

BREAKING THE SILENCE

A NEW CAMBODIAN PLAY 
SCRIPT BY ANNEMARIE PRINS



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Except: The Cambodian People's Lament by Sath Bunrith

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Chhon Sina
Pok Sovanna
Nen Phearith

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Dancer:
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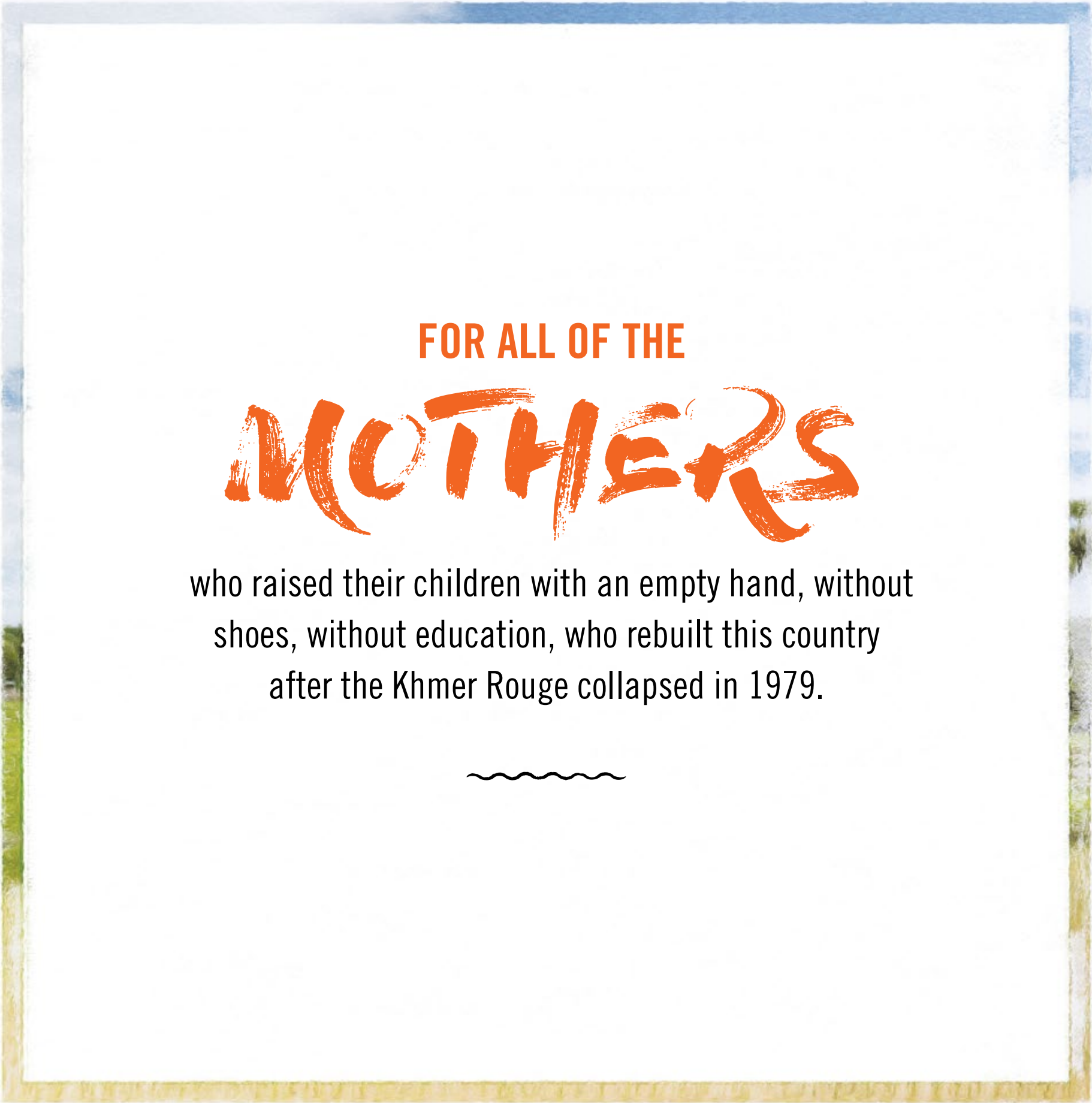
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Funded by Swedish International Development Agency (Sida); supported by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

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Khan Munich at her grand-father’s childhood pagoda.
Samrong Punley Pagoda (was built in early 1900s)
Samrong village, Punley commune, Angkor Borei district
Takeo province.

PREFACE

There has been a long silence in this country regarding the Khmer Rouge era, a silence that has lasted for decades and kept alive by fear, pain, and politics.

In recent years however, there have been solid efforts to end this silence in the form of legal justice, outreach programs, and genocide education in high schools in Cambodia. While each measure is valuable for Cambodia’s healing, there must also be measures which focus on the emotional and psychological components of reconciliation and healing. This is where art can make a significant contribution. The Khmer Rouge killed many artists but not the artistry of the Cambodian people. Artistry is our soul.

This play seeks to break Cambodia’s silence, as evidenced by its title. It is a play about the Cambodian people: their suffering, anger, and courage to move on, no matter the circumstances. Khmer Rouge victims are emotionally broken people living in a broken society; a people without souls or with wandering souls. I have found our soul in this play, Breaking the Silence. It will help restore our dignity and humanity and lift up our morality. It will also help our children to better understand their country. It is my hope that this play, and future plays like it, will have a prominent role in rebuilding Cambodian society.

YOUK CHHANG

Director

Documentation Center of Cambodia

PROLOGUE

The paddy fields stretch beyond the horizon,
Where water glitters, palm trees dance,
Where egrets and herons flap after fish,
Water buffalo charge each other, grunting like giants.

In the air,
The birds dive out of the sun.
Dragonflies quickly fold their wings and fall,
And grasshoppers crouch in the grass.

Boys and girls fall into small clutches –
Some play reak and bikom,
Some sing in the trees,
Others sprawl in the shade.

When the sun streaks across the horizon,
The birds disperse and fly
In ordered flocks to their nests
And the herders lead their cattle home.

When darkness settles upon the plain,
Insects, geckoes, and frogs rock this kingdom.
A million stars drop everywhere,
And farmers fall asleep in peace

A SONG (Sokly)

Sath Bunrith – The Cambodian People's Lament

*The Cambodian people's lament
Is like a turtle dove
That is tossed in a storm.
Caught in the rain and thunder,
Left in the terrible cold,
Its eyes
Filled with sorrow.*

~ Sovanna ~
*So many stories.
We have to tell our stories.*

~ Sina ~
*We're telling our stories
out of a relentless urge.*

~ Sokly ~
*How did it happen
that Khmer killed Khmer?*

~ Theary ~
*You must try
to help us think this through.*



SCENE 1

Vutha ~

This is a story about divided people.

You are Mrs. Sophy.
You are 52 years old.
You want to hear the truth and nothing
but the truth.

You are Mrs. Thida.
You are 53 years old.
You don't want to talk, you don't want to hear,
you don't want to see.

You are Mr. Akrak.
You are 58 years old.
You can't handle the truth.

Vutha ~

What did you do during the Pol Pot period?

Sina/Akrak ~

I was a youth leader.
I educated youth to love the country.

Vutha ~

Did you give orders to arrest people?

Sina/Akrak ~

Yes, of course, we could not prevent it.
Even our parents and children were taken.
There was nothing we could do.

Vutha ~

You were an important person?

Sina/Akrak ~

No, not at all and I am telling you the truth. Orders
from higher up did not come to me directly because
I worked at a very low level. I am illiterate.
I was under their control.
I did as I was told.

Vutha ~

You knew about the mass killings?

Sina/Akrak ~

The killings were in the other village.

Theary/Sophy ~

You're a liar.

Sina/Akrak ~

No one was killed here.
I did not do anything.

Theary/Sophy ~

You're a liar.
You can't deny knowing about the killings,
everybody knew about the killings.

Vutha ~

'A dead elephant could never be covered
with a flat basket.'

