made by an informant. Most emphasised their own behaviour and their attempts to earn good karma themselves through tolerance of others. ***Jull sapriep kah*** (understanding the situation) and ***Chum neh dang*** (knowledge) were used to distinguish between those who had knowledge and those who had no knowledge (*ah!k-vi!j-jie*). They referred to Khmer Rouge as being an unfathomable quantity, whose lack of understanding was taken to indicate the need to exercise great care. When there was freedom and a better standard of living, 'understanding the situation' had other implications. For example, it could be a way of evaluating their own and others' behaviour in retrospect. The interpretation of this complex of meanings is discussed in the exegesis of central terms (section 7.2).

*

The next chapter presents other forms of data which helped to clarify the meaning of the findings and to propel the interpretation towards an intermediate summary.

7. Interim summary and triangulation of findings

What have resilient Cambodian survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime?

Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the results of the microanalysis of the interviewees' narratives. This chapter continues the process of drawing meaning out of the data in several ways.

In section 7.1, the case history of a person who does not fit the requirements for the analytical category is presented. This gives the opportunity to make a baseline comparison.

Section 7.2 presents the findings from the exegetical analysis of certain Khmer words used frequently by all informants. The terms were highlighted in the narrative quotes in the previous chapter.

To move from the themes coded from the narratives to try to understand, interpret, and explain what was said, the interim summary in the next section (7.3) looks at the data as a whole. It tries to make sense of it and relate it to the context of other war refugees, in looking for ways to improving their contacts with health and social workers. The interim summary draws on the findings from interview and observational data, the concepts and categories that emerged through microanalysis, and results of the exegetical analysis of terms commonly used by the interviewees.

Finally, the thrust of the intermediate hypothesis is discussed with a series of experts in transcultural psychiatry who are asked for their comments on summative statements. This was done as a step on the way to framing the output for other health workers (section 7.4).

7.1. A comparative case history

Before summarising the findings of the microanalysis, another piece of data will be introduced: a brief look at an unplanned interview with someone who proved to be the brother of an informant. I had mistaken him for his brother, whom I had not seen for 10 years. While the misunderstanding persisted, he received the same information and introduction about the goals of the project, with its action research intention. After a while, it became clear that he was someone else and that he might not meet the resilience criteria for the analytical category; but by then it was too late to stop politely. In the search to understand the meaning of the findings, this meeting was a bonus, enabling a base line comparison: whereas one brother was very resilient, the other appeared not to be. Meeting a non-member of the analytical category highlighted several qualities that appeared to distinguish the resilient from the traumatised.

This non-member was valuable to the project because his approach to life was so different – despite having the same parents, coming from the same household, having the same level of education and the same profession, belonging to the same social class, and having been interned in the same production unit during the Khmer Rouge period.

> My mother died when I was in 2nd grade, so even when I was young I didn't have a happy life. Afterwards, when I came to live with my stepmother – my father didn't treat me badly, but my heart was broken….
>
> [*Under Pol Pot*] we lived in the same village, in the same house the whole time together, even though we were divided into groups, but I asked to be in the same group as my sister, the mobile youth group. Every day when the sun is shining, we think: We have life – we survived. When the sun is setting we think we will die again. During the day we worked and during the night we were afraid of the Khmer Rouge, that they would take us to be killed.
>
> I panicked because one night when I went to my sister's house they told me her husband was taken to be killed. I told her not to cry, because if we cried

maybe we would be taken as well. Her son told me, 'They took my father. They came and asked where the doctor was and I said he was not here.' (People called him 'the doctor'). They searched and found him and they said, 'You, doctor, you must bring the patient to the hospital and bring the hoe. My brother did what they said and he never came back.' The hoe – that was in order to kill, to dig and to bury. We had to take the hoe ourselves and dig our own graves. My brother-in-law said if he was taken and killed, not to forget his son. He disappeared from that moment and his daughters didn't know, the smallest one kept asking and asking, where is Papa? *[He repeats several times:]* 'You must bring the patient to the hospital and bring the hoe.'

When we came back we had three nieces and one nephew. I and S took care of them. We brought them up. (*Begins to cry*) It was very difficult, those were hard times.

<div align="right">Informant 21, C</div>

The special characteristics of 'brother two' – noted also by the interpreter who re-translated the interview – were that 1) his story was chronologically erratic – he jumped back and forth along the life line; 2) he cried frequently; and 3) he spoke more about the experiences of others than about his own experience. This led to the following reflections:

1) In the informant group, chosen from the analytical category (section 2.1), life stories were told chronologically. Interviewees appeared to relish the autobiographical act; it gave the impression of being a self-reflexive act of personal integration.

2) Members of the analytical category spoke of their traumatic experiences in a matter-of-fact way, giving the impression they were returning to a familiar narrative. Brother two, in contrast, would often burst into tears.

3) Although briefly, members of the analytical category spoke about their personal losses, even when not asked to do so. Although brother two said he had been married before Pol Pot and had evidently been widowed, he never mentioned

his wife again. Instead he focused on the losses and difficulties experienced by other members of the family.

This person seemed to lack the basic security of the others. He appeared to lack their expressions of agency: he did not take hold of his fate, did not relate to its conditions and causes. He seemed to see it as something outside himself, against which he was powerless to do anything except suffer. There seemed to be an absence of chronicity in his account and a lack of congruence between actions and explanations.

The usefulness of this encounter for the research was that one person's story could be so markedly different even though he had received the same information and introduction about the goals of the project. The question (how did you manage so well?) may have been a leading question, but only the resilient chose to follow the lead.

7.2. Exegesis of key words[41]

In the process of summing up the findings, *words* were the first fish caught in the rivers of narrative. As seen in the findings presented in sections 6.1 to 6.3, certain words came up again and again. In the methodology chapter (section 2.5.3) it was explained how, in the process of re-translations with various interpreters, it was discovered that certain concepts had layer upon layer of meanings. What did this basketful of mysterious fish, these commonly used Khmer terms, actually mean?

As a form of analysis, the exegesis of words involved close cooperation with interpreters and a continual discussion with them about the different meanings of certain words and expressions used repeatedly by all informants. The words in question were verbs and adverbs that qualified ways of acting, the way things were done, and that might be helpful for understanding behaviour. Such a connection between language and causation of behaviour, why human beings make the choices

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41 This section is based on Overland, 2010.

they do, has been seen as a linguistic mystery, something which remains as obscure to us as ever (Chomsky 1975: 138) – making it all the more intriguing. [42]

The terms on the list were given slightly different associations by different Khmer teachers, interpreters and informants. A list was made of the assorted meanings, uses and associations these terms had for these Khmer speakers – partly to understand the concepts better, partly to find out if these words had significance for the interpretation. The first observation was that the words could be grouped into clusters. They were:

1   *Words expressing agency*

2   *Words expressing social solidarity*

3   *Words expressing religious worldview*

One example from the first cluster, words expressing agency and self-reliance, is the phrase *rok si dtiang-dtro!ng*. Below are two ways of using this expression – one used by a teacher, the other by a farmer – as explained by the interpreters:

> *Rok si*: literally, 'work to eat', is the verb 'to work' used by farmers and sellers, not salaried employees.

> *dtiang-dtro!ng*: adjective and adverb meaning truthful, honest, upright.

Roksi dtiang-dtro!ng was used by many informants to describe the way they worked as they struggled to return to normalcy. It was also translated as: 'focused on your own work, attention to your own possibilities, not jealous'; 'not thinking that person has more or I have more', not comparing oneself with others (interpreter). 'If we do a lot and we receive a lot, it is ok!' (informant 11 N1). This phrase was not used in their accounts of the Pol Pot era. Perhaps it would have been meaningless, possibly dangerous, to put such a fine sentiment on it at that time.

It was different with another action term, *dto su*, to struggle or fight. *Dto su* was used both for the daily struggle to survive, as remembered from childhood in a subsistence economy, and for the struggle to get on one's feet again after Pol Pot. It was used for

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42 Strauss also points out the crucial role of language in an interactionist approach, but focuses exclusively on the naming of things, which has less usefulness for this project than verbs (2008 / 59:12).

the military struggle against the Khmer Rouge, against the Vietnamese and, for some, against other warring factions that harried the Thai border region for more than a decade after the fall of Pol Pot. In the reign of Angkar, the cry 'dto su!' was used extensively by the Khmer Rouge in revolutionary songs and in the production units, to exhort people to work harder: 'long live the line of absolute struggle (***dto su***)... of the clear-sighted Cambodian revolutionary organisation!' (radio broadcast on 17 April 1975, from the exodus from Phnom Penh, quoted in Ngor, 2003/1987: 98). This use of *dto su* did not seem, however, to have affected the positive value of the term for the work ethic and the determination of the interviewees – unless it perhaps strengthened it. *Prang praeng*, a third term in this category, was interpreted both as 'persevere, try again and again' and as 'fight to survive, exertion, all-out-effort'.

These terms, interpreted as expressing an attitude of agency and self-reliance, were used in explaining coping behaviours, and strategies for survival.

Another set consisted of words related to social integration: good deeds, good ways of acting, the responsibility to care for others and to behave towards others in a certain way: respect, humility, decency. In this set on how to behave socially were several terms with links to the set of words expressing religious worldview: e.g., *kampal/a-kampal* (karma/bad karma) and *kosal* (merit/good deeds: helping others, practising generosity, loving kindness and the other Buddhist virtues or perfections). As indicated in section 6.2, after Pol Pot there was no particular focus on help that was received, but several mentions of help that was given.

More explicitly religious were some terms in the third set, *jull sapriep kah* (understanding the situation) and *chum neh dang* (knowledge). Lack of knowledge, ignorance (*ah!k-vi!j-jie)* was, as mentioned, the strongest criticism I heard of the Khmer Rouge: 'they had really no knowledge [*ah!k-vi!j-jie*]' (Informant 16 N2). They were *ignorant*. These terms are interpreted as being explicit and/or implicit references to religious doctrine. 'Right understanding' is, for example, the first step on the Buddhist Noble Eight-fold Path.

Like physical objects, these potent words seemed to be meaningful symbols, readily accessible in the conscious mind, full of associations that could awaken emotions and

tap into resources. In psychological terms, the words anchored the resources. As Sivun Pen, one of the interpreters and expert witnesses, was leaving, taking with him some tapes to re-translate, I asked him to note the special words on the growing list of keywords in case they came up as he was translating, because it seemed to me that some of these words might have special significance. He responded, matter-of-factly, 'They are only words, these Khmer wordplays, but we use them as theory to guide our lives' (field note, 31 May 2009).

In the process of multiple re-translation and discussions with Cambodian interpreters and teachers it began to appear not only that certain terms had multi-layered meanings, but also that these words might in some way be bearers of answers to the salutogenic question *(why are these people healthy?)* and carriers of possible cultural coping strategies. If so, these answers might be related to the meaning clusters or key concepts 1) *agency*, 2) *social solidarity* and 3) *religious worldview.*

The words from the religion cluster (3) were direct references to the doctrines of a worldview, or *nomos.* This nomos included in its scope commonly used expressions of (2) social integration and solidarity ('We held together and showed our love to each other' (Informant 14 N2) and of (1) agency and self-reliance ('it's me that works there!' (Informant 13 N1).

What was the relationship between worldview and words? Could a certain way of viewing life have been planted in the interviewees through the medium of words? Could survival strategies belonging to a worldview be accessed in day-to-day life through central meaning-bearing words from childhood? These empirically generated questions fed into the on-going theoretical reflection about resilience resources and how these were made accessible for the interviewees. A methodological choice had been made, however, to separate the preliminary analyses from the analysis proper. Therefore, after this suggestion as to a possible role played by language in the processes of survival, the final analysis of the relationship of the themes revealed by these words to resilience and coping is left for the abductive analysis in Chapter 8. The interpretation of findings is summarized in the following section.

7.3. Intermediate summary

The data presented and sorted chronologically in the previous chapter represent the self-reported behaviour and explanations of the coping and resilience of persons who had fared remarkably well through and beyond the Khmer Rouge, despite grave traumatic experiences. Although qualitative rather than statistical analysis procedures were used, initial findings seem to indicate that several cognitive and behavioural characteristics were related to each other in some way that invited further exploration.

On the way to making an interim summary of the content, the themes frequently mentioned by the interviewees as actions and explanations of actions at the three historical cusps, together with the Khmer expressions used, are presented:

1975–1978 Khmer Rouge regime

What they did: *key words*

- *Starved* [43]
- *Worked hard / struggled*   **dto su**
- *Witnessed, experienced brutality*
- *Lost family and friends*
- Understood the situation /adapted   **jull sapriep kah / som rap klouen ruh**
- Escaped to the jungle   **dto su**
- Help given and taken

How or why they did it

- Social solidarity
- Adaptation/ understanding the situation   **som rap klouen ruh / jull sapriep kah**
- Religious worldview   **Sasana, kampal**
- Perseverence   **prang praeng**

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43 The first four themes refer to what they endured, rather than what they did

1979 Fall of Pol Pot

What they did:

- Found family, care for others   **kosal**
- Worked /persevered   **rok si/prang praeng/**

  dto su

- Talked about it
- Struggled / fought for freedom   **dto su**
- Religious commemorations   **kosal**

How or why they did it:

- Struggling   **dto su**
- Work   **rok si**
- Adaptation   **som rap kloeun ruh**
- Social solidarity – caring (good deeds)   **kosal**

Normalisation: 1980 to the present

What they did:

- Worked for the daily food   **rok si**
- Gave help / good deeds   **kosal**
- Held family together   **kosal**
- Performed religious practices   **kosal**

How or why they did it:

- Religious worldview   **kampal**
- Learning from hardship
- Agency / self-reliance   **dto su**
- Understanding the situation / knowledge   **som rap klouen ruh /**

  chum neh dang

Figure 3 offers a graphic representation of the findings from the microanalysis.

Figure 3. *Themes*

Historical events =>	Pol Pot Regime 1975 -78 Khmer Rouge emptied the cities at gunpoint, driving people to the country to work and be re-educated.	Fall of Pol Pot 1979 Most went back to their villages: Some went to the border camps; Some fought for freedom	Normalisation 1980 => present In villages, people rebuilt homes and temples; In the camps, waited to be vetted by receiver nations; In Norway, learned to adapt
What they did	*Starved* *Worked hard* *Brutality* *Lost family* *Adapted* *Escaped* *Gave / received help*	*Found family* *Worked-to-live* *Talked about it* *Struggled /fought*	*Struggled / worked* *Gave / received help* *Held together* *Did religious practices*
How and why they did it	*Caring for others* *Adaptation / under-* *standing the situation* *Religion* *Self-reliance / Perseverance*	*Struggling* *Work* *Adaptation* *Social solidarity*	*Religious worldview* *Learning by hardship* *Agency, self-reliance* *Understanding the situation / knowledge*

Informants had various shared ways of behaving and ways of explaining their behaviour, presumably learnt in childhood. But this remains a description, a list of common themes interpreted from their narratives. From these lists, the sum of fragmented acts and mental habits, how could sense be made of what people had said – how could it be interpreted? Could the way the interviewees had understood their situation and made sense of their suffering be relevant for other attempts to understand

resilience and to improve work with refugees? An intermediate narrative, summing up the findings of the microanalysis presented in the previous chapter, was needed for understanding what was going on here.

In its simplest form, the communication with interviewees can be illustrated by the following exchange:

- *How did you survive and recover?*

- I just kept on going.

It was the task of the analysis to find out what was meant, what meaning-structures were present in the descriptions and explanations of behaviour. What did it mean for them that they acted like this, explained it that way?

The resilience of the informants, based on the findings from the microanalysis of biographical narratives, was interpreted as being constituted by resources such as these:

> motivation to work hard, to engage vigorously in physical labour, to struggle for survival or for the collective good

> closeness in family relations and focus on caring for others; the ability to recreate a collective lifestyle where possible[44]

> a sense of individual responsibility

> ability to adapt, to understand the situation, 'knowledge'

> a religious worldview with an ethic or code of moral virtue

Working hard, agency and self-reliance, understanding the situation and social solidarity/caring for others were central themes mentioned by our informants. These qualities and resources can be seen in the biographical excerpts at the beginning of Chapter 6, but they could have been equally well represented by any of the narratives. There was a certain congruence between behaviours described and explanations of how and why people had behaved in these ways: they did what they said, and said

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44 'Woe to him who found no one waiting for him' (Frankl, 1971:92).

what they did. They explained their behaviours in a manner that made it clear that these ways of acting and thinking were familiar, culturally accepted coping strategies for them. But what was the organising principle? Where was the coherent system of meaning, the *Sinnzusammenhang*?

The exegesis in section 7.2 provided a suggestive clue: the Khmer words that were so salient in the narratives were clustered into three tight thematic groups. In order to find out whether the centrality of the three word clusters – religious worldview, self-reliance and social solidarity – was supported by the themes from the microanalysis, I went back to the NVivo overview at the beginning of the previous chapter (figure 2) and counted. It emerged that themes related to the cluster for self-reliance and agency (work hard, escape, struggle, persevere, fight, agency) came up 109 times in the spontaneous life-story accounts. Themes related to social integration (gave and received help, tried to find family, caring for others, held family and community together) were mentioned 92 times (107 if the 15 mentions of 'lost family' are added). Themes related to religious beliefs and practices (good deeds, adaptation, religion, conducted religious rituals and practices, did ceremonies, religious worldview, understanding the situation) appeared 81 times. After these most frequently mentioned themes had been accounted for, only 'talked about it' and two traumatic stressors from the Khmer Rouge regime (starved and experienced brutality) remained unaccounted for. The frequency of the themes in the thematic clusters went a long way towards explaining why the keywords were interpreted as central in the first place: interviewees had simply talked more about these themes than about anything else. Coupled with impressions formed in participant observation during the interviews, the cross-check seemed to support the move from the coding, themes and word clusters to the interpretation that these three clusters were indeed important for the informants.

In order to illustrate the link from the key-word clusters to the themes (shown in figure 3) to the narratives, random quotes from informants 1 to 10 are chosen here to illustrate their ways of using key-words from the first cluster (agency):

Figure 4: *Agency / self-reliance cluster. Struggle, fight, work hard, persevere.*

1. In practice, the poor in Cambodia have to manage on their own, have to ***dto su*** (struggle for life) from the age of 7, participate, contribute to help our parents (N1).

2. I was the boy with no parents. To survive, you had to be physically strong and passively accept (C).

3. I taught the children to ***prang praeng*** (to persevere), try as hard as they could (éforcer tout)… Pol Pot had burnt all the houses. We didn't have tools, didn't have things. We had our hands and we had to ***dto su*** (struggle) to survive (N2).

4. After the Pol Pot regime, we tried to work hard to make a living according to our physical strength and individual abilities. We don't think much about other people, just according to our abilities and not jealous of other people (***Rok si tamtrong***) (C).

5. Belief in oneself, self-confidence. To ***prang praeng*** (persevere) doesn't depend on competence... it's based on belief in oneself and will-power (C).

6. So that there should not be any more killed, I had to ***prang praeng*** (try to continue) and ***dto su*** (struggle)…. We only think about what we need to do next, go on, take the next step(C).

7. (After Pol Pot) We just had to manage by ourselves and ***dto su***. Every day I say to children and grandchildren that they must ***dto su*** (work hard) and not do anything wrong (bad karma, akampal) to other people. ***D to su*** (Work hard) and be free of blame (C).

8. I must just say one thing. My father was very strict. I ***rok si*** (worked) from the age of 12, had to carry 100 kilos of hay to two buffaloes. We worked all the time. I have school only two years. I can't read and write (N1).

9. Just helped my parents to ***rok si*** (work) in the rice fields, just help parents, no? To ***rok si*** makes me very happy now, because I'm still sad because of my husband's death (N1).

10. I worked both in the finance department and what we called… departments of industry, education and defence. I worked all the time, so every time there was a meeting, I was there (N1).

