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Negotiating violence and non-violence in Cambodian marriages

Rebecca Surtees

Domestic violence is a pressing issue in Cambodia. Combating it requires an understanding of the social meanings behind it. As such, policy makers and planners need to start from a careful picture of the cultural terrain upon which this violence is played out. This will equip them to recognise potential points of entry for interventions. This article begins by exploring the relationship between social structures, culture and domestic violence in Cambodia. It then turns to the work of two Cambodian NGOs – Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC) and Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV). Their work is founded on both the cultural terrain of Cambodia, and international human rights standards.

Domestic violence has been increasingly recognised as both a social problem and an issue of human rights in recent decades. In Cambodia, development discourse and programmes have increasingly acknowledged the existence and widespread impact of domestic violence in both advocacy and applied interventions. Coming to terms with, and addressing, this violence is urgent. This in turn necessitates a finely tuned understanding of the interplay of social structures, culture and domestic violence. By locating the elements that promote and perpetrate domestic violence, we are better able to understand why and how this violence occurs, as well as how it can be targeted through interventions. In considering the work of two Cambodian NGOs – Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC) and Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV) – we can identify key elements of successful domestic violence interventions in Cambodia. The success of these approaches is in their skill at acknowledging

and accommodating the cultural terrain upon which domestic violence is played out, while simultaneously challenging and re-conceptualising the degree to which domestic violence is considered acceptable and permissible.

Qualitative data indicates that between 15–25 per cent of Cambodian women are beaten by their husbands (WGWRC 1994), and 73.9 per cent of women in a national household survey were aware of at least one family which suffers domestic violence (Nelson and Zimmerman 1996). Research also indicates that domestic violence is an issue in families across the socio-economic spectrum; education, age and income have no correlative effect on the use of violence by intimate partners (*ibid.*). As one Cambodian woman observed to me, 'It happens a lot, to my friends, to my family... Many women in Cambodia are hurt by husbands' (interview, July 1998).

Not only is the violence widespread: it is also severe. Over half of abused women in the national household study sustained

injuries; more than 50 per cent of women were struck with an object, and 9.1 per cent of injured women had been tied up and hit. Equally disturbingly, 36.4 per cent of women reported having been threatened with a knife or gun, and 5.5 per cent of women reported being stabbed or shot at by their abusive spouse (Nelson and Zimmerman 1996). One woman told of being attacked by her husband with an axe. Another woman spoke of being beaten with whatever was at hand, explaining, 'he beats me with the lock and chain from his *cyclo*, he whips me with a plastic rope, he slaps my face, he pushes me down and kicks me. He punches me with all his might. He beats me with a bamboo rod... He grabs whatever is near him' (Zimmerman 1994, 81).

But uncovering a glaring social problem is one thing. Accounting for it and addressing it in appropriate ways is another. To understand and redress domestic violence, it is critical that we analyse and understand the cultural terrain upon which this violence occurs. Our starting point must necessarily be a contextual understanding of marriage in Cambodian society, and the meanings this holds for Cambodian women themselves. As critical is an understanding of social attitudes to domestic violence and how these contribute to and mitigate domestic violence. As Kleinman argues, 'everyday practices [are] the appropriate site to understand how larger orders of social force come together with micro-contexts of local power, to shape human problems in ways that are resistant to the standard approaches of policies and interventions programs' (2000, 227).

Women as wives and mothers – status within Cambodian marriages

Cambodian society is centred around the family and household, in which 'the bonds between husband and wife, siblings, and especially parents and children, are the

strongest and most enduring relations found in village social organisation' (Ebihara 1974). While the conflict and turmoil of recent years have done much to disrupt social structures, this observation remains salient.

Women's role within this template is primarily as wife and mother; marriage and parenthood are important signifiers of status within Cambodian society (Ledgerwood 1990). Women are tasked with the care of the children, responsibility for the household and household economy, and ultimately with ensuring the success of their husbands. Buddhism – to which 95 per cent of the population adheres – also privileges the status of wife and mother, in that the growth and survival of the Buddhist monastic order (*sangha*) is dependent on women's donations of sons, food and money (Keyes 1984; Ledgerwood 1990).