Sokly/Thida ~

Stop it, don't talk with him, I don't want to talk
with them. I don't want to hear. I don't want to see.

Theary/Sophy ~

People were afraid of you then. They said that if you stared at a person, even for a moment, that person would disappear the next day.

Sina/Akrak ~

People just say those things.
There's no evidence.

Theary/Sophy ~

I want you to tell the truth. You were aware of the killings and you yourself were involved in them. Don't deny it.

Sina/Akrak ~

It happened everywhere, everyone was in the same situation. We were ordered by senior leaders. We did not argue because we were afraid to die.

Theary/Sophy ~

You were afraid of dying? Don't you think we were afraid too?

Sokly/Thida ~

What could we do? That's the turn the country took.

Theary/Sophy ~

Are you not haunted by the memories of all those thousands of deaths?

Sina/Akrak ~

No, they never plague my conscience.
I was tied to the Angka. Whether it was genocide or not. Who can say?

Theary/Sophy ~

Because of you people were killed.

Theary/Sophy ~

Stop fighting.
When we fight too much the murderous blood will return to this generation. Please, shut up. Let us dig a hole and forget about the past.

Theary/Sophy ~

Too much blood has been spilled and flowed like a river to forget or forgive them.

Sina/Akrak ~

It wasn't all for fun. I suffered too. When Angka was defeated an angry mob chased me into the jungle. But when I came back I was supported by villagers. They even provided me with food.
I was not shot, that means that I did not kill anyone. I'm still alive today. Only good Karma will let you live for so long.

Theary/Sophy ~

It's not your Karma that kept you alive, but the relatives of your victims who follow the teachings of Buddha.

Sina/Akrak ~

Listen, I have to go now.
It's time to eat.

Vutha ~

Stop!
Someone wants to talk to you.
It is Mr. Preal.
He is 50 years old.
He hesitates day and night:
revenge or no revenge.

Sovanna/Preal ~

Where is the body of my father?
You arrested him.
You killed him.
Where is his body?
I want to bury my father.

Sina/Thida ~

The killings were in the other village.

Sovanna/Preal ~

You lie.

How did it happen that *Khmer killed Khmer?*

Sina/Thida ~

You have no proof.

Sovanna/Preal ~

I saw you.

Sina/Thida ~

Sorry, I really have to go now.

Sovanna/Preal ~

No. You have to answer. You killed my father.
But you dare to not admit it.
When he came out of the jungle I only asked him, 'What happened to my father. Where is my father?'
He was afraid I would kill him.
He said he did not know my father. He lied.
I had a gun and he knew I would shoot him if he confessed. I really wanted to kill him then.
But my friends warned me against killing a man because of the consequences for my Karma.
That's why I did not kill him. But even today, all of this weighs heavily on my mind.
Perhaps if I had beaten him, then he would have told me the truth and I would have been able to bury my father. But I did not.
I don't know what to do.

I know that revenge ends with no revenge; it never stops. I know that we are forbidden from killing all living beings, from all killing, of all creatures on earth, not even the mosquito that bites us. But I am not a god and until my death I will remain with this doubt.

Sokly/Thida ~

Who is bad, who is good.
How bad is bad, how good is good?
What is the country we give to our children?

A SONG (Vutha)

Ou Oeur - The Keening of wives

*O, darling, my darling!
Now you are dead.
You're shot dead...Budho!
You've left me alone
in the middle of this island.
From today onward
I shall have no hope.*

*May you accept my apologies
for all the wrongs I've done you.
Please do forgive me
that I have to bury you here.
Goodbye, my darling-
may your consciousness
rise to heaven!*



SCENE 2

Vutha ~

This is a story about two women who were young,
so young when their lives were ruined.

You are Sina.

You are 43 years old.

You always miss your father.

Sina ~

It is the year 1976.

I am 10 years old.

My father has been taken to the hospital.

My handsome father, with his curly hair.

My strong father with his brown skin.

My father has oedema. That is the illness people
get when there is no food.

Known as 'the hunger illness'.

His body keeps swelling up and down like a balloon.

He cries out for help, "Help, help! My belly
aches so much!"

A young nurse comes in and shouts at him,

Sovanna/Nurse ~

What a terrible noise! I can't get any sleep!

Sina ~

Mom puts her hands together and begs

"Please help my husband. He is having severe
abdominal pain."

The nurse reaches her hand into her pocket, takes
out a handful of dark pills and leaves.

Mom gives the pills to Dad but it doesn't stop the pain.

My father groans and moans.

There comes the nurse again. She shouts at Dad,

Sovanna/Nurse ~

Why are you making so much noise? You wanna
die or what?

Sina ~

Dad screams. His eyes bulge.

Mom begs, "Please help my husband. His pain is
getting worse..."

The nurse approaches Dad with a large syringe.

She gives him an injection.

Dad is quiet, silent.

Mom hugs Dad, she cradles Dad.

The nurse flashes a torch at Mom,

Sovanna/Nurse ~

Hey, what are you doing? Can't you see your hus-
band is dead. You are holding a corpse.

Sina ~

Ma doesn't cry.

Ma doesn't talk.

I am ten years old and all empty inside. Ever since
that day.

Vutha ~

You are Mrs. Somphor.

You are 48 years old.

You carry the burden of shame.

I know I should forgive.

*But you killed my father and
you yelled at my mother.*

Sokly ~

Why are you not sitting with us?

Sovanna/Nurse ~

I am not sitting with you because I am ashamed.

Sokly ~

Have you listened to her story?

Sovanna/Nurse ~

Yes.

Sokly ~

What would you do if you met the nurse who
screamed at your mother?

Sina ~

I would run away.

I would be silent like my mother.

Sokly ~

What would you do if you met the little girl who
sat with her dying father and her silent mother?

Sovanna/Nurse ~

I would walk into my house and softly shut
the door...

Sokly ~

Here she is, the nurse.

Do you remember her?

I think she wants to tell us her story.

Sovanna/Nurse ~

It is the year 1976.

I am 15 years old.

There was an appeal for young girls to join the
revolution, to come and work as a nurse at the
Medical Centre.

I was so happy, this was my dream come true. Me,
taking care of sick people. Me, only 15 years old
becoming a real nurse.

I worked very hard.

I was so proud. They even allowed me to give
injections.

But soon I realized that I could do nothing. That
hospital simply did not function as it should have.
We were only there to let people die. We had nothing
to offer them. There was no medicine. Pills looked
like rabbit droppings. They did not help at all.

It was all wrong. I was confused and angry, so angry.
I wanted to hit the beds, I wanted to hit anything.

I hated the Khmer Rouge. I hated the patients who
just kept dying one by one by one.

I wanted to escape but that was impossible, I was
trapped in this terrible situation.

One day I dropped a syringe unintentionally.

This was a big mistake.

The head nurse accused me of being a traitor and
if this happened once more I would be re-educated.

From that day on I did as I was told. I became a
robot with rabbit pills and a syringe.

Finally we were liberated. I went back to my
hometown.

Soon after, I married. I did not become a nurse as
I had dreamt of when I was so small.

I have a quiet man and good children.

We live a quiet life.

Sokly ~

Well, can you say to this woman that you are
sorry for not helping her father?

Sovanna/Nurse ~

What could I do. We had nothing to offer them.
One cup of rice for 20 people. So they died.
Even with medicine they could not be saved.
What could I do? I was like a bird in a cage.

Sokly ~

Please, tell her you are sorry.

Sovanna/Nurse ~

I am very sorry but we had no medicines, I could
do nothing.

Sokly ~

Do you accept these excuses?

Sina ~

I know I should forgive. But you killed my father
and you yelled at my mother. It is so difficult I don't
know how to deal with this situation. I don't know
what I can say.

Vutha (sings) ~

*Come out of the circle of time and into the circle
of love*

Sovanna/Nurse ~

Something went wrong with my heart. My heart
was locked.

I have been ashamed all my life. I never stop being
ashamed.

This is the first time I told my story.

Thank you.

You have broken my silence.

I have hope, a little hope that I shall be forgiven.