It may seem meaningless to count themes when they are linked and cross-linked with each other and with other themes. After all, giving help and caring for others (social

solidarity) were virtuous acts (**kosal**) that gave merit according to the religious worldview. Being self-reliant was a fundamental truth about the human condition as understood in this religious worldview: in the end you were alone, responsible for your own karma. Nothing was going to help you, you would have to struggle to do good to improve your karma – and that brings in the social cluster again. It was the existence of others and the occurrence of difficulties that supplied opportunities for doing good deeds, leading to merit and karmic advancement. The third cluster, religious nomos, supplied both the codes of behaviour in the other two and the rationale for them. The cognitive constructs nomos, self-reliance, and social solidarity appeared to cohere in a mutually dependent constellation.

Of course, these themes and words might simply be words and ways of speaking the informants were accustomed to hear and to use, parts of a traditional discourse. Other explanations are possible, not all intrinsically Buddhist. For example, there is the theme of the subsistence society, mentioned by two informants. Sent out into the jungle at the age of 7 to find food, you get to be self-reliant, to trust yourself, to be inventive. Interestingly, the two informants who raised this issue grew up in the country but had higher education; they seemed to have come to this conclusion in reflecting over their own lives. Their reflection may be interpreted as relating to the self-reliance, the responsibility for one's own acts; this is also demanded of the believer in a karmic system.

The narratives were understated. A few said it was 'hard', yet they did not complain, did not say 'it was awful' or 'I was terrified'. They did not talk about how they felt. They said rather, 'do what we need to do next, go on, take the next step' (informant 6). They spoke as I am writing, in strings of short sentences. They moved through it step by step, one foot after the other, carefully. They did not raise objections. Inside, the nomic roles appeared to hold sway and they seemed to have kept sight of their values while remaining still, keeping their heads down so as not to attract attention, or escaping. I interpreted this first as submissive, then as adaptive, then as a form of resilient behaviour.

This is still a somewhat behaviouristic interpretation, counting the frequency of words

and themes. What did it mean? As extrapolated from the epistemological reflection in Chapter 5, if these resilient survivors ordered their biographies subjectively in terms of a given nomos (Berger, 1990/1967: 21), then unravelling the narratives – the way they talked, the themes they raised, the words they used – might be a way both of interpreting their responses to their experiences and of learning about their worldview. The words they used that had become themes in the microanalysis were interpreted as being embedded in a discourse, as Berger indicates they might be. The particular part of the religious discourse intuited here was the Buddhist concept that individuals are responsible for their own salvation, which is to be attained through attention to their karma. Informants seldom employed specifically religious terms like 'karma', but frequent use was made of the words 'knowledge' and 'ignorance' and the suggestive 'understanding the situation' in the third word cluster.

Knowledge and ignorance expressed in this way are pillars of basic Buddhist doctrine. *Ah!k-vi!j-jie* is the same word as *avidya* (ignorance, Skt.), the opposite of *vidya* (knowledge, Skt.). The specific knowledge indicated is knowledge of the emptiness, interdependence and interconnectedness of phenomena (including persons), directly linked in the doctrine to the need to show compassion. Having 'knowledge' in this context means understanding this doctrine and acting in accordance with it; 'ignorance' means not understanding it and acting against it. 'Realisation of emptiness… the wisdom aspect', is contrasted to compassion, 'the method aspect of the practice,' says the Dalai Lama, who was raised in the more academic Gelugpa tradition (Dalai Lama, 1998: 230).

IN 1992, one of the Cambodian patriarchs, Maha Ghosananda, stood on the stage of the National Theatre in Bergen to receive the Rafto Prize for Human Rights. In his acceptance speech he equated – oddly, it seemed at the time – *wisdom* with self-preservation. He held up his small sandaled feet one after the other and explained:

> If there are mosquitos around, you use a mosquito net. This is wisdom, one foot. You share your knowledge with others. This is compassion, the other foot. Step by step, each step is a prayer (field note, 4 November 1992).

Ghosananda chose a simple metaphor for the goals of Buddhist practice

wisdom/knowledge and compassion (section 5.3) suited to everyday life and to survival. Could there be a potential for self-forgiveness in this understanding? At any rate, the interpretation of wisdom as self-preservation might be helpful for coping with one of the common psychological sequelae [morbid conditions or symptoms] of traumatic events: survivor guilt. The Khmer expressions *prang praeng*, to strive, to try again and again, and *dto su,* to struggle, express this rationale. To survive, far from being something to feel guilty about, seems almost a moral obligation in the Ghosananda understanding.

As to the differences among the three samples, several have been noted in the presentation of findings. Those informants who remained in the jungle to fight, or returned home, picked up their lives and then became refugees after 2000, had to a certain extent modified their discourse: the agency dimension was if anything stronger in this N2 sample. As far as social solidarity goes, those who had been soldiers appeared to have replaced love of family with love of country, a higher order unit of social integration, but they still employed the same social-relational language of caring. Expressions of the religious nomos were weaker in the N2 group, but present:

> If we think that we are Buddhists and we have merit *[**kosal-** good deeds]*
> and like that and then we were lucky and survived.
> *You had earned merit before?*
> (*laughter*). Yes, I think so. Believe so...
> It's because we have merit from before, from earlier, therefore we could
> survive. If we didn't have merit, we could not have survived.
>
> Informant 18 N2.

In the end, the main categories applied to all interviewees. As an interim hypothesis, the three clusters all seem to be related to a worldview or a coherent system of meaning such as that of Khmer Buddhism.

The project had four sub-questions (section 1.1) designed to elicit answers to the main research question. These two chapters mark the completion of the first three sub-questions: 1) informants' accounts of their own survival were registered; and 2) various qualities and resources were identified. Concerning sub-question 3, on help

they received that made a difference, this theme is restricted to a few informants who spoke of help that had been instrumental for their physical survival, and only during the Khmer Rouge regime. Several in Norway were grateful for the help they had received from NGOs, social workers and neighbours; but according to the findings, no one in Cambodia had received any particular help in the periods from 1979 onward, although several spoke about help they had given to others. Interviewees stressed that they had managed on their own. At the same time, one woman answered a direct follow-up question about this by saying 'I didn't have any relatives, just myself and my sister that continued together, to survive' (Informant 6 C). Despite several mentions of help received during the Pol Pot regime, it seemed that they felt they had done it themselves in the later periods – or perhaps members of the nuclear family were not considered as 'others'.

Sub-question 4, on systematising and making the final results available for health professionals, is in focus in the next section, 7.4.

What has been achieved so far is a description of the interviewees' own understandings of how they survived, physically and mentally, as well as an intermediate interpretation loosely relating these findings to their worldview or religious nomos with its codes of moral conduct. Cultural and religious explanations, understandings of the meanings of situations and how to act appeared basic to almost everything they said.

In terms of theory, the intention of the research question was to uncover, understand and explain this elusive phenomenon, in order to learn about the nature of the interviewees' resilience. It increasingly appeared that there was something in their religion that they had 'found useful for their survival, recovery and normalisation'. In addition to explicit references to religious beliefs and practices, a certain implicit worldview emerged from the accounts of the interviewees, in their ways of speaking, in the behaviours they described and in the choices they made. The same kind of worldview was evident in the accounts of informants of both majority and, surprisingly, minority religious orientation (two Christians). Although those who had become Christian did not speak of **kampal** (karma) as such, they showed that they

belonged to the same kind of community of practice, mentioning the same values and practices, the same giving of merit to those who had died.

The practical mental health intention of the research question was to find a way to use what was learnt to contribute to improving the rehabilitation of war refugees, by gathering and processing new knowledge about resilience. A direction was suggested, but in order to understand the map clearly, further analysis was required.

A necessary step was to examine the preliminary findings by triangulating them with a panel of experienced health workers, as shown in the next section. What would professionals in this field think of these findings?

7.4. Triangulating the findings: interviews with expert health workers

This section is a triangulation of the intermediate findings from the microanalysis.

The intermediate hypothesis discussed above gave rise to several questions. If the interpretation is that a worldview with an integrated code of moral conduct has contributed to the interviewees' resilient survival, what does this mean for health care? What about the explanatory resources that might be offered by other religions, cultures and codes of conduct? Is there anyone else with parallel resources available to them? How often are war refugees themselves asked how they explain what happened, what they think about it and what it has meant to them? To the extent that beliefs are deeply held, many worldviews – particularly those pervasive belief systems that provide both explanations and codes of conduct – may offer an explanatory model helpful for those who are believers. What do experienced transcultural therapists think about these issues of culture, religion, and beliefs?

The therapist's role may be seen as offering more choices to people who are unable to see beyond where they are, dissatisfied with what they see as the choices available to them. It is part of the turn from 'victim' to 'survivor' to give the survivor more choices. The findings suggest that therapy could facilitate greater choice by helping people find and develop choices that are closer to their own values. In some cases this might be done by trying to access how the patients explain or understand their experiences in light of their own beliefs and values.

As a further triangulation of the findings, the next step was to ask therapists known for their work with traumatised refugees whether they include questions of culture and religion in therapy, and if so, how they do this. The reasoning was as follows. If refugees with the kind of trauma load shared by the interviewees were to arrive in Norway today, they might easily be referred to whatever treatment was available locally, on the primary or specialist level of mental health care. It is far from certain that that they would be asked about their culturally-founded explanations of their situation, but not unlikely that they would be offered a course of psycho-

pharmaceutics that could end in dependency. An opportunity to influence the sequence of events by awakening the natural mechanisms of resilience could be lost in the temporal interstice between the war refugee's first meeting with a frontline health worker and eventual arrival in the office of a specialist consultant.

A brief guide for this kind of inquiry is already available for clinicians. As mentioned in section 2.1.2, there has been some criticism of the 'culture-free' approach of the *DSM-III*, the international diagnostic manual for mental health disorders, as a 'monolithic yardstick' (Eisenbruch 1992: 8). The version still in use in 2012, the *DSM-IV TR,* met the criticism by adding a tool for cultural interpretation, the Outline for Cultural Formulation (American Psychiatric Association, 2000: 897). If clinicians used this outline, they would have some opportunity to gain access to the patient's explanatory models. Although somewhat cursory (only one and a half pages) and located in a rather obscure appendix, this cultural formulation (CF) is much better than nothing. It suggests four basic areas that may be examined by the clinician in order to 'address difficulties that may be encountered in applying DSM-IV criteria in a multicultural environment' (American Psychiatric Association 2000:898). Areas to be covered in the CF are: the cultural identity of the individual, cultural explanations of the individual's illness, cultural factors related to psychosocial environment, and cultural elements of the relationship between the individual and the clinician (idem.). The most useful quality of the CF is that it is culturally sensitive: it suggests that the clinician should *ask the patient* about these things, instead of simply applying a taxonomy of essentialist criteria.

But the Cultural Formulation is essentially a diagnostic tool, its primary function being, like the rest of the *DSM*, to help the clinician to set an adequate diagnosis. In connection with the revision for the next edition (*DSM-V*, due in 2013), a review of the usefulness of the CF was made by Laurence Kirmeyer and colleagues, who asked 60 Canadian psychiatric consultants in a specialised clinic about its usefulness. Over 90% found it moderately to very useful. Among the suggestions for improvement was to include a section on religious and spiritual practice. More than half, however (57%) had little or no familiarity with the CF before coming to work at the Cultural Consultation Service (Kirmayer, Thombs, Jurcik, Jarvis & Guzder, 2008).

To return to the present study: it seemed necessary to access the responses of some experienced health workers in the field of transcultural psychiatry to this 'approved' instrument, which relates to a certain extent to the results of this research. If these experts resembled the Canadian sample mentioned above, there would be a 50% chance that they would not be familiar with the CF or with a culturally sensitive way of thinking. The CF appendix in question does not appear, for example, in some translations of the *DSM-IV*. A handbook based on the CF has recently been published in Swedish, subsequently translated to Norwegian by the Norwegian Centre for Minority Health Research (www.nakmi.no) and distributed to all psychologists and psychiatrists in Norway through their professional associations (Baarnhielm, Rosso & Pattyi, 2010). In connection with the aims both of improving the rehabilitation of war refugees and of making the results available to health workers, it seemed worthwhile to contribute to the awareness of this CF, if it could help even a few health workers to gain access to the cultural explanatory models and coping strategies of their patients.

Do the findings from this research, the suggested significance of cultural and religious meaning resources for the resilience of one population, have more general application? What do mental health workers with extensive experience of working with post-conflict trauma think of such cultural questions? Could deliberately bringing up questions about patients' cultural meaning resources help them to deal with traumatic memory? Do therapists ever approach such questions in their meetings with patients? How can such meaning resources be accessed and actualised by the therapist or the primary health care worker?

From my own personal experience of transcultural clinical settings, there was an expectation that, at a high level of expertise, attempting to access cultural explanatory models would be a standard approach. I sought confirmation of this expectation by using a snowball approach, beginning by asking a handful of transcultural therapists. Questions were addressed by e-mail to a small sample of therapists with wide experience in this field.

Those who responded are listed below:

> Marek Celinski, neuropsychologist, Canada

> Ole Helbo, psychiatrist, Denmark

> Jone Schanche Olsen, psychiatrist, Norway[45]

> Rashmi Singla, psychologist and author, Denmark

> Nora Sveaass, psychologist and author, Norway

> Sverre Varvin, psychiatrist and author, Norway

> Several other experts were also consulted in connection with the study:

o Sotheara Chhim, psychiatrist and director, transcultural psychosocial organisation (TPO), Phnom Penh

o Laurence Kirmayer, psychiatrist, professor and director, Social & Transcultural Psychiatry, McGill University

o Sothara Muny, psychiatrist, TPO, Phnom Penh

The questions to this group were framed as follows:

'My research project looks specifically at several samples of survivors of the Khmer Rouge (non-clinical samples), who have done remarkably well. The research has sought to uncover the roots of their resilience. The main finding so far is that these resilient survivors found support in a worldview based on a pervasive folk religion with a closely integrated code of moral action (Khmer Buddhism).

In my experience, issues of culture, worldview and beliefs are seldom raised in the therapy room. I am therefore asking therapists with wide experience in the field of multicultural psychiatry to reflect briefly around four questions:

1. *Do you ever ask the patient how her experience would be explained or understood in light of her beliefs?*
2. *How can space be given for the religious and cultural worldviews of the patient?*
3. *What advice would you give to health workers as to how to approach such questions?*
4. *Do you use/do you have any comments on the Outline for Cultural Formulation?'*

A summary of the responses follows.

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45 Former head of the Norwegian (now Cambodian) mental health training programme established by Hauff

Figure 5 *Summary of responses from therapists*

They do ask the patient how her experience could be explained or understood in light of her beliefs, by:
 - asking about the patient's problem-understanding in relation to belief systems
 - taking care 'to ask indirectly and not using any sophisticated terms'
 - finding it extremely important for understanding the patient's expectations and to gain information on belief systems regarding health and illness

They do give space for the religious and cultural worldviews of the patient, by:
 - asking in terms of their resourcefulness- what the patients think may be helpful for them to cope and recover
 - asking 'what do you think about what happened to you?' after a relationship has been established
 - direct questioning - especially in relation to what has given them power, strength, the ability to survive what they have been through
 - asking also the client's 'significant others' belonging to a similar belief system
 - being alert when it comes up and then trying to explore
 - recognizing the basic humanity and equality of the 'other' irrespective of her power position
 - relevant questioning and listening, with patience and space for the 'other's' viewpoint

Advice to health workers as to how to approach such questions:
 - it is important that a relationship has been established first
 - ask if the patient wants to share this with you, emphasising that you are interested in understanding
 - do this when there is some contact established, an atmosphere of trust and respect
 - make it clear that your asking is motivated by interest and a willingness to understand their values and beliefs and what is important in their lives
 - focus on the person's unique understanding of the issues
 - be sensitive and open – the opposite of ethnocentric

Comments on the Outline for cultural formulation in DSM IV
 - most were familiar with the outline for cultural formulation in *DSM IV*
 - a few had used the outline, but found it time-consuming and preferred 'trying to explore'

These approaches have been incorporated into the conclusions and proposals of this

project. In seeking information about cultural explanatory systems, consultations were also held with two Cambodian psychiatrists, Sotheara Chhim, director of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) in Phnom Penh, and Sothara Muny, psychiatrist at TPO in charge of therapeutic backup for witnesses at the Khmer Rouge tribunal, the Extraordinary Chambers of the Court of Cambodia (ECCC). Both are graduates of the Norwegian mental health post-graduate training programme in Phnom Penh – now the Cambodian Mental Health Training Programme – an initiative led by Hauff under the auspices of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (Hauff, 1994).

Chhim is concerned in his on-going dissertation research with how mental health care is subject to cultural variation and, against this background, how to provide culturally relevant mental health care for people of diverse cultural backgrounds. His research is concerned with the benefits of understanding the trauma response in Cambodia. He asks, 'What are the differences between the Cambodian construct of response to trauma and that of the international classification (PTSD)?' Most Cambodian psychiatrists and psychologists translate PTSD as *baksbat*, or *chumgneu* Baksbat (Baksbat illness), a Khmer concept which may be translated as 'broken courage; never daring to do something again'. The term is used to describe someone who has experienced terrible events and then lost courage or become passive. Chhim finds that although the Western treatment approach has effectively reduced symptoms, it may not be sufficiently culturally sensitive to help Cambodian patients. Patients have seldom been discharged, and their numbers continue to grow. Idioms of distress, as well as illness factors, are culturally specific and are thus better explained within a socio-cultural paradigm (Chhim, 2009).

As a footnote to the apparent health of those interviewed for this study Cambodian psychiatrist Sothara Muny remarked, upon reading the anonymised accounts of several interviewees: 'By the time they can talk about it, they are up from the deep level of trauma to a level where they can organise information ... and tell it to others. If it remained at the deeper level, they would not be able to' (Sothara Muny, cited in a field note, 11 March 2009). This is a clear contrast to the situation of the chronically traumatised, who 'lack the integrative capacity and the mental skills to fully realise

their horrific experiences' (Van der Hart & Nijenhuis, 2008).

The Cultural Formulation (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) is a simple instrument designed to assist therapists in accessing the cultural backgrounds of their multicultural patients. The purpose of the Cultural Formulation, like that of the *DSM IV* as a whole, is diagnostic precision. It was never intended to be an inquiry into the resource base of clients, with the intention of being able to access their cultural resources, or with the belief that these might be helpful to them in the process of recovery. Nonetheless it makes this statement: 'The Cultural Formulation addresses culture – it's about context; and the nosologies [classifications of diseases] are all about decontextualising problems… but this document (*DSM*) is so influential… in terms of consciousness, that it was worth it to get some mention of culture in the text'. In the work of preparing the Cultural Formulation for the *DSM V*, there was 'an effort to balance it better, so it is not just about the pathology; the Cultural Formulation was not really supposed to be just about pathology' (field notes, conversation with Laurence Kirmayer, 26 October 2010). Kirmayer stresses elsewhere that the focus of rehabilitation is on strengths rather than weaknesses, resilience rather than vulnerability (e.g. Kirmayer, Kienzler & Afana, 2010).

In the end it will always be up to the individual clinician to determine how such an approach fits into the therapeutic conversation, a question of his or her training, inclination and professional context. Although intended for clinicians who diagnose mental health in transcultural treatment settings, the Cultural Formulation contains guidelines and tips which may also be useful for frontline health and social workers.

Although by no means a survey, the enquête served to show that the theme of cultural explanation was familiar to the informants. All of these experts were asking about culture in some way, all were seeking cultural resources. Some used the Outline for Cultural Formulation in *DSM IV*, most did not. As to the last sub-question – how to systematise and make the findings available for health professionals – it was helpful to receive tips from experienced transcultural clinicians. The suggestions given by these experts could be useful for therapists and for others who work with war refugees.

