

PEACEBUILDING AND THE POLITICS OF WRITING

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Abstract:

Studies on the impacts of peacebuilding have predominately focused on whether there have been increases or decreases in the occurrence of violent conflict, or stable transformations into democratic governance. At the same time, peacebuilding practices have sought to affect the behaviour of communities, and to improve the quality of life of individuals. Yet, the populations themselves are treated as objects to be acted upon, rather than agents. Drawing on the work of Rancière, this paper explores the ways in which peacebuilding practices serve to determine who is able to claim membership in Cambodian society, and crucially shape the very voice that communities can use to claim rights. By focusing on literacy training in the Cambodian highlands international peacebuilding practices will be shown to serve to police society (following Rancière's articulation of the term), rather than to provide for an emancipatory potential. This paper draws on fieldwork in the province of Ratanakiri to examine the narratives of peacebuilding and the accompanying development practices of local community members, government representatives and NGO activists.

Introduction

The literatures on peacebuilding and development, in particular the policy literatures, have tended to treat the recipient population as objects on which the international community can apply technical efforts to alter behavior and bring about development. The communities are treated as subjects of analysis, without a commensurate recognition of their internal complexities and power relations, let alone engagement with the idea that local populations might have multiple agencies. Instead the recipients of peacebuilding and development are seen as nascent liberal subjects, bearing the markers of underdevelopment and a lack of empowerment. This in turn is reflected in the lack of substantive consideration of the possibility that local communities might have complex understandings of the development process, or have the ability to shape the possible outcomes. At the same time, the peacebuilding practitioners deploy a narrative of emancipation, and generally understand their actions as improving the life chances and opportunities of peoples, and as providing communities with more capacity to direct their own lives. This tension, between practice and intent becomes particularly evident when we turn our attention to technical measures that underpin peacebuilding and development that are undertaken with the specific intent of emancipation.

Drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière provides for an alternative narrative of the affects of peacebuilding measures, refocusing our attention away from policy literatures, and onto the ways in which policies and academic framing serve to delimit what is possible, and crucially ‘who’ can be heard. The political act, an exceptionally rare occurrence for Rancière, is understood as occurring at the moment a previously unheard voice steps forward and makes a claim to be heard on its own terms. This

paper argues that Rancière's framing demonstrates that while literacy training programmes may be promoted as a form of emancipation, they may simultaneously be deeply conservative. This paper will also argue that a focus on literacy reveals the ways in which the drive to enable indigenous peoples to 'be heard' may undermine the intent to empower communities, and instead serve to police them.

These issues are of specific interest in peacebuilding situations given the ways in which such moments are defined by a desire to alter the political culture of states, and to resolve sources of conflict. Furthermore, processes of peacebuilding are intended to empower communities and to provide the basis of long-term development. While the initial phase of peacebuilding may be delineated by the presence of third-party military forces in a state, post-military peacebuilding which takes place in the years following is demarcated by the application of development techniques led by the international humanitarian sector. This paper explores the ways in which such peacebuilding projects, which are presented as technical solutions, can serve to police communities, determining who can be heard on particular subjects, and on what basis engagement between communities and the state can take place.

To date the analysis of peacebuilding practices have tended to concentrate on programmes with an explicit orientation towards conflict transformation or democratization. However, it is essential to expand the examination of peacebuilding beyond these specific initiatives and explore the impact of broader initiatives that are represented as essential to peacebuilding. As will be demonstrated, underpinning most peace initiatives is a presumption that literacy is at the heart of empowerment. The ability to read and write is seen as essential for local populations to understand their current condition, and for their empowerment within and against established

power structures. Yet, literacy and education are presented as development problems rather than related to peacebuilding. The issue of literacy for indigenous communities is intrinsically related to all of their struggles to both protect aspects of their ways of life they wish to preserve, in defence of their communities, and in their pursuit of a better quality of life (Hornberger 1998). The emphasis on education and literacy training for peoples with oral linguistic traditions as it is at the heart of both how we expect indigenous communities to press for their rights, but simultaneously impacts on their sense of community. As Rancière's work allows us to highlight, if the political moment is the one where communities seek a right to be heard, this is inevitably tied up with the ability to speak such claims (See the 'Ten Theses on Politics' in Rancière (2010)).

Drawing on fieldwork in the Cambodian highlands, this paper argues that literacy training which is promoted by NGOs and the Cambodian state as a means of empowerment, restricts the voice of local peoples, but also that local communities are aware of such limitations and pursue literacy training as a means of limited empowerment within a system they feel they can not change. Language training has thus largely served to police indigenous communities, thereby predetermining the nature of their engagement with the Cambodian state.

Peacebuilding

At the heart of peacebuilding practices is a desire to resolve the sources of conflict within society, and to transform the methods of conflict resolution. When considered more broadly, peacebuilding should be seen as a long-term process that continues long after the end of violence. However, as a result of this broad conceptualization,

what peacebuilding involves is often vague, with even the desired end-state left ambiguous. Doyle and Sambanis, in assessing the process of peacebuilding describe it as “the outcome of a dynamic process, which is shaped partially by the peacekeepers’ performance and their peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts and by the parties’ reactions to those efforts...(Doyle & Sambanis 2006: 27).” Indeed, as Richmond (2008), and Heathershaw (2008) have pointed out, what constitutes peace is under-theorized, though clearly situated within liberal thought. While the end-point of peacebuilding may be indeterminate, it is clearly a liberal project, entailing both economic and democratic liberalism within the bounds of a state. Yet, the language of peacebuilding is replete with a drive to empower individuals vis-à-vis the state, and to provide for the protection of individual rights.

Peacebuilding practices are often presented as empowering local populations, and of returning the target states to some normalcy of political action. Though the literature is generally vague about the precise meaning of politics, it can best be described as a drive to remove the use of violence from the contestation for power within the state, and from competing claims over the distribution of goods. This notion of politics is narrow and unsurprisingly is consistent with liberal, and in particular liberal institutionalist, understandings of the state. As Richmond (2009: 568) has demonstrated, peacebuilding practice is largely dependent on the belief that emancipation can only follow from the achievement of security and the development of liberal institutions. Emancipation is effectively unimaginable outside of the liberal democratic state and its constituent parts of citizens and liberal government.