Sina ~

I try to forgive. I long to forgive.

But we should never forget.

When we forget it is as if we lost parents, children,
brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles for nothing.

A SONG (everyone)

The memories.

Lots of memories.

*They keep coming back as the
spokes of a turning wheel.*

Always the same.

*As the spokes of a wheel.
The wheel turns in my head.*



SCENE 3

Vutha ~

This is a story about betrayal and eternal guilt.

You are Mr. Rithy.
You are 51 years old.
You lost the lust for life.

And you are Mr. Rithy's mother.
You are 76 years old.
You are the guardian of your son.

Sovanna/Mother ~

We live in sadness.
My son has problems with his head. He constantly
strokes his head as if it hurts.
My son is sick. Tied to his misery.
My son is not a bad man.
He never was one of them.
But that day way back, when they took him to pris-
on, that day destroyed our lives.

Theary ~

They put you in prison?

Sovanna/Mother ~

They tied him up.
They wanted names.

Sokly/Rithy ~

I did not give names.

Sovanna/Mother ~

They beat him.

Theary ~

You gave them names.

Sovanna/Mother ~

They tortured him.

Sokly/Rithy ~

I gave them 2 names.

Theary ~

You denounced a lot of people.

Sovanna/Mother ~

They burned his hands, his feet.

Theary ~

You sent many people to the white bone village.

Sokly/Rithy ~

They hung me upside down.
I gave them 5 names.

They nearly drowned me.
I gave them 8 names.
They nearly whipped me to death.

Sovanna/Mother ~

He was crying like a turtle placed on a fire.

Sokly/Rithy ~

I denounced whomever came to my mind.
10 names, 20 names. Names and names until
they were satisfied.

Theary ~

You gave them 30 names.
If each of them gave 30 or 40 names, and so on,
within a year or two, there would be no one left.

Sovanna/Mother ~

He did not want to do that.
Who killed whom? I did not know.

Sokly/Rithy ~

I think of the dead every day. I pray to the gods
that if I denounced them, their spirits will not
suffer the consequences.
Day after day it still torments my heart.
It haunts me every day why I am not dead myself.

Vutha ~

Mr. Rithy, if one of the dead came back to life,
how would you react?
What would you do?

Sokly/Rithy ~

That would make me extremely happy. I would
bow deep down and ask for forgiveness.

Sovanna/Mother ~

And ask the dead to lift the bad Karma.

A SONG (Vutha and Sokly)

Ou Oeur – Oath of Allegiance

*If I am a rake.
Let me not survive,
If I'm just a weight on the earth.
Let me drop dead,
Let me sink with the sun,
If I'm noncommittal
To the land of Kok Thlok.*

...if one of the dead came back to life,
how would you react? What would you do?





SCENE 4

Vutha ~

This is a story about a student who dreamed about a better world.

You are Sarun.
You are 52 years old.
You miss the love of a mother.

Theary/Sarun ~

I am Sarun.
When I was young, I was a good student here in the village school.
My parents were very proud of me. My father worked hard so I could go to University in Phnom Penh. He dreamed of me becoming a professor.
It was during the Lon Nol period, and the situation was bad. There was so much corruption and violence in the country.
We students, we were idealistic. We wanted a better society, a better world. We organized large demonstrations against the government and many of us were arrested.
In prison I was tortured. They beat me up and burned me with electric shocks.
But this only increased my anger, even towards Lon Nol.
When I was released I ran off into the woods and there I met the Khmer Rouge. They fought for a better society, for a free country. No corruption, food for everyone.
I really believed this.

So I wanted to join them.

I realized that I could not show that I had higher education. I worked hard to make my hands look rough and exposed my face to the sun so that I looked dark like a farmer.
I was willing to humble myself for the good cause. In the end I did everything they wanted. I lay underneath huts to spy on families, I arrested people, I did very cruel things. I could not think as a human being anymore. I became like a dog who looks up at his owner, wagging its tail, afraid to be beaten.

A SONG (Vutha)

Ou Oeur- The fall of Culture

*I'll be nowhere,
I'll have no night,
I'll have no more day anymore,
I'll be a man without identity.*

Theary/Sarun ~

After the revolution I went back to my home village.
Now I live alone and teach at my old primary school.

I heard that my father was killed while working in the rice field. My gentle father who dreamed of me becoming a professor.

They beat him to death because he was too weak to do the work.

Sometimes I am angry, sometimes I am sad.

It's all a confused mess in my head.

I cannot understand how a whole country could be cheated. How I could be cheated.

Yes, I blame the Khmer Rouge for misleading me, but my Karma is in my own hands so I can do nothing but blame myself.

I go to the market and I see my mother. She does not greet me. She lowers her head and turns away. I want to tell her that I need her.

Vutha ~

You are the mother of Sarun.

You are 75 years old.

You miss the love of a son.

Sovanna/Mother ~

I go to the market. I always go when my son will be there too.

But when he looks at me I cannot return his look and I walk away. I am ashamed of him.

My husband was beaten to death and I lost my son when he became one of the murderers.

I hear he is a good teacher who never beats the children, but always explains very patiently and then I am secretly proud of him.

When I go to the market I know that he wants me to forgive him, but this is so difficult.

Sina ~

The mother and the son stand still.

They waver just one moment too long.

And then the son finally approaches his mother.

He bows and says,

Theary/Sarun ~

Mother, will you please forgive me. I have done bad deeds and I am so very sorry. What can I do to be cleansed?

Sovanna/Mother ~

It will never be the same.

It will never be the same.

A SONG (Vutha)

Ou Oeur – The howling dead

Oh, my love!

You induce in me everlasting sorrows.

Henceforth my world is different.

Henceforth I will live in the trees.