In Cambodia, as is the case throughout Southeast Asia, women gain an important public value through domesticity. They gain prestige as mothers, and official status as elders, worthy of respect. Women are able to exploit this status in their economic ventures and for financial gain (Wazir 1995). As Wazir argues, 'motherhood diffuses boundaries between the public and domestic spheres and gives women the legitimacy to explore other forms of personal or social activity outside the family' (1995, 19).

Compelling evidence abounds of the privilege attached to the roles of wife and mother. For example, Ledgerwood (1990) recounts instances of Cambodian women who no longer lived with their abusive husbands, but nevertheless displayed photos of their husbands in their homes, in places of respect. Further evidence is found in the increased prevalence of polygamy in Cambodian society, a practice which was not traditionally widespread. The dearth of men caused by the war (1970–1975) and the ensuing civil turbulence, which endured until 1998, forced many women to choose between being a second wife or remaining unmarried. While the status of second wife is

less valued, given the primacy of family and women's role within it in the Cambodian social order, some researchers argue that many women prefer to be second and third wives, rather than to remain unmarried (Ledgerwood 1996; Baldwin et al. 2000).

Social acceptance of domestic violence

Social acceptance of domestic violence is also a factor in its perniciousness. In Cambodia, many men feel it is their right to beat their wives for 'legitimate' reasons, which generally centre on a wife's failure to fulfil her familial responsibilities. Beating is a legitimate punishment for preparing unappetising food, being sexually unreceptive, or ineffective child-rearing techniques. In situations of domestic violence, the question is thus always what the woman has done to deserve it (Ledgerwood 1990).

Acceptance of domestic abuse is reinforced in literary texts and proverbs. For example, the *chhap srey* (the woman's code)¹ advises women to: 'Follow the command of the husband like a slave; dread your husband's heart for fear of otherwise being insulted or beaten; cook well and never dare to eat until your husband returns home; suppress your emotions to avoid the risk of having your husband insult you; even if your husband has a terrible temper, you must never dare to reply' (quoted in Zimmerman 1994, 26; Pou 1988).

Social acceptance also leads in some cases to institutional acceptance. One research study found that 48 per cent of police surveyed did not consider domestic violence a crime, and only 17 per cent of police officers who witnessed a man whipping his wife would arrest the man (WRC no date). Even in the NGO community, increasingly oriented towards human rights, women and men workers betray varying degrees of acceptance of this violence. For example, one Cambodian female human rights worker strongly

disagreed with her agency's interference in an instance of domestic violence, arguing that the woman might have done something to merit the assault (interview, May 1998).

However, while domestic violence is socially accepted, it is important to emphasise that it is not encouraged. There are social mechanisms to discourage violence. For example, there is a view that, by resorting to physical violence, one lowers oneself in the eyes of the community (Ledgerwood 1990; McLellan 1996). But this needs to be read in context. If a man beats his wife for no reason, shame might play a role. However, if he beats her for socially acceptable reasons (i.e. lax household responsibilities, infidelity), shame is not likely to be an issue (Ledgerwood 1990). Family intervention may also discourage domestic violence, with research indicating that 'more than twice as many women whose parents are dead are abused as women who live with their parents' (Nelson and Zimmerman 1996, 29). However, while families may intervene to stop the violence, they may also subsequently encourage women to return to their husbands. As one mother advised her abused daughter, 'Please go back home. Don't be afraid of your husband, he won't beat you until you are dead. At most he will just hit you until you are unconscious. If he beats you to death, I will bury your bones' (Zimmerman 1994, 26).