This is a point that Mark Duffield has noted and critiqued: “Development is the essence of a specifically liberal imperial urge. It embodies the experience of life that

is culturally unfamiliar as provisional and incomplete, and consequently in need of external tutelage to induce self-completion. (Duffield 2007: 241-2.)” Peacebuilding is thus a means of *facilitating* liberal development in post-conflict states. At the same time, with its emphasis on the liberal subject it comes with a presumption about the good life, and how it is best achieved. While emancipation is a core component of the language of peacebuilding, it is emancipation in a particular form, with goals and means pre-determined and outside of the potential input of the recipient population. As the end point of peacebuilding is the achievement of a liberal condition, the application of peacebuilding practices tends to be quite technical in nature. The debates are predominately policy-oriented, focusing on means of implementation. This provides little scope for local input into the desired end-state, with a focus instead on local choices between technical programmes.

It is this precise dynamic that a focus on the politics of peacebuilding practices allows us to explore, and that provides a means of understanding the range of the possible, and who is able to speak on given issues. As I have argued elsewhere,

...discourses of technicality and security ... foreclose debate, privilege particular voices, and mask the exercise of power. It is precisely because it unsettles the received knowledge that politics is necessary. It is only in its apparent absence that the possibility for local voices to be heard, and for resistance, disappears. (Christie 2010: 10)

There is a growing dissensus sp? with technical formulations of peacebuilding as attention to the silences within such forms of politics are explored. This body of critical scholarship can be usefully defined as engaged with ‘*the political*’. Broadly speaking this scholarship is not pre-occupied with the functional struggle for power as much as it is interested in identifying what is removed from debate, who is empowered to speak, and who is rendered invisible in such processes.

The literature on the political is diverse, but tends to follow two particular strands. On the one side there are those who have most clearly embraced Schmittian articulations of what constitutes ‘the political’. On the other are those who tend to more closely adhere to Hannah Arendt. The precise distinctions between these literatures is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, a brief description is essential so that subsequent analysis can be located within the relevant debates. Sluga has distinguished between Schmittian and Arendtian approaches as follows:

Where Schmitt, like Hobbes, perceived human plurality as something to be constrained, Arendt continued to think of it as opening up the possibility for exchange and communication across the abyss of difference that divides us, and as the positive condition of all things political. (Sluga 2008: 103-104)

Binding these authors, from Schmitt, through Arendt, is an elevation of *the political*, and a broad concern with its replacement by technological expertise and a general fading of meaningful politics from social life. This should not be taken as a conflation of their various arguments as their understandings of politics are profoundly different.

In contrast to these two bodies of work, a third approach has been emerging, led by Jacques Rancière, which on the one hand fundamentally disagrees with the ‘friend/enemy’ distinction that is at the heart of Schmittian thought, and that also rejects Arendt’s ideals – also expressed with Habermasian thought – of ideal speech permitting politics.

Rancière, instead, has taken a distinct path, dependent on its emergence from Althusser. The central point here is that there is a reversal of the Althusarian hail of ‘you there’, rejecting any sense that politics is a common event. According to Rancière:

Politics is not the exercise of power. Politics ought to be defined in its own terms as a specific mode of action by a specific subject and that has its own proper rationality. It is the political relationship that makes it possible to conceive of the subject of politics, not the other way. (2010: 27)

In this respect the political is not the struggle to control the government, or action in areas defined as the responsibility of the state. Rather it is the rare moment when communities make a claim to be heard by the government or broader communities on the basis of their rights to be heard as a community in their own sense.

Given the narrow definition, it is clear that the moment of the political cannot be common, indeed in his sixth thesis on politics, Rancière argues that politics is not necessary. Instead it is an exception where “[t]he ‘normal’ order of things is for human communities to gather under the rule of those who are qualified to rule and whose qualifications are evident by dint of their very rule (Rancière 2010: 35).” The normal condition is one where alternative distributions of power are unimaginable. There is, within this theorization, a clear normative goal of revealing the ways in which normal politics serves to render the dominated invisible (Deranty 2003: 137).

He understands the majority of what is commonly portrayed as politics as constituting an act of policing, of proscribing who can be heard, on what basis claims can be made, and on what issues they can be said. According to Bowman,

Rancière effectively dismisses this distinction, and argues instead that the most relevant distinction to be made is that politics is rare, while what is common is police (Rancière 1998, 17, 139). By police, what Rancière refers to is work and actions that protect the status quo. What is normally thought of as politics is, in Rancière’s terms, most often policing. Ironically, the best example of this police work is the administrative tinkering of politicians’ “political” actions. (Bowman 2007: 541)

This is a vision of the political which on the one hand rejects the possibility of an ideal communicative moment, which is of central importance to the Frankfurt school.

On the surface, Rancière's focus on the silences of the subordinate, and the consequent search for those moments where they seek to be heard, echoes a Habermasian vision of ideal speech (Deranty 2003:137). Yet, as Deranty has argued, Rancière's political moment and Habermasian notions of ideal speech are not equivalent. Rather, according to Hallward, "The democratic voice is the voice of those who reject the prevailing social distribution of roles, who refuse the way a society shares out power and authority... (Hallward 2003: 10)" At the same time, Rancière's position is inherently optimistic as it is based on a basic presumption of the capacity of all people to reason, which results in a basic equality of all. Thus, within Rancière's work is a radical postulate that the moment one accepts a principle of equality, and crucially an equality of capacity, then one must also accept that people have an ability to protect their rights (Deranty 2003: 140).

In an interview with Hallward, Rancière states:

I'm just saying that language games, and especially language games that institute forms of dependence, presume a minimal equality of competence in order that inequality itself can operate. That's all I'm saying. And I say this not to ground equality but to show, rather, how this equality only ever functions polemically. (Hallward 2003: 198)

This event is crucial as it represents the moment within which those who are excluded from the political order, or are in a subordinate position within it, seek to speak for themselves. The political act then is something that is remarkably rare, emerging at those moments where communities finally strike out and demand to be heard. This then raises a complicated question within the context of peacebuilding. If peacebuilding is about empowerment within a conflict or post-conflict setting, and is expected to do more than transform the means of conflict resolution (to remove violence from consideration), it should be understood as empowering communities.

Within peacebuilding we should then be attuned on the one hand for the moments where groups seek to collectively claim a right to be heard not on the terms dictated by the state, but rather on their own terms. On the other hand we also need to look at those mechanisms which serve to empower communities and ask whether they serve to proscribe the forms of interaction with the state (policing communities), or to facilitate *the political*.

The complication that arises, and which this paper in part seeks to address, is the question of to whom these peoples wish to talk. There is an occlusion within Rancière's writing when it comes to inter-cultural communication, in particular for struggles for equality within multi-lingual contexts. In these spaces, the language games are themselves potentially the means of policing. By insisting on the use of dominant languages in approaching government or asserting legal rights (when they exist), many indigenous groups are inherently silenced. This is in spite of the intended emancipatory goals of such policies.