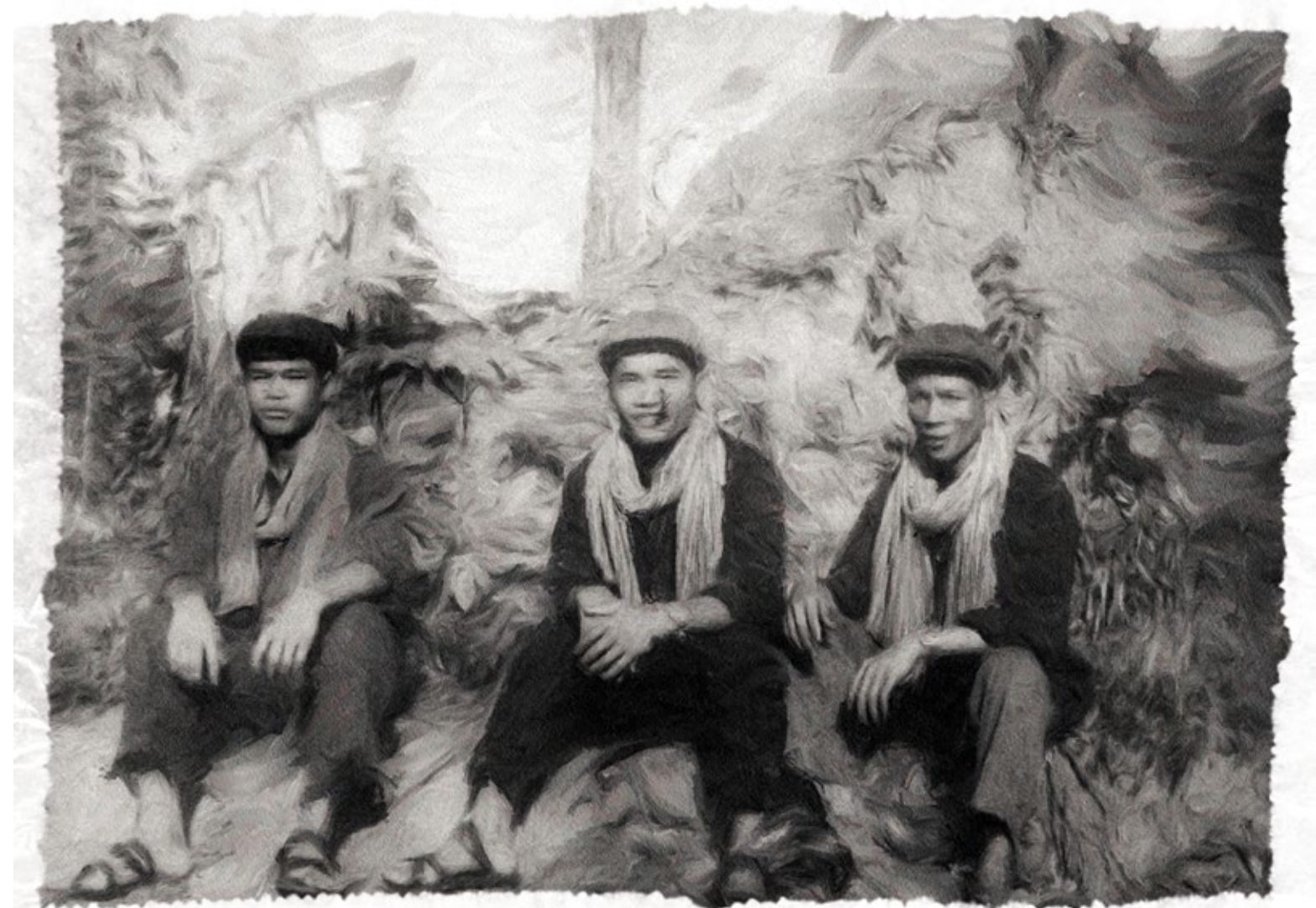
Listen to my howl through the winds,

Look at my sorrows through the grey skies,

Feel my tears through the rains,

O, my incomparable love!

I cannot understand
how a whole country could be cheated.





SCENE 5

Vutha ~

This is a story about a little girl who wanted to say sorry but could not.

You are Mrs. Sophorn.
You are 38 years old.

Sokly/Sophorn ~

It is the year 1976.
I am 7 years old.
We live in a small hut, Ma, my two brothers,
my baby sister and me.
One damp night I woke up. I was so hungry.
That day I found a fat juicy earthworm and I wanted
to eat it, but when it crawled in my mouth I spit
it out and vomited.
So now my stomach is growling.
I think of the jar in which Pa has hidden our very
last bit of rice "for when it is really needed" he said.
That was before he was taken away for re-education.
I think of the jar, I think of the tasty rice.
I am drawn toward the jar. Nothing can stop me.
I get up.
I tiptoe over the other sleeping bodies.
My stomach growls loudly. I stop. Have they heard
my stomach? No, they continue to sleep. My mother,
her arms around my baby sister with her face
swollen by hunger.
My fingers can feel the jar. I try not to breathe.
I slowly lift off the lid.
My hand reaches in and takes out a handful of

uncooked rice and quickly shoves it into my
hungry mouth. I soften the grains with saliva.
When it is soft enough, my teeth grind the rice
grains, they have a sweet taste that slides easily
down my throat. I want more, more.

Theary ~

Ma, look, someone was in the container last night!

Sokly/Sophorn ~

I glance at the container and I see that the lid lies
crooked.
I did not close it properly.
Ma says,

Sovanna/Mother ~

Maybe some rats got into it and stole some. Tonight
I will seal it very tight. This rice belongs to all of us.

Sokly/Sophorn ~

I want to scream, "It was me, Ma, I stole from the
family. Please forgive me."
But I say nothing.
I am bad and I can see that Ma knows it.
She told us once that children should be good.
That doing bad things will create bad Karma and
they will come back in the next life as snakes,
slugs or worms. But that their bad Karma can be
healed when they confess their bad deeds and
apologize.
I want to confess. I want to say I'm sorry.

But I say nothing. I am silent.
I want to confess. I want to be punished. I say nothing.
I hate Mom for not punishing me. I hate myself
for hating my mom.

♪ SONG (Sokly)

Lullaby "Mother's Virtue"

*This is the heart of the mother.
Whether near or far,
she always thinks of her child and
she never minds whether the
child is good or bad,
since whether good or bad the child
still belongs to her.
This is how mother and child are
linked to each other.*

Sokly/Sophorn ~

I am 39 years old now.
Baby Geak died from hunger in 1977 and soon after
Ma also. My older brother was taken to a youth
group, I never heard of him again.
I survived.
My life is quite good, I studied and I became a
doctor. On damp nights, the guilt always returns.
I know I was very young in those days, I know
the hunger changed people into animals who would
do anything to grab whatever might be edible.
But this guilt stays with me and I wish someone
would help me. I wish Ma was there again, so
I could confess my sin to her, which I dared not
confess when I was only seven years old.

♪ SONG (Vutha)

*May the Boddhitree be free to grow,
May the sugar palm be free from blame,
May the supernatural devils be banished
from Cambodia,
May peace be restored to the people
of this land.*

...bad Karma can be healed
when they confess their bad deeds and apologize.





SCENE 6

Vutha ~

This is a story about a girl who stopped talking.

You are neighbour Ri.
You are neighbour Ra.
You are neighbour Rine.

A SONG

(Vutha, Sovanna, Theary, Sokly)

**Ou Oeur – The angel performs
a heavenly dance**

*An immaculate carpet of grass;
Greenness stretches beyond the horizon.
An angel with hair the color of gold
And the complexion of polished ivory*

*Sways her body with the grasses.
As she dances a classical ballet
Her long hair floats in the air
In a pattern which dazzles my eyes.*

Vutha ~

You are Chea.
You are 47 years old.
You are invisible.

Sovanna/Neighbour ~

It is the year 1976.
Chea is a teenage girl.
She is thirteen years of age.

Chea is so beautiful.
Her supple body shows the beginning of womanhood.
She has curly hair.
Smooth skin, full lips, large round brown eyes
with long lashes.

Theary/Neighbour ~

The soldiers gaze at her wherever she goes.

Sovanna/Neighbour ~

Chea's parents guard her intensely.
They smear mud on her face to hide her beauty.
Her head is always covered with a scarf.

Theary/Neighbour ~

The Khmer Rouge soldiers gaze at her wherever
she goes.

Sovanna/Neighbour ~

One evening in March 1976 three soldiers come to the hut of Chea's family.

Theary/Neighbour ~

They say Angka needs Chea to pick corns.

Sovanna/Neighbour ~

Chea's mother wraps her arms around her daughter. She cries, "Take me; I can work faster and pick more corns for you than my daughter".

Chea's father pleads on his knees, "Take me; I am much stronger and will work for you the whole night".

Theary/Neighbour ~

The soldiers say, "Sorry, but Angka needs Chea. No bargaining. Useless to discuss with Angka. When he Angka tells you what to do, you do it".

Sovanna/Neighbour ~

The soldiers take Chea into the woods. She looks back until she can see her parents no more.

In the black night Chea's mother wails like a she-wolf that has lost her cub. Yes, true to their word, the soldiers returned Chea to her parents the next morning. She is not Chea anymore, beautiful smiling Chea. Her face is swollen, shoulders slumped, arms hanging like dead weights. Since then Chea does not speak anymore. Never.

Her body walks as if there is no more life in it.
Her head is always down.
Nobody comes near her.
Nobody talks to her.
People turn away when she passes by.

Sokly/Neighbour ~

I also turn away when she passes by and my heart is racing.
Sometimes Chea marches straight into the group of people waiting for food. As if daring them to say something to her. The gatherers shuffle their feet, cough into their hands and avoid eye contact.
As do I.

We make Chea invisible.

Now, thirty years later, Chea lives in my village.
A silent woman.
Nobody comes near her.
Nobody talks to her.
People turn away when she passes by.

Always when I see her my heart starts racing.
I feel guilty, guilty.
I say to myself, "I was just a little girl. I could not help it; I did what the elders did, just a little girl".
I say to myself, "I betrayed Chea. Left her all by herself in her loneliness, her horror.
I was a coward".

Today I see Chea. My heart races. I sweat.
I have to soothe my heart. I cannot bear the guilt anymore.