Another factor which makes domestic violence so pernicious in Cambodia is that it is seen as a private, family issue rather than as a public and social problem. However, to read and understand domestic violence as a public issue means that it appears in its true light, as one of many manifestations of social violence, rather than as a form of violence which is outside the domain of public awareness and significance. To promote this understanding of domestic violence is neither a simple nor an insignificant undertaking. Indeed, one of the major obstacles in combating domestic violence everywhere in the world is that it is commonly

conceptualised as a private issue rather than a public concern. This is dangerous for a number of reasons. First, it suggests domestic violence can be understood in isolation, outside of the social and political context in which it is perpetrated. As Marcus argues, 'all too often, it is distinguished from other forms of punishable violence in a society; this distinction confines it to the category of "discipline", or response to "provocation"; it is minimised or denied, or viewed as individual and aberrant, rather than a culturally justified and endorsed systemic practice designed to silence and to coerce a clearly identifiable population' (1994, 17). It permits a focus on the individual as a sufferer of violence, and an ignorance of the fact that such violence is systemic (Surtees 2000).

Second, seeing domestic violence as a private affair permits society to ignore the specific, gendered nature of domestic violence. Women suffer domestic violence because they are women, and they suffer it at the hands of their intimate partners. The punishment (or lack thereof) for perpetrators of domestic violence further supports this assertion. As one aid worker in Cambodia explained to me, 'When a man is killed by a woman, the woman will go to jail. When a man kills a man, the man will go to jail. When a man kills a woman, the husband pays off the family, or nothing at all happens. It is the difference between women and men' (interview, June 1998).² Of course, domestic violence is not simply an issue of sanctioning men's violence against women. Were a man to beat or kill his neighbour's wife, there would be repercussions. Domestic violence is violence within marriage and the family, which has everything to do with the sexual nature of the relationship between (abusing) man and (abused) woman. Sexual relations, sanctioned as taking place within marriage, and hence the private domain, introduce a different set of social dynamics and allowances in terms of violence (Surtees 2000).

Third, seeing domestic violence as 'private' implies that the state has no duty or ability to intervene. Yet the dichotomy of public/private in the contemporary state is an overstatement. There are numerous examples of the selective intrusion of the state into the private sphere, including taxation, social security, immigration laws and marriage and family law, established religion and military service (Carrillo 1992). As Marcus has put it, 'family and state are not unrelated institutions' (1994, 26) and it is disingenuous to suggest that family issues are beyond the state's control (Surtees 2000).

If domestic violence is seen as an issue of public concern, it can be understood in terms of what it seeks to achieve and promote, which moves the focus beyond the act itself or the context in which it occurs. If we accept that violence in general is 'a strategy for asserting control and domination and creating terror', we must accept that domestic violence seeks the same objectives (Marcus 1994, 26). The fact that it is perpetrated within an intimate personal relationship does not modify, or in any way change, the objective of the violence.³ It cannot be understood as a 'lovers' quarrel' or trivialised as a 'spat'. Further, women's experiences as victims of domestic violence must be reconsidered. While victims of 'public' violence elicit social sympathy and support, abused women are often dismissed as provoking the assault, or because it is judged by outsiders to be 'none of our business'. As a result, abused women and their experiences are 'disconnected from the social, cultural, economic and political context of domination and subordination' (Marcus 1994, 33).

From understanding to intervention

The above discussion has sketched out the social terrain upon which domestic violence is played out. Understanding this is critical in the designing of policy interventions

which fit the Cambodian social context. As Kleinman observes, 'the problem may be global, but the intervention needs to be oriented to a local world' (2000, 235). Focus must be placed 'on the interpersonal space of suffering, the local, ethnographic context of action. This requires not only engagement with what is at stake for participants in those local worlds, but bringing those local participants (not merely national experts) into the process of developing and assessing programs' (Kleinman and Kleinman 1996, 18). This means that concern for human rights must always be central, but development programmes must also accommodate local cultures, to ensure that these facilitate and change, rather than form an obstacle to it (Hobart 1993).