The answers provided a necessary basis for the first fruit of this study, an embryonic

resilience interview. This was aired in a series of seminars with health and social workers and students. One social worker was thrilled at the prospect of being able to 'lift the client, to let him know that we see him and acknowledge what he has done'. One felt hindered by local authority rules of engagement, which forbade 'digging up the past'. One reflected that clients were always being asked about their problems and past difficulties, but never about how they managed to deal with them. 'They tell it anyway', said one, 'and it gives me so much – to learn about their experiences builds a relationship, because I know their story.' Another said it was delightful to have a conversation with a positive note, for once, to focus on something other than the victim role (comments cited in field notes, 8 September and 9 November 2010). A few experienced primary health workers indicated that they found it ethically challenging to administer the PTSD questionnaire to all newly-arrived refugees, as recommended by the health authorities (comments cited in field notes, 26 September and 15 October 2011). Yet no instruments facilitating a resource-oriented approach are recommended or provided.

Such comments led to the conclusion that a cultural resilience interview instrument was needed. Developing such an instrument became part of the process towards fulfilling the practical mental health intention of this project. What was developed is presented in section 10.1.2, on taking beliefs into account in processes of healing. The Cultural Resilience interview outline itself appears in section 10.2.

A cultural turn is not the sole property of this study. In its *Field Manual of Rehabilitation,* the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (RCT) uses the globally developed concepts of the International Classification of Functioning & Disability (ICF; WHO, 2001) rather than diagnoses from Western medicine. 'This serves to emphasize the rehabilitation approach, which is focused on a person's ability to be active and to participate, rather than on disease or on remaining injury' (RCT, 2011).

In the next chapter, the tendencies in the intermediate interpretation now presented are further developed by being related to theories by means of an abductive process.

8. Analysis: understanding what the findings meant

Introduction

In this thesis, concepts, themes, and categories contributing to survival, recovery and normalisation after traumatic events have been uncovered from described behaviour and explanations (in Chapter 6) and summarised (in Chapter 7). Understanding and interpreting what the interviewees found useful is the next stop on the voyage of discovery, and the goal of the abductive analysis in this chapter. Explaining the results will be the task of Chapter 9.

If the research is conceived as a corpus, at its heart lie the data, the actions and meanings of the informants drawn from their narratives, as presented in the previous chapters. On the one side lie questions from the field of health: how may this kind of resilience influence health, how can it be influenced by healthcare, and how can the practices of health professionals help to foster it? On the other side lie questions of belief and meaning and how they relate to the resilience demonstrated. Both kinds of questions need to be addressed.

In the present chapter, the data are subjected to analysis by means of a technique called here 'abductive reinterpretation'. The intermediate narrative is reframed in a series of abductive reinterpretations, in terms of several theoretical themes that were examined in section 5.2. These themes are theodicy, or the problem of evil, as understood in the relevant *nomos*; solidarity and social disintegration; and identity and threats to identity. These theoretical themes are used to reframe the findings as abductive reinterpretations.

In section 8.2, the first abductive reinterpretation is returned to the informants for their comments. This served as a form of triangulation and verification of the interpretation, as described in section 2.5.4. This is followed by a retroduction, illustrated in the following diagram, combining the three abductions and seeking their essence.

Figure 6. *Synthesis of Cambodian resilience*
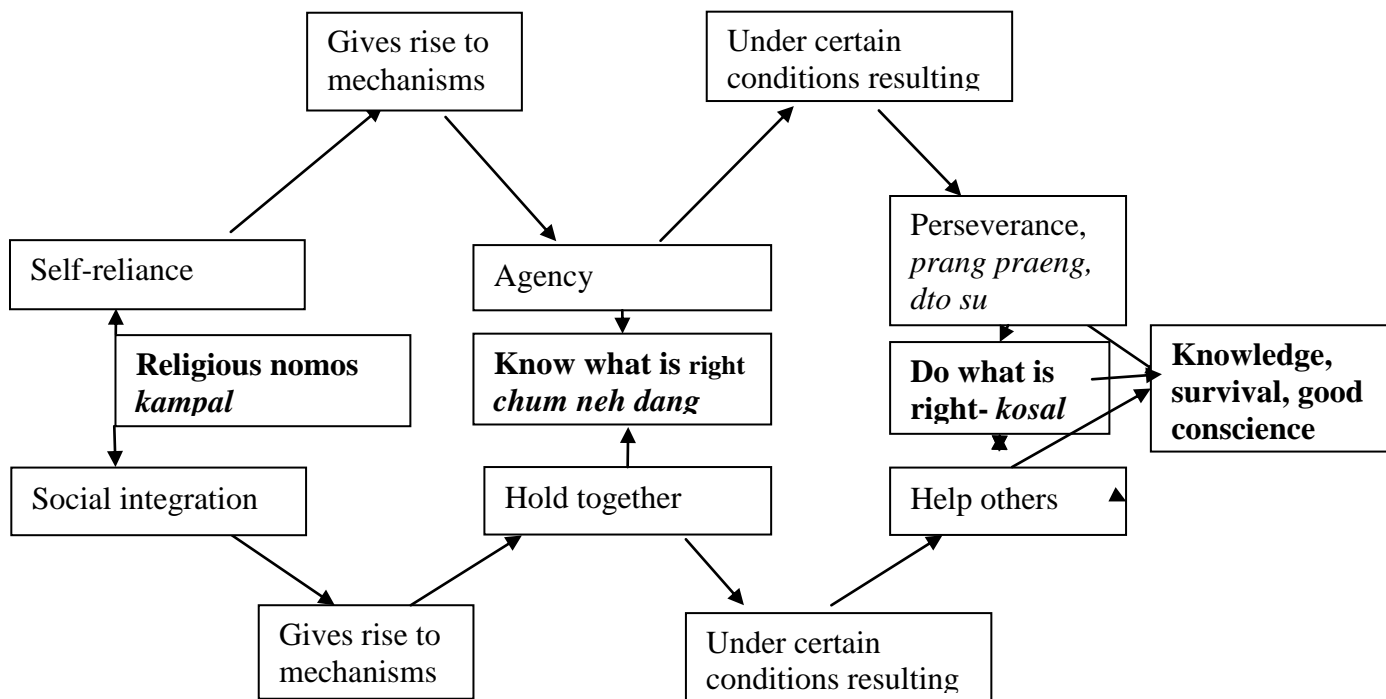
Figure 6, which reappears later in the chapter, synthesises the analytical processes described in Chapter 8.

In section 8.4, after the argumentation is summed up in another diagram relating the specific claims of the interpretation to findings in the data, rebuttals of some expected counter-interpretations are offered.

8.1. An abductive process

Social science aims to explain events and processes, to describe and conceptualise the properties and mechanisms that generate events and make things happen. From empirical surfaces – what can be seen and heard – one must move to the 'the transfactual conditions' for the research object to be what it is (Danermark, 2002: 74-78). This is a critical realist formulation, but is also a description of the aims and practices of social science that transcends the notions of any particular school. An abductive approach has analytical merits which warrant independence from any

specific philosophy of science orientation. Its fundamental structure is neither inductive nor deductive, but a position that 'interprets or re-contextualises individual phenomena within a contextual framework or set of ideas' (Danermark, 2002: 80). Abductive thinking leads out from a body of findings to their meanings in other theory frameworks and may be adapted for use in an interpretivist project like this one.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the findings, it was necessary to return to the starting point and ask again, why do some recover and thrive after the worst imaginable traumatic experience? In following Danermark's ideas for abductive thinking:

(1) the results *[here, the behaviour and explanations of persons who have fared well despite their experiences – the results of the microanalysis]*,

(2) were related to a frame of interpretation or a theory, which

(3) led to a new set of assumptions about the events

Although based on Danermark's suggestion, this procedure was an inversion of it, better suited to this project's grounded point of departure. Rather than beginning with a theory, it had begun with the life stories, found the common essences revealed by the microanalysis and exegesis of key concepts, and identified theories that suited the content. The theories and the results were then combined in meta-narratives, or abductive reinterpretations. Working in this way was more faithful to the grass-roots approach, holding closely to the words and themes of the interviewees as related in their unprompted narratives. It also opened the door to certain social theories discussed in Chapter 5, illuminating ways of building on them (as described in section 2.3, relationship of traditional theory to grounded theory).

Abductive reinterpretation was tried in terms of several of these theories, to see if they worked. Did the collective statements seem meaningful when inserted into another theoretical frame? Did they become analytical utterances that gave meaningful perspectives on a life? In the material a series of thematic statements was intuited, organised in a time sequence.

The process of making the reinterpretations went like this. Nearly all informants had

told similar things in a similar time sequence: what they did on 17 April, what happened to them in the years of the Khmer Rouge, what they did when the Vietnamese took over, what they did afterwards. In making an abductive reinterpretation, common features of informants' accounts and ways of tackling traumatic events were reviewed, to give insight into the shared features. Reading through the narratives again and again, I noted down these common features, interpreting them as summative phrases. For example: they were driven out of the cities; they were in shock, they were sent here and there, they worked until they dropped, they starved, they saw their children starve, they saw people executed. They did not complain about what had happened or what had been done to them: they simply stated it. What behaviour and explanations did they all have in common? What theory or frame of interpretation could be used to re-contextualise these utterances?

They repeatedly used certain key-words (discussed in section 7.2); words that meant struggle to survive, adapt, try again and again, work hard and honestly, care for others, do good deeds and pay attention to karma. And the words fell into three clusters. As shown in the intermediate summary in section 7.3, the word-clusters corresponded closely to the central themes derived from the microanalysis. The word and theme clusters increasingly appeared to relate to coping resources of some kind.

Theoretical perspectives that could make these three central aspects of the narratives meaningful were available. The next step was to make abductive reinterpretations in terms of theories suggested by the key concepts and theme clusters, theories discussed in section 5.2. Findings were therefore retold as collective narratives, abductively reinterpreted in terms of 1) the Weber/Berger hypotheses on the karma theodicy, 2) Berger's perspective on agency, and 3) Durkheim's theory of solidarity and social integration. At the end of this process, the abductions were combined in a retroduction (section 8.3).

8.1.1. Survival by religious worldview (theodicy)

A worldview was present in the described behaviour, explanations and ways of speaking. Buddhism was implied, but seldom stated. Only a few of the interviewees

used words like 'karma' in terms of the religious doctrine.[46] In the childhood contexts of the interviewees, Khmer Buddhism was not thought about – it was simply the way life was. The 'way life was' proved to be permeated with Khmer Buddhism. This surfaced in expressions like 'if we do good deeds, we hope we'll get a good life' (informant 17 – N1): the world is a self-maintaining system of ethical retribution, where our good deeds will be rewarded and our bad deeds will be punished. This is an expression of a theodicy, an explanation of how the problem of evil is solved in the worldview in question, how the power of the divine is reconciled with the imperfections of this world. As shown in Chapter 5, theodicy has been discussed at length by both Weber and Berger in a comparative religious perspective, and both use the Buddhist, or 'karma-samsara', theodicy as a case (Weber, 2003/1922: 361ff; Berger, 1990/1967: 53ff).

Weber's work on theodicy is not regarded here as a full-blown theory, but rather as an explanation or hypothesis about a theodicy in a comparative religious perspective. It can be said to be theoretical in the sense that both Berger and Weber suggest the broad consequences of such a religious doctrine for members of religions that share this 'rational' soteriological focus.

In the first abductive reinterpretation, a composite or synthesis of the stories, the Weber/Berger hypothesis about the karma/samsara theodicy was used as the organising principle for the following collective narrative:

We were driven into the street at gunpoint. We were driven out of the city. We didn't understand what was happening or what was expected of us. We were shocked and bewildered by the behaviour of the Khmer Rouge soldiers. We had never seen anything like it before, although we had been living with war for a long time. They took everything that was dear to us and tried to destroy it. We say tried, because they could not destroy that which is always true and that we know in our hearts. We knew what they were doing was wrong, therefore we were freed from some of the rules of behaviour we have, such as always telling the truth. We just followed what our parents and the monks had taught us, always showing respect and humility outwardly and

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[46] As Berger notes, one must distinguish between the Buddhism of the monastic intellectuals and the syncretic Buddhism of the masses (1990/1967:60.).

*working as hard as we could. One of the hardest parts was that no matter how hard we tried, we could not get enough to eat. We had to stand and humbly look on while they killed people we knew, people who were dear to us. We had a duty to persevere and survive (**prang praeng**) and just keep on fighting for our lives (**dto so**), because this is the life we have got. But we shouldn't do harm to any other person while we fight to live. We should try to help each other survive because that is the key, the way to advance up the chain of being. We managed well because we tried to follow these rules. Others who did the same died. We were lucky, we were no better than them – perhaps it was **kamma** from an earlier life, but we owe it to them to go on fighting for life (**dto so**) and doing the right thing (**kosal**) because it will be repaid in the end, maybe not tomorrow or in this life, but in 1,000 years.*

We have never worked to get the Khmer Rouge punished. They will get reborn as dogs or hungry ghosts. If someone else wants to punish them, that's fine. It's up to them. In the end you are responsible for your own outcome and the only way to make it better is by following the good rules of behaviour and helping others.

The reinterpretation above is composed of common events and attitudes both expressed in and interpreted from, the narratives. The new insight provided, not immediately apparent in the stories, was that the stories were expressed in terms acceptable for the worldview or *nomos:* letting oneself be led, feeling shock and confusion, but continuing to observe and trying to understand the situation and to adapt, relating this to the nomos, holding to the worldview, trying to go forward without pride, not comparing oneself to others, remaining conscious of karma, attempting to do good deeds, and leaving the guilty to the self-regulating mechanisms of karma.

Buddhist theodicy makes the reinterpretation meaningful.

An unintended consequence of this abductive reinterpretation was that it resolved the challenge of the repetitiveness and terseness of the biographical narratives. Fortuitously, it addressed the danger of losing empathy and becoming immunised to the experiences of trauma survivors. Analytically united in abductive syntheses in a

more rhetorical prose style, the repetitiveness of the narratives was transcended. A channel was provided for the release of stored, unexpressed emotion unconsciously absorbed by the researcher from the terse individual accounts.

8.1.2. Survival by self-reliance / agency

There was a strong element of agency and self-reliance in the narratives. This was so understated that it was not even apparent before the last sample was analysed, with its tales of soldiering, using the word *dto su* (struggle or fight) in a military sense, in a context perhaps more immediately associated with agency in the West. But once 'agency' had surfaced as a category, it became clear that it was evident also in the quiet persistence of those who served by biding their time, keeping their heads down, and not losing hope in a better future; or by deliberately taking a chance of sneaking food in the hope of prolonging the lives of those closest to them. Through the early imposition of individual responsibility, they had learned to survive in rain and storm: 'We were superstitious and afraid of the jungle, but we had to be strong. It gave us belief in ourselves' (informant 1 N1). Childhood learning seemed to have taught them how to make use of what they had, of nature.

In a socially constructed world, says Berger, we can become alienated when the objectified world becomes so separate from us that we forget our part in forming it. Even one's own self can be part of an external, uncontrollable reality.[47] Berger indicates two ways of dealing with this: we can either take back the world and our own responsibility for it; or give up and let everything, including the self, confront us like a fact of nature that we are powerless to control (Berger, 1990/1967: 86). In the latter scenario, the individual succumbs to alienation, handing over control of his destiny to something outside himself. He becomes something that is acted *upon*, a victim – even a victim of his own nature. In these terms, the resilient survivors were not alienated.

The interviewees did not appear to lose a sense of responsibility for their own lives and destinies. They resisted the temptation to succumb or become alienated, and

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[47] This phenomenon, not unknown in late modernity, may be one of the pathological sides of individualism.

instead were able to 'take back the world' (Berger, 1990/1967: 86). The theory-based interpretation is that they thought that, in some sense, the world and the self were something they were responsible for, something they contributed to constructing themselves. Interviewees appeared secure both in their basic trust as individuals and in an ontological security provided by a well-entrenched belief system. They may also be seen as having bracketed out 'questions about ourselves, others and the objective world' in order to avoid being 'overwhelmed by anxieties that reach to the very roots of our coherent sense of "being in the world"' (Giddens, 1991: 37).

Berger's approach to agency and self-reliance was used as the interpretive key for the following collective reinterpretation:

*We are responsible for our own lives. We have **dto su** (struggled) against becoming victims and maintained our agency, self-reliance and independence. They held meetings and they'd ask things and some people would answer, but we kept quiet, we **jull sapriep kah** (understood the situation). We did not hurl ourselves into suicidal attacks against the well-armed Khmer Rouge, for our duty was to survive, to **prang praeng,** (persevere /try again and again), to keep control over ourselves until an opportunity presented itself. We kept our heads down and worked as hard as we could manage, not to be noticed. We believed that it could not last, that change would come.*

*When the Khmer Rouge regime was routed, some of us did fight (**dto su**), we took up arms and it was right to do so. The Vietnamese were taking our freedom before one day was gone. Our beliefs (patriotism, freedom, loyalty) led us to take charge of our destinies and **dto su** for the nation, instead of continuing in the role of victims after three years, eight months and twenty days of Khmer Rouge regime.*

*Some of us didn't fight, but we **dto su** (struggled) all the same. And after Pol Pot, we had to **rok si** (hustle, work for the daily bread), to swap what we had and stand along the road to sell, in order to get enough to eat for our families.*

This reinterpretation is composed of common events and attitudes recontextualised in

terms of the self-reliance aspect of the worldview. The new insight provided is the perspective of taking responsibility for their own lives. They did not become victims. They appeared to reaffirm their agency by working hard, by not giving up, by holding fast to their inner independence, by understanding the situation, by ignoring commands that they could safely ignore, by stealing food to feed their families and lying to protect others, by persevering, by keeping their behaviour under control, by escaping from the production units, by fighting for Cambodian freedom – and by struggling to survive by any means, however humble. This was seen as a responsibility, nothing to be ashamed of. In spite of the value placed on showing respect, they had no respect for the authority of the Khmer Rouge who had really no knowledge (*ah!k-vi!j-jie*).

8.1.3. Survival through social solidarity

Another characteristic of the narratives was the expressed centrality of family, of extended family and of general sociability, of gatherings and neighbours and of the responsibility of caring for others. In Durkheim, whose sociology is 'mostly about social cohesion' (Østerberg in Durkheim, 1991: 9), social integration is the source of life energy (**sah pievet**), while despair, submission, suicide are always linked to the lack thereof. In Buddhist doctrine as well, 'we are essentially social animals, depending on others to meet our needs. We achieve happiness, prosperity and progress through social interaction' (Dalai Lama, 1998: 101).

Many left Phnom Penh and other cities in large groups, but during the Khmer Rouge regime, family members died of hunger and exhaustion or were executed, until often only a few were left. They were also subjected to concerted attempts on the part of the Khmer Rouge to break the bonds of the nuclear family, but in many cases survivors clung together, comforting each other, finding and stealing whatever could be eaten, risking their lives to sneak back to their families at night. Examples of the strength of social bonds, solidarity, and sociality among Cambodians are given in what the interviewees tell of their actions after the fall of Pol Pot. Without exception and sometimes at great personal risk, their first priority was to go to the places where they

might meet or hear of the fates of family and friends ('Whooh, crazy. But we were not scared at that time' Informant 24 C). These stories are largely told in 'we' form.

The story below was unfolded from the key concepts, and the organising principle was Durkheimian:

*We have always held together. The family is very important for us, also close neighbours and friends. Some of us grew up without parents and we loved and respected the old people of the village, who took care of us.. During Khmer Rouge we tried to help each other by sneaking food. Even some of the Khmer Rouge were kind and helped us. Some of us were alone after Khmer Rouge, survived alone, but tried to follow what we had learned from our parents. Most of all, we mustn't do anything bad to any person. Especially not look down on anyone. If there's anyone who has difficulties, we must help them. The first thing we thought about after the Khmer Rouge fell was to try to find our families. When we came back, the houses were empty, but we were happy because we knew each other. It was a sign of stability for the whole village. We who went to the camps and later came to Norway, we all lost someone, but we **dto su** (struggled) to keep what was left of our families, together. We **dto su** to get accepted for resettlement. Afterwards we **dto su** to find those who were lost and bring them to Norway. Gatherings when we go to the temple, make a ceremony in someone's house – this feels good, brings peace. We must remember the others and, with the thought of those who died or live in poverty, we must do our best help to others in Cambodia.*

The reinterpretation above is composed of events and attitudes related to the social dimension of the worldview. The new insight provided is the emphasis placed in the narratives on closeness of family relations: return to the home place/search for the family; respect for the elders and others, attention to one's own behaviour, good deeds and helping others; gratitude for help from others; and the importance of community stability and religious gatherings.