The focus then of an analysis of peacebuilding that is informed by Rancière's work must be on the ways in which its implementation affects subordinated groups' capacities to claim their rights as equal participants within governance systems. The focus on speech acts, on the public claim to the broader population for equality, is thus at the heart of such analysis. This is of direct use to the debates surrounding peacebuilding as it is precisely the intent of peacebuilders to empower the disenfranchised (though clearly this is done within a liberal frame).

This has clear methodological implications, requiring that researchers proceed from a position that seeks to hear the local voice, and to do so on the conditions set by them. Furthermore, this must be undertaken in a way that seeks to reveal and disrupt any

nostalgic or romantic version of particular identities, including any attempt to ascribe an 'authentic' voice to peoples. For Deranty, "[t]his means that the analysis of domination can no longer be carried out from above or behind the back of the exploited but has to be carried out immanently, in the exploited's own words and actions (Deranty 2003: 140)." Of course this is complicated in two related ways. The first is that it is not always possible to identify the exploited / subordinated groups prior to their self-identification, and that identifying them before they have been prepared to make that shift towards *the political* may very well serve to delineate the groups from without, shaping and restraining the ways in which they can be understood. This is at its heart another form of policing, even when done with the best of intentions. On the other hand, any such study must face the tensions inherent in writing about another groups' struggles to be heard.

These issues come to the fore with indigenous communities who inhabit the state-periphery, both in terms of geography and politics. Within Rattanakiri and Mondulkiri there has been a rising concern of the impact of the peacebuilding / development project on indigenous populations. They are experiencing significant changes to their communities, often facing land-grabbing, dislocation, erosion of traditional life pathways, erosion of food security, and being forced to move into wage labour where they face systematic discrimination. Elites, and the state apparatus, at the same time, have demonstrated a concern about these communities organizing to assert some control over the processes impacting on their lives. Manifested in part through restrictions on the movement of peoples, and the intimidation and public surveillance of groups and individuals seeking to defend indigenous rights, there is a struggle over defining who indigenous peoples are, and how they can interact with the state. Despite this, the government has consistently

declared an interest in improving the lives of indigenous peoples, and of the centrality of education in this process. In Cambodia this has had the effect of putting many NGOs and the Government on the same side in the promotion of literacy.

To address community impoverishment, NGOs (such as CARE International, and the ICC), UNESCO, and the government of Cambodia, have advocated literacy training. This is supported by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with their focus on universal literacy rates. However, as will be demonstrated later, the promotion of literacy has been approached by NGOs as a technical rather than political issue. This echoes Chantal Mouffe's observation:

This can only reinforce a tendency, already too much present in liberalism, to transform political problems into administrative and technical ones, and it chimes with theories of neo-conservatives like Niklas Luhmann who want to restrict the field of democratic decisions by turning more and more areas over to the control of supposedly neutral experts. (Mouffe 2005: 48)

An approach to this issue through the work of Rancière provides a different and more complex account that refocuses our attention away from the actions and intentions of the state and international community, and places it firmly on disadvantaged communities. By understanding the political as a rare moment of a claim to equal rights, and of an attempt to be heard on a communities' own terms, literacy training is complex as it delimits the voice of a community (dictating the language form communities are to use), but also demands an examination of how local communities perceive the issues they face and how they seek to respond. The following discussion will provide a contextual understanding of the dynamics affecting local communities in the highlands, and then look at how three different indigenous communities, facing distinct degrees of displacement by development, represent both their understandings of security and literacy training.

Background

In order to understand how this issue has played out in Cambodia a grasp of the local context is essential. The first part of the story that must be told is the changing physical environment. Minority language groups are found throughout Cambodia, but it is within the Eastern highlands that we find the greatest concentration of indigenous peoples. The three provinces of Mondulakiri, Rattanakiri and Stung Treng, are frontier spaces along the hills that separate Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and until recently have been remote from the lowland plains of Cambodia. The rise from the Mekong used to be thickly forested, which in combination with the heavy rainfall in the monsoon season, and steep and muddy roads leading up from the lowlands, made the Eastern ranges virtually inaccessible by road for months at a time. Indeed for much of Cambodia's modern history it was far easier to reach much of the highlands from Vietnam than from the rest of Cambodia.

This remoteness is reflected in the variety of ethnic groups in this region. These three provinces represent roughly 30% of the total geographic size of the country, yet only account for some 5% of the country's total population. There are at least seventeen ethnic groups in these provinces, the majority of which follow animist beliefs, in a country which is overwhelmingly Theravadan Buddhist. It is important to be wary of any generalizations of the upland communities given the breadth of their experiences and cultures. The Inter-Ministerial Committee for Highland Peoples' Development stated that in 1997 indigenous peoples constituted roughly 66% of the population of Rattanakiri, and 71% of Mondulakiri, but represent .04% of the total population of the state (these numbers exclude both the Cham and Vietnamese). In terms of livelihood

these communities have a wide variety of practices, but many of them have until the current generation, practiced forms of swidden agriculture, and have lived a semi-nomadic life (White 1996; ADB 2002).

Linguistically the communities fall within two broad groupings. The majority of the groups are characterized as Mön-Khmer which includes the Brao, Khmer Khe, Kravet, Kreung, Kraol, Lun, Mel, Phnong, Poar, Raong, Saoch, Stieng, Suoy, Kuy, Tampuon and Thmaun ethnic groups (ADB 2001: 3). These communities do not have indigenous systems of writing, and the languages are sufficiently removed from the modern Khmer to make communication quite difficult. The outlier in this respect is the Jarai community which falls within the Austro-Thais (or Malayo-Polynesians) linguistic group. Furthermore, unlike other communities, the Jarai have also had a developed writing system introduced by missionaries employing a similar orthography to that used within Vietnam.

This link with Vietnam is indicative of the problem of border-making in the region. The idea of a hard boundary in this region is in effect a product of the last 50 years, and has only taken on a significant local impact since the mid-1960s. Families straddle the region, and some people continue to move with some freedom across the frontier (though with the increased access to the region this is ironically becoming much more difficult). This then complicates the politics of the region as both Vietnam and Cambodia have sought to assert their authority and nation-building exercise over their respective spaces. Within Cambodia this has been articulated most clearly in the public discourse of indigenous groups as being Khmer, though Khmer of a more primitive and at times 'authentic' form. This narrative of the '*Khmer Leou*' serves to enforce a narrative that the entire population of the state is predominately

Khmer, and to bring the indigenous communities into a broader nation while simultaneously writing them as distinct from neighboring states (whether Thailand, Laos or Vietnam).