Will you hold my heart and
forgive me?

A SONG

(Vutha, Sovanna, Theary and Sokly)

**Ou Oeur – The angel performs a
heavenly dance**

*It's unbelievable! I shall
Treasure this scene in my mind forever.*

Slowly I take one step toward her. Two steps.
"Chea, will you forgive me, please.
Will you hold my heart and forgive me.
Please come with me so we can drink a cup of tea together."
Chea does not look, does not speak.
Maybe I am too late.

Tomorrow I will try again.



SCENE 7

Vutha ~

This is a story about a boy and a girl who once upon a time were dear friends.

You are Mr. Saroun.
You are 49 years old.
You don't trust anyone.

You are Mrs. Sophear.
You are also 49 years old.
You are a caring mother.

Sina/Sophear ~

Do I know you?

Theary/Saroun ~

No, no.

Sina/Sophear ~

You look familiar.

Theary/Saroun ~

No, I never met you.

Sina/Sophear ~

We were driving through Phnom Penh on the same truck and we were together for a month in the same unit. Remember now?

Theary/Saroun ~

No, I don't know you. What do you want?

Sina/Sophear ~

It is nice to see you again. You had a funny face and a big smile.

Theary/Saroun ~

Are you crazy?

Sina/Sophear ~

We sang and we danced. You were the best dancer.

Theary/Saroun ~

Really?

Sina/Sophear ~

Sure. Watch and listen and you will remember. We walk up to the front and stand facing the crowd.

We are wearing beautiful black shirts and pants, shiny and new, with bright red scarves around our waists.

We wear red ribbons across our foreheads with red fake flowers made of dyed straw.

SONG

(all actresses, Vutha yells)

The Angkasong

*We are children, we love Angka
with no limits.
Because of Angka we can survive and
have a prosperous and happy life.
Before the revolution we were so poor
and had such a hard time.
We lived like animals. Nobody cared
about us, we were abandoned.
We were just skin and bone, day and
night we lived in fear.
We had nothing to eat except for
what we begged from each other.
Now we are healthy and strong because
of the support of our great Angka.*

*We are the children of the Angka.
We are fearless.
We are the future.
We learn how to fight.
And this is the rifle.
The rifle is easy to shoot.
A child can shoot it.*

Theary/Saroun ~

You know something. I liked the rifle.

Sina/Sophear ~

I liked that boys and girls were treated the same.
I liked the singing and the dancing. I liked that
we were together like a family.

Theary/Saroun ~

Yes. They were great times.
We were going to make a better world.
Angka said, "You are the future. You are the children
of Angka. From now on Angka is your real and
only family.
Angka relies on you to make the revolution a success".
We mattered.
It was serious business.
They said, "Always be on guard.
There are many enemies.
The city dwellers with their soft hands, do not
trust them.
From now on they will do real work, honest work
to make our glorious country into one plentiful
rice field, giving food to everyone.
If they are lazy or sick they are useless and Angka
will have to get rid of them".
They said the wheel of history is turning. Anyone
who dares to stop the wheel will be destroyed.
It was serious business.
We were the wheel of history.

Sina/Sophear ~

You still believe all that?

Theary/Saroun ~

I did then, of course. I have never again felt as
important as then. Yes, sure, I did believe them.

Sina/Sophear ~

We did a lot of terrible things.

Theary/Saroun ~

But this was war, you remember. It was the revolution.
Obey or die. Who wants to die?

Sina/Sophear ~

Why are you so angry?

Theary/Saroun ~

I'm not angry. I just have a headache. This splitting
headache.

Nightmare

Vutha ~

*It is the year 1975.
You are a boy of 15 years.
You spot a little girl with some fruit. She goes
to put it in her mouth, but you, the boy of 15 years
beats the girl to death.
You scream, "All fruit belongs to Angka. You are
stealing from Angka. You are the enemy".*

Sina/Sophear ~

You look pale.
Do you want a drink?
Let's talk a bit.
How is your life now?
Are you married?
What work do you do?

Theary/Saroun ~

What do I do?
Nothing and everything. I sell books in the street.

Sina/Sophear ~

What kind of books?

Theary/Saroun ~

Books about those days.

Sina/Sophear ~

I am a widow and I have three children.
I sell drinks and pineapple.
We manage.
My children went to school. They can read. I cannot
read and now I am too old for that. Otherwise
I would have read your books.
Have you read them?

Theary/Saroun ~

Who wants to read them? They are just for
the tourists, they love all of that. If I sell one of
those books a day, I can have a meal. That's
what books are good for.
Anyway, why are you asking all these questions?

Sina/Sophear ~

I'm just curious.
Tell me, how did you lose your happy smile?
How come you are still alive?
Why don't you say anything?

Theary/Saroun ~

I have a headache. This splitting headache.

NIGHTMARE

Vutha ~

It is the year 1976.

Three young soldiers come to the hut of Chea.

You are one of them.

You are a boy of 16 years.

The three soldiers drag Chea into the woods.

Chea screams.

The three soldiers rape Chea. You are one of them.

Theary/Saroun ~

It was all for Angka. We would make a better world.

Sina/Sophear ~

Yes, that is what they said, but I did terrible things. I was frightened day and night, so I did terrible things to please them.

Theary/Saroun ~

What do you mean by terrible things?

We had to sacrifice ourselves.

I did as I was told and that was hard enough.

When I came back to my village I found out that my parents were killed by angry villagers.

And the neighbour hit my head with an axe because I was Khmer Rouge.

My younger brother is alive, but he doesn't want to see me. Why, what does he know, he was only 2 years old at that time.

Yes, maybe there were hard times, but today is hard as well.

We were all wasted.

Sina/Sophear ~

May I please tell you something? It is important for me to say this.

One day so much happened: It was 1977. I was 15 years old. I betrayed a woman because I overheard her when she was singing an ancient lullaby to her child. She was taken for re-education right away and never came back. That same afternoon our section had to destroy the Buddha statues in the temple.

That night I had this terrible dream.

I heard a voice call out to me,

A SONG (Sokly)

Don't forget about the bodiless witches.

At night when the witches go to sleep their

heads separate from their bodies.

The heads fly so fast with their intestines

dangling behind.

Their tongues lick blood and puss.

They eat flesh of dead bodies.

Sina/Sophear ~

When I woke up I knew that the dream meant that I had landed in a land of bad Karma.

But today I know that that terrible nightmare saved a tiny part of my soul.

Theary/Saroun ~

Please stop talking. I wish you would stop. I don't want to hear. I want nothing. I don't want my headaches anymore.

Sina/Sophear ~

No, now I cannot stop anymore.

I have to put one question to you and I want you to listen.

You know what the Buddha says: never join the fight, but don't hide from it.

That is why I go every year to Tuol Sleng so as not

to hide from the past, and tomorrow is that day. Before I go I always feel frightened as I do now. When I am there and I see all those faces, the little children, I think that I should be dead instead of them.

Then I feel miserable.

I ask forgiveness from their spirits and I make offerings.

And the next day I am sad.

But I do not have my terrible nightmare anymore.

Maybe you want to come with me tomorrow. Maybe it will bring an end to your headaches. Do you have the courage to come with me? I'll be here at 11 o'clock. Will you come?

Theary/Saroun ~

Maybe I'll go.

When I came back to my village
*I found out that my parents
were killed by angry villagers.*

And the neighbor hit my head with an
axe because I was Khmer Rouge.



SCENE 8

(A young actor (actress) sits during the performance in the public. He (or she) was born quite some time after the genocide. Immediately after the last words of Theary, "Maybe I'll go", he or she jumps on the stage and starts the new last scene which is a discussion between two generations.)

Phearith ~

Maybe, always Maybe?
Why hesitate!
Make a choice,
Are you going or not?
Stop this Maybe, Maybe!

Sovanna ~

You stop!
Get out!
Who are you?

Sokly ~

What are you doing here?
How dare you!

Theary ~

This is our stage;
This is our play.

