**Creating Safety, Finding Voice and Remembering: Local NGOs Work Towards Dealing with Cambodia's Legacies Through Non-Judicial and Social Processes of Dialogue and Restoring Cultural Memory**

Proposal by Christoforos Pavlakis

This proposal attempts to examine the ways in which local non-state actors and institutions influence memory mechanisms and reconciliation encounters in post-conflict settings through a detailed study of the work of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Cambodia. Often viewed as a successful attempt at engineering peace, Cambodia, while being relatively stable, has failed to grapple with the legacies of its past. Numerous experts argue that memory and reconciliation are crucial elements of peacebuilding, yet these have largely been neglected in the crafting of the peace process in Cambodia. The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) did not place these issues at the forefront of their work. Despite the establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) to prosecute former Khmer Rouge leaders, evidence of the ECCC being stifled and manipulated by Cambodian government leaders suggests that the current government does not wish for people to genuinely process Cambodia's collective history.

With such a history and current climate, the starting point of this research was found in the lessons to be learnt from the ways in which local non-state actors and institutions perceive and act on these issues of justice and reconciliation, which 'official' channels seem to underplay. This proposal acknowledges and documents the local cultural processes that Cambodian non-state actors and institutions are utilising to encourage people to reconcile and move forward. Local NGOs, specifically working on justice and reconciliation, were the focal point of this research in Cambodia. Semi-structured interviews, ongoing informal conversations with NGOs (fifteen in total, to which the author is thankful), and sharing of policy documents enabled a deep analysis of the work carried out by these institutions.

This proposal aims to build a case that local NGOs in Cambodia have played a critical role in influencing how transitional justice has transpired to date, and how individuals are reconciling with the past. Local NGOs have shaped justice initiatives by working with the ECCC to ensure its mandate is achieved. These NGOs have also encouraged people to reconcile the past by: maintaining cultural memory places and other mnemonics; creating avenues and spaces for people to talk and share about the past; and allowing young people to be engaged and empowered through critically exploring Cambodia's history. Collectively, these roles have influenced both the pervasive, government-driven official and localised unofficial discourses surrounding justice and reconciliation in Cambodia. I argue that these discourses have been reshaped, challenged and even countered through the work of local NGOs. Their work, both in partnerships with the official and completely outside the official, has built on the local, relied on cultural resources, and used space and voice to enable their work. Together, local NGOs are assisting communities: overcome amnesia about the past; break down cultures of silence and avoidance; and ultimately, look to the past in order to envisage a peaceful future.

**Keywords**: Cambodia, cultural sites, cultural memory, dialogue, transitional justice, trauma recovery.

Christoforos PAVLAKIS is an educational advisor at the Bophana audiovisual resources center in Cambodia and an adjunct lecturer of Archival Studies in the Department of Information Studies at the University of Athens, Greece, where he is also an affiliated faculty member with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

His current book – soon to be published- explores the role of archives and records in the construction of memory about the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. His research traces a collection of mug shots taken at Tuol Sleng prison from their creation as bureaucratic documents that streamlined mass murder, to their inclusion in archives, digitization, and use by survivors and the family members of victims to spark narratives about the regime and memorialize the dead. The book also addresses the incorporation of the mug shots into tourist images which are then uploaded on flickr, Facebook, and travel blogs.

In his current professional affiliation in Cambodia, he supervises educational programs that contribute to the reconstruction of the country's past, documenting events even before and after the Khmer Rouge. Cambodia's memory, which could not be fully erased by decades of war and destruction, gives us the opportunity to discover the country's culture and identity

Pavlakis research interests include:

- archival theory
- information ethics
- social justice, human rights, pluralism, and archives
- community archives as alternatives to mainstream institutions
- the politics of accountability, ownership and access
- the collective memory of violence
- archival pedagogy
- visual culture

He takes a social justice and pluralist approach to archival education, encouraging students to make connections between records creation, archival management, power and cultural diversity.

He is also a member of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), an online repository which documents and provides access to the diverse stories of South Asian Americans.

Hee holds a PhD in Information Studies from the University of Athens, Greece in 2013. He also holds a BA in religion from the same university, and a degree with an archives concentration from the University of Lille, France.