Economic Development

Peacebuilding is about the resolution of sources of conflict on the one hand, and of the transformation of the means of conflict resolution on the other. The liberal content of contemporary peace practices is in part manifested in the presumption for economic development of a particular form. The search for economic growth as a means of poverty alleviation, and thus addressing one potential source of violent conflict, has become a clear orthodoxy across the vast majority of the development industry. However, as has been discussed elsewhere, this approach to state-wide economic growth has not benefitted all of the targeted societies, and has resulted in increased deprivation amongst the poorest. This has been particularly evident in the drive to alter the economics of post-conflict states' geographic peripheries where some groups who are marginalized from the state have seen their lives become more contingent as a result of peacebuilding processes. These processes are particularly acute in Cambodia's highlands which have been subject to dramatic and rapid change. These have thrust upon communities, which only fifteen years ago were exceedingly remote, onto the front line of economic development.

The remoteness and resulting isolation of Cambodia's highlands has meant that the modes of economics within the region were out of step with modern assumptions of the need to exploit economically viable resources and land. The highland region contains a vast potential for economic exploitation, in terms of its natural resources

and agricultural potential, as well as its capacity as a site of large hydroelectric projects. Straddling the border with Vietnam, with its direct port links to the Pacific, facilitating access to the markets to the East through the improvement of the road network has been a cornerstone of the country's development strategy. The area is rich in natural resources, with proven sources of precious and semi-precious stones and minerals. Partially in speculation, and in part to secure access to known mineral sites, the Eastern highlands have witnessed a scramble to secure concessions, with some studies indicating that there have now been more concessions provided than there is land to mine. Perhaps more damaging has been the logging of the region, most of which has been conducted illegally. During my first trip to Rattanakiri and Mondulakiri in 2003 the roads from the lowlands were impassable during the rainy season, and the forest coverage was often threatening to overtake the roads. The highways today, only a decade on, are unrecognizable, with the forests having been cut back dramatically. As one observer of indigenous issues stated, 'today it is like standing on top of a bare hill, you can almost see Phnom Penh (INGO representative statement, 05 April 2013, Phnom Penh). While the local indigenous communities have often participated in, or facilitated, the logging, with the exception of a few individuals there is little evidence of any economic benefit flowing from this exploitation. Despite this, there has been a consistent narrative from the government of a desire to help indigenous communities.

Early on in post-UNTAC era, the Government publicly stated that it was striving to defend upland communities. As Colm has noted, "In 1995 and 1996 both Prime Ministers pledged that the Royal Government would not allow any investment projects to proceed in Northeastern Cambodia that threaten the livelihoods and cultures of the highland peoples (Colm 1997, p.1)". The state's second

Socioeconomic Development Plan ran from 2001 to 2005 and included a number of points specifically related to indigenous peoples, in particular the building of road infrastructure throughout the region, the development of industrial scale agriculture, and to enable local peoples to more fully participate in the entire economy. This then is a repetition of the argument that the upland peoples are in effect Khmer, and that they require the exact same form of development as that of the lowland peoples. The recognition of the distinct cultures in the region has not interrupted narratives of their innate 'Khmerness'.

Central to the national development strategy has been the construction of road links between Cambodia and its neighbours, and to access the state's hinterlands to enable the economic exploitation of natural resources. The national infrastructure that the state inherited in 1993 was exceedingly poor, with major arterial roads throughout the country in dire condition. During the rainy season many of these became impassible; this was particularly true of road connections in the highlands. Commencing in 2007, the government started work on a highway (No. 78) from the Vietnamese border, through Banlung (the provincial capital of Rattanakiri), to the lowlands. While the initial construction consisted of a widening and ploughing of the dirt roads, the highway is currently being paved. As a result what was, only ten years ago an impossible over-land route in the rainy season, can now be completed in roughly six hours.

It is within the agricultural sector that we see even greater change of the economy and society. The last decade in Rattanakiri and Mondulkiri can be defined by the introduction and rapid growth of industrial scale agriculture. The forests that have been cut back have been rapidly replaced by plantations of rubber trees, cashews and

palm trees. Indeed the Government's official development plan has identified Monduliri's highlands as a space for large plantations. In 2010 the government's official tourism strategy put up large bill-board pictures throughout Phnom Penh that illustrated what one might see in different provinces. Monduliri was represented by an oil-palm plantation. This is indicative of the government's perception of the region as currently being unproductive, yet holding the potential for substantial economic growth on the other. The ownership of the land on which these have been built is hotly contested, with extensive evidence that much of the land has been obtained through coercion and exploitation. For communities that rely on the land for their well-being this has dramatic effects, reducing their food security and threatening their traditional community beliefs and practices. Despite the growth of the plantations, indigenous peoples have not found work in this new sector. Plantation owners from the lowlands have tended to employ Khmer or Cham that have been brought in for the express purpose of industrial farming.

As a direct result of the economic development strategies, the demographics of the highlands are shifting rapidly. The economic potential of the region has attracted thousands of internal immigrants in pursuit of land and labour. This has included, for example, the granting of small land concessions along the newly constructed highway, almost all of which have gone to either Khmer or Cham peoples. The impact on the lives of upland communities has been dramatic.

Since the 1990s the opening up of Cambodia's economy has had far reaching consequences for Rattanakiri. The pursuit of logging concessions, hydropower projects, and industrial plantations has occasioned a major shift in the use and ownership of provincial land resources. (McAndrew 2001, p.1)

McAndrew's study lists many of the negative impacts on local indigenous populations coming from logging, mining, hydro-electric schemes, rapid influx of Khmer, and land displacement. One part of the story in this respect is an enduring bigotry by some portions of society towards the upland peoples. They are understood to be lazy and unreliable, and to be unsuitable for employment as wage labour on the very plantations that have been built on their dispossessed land. The plantation managers have instead often favoured Khmer from the lowlands, contributing to the demographic shift of the region, and feeding into the dire poverty of some upland communities that have lost their forms of livelihood without any obvious replacement.