Phearith ~

I am (name)
I am Khmer

I am young
I am a young Khmer.
I have been listening to your words and I have many questions.
I watched your play and I am confused
Why all the shame?
Shame of what or whom?
Why the fear?
Fear of what or for whom?
Why the endless guilt?
Why the silencing?
Why is it so gray like the sky which is about to rain?
Why is it so complex like searching for a needle in the ocean?

Sovanna ~

Shut up.
This is not your genocide.

Phearith ~

No, I won't shut up.
You are my parents (elders), so I am part of your

genocide and I need to know.
What happened?
I need to know.
Tell me.
This is urgent. I need to know.
What happened. Did everyone go insane?

Sina ~
You cannot know.
You were not born when we suffered this misery.

Phearith ~
That is true
But we live in the same country.
A country of 15 million people today, both
children of the victims and children of
Khmer Rouge cadres.
Yes, we breathe the same air.
We drink the same water.
I respect you and your past, but I don't want
to drown in your sad memories.
Genocide is our identity.

A SONG

*If the water in our pond is still
transparent,
Please don't try to make it muddy.
Do not litter it with trash
And do not bathe in its waters.*

Phearith ~
I need to know what makes you shut up and cry
without tears.
I want to learn, to know where I come from.

Sokly ~
You cannot understand what we went through.
Shut up.
You have no right to turn my life upside down
with your curiosity.
We are suffering from a past that was too horrible
to tell.
We suffered from monsters that ruined our lives.

Theary ~
And we don't know why.
What did we do wrong?
Are we bad by nature?
Are all the perpetrators bad by nature?
Like father like son?
Like mother like daughter?

Phearith ~
I want to tell you a story, a real one.
My story.
Please listen!
As a child we got new neighbors, they had a son
my age.
I thought, great, a new friend, and I wanted to go
and play with him.
Then my father gripped me by the neck and
screamed as I never heard him scream, "Don't you
ever play with the son of that family. Nor speak,
nor even look at him."
I asked why not?
He answered, "His father was one of the murderers."
He said, "Like father like son."

Bad blood makes bad blood.
Bad blood forever."
It sounded terrible, but I was too young to understand
and I dared not to ask.

But now I'm grown up.
My father died.
That's why I came to you for answers.
Tell me what happened.
Why the mistrust.
Why the hate.
Why?
Tell me, what did you do to be punished so badly?

Sina ~
It was our Karma. Maybe.

Phearith ~
The Karma of whom?

Sina ~
Our bad Karma, the destiny of Cambodia.
Maybe we deserved the suffering because of bad
Karma.

Phearith ~
We? Who is we?

Sokly ~
We, Cambodians.

Phearith ~
Do you mean that millions of Cambodians had bad
Karma at the same time?
All of them?
I don't believe you.
No way.

Sovanna ~
Tell me,
What do you want?
The country took that turn.
The genocide was just an arbitrary disaster.
Let us dig a hole and bury the past.
We cannot restore what we have lost or erase the
disaster created by the Khmer Rouge.
Let's forget about it.

Phearith ~
You mean this was all just like a whim of nature?
That means it could happen any day again?
No way!
It was not doomed to happen this genocide.

Sokly ~
He is right.
Nothing happens by chance.
That is what Buddha says.

Sina ~
Yes, Buddha says we are born with sins.
What counts is what we do with them.
Our previous acts lead to what we are in the present.
If we do not believe in acts and their results, for
our entire lives we will not live in peace.

Sovanna ~
Karma is fluid, we ourselves can make it blossom
or dry out.
No, this was not doomed.
The genocide was man-made.
This Pol Pot regime was man-made.
It was the war and poverty that made people hope
for a better future.

But Khmer Rouge made them vicious and commit crimes.
We must learn from that; we must understand how a just society functions.
We have to undo bad Karma by understanding,

Theary ~
Education is the solution.

Phearith ~
These perpetrators went to University in Paris.
So what?

Theary ~
I mean educating young people in school, and also educating all people to give up bad deeds and practice good deeds.
That is what I also mean with education: we have to learn from history.
This cycle can and must be broken.
That's why we had the Tribunal.

Phearith ~
What did the Tribunal bring?
It lasted so many years and took so much money.
There were so many fights in the court about legal details.
Nonsense.

Sovanna ~
It is better to have fights in the courts than in the villages.
For all.

Phearith ~
The senior leaders never admitted they performed criminal acts.

Sokly ~
But they stood trial, so they are held accountable.

Phearith ~
What does accountable mean?
Their crimes are so enormous; they cannot appeal for forgiveness.

Sokly ~
Still it is good that it happened. Whatever the outcome is, at least things are out in the open
For all.

Phearith ~
Do you believe that if you do bad things you will be punished?

Sokly ~
Yes, I believe that.

Phearith ~
So, the Khmer Rouge did terrible things and they may not be punished?
They will just die quietly in their comfortable prison.
My father hated them.
He said they should be chopped with a knife into a million pieces until they die.

Theary ~
No way, death penalty is abolished!
We should not become criminals ourselves.

Phearith ~
He said they are monsters, they can never be forgiven!

Theary ~
If we say that monsters are beyond forgiving, we give them a power they should never have.
We give them power to condemn their victims to live forever with the unhealed pain.
We give the monsters the last word...

Phearith ~
He really hated them!

Sovanna ~
He was locked up in the prison cell of his bitter memories.
Hate needs healing - it is a malignancy, it is dangerous and deadly if allowed to run its course.

Sina ~
I think the Khmer Rouge leaders were also locked up in the prison cell of their memories. They went insane with their horrible memories. And they died with their horrible memories.

♪ SONG

*Hate and revenge never get what
it wants; it never evens the score.
Hate is a foul breath that destroys the hater.
Hate of the other means hate for yourself.
If we all live by 'an eye for an eye' the
whole world will be blind.
Hate needs healing.*

Phearith ~
Ok, but if you cannot hate, you must at least be angry.

Sina ~
Yes of course.
Anger is normal.
Anger is a sign that we are alive and well.
Healthy anger drives us to do something to change what makes us angry.
So anger pushes you with hope toward a better future.
Anger and forgiveness can live together in the same heart.

Phearith ~
What do you say? Forgiveness?
Do you mean we have to forgive and let go?
How is that possible?

Sovanna ~
Forgiving is the only way we have to a better fairness in our unfair world.
Forgiveness is the strength of the heart.
It is love's unexpected revolution against unfair pain.

(continue with alternating singing and speaking)
Forgiving turns off the video tape of our hurt memory;
Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirits
Forgiving sets you free.
Forgiving is not forgetting.
Forgiving does not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory.

Transform the *River of Blood*
into a River of Reconciliation. A River of Responsibility.

When I forgive my enemy, I don't have to become
friends with him or her
Endless hate makes a victim of the hater and
very often of his whole family
You don't have to be enslaved by the past.

Phearith ~

Thank you. I am relieved
I am very happy that I came to you and that you
answered my questions.
I can confess to you now that I betrayed my father
and secretly played with my neighbour friend.
We had lots of fun and it made me happy.
Until today he is still my best mate.
My father never found out.
Now my father is dead.
Thank you.
You helped me with your words.
Maybe I was not a good son, but now I do not regret
what I secretly did.
Now I forgive myself for not having told my father.
He was caught up in his pain
What could I do. I could not heal his grief, his
bitterness, because he could not share his experiences
with me.
He was trapped in his pain and his past.
But I have to make a life of myself.

A SONG (All)

*We have lamented.
Licked our wounds.
Now: Let's walk up to the future.*



EPilogue

Vutha ~

This is the story of Breaking the Silence.

A SONG (Vutha)

*Transform the River of Blood
into a River of Reconciliation. A River of
Responsibility.*

*Transform the River of Blood
into a River of Reconciliation. A River of
Responsibility.*

Sokly ~

You have witnessed a story of war, but it is also
a story of love.

Sovanna ~

After Pol Pot we thought it was hate that made us
strong, hate and anger.

Theary ~

But now we realize that without love our minds
would have been destroyed and our souls would
not have survived.