In a sense they self-reflexively saw through these social codes during the Khmer Rouge regime. They realised that these were social codes, that the regime in power punished people for observing them, that they were hard to uphold with a broken heart

('We had no feelings, no sensitive feelings'). But they had struggled to keep some semblance of solidarity alive in secret, within the family, between trusted friends. This was part of the struggle for stability and morality in a destabilised state.

8.2. Informant validation

When placed in new contexts by the abductive process, the actions and choices of the interviewees were seen in a new light, developed, and altered. While inductive reasoning infers from one set of facts to a similar set of facts, abduction 'infers from facts of one kind to facts of another' (Danermark, 2002: 92).

The three reinterpretations became formalised, idealised statements of the actions and values expressed in the narratives, developed in a selective way determined by the different theoretical reinterpretations of the tendencies. But what would the interviewees themselves think of such ideal types of their personal histories? Would they be able to recognize their stories in a reinterpretation based on common elements compiled on the basis of their own narratives? I decided to take one of the abductive reinterpretations back to them for verification.

On a field trip to Cambodia in 2009, follow-up interviews were arranged with informants who had been interviewed in a village in 2007. In my bag was the first reinterpretation, which reframed the findings in the context of the Weber/Berger interpretation of Buddhist theodicy and which illustrated the effect such a worldview seemed to have had on interviewees' meetings with grave traumatic experience. Before the trip to the province, the 'narrative' (actually the abductive reinterpretation), which had been translated to Khmer in Norway, was taken to a bureau in Phnom Penh to be back-translated into English. Although this was a cold translation without priming or prior introduction, the new English version satisfactorily captured the sense of the original reinterpretation, thereby confirming that the Khmer version was usable (see Appendix III, Khmer translation)

One after another, the informants read through or had the text read to them. It was described to them as a condensation of what some interviewees had said. They were asked to comment on it. The Cambodian interpreter had added paragraph-breaks and these were numbered in order to keep abreast of the comments. After each numbered paragraph, interviewees would comment: 'similar', 'it's like what I experienced'. The reinterpretation was couched in terms of the karma theodicy and there seemed to be no section which was not immediately identifiable for them as something that everyone knew. 'The explanation is like my experience. I agree with it.' (informant 20 C). One person said that it was similar, but 'in more detail' (informant 23 C).

Just as it began to appear that they were going to agree politely with everything, several stopped up on the very last paragraph. Five of 11 re-interviewed in Cambodia in 2009 said that they disagreed with the sentence 'We have never worked to get the Khmer Rouge punished. They will get reborn as dogs or hungry ghosts', and now said that they 'wanted to have the Khmer Rouge punished'. No one had mentioned this concern in 2007. While a corresponding population in Chile, Argentina or Peru might have been expected to raise the issues of impunity and accountability (see e.g. Sveaass, 1994: 211), this had not happened with the Cambodians: not because they thought it was a bad idea, but because it did not seem to have occurred to them. It was not a standard part of their worldview and its discourse.

So in a sense, it began to appear that the world was no longer viewed by everyone, even in the village, as the self-contained system of retribution that Weber describes (1993/1922: 145; 2003/1922: 367). A few seemed to have given up on the theodicy part of the nomos – 'I do believe in karma,' said one, 'but still wonder why some died'. And another reflected:

> I think that if we talk about Karma *[kampal]*, we cannot receive the results
> in the next life. If we do something today, we get results today, not in the
> next life.... It doesn't mean that I'm not a Buddhist – Buddha taught us: do
> good – receive good [*twer bon baan bon, twer baap, baan baap]*. But it's
> not in the next life, it's in this life.[48]

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48 The informant's reference to rewards of good karma in the present life is an expression of a widely held belief

In sum, in spite of an almost universal verification of the re-interpreted karma narrative, for five of the 11 interviewees in Cambodia, doubt had entered about punishing the guilty. If this incongruity was a reflection of a more general trend, it might mark a shift in the centre of gravity of public opinion, a new leaf in a worldview and even a weakening of the absolute repose in the 'self-contained cosmos of ethical retribution' (Weber 1993/1922: 145).

The Cambodian context is indeed becoming more dynamic in some respects. Under the leadership of Youk Chhang, the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam) has brought information about the Khmer Rouge tribunal, the ECCC, to the people for the last decade.[49] The DC-Cam, which has amassed much of the evidence used in the trial (Brady, 2010 § 6), has been working to facilitate what is known in Norway as an 'enlightenment of the people' (*folkeopplysning*; author's translation). There have been radio programmes, tours organised for schools and community leaders, theatre performances: and, every week for several years, new groups of students were gathered for a Sunday seminar and then sent out to their villages to interview their parents and older neighbours about the Khmer Rouge regime, to gather testimony (field note, 5 May 2005). Several interviewees spoke of the focus on the tribunal in society, but this was not universal. One city man said, 'the people are not interested in the tribunal' (field note, 10 March 2009).

Although still clinging to their Khmer Buddhist identity, some interviewees appeared to be beginning to question, perhaps to take the first step towards secularisation. Was this a contradiction of the first abductive reinterpretation? Did it undermine the centrality of the karma theodicy for interviewees' survival and recovery? Several counter-arguments are possible:

1. The research was trying to discover what had helped the informants at the time of their traumatic experiences and their recovery from them.

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among this population.

49 Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia. The tribunal was formed in 2006 after nearly a decade of wrangling between the United Nations and Cambodian government, and is scheduled to try four other senior Khmer Rouge leaders (DC Cam, various issues)

2. The reinterpretation as a whole expressed a karmic worldview. Since the informants agreed explicitly with the other sections, they did not reject the idea of karma as such.

3. The sentence that was rejected by some contains the word 'punish', a word that has become part of the international discourse around the Khmer Rouge tribunal, as explained above.

In the first round of interviews, only one informant raised the theme of justice.[50] Interestingly enough, she was also the only one to express the opinion that the Khmer Rouge regime had actually contributed to a more egalitarian society in Cambodia:

> People who were rich before 1975 were not happy after 1979. People who were poor before 1975 were happy after '79. Students before 1975 from rich families were lucky because they could study at a higher level. The poor could not study at a higher level. But after 1979 both the poor and the rich could go to school together.
>
> *But the rich must have suffered a lot during the Khmer Rouge – why were they not happy after 1979?*
>
> That's because the rich before 1975 always had something new, but they were very disappointed after Pol Pot regime, because they got poorer.
>
> Informant 2 C

In relation to the others' opinions of the Khmer Rouge in 2007, this opinion seemed somewhat iconoclastic. The other interviewees expressed a belief that life itself would take care of the misdeeds by punishing the guilty and rewarding the good. They seemed to think it counterproductive, with the thought of their own salvation, to be concerned with the transgressions of others or to ponder the existence of evil in the world. Evil would continue to exist, as the natural counterpoint of good in a dualistic world, until all sentient beings were liberated. This understanding of how the world fits together, the wheel of dharma rolling from rebirth to rebirth, governed by the karmic law of cause and effect, had presumably been absorbed in the primary socialisation of the interviewees. It was not only a religion but an existential gestalt.

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[50] Before I also thought of revenge, but now I would like the best qualified persons to come and tell us how to tackle a genocide – to get information about why they killed their own...

The change that had occurred by 2009, when the interviewees were next interviewed, was not relevant for the mindset that had been active at the time of the traumatic events and recovery from them. In light of the research intention to explain the nature of their resilience to extreme experience, the informants' subsequent philosophical reflections, although interesting in regard to the future democratisation of Cambodia, do not seem to undermine the interpretation as a whole. Implications are discussed in section 9.4.

8.3. Retroduction

Retroduction is an attempt to arrive at an interpretation of the essential, of what is 'basically characteristic and constitutive' (Danermark, 2001: 96). In this dissertation it is used as a way of reducing the results to a more unified understanding and interpretation of these successful survivals. In a sense, a triple-hermeneutical process is undertaken: the interpretations of the interviewees, as interpreted by me, have now been subjected to reinterpretation. How is it possible to survive the kinds of extreme traumas experienced by Cambodians of the Khmer Rouge cohort and still be doing well and still define oneself as doing well? How do the three themes interrelate? In this section, the essences of the three abductive reconceptualisations are joined in a simple retroduction.

The behaviour and explanations in the data suggest that two essential factors, agency and social integration, were held together by a third one: a remarkably tenacious religious worldview with a central karma theodicy.

Social solidarity, family cohesion, holding together, caring for each other and mutual assistance seemed to have been central for physical and mental survival. Another important factor was a sense of agency, autonomy, individual responsibility and self-reliance: the informants did not appear to have lost the consciousness of their participation, their responsibility. They refused to become victims: instead they reaffirmed their agency by working, by fighting, and by struggling not to give up. They had an accompanying assuredness or confidence in their values that appeared

related to this individual sense of autonomy. Together, these beliefs formed an integrated wall of strength. Holding the wall together was the theodicy of the nomos, the conviction that: the world was a moral universe (Rafmann, 2009), a self-maintaining system of moral retribution, and the only thing one had to watch out for and be accountable for was one's own behaviour.

The essence of the interpretation is that Buddhist theodicy held together the supportive structure of the nomos, what was accepted as knowledge in that society, which in turn held the person together. Ethical reflections on this interpretation are resumed in section 9.4.

As shown in the previous sections, the original findings are developed into abductive re-interpretations by being placed in different contexts of ideas. The karma/samsara theodicy appears fundamental for understanding the survivals.

In Figure 6, presented again here, the three abductive perspectives are united in a graphic representation of a retroduction of the findings of the research, addressing the theoretical aspect of the main research question: what these survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after traumatic events.

Figure 6. *Synthesis of Cambodian resilience*
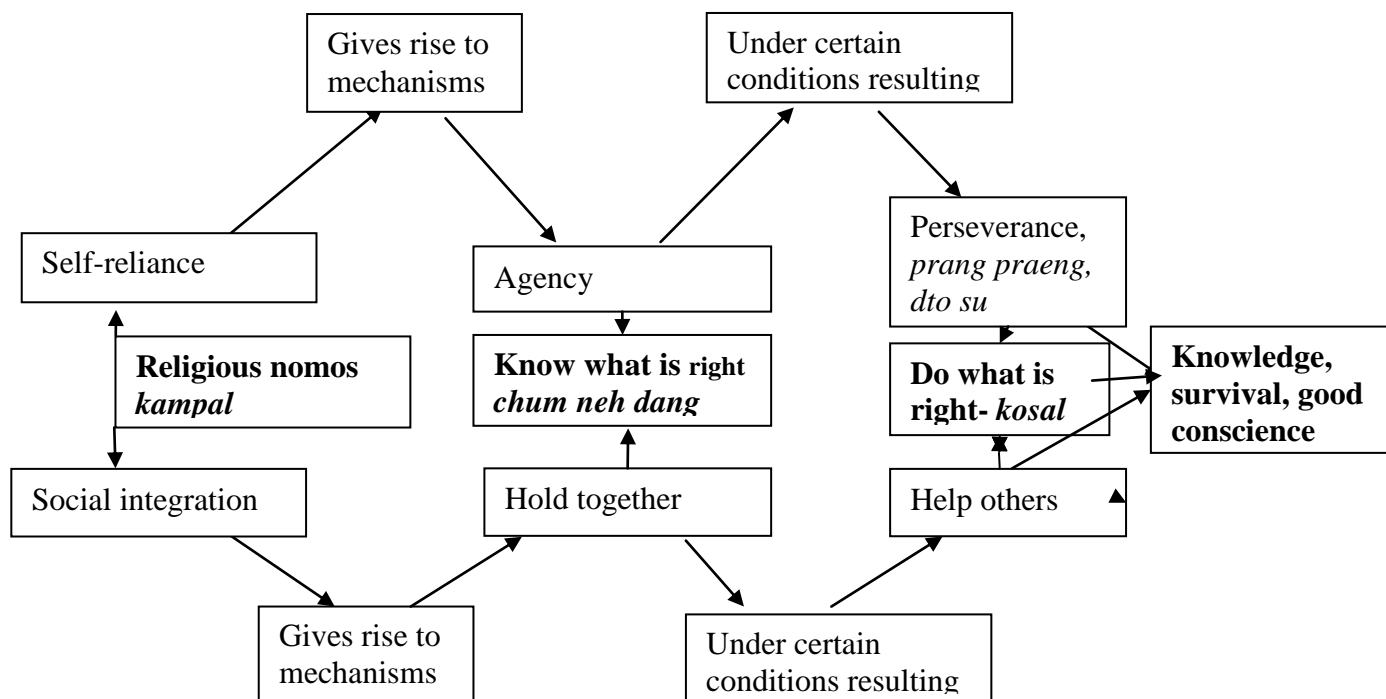
The figure, adapted from Danermark's model for retroduction (Danermark, 2002: 111), is an idealised representation. It shows the suggested relationship between a religious nomos, a certain knowledge and a set of beliefs, and relevant forms of practice that implemented aspects of the nomos: self-reliance and social integration. The union of the three is interpreted as having provided useful strategies and a knowledge or conviction, an assuredness of right and wrong, an ontological security unshaken even by the ever-present threat of death. This constellation made it possible to survive with a good conscience.

For Durkheim, it would hardly be surprising that religious worldview and social integration should turn up together, because in his view the two are inseparable: the social is the basis for religion. Religious worldviews are collective representations, a product of a cooperation that extends through space and time (Durkheim, 1995/12: 15). To Berger and Giddens, it might be unsurprising that a sense of self-reliance should accompany a post-figurative worldview, with all the ontological security implied in such a nomos. Legitimising marginal situations and giving the individual the knowledge that 'even those events or experiences have a place within a universe that makes sense' is within the realm of the possible for a religion with an unquestioned 'reality maintaining task', (Berger, 1967/ 90:45).

In the next section, the results of the combined analyses are presented in a structured argumentation, where the logic of the arguments is further clarified.

8.4. Argumentation: an interpretation of survival

The themes and keywords conveyed in the narratives suggested that the nomos of Khmer Buddhist traditional society, with its accompanying code of conduct and its knowledge, might have influenced their resilience and thus be related to the mental health of the interviewees. In this section, another map interprets the relationship between the forms of action mentioned by these resilient individuals (the behavioural) and the nomos, its moral codes and its theodicy (the cognitive). This alternative

graphic visualisation shows how the hypothesis can be set up as a formal argument. After an explanation of the argumentation (8.4.1), we turn to some rebuttals.

As noted, the starting point for the analysis came from biographical interview data from survivors of extremely traumatic experience who did not appear to suffer from pathogenic symptoms of trauma in the form of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Their narratives of survival were mined for explanations by means of microanalysis, exegesis and abduction. Figure 7 sets up the argumentation for the final interpretation as grounds, claim, warrants and possible rebuttals in the useful framework suggested by Murphy (1994).

Figure 7 *Structure of the argumentation*

Rebuttal 1: is it an essentialist claim?

Rebuttal 2: world-view fosters autocracv?

Grounds: they speak of working hard, struggling, persevering, caring for others, understanding the situation and doing good deeds.

Claim. Belief in a karma theodicy, linked to agency and social integration, has helped some Cambodians survive physically and mentally because they believe they have earned it

Warrant. These are virtues and principles of moral conduct in Khmer Buddhism that earn good karma for this and the next life

Rebuttal 3: If all Khmer are Buddhist, what of the others, the less resilient ones?

Backing. Chapter and verse from a moral codex, *Chbabb* (4.4.1) and the Dharma.

8.4.1. Explanation

This argument is not a 'proof' of causality but a demonstration of a hermeneutically developed explanation. The argument structure is used for its clarity and the opportunity of viewing the results from yet another perspective.

The argument follows the inferential logic of grounded theory and the general theory rule of Weberian social philosophy, with its emphasis on the importance of actors' meanings. In terms of material theory, the warrant for putting forward the claim is a reading of data from informants, abducted or read in light of a Khmer Buddhist worldview with its theodicy, its doctrines (Dharma), and the accompanying ethics and code of moral conduct: the systematic guide to behaviour found in this particular nomos (5.3.1). This sort of code may be described as a material theory: in the field of ethics, many arguments bring to bear general principles of moral conduct. 'The principle serves as the warrant for the argument.' (Murphy 1994: 38).

The claim in the argument goes like this: ideas related to the belief in karma and knowledge of right action helped these Cambodians to survive, both physically and mentally, because they believed they had somehow earned the right. Here we can note MacIntyre's formulation, 'What constitutes the good life for man is a complete human life lived at its best and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life' (in Henriksen 1997: 225). If they exercised their virtues, they earned good karma, and it was consonant with this belief to expect that life would eventually improve after trials had been endured.

The grounds from which this argument grows are that, in explaining their survival, informants said they had acted in certain ways (perseverance, working hard, caring for others, struggling, understanding the situation, good deeds, respect and so on). The kind of behaviour described is recommended by the everyday doctrines of Khmer Buddhism for earning good karma in this and the next life. A perspective like Weber's on the importance of meaning or 'idea' for a person's life choices can help to explain how a material theory, like this principle of moral conduct, could have such a far-reaching impact on the interviewees. If they held an unquestioning belief that following certain rules of moral conduct would lead them to salvation, it would be natural to postulate that this affected their behaviour. These were non-secularised individuals, saturated with Khmer Buddhist meaning, as shown by how close their expressions of meaning were to their lived experience. The interviewees were grounded in a common heritage of meaning, which they continued to choose even when events called it into question. They still chose the tradition even when

confronted by a paradox within the tradition (such as the theodicy problem, an overwhelming demonstration of the existence of evil) that might have been expected to make them abandon the tradition. In this respect they were *dasein,* ontologically wrapped up in a tradition that might obscure other choices. The material-theoretical explanation does not consider the possible effects of such a conclusion on a societal level, but focuses only on the results for the individual's survival and normalisation (see rebuttals in the next section).

One backing for the claim is the existence of very concrete popularised moral codes, the *Chhbabb* (see section 5.3.1; Øverland 1998; Pou, 1988). These constituted the curriculum in the local school system and served as a guide to socialisation before the Pol Pot regime, much as the Bible once did in Europe. Another backing is to be found in the basic Buddhist doctrines, the *Dhamma* (*Dharma),* which provided and continue to provide the content of the religious services attended by almost all interviewees. Also the two Christian informants expressed meanings and described actions which indicated that they shared most of the worldview and practices of the majority.

Most importantly, subsistence strategies for survival, ingrained in childhood, were sanctioned by the informants' understanding of survival as a sacred duty (as explained in section 7.2). Interviewees appeared to have a belief in re-incarnation and salvation through good deeds. A worldview that dealt with the problem of evil in a certain way was apparent in the way interviewees described how they had tackled the experiences and their memories of them. A strongly held belief system, theodicy, and closely-knit code of moral conduct apparently provided the tools for the psychosocial survival of its adherents. The ingrained code of moral action in the nomos seemed to offer a kind of protection against anomie, simply because the proper forms of behaviour, the right things to do, were *known* (and were also known to the two Christians among our interviewees). Informants had answers to their existential questions, they were 'ontologically secure' (Giddens 1991: 47); they knew what was considered as knowledge in their society (Berger, 1990/1967).

Knowledge

Could this 'knowledge' be the link among the three clusters of words? Words for struggle, self-reliance and agency can be related to the wisdom or knowing that survival is one's own responsibility. Awareness/knowledge of the empty nature of reality with its interconnectedness and its dependence on causes and conditions (a basic tenet of Buddhism) may have contributed to a choice of self-reliant strategies and attention to one's own behaviour, in accordance with the stated intention of the doctrine.