Thus, anti-violence interventions which are feasible elsewhere may be inappropriate in Cambodia. Take, for example, the 'solution' of suggesting that a woman divorces an abusive husband. Even in situations of domestic violence, Cambodian women are very reluctant to leave their marriages. Divorce deprives women of their privileged status as wife, closes many access routes to social power, and decreases women's status (Ledgerwood 1996). As CWCC director Ung Chantoul commented to me, 'abused women have an option here at the shelter to a certain extent... we can help them get a job, we can help them with counselling...but then the women are often saying "it is hard to be a widow". We must think of what it is like to live in Cambodia without a husband' (interview, June 1998). Divorced women suffer social discrimination (Ovesen et al. 1996; Zimmerman 1994) and 'censure from the community acted as an extremely strong deterrent to divorce, particularly for women... a woman is marked for life, as a disgrace to her family, as an unfit marriage partner, as "used goods"' (Ledgerwood 1990, 181). As former PADV director Sar Samen has noted, 'in Cambodia, they believe that divorce is not good for women, because it hurts the future

of the children, and it's hard for the woman to live without a husband. People look down on her' (interview, May 1998).

In addition to social stigma, there are real economic hardships for female-headed households, including labour shortages and the issue of land ownership (Baldwin et al. 2000). For example, in one study, all of the abused women were dissatisfied with their divorce settlement, as husbands were awarded property that the women had purchased themselves, or owned prior to marriage (Zimmerman 1994).

Further, leaving the relationship does not always remove the risk of violence. Abused women risk murder and 'separation assault' – that is, the spouse continues to hurt his wife after separation (Mahoney 1994; Teays 1998). Zimmerman documented 'a great deal of circumstantial evidence of spousal murder. We learned of at least ten women who died as a direct result of beatings' (1994, 78). This was vividly illustrated recently, in the case of one woman who was nearly beaten to death by her estranged husband after she refused to have sexual relations with him (*Phnom Penh Post* 2002). For these reasons, divorce is hardly a panacea in Cambodia.

With this in mind, we can identify key points of entry, and formulate interventions by looking at the work of Cambodian NGOs on domestic violence. While the terrain is a difficult one to negotiate, it is not impossible. Two Cambodian NGOs – the Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC) and the Project against Domestic Violence (PADV) – have proven successful in formulating appropriate interventions in domestic violence in Cambodia. What is most compelling about the approaches of CWCC and PADV is how their interventions mesh with social norms, while simultaneously challenging the permissibility of domestic violence. For example, CWCC attempts to reconcile marriages where possible, while forcing an acknowledgement of women's rights, through the use of marriage

contracts. Similarly, PADV's awareness-raising efforts confront the understanding of domestic violence as a private, family issue, outside of the scope of human rights and public intervention. These NGO initiatives should be analysed, acclaimed, and expanded.

Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC)

The Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre was established in 1997, in response to the overwhelming rate of violence perpetrated against women, and the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of this violence.⁴ The organisation is founded on concern for domestic violence as a violation of women's human rights, and a parallel concern to ensure abused women can make their own choices. CWCC sees its role as facilitating domestic violence survivors in making choices that meet with their needs and interests. A central choice is whether or not to leave their abusive marriage.

This choice is most frequently conceptualised as that between 'victim' (those staying in the relationship) or 'agent' (those leaving the relationship). The situation, however, is significantly more complex, particularly where social prestige is associated with marital and parental status. Leaving the relationship is not the only means by which women can express choice and agency. Women who stay in their relationships exert agency, and negotiate in ways that are camouflaged if their choice is seen simply as 'staying'. For example, in seeking to change the relationship, getting advice from friends, finding temporary shelter, having someone intervene, or setting conditions for their return, women are acting out their resistance to domestic violence within the framework of 'staying' (Surtees 2000). As Mahoney argues, 'Emphasising exit defines the discussion of violence in ways that ignore the woman's life experience and the personal and societal context of power, focusing instead on whether her responsive actions conform to societal

expectations. The idea that women should leave – and that a woman acting in her own interest will always leave – is shaped by this atomistic view of agency' (1994, 74).

