

# Understanding Everyday Peace in Cambodia: Plurality, Subtlety, and Connectivity

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/jpd](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jpd)**SungYong Lee**

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**Abstract**

This article explores the nature of everyday peace in local communities in Cambodia. Drawing on interviews and observation and focusing on the reconstruction of relationship between community residents and former Khmer Rouge leaders, the analysis demonstrates that everyday peace in these communities is characterised by three features: plurality, subtlety, and connectivity. The findings demonstrate how the nature of social relationships with former harm-doers varies within and between communities; sheds light on the subtle, mundane, and episodic ways in which peace is sustained and manifested; and highlights the connectivity of local agency with broader political contexts that contribute to shaping everyday practices and experiences of peace. In conclusion, this article revisits the fixity and homogeneity of the peace in a society which is assumed by many studies, calls for further exploration of the prepolitical nature of everyday peace, and discusses implications for a recent academic debate over victims' silence.

**Keywords**

everyday peace, plurality, subtlety, connectivity, Cambodia, relational peace, prepolitical peacebuilding

Identifying the nature of peace that emerges in postconflict societies is not straightforward. Over the past years, increasing academic attention has been given to the identification and examination of variations and complexities of peace presented in postconflict peacebuilding processes. A group of studies, now broadly named the *local turn* literature, has made efforts to unpack and examine the emergence of peace in local communities. As critiques to the notions of liberal peace that have been dominant in contemporary peacebuilding processes, these studies have generated debates on various concepts like hybrid peace, agonistic peace, and everyday peace (Jarstad et al., 2020). In particular, the concept of everyday peace was introduced to acknowledge and examine “a peace at a different level,” where ordinary people develop and experience peace (van Iterson Sholten, 2020). Although

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they may look “banal, mundane, and unimportant” and are often “unrelated to formal peacebuilding initiatives,” everyday forms of peacebuilding, it is argued, can promote more emancipatory and bottom-up processes that more accurately reflect local actors’ perspectives and interests (Autesserre, 2017, p. 124; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Richmond, 2011).

Despite the significant contribution of the everyday peace discourse to the theoretical and conceptual exploration of peacebuilding, relatively limited analytical attention has been paid to the nature of everyday peace. Empirical studies of everyday peace more often use the concept to examine particular initiatives for promoting peace, the agency of local actors, and the contextual issues that affect the dynamics of peacebuilding. Accordingly, they reveal much about *how* and *through what practices and strategies* local communities promote everyday peace but make a fairly limited examination of *which peace* they develop and what it looks like. Moreover, everyday peace in the critical scholarship tends to be understood as political actions based on normative emancipatory perspectives. Due to this tendency, unintentional, organic, emergent, or prepolitical, everyday peace practices remain understudied despite their significance for how peace is manifested (Millar, 2020).

Addressing these knowledge gaps, this article explores the nature of everyday peace in Cambodia by looking at community residents’ reconstruction of social relationship with former Khmer Rouge (KR)

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leaders.<sup>1</sup> The analysis demonstrates that everyday peace in the examined local communities is characterised by three features: plurality, subtlety, and connectivity. Thus, the findings show that local actors in Cambodia experience significantly different forms of everyday peace and that such plurality

is visible between as well as within local communities. Further, the case study highlights that important local practices often look insignificant, episodic, and mundane but are key to shaping and sustaining peace and the coexistence of different social groups. Moreover, the forms of everyday peace are shaped based on the constant interaction between local communities and their wider political contexts. While these features of peace are generated through the analysis of this specific empirical context, they may arguably have empirical resonance beyond the case of Cambodia and present useful implications for addressing the two knowledge gaps stated above: the nature of everyday peace and prepolitical features of everyday peace.

This study is based on the author’s approximately 15 years of work in and research on Cambodia as a field practitioner and researcher, including residence in Phnom Penh between 2006 and 2007. The author has observed the communication and interaction of former KR leaders with other community members, while involved in community activities and nongovernmental organisation (NGO) programmes for rural development and peace education. The interview data cited in this article were collected during two rounds of field research in 2019. Interviews were conducted in Phnom Penh (the capital city) and Battambang and Svay Rieng (two provincial cities that were under the influence of different subgroups of the KR). Interview participants include four former KR leaders and 22 community members who have experienced the KR regime. A majority of them participated in both rounds, each of which set different primary themes: the process of relationship building, competing narratives, and the roles of external actors. Moreover, a few follow-up interviews were conducted online in 2020 to explore aspects of the previous interviews in more detail. The interpretation of the data was cross-checked with a Cambodian researcher and community leaders who understand the local contexts of the areas where the interviews were conducted.