Knowledge and awareness of the ethos of compassion (the second basic tenet) – the idea that there is a general widespread and regrettable ignorance of the 'true' nature of reality – may have cultivated social integration, caring for each other, and sharing what was available. Ignorance of this basic emptiness and interconnectedness is seen as the root cause of suffering, and is used in Buddhist texts to inspire compassion for others who do not 'understand': 'Wisdom must always be balanced by compassion and compassion must be balanced by wisdom' (e.g. Ghosananda 1992: 33 ff.).

The role of the pagoda in promoting social integration (Kent, 2007) was a positive support in Cambodia. Where they resettled in Norway, there is no pagoda; with regard to mental survival the central factor appeared rather to be the inner knowledge, the assuredness that there was a right way of behaving in every situation. A person knew it, 'understood the situation' and was able to choose survival behaviour adapted to the situation.

Below follow responses to a few rebuttals that may call attention to possible holes in the argument.

8.4.2. Rebuttals

Rebuttal 1: *Isn't it essentialist to claim that a set of religious beliefs and practices has played such a significant role in the resilience of the interviewees?*

The findings suggest that survival strategies learnt in childhood were reinforced by the interviewees' understanding of survival as sanctioned by religion. This may appear a

normative claim, advocating particular religious beliefs and practices over and against a late-modern discourse of 'freedom'. Actually, this was simply how the informants explained it and I interpreted it.

Even though 'Buddhism was abolished' (Ebihara 1990), the findings indicated that informants met the Khmer Rouge years with their childhood Buddhism and their code of moral ethics as invisible baggage. Despite the destruction of monasteries and pagodas, defrocking of monks and ban on religious practice from Pol Pot's 'year 0', the informants remained infused with everyday religious beliefs and explanations in a way that is less common in much European religious life today. They were also – at least outwardly – value conservative. Young Cambodians who live in exile may not appear to be so as they break-dance in sports clothes. On the other hand, they seem more than willing to adopt the physical expressions, the 'key words' and ritual actions of Khmer Buddhism and the Chbabb, and parents still make an attempt to remind children of traditional behavioural norms:

> After the meal, several of the young mothers used the opportunity to take their small children up to the altar, light incense and hold their hands in a *sompeah*.[51]

> (field note, Lillesand, 7 April 2007)

Although the religion is far from pervasive or widespread in Norway, a pious *sompeah* is made also by teenagers, at least publicly on special occasions. However, finding out how deep-seated this attitude is among members of the second generation – and more importantly, if it is accompanied by a secure knowledge – would require another research project.

Rebuttal 2: *What about the social and political consequences of this kind of worldview? Do these conclusions in some way seek to exonerate a religion that may have contributed to passive acceptance of the rise of a Pol Pot?*

What about human rights and democracy? While religious practices, knowledge, and

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[51] Respectful greeting with palms pressed together before the forehead. It was forbidden by the Khmer Rouge.

beliefs may prove a psychosocial resource for the individual, it is also clear that some such worldviews may lead to acceptance of the status quo, give free rein to oppressive practices, and serve to institutionalise inequality. Khmer Buddhism may seem rather efficacious for restraining and controlling the people, thus indirectly making it easier for Pol Pot's regime. With such docile constituents, the state could perform unrestrained.

Refuge is taken in Berger's statement that 'questions raised within the framework of an empirical discipline… are not susceptible to answers coming out of the framework of a non-empirical and normative discipline' (1990/1967: 179). Although the task is challenging, a sociologist of religion must steer clear of normativity and value judgment. Therefore I have attempted not to evaluate, but simply to present, understand and explain the data.

In this study, answers were sought for questions about individual survivals, not about the differential democratic potential of societies based on different forms of religious worldview.

It would be a paradox, perhaps, if religions that guide and control individuals' life choices down to the least detail prove helpful for surviving extreme experience. The systematic guide to behaviour offered by a rigorous code of moral conduct can appear to be useful for decision-making in a crisis, however.

Rebuttal 3: *If almost all Cambodians are Buddhists, what about those who survived physically but not mentally? Why do many still appear to be suffering from the effects of the Khmer Rouge period, as indicated by the quantitative studies of the comparative background (3.1.3)?*

One answer could be that the scores express an ecological fallacy: PTSD could be a map that does not fit the terrain. Eisenbruch and Van de Put seem to suggest as much when they say, 'The way people judge the quality of their life is not significantly related to their mental disorders' (2002: 104). If informants judge the quality of their lives as better than their trauma scores would indicate, this may say more about the

instruments used than about the informants' actual state of mind.

Many who shared the theodicy also died. What this study has sought to identify are the resources and strategies used by some of those who survived both physically and mentally. The focus of the research was not what was lacking among those who did not recover, but what those who did recover utilised and how they explained their survival. The argument is not that all who share a Khmer Buddhist nomos do well, but that those who do well understand it in terms of their karma, together with a dash of 'I guess I was just lucky' to protect themselves from the sin of pride. Death is ever-present: in the end, it is the way it is understood that makes the difference. In terms of the 'survivor guilt' known to plague many survivors, it may be noted that the informants appeared able to forgive themselves for surviving when some did not. When interviewees voiced regret, it was because they were unable to conduct the proper ceremonies for those that had disappeared.

The data indicated that most of these Cambodians, while experiencing as much pain and sorrow as others from traumatic, life-threatening experience, did not call into question the superstructure of their worldview because of their experiences. They explained their actions, giving their grounds, their ethics, in simple terms related to rules of behaviour from their religious nomos: 'if we do good deeds, we hope we'll have a good life' (Informant 1 N1).

The moral competence of the interviewees: 'the ability to evaluate and determine actions, practices and ways of living according to relevant reasons and insights and being able to act in accordance with them' (Henriksen & Schmidt, 2007: 114) consisted in knowing how to follow behavioural norms. To practise this ethic of moral virtue required judgment, phronesis, or the ability to weigh the conditions and the context and act morally (Henriksen 1997: 226) according to a given system of morality: what was considered as 'knowledge' in the society. The findings indicated that the interviewees had and exercised phronesis.

For those who were old enough to have absorbed this nomos or stable worldview, the behaviour of Khmer Rouge soldiers was shocking, confusing, simply beyond the pale. As if when meeting a madman walking down main street or a child with a gun (as

many of the Khmer Rouge cadre were), they experienced fear of dying, but no threat to their worldview. To them, the unfortunate Khmer Rouge had so demonstrably cut themselves off from the rules and the benefits of this worldview or nomos that they were inviting, in a sense, a fate worse than death. The karma/samsara theodicy supplied the interviewees with the clear knowledge and guidance that they should concentrate on their own karma – or it made them resolve to work to remedy any holes in their record.

*

Perhaps the resources, beliefs, choices, values and strategies that helped the 'successful' survivors are easier to codify and easier to remember, because they are universal qualities, sometimes seen as part of human nature.[52] It would be a mistake, however, to interpret the way Cambodians kept to their religion as a salvage operation motivated purely by concern for the loss of cultural forms under the impact of acculturation, as has been popularly claimed of immigrant religious revivals. Such criticism underestimates the living and adaptive aspects of religious traditions. Recognising the resilience of indigenous communities, various authors have recently begun to think in terms other than 'decline' and 'fade' (Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk, 2005). As Foard remarks, post-modern religion is not simply a return to tradition, for it recognises its own relativising history, its own rhetorical character (1994:38). Perhaps the interviewees had something in common with typical post-modernists, as they deconstructed the bizarre form of modernism or secular rationalism that Pol Pot tried to impose on them. These successful survivors, presumably realising that Pol Pot's extreme form of modernity was fragmentary and episodic, seem to have managed to reflexively bracket the self-reliant self and keep it tucked safely away for later.

This has been an interpretive understanding of the results. In the next chapter, the results are grounded in theory, explaining how the discovered resilience might have been conveyed to the interviewees: the route from the internalised religious nomos, to the beliefs and behaviour, to the good life.

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[52] See e.g. Midgley: Darwin maintained that any animal would acquire a moral sense as soon as its intellect approached man's (Darwin 1859 in Midgley 1997).

9. Grounding the results: explaining how the resilience works

Introduction

In Chapter 6 the self-reported actions and explanations of the interviewees – ways of acting and reacting, forms of resilience, qualities and resources captured in the accounts of their survival – were subjected to a microanalysis that produced findings. In Chapter 7, a professional perspective on the intermediate interpretation (7.3) was obtained through interviews with transcultural therapists (7.4). This became an aid in addressing the practical, mental health intention of the research question 'to improve the contact between health workers and war trauma survivors'. In Chapter 8, the results of the intermediate interpretation were re-read as abductive reinterpretations and subjected to a retroduction, in a search for their essential meaning.

As described in section 2.3, generating or amplifying existing theory was an integral part of the grounded theory approach. In the present chapter, after a brief summary of the final results, the amplifications of existing theory are examined and theoretically grounded in sections 9.2 and 9.3. In section 9.2, possible theoretical contributions to social theory themes (section 5.2) are discussed in terms of the empirical discoveries.

Section 9.3, 'Anchoring in trauma and resilience (mental health approaches)', traces the route to the research question's practical mental health intention, to contribute to improving work with war refugees. The results are first viewed from the perspective of the comparative background discussed in Chapter 3 (9.3.1), then from the perspective of current trauma and resilience discourses (9.3.2 and 9.3.3). In section 9.3.4, implications of the results for future work with post-conflict survivors are discussed.

In the concluding section of the chapter, a thorny issue that remains is reviewed. Section 9.4 is an ethical reflection on the findings in relation to human rights, opening to a global perspective through the voices of influential Third World intellectuals, who – perhaps surprisingly – echo the European voices of Weber and Durkheim, Frankl and Bettelheim.

9.1 Brief summary of results

The Cambodian interviewees have shared a traumatic experience, massive, continuing over time, deliberately aimed at breaking the individual will and the bonds of interpersonal trust. Analysis has revealed that explanatory models rooted in religion and culture dominated the findings. This was something of a challenge for scientific neutrality. It was, however, how interviewees themselves sought and found meaning in their experiences that was the focus of the research, and their answers had to be respected.

This meaning, what was accepted as knowledge among the interviewees, appeared to be built on belief in a karma theodicy that was central to an ethic or code of moral virtue. Out of the code of moral virtue, taught from infancy, came knowledge in the form of a series of ways of doing things, ways of treating people, and ways of surviving. The interviewees had absorbed the beliefs; they knew the appropriate action. The knowledge had been learned, internalised, practised and could still be verbalised. After the 30 biographies had been translated, re-translated, back-translated, abducted, retroducted, and verified, the various forms of analysis of the data provided an interpretation of how the resilience resources below might have worked to facilitate survival and recovery. This is discussed in detail in the following sections.

The interpretation of the resilience resources accessed in the midst of the potentially traumatic events and their aftermath is summarised under three factors or resources. The first, nomos and worldview, embrace the other two: social integration and self-reliance. Each resource has a cognitive aspect, or belief, and an outwardly directed, behavioural aspect or action.

- Nomos and worldview:
  - belief – in a religious worldview with an encompassing karma theodicy
  - action – act in accord with an ethic or code of moral virtue
- Social integration:

- belief – in the importance of family and community

- action – hold to or create a collective lifestyle, do good deeds, care for others

- Self-reliance /Agency:

  - belief – in individual responsibility and self-reliance

  - action – work hard, persevere, struggle, fight, survive

9.2. Anchoring in meaning (social science approaches)

In instrumentalising the research question, the central sub-question asked about qualities or resources interviewees had and how they worked. Expressed another way, one part of the task was to find out what resilience resources were operative; the other part was to explain how they operated: how interviewees' meanings related to their actions, their behaviour. These parts will be addressed in order, by first interpreting and theoretically grounding the 'what', the nature of the particular resilience resources, and then examining more closely the 'how' in how they worked. This section refers back to several of the theory themes discussed in section 5.2: religion, theodicy, nomos and anomie, solidarity, language, identity and culture. Some of these theoretical resources proved useful for interpreting the findings; in some cases, the research led to the generation of new related hypotheses or to the amplification of a given theory.

To return to the general theory basis of the project: how does that which has been learned build on Weber? His idea that coherent systems of meaning (*Sinnzusammenhänge*) define the situation for individuals and are linked with their motives (Weber 1993: xxiii) was described as paradigmatic for the research. The intention was to look for interviewees' meanings in the sense of 'significances, understandings, interpretations, opinions and reasons for acting' (section 5.1.2). Weber's methodological individualism and *verstehende* approach were also central to

the design and choice of methods. Linked elements of meaning flooded out of the biographical narratives, and, after a series of analyses, carried the interpretation to dry land.

With regard to the centrality of a coherent system of meaning for the actors, results confirmed the usefulness of such a model of consciousness – both for the object of study (the persons in question) and for understanding the object of study. A coherent system of meaning is more or less synonymous with a worldview (*Weltanschauung*), a cognitive orientation of individuals and societies to the world and to life. Having a *Sinnzusammenhang,* a coherent system of meaning, seemed to form the basis for the resilience resources used by the interviewees.

Berger's nomos (Berger 1990/1967), what is accepted as knowledge in a society, is certainly a coherent system of meaning. This key concept was central to understanding and explaining what Cambodian interviewees found useful for their survival, recovery and normalisation.

The project set out to uncover the nature of the actual nomos from the data. The nomos in question had two notable aspects: 1) it contained the specific knowledge that Buddhists believe to be essential for salvation; and 2) it was a storehouse of knowledge of ways of behaving learnt in primary socialisation. These two aspects are discussed below in turn, in 9.2.1, theodicy and 9.2.2, nomos in language. The relationship of the findings to other theoretical resources is presented under 9.2.3, identity – agency, and 9.2.4, social integration. Culture and acculturation were also sensitising concepts in Chapter 5, but are set aside for the moment in favour of the more concrete explanatory theories. They are central, however, in relation to the goal: to contribute to improving the meeting between health workers and war trauma survivors by gathering and processing new knowledge about resilience, as discussed in section 9.3.

9.2.1. Theodicy

The research uncovered a firm belief in a karma-based theodicy among the

interviewees. This was even true, as far as the available data indicated, for those who no longer professed Buddhism but who continued to use its everyday speech habits.

The project refers to Weber's and Berger's treatment of the 'Indian' theodicy presented by Weber (1993/1922) and further developed by Berger (1990/1967) for the insights provided. Weber is not theorising, but uncovering a full-blown doctrine that is quite aware of itself. His explanations are quite similar to the arguments in Buddhist texts and inherent in the basic doctrine, the Four Noble Truths (see section 5.3). Yet he makes no normative claims for the effects of theodicy on human life, in contrast to the original doctrine, which posits suffering as a result of the absence of knowledge (ignorance, *avidya)* of the Buddhist understanding of the nature of existence

Neither Weber nor Berger adds anything to the religious doctrines in which the form of theodicy is both implicit and explicit. This is not their intention as sociologists of religion; but they do suggest some sociological implications. Weber indicates that the theodicy might work for human believers, without stating how it might do so and without empirical basis. In this respect his discussion of theodicy resembles religious philosophy, rather than sociological theory. The focus on rationality can make his discussion appear more concerned with the inner logic and coherence of the system than with its actual impact on believers' lives, yet the seed of a hypothesis is sown.

Part of the project's ambition in terms of theory was to pursue this hypothesis empirically: to see how, if at all, Buddhist theodicy impacted upon the informants' meeting with the problem of evil and on their recovery from it. As a law that has not been tested in a courtroom requires its precedents, a sociological hypothesis benefits from empirical precedents, and here this study has hoped to provide a hermeneutical example.

In identifying what resilience resources were in play in interviewees' lives, the theodicy of karma was found to be central in their meaning-making. This part of their worldview supplied an understanding of the existence of evil in the world and, through the explanation, a way of coping with it. The data indicated that interviewees ascribed a practical efficacy to the theodicy, with its extrinsic linkage of good deeds to salvation. The form of theodicy in question did appear to influence the way the

interviewees responded to the evil or wicked behaviour of others. It did seem to work, as they tried to accept their karma while also declaring that they were trying to improve it. The informants expected that karma would sooner or later sort out incongruities by punishing the guilty and rewarding the good; they themselves seemed unconcerned with the transgressions of others, however heinous.[53]

Buddhist theodicy was a coping stone, or key resilience factor, holding together the religious nomos or worldview, the coherent system of meaning and behaviour of the individuals that believed in it. This in turn is interpreted as having contributed to holding them together as persons.

The theodicy, which was fully intact at the time of the traumatic events and the recovery from them, influenced how informants approached the problem of evil presented by the Khmer Rouge. The theodicy was implemented by practices described in the findings in Chapter 6, including mortuary rituals, religious practices, and attempts to follow the moral precepts. A belief in the theodicy was demonstrated by interviewees' awareness of the consequences of specific behaviours for the individual. In a deeply ingrained code of moral conduct pertaining to the nomos, the actual codes emphasised pro-social behaviour and self-reliance. The theodicy was consistent and coherent; it explained why there was evil in the world and showed a way out of it, thereby providing a secure framework for living and dying and a kind of certitude. In some Christian contexts it could be compared with the expectation of being forgiven sins by having recited, say, a certain number of *Ave Marias*, or by acknowledging Christ as the saviour at the end of one's life.

Khmer Buddhist theodicy also provided a way of harmonising survival and salvation, addressing the difficult question of survivor guilt, as described by Maha Ghosananda in summing up several popular stories: 'When you find a way to save the dying cobra without lifting it, you have balanced wisdom and compassion' (Ghosananda, 1992: 33–34), each clearly repeating the message that it is not only all right to survive, it is a duty.

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53 'There is no room in the Buddhist precepts for expressions of moral indignation or outrage. The expression of unbridled negative emotions, such as hatred or disgust (…) is seen as the very root causes of our moral weaknesses' (Traleg, 2001:32)

What has been learnt about the karma theodicy that builds on Weber? In short, this set of beliefs was found to be a logical interpretation of the salutogenesis of these resilient interviewees, a coping stone in the wall of their resilience, and an empirical demonstration of the Weberian discussion of the theodicy.

9.2.2. Nomos in language

To return to the nomos as a whole, this storehouse of knowledge and ways of behaving learned in primary socialisation and the important 'how question': how did it work? Through what channels did it operate? Seeking back to the sociological roots, we find that, after language has been created and objectified, it assumes another role. Internalised language facilitates the subjective processes of the past, permitting them to extend beyond the face-to-face situation (Berger & Luckmann, 1991/1966: 49). Even in the *longue durée*, long after the death of its creators and those who taught it to us, the capacity of language to influence the individual's subjectivity is retained.

What has been learned about language that builds on Berger and Luckmann (1991/1966) and later Berger (199071967)? Building on their perspective, it was not surprising that the words in which religion and culture were transmitted should have a special significance for the interviewees. 'They are only words, these Khmer wordplays, but we use them as theory to guide our lives' (field note, 31 May 2009).

An explanation of how the mechanisms of the informants' resilience actually worked was found in the simple fact that certain ideas, embedded in the vocabulary of everyday life, were accessed daily throughout the life course through the medium of language. A worldview that dealt with the problem of evil in a certain way was conveyed to them through the everyday language that formed their approach to daily life, in central meaning-bearing words from their childhood. These words were bearers of what are called here 'culturally acceptable coping strategies' belonging to a 'systematisation of practical conduct arising from integral values', in the Weberian phrase (Weber, 1993/1922: 149).

The findings have shown how a certain way of viewing life, a nomos reflecting

certain values, had been routinely accessed in everyday life. When the key-words were used, they seemed to access or even to trigger culturally acceptable coping strategies stored in the memory of the interviewees. Readily accessible to the conscious mind, full of associations to a worldview, the words became meaningful symbols, keys that awakened supportive emotions and unlocked resources.

The exegesis of the words and phrases made two contributions to the understanding of the 'how' mechanism:

1. Exegesis revealed how the words themselves constitute an expression of the worldview, or nomos, which includes in its scope both expressions of agency ('it's me that works there!') and of social integration and solidarity ('We held together and showed our love to each other').