There is little research anywhere in the world into how abuse is successfully overcome in a relationship. Little is known about women who stay and renegotiate their relationship, or about the batterer who stops battering.⁵ Nevertheless, even seemingly straightforward situations of victimisation and violence potentially hold within them possible negotiation. As Mahoney observes, 'legal and social inquiry then turn to investigation of "staying" as a problem, rather than giving attention to the help and support a battered woman needs to effectuate her goals' (1994, 76).

Significantly, it is precisely this issue of agency within 'staying' that has value for interventions on domestic violence in Cambodia. Agency as manifested in the West – divorce, separation, criminal charges, restraining orders – appears neither desirable, nor particularly plausible, from a legal, economic or social perspective. But this does not mean that Cambodian women are simply passive. For example, Cambodian women agreeing to be interviewed for research on domestic violence are expressing their voice. Likewise, women negotiate when they seek temporary refuge with family or neighbours, or file a complaint with the village chief, or confront their husbands and demand change. Once expressions of women's actions are identified, they can be further developed, and other possibilities identified to support and enhance not only women's agency, but also their options.

A valuable illustration of encouraging women's agency (and alternatives) in cases of domestic violence comes from CWCC, in its critique of the state-administered process of marriage reconciliation (*psapsaah*). Conventional marriage reconciliation consists of a number of stages, and, while not uniform, follows a general pattern. The woman files a divorce complaint. The couple are then required to attend a reconciliation meeting

with a Commune official. They each voice their complaints. The woman complains of abuse. The husband likely explains (and excuses) his behaviour by accusing the wife of infidelity or, more commonly, of domestic violations, like burning the rice or not disciplining the children. The reconciler then suggests how the situation might be remedied, and the husband pledges to end the abuse, if the wife drops her complaint. Generally, there are three reconciliation meetings before the court will entertain the possibility of divorce (Zimmerman 1994).⁶

The practice of Cambodian marriage reconciliation is ultimately dangerous for the abused woman. First, the mandatory nature of this form of 'reconciliation' does not address the specific risks of an abusive relationship. Second, while the law stipulates that reconciliation should not be pursued when the court finds that the complaint is based upon very serious circumstances, domestic violence researchers found no occasion where this exception clause was used (Zimmerman 1994). As such, the process violates a woman's right to live free from violence. Third, officials are inadequately trained in reconciliation, and consistently misquote and misrepresent the marriage law. Even among the informed, legal decisions do not always reflect legal parameters (Zimmerman 1994). Fourth, the process seeks a pre-determined outcome of reconciliation, and as such is a violation of a woman's right to autonomy. Fifth, the reconciliation process, as a 'no-fault' system, ultimately places at least some blame with the woman, failing to address the issue of domestic violence as a criminal assault and human rights violation.

CWCC has developed an alternative to the above process. In its alternative intervention, CWCC oversees a legal contract between the married couple, in which the husband pledges to cease abuse if the wife returns to the marriage. However, the contract goes beyond that of mainstream reconciliation pledges, which are not binding or enforced.⁷ The CWCC contract is

a legal document, which includes conditions of return, and provides for legal and financial settlements for the wife, should the abuse continue and the couple separate. Provisions might include the husband's relinquishment of the family home; financial support; custody of the children; or a pledge of uncontested divorce. As Acting Director of CWCC Sun Sothy explained to me, this means that in the event that the husband violates the CWCC agreement, the victim has a legally binding document which will be of assistance when filing a complaint for divorce in court (personal communication 2003). As such, the wife is able to return home, while making her own conditions for return. CWCC provides women with negotiation tools, signalling an awareness that women's decision-making power represents a critical point of intervention for domestic violence programmes. That being said, Sun Sothy stressed that 'after signing, it does not mean that the domestic violence case is finished... CWCC gives one chance for the couple to reconcile and live together without filing a complaint in court' (ibid.). In 2002, 28 domestic violence victims were staying at the CWCC shelter, of whom 12 opted eventually for divorce, while 16 opted to return to their families (ibid.).