Sina ~

The love of a parent, the love of a brother, the
love of a sister, the love of a grandmother, the love
of a grandfather, the love of a neighbour,

Sokly ~

and even the love of our enemies.

A SONG (Vutha)

**Transform the River of Blood
into a River of Reconciliation. A River of
Responsibility.**

Speak, speak, speak.

All (while walking into the audience, distributing rice balls):

*The Suffering of Cambodia has been deep.
From this suffering comes Great Compassion.
Great Compassion makes a Peaceful Heart.
A peaceful heart makes a Peaceful Person.
A peaceful person makes a Peaceful Family.
A peaceful family makes a Peaceful Community.
A peaceful community makes a Peaceful Nation.
A peaceful nation makes a Peaceful World.
May all beings live in Happiness and Peace.*

HISTORY OF THE PLAY

(2008-2018)



This play, *Breaking the Silence*, seeks to create and tour a new version of the successful play *Breaking the Silence* a play based on testimony from Khmer Rouge survivors, designed to contribute to the ongoing dialogue resulting from the effects of the genocide as transmitted among multiple generations and between ex Khmer Rouge supporters and their victims.. Since the conception of the play, the disappointing outcomes of the tribunal have affected people's belief and trust in their country's justice system. The process of reconciliation demands an answer to questions about Karma and accountability. *Breaking the Silence* contains all the elements to become an extended tool to confront with artistic integrity this crucial final phase of the tribunals. Writer and director Annemarie Prins is committed to rewriting some scenes and adding a new one, confronting the destabilizing effects of a failing justice system.

PHASE ONE

The project's development began in January 2008, when writer and playwright Annemarie Prins and Nan van Houte conducted research on the process of reconciliation in Cambodia at the invitation of Amrita Performing Arts. The staff of Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) helped to coordinate interviews with victims and perpetrators, gave access to testimonials, and organized viewings of historical footage and movies.

The play brings to life the survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime, both victims and former cadre, told in seven stories. Seven daily life situations reveal the heartache and strength of dealing with the experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime. The characters express feelings of guilt, fear, sadness, confusion, and even hope as they attempt to confront and reconcile with their troubled past.

Breaking the Silence premiered in Phnom Penh at the National Exhibition Center on February 21, 2009, the same week as the official start of the trials. Immediately following the premiere, the work embarked on its first national tour through Cambodia's southern provinces.

Our goal was for Cambodians of all ages to benefit from the work by confronting issues related to their recent tragic history in a safe, creative, and nurturing environment. They were given the opportunity to voice their own experiences through pre- and post-performance outreach programs facilitated by DC-Cam, which also sought to help them seek the means for completing the process of reconciliation and healing and the tools to move forward.

In these and other ways, this first provincial tour was a great success. The work reached approximately 7,000 Cambodians in a wide variety of settings.

PHASE TWO

Breaking the Silence and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal

In response to the positive reactions, additional provincial tours in Kampot and Takeo were planned for February 2010. Again thousands of people attended the performances. Many of them contributed to the after talks, speaking about their sufferings or even their wrong choices or bad deeds during the Pol Pot regime, while the younger generation posed questions.

That period coincided with the start of Case 002, the second trial of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal involving the four most senior Khmer Rouge seniors leaders still alive. Given the significance of Case 002, realizing that there was a need to reach more of the dispersed Cambodian population (and those in the diaspora), DC-Cam asked Annemarie Prins to write and record a radio version of the play. Daily radio broadcasts of *Breaking the Silence* were launched in April 2010 and continue today.

Breaking the Silence both benefited from and contributed to the widely sensed necessity to end the silence, while at the same time served as a vehicle itself for triggering dialogue as a start to reconciliation. Even though the tribunal was not dealt with in the play itself, the pre- and post- performance programs involved discussions based on the hoped for effects of the costly trial, including its function in restoring faith in a legal system and the sense of justice. Five Khmer Rouge leaders were brought to trial, so it felt also fair to encourage the villagers to forgive those who had been far less responsible.

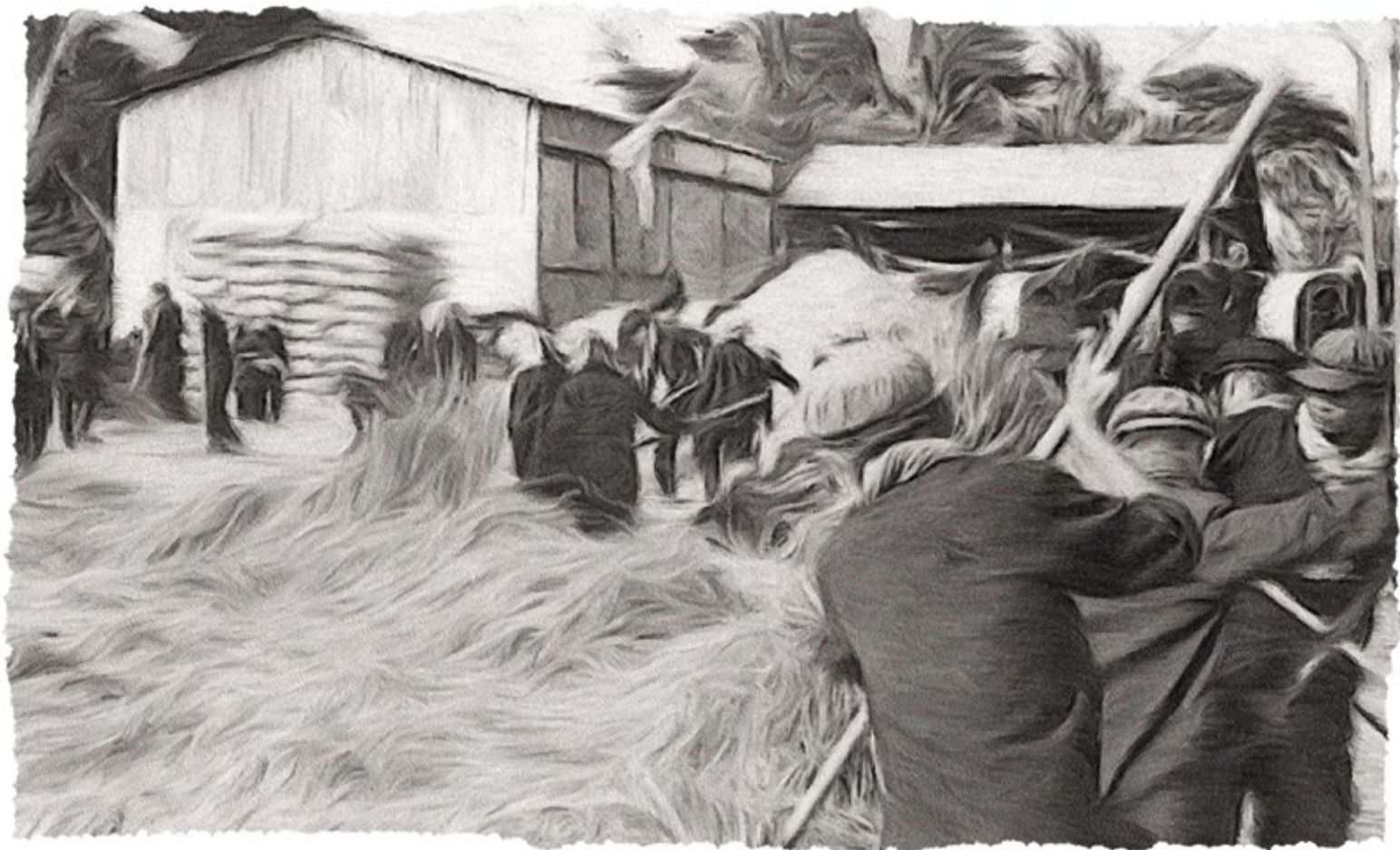
Though *Breaking the Silence* is not to be read as an overt plea for forgiveness, it puts the deeds of the wrongdoers in context and shows how and why very young boys and girls initially chose to support Khmer Rouge only to soon discover that there was no way back. At the same time, the play in diverse ways refers to the teachings of Buddha. As we proposed this new phase in July 2012, we had to admit that the tribunal would most probably end in some level of disillusionment, as many former Khmer Rouge leaders are too old or ill to stand trial.