2. Methodologically, the words filled in the gap (claimed by critics of constructivism) between individual constructions of reality and the possibility of discovering a common understanding which makes generalisation possible. If all informants formulate their actions and their explanations in the same terms, it makes sense to assume that their constructions have something in common.

The living presence of the nomos in everyday language seems to have impacted on how the interviewees tackled the experiences and on their memories of them.

This empirically-based explanation suggests an extension of Berger and Luckmann's thesis (1966) on the workings of language on human life. The hypothesis proposes a more active role for internalised, culturally-charged language, bringing it forward from its implicit societal hypostasis, its 'power to constitute and impose itself as reality' (1990/ 1967: 12), to an explicit function as a carrier and a reminder of internalised worldview when used in marginal situations. Berger (1990/1967) does not seem to envisage this role for language in his reflections over extreme experience. 'When the known world begins to shake', he says, a person loses his moral bearings, with disastrous psychological consequences and becomes uncertain of his cognitive bearings; this leads to the ultimate danger of meaninglessness (Berger 1990/1967: 22). This is just what did *not* seem to happen to these resilient informants. Berger appears to underestimate the power of the nomos and its internalised language. Perhaps he is

upholding a scholarly methodological atheism, unwilling to extend the willing suspension of disbelief which is the final prerequisite for accepting that everyday habits of belief can keep believers afloat in the stormiest waters imaginable. This is a simple extension of a cogent theory about language, but is central to understanding these survivals. Some people seem able to survive extreme situations by flying on autopilot.

By means of its methodological approach, the project was able to contribute this small empirical extension to the Berger and Luckmann thesis on the role played by language in the development of societies and identities. Not only does language do what Berger and Luckmann say it does (1991/1966), it may also be a resource *in extremis*, a bearer of resources learnt from parents in the transmission of their cultural beliefs and a channel for delivering them.

9.2.3. Identity – agency – ontological security

In psychological terms, the survival of identity, the re-integration of the personality (Bettelheim, 1979: 29), can appear to be precisely what is at stake in a post-trauma situation. Yet both participant observation and theoretical knowledge of Cambodian thought indicated that Cambodian concepts of identity were so different as to be untranslatable. Indeed, in Buddhist doctrinal terms, the 'self' is a construct. In everyday life in Southeast Asia, personal identity is tangential to the collective aspect, where roles and the importance of playing them properly are paramount. Western identity concepts are understood in a Buddhist philosophical context as describing the relative level of reality, as opposed to the absolute. The concept 'identity' was vague for most interviewees. They did not reflect over their identity, and so I cannot. For these reasons, 'identity' was not central to the project, except as a reminder of how different such conceptions can be.

The concepts of 'agency' and 'ontological security' did come to the fore, however.

Worldview / *nomos* appeared to contribute to upholding self-reliance, because of its very nature. The interviewees had been brought up to believe that, in the end, everyone

stands alone with his or her actions and faces the reckoning: no divine force will be there to forgive them for un-virtuous behaviour. The interviewees were individuals who, in Weber's words and in the tradition of Buddhist soteriology, believed they would have to forge their own destinies (Weber, 1922/1993: 145; 1922/2003: 364). They assumed they were wholly dependent on their own actions for salvation (effort, self-reliance, good deeds, social integration and other behaviours encouraged by the *Dhamma*); they should not rely on external support. A sense of individual responsibility stemming from this conviction seemed to have given rise to qualities of agency and self-reliance. The internalised belief had consequences for how they behaved – even, it seemed, in situations in which human life was imperilled. In such situations, belief in karma led the interviewees to choose strategies that proved to be winner strategies. Seen from this perspective, the strategies would have been winner strategies even if their proponents had died, because they would have died knowing they had behaved correctly.

9.2.4. Social integration

The interviewees had common goals and concerns and showed their solidarity in the family and in the collective (as in Durkheim, 1978/1897). The *nomos* conveyed by language was also closely linked to ideals of social solidarity and caring for others. It included codified behaviours, such as the respect conveyed by the *sompeah*. But it also included many standard patterns of speech expressing how family members and the other should be treated. Goffman uses respect in much the same way, as 'decorous behaviour' which may be motivated by a desire to avoid sanctions or to impress (Goffman, 1990/1959: 111).

Based on the soteriology of their religion, the stated concern of the ethics of moral action of the informants was to benefit others, to wish others well, to be compassionate. Whether or not they achieved this goal was another question, also for them; yet they did know and could formulate what they *tried* to do. Words like *prang praeng* (try again and again), *dto su* (struggle), *kosal* (good deeds), held (as explained in section 7.2) a rationale for forgiveness – for survival and self-preservation.

Parameters and explanations for proper behaviour, for how to go on, were supplied by the deep structures of a language imbued with a code of moral conduct, rather like the voice of a grandfather, the bearer of the tradition, saying – It's good that you survived, you did well, but 'We who have survived must open our hearts a little bit; for those who died under Pol Pot – they didn't get anything along with them' (Virak Yenn).

According to the interviewees, both the good life for oneself and eventual, ultimate salvation could be attained through *kosal* (good deeds), such as generosity, the first of the Six Perfections in Buddhism. Both in their statements and in their observed behaviour, they expressed the importance of being generous. They explained their generosity with religion. Religion explains the links between acts of generosity, loving kindness and compassion – and rehabilitation, healing, or re-winning a feeling of self-worth. Acts of generosity and loving kindness are 'skilful means' (*punna*), conducive to the growth of wholesome states (Harvey, 1990: 42). They are also everyday practices that earn merit for the Cambodian Buddhist. Accumulating merit is, in this belief system, the way to salvation, even though Theravadins may not expect to achieve Nirvana for thousands of years.

The Cambodian patriarch Maha Ghosananda focused in his writing on giving preference to the welfare of others, working to alleviate the suffering of others, feeling joy for the successes of others and treating all beings equally (1992: 61). Through effectively turning attention from ego to alter, these acts are believed to be beneficial for the practitioner.[54] Ghosananda's description of the merits of loving kindness resembles in some ways a self-help handbook for rehabilitation, promising the sort of functional levels aimed at in some therapies:

> Those who practice loving kindness sleep well. They have no bad dreams. They wake up happy. They can focus their minds quickly. Their minds are clear and calm. They have no nervousness (Ghosananda, 1992: 56).

But a caveat is in order. Such a system of beliefs and practices may have the positive

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54 'Foolish selfish people are always thinking of themselves and the result is negative. Wise selfish people think of others, help others as much as they can and the result is that they too receive benefit' (Dalai Lama, 2002).

consequences described by the interviewees; yet such a system may also have negative consequences for its members. It can dogmatise and fixate. It can create social divisions, normative cultural boundaries and moral communities which exclude others. It can be used to legitimate the suffering of others. It can lead to passivity and fatalism. The ability to adapt, which was found significant for survival and recovery here, can also be interpreted as a concession to authority which permits total power to act unrestrained. In regard to these dangers, the saving grace for the interviewees appears to have been a notable degree of autonomy, self-reliance and sociability.

9.3. Anchoring in trauma and resilience (mental health approaches)

The preceding sections offered interpretations of the theory contributions to this mental health issue from a sociological perspective. What has been learned that builds on theories of trauma and resilience from the mental health domain? What contribution can be made to the aim of improving the meeting between health workers and war trauma survivors? In this section the findings are first regarded in a comparative perspective, against the backdrop of the PTSD diagnosis. This is followed by further thoughts on the majority discourse on trauma, on resilience, and finally by suggestions for an altered perspective on psychosocial work with war refugees.

9.3.1 Findings against the comparative background

Although other mental health outcomes are possible after potentially traumatic events, it was found useful for this project to use trauma as defined in the PTSD diagnosis in *DSM IV* as one end of a trauma-resilience continuum. Was this the best choice? As has been shown, central field studies of this population found depression to be at least as prevalent as PTSD. Still, the project needed a discrete category, with specified symptoms related to specified stressors, if the intention should be to indicate comparatively whether or not the diagnosis and its symptoms were meaningful tools

for understanding interviewees' lives. This function is well served by the description of traumatic experience in Criterion A of the PTSD diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), which was used as a criterion for the analytical category (3.1).

The four universal themes raised by all informants regarding the first historical period, the Khmer Rouge regime, all threatened death or serious injury to oneself or others: starvation, hard work, brutality and loss. Returning to the comparative background, symptoms of PTSD were mentioned in the three Cambodian trauma studies presented in section 3.1.3 (see Appendix V for the diagnosis itself). The diagnostic symptom groups are, again: 1) Persistently re-experiencing the traumatic event; 2) Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma / numbing: 3) Persistent symptoms of increased arousal; 4) Duration (more than a month); 5) The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other areas of functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The interviewees did speak of their most traumatic experiences, but did not dwell on them. In their life stories after Khmer Rouge, with very few exceptions, there was no mention of mental distress. This may partly be ascribed to the information about the project's focus on, and interest in, their explanations of how they had managed to recover and thrive. However, the fortuitous interview with a non-member of the analytical category (section 7.1) indicated that those who wished to talk about their distress were free to do so.

After the interviews and observational data had been coded, triangulated and analysed, there were a few examples which fit the symptoms of the diagnosis. One person said he had been depressed for several years after the Khmer Rouge, but had recovered when his exertions began to be rewarded as before. He felt there was again balance between how hard he worked and how much he got to eat. One person had been to the clinic in Cambodia for pills for headaches. One mentioned a persistent stomach ache. One person was given the Harvard trauma questionnaire and scored high on stressors, but then he smiled and continued on his way, apparently un-distressed. Apart from these examples, no one communicated, or was reported to have suffered from, the diagnostic symptoms: re-experiencing, avoidance, arousal, or significant distress or

impairment. This does not mean that the interviewees never had distressing emotions or intrusive thoughts – but they did not mention them, and their social, occupational or other areas of functioning did not appear to have become debilitated by them. The problems raised by the interviewees were the loss of close relatives and friends and the practical challenges of making a living: surely normal reactions to an abnormal situation. These findings bear some relation to Elsass' observation about reports on Tibetan refugees' problems: they are inscribed in a local context and 'are not ascribed the Western meaning of mental health problems' (Elsass, 2003: 241).

This is perhaps unsurprising: it was a non-clinical sample consisting of people who were recommended to the project because they were doing remarkably well. The double focus of the study was both to understand the factors that distinguished their trajectories of recovery and how they worked, in order to learn something that might be useful for psychosocial work with other war survivors.

As mentioned in the introduction to and definition of the term 'trauma' (3.1), it was not expected that the interviewees would have no symptoms – no nightmares, no flashbacks, no terrible visions of what happened. It was not expected that they had some innate capacity to simply change tracks. The narratives are rather interpreted as saying that it was a struggle (*dto su*), but one in which the interviewees chose to engage. It was not presented as easy. Yet it appeared that those who held tenaciously to their childhood beliefs, who doggedly faced the challenges of anger, grief, hatred, and revenge by struggling to preserve, reincorporate and realise their values, did feel that their efforts had been rewarded. According to Bettelheim, survivors who tried to salvage something positive by working through their trauma have in essence mastered their psycho-social problems and achieved a reintegration of the personality that would be 'more resistant to severe traumatisation than the old one had been' (Bettelheim, 1979: 34). It is to be hoped that these words will prove true for the present survivors as well.

9.3.2 The trauma discourse

From the outsider position of a non mental-health professional, the ongoing debate on

the prevailing Western trauma discourse in late modernity has been raised. As discussed in section 3.1, some therapists find the PTSD diagnosis cumbersome and inaccurate for non-Western populations. Psychologists and psychiatrists were among the first to point out what they saw as the inherent limitations of an essentialised traumatology (Summerfield 1999, 2002, Eisenbruch 1999, Kleinmann 2006), which can lead to a focus on a trauma catharsis at the expense of at the expense of a focus on possible resilience.

The trauma discourse should not be underestimated as a weapon in the defence of human rights. Chapter 3 described how an understanding of pathogenic responses to potentially traumatic events has been combined with a medical rights-based approach, where mental health professionals document and promote the civil and political rights of patients whose distress is related to human rights violations (Steel, Steel & Silove, 2009; Silove, Steel & Watters, 2000). Health professionals use this approach in writing medical reports on patients' physical and/or psychological damage after human rights abuse. One resource in this work is Annex I of the Istanbul Protocol, *Principles on the effective investigation and documentation of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment* (see Appendix VII). The Norway Directorate of Health provides guidelines on its web-site (see OHCRC, 2012). Using the Istanbul Protocol as a guide, physicians can become experts at writing such reports, photographing and describing scars as legal evidence of maltreatment. Psychological scars may not appear so clear-cut, but it is also possible for psychologists to describe symptoms coolly and scientifically, stating the possible relationship between observable symptoms and known effects of types of experiences described.

This seems a meaningful use of the medical rights-based approach. What the authorities appear *not* to want is the type of report that quotes the patient's description of what he has suffered in his own words: 'saw his entire family shot to death'. This kind of account is of little use to the immigration authorities, who are lawyers and require concrete documentation – particularly when the health professional has no way of verifying the story.

Meanwhile, the phrase 'traumatised refugees', originally used to describe refugees with a pathogenic response to traumatic events, has now come to be understood as indicating that all war refugees are traumatised. To what extent is it useful to talk about a condition so generally? It does not provide the narrow definition necessary for arguing for the human rights of the traumatised. At the same time, it is not helpful to bring this vague shadow over all persons who have been exposed to potentially traumatic events. Under its shadow, the path of least resistance for war survivors can be to abandon the natural mechanisms of resilience which might have stood them by and creep under the woolly blanket of the generalised concept of 'traumatised refugees'.

The phrase 'traumatised refugee' may also alienate health workers, with its implied assumption of a mental health diagnosis even before the refugees have arrived. Thus it may contribute to diminishing the interest in learning about trauma studies in general.

The problem of the essentialising of the trauma discourse was part of the practical mental-health relevance of this project (section 2.1). Unfortunately, the phrase 'traumatised refugees' is now so well entrenched that it is hard to escape. This research would suggest describing war refugees as 'persons who have been exposed to potentially traumatic events' (Steel et al 2009), or simply as 'war refugees'. Let 'traumatised refugees' regain its correct linguistic meaning – refugees with a morbid condition produced by external violence or emotional shock (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1989). And – let there be a more resource-oriented approach to them.

9.3.3 Resilience resources

As for the resilience resources, it may be easier to say what the properties and resources found in this study were *not,* than what they were. They were not the generalised resistance resources that Antonovsky found, such as 'money, ego strength, cultural stability and social support', which facilitated making sense of stressors (Antonovsky, 1987). Many of the informants made a remarkable recovery living more or less without money in Cambodia and in spite of a hiatus in cultural stability and the marked decrease in social support due to the loss of family members. Nor was it ego

strength, or 'the reintegration of a core self' (Bettelheim, 1979: 29), as 'identity' seemed to have other meanings for them. Despite the strong expression of agency and self-reliance in the material, this seemed an agency independent of 'identity' or self. The narratives showed a notable lack of preoccupation with self-understanding. Of Antonovsky's list of resistance resources, only 'social support' (Antonovsky 1987) was confirmed by this study.

The aptness of Antonovsky's term 'sense of coherence' (1987) was confirmed, however. Trying to explain Sense of Coherence (SOC) in an interview with an educated informant, the interpreter hit upon the fact that SOC could be translated as karma: was it not so that a sense of coherence is also a belief that there is a connection between how people behave and what will happen to them? The cultural norm had been up-ended by the Khmer Rouge experiment, but the norm had remained deeply embedded. A sense of coherence was supplied by a worldview and codes of conduct held together by a belief in karmic justice: the expectation that you will get what you deserve. Here they might agree with Frankl that he who knows *why* he lives, can find out *how* to live (Frankl, 1971).

In *Trauma and Recover*y, Judith Herman writes that traumatic events overcome the ordinary systems of care that give a person a sense of control, connection and meaning (Herman, 2001: 33). The traumatic events survived by the informants involved frequent threats to life and personal integrity and close personal encounters with violent death over a period of several years, yet these individuals were able to maintain or re-win, in spite of their experiences, a sense of control (of the mind), connection (with significant others) and meaning (through the worldview with its theodicy). What sort of resources or properties supplied them with these abilities?

The selection of resilience resources referred from the technical literature in section 3.2 included basic trust, social integration, culture, religious beliefs, and work or meaningful activity. The relationship between the presence or absence of basic trust and the predisposition for PTSD is probably significant, but remains in need of further research in the domain of psychology. As to the importance of social integration and significant others, an 'inner dialogue with safe persons from our past' as in Varvin

(2000:5), is reflected in the results. Here it emerges in accounts of how the internalised value-teachings of primary others were accessed in life, accessing through the medium of language the echo of a mother's or grandparent's voice. Otherwise, the listed resilience resources – basic trust/sense of coherence; social integration, culture, religious beliefs and work or meaningful activity (section 2.2) have figured in one way or another in the findings. The upward drift of the findings says nothing about what made some Cambodian survivors use the resources at their disposal and not others, however. Some resilience resources, such as basic trust (in the psychological meaning of the term) may be a key, but little can be learned of it in a hermeneutical sociological project like the present one.

The interviewees had as a point of departure not an identity concept but a collective reality, where their own behaviour was the bearing element. In such a context, ways of behaving appeared more important for mediating traumatic stress than culturally specific concepts of the sanctity of body and self. The Khmer Rouge repeatedly attempted to break down norms, induce alienation and destroy interpersonal trust. How did people manage to reverse this process? In spite of the outward appearances – submissive roles played, lies told, and eyes downcast – the interviewees played their parts actively. They seemed not to have forgotten what they believed to be right. They empowered themselves with quiet knowledge and perseverance, accessing internalised resources. Holding to and acting on a system of knowledge seemed to supply missing structures of support in a torn-apart world.

There is one significant difference between the listed individual resilience resources and the results of this research. The results indicate that the resources seem to be integrated into a coherent system of meaning, into the collective knowledge of the culture in question.

This project has found no confirmation of expectations that work, or family, or religion as *individual factors* would support resilient recovery. The central hypothesis is that the elements were parts of a constellation of resilience resources and a coherent system of meaning. Most significant of all, this was the interviewees' *own* coherent system of meaning.

9.3.4. Improving the meeting?

It is time to return to the goal and ask how the results of the research can contribute to improving encounters between war survivors and health workers.

It is not suggested that the answers to the main research question, the specifically Cambodian resilience factors found here, have a general application for frontline health workers. Solutions to some of the challenges met in restorative and preventative treatment of war trauma survivors will not be found in another kind of cultural box. A contribution to the practical, mental health aspect of the research question may be found in another kind of therapeutic conversation – one which explores the resources of the client in question, one in which resilience rather than trauma is in focus and one which asks what helped, rather than what hurt. In such a process, the specific resilience resources available to the presenting survivor may be revealed.

Mollica describes the important lessons of the trauma stories, providing future generations with a record of coping and overcoming 'and with it the cultural resiliency of generations' (Mollica, 1996: 152). The story rightly belongs to the cultural history of a people, a common heritage of ways used by forebears to cope with the suffering of their time.

The results of this research suggest that what needs to be acknowledged is rather the resilience story that has been embedded in, and often engulfed by, the trauma story. For too many years, the traditional psychoanalytical focus on full disclosure has left survivors and their children struggling in a sea of regret and despair. The children are anxious because they do not understand what it is all about – the parents dread exposing them to what they have suffered, while also feeling that they 'should.' This mechanism has also become part of the popularised trauma discourse. In fact, it seems possible that some of the pain of second-generation survivors is caused by the trauma discourse itself – by the feeling that something is not being disclosed that *needs to be disclosed.*

This state of affairs has contributed to the conspiracy of silence decried in the

transgenerational Holocaust trauma literature, as conceptualised by Danieli (1998, 2009). There may be some who want to tell their trauma story in its full horror. Most do not. The informants in this study have had, and have used, the opportunity of sharing their experiences with each other, especially in the early years: they spoke about it at the beginning, then laid it away. My impression is that, between equals in experience, perhaps fewer words and less depth suffice.