State-building

The pursuit of legitimacy by the government of Cambodia has in part been based on a discourse of the state as a defender of Khmer culture, and the Khmer people. This has played out against a backdrop of a narrative of Vietnam representing a threat to the state. The main political parties have, since 1993, claimed that they are the best placed to assert Cambodian rights. At the same time, Cambodian culture has been portrayed as under-threat from a dominant Vietnam. With the opening up of the Cambodian and Vietnamese highlands, these issues have come to the fore as the zone has become of increased economic importance to both states. At the same time, Vietnamese policies in the central highlands led to a refugee crisis in 2002 to 2004 as indigenous peoples crossed into Cambodia and sought formal refugee recognition. In response the United Nations set up a number of refugee camps in Eastern Cambodia. One of the results was an increased concern at the time on the part of the Government of Cambodia that there might be a nascent separatist movement. While this concern

by the state has reportedly declined over the past five years, it continues to inform conversations about the Jarai peoples in particular.

What we then find in the highlands are multiple communities of distinct linguistic traditions that are experiencing rapid erosions of their traditional ways of life. Faced with forced development, land deprivation and erosion, the shift to wage labour, and demographic shifts with the influx of Khmer workers from the low-lands, indigenous communities are being forced to confront these developments from a particularly weak position. It is against this backdrop that the state education policies, and the work of NGOs working on literacy, should be assessed.

Literacy Training

Writing is seen as being at the core of addressing all of these issues, for both NGOs and the state. There is often a great deal made of the differences between state and NGO priorities, emphasizing the general privileging of NGO perspectives over those of the Southern development state. Yet, when it comes to issues of education policy there is broad consensus on the goals, if not always the means of their achievement. The problems that have been articulated within this paper are seen as being in part responsive to increased educational levels amongst the highland communities. In this case the logic informing NGOs and the state's education initiatives do differ.

For the state, literacy has been seen as both a crucial component of nation-building, and as a means of putting in place the ground-work for sustained economic development in the Eastern provinces. As discussed previously it is only within recent years that the central government of Cambodia has been able to claim to

govern the entire physical space of the country. It is with the opening up of a year-round road that it has been feasible to achieve such a reach of authority with the Eastern highlands. The state has, since its independence, sought to represent the vast majority of its citizenry as Khmer, bound together by language, history and religion. The indigenous groups have proven a challenge to this narrative, practicing as they do a different religion, having distinct cultural practices, unique languages, and a complex but distinct history.

The state sees education as a means of community building, and of the construction of a narrative of a single Khmer identity. This is reflected in the education policies in two regards. The first is in the formal curriculum which provides a story of what constitutes Cambodia that incorporates the peoples of the highlands into the broader categorization of the Khmer. The government has been willing to accept some basic levels of bilingual education, in particular for the non-formal curriculum. However, teaching children to read and write their own language is being undertaken as a means of bridging communities into Khmer. Indeed, children entering the education system are expected to move to the formal state curriculum. The second argument is that literacy is crucial to enable indigenous peoples to more fully participate in the Cambodian economy, to benefit from a shift to wage labour, and to be able to harness the markets in Banlung and Sen Monorum (the provincial capitals).

The more fundamental writing of Khmer identity is being undertaken through the literacy programmes and the drive to bridge the various languages into Khmer. The choice of script is particularly important in this regard. Eschewing existing orthographic forms in some instances, the state has been consistent in requiring that new writing systems stick to the Cambodian form of the Pali script. In some instances

there are sounds present in minority languages that do not have equivalent orthographic forms. Rather than developing new symbols (which might fit into a logical sequence of sounds), officials within the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) have insisted that archaic symbols in Pali that have been dropped from Khmer are repurposed. This policy interpellates with the broader discourse of the upland peoples being older, and in some respects more 'authentic' Khmer sub-groups.

We want all the children to learn Khmer, but here we use bilingual education because we have difficulties with teachers. When they use bilingual education we can get them in school, and it is a bridge we can use to get them to learn Khmer. In the future, because we start with local language, we can teach more Khmer. (Interview, Provincial Director of Education, Banlung, August, 25, 2004)

Today there are two forms of state-mandated education in indigenous languages: Formal bilingual education and Non-Formal Education. These differ according to whether the programmes are oriented towards the delivery of official state curriculum in the case of formal bilingual education, or if the teaching in first languages is designed to provide education in broader issues such as health care and agriculture. In both cases the curricula is formally approved by NGO groups, provincial and state representatives. In *Rattanakiri* alone the Education Ministry reports that it has worked with the following groups on a variety of education projects: Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP); ICC; UNICEF; UNESCO; Participatory Development Training Center (PADEC); CARE International; CREP; AFFE; and the Japan Center for Conflict Prevention (JCCP).

For NGOs and International Organizations (IOs), to be able to write, read and speak Khmer is crucial to enable indigenous peoples to assert their rights. This is a position articulated clearly by the ADB which has argued that:

The main problem for development in the local community is language. Some NGOs/IOs have paid attention to this problem. It is very important for indigenous peoples to understand what the development workers are saying and to be able to contribute their own opinions. (ADB 2002: 15)

For NGOs there has been a focus on the argument that literacy training is ultimately empowering for local communities. Putting aside the potential problems that emerge from a rendering of cultures without a written language as lacking in agency (not because the arguments are illegitimate but rather that they are beyond the scope of this paper), we can focus on the assumptions behind this faith in literacy. To start with there is a general argument made by numerous NGOs and their representatives that greater literacy in the state language will facilitate an awareness of legal practices, and facilitate communities in acquiring assistance where necessary. UNESCO (2004), for example, uses the motto: “literacy as freedom”, a clear normative assertion of the emancipatory power of education.

This stems in part from the observation that individuals are being asked to sign away their land and access to resources by powerful individuals. The legal documents are clearly not being read and the individuals concerned are taking the word of people negotiating on behalf of the elites pursuing land-grabbing. The hope then is that through greater literacy individuals will be better placed to determine whether documentation is authentic and promises what is claimed.

This argument, however, is problematic as it ignores power differentials on the one hand, which may render any increased awareness of the documents largely irrelevant, and the abject poverty facing many communities that makes the ludicrously minor amount of money or goods being offered for land and/or resources attractive in the short-term. Finally, legal language requires much more than a basic level of literacy.

The second strand of argumentation in favour of language training is that it will provide greater life-chances within the developing economy. As has been discussed elsewhere with respect to swidden agriculture, the vast majority of the development community has assumed that the 'old way of life' is no longer sustainable, let alone defensible. In this respect the development agencies and their representatives share a common vision of development with the state. This assumption, presented as a 'realist' position, abandons any potential defence of particular life-ways, and then represents peoples as requiring development. It should be noted as well that this resonates with the broader liberal norms within the rescue industry (Amar 2012), which understands increased levels of development as representing the betterment of peoples' lives, and of increasing their potential as human beings.