It will be hard to overcome the feeling of injustice many Cambodians feel at the moment and balance it with their belief in Karma. Can we trust that those responsible for the death of 2 million will suffer the consequences of their actions in their next lives? What does the genocide and its aftermath tell about their own Karma? Can we forgive those who have done atrocious things yet do not plead guilty before they die? Can we forgive bad Karma? After the performance in Tean commune in Kandal Province, an elderly lay priest, one of the interviewees during the research trip, took the microphone and delivered a moving speech ending with an open question towards his community: do we have to forgive Pol Pot?

PHASE THREE: THE FINAL STAGE

The Khmer Rouge Tribunal has failed to instill a belief in justice. To the contrary, in many ways it has contributed to the skepticism. New questions have been raised that must be dealt with in order to proceed with reconciliation and to start rebuilding a broken society. Cambodians may have to decide whether it is beneficial for their country, for themselves, and for their well-being to forgive those perpetrators who will never confess, ask for forgiveness, or be convicted. The author is eager to take up the challenge to make a new version of *Breaking the Silence* that deals more explicitly with the questions of Karma and the Khmer Rouge tribunal.

This project, like many DC-Cam projects, serves as an informal truth and reconciliation program in Cambodia. By revising the play to directly deal with questions emerging in the wake of the tribunal, including the key issue of karma, we seek to help large audiences throughout Cambodia grapple with the difficult questions now being raised by the tribunal's shortcomings and to consider ways in which the Khmer Rouge Tribunal might still contribute to the process of healing and reconciliation in Cambodia.



BREAKING THE SILENCE

SCHEDULE FOR 2019 IN COLLABORATION WITH AMRITA PERFORMING ARTS

The theatrical performance of *Breaking the Silence* will be conducted in five locations:

PHNOM PENH
JAN 10-11, 2019

TAKEO PROVINCE
FEB 11-14, 2019

KAMPONG CHAM PROVINCE
MAR 4-7, 2019

PREY VENG PROVINCE
MAY 1-4, 2019

BATTAMBANG PROVINCE
MAY 21-24, 2019

For more information about the 2019 schedule, please contact:

Min Sanas and/or Seang Chenda

Researcher/Coordinator

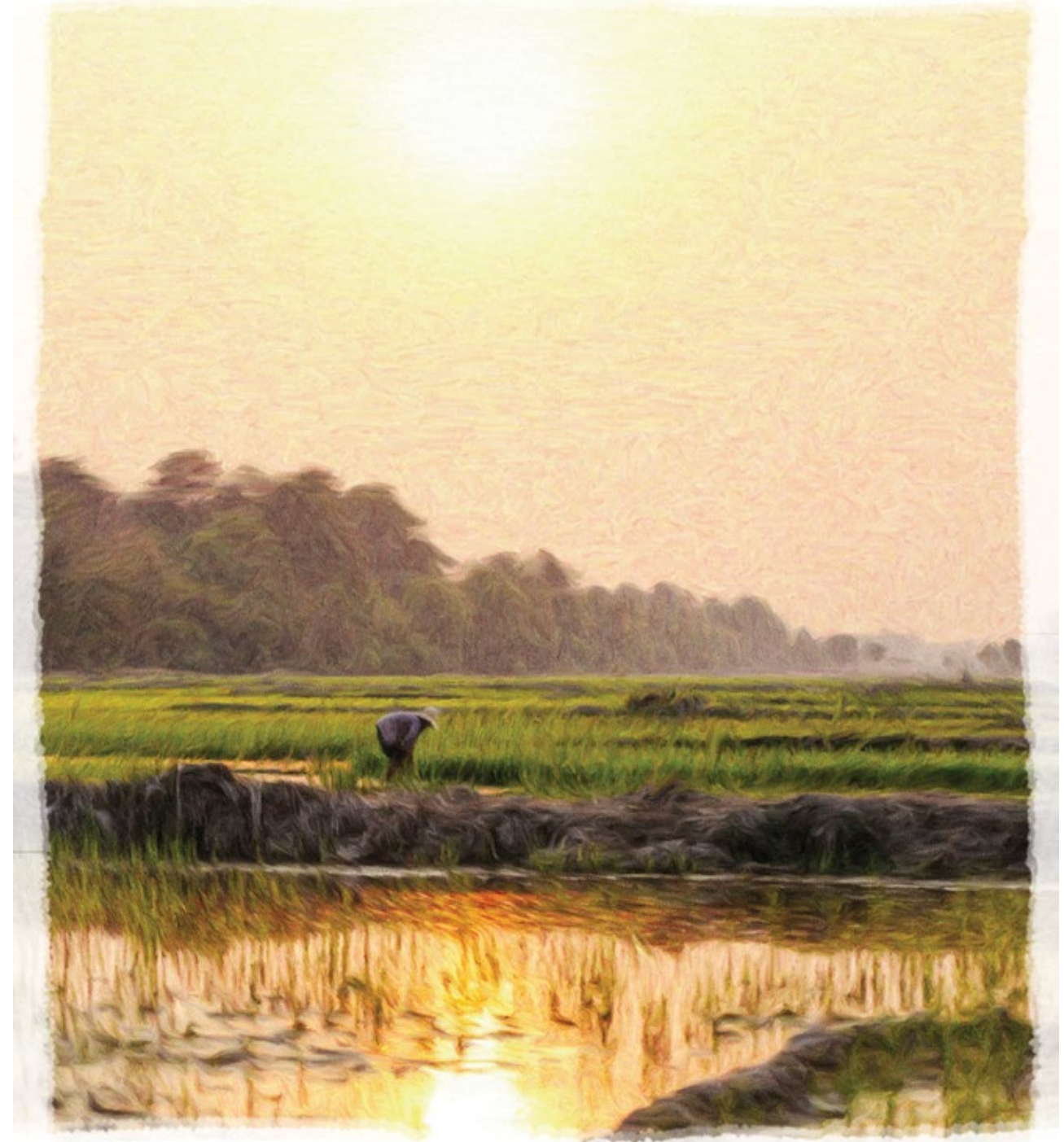
Genocide Research & Education in Cambodia/

Sleuk Rith Contemporary Art Gallery

t: +855 (0)10 848 444 or +855 (0)12 663 611

e: truthsanas@dccam.org or truthchenda.s@dccam.org







មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) was founded and constituted in 1995 after the U.S. Congress passed the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act in April 1994, which was signed into law by President Clinton. The Royal Government of Cambodia also formally supported DC-Cam. DC-Cam has received numerous accolades and awards for its work in support of memory and justice for victims of the Cambodian genocide. In 2017 alone, DC-Cam was the honored recipients of the Judith Lee Stronach Human Rights Award from the Center for Justice and Accountability, and his Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni made Youk Chhang a Commander of the Royal Order of Cambodia in recognition of Chhang's distinguished services to the Kingdom of Cambodia. In 2018, DC-Cam also was a winner of the Ramon Magsaysay Awards, which is regarded as 'Asia's Nobel' prize, for preserving historical memory for healing and justice.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

A NEW CAMBODIAN PLAY
SCRIPT BY ANNEMARIE PRINS 

Art is not only an area for entertainment and inspiration, but also a field for exploring the depths of human sadness, horror, and evil. In both contexts, art can serve as an important field for education. Breaking the Silence is a work of art that attempts to integrate elements of the sublime in theatrical dance within the context of a story about genocide and horror. Because of its educational value, Documentation Center of Cambodia in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport have included elements of the play within its curriculum and its teachers' guidebook for the history of Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1979. Art, in all forms, is not only an excellent way of remembering the past, but also incorporating this memory in different ways for the classroom and public. Funded by Swedish International Development Agency (Sida); supported by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

PUBLISHED BY DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA, 2018.