The main hypothesis of this research is that telling the resilience story might prove more useful than telling the trauma story for many individuals and for their families. How can this done? With the aid of an empathetic and affirmative helper, who acknowledges the traumatic events without probing them and seeks for resources rather than problems, the survivor may be assisted in formulating a narrative of survival. Such a resilience narrative would depend on helper–client cooperation to:

1) acknowledge the pain and difficulty of the potentially traumatic experiences without full disclosure

2) clarify the resources chosen and used in the struggle to survive and recover

3) acknowledge the resilience and coping strategies

4) dedicate the experience to future survivors.

The experience was like a black clump, he said, and he did not want to tell anybody about it, because if he told it, he would have to tell everything. 'Is it – like a pearl?' I asked. 'Yes', he said, 'like that. If you take it apart, the pearl could get broken and you'd be left with the black grit.'

> What I experienced was too terrible to be told, yet I survived – in these ways. Because I held onto these beliefs, these values, these choices, these ways of acting, these strategies, I survived to be your father and give you this gift.

Recently the following message was sent by a refugee from an entirely different culture: 'My soul is tranquil, because I did what I could to protect my family. I have peace in my soul because I have been honest, loyal, shown solidarity and never done

harm to others. Because I still believe there is good in people, I believe that a better world is possible if each one of us shows a little more empathy, tolerance, solidarity and love' (field note, 20 November 2011). This is another kind of resilience story.

As a sociologist who observes the work of clinicians and other helpers and is impressed by their skill, I wonder: is it possible to acknowledge the pain, to honour and respect the bearer of the pain, and still to focus on the resources?

Uncovering the resilience story can approach the unspeakable that the conspiracy of silence has rendered tacit, and acknowledge it without delving into it. It can serve as an affirmation and reminder for the survivor: yes, it did happen; I did manage. It can empower her ability to survive from day to day, her peace of mind and the cultural resilience of posterity. It can help her children not to feel left on the sidelines.

It might also lighten the daily work of frontline health workers. How this might be done, how the practical, mental health aspect of the research question is answered, is addressed in the final chapter. But first, to sum up some concerns that remain about the results.

9.4. Ethical reflection: the coping stone in a human rights perspective

> We are not ripping up in old wounds by demanding an end to impunity. On
> the contrary, these wounds were never healed because of impunity
>
> (RCT statement, June 1999)

The broadside above is an expression of part of the Western discourse. The idea of accountability to society for crimes committed is firmly entrenched. This is conjoined with the belief that there can be no reconciliation without justice and an end to impunity: i.e., retributive justice for wounds that were never healed, as in the statement above. These are parts of a modernist discourse, or *nomos,* and they resonate with Durkheim's view:

> The feelings which crime offends are strong collective feelings... It is the collectivity itself, the society that reacts. When a strong feeling is offended, everyone feels the need to join the rest, to give a collective punishment
>
> (Østerberg, 1983: 182, author's translation).

In this empirical social science study, a rigorous attempt has been made to base the findings as much as possible on the undirected narratives of the interviewees, without interference from the categories of my own Western rights-based worldview. In the end, it was about how they saw themselves. In contrast to the popular understanding of Cambodians' plight today, the informants did not take up issues related to the two well-known ideal categories of the Western discourse – accountability, on the structural level, and full disclosure, on the psychological level.[55] My impression of the popular discourse is that, as in the quote above, it universally ascribes to survivors the desire and the need for accountability and an end to impunity for crimes committed against them.

Some critics of this discourse will point to the pragmatic use of human rights in defence of whatever war happens to be in the service of current Western interests. According to this view, 'human rights are inseparable from the mentality of the Enlightenment [which had an important but now defunct function] and as presently construed are the product of a particular society at a particular time: Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War' (Wilson, 1997:4).

In the context of the dawning awareness of human rights in Cambodia, things may be changing. As mentioned in section 8.2, it may be that the world is no longer viewed by everyone in this survivor cohort as the self-maintaining system of ethical retribution described by Weber. In 2009, a few of the interviewees seemed to have, somewhat sadly, given up on that part of the doctrine: 'I do believe in karma, but still wonder why some died' (informant 6 C). With some firmness, almost defiance, five informants expressed a desire to see the guilty punished, thereby embracing this culturally unfamiliar belief in accountability in the eyes of the worldly law. The

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[55] Summerfield has a different perspective, having observed international trauma projects that try to make people *suppress* feelings of anger towards the perpetrators (Summerfield, 2010: 1106).

expressions of these informants had not been part of their thinking during the traumatic events, nor during their recovery from them, and were therefore not relevant for the particular focus of this project. The change had occurred in the climate of the ongoing Khmer Rouge tribunal (ECCC), backed by international aid, fostered by various NGOs, perhaps promising an end to a troublesome stomach ache that had persisted for 30 years.

Grey (2010), in an ambitious master's thesis, conceives the possibility of a harmonious balance between the Khmer Buddhist worldview and the modernist discourse of the tribunal. It is uncertain whether this optimism is reflected among Cambodians. For example, in a recent study, Sonis et al. (2009) found that 87% (n=681) of Cambodians over 35 years of age interviewed in Cambodia believed that the trials would create painful memories for them. The main problem in this 'harmonious vision' is that it is uncertain whether the Cambodian man in the street will understand and follow the logic.

Yet, change may be coming. The impact of the dream of worldly justice, in the shape of the on-going Khmer Rouge tribunal (ECCC), had spread even to a remote Cambodian village. The promise of worldly equality and human rights is in the air. Although the end to impunity promised by the ECCC would mean that everybody gets their just deserts, it is not at all clear how people like these informants would fare if there were a new catastrophe. In contrast to Western Europeans, Cambodians have not had 200 years in which to develop alternative explanatory systems. As Durkheim observed a hundred years ago, when this process was well started in Europe, the morality which had been practised would be 'irremediably shattered and that which is necessary to us is only in process of formation' (Durkheim, 1933: 409). This was where *anomie* came in.

These findings suggest that such a change, demanding punishment for the guilty, may weaken the Cambodian worldview. If the worldview is conceived as a protective wall, the karma theodicy can be seen as the keystone, sometimes called the coping stone in the wall. When the belief in a righteous and self-maintaining moral universe is removed, the wall it holds together may crumble. It could be compared to the

forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden: without the karma theodicy, the nakedness, defencelessness and lack of appropriate knowledge will become apparent. In Cambodia there is a long way to go before democratic structures become stable enough to give the security once found in the 'knowledge' of a self-maintaining universe of moral retribution. When explaining their survival and recovery as it occurred, these resilient Cambodians spoke in terms of their worldview, their cultural complex of meanings. This constellation of meanings, beliefs and practices is one thing they had that helped them to cope – a secure knowledge, based on an underlying worldview in which coping strategies were rooted.

There is no reason to expect that the members of this particular *nomos* are unique, in this respect, among the peoples of the world. Other peoples may have their own kinds of secure knowledge. This realisation influenced the final approach to the practical mental-health aspect of the research question, 'to improve the contact between health workers and war refugees'.

Like other worldviews, this one has other aspects – not all positive, not all in harmony with a human rights perspective. As Berger says, the tendency of religions has been 'to falsify man's consciousness of that part of the universe shaped by his own activity, namely, the socio-cultural world' (Berger, 1990/1967:90). One interviewee, concerned about justice, railed uncharacteristically against it, only to retreat into a plaintive: 'It doesn't mean that I'm not a Buddhist' (informant 5 C).

10. Legacy of survival: conclusions and proposals

Introduction

How have the interviewees survived, recovered and achieved normality after the Khmer Rouge regime? The accounts of 30 resilient survivors have yielded explanations of resilience resources that mediated their traumatic experience, as explained in the previous chapters. What is the nature of this resilience? How does it work? And how can knowledge of it contribute to future work with war refugees?

The metaphor of a voyage of discovery proved useful for organising the progress of the project and keeping in touch with theory. On the very last leg of the voyage, section 10.1 answers the research questions. Questions of the correspondence between findings and conclusions and whether it is possible to generalise from and replicate the study are addressed. The thesis concludes with proposals for health and social personnel, for use in counselling new groups of war refugees (10.2). These proposals and the 'Cultural Resilience Interview Outline' developed in the project are based on the results, including responses to the findings from expert health workers (7.4).

Although the horrific can be gripping, the thesis has not been another contribution to the documentation of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge regime. This is a torch that has been carried by many well-qualified in history, psychology and jurisprudence (Kiernan 1996, Chandler 1999, Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 2002), as well as by many individual survivors who have written testimonies of their experiences (Ngor, 1987; Pin, 1987; Pran, 1997; Vann, 1998; Him, 2001; Sonn, 2001). An example of the latter genre is Dith Pran's collection of survivor accounts (Pran, 1994). These focus on the Khmer Rouge's crimes against humanity and the survivors as victims, 'lest we forget'. From the brief biographical notes that precede the accounts, it appears that each person is doing remarkably well today (Antonovsky, 1987: 64) – yet no information is given about that side of the story. The popular fascination with tragedy, catastrophe and trauma appears to have drowned the resilient response. I wished to tell the other side – lest that part should be lost: the important lessons of the resilience stories, providing

posterity with a record of coping and overcoming. To leave such a legacy, more needed to be said about – more focus needed to be placed on – how these survivors did it.

10.1. Taking beliefs into account in healing: conclusions and implications

Through a process of analysis, evidence was found to support the interpretation that the resilience of the interviewees, as it emerged in their explanations of survival and recovery processes, was related to a traditional worldview. They had the 'knowledge', beliefs, and practices connected to that worldview, they believed in it and they used it 'as a theory to guide their lives' (Sivun Pen, cited in a field note, May 31, 2009).

There are two uses for the results, related to the main research question's theoretical and practical mental-health aspects respectively. The theory aspect has to do with finding out and formulating what was useful for the interviewees. The practical aspect has to do with making the new knowledge useful for others. In this section, the conclusions are summed up. What did I, the researcher, ask and what answers did I receive?

10.1.1. Main research question (theoretical aspect)

> What have resilient Cambodian survivors found useful for their recovery and normalisation after the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime?

What was learnt about this particular resilience? What was uncovered, understood, and explained by the findings? The main research question was answered by interpreting the findings from the sub-questions: life-story-narratives were recorded and in interaction with analytical processes, the narratives disclosed qualities and resources

the interviewees had and how they worked.

A set of behaviours and beliefs had been useful for the interviewees' survival, recovery, and normalization. These were connected to an encompassing *nomos* or worldview in which certain types of knowledge belonging to the culture were rooted. Belief in a karma theodicy was central to a pervasive ethic or code of moral virtue which underpinned ways of doing things, ways of surviving, and ways of treating people. Springing out of and closely interwoven with the *nomos* and its codes of behaviour were specific behaviours and beliefs related to social integration and self-reliance or agency. With regard to social integration, it emerged that all the informants had, or had found, some sort of family that they had gone to great lengths to hold together, and some sort of community in which they actively participated. Concerning individual agency and self-reliance, this quality was demonstrated by all, as the will to do, to work hard, to persevere, to struggle, to fight and to survive.

According to their narratives, the interviewees owed their survival, recovery and rehabilitation to these resources, rooted in a strong belief system, a cultural and religious *nomos* with a code of moral conduct and theodicy. The problem of evil appears to have been resolved for them by the natural mechanisms of karma. The self-contained cosmos of ethical retribution that they believed in, and the meaning it might have for those who believe in it, are suggested by both Weber (1993/1922: 145) and Berger (1990/1967: 53ff). Within this nexus lie the reconstructed pagodas in Cambodia with their socially integrative function (Kent, 2007).

Yet most significant for survival, in my understanding, was the living internalised knowledge that was actualised and used. The fact that there is in Norway no Khmer Buddhist pagoda may have brought this to my attention and contributed to the interpretation: Cambodians in Norway must carry the religion within them and recreate *in situ* the ritual sharing of emotional moods and sacred objects that usually takes place in a pagoda.

This *nomos*-knowledge was so resilient that it survived throughout the Khmer Rouge years. As informant 20 says, 'Pol Pot regime was a regime that killed people, but if we did good deeds it could keep us alive. Buddhist Dharma is right.... So I did good

deeds'. In other words, 'the Khmer Rouge had *their* construction of reality; we had ours' – which was the 'right' one.

There are two sides of this interpretation of how they have accessed 'the knowledge' themselves. One is the tenacity of what Berger and Luckmann call 'the castle of ontological certitude' (1991/1966: 20): learned ways of understanding and coping with difficulties (other cultures may have other ways) that persist in human consciousness after socialization and internalisation. The other is that these ways were conveyed by the daily use of common words in a language imbued with the values of the culture. Language was the channel, the bearer of culturally recognised coping strategies to them *in extremis*, as everyday words became carriers of the resources learnt from parents in the transmission of traditional worldview and codes of conduct.

The relationship between the two, language and coping, is unsurprising, like the similarity between two sides of a face. I asked an Englishman recently what key cultural coping strategies had helped Londoners through the Blitz. He replied without a moment's hesitation, 'A stiff upper lip, I suppose'. Such words are also potent reminders of a knowledge of how one should act.

<div align="center">*</div>

The question arises, however, whether the vessel used on the voyage – the methodology – was adequate to the task. With regard to trustworthiness, the question may be raised: is it actually demonstrated 'beyond a reasonable doubt', that the conclusions are trustworthy results of the findings? Has it been shown that the findings are grounded in the data? These issues were addressed by trying to make the processes of data gathering (2.4) and analysis (2.5.1) as transparent as possible. Large sections of coded interview material have been included to provide the reader with adequate information for evaluating the results (Chapter 6). In the intermediate summary in section 7.3, findings are held close to the empirical basis, double checked, cross-checked, listed, and counted. In section 7.4, experts are invited to comment on the intermediate findings, while in 8.2, an interpretation is subjected to informant validation. The structure of the argumentation (8.4) is meant to demonstrate how the claims were hermeneutically developed. Such a project, built on inter-subjective

communication, will never be able to provide 'absolute truth'. The intention was not to produce the final truth about all successful survivors, but to learn something from 30 successful Cambodian survivors that could illuminate resilience thinking in general. The findings may apply to other Cambodian survivors who satisfy the selection criteria, but, as noted, this study did not set out to make such a prediction (section 2.5.1).

With regard to transferability, the possibility of replicating this study with other Cambodians or other war refugees would be limited, unless other researchers were willing to adopt a social role similar to that adopted by this researcher. The same procedures would need to be followed with the other cases, and characteristics found that corresponded to the criteria for this analytical category (section 2.1) (Riis, 2012:350, author's translation). The instrument suggested here, the cultural resilience interview (10.2), can provide a basic format for such a project. Research of this kind is sorely needed, not least in regard to refugees from the Middle East.

Are researcher effects on processes, interpretations, findings, and conclusions sufficiently dealt with in the study? Possible effects of context and bias were addressed in a self-critical appraisal of the researcher' positionality (1.4). Attempts were made to address bias by taking a phenomenological stance in the interview situation (2.2) and by using 'methodological atheism' (Berger, 1990/1967) as a strategy for maintaining an open and questioning approach to emerging findings and interpretations (in 2.4.1, problems with presuppositions and predispositions).

Finally, in qualitative research a methodological gap is often found between individual constructions of reality and the possibility of generalising from them. The possibility for generalisation may be a shortcoming. In this study, the exegesis of key-words used by all interviewees helped to fill in this gap. If informants formulate their actions and their explanations in the same terms, it may not demand too great a stretch of the imagination to assume that their constructions have something in common (section 7.2). Perhaps this will permit an appropriately narrow generalisation about a lived common experience to be offered with a greater sense of conviction.

*

Yet, one thing was finding out what helped to explain the survival, recovery, and normalisation of resilient Cambodians – another was where it was found. It was not found to lie in freedom, peace, equality, economic security, accountability, or therapy – but in the living and adaptive resources provided in some old strategies or practices from the traditional culture and religion. These, based on an underlying worldview in which coping strategies were rooted, provided a knowledge in which they felt secure.

Similar cultural resources could be imagined to be accessible to other peoples from other cultures and religions. Would any coherent system of meaning do? What would be the conditions for such a coherent system of meaning to work in the way described?

It seems it would need to have been learned from trusted significant others, taken for granted from early childhood and reconfirmed daily in living phrases which embody the values in question. When such conditions are present, then the hypothesis has implications for work with new generations of war refugees.

10.1.2. Main research question (practical mental health aspect)

The project had a stated intention 'to use the knowledge obtained to improve the contact between health workers and war trauma survivors' (section 1.1). It was hoped to make a sociological contribution to the growing focus on resources in mental health. It was hoped that the knowledge generated might be used to contribute to improving preventative work with new generations of survivors from war zones. If the new knowledge about resilience is that certain living and adaptive resources of religions and cultures may provide resources for survival, recovery, and normalization, what does this signify for the contact between health workers and trauma survivors?

It is probable that the resources of some other cultures and religions may have something in common with those uncovered and explained in the paragraphs above. This could seem to imply that health workers need a general cultural competence – that they should know about all cultures and religions, or at least be familiar with the cultures of those with whom they are dealing.

That is not my argument, however. The problem at hand is to contribute to improving

the meeting between health workers and war trauma survivors. If one wishes to learn more about a person's cultural resilience, it can best be uncovered, understood and explained by asking that person about it. Such a culturally sensitive, open, questioning and listening approach can more than compensate for previous lack of cultural knowledge, as many good therapists and health workers are well aware. And here, as elsewhere, it is always important to remain attentive to the nature of the resources in question and to evaluate them in a human rights perspective in order to distinguish possibly harmful beliefs and practices.

How can strengths and resources be found? Existing cultural resilience instruments are usually descriptive rather than prescriptive, designed to assist therapists in assigning a correct diagnosis according to existing diagnostic schemata. They are not designed for use in accessing the resources of patients, nor intended for frontline health workers.

In the triangulation of the findings with expert health workers (section 7.4), it appeared that, at a high level of expertise, accessing cultural explanatory models is a standard approach. Questions about cultural explanations are posed by these transcultural therapists as a matter of course. These are questions that directly address the cultural resource base of the client, questions that are put with the intention of accessing such resources for the benefit of client and health worker alike. After this triangulation, the dissemination of results and proposals to health professionals working with post-conflict refugees began during the final phase of the research.

A concerted effort to introduce such questions could effectivise the contribution of frontline health and social workers who are the first to meet newly-arrived war refugees, and could reduce the pressure on specialist mental health services. The prescriptive side of the research question is addressed in the proposals below.

10.2. Proposal: a cultural resilience interview outline

The central hypothesis developed in the course of this research concerns the practical mental-health aspect of the research question: to improve the meeting with war refugees. As a preventive measure, to avoid unnecessary referrals to psychotherapy for

those who have the resources to find their own way to recovery, another form of therapeutic conversation with refugees is suggested. The *DSM IV* trauma diagnosis states, 'The disorder may be especially severe or long lasting when the stressor is of human design' (American Psychiatric Association, 2000: 437). My interpretative hypothesis is that man-made, inter-relational traumas, such as those imposed by the Khmer Rouge regime, should be addressed inter-relationally, in interplay with other human beings. Ideally these others – friends, family, or health workers – will not assume that survivors are pathologically traumatised, but will express satisfaction and admiration for their survival and will wish them well. Such an approach combines cultural sensitivity with a trauma-informed approach (e.g. Bath, 2009).

A cultural resilience instrument as an aid in this conversation can contribute to improving the interplay by focusing on clients' strengths and resources as well as their problems and needs. There are many resilience instruments available, but their usual aim is to measure rather than to promote resilience. The intention of the research was to contribute to improving the meeting between war refugees and helpers, frontline workers in particular. Preventative work can be facilitated by finding ways to help survivors to tell their resilience stories. By lifting up, learning from and reminding them of their own resources, this can help to remind clients of their own cultural explanations, their own people's hard-won resilience, their own survival-resources, developed in past periods of hardship. A simple first step was suggested by the question: 'What do you think about what happened to you?' (Olsen, cited in a field note, 18 October 2008).