Throughout both sets of narratives we have thus seen a number of common positions being adopted by both NGOs (and their funding bodies), and the state. Highland communities are seen as being backwards in terms of development, and there is a broad agreement that they need to be empowered to engage with the liberalizing economy. In an environment where their previous ways of life are understood as backwards and unsustainable, language skills become a crucial element of their attainment and defence of rights, as well as their ability to acquire benefits from the expanding liberal economy.

A turn to the categories developed by Rancière provides an alternative vision of these events, one which challenges the assumptions informing the education policies, and demands a re-centering of the conversation about the relevance of language training.

Within the OECD/DAC declaration there is wording that recognizes how education is important for empowerment: 'The attainment of basic literacy and numeracy skills

has been identified repeatedly as the most significant factor in reducing poverty and increasing participation by individuals in the economic, political and cultural life of their societies' (OECD/DAC, 1996, p. 9). In this matter the NGOs are entirely in step with broader norms surrounding education. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are explicit about education targets. These provide little room for education achievement in minority languages, and speak instead of literacy in the state language/s. As Kosonen has argued, "the default conceptualisation of literacy of many language planners, governments as well as international development agencies, is literacy in the national or the official language (Kosonen 2005: 123)." This has shaped international funding of NGO work, and has legitimated the goals of the Cambodian state.

Method

To assess the local perception of language training in the highlands, two field trips to Rattanakiri were undertaken in 2009 and 2010, with a further brief follow-up research trips to Phnom Penh in 2011, 2012 and 2013. The first entailed visits to three distinct communities which were selected in consultation with INGOs and LNGOs working on education policies. Three different indigenous groups were visited, one Kreung, Tampuan, and Jarai community. The villages also varied in their distance from the provincial capital, and were also facing varying levels of displacement from their traditional ways of life. During the first field-visit a series of open-ended questions were posed to family groups in each village. These open-ended questions were intended to foster a conversation about their perceptions of potential benefits from literacy training and training to speak Khmer. Working with translators (no one

individual was able to cover all of the linguistic groups) I engaged in open-ended interviews with household groups. At the same time this was undertaken in conjunctions with a discussion about their perception of what constitutes security, as a means of understanding what communities see as informing their choices about learning Khmer. .

The understanding of security was explored by asking each household to define what they understood the translated word to mean. . This was based on the translated word for 'security'. While this focused specifically on the local framings of 'security' – as translated – this provided far more value than Dillon (1996: 17) argues in stating that focusing on the concept is 'less likely to tell us about any particular experience of rule under any particular discourse of danger'. Rather, looking at the ways in which local perceptions and descriptions of what constitutes security and thus the good life change according to the condition of peoples precisely focuses our attention on the impact of governing regimes and development models. Higate and Henry (2009) have provided another model of analysis for a study of this sort. Yet, their focus on embodied action while important, would take attention away from the politics of language which this study is focused upon. As will be discussed in more detail, there were commonalities across the three villages, but there were also some crucial differences. These appear to be linked to the degree of community displacement, and the extent to which their livelihood was perceived as being subordinate to the Khmer.

Three villages were visited in 2009: Kong Nak, Tong Krapoo, and Takok Chray, and I subsequently returned to Takok Chray in 2010, roughly one year on. I have undertaken further indirect follow-up by interviewing NGO workers that have been engaged in indigenous rights' issues in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri in 2013. These

interviews were undertaken through translators that were arranged by a local NGO working in the provincial capital, Banlung. The conversations were recorded using field notes, which have been assessed for continuities of themes and issues. To validate the observations the findings and arguments have been run past numerous activists and scholars working in the highland region, including representatives of indigenous groups involved with NGOs.

Village 1: Kong Nak

Kong Nak, a Kravet community, was the closest of the three villages to the capital of Banlung. The village itself was in better overall condition than the other two sites, which led me to expect a greater degree of satisfaction in their lives, which was not borne out in the interviews. Indeed, there was a greater concern about losing their language, and of a concern for conflicts within the community which appear to be arising from land-grabbing which has pitted some members of the village against others.

I conducted three household visits, speaking to ten people, varying in age from the mid-twenties, to the elderly. The interviews were conducted with the households and various members contributed in different ways to each of the questions. The narratives of what constitutes security were interesting. Household 2 indicated that security was “living in a place with no oppression, we are not asked to do what we don’t want”. Household 1 stated that it was about having food to eat and having happiness and a balance of life, implying that at present these are presently absent. Both of these were picked up by the third household which stated that security was about having abundance and being free of oppression from anybody. The overarching discourse was one of concern of their quality of life, and of a worry of the ways in

which people in positions of authority could negatively impact on their lives. There was thus a far greater worry over potential conflict arising from outside forces, and the ways in which these dynamics might erode the sustainability of the community.

In terms of their support for language education, the people who were interviewed were very supportive of literacy training, in particular in Khmer. This was linked in each instance in the desire to improve the quality of life of all of the community members, household 1 stated that “we really want to change our livelihood, we are living in the primitive life” (Interview, household one, 2009). Education was represented as the means to move from physical labour, particularly farming, to shop-keeping which they associated with an easier life. Notably, though, there was little interest in the bilingual component of education within this site. This appears to reflect a generalized sense that they would not be able to sustain an independent Kravet culture in light of the shifting economy and demographics of the province.

There was, however, some apparent disagreement of what aspects of Khmer life members of the community wished to take on. While everyone interviewed talked of a better standard of life, and equated this to the Khmer way of life, there were differing positions towards what parts of their traditional ways of life people wished to retain. As one middle-aged man stated: “we would like to have Khmer business and livelihood. For example we are shitting in the forest, Khmer have latrines. (interview, household three, 2009)” During the interview with household two, a young man came in half-way through the talk. He stated that ‘we want all parts of Khmer life, communication, how they are living. We want to worship like Khmer peoples who go to pagodas’. This is a point that other observers of Cambodian indigenous communities have noted (interview, Cambodian LINGO worker, Banlung,

2 September 2009). At the same time this ran counter to the point made by an older woman who said they wanted to keep their traditions, like respect for all people (implying the Khmer lack this characteristic). This once again reinforces the narrative that Khmer life is easier, but that at the same time the community has suffered in part at their hands. These tensions were also evident in the third household where the elders expressed some concern that ‘young people only want what is new. Some youth don’t use Kravet words (Interview, Kravet household 3, 2009)’.