The CWCC approach avoids divorce, at least initially, while still guaranteeing the rights and safety of the abused woman, and allowing her to make choices with which she is comfortable. In contexts in which divorce is not only legally possible, but socially sanctioned and economically viable, such measures are not vital. In Cambodia, however, given the problematic nature of divorce there, such measures are important: they facilitate women's agency while protecting their rights and safety, in a culturally sensitive manner.

Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV)

The Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV) was established in 1995, as a resource, information and training agency.

PADV tackles domestic violence in large part through its awareness-raising campaigns, and profiles it as a public, rather than private, issue. That is, PADV is reconceptualising the terrain upon which this issue should be addressed. This is critical, given that current ways of categorising violence – ‘... public versus domestic, ordinary as against extreme political violence – are inadequate to understand either the uses of violence in the social world, or the multiplicity of its effects in experiences of suffering, collective and individual’ (Kleinman 2000, 227).

In its efforts to force recognition of domestic violence as a public issue, and ensure it is tackled as such, PADV produces information materials on domestic violence. These include a video enacting a survivor’s story, a television drama, radio announcement, and the first Cambodian poster against domestic violence. Perhaps the most striking example of PADV’s awareness-raising efforts was its 1998 national theatre tour. This was undertaken in collaboration with the Women’s Media Centre (WMC)⁸ and the Prom Mahn theatre troupe. The play adopted the *ayai* style – a Cambodian improvisational theatre form using song and comedy – to convey its message in a culturally appropriate way.⁹ The play contrasted the lives and fortunes of two neighbouring families. One family enjoyed a happy and good life, due in large part to the loving relationship between the husband and wife, while, by contrast, their neighbouring family suffered much misfortune and pain, due to domestic violence in their home. The drama suggested non-violent ways of settling domestic discord within families. The play raised and explored domestic violence as a public issue and a criminal act, but it did so subtly and in such a way that it did not overtly attack men and husbands. It permitted men and women to take a vantage point on domestic violence, and demonstrated the means to ameliorate this violence, without loss of face or dignity (Frieson 1998; Baldwin 2000).

For the vast majority of the audience, a drama which discussed domestic violence at all, let alone as a public issue, was novel. PADV staff also took advantage of the forum offered by performances of the drama to disseminate information about domestic violence, and the means to effect change. This information included printed matter about the law, referral agencies, and other NGOs working on domestic violence. Prior to performances, PADV staff also met with government and community leaders to provide information on the existing laws, and appropriate responses. This ensured that the issue was framed in a way in which the community and community leadership had a role to play and could assume responsibility.

The travelling drama and its associated advocacy activities generated extensive attention in the media, as well as stimulating public dialogue on the issue of domestic violence (Mapleston 1998). This is a significant development. As one former PADV technical adviser observed, ‘more organisations are talking about domestic violence as a category of violence... People have started to talk about domestic violence as a human rights issue’ (interview, May 1998). As such, PADV’s theatre tour represents a valuable means of profiling this assumed private issue, and situating it firmly and correctly in the public domain.

As Marcus argues, ‘Often the recasting takes what is designated as a “personal situation” and identifies it as a social and political issue. Often, recasting provides a foundation for a re-viewing of an issue in new ways. In turn, this re-viewing may result in the emergence of new and different assessments and evaluations of a problem. Finally, this re-viewing may lead to the development of innovative strategies for the future’ (1994, 25).

Through this ‘recasting’, PADV has pushed the parameters of what can be discussed publicly. The play gave persuasive examples of why domestic violence could not, and should not, be seen only as an issue

of the domestic sphere. And it equipped public actors – officials, neighbours, community leaders – with the information they needed to tackle the issue in the public domain. Of course, this is not to say that this public recognition and recasting was a straightforward process which is now complete. Everywhere in the world, it has been a long and arduous battle to situate domestic violence in the public sphere. However, PADV's work is noteworthy as an important step in this direction.¹⁰

Conclusion

In Cambodia, marriage and domestic violence are so embedded in social systems that development initiatives cannot target these issues in a cultural vacuum. Without acknowledging and exploring the presence and meaning of domestic violence in marriage, it is impossible to tackle it.