My proposals from this project are represented in the 'Cultural Resilience Interview Outline' (figure 8), designed as a simple check-list for the use of frontline health and social workers. The outline is in the first instance conceived as preventative: not intended for the chronically traumatised. The resilience interview offers pre-emptive possibilities for mobilising resources before clients have been indelibly defined as 'traumatised'. Yet proactively attempting to gain access to the cultural explanatory models of the patient, often overlooked in work with war refugees, may be an unexploited resource for some therapists, as well. Further research in the domain of mental health is needed to discover if and how the cultural resilience resources of the

chronically traumatised may be re-discovered by therapists.

The research was carried out with the aim that war survivors, instead of being met with a prescription for sleeping pills, be met with a salutogenic approach. Frontline health and social workers who wish to access the cultural resources of newly-arrived war refugees may use this interview outline as a basis for developing questions to open a channel to the individual's resilience story, rather than her trauma story, with a view to empowerment and the long-term promotion of resilience.

Figure 8. Cultural Resilience Interview Outline

Preparations:

- Don't assume people are traumatised because they have had traumatic experience and come from war-torn lands.

- The great majority of war refugees will manage to recover from their experiences with well-regulated lives that provide opportunities to exercise their own coping strategies.

- Mental health is closely related to social support, meaningful everyday activities and economic conditions (Lie, 2009).

- In meeting war refugees it can still be a good idea to ask about the past in a general way, by acknowledging it: *I know you come from a place which has been racked by a brutal war, that you have had a very hard time – yet you seem to be managing somehow ...*

Example questions:

- How have you managed so well?

- How did you cope with it?

- Where did you find the strength?

- What values guided you in deciding what to do?

- What parts of this story would you like to tell your children?

- What would your grandfather / your grandmother have said?

In answering these and similar questions, the resilience story can be formulated: acknowledging the pain and difficulty without full disclosure; clarifying the resources chosen and used; and acknowledging the resilience and coping strategies (section

9.3.4).

Instead of focusing on what is broken, on events too terrible to be named, a reasonable attempt may be made to help the client to reframe his or her survival as a resource, something of value that can help others to live and meet difficulty. The present research has indicated that behind an apparent mastery over body and emotions, accompanied by an outwardly submissive attitude, an extraordinary agency and fearlessness can be nurtured. Given the opportunity, survivors may begin to formulate a resilience story that is, strictly speaking, a legacy held in trust for future generations.

Glossary of central terms as used in the dissertation

Abduction

Epistemological mode of inference that 'interprets or re-contextualises individual phenomena within a contextual framework or set of ideas' (Danermark, 2002: 80) [section 8.1]

Cambodian / Khmer

Cambodian refers here to the people, Khmer to the language and religion.

Comorbidity

The presence of one or more disorder or disease in addition to a primary disorder or disease [section 3.1.1 *On PTSD*]

Dharma / Dhamma

Doctrine; core principles of Buddhism, 'usually referring to the ultimate truth underlying existence' (Traleg, 2004:240) [section 5.3]. With lower case 'd', dharma means phenomena.

Nomos

The 'cognitive and normative edifice that passes for knowledge in a society' (Berger, 1990/1967: 20-21) [section 5.2.3]

Resilience / resiliency

The ability to 'bounce back' or regain form after great strain, to recover from misfortune or change [section 3.2].

Retroduction

'From a description and analysis of concrete phenomena to reconstruct the basic conditions for these phenomena to be what they are' (Danermark, 2002:80) [section 8.3]

Salutogenesis

Health-promoting practice (Antonovsky, 1987)[section 3.2]

Theodicy

The problem of the existence of evil in a divinely ordered world [section 5.2.2]

Trauma

Morbid condition of body produced by a wound or external violence; (psych.) emotional shock (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*)[section 3.1]

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Appendix I Information to interviewees in Norwegian

<center>Forespørsel om å delta i undersøkelse</center>

til…………………………………………………………………………,

Dette brevet sendes til flyktninger som ser ut til å ha klart seg bra selv om de hadde vonde opplevelser ifm krig i hjemlandet. Du forespørres om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt som skal finne ut mer om dette, for å kunne hjelpe andre flyktninger og helsearbeidere som jobber med flyktninger.

Psykososialt team for flyktninger er interessert i å finne ut hva flyktningene selv mener. Hva har hjulpet deg mest etter at du har vært utsatt for vonde opplevelser? Sosiolog Gwyn Øverland skal snakke med flyktninger som har klart seg bra i Norge til tross for en vanskelig fortid. Prosjektet er støttet av Helse-Sør.

Intervjuene skal være helt konfidensielle. Tolk skal benyttes hvis ønskelig. Du kan selv velge tolk. Om det senere skrives artikler om det vi har funnet ut, vil det ikke være mulig å vite hva du har sagt.

Deltagelsen er frivillig. Vi kan gjerne møtes for å drøfte spørsmål du måtte ha. Du kan selv trekke deg når du vil uten å oppgi grunn, og alt du har sagt vil da bli slettet.

Ønsker du å delta i undersøkelsen kan du kontakte Gwyn Øverland på tlf. 38 03 8580 eller skrive til:

Psykososialt team Sør

Servicebox 416

4604 Kristiansand

Med vennlig hilsen,

Birgit Lie   Gwyn Øverland

avdelingsoverlege   rådgiver

Appendix II English translation of the information to interviewees

To:……………………………………………………………………………………..

This letter is being given to refugees who seem to have managed well even though they had painful experiences in connection with war in the home country. You are being invited to participate in a research project which aims to find out more about this, in order to help other refugees and health workers who work with refugees.

Psychosocial team for Refugees is interested in finding out what the refugees themselves think. What has helped you most after you were exposed to painful experiences? Sociologist Gwyn Øverland is going to speak with refugees who have managed well in Norway in spite of a difficult past. The project is funded by the Southern Norway regional health authority.

The interviews will be completely confidential. Interpreters will be used if desired. You can choose the interpreter yourself. If articles should later be written about what we have found, it will not be possible to find out what you have said. Participation is voluntary. We are happy to meet you and discuss any questions you may have. You can withdraw whenever you wish without giving any reason and everything you have said will then be deleted.
If you wish to participate in the project you can contact Gwyn Øverland tel. 38 03 8580 or write to:

Appendix III Khmer translation of information to participants

ក្រុមសង្គមចិត្តសាស្ត្រសំរាប់ជនភៀសខ្លួន
សេចក្ដីស្ម័គ្រក្នុងការចូលរួមការស្រាវជ្រាវ

ចំពោះ លោកស្រី លោក ....

លិខិតនេះនឹងសូមធ្វើជូនដល់ជនភៀសខ្លួនទាំងឡាយ ដែលអាចរស់នៅដោយខ្លួនឯងបាន   ដោយមិនបាច់
ទទួលការការព្យាបាល បន្ទាប់ពីផុតពេលកាត់នូវការឈឺចាប់ ក្នុងសង្គ្រាមនៅប្រទេសកំណើតរបស់ខ្លួន ។

គណៈកម្មការយើងសូមអញ្ជើញលោក អ្នក ចូលរួមក្នុងការស្រាវជ្រាវអោយជ្រៅជាងនេះ   ដើម្បីជួយ
ជនភៀសខ្លួនដ៏ទៃ និងដល់បុគ្គលិកសុខមាលភាព ដែលធ្វើការជាមួយជនភៀសខ្លួន ។

ក្រុមសង្គមចិត្តសាស្ត្រសំរាប់ជនភៀសខ្លួន   មានការចាប់អារម្មណ៍ ក្នុងការស្វែងរកន័យអ្វីមួយ ពីជនភៀសខ្លួន
ថាតើអ្វីដែលអាចជួយសង្គ្រោះអ្នក   បន្ទាប់ពីអ្នកបានឆ្លងកាត់នូវការឈឺចាប់បែបហ្នឹង ។សង្ខមទូ **ធ្មីន អូវិទ្យេន**
សូមធ្វើកិច្ចសន្ទនាជាមួយជនភៀសខ្លួន   ដែលមានជីវិតដ៏ប្រសើរក្នុងប្រទេសនីរវេស្យទោះជាមានអតីតកាលដ៏ជូរចត់
ក៏ដោយ ។ តំរាងការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ ត្រូវបានឧបត្ថម្ភដោយក្រសួង សុខមាលភាពភូមិភាគខាងត្បូង ។

បទសម្ភាសន៍និងប្រព្រឹត្តទៅក្នុងលក្ខណៈអាថិកំបាំង   ដោយមានអ្នកបកប្រែភាសា បើលោកអ្នកត្រូវការ
ហើយអាចជ្រើសរើសអ្នកបកប្រែណាក៏បាន ។លទ្ធផលនៃការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ នឹងប្រស្ងូតចេញជាអត្ថបទ
ដោយមិនអាចដឹងពីប្រភពនៃបទសម្ភាសន៍ឡើយ ។

ការចូលរួម ធ្វើឡើងដោយការស្ម័គ្រចិត្ត ។យើងនឹងសន្យាជូនបន្ថា នៅថ្ងៃណាមួយ ដើម្បីធ្វើបទសន្ទនា ។
លោកអ្នក   អាចលាឈប់បានដោយមិនចាំបាច់បង្ហាញនូវមូលហេតុអ្វីឡើយ   ហើយន័យនៃបទសម្ភាសន៍
ក៏ត្រូវលប់ចោលវិញដែរ ។

ផែនការនេះ មានតំរាងបញ្ចប់នាពេលចេញឆ្នាំ២០០៨នេះ តាមលក្ខណៈជាឯកសារអណាមិក ។
លើករណី ដែលលោក អ្នក មានបំណងរួមចំណែក ក្នុងការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ សូមមេត្តាទាក់ទងនឹង
អ្នកស្រី **ធ្មីន អូវិទ្យេន** ទូរស័ព្ទលេខ ៣៨ ០៣ ៨៥ ៨០ ឬ មួយសរសេរលិខិត ទៅអាស័យដ្ឋានខាងក្រោម:

ក្រុមសង្គមចិត្តសាស្ត្រ សុខមាលភាពភូមិភាគខាងត្បូង
ប្រអប់សេរ៉ា: ៤៦៦. ៤៦០៤ ត្រិស្ងានសាន់ដ៏
សូមទទួលយកការគោរពរាប់អានពីយើង ។

Appendix IV Khmer translation of 1st abductive reinterpretation

យើងខ្ញុំត្រូវបានគេបណ្ដេញអោយទៅតាមផ្លូវ ដែលប្រឈមមុខនឹងគ្រាប់រំសេវ ។យើងខ្ញុំត្រូវគេបណ្ដេញចេញ
ពីក្រុង ។យើងខ្ញុំមិនយល់ទាល់តែសោះថា តើអ្វីទៅដែលបានកំពុងកើតឡើង ឬអ្វីទៅដែលយើងរាំងពឹង
នឹងកើតមានសំរាប់យើងគ្រប់រូបនោះ ។

យើងមានការតក់សុតនឹងរលល់គំនិតយ៉ាងខ្លាំងទៅលើកំរិយាបថរបស់ទាហានខ្មែរក្រហម ដែលពួកយើងមិន
ដែលពើបប្រទះពីដើមមកទាល់តែសោះ ទោះយើងឆ្លាប់បានរស់ក្នុងភ្លើងសង្គ្រាមជាយូរលង់មកហើយ
ក៏ដោយ ។ពួកវារំបអូសយករបស់ជាទីស្រឡាញ់សំរាប់យើងនឹងយកទៅបំផ្លាញចោល ។យើងនិយាយថា
សាកល្យងទៅ ពីព្រោះពួកវាមិនអាចបំផ្លាញរបស់នោះបានទេ ដោយវាជាការពិតជានិច្ចហើយយើងដឹងក្នុង
ក្រអៅ បេះដូងរបស់យើងផង ។យើងដឹងថាអ្វី ដែលពួកវាកំពង់ធ្វើនោះវាខុសហើយយោរាយោ'បំផុត ។ករណី
នេះហើយ យើងត្រូវបានគេដកហូតនូវវិន័យខ្លះនៃកំរិយាបថដែលយើងមាន ដូចជាការនិយាយស្ដីពាក្យ
សច្ចៈជានិច្ចជាដើមនោះ ។

យើងសមតែដើរតាមអ្វី ដែលមាតាបិតាយើងនឹងព្រះសាមណៈបានប្រដៅយើង ។ជានិច្ចជាកាល
យើងត្រូវបង្ហាញនូវការគោរព ការអោនលំទោន ព្រមទាំងខំធ្វើការប្រឹងប្រែងតាមដែលអាចធ្វើបាន ។

រឿងមួយ ដែលធ្ងន់ធ្ងរបំផុតសំរាប់រូបយើងនោះគឺមិនមែនរឿងធ្វើការមបាហាត់ឡើយនោះទេគឺការគ្មាន
អាហារគ្រប់គ្រាន់សំរាប់បរិភោគ ។យើងមិនយល់អ្វីទាំងអស់ កាលដែលគេប្រល័យមនុស្សរំដែលយើងស្គាល់
ដែលជាទីស្រឡាញ់របស់យើង ។យើងមានកាតព្វកិច្ចមួយគឺការរស់រានមានជីវិតនឹងការតស៊ូសំរាប់ជីវិត
យើងគ្រប់រូប ពីព្រោះជីវិតនេះយើងបានទទួលមកហើយ។បើយើងបោះបង់នោះ យើងត្រូវតែឆ្លងកាត់នូវ
នូវការពិសោធន៍ទាំងនោះម្ដងទៀត ។ប៉ុន្តែពេលដែលយើងតស៊ូដើម្បីរស់នោះ យើងមិនត្រូវធ្វើអោយអ្នក
ខ្លីទៃអន្តរាយឡើយ ។យើងគួរជួយមនុស្សផងគ្នាអោយរស់រានមានជីវិតដូចយើង ព្រោះនេះជាកូនសោរមួយ

ជាមគ្គុៈមួយសំរាប់ភាពលួតចំរើននៃចំណោងរវាងសត្វលោក ។

យើងប្រព្រឹត្តតាមគន្លងវិន័យនេះដោយល្អ ។អ្នកខ្លះ ប្រពៃត្តដូចគ្នាដែរ តែគេគ្មានវាសនាមានជីវិតទេ ។ នេះជាវាសនាយើង .ប្រហែល ជាកម្មពីបុព្ទេ ទើប តែយើងមានបំណុលកម្មលើគេទាំងឡាយក្នុងការ តស៊ូដើម្បីជីវិតនេះ ហើយបំពេញនូវកុសលកម្ម ពីព្រោះលទ្ធផលនឹងបានទទួលនៅទីបំផុត ប្រហែលនៅថ្ងៃ ស្អែក ជាតិនេះ ឬ ១០០០ឆ្នាំទៀត ។

យើងមិនដែលធ្វើឱ្យខ្មែរក្រហមទទួលការកាត់ទោសឡើយ ។ពួកនេះនឹងចាប់ជាតិដូចជាផ្នែកតិរច្ឆាន ឬជាប្រេតបិសាចអត់ឃ្លាន ។បើអ្នកណាដាក់ទណ្ឌកម្មលើពួករាជការប្រសើរណាស់ នេះស្រេចទៅលើគេចុះ ' នៅទីបំផុត អ្នកជាអ្នកទទួលខុសត្រូវលើកម្មផលរបស់អ្នក ។

តែមគ្គុៈប្រសើរតែមួយគត់គីការដើរតាមគន្លងវិន័យប្រពៃនឹងការជួយសង្គ្រោះមនុស្សជឹងទាំងឡាយ ។

Appendix V: PTSD diagnosis

Diagnostic criteria for F.43.1. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

A) Criterion A: **direct personal experience of an event that involved:**

1. actual or threatened death or serious injury or other threat to one's physical integrity;
2. or witnessing an event that involves death, injury or a threat to the physical integrity of another person;
3. or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.

B) The traumatic event is persistently reexperienced in one (or more) of the following ways:

1. recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions

2. recurrent distressing dreams of the event.

3. Acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the event, illusions, hallucinations and dissociative flashbacks of the event

4. Intense psychological distress on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

5. Physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the event.

C) Criterion C - Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma/numbing:

Three or more of the following:

1. efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings or conversation associated with the trauma

2. efforts to avoid activities, people or places associated with the trauma

3. inability to recall an important aspect of the event

4. markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities

5. feeling of detachment or estrangement from others

6. restricted range of affect (unable to have loving feelings)

7. sense of a foreshortened future (e.g. does not expect to have a career, marriage,

children or a normal lifespan)

D) Criterion D: Persistent symptoms of increased arousal

Two or more
1. difficulty falling or staying asleep

2. irritability or outbursts of anger

3. difficulty concentrating

4. hypervigilance

5. exaggerated startle response

E) Criterion E: Duration. Symptoms B, C and D minimum one month

F) The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other areas of functioning.

(American Psychiatric Association, 2000: 465-68)

Appendix VI: Characteristics of the informants

age in 2009	Gender	Education	Religion	Interviewed in 1998
59	f	12+	Buddhist	
55	f	0	Buddhist	
58	f	0	Buddhist	
61	f	12	Buddhist	
49	f	3	Buddhist	
66	f	12+	Buddhist	
59	f	12+	Buddhist	
50	f	10	Buddhist	
55	f	12+	Buddhist	X
69	m	12+	Buddhist	X
49	m	12+	Buddhist	
65	m	12+	Buddhist	X
56	m	3	Buddhist	X
47	m	9	Buddhist	
63	m	0	Buddhist	
59	m	0	Buddhist	X
57	m	12+	Christian	X
52	m	7	Buddhist	
62	m	9	Buddhist	
50	m	6	Buddhist	
47	m	3	Buddhist	
55	m	2	Christian	
55	m	6	Buddhist	
70	m	12+	Buddhist	
46	m	7	Buddhist	
70	m	10	Buddhist	
47	m	0	Buddhist	
71	m	12+	Buddhist	
45	m	12+	Buddhist	

Appendix VII: The Istanbul protocol, Annex 1

Principles on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [1]

"The medical expert should promptly prepare an accurate written report. This report should include at least the following:

The name of the subject and the name and affiliation of those present at the examination; the exact time and date, location, nature and address of the institution (including, where appropriate, the room) where the examination is being conducted (e.g. detention centre, clinic, house); and the circumstances of the subject at the time of the examination (e.g. nature of any restraints on arrival or during the examination, presence of security forces during the examination, demeanour of those accompanying the prisoner, threatening statements to the examiner) and any other relevant factors;

A detailed record of the subject's story as given during the interview, including alleged methods of torture or ill-treatment, the time when torture or ill-treatment is alleged to have occurred and all complaints of physical and psychological symptoms;

A record of all physical and psychological findings on clinical examination, including appropriate diagnostic tests and, where possible, colour photographs of all injuries;

An interpretation as to the probable relationship of the physical and psychological findings to possible torture or ill-treatment. A recommendation for any necessary medical and psychological treatment and further examination should be given;

The report should clearly identify those carrying out the examination and should be signed. The report should be confidential and communicated to the subject or a nominated representative. The views of the subject and his or her representative about the examination process should be solicited and recorded in the report. It should also be provided in writing, where appropriate, to the authority responsible for investigating the allegation of torture or ill-treatment. It is the responsibility of the State to ensure that it is delivered securely to these persons. The report should not be made available to any other person, except with the consent of the subject or on the authorization of a court empowered to enforce such transfer." (OHCHR, 2012)

[1] The Commission on human rights, in its resolution 2000/43 and the General Assembly, in its resolution 55/89, drew the attention of Governments to the Principles and strongly encouraged Governments to reflect up on the Principles as a useful tool in efforts to combat torture.

2 Under certain circumstances professional ethics may require information to be kept confidential. These requirements should be respected.