Village 2: Tong Krapoo

The second village where interviews were conducted was Kreung, and at first glance appeared to have some of the markers of wealth, at least in terms of more consumer goods, including a few televisions and DVD players (though these ran off car batteries). The community has a small school which currently teaches in Khmer to roughly 100 children, between Grades 1,2 and 3. Five household visits were conducted, interviewing eight adults. In each instance the teaching of Khmer was seen as positive insofar as it enabled youth to find better jobs, and to improve their quality of life. At the same time, their description of what constitutes security implied conflict within the village, and between the village and Khmer communities. One household stated, in response to defining security, “There is no security or happiness so it is impossible to respond”, while another argued it would mean “no complications in the village, no oppression”, while another stated “a place that is peaceful, no war, no conflict...”. These concerns were directly related in follow-up questions to recent experiences with land-grabbing where Khmer developers had paid

some members of the community who signed over parts of what was seen as communal land.

Thus, unlike the first village, this community was at the start of the externally imposed disruption of its traditional rhythm of life. This is a community concerned with the destruction of its forests, threatening current sources of revenues generated through the sale of non-timber forest products (NTFP), and eliminating important sources of food diversity. The impacts of land grabbing and deforestation were creating divisions within the community, leading to both internal conflicts, as well as intensifying the conflicts with the influx of Khmer industrialized agriculture.

This conversations with the village members suggests that the community is generally more concerned with the retention of Kreung culture and language. This, in turn, was reflected in a more positive attitude towards the value of bilingual education.

According to one interviewee, they wanted more education in Kreung in order to maintain their culture and traditions for future generations. He drew a direct link between learning Kreung and keeping a sense of a community identity. Other interviewees echoed this point, stating that people should learn Kreung first, prior to Khmer. Another household stated that their children do not study Kreung, using Khmer words instead. As one villager stated: "I am nationality Kreung in Cambodia", illustrative of how learning Khmer is predominately seen within indigenous villages as a means of engaging with Cambodian society, rather than as a means of becoming Khmer. Drawing hard conclusions on the drivers of this more supportive and positive view of bilingual education is difficult. On the one hand there is an apparent correlation between the state of the divestment of traditional forms of livelihood, but on the other the community does also have the trappings of an

effective education system which would account for some of the positive attitude towards bilingual education.

Village 3 – Takok Chray

The third village that was visited, Takok Chray, is a Jarai community located close to large plantations, but which has managed to retain significant portions of its woodlands (sufficiently large that villagers report that the forest still contains tigers). The community has been a test site of a local NGO, Ockenden, which in turn receives funding from major international donors. The NGO has worked with the community on issues of local governance, farming practices, and the construction of a water reservoir within the village. During the first visit in 2009, I visited nine households within the village. This community responded to questions in a different way than the previous two sites. While in the Kreung and Tampung communities household members tended to take turns responding to questions, and to talk about the questions, here the tendency was for a single member of the house to respond and for the other people present to defer in their responses. As such, the responses tended to reflect to a greater extent the older generations within the village. Unlike other ethnic communities, the government has not approved bilingual education in Jarai villages, though there are attempts to provide Khmer education by some independent NGOs working outside of the formal partnerships with the provincial government.

In 2009 this village was experiencing significant health issues. Within most of the houses I visited there was at least one individual who was clearly ill, usually lying down to the side within the house. Thus, it was not surprising that their responses to

the question of what constitutes security tended to stress health issues. Typical comments by villagers on what security meant included:

- *“People still face health issues, disease. Need health people to come visit. There is one at the commune level but you need money to get there, a treatment fee, and to buy food there. (Interview C4)”*
- *“Sufficient food for a full year, better health. (Interview C1)”*
- *“Enough food to eat. (Interview C2)”*
- *“Means a lot of things, like food for family. We pray a lot but, we might not get rain, but now have insects. (Interview C3)”*
- *“Food for us. No doctors, better health. If we had a doctor it would be better. (Interview C6)”*

Unlike the previous villages this village has yet to receive either formal or informal education, though the LNGO, Ockenden, did plan to commence some basic literacy training (in Khmer not Jarai). When it turned to the question of reading and writing, the villagers that were interviewed stressed at first the need for youths to learn the Jarai language. This was linked in each case to the preservation of traditions, and for the propagation of particular ethics such as a respect for elders, however a number of the villagers also indicated a need for the youth to learn Khmer. While the previous villages presented this as providing the capacity to shift the forms of employment from manual labour to shop-keeping, there was far more emphasis within this village of facilitating interaction with Khmer, without referring to a change of labour practices. This was expressed first as allowing villagers to sell goods to Khmer, and to ensure that a fair deal is achieved in such interactions. “If they can read and write they cannot be cheated. (Interview C5)”

As with the previous two villages the issue of education was cast by the community members against the background of their current socio-economic state, and was seen as relating to their ability to affect their development trajectory. In this respect the issue of whether to learn Khmer was seen as potentially empowering the youth, and

by extension the entire community, in the face of encroaching development.

Nevertheless there was also an expressed concern that the village needed to retain its Jarai language as a core component of their identity.

Literacy Training and *the Political*

What all of these interviews highlight is that literacy training is not a strictly technical exercise, and that it is perceived by the communities as affecting their communities' capacities to engage with broader Cambodian society, that it would shape the life-chances of the youths, but that it also had direct implications for communities' futures distinct from Khmer society. Across all of the interviews there were common themes that emerged that cross-cut the three villages. There was first evidence of a generational shift underway where the youth were driven to learn Khmer, seeing it as a means of living a more 'modern' and privileged life. Speaking Khmer, and adopted Khmer trappings such as the style of dress, were represented as facilitating a better quality of life, and as not being 'backwards'. Learning Khmer was closely linked by both the youth and adults to the promises offered by education, of enabling people to better navigate the developing Cambodian society, and of the promise of a better life in the future. However, while the youth were seen as turning their backs on the traditional ways of life, the elders saw education as necessary to protect communities. Yet there was a simultaneous concern that the economic protection of communities might also undermine their sense of a community and distinctness from the Khmer.¹ Secondly, the community members discussed the topic of literacy training as being inherently complicated, of requiring trade-offs that would likely have long-term repercussions for their communities. Though on the balance everyone saw education

in Khmer as important, they were concerned with the ways in which this might affect the sustainability of their identity as a distinct people. Finally, there was a common refrain that a lack of knowledge of Khmer affected their ability to negotiate with Khmer peoples, and the state.

The arguments that were made in favour of Khmer education within the three communities largely resonate with those advanced by both the NGO sector and the Cambodian government officials. However, while the state and NGO representatives provided a near universal praise of the value of education in empowering communities, the households which I talked with were also more cautious in their advocacy of Khmer education, seeing within it the potential loss of who they are. If peacebuilding is about empowering communities then this must be seen as a qualified and cautious support for the emancipatory value of Khmer education.