This should not be taken to mean, however, that there is no space for internationally informed and formulated interventions in Cambodia. The universality of domestic violence reveals many commonalities of experience and, thus, potential for programmes which incorporate elements which have proven successful in other contexts. Nor is this an argument in the vein of cultural relativism where traditional resolutions are 'ideal' because they are 'cultural'. Too often women suffer violence precisely in the playing out of traditional features of a culture. Rather, what I argue is that space must be provided for Cambodian women (and men) to design and implement domestic violence interventions which are grounded in local cultural perspectives (Surtees 2000). As Desjarlais argues, 'perhaps it is precisely in the clash between worldviews, in the tension between symbolic systems (how reality is defined, the body held or experience articulated) that some... insights emerge' (1992, 18).

Significantly, by combining international standards and an understanding of cultural and social structures, one can formulate

interventions which respect human rights, while simultaneously maintaining or evolving desirable elements of the social order. Both CWCC and PADV have done precisely this, in their efforts to combat domestic violence in Cambodia. These interventions mesh with cultural norms and the established social order, while simultaneously seeking to redress the prevalence and permissibility of domestic violence. Such interventions and perspectives must be further acclaimed and expanded.

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Notes

- 1 The *chbaps* are prescriptions for proper behaviour and comportment. There are *chbaps* for all human relationships – *chbap srey* (woman's code), *chbap proh* (man's code), the *chbap kun cau* (grandchildren's *chbap*), *chbap baky cas* (*chbap* of ancient advice), *chbap keru* (inheritance *chbap*) (Ang 1986).
- 2 In one instance, I recall a neighbour intervened in a situation of domestic violence and was injured by the abusive husband. Charges were brought against the husband for his assault on the neighbour. No charges were laid for the assault on the wife.
- 3 The significance of this understanding cannot be overstated. As Dworkin

argues, 'It is easy to say that men beat women in order to express domination, to exercise control, these are easy sentences to say. But I need you to think about what they really mean... When we talk about battery, we have to remember that we are talking about every aspect of a human life, every single day, all the time. The problem of human freedom has never been considered from the point of view of a woman's life' (1997, 157-8).

- 4 A domestic violence law is currently being debated in the Cambodian National Assembly (Ball and Nren 2002). The law was formulated by the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs in 2001 with inputs from civil society. NGO efforts to advocate for, articulate and pass domestic violence legislation has been on-going since 1996.
- 5 One study found that 27 per cent of women who reunited with their abusive spouse experienced violence within six weeks and 57 per cent experienced violence within six months. That is, more than 40 per cent of women reported no violence for six months after returning to the relationship. In another study, more than 50 per cent of abusive husbands arrested their abuse out of fear of divorce or the desire to rebuild their marriages (Mahoney 1994).
- 6 Divorce generally involves at least three stages of reconciliation; months of waiting in between; extensive cost; travel to the court; court delays; social pressure from family, neighbours and officials; and continued abuse from the husband. Further, it is not uncommon that the judge simply refuses to grant a divorce. As one survivor explained, 'I went to the local authorities for help, but they would only arrange reconciliation' (Oxfam website 1999).
- 7 Only one of the 28 women who attended reconciliation meetings said it was successful. Some women reported that

the reconciliation process did more harm than good. Several were beaten immediately afterwards (Zimmerman 1994).

- 8 Women's Media Centre (WMC) was established in 1993 to produce media material on a range of gender issues, as well as to monitor and analyse the representation of women in the Cambodian media.
- 9 The play was performed in 39 rural communities in five provinces, reaching more than 250,000 people in total (Baldwin et al. 2000).
- 10 Such 'recasting' efforts continue in the present. Most recently, in January 2003, PADV, as a member of the Cambodian Committee of Women (CAMBOW) was involved in implementing public hearings on domestic violence at which victims shared their stories and experiences of domestic abuse with government representatives. As PADV director Hor Phally explained, this initiative seeks 'to give the problem a human face and provide a comprehensive picture of the effect of domestic violence on society as a whole' (CAMBOW 2003).

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