Next, this article is situated in relation to academic debates on everyday peace. Then, the analysis follows, exploring how plurality, subtlety, and connectivity is manifested in the process of relationship building in Cambodian local communities and discussing the theoretical and practical implications

of these features of peace. Through the analysis, it argues that, although the overall conditions for social reconciliation in Cambodia may look stunted and elusive, there is much more nuance and complexity if we look at how peace is experienced in the everyday. In the conclusion, the implications of the findings presented in the previous sections are further discussed.

## Understanding the Nature of Peace in Local Communities' Everyday

To reiterate, this article situates itself in and aims to contribute to the ongoing debates on everyday peace by empirically exploring the nature of peace in local communities of Cambodia. The introduction of the *everyday* into peacebuilding scholarship, arguably since the mid-2000s, further enriched critical peace studies by paying close attention to “the practices and norms deployed by individuals and groups” to build peace in their daily lives (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 553). Studies on everyday peace commonly point out that conventional approaches to peacebuilding focus too much on top-down process for institution-building at the national level. These studies highlight that aspects of people’s everyday lives, such as local agency, rights, needs, livelihoods, customs, and kinship, provide important contexts for peacebuilding. Moreover, they acknowledge the importance of the bottom-up strategies for peacebuilding that community residents undertake in their daily practice and the agency underlying such strategies. Existing research has emphasised the “multi-dimensional, context-dependent and evolving” features of everyday peacebuilding practices (Firchow, 2018, p. 14) and complex dynamics of peacebuilding, by using various concepts like hybridity, fluidity, unpredictability, and mundaneness (e.g., Baaz & Stern, 2017; Chaves et al., 2020; Mac Ginty, 2014; McGee, 2017; Randazzo, 2016; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011; Vaittinen et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the current discourse on everyday peace has been somewhat limited in its scope. Firstly, the critical scholarship on everyday peace has focused more on the process

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and dynamics of peacebuilding rather than the nature of peace that is developed as an outcome of the process. A similar tendency is found in many studies ranging from conceptual definitions that see everyday peace as “the routinized practices used by individuals and collectives” (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 549) to empirical studies that examine the

mechanism of peacemaking, peacebuilding actors’ practice and agency, and the relevant social contexts (e.g., Baker, 2019; Boege, 2012; Fridman, 2020; Ware & Ware, 2020). Moreover, while the everyday peace indicator project that has explored how peace can be evaluated from local actors’ perspectives is a welcome addition to the academic debates (Firchow, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2013; Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2016), the features of peace that local communities experience in their everyday life has remained as a relatively marginalised area. Secondly, a large number of studies focus on the political nature of local actors’ everyday practice. In these studies, such implications are explained mainly as local actors’ emancipation from the dominant influence from the externally oriented liberal peace (Randazzo, 2016). Indeed, many everyday peacebuilding activities are politically motivated and, more importantly, should have political effects regardless of the motivations. Nevertheless, if researchers assume that “the everyday must always be considered a site of politics,” such a framework risks devaluing the prepolitical realm of everyday peace and misjudges the reality in the communities (Millar, 2020, p. 317).

Against this backdrop, this article examines how everyday peace is manifested and experienced in local communities in Cambodia, thereby contributing to specify and explore the nature of everyday peace: What does everyday peace look like, and what are the features that characterise it? Moreover, the exploration of everyday peace in this article does not assume peace is produced through explicitly

or consciously political practices and can therefore capture how everyday peace is manifested in mundane aspects of everyday life that are not commonly seen as related to peacebuilding (Das, 2007; Millar, 2020; Ochen, 2014; Visoka, 2019).

For this purpose, this article will examine the reconstruction of relationships between local communities and former KR leaders in Cambodia, using social reconciliation as an indicator of peace. Variations in reconciliation have been adopted in many previous studies as key indicators for peace (Alfonsin, 1993; Amnesty International, 1998; Lederach, 1997; Rigby, 2001). To identify and examine variations of social reconciliation, this study draws on the relational peace framework developed by Söderström et al. (2020). The framework focuses on three overarching aspects of a relationship—behavioural interaction, subjective attitudes, and the parties' ideas about the relationship—in order to render a more fine-grained view of varieties of peaceful or conflictual relationships. Following this approach, peace in this article is conceptualised as ontologically located in the nature of relationships. The case study below will inductively trace and examine features relevant to the aforementioned three aspects that have been developed and presented between the former KR leaders and other community residents in Cambodia.

Identification of victim and harm-doer is not straightforward in Cambodia, as virtually all of the population living under the regime, including many former KR leaders, have gone through severe challenges. Moreover, many people were victims, harm-doers, and bystanders at the same time. In this regard, this article will use the term community residents with the acknowledgement that most of them were directly/indirectly victimised by the violence under the KR regime. Moreover, harm-doer will be used to denote KR leaders who are accused by community members of being responsible for killings conducted in their areas.

## **Post-KR Social Relationship Building and Everyday Peace in Local Communities of Cambodia**

Although some four decades have passed since the end of the KR regime, institutional arrangements for promoting social reconciliation in the country have been limited. The People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which toppled the KR regime in 1979, promoted political mechanisms for justice and reconciliation; however, most programmes were manipulated and distorted by the new regime's political objectives and a decade-long civil war. To enhance its political legitimacy, PRK highlighted its identity as the liberator from KR's brutal rule and manipulated judicial processes, truth-finding mechanisms, and memorial programmes for this purpose. When the civil war was "officially" terminated by signing the Paris Peace Agreements in 1991, PRK retained its political leadership (in the name of Cambodian People's Party [CPP]). This time, the government maintained a low-key attitude towards the KR issue, trying to avoid the issues emerging as threats to security stabilisation. It allowed the core KR leaders to maintain their strongholds or to take positions in the ruling CPP. Moreover, KR history was removed from most educational curricular and mainstream media coverage so that it did not generate unnecessary social controversies (Chandler, 2008; Guillou, 2012; Manning, 2017).

The establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, a tribunal on KR's harm-doing, was a significant step towards justice and reconciliation in Cambodia. However, the process has been affected by the narrow scope of prosecutions targeting five top leaders only, the length of time taken before and during trials, and the political influence from the Cambodian government (Manning, 2017). There have been a significant number of initiatives for social reconciliation which have been mobilised by civil society actors such as the Documentary Center of Cambodia, the International Center for Conciliation, Trans-cultural Psychological Organization, and Youth for Peace. The areas of reconciliation covered by them include truth-finding, public education on KR history,

psychological healing, and intergroup dialogue. Nevertheless, the capacity of these civil society actors was far from sufficient to cover the sheer number of people who needed support due to the inconsistent funding availability, limited human resources, and a lack of political back up (Interview VII).

Under such circumstances, reconciliation with KR history was largely left to the victims and the wider population in local communities. In their everyday lives, people have reconstructed and developed their relationships with former KR leaders reflecting the political, social, and cultural conditions facing them over the past decades. The following analysis explores the nature of the peace that has been produced as a result, arguing that it is characterised by the three features of plurality, subtlety, and connectivity.

### *Plurality*

The analysis of interviews and observational data shows that everyday peace in Cambodia is characterised by plurality, where multiple levels and forms of peace coexist within and between local communities.

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Such forms of relational peace in Cambodia can be clearly identified from local communities' subjective attitudes towards former KR cadres as well as their understanding of their relationship to them. Local communities have dissimilar perspectives and interests, and community

members develop various peacebuilding practices, reflecting the social, cultural, and political conditions in their own communities. Hence, the peace(s) emerging from such practices demonstrate a wide variation.

For instance, some community members harbour antagonism and mistrust towards harm-doers although they are reluctant to express their anxiety in an explicit or violent manner. One interview participant mentioned: "Actually, I once wanted to see him (a former KR leader), thinking of doing revenge because he killed my father. (...) Yes, I am still angry" (Interview II). These respondents tended to present negative ideas of the nature of the relationship between the KR leaders and other community members and often feel unsure if reconciliation "can be ever possible" (Interview XI).

In other cases, interview participants do not express particularly negative nor positive attitudes towards former harm-doers. Instead, people focused more on their own daily life or peace of mind and wanted to stay away or move on from the painful memory and trauma. The efforts to move on were expressed in two contradictory ways: commemoration and forgetting. In explaining his family's efforts to forget, an interview participant said:

During the Khmer Rouge, I lost one of my uncles. But my mother never asked who killed him. She just came back to life and then work hard to get rice. (...) When they were hungry, it was difficult for them to discuss who killed who. (Interview VI)

Some community inhabitants accept former KR leaders as part of the community. They engage in practical activities with the former perpetrators although they do not build close relationship as referred to in the following statement: "He (a former KR associate) is skilful in making fences. So I ask for his help when I need to fix my fences" (Interview VIII). When asked their understanding of the social relationship in their communities, the respondents in this category often gave responses like the following: "We are OK. We don't have a problem with them (KR leaders)" (Interview I).

Although the number of examples was significantly smaller than the number of examples of concealed antagonism and tolerance of coexistence, a few interview participants' perception towards their

counterparts represented rehumanised relationships. A former soldier who fought against KR, for example, mentioned: “They (KR soldiers) are victims as well. I know many of them who helped us when we got injured. When I asked why they were helping me, they said ‘we are all Khmer’ (Cambodian)” (Interview IX).<sup>2</sup>

Such plurality is visible *between* as well as *within* local communities. Firstly, the types of relationships may vary according to the geographic areas that are subject to different social contexts. For instance, in one village in Battambang province in Northwest Cambodia, military combat continued until the last period of the civil war. The security condition in many areas was unstable even after the official peace agreement was signed in October 1991. Moreover, the village was near the area where a large number of former KR leaders had collectively lived. In this context, many research participants presented concealed antagonism since they felt that they had not had suitable opportunities to express their emotion. Some expressed that they were still the “minority” in the area and were cautious with their actions. Hence, the unexpressed anxiety continued for decades and many community inhabitants continued to disconnect their relations with former KR leaders whenever possible (Interview II).

Nevertheless, the interviews in Phnom Penh present a significantly different dynamic. Phnom Penh, the capital city, had been literally evacuated during the 4 year-long KR rule. The population who had lived in the city were relocated to the collective labour camps in rural provinces. Hence, the local communities in the city were redeveloped only after the regime collapsed, populated with a mixture of the previous residents who returned home and a large number of new people from other parts of the country. In many cases, it was beyond people’s capacity and interest to learn what their neighbours had done during the KR period. Even in cases where a resident was disclosed to have been involved in KR operations, other people’s anger against him or her was not strongly felt unless the person was directly involved in the killing of their own associates. Under such a circumstance, a majority of the interviewees wanted to move on so that they could sort out urgent daily issues like economic hardship (Interview III).

Secondly, a similar level of variation can be seen *within* the same community. The dynamics of relationship building are normally associated with multiple motivations from community residents. In most interviews, it was reported that there is a significant portion of people who do not share the prevalent attitudes to the KR leaders in their communities. For instance, an interview participant called a former harm-doer living in the same village a “mosquito” and repeatedly confirmed that he did not like that his village allowed the former KR leader to engage in economic collaboration (Interview IV). In other cases, many people who were more positive about reconciliation with former harm-doers expressed being uncomfortable that they maintained a relationship that was different from their communities’ mainstream views. These participants mentioned personal experiences or events that enabled them to see the human aspects of the harm-doers. These interviewees, however, had faced difficulties in sharing their views with other community members. They did not engage in the types of actions collectively mobilised and organised within local communities vis-à-vis former KR leaders (Interviews IX and X).

In short, local actors in the same society of Cambodia experience everyday peace and community relations in significantly different ways. When focusing on community residents’ subjective attitudes towards the KR leaders, findings range from concealed antagonism to rehumanised relationship. Such plurality was developed in the dynamics of the interaction *between* different identity groups, world-views, or cultural contexts that are related to the process of peacebuilding. *Within* the same groups or cultural contexts, moreover, individuals and communities may experience significantly dissimilar types of peace according to their personal experience during the KR period, the relationship with harm-doers that had been established before the KR period, and their normative and religious beliefs. The recognition of such plurality is important for having a nuanced understanding of the nature of everyday peace that is being developed in the local communities (Baker, 2019; Berents, 2015; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011).

## *Subtlety*

Subtlety is a feature that is particularly relevant to the examination of everyday peace by focusing on behavioural interaction. The actions taken in local communities of Cambodia for peacebuilding often look insignificant and less visible and can be expressed in the form of nonaction or silence. Hence, their significance may not be well acknowledged unless particular attention is given (Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012; Lee, 2015; Visoka, 2016). In Cambodia, such subtle features are clearly present in community residents' behavioural inter-

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action with former KR leaders, which are underpinned by the dissimilar attitudes described in the above section. The areas of actions taken by community residents include the verbal expressions shared between community residents to denote former KR leaders, the frequency and level of the community's engagement with them, the types of topics to be shared during the engagement, or deliberate exclusion, all of which happen in communities' daily life. Despite their subtlety and invisibility, the dynamics of people's interactions and the social conditions underlying them play critical roles in determining the nature of everyday peace.

One example is the adoption of social shunning, which reflects many community members' concealed antagonism. Mobilisation of social shunning requires a consolidated will amongst most community residents, and its implementation is involved in implicit mutual monitoring of neighbour's actions. Former KR leaders and their families may not be invited to important social events, included in the collective labour projects, or consulted when making decisions on community development and are not supported if they open shops. As time goes by, the form of relationship building (or relationship cutting) with former KR leaders settles in as a new "norm" in local communities. The relationship often continues inter-generationally through the narrative inherited within families. For instance, one interview participant mentioned: "My neighbour never allows her children to play with his (a former KR leader's) family. (. . .) She doesn't explain why but the children know that they can't" (Interview V). In this regard, social shunning is a collective and systemic action of community members and its impact is significant and sustainable. Nevertheless, when focusing on the action itself, social shunning is expressed in the form of "nonaction."

Due to their invisibility, local practices relevant to everyday peace can be unrecognisable to external practitioners. Moreover, even in cases where researchers identify such (non)actions, the significance of these actions as an organised collective practice may not be acknowledged. For instance, everyday peace and functioning relationships of coexistence sometimes rely on a degree of silence. During the author's field visit to a local village, interview participants did not mention one former KR leader in the village. Then, when the author directly asked a question about him, they began to acknowledge his presence saying that they forgot about him. Nevertheless, the studies of Zucker (2009) and McGrew (2011) made the same observation. In other words, this type of behavioural interaction (or the avoidance of interaction) is likely to be the deliberate and systematically adopted action and an indicator of the types of everyday peace as explained in Mac Ginty (2014).

Another aspect of subtlety is that it is difficult to distinguish the meaning and significance of these actions in relation to social reconciliation. One reason for such a difficulty is that many local actors take actions for rebuilding social relationship without consciously thinking of the significance of such actions in terms of peacebuilding. The communities' relationship with former KR leaders was gradually and organically determined through the direct and indirect discussions between the community residents, and the power relations between community leaders often play important roles. The repeated

practice of relationship building can form a loose social system that indirectly binds the behaviour of the majority population. Hence, in many cases, they take actions (or nonactions) following their intuitive sense (to protect them) or to avoid troubles within their own communities (Mac Ginty, 2014, Interview X). Another reason is that such actions are usually undertaken as part of events or activities that have wider objectives. The events include cultural rituals, households' private fortune-making events, and community events organised by some local elites. Reconciliation with KR history is not usually identified as an objective although it is deeply underlying as one element.

In terms of healing and commemoration, for instance, most activities mobilised by local communities' residents are conducted as part of major Buddhist festivals such as *Pchum Ben*, a Buddhist day when people provide offerings to the dead. While the victims who lost their lives during the KR regime are included in the Buddhist rituals, the events are held to commemorate all ancestors. In other cases, commemoration is an effort for healing (to wash away their sense of guilt) and building reconciliation with the dead (to pray for the well-being of the dead). Community members conduct many small-scale rituals or make offerings and, in the local narratives, these commemorations are frequently explained as actions to prevent naughty deeds by ghosts (*khmaoch*) that community residents believe exist in their communities (Guillou, 2012). While they reflect local communities' animistic belief, interview participants consider that many such spirits are of the victims killed during the KR period (Interviews V and XI). It is observed in other Asian societies that local communities' desire for reconciliation with the dead is expressed as a fear of bad influence from ghosts (Grenfell, 2021). Nevertheless, when local communities' interpretation of their actions is associated with local myths, it is not easy to distinguish between the motivations related to social reconciliation and these actions.

To be clear, the clarification of subtlety does not mean that local practices for everyday peace are always presented in a subtle manner. There are more outspoken, organised or institutionalised actions

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for social reconciliation in Cambodia (e.g., politically organised commemorative events on National Day of Remembrance). The point is that there are many subtle actions in local communities that contribute to build, or withhold, peaceful relationships, and the identification of their significance requires careful and nuanced examination. Subtlety is a challenging feature of everyday peace

for many researchers and field practitioners, especially those who make occasional visits to the communities. While the author benefitted from his long-term engagement with and networking in the studied local communities, it was repeatedly confirmed that the subtle features identified to the author were just a few examples. In this regard, underresearched in the conventional discourse on peacebuilding is the exploration of such a fundamentally alternative framework to accurately identify and reflect local actors' perspectives and examine relevant data in a nuanced manner. Recent endeavours to adopt more ethnographic and participatory approaches to peace and development research (Hennings, 2018; Millar, 2018; Schulz, 2020; Williams, 2018) are a meaningful departure to open up rich academic debate over such alternative methodologies.

### *Connectivity*

While local manifestations of peace are characterised by their plurality and subtlety, they are also inevitably shaped by wider political contexts. In Cambodia, the scope of local agencies that could be utilised for communities' peacebuilding can be significantly affected by the types of state governance or the social structure related to governance in the postconflict period. Vice versa, the implementation of the state programmes is frequently promoted or discouraged by the dynamics of local

governance. The forms of everyday peace are shaped by the interaction between the two. Thus, everyday peace is also characterised by its connectivity in relation to these broader societal structures and contexts.

As an example, this section describes local community actions in response to broader political structures, especially focusing on the political authorities' restriction of the KR-related narratives. The CPP leadership first gained its political power in 1979 by ousting the KR regime and carried on the civil war against KR and other military groups throughout the 1980s. During this period, it constantly emphasised its identity as "the liberator from the KR oppression" as one major source of its legitimacy and implemented many political events to proclaim KR's antihumanitarian actions. Once the peace process started in late 1991, the CPP leadership deliberately discouraged open debates about the KR period to avoid the risk of violence recurrence.

The immediate consequence of this political circumstance was a lack of public discourse on the issues of KR and the promotion of social reconciliation. The school curriculum in primary and secondary education has not included any topics relevant to them until the mid-2010s. The mass media that is under strong government influence has not covered any topics on the KR period, apart from episodic reports of the ongoing international tribunal on the KR leaders. Although a few NGOs have published testimonials of the KR victims and other references, the number of information sources available in Khmer (the Cambodian language) has been limited. Accordingly, a majority of the youth in local communities had few opportunities to learn the history related to the KR regime, creating a big intergenerational gap in their understanding of the period. In addition, when public discourse was made on the issues, people carefully selected the narratives that contributed to the government's political legitimacy. While the government has not proclaimed any official lines for narrative generation, most civil servants who were selected by the ruling CPP had been active in advocating the government's political legitimacy. Hence, the discourse within local communities also goes through a process of selecting which narratives, amongst others, should survive.<sup>3</sup>

The responses of community residents and civil society actors to the political contexts formed three major patterns. First, the collective efforts for redetermining relations with former KR leaders were promoted in ways that would not attract the authorities' concern. Thus, community residents tend to be cautious in taking actions that look reconciliatory. For instance, in a few communities where a majority of the interview participants presented their willingness to accept shallow coexistence with former KR leaders, the people who expressed antagonism tended to be more outspoken whereas the individuals who were willing to engage in more positive relations with them feared disclosing such attitudes (Interviews III and VIII).

Second, as discussed above, communities looked for and, whenever available, utilised nonpolitical spaces for their activities. Many community members adopted Buddhist rituals, commemorations and sermons, as the main venues for social reconciliation under the dominant religious influence of Buddhism. Such a choice was partly due to public perception of Buddhist *sangha*<sup>4</sup> as the religious body that is not meant to involve secular issues, and the fact that the mainstream Buddhist orders have maintained a collaborative relationship with the political authorities. From a practical perspective, annual Buddhist anniversaries offer multiple opportunities in which community members can participate without organising separate events. Hence, varied forms of commemoration were adopted following Buddhist traditions, which included erecting *stupa* (monuments) where mass killings occurred, conducting mock funerals for the dead, collecting and placing the bones of the dead within local monasteries, and making offerings during Buddhist annual events.

Third, when communities are involved in the programmes that are more explicitly organised for social reconciliation by civil society actors, the agenda to be discussed in the programme is carefully chosen.

Moreover, while a significant number of NGOs have operated programmes to promote social reconciliation, most of these programmes focus on truth-finding, trauma healing, and raising public awareness, which include erecting peace museums and commemorative sites, collecting victims' testimonies, medical treatment and counselling support to victims, and the development of educational materials (textbooks, mobile apps). Although the contributions that these initiatives have made are worthy of high praise, it should be noted that these programmes are one-sided, looking into victims' pain without facilitating mutual understanding between victims and former harm-doers (Interviews VII and VIII).

In many previous studies, connectivity has been acknowledged with a particular focus on the influence/restriction of the liberal institutional peacebuilding on the formation of local peace, while the

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examination on local communities' response to it in their everyday is less significant (Boege, 2012; Brigg & Walker, 2016). Building on this, the above examples focused on another aspect of connectivity: how community members build and experience everyday peace under the given conditions, which influences how the wider institutional arrangements settle in the local areas. When focus-

ing on behavioural aspects of relational peace, the actions described above may look obedient towards authority, tactical, and conflict-avoiding. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that community populations in Cambodia have sought ways to keep promoting the social relationship that they value, despite the challenges and conditions of the wider political contexts. The forms of everyday peace are determined based on the constant interaction between local communities and the wider contexts, and the meanings and significance of them need to be understood within the contexts.

## Conclusion

This article set out to empirically explore the nature of everyday peace in Cambodia. Focusing on the reconstruction of relationships between community residents and former KR leaders, the analysis demonstrated that everyday peace in these communities is characterised by three features: plurality, subtlety, and connectivity. Firstly, the findings highlighted the dissimilar types of social relationships that Cambodian local communities engage in with former KR leaders. Negative forms of behavioural interaction such as avoidance and passive coexistence are underpinned by attitudes of the community residents towards the former KR cadres such as concealed antagonism, mistrust, and sense of weariness. In contrast, the interactions like practical collaboration and rehumanised relationships represent more positive attitudes like sympathy and trust. Such plurality of relationships exists not only between the communities that are influenced by different contexts but also between individuals within the same communities. Secondly, the findings demonstrated that important actions and tactics adopted in local communities for promoting peace may look insignificant, episodic, and mundane. Despite their subtlety, these actions indeed play key roles in determining relationships between former KR associates and other community members, thereby shaping the nature of everyday peace. Thirdly, the analysis emphasised the interactions of external contexts and local agency that form the unique features of local peacebuilding, captured by the concept of connectivity. Peacebuilding actors can lay different pathways for pursuing their objectives while being under the conditions and restrictions set by external contexts. The nature of local peace is constantly changing and, in this regard, the above findings are valid in the particular local contexts in Cambodia as of the late 2010s. Having said this, plurality, subtlety, and connectivity as features of everyday peace can be expected to be relevant for a more nuanced understanding of peace in postconflict societies beyond the case of Cambodia.

The above findings generate theoretical and practical implications that are relevant to the ongoing endeavour to identify and examine the nature of everyday peace. One implication is related to the limitations of

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the assumptions of the fixity and homogeneity of the peace in a society, often represented by institutional mechanisms, which many conventional studies adopt (Gibson-Graham, 2003; Mac Ginty, 2014). In Cambodia, for instance, the nature of peace in Cambodia seen from people's everyday looks significantly different from what is measured in the previous attempts to generalise overall conditions with the focus on the relevant institution-building

at state level. For instance, in evaluating the overall conditions for reconciliation in Cambodia, Ngarm (2017, p. 24) mentions that while "Cambodia has seen to some extent reconciliation at the political level (...) the social emotional reconciliation dimensions still remained untouched." From a similar perspective, Robertson (2019, n.p.) confirmed "reconciliation remains elusive." In other reports, the level of reconciliation was examined through the development of truth-finding mechanisms, tribunals on KR leaders, history education, and support to victims (e.g., Dicklitch & Malik, 2010; Pham et al., 2019; Simangan, 2017). While the limitations highlighted in these studies are fair and important, their evaluations under-report the complexity of the local realities and were often driven by the assumption of a direct and predictable relationship between such institutions and people's lives (Millar, 2014, p. 504). Hence, understanding the nature of everyday peace requires the adoption of a nuanced analytical lens to appreciate the overall conditions that are concurrent across the society as well as the variations that different communities present.

In addition, the features of subtlety and connectivity demonstrate the importance