Within the three communities there were clearly articulated arguments about the benefits of learning Khmer. These were fixed on a few inter-related themes, in particular it was seen as providing the basis for greater economic prosperity, of ensuring communities could be fairly treated in their dealings with the broader Khmer population. Simultaneously, people indicated that this may come at the expense of valued aspects of their own cultures. Indigenous languages were seen as a core component of their group identities, and of affecting nearly every aspect of their 'traditional' life styles.

Language training is clearly being demanded by the villages that I visited, this was irrespective of whether the communities had only Khmer language instruction, such as in village B, bilingual education as in village A, or no formal or informal education as in village C. All of the interviews with indigenous households in 2009 and 2010

showed that people had a complex understanding of the issues surrounding literacy training in both their own languages and in Khmer. There was a clear sense that people saw a trade-off between the two, and that they perceived tensions arising between the potential benefits arising from learning Khmer, tempered by the potential impact on community identity that might follow a gradual erosion of their own languages. They perceived a complex risk around language education, but generally sided in favour of Khmer education as a risk, but worth taking in the hope of improving the quality of life.

Using Rancière to approach the question of peacebuilding and education focuses attention on the ways in which communities seek to be heard and the ability to make claims of equality within the state. What this study has found was that the villagers in all three of the indigenous communities do not feel equal to the Khmer. They witness a different lifestyle, with many of the modern trappings such as scooters, televisions, and access to a variety of food-stuffs, and strive for similar attainments. Some respondents in all three villages have also expressed concerns over the ways in which they are unequal in dealings with Khmer. Whether this is expressed as a desire to get a fair price in markets, or in ensuring that their land is protected from developers, or in acquiring employment, there is a common story of a lack of equality.

The learning of Khmer is perceived as a means of empowerment, of empowering individuals and communities in their engagements with the broader society. This is entirely consistent with the ways in which NGOs and the government present literacy training. Yet there is a lack of evidence that in learning Khmer the communities are being empowered, or that this has led to a reduction in the negative treatment indigenous peoples face. What it does do is shape the terms of engagement. In

advocating for Khmer language training, over that of indigenous languages, the communities are in effect having the terms of the engagement with Khmer society being dictated. Rancière's formulation provides the basis on which we can challenge the emancipatory move of literacy training in this respect, and provides an understanding of the issues that much more closely reflects the lived experiences in the Cambodian uplands.

However, this should not be taken as a lack of agency of the part of the communities, and they have demonstrated complex arguments for and against learning Khmer, and of using the Khmer script for the protection of their own languages. That said, the reasons why Khmer is seen as essential is precisely because of the encroachment of lowland Khmer society, and of the erosion of their own traditional ways of life. The pursuit of language training within indigenous communities in the Cambodian highlands is defended by community members as a means of achieving the life that others have, and also of a means of protecting aspects of their current lives they wish to maintain in the face of cultural change. Thus, while for many of the youth the learning of Khmer offers the promise (though seldom realized) for a perceived 'modern' way of life associated with material trappings of success, for adults learning Khmer is more generally seen as crucial to enable interaction with both the government and the increasing Khmer population. It is thus promoted as the basis of protecting rights and preventing or resolving conflicts.

What we then find within the struggle over education is a bipartite division that plays out as a policing move, but where it is being embraced by the local communities precisely as a means of the achievement of equality before the law. The '*policing*' of indigenous societies through Khmer literacy training is manifest in the demand that

groups interact with the broader society as Khmer speakers, as members of the broader Khmer/Cambodian society. This in effect restricts their ability to demand formal recognition of their languages and traditions as *full* equals within the state. The community members are then able to make claims against the state, and to argue for equality, but must do so through the language of Khmer, pre-determining their engagement *as* Khmer. Their ability to shout out ‘here we are, and we “as Kreung” have rights’, would be for Rancière, that rare moment of *the political*; the moment where steps towards democracy are taken (and where the effects of policing are thrown off). Yet, such moments are actively discouraged, and the very requirement that such demands are made in Khmer delimits the ground of engagement.

The point here is that peacebuilding practice, and broader development practices, are inherently not about the re-substantiation of politics. Literacy training may have positive impacts on the recipient populations, and crucially we must recognize that those that are best placed to adjudicate whether this is the case are the villagers themselves. Yet we must also recognize that policies implemented with the goal of emancipation, and that are seen by many as empowering communities should not be seen as a return to politics. It may in fact be quite the opposite. Peacebuilding, in seeking to regularize forms of interaction between populations, and between populations and the state, serves to delineate who may speak and be heard, and on what basis this is to be done. It is, then, the very epitome of what Rancière has characterized as policing.

At the same time, Rancière’s work on voice and hearing needs to be opened up in a way that allows for the recognition that the claim to be heard on one’s own terms may

actually be a claim NOT to be heard in the language of the state. It can be a claim for separateness and uniqueness, even if it is within the same broad polity.

Peacebuilding studies have tended to focus on those policy initiatives most closely linked to conflict transformation, including democratization, security sector reform, and social change related to altering perceptions of the viability of violence, and of instilling consociational behavior. Yet, as the critical literature has pointed out, peacebuilding ought to be more expansive in its goals, and should be about emancipation. This is in part reflected in the promotion of democratic governance and liberal norms. The study and practice of peacebuilding straddles the disciplines of security and development, integrating the range of activities into peacebuilding practice. Education, and in particular literacy, resides squarely in this intersection of disciplines. It is promoted as a means of both political and economic empowerment, understood as essential to navigate in the modern era. For all of this it is also presented as an inherently technical issue, with unquestionable ends. Yet, this is precisely what the use of Rancière lays bare to analysis. If we see education as a technical issue, and approach politics as the strict pursuit of power, then education in the state language a clear imperative. Yet, employing R'nciere's framework of *the political* versus *the police*, we are attuned to the ways in which technical processes proscribe who can speak, and the language in which this can be done. The promotion of Khmer literacy at the expense of local languages is the very archetype of policing, ensuring that claims to be heard must be cast within a pre-delineated construction of identity.

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ⁱ It should be noted that the interviews were not attuned to the question of gender divisions, nor were sufficient numbers of interviews conducted to draw significant conclusions on differences of responses by men and women. Further work is required to see if these issues have a strong gendered component. It appears that the dominant split is rather along the lines of age. However, as the traditional family structures of the indigenous peoples are broken down it is likely that this will result in significant shifts of gender roles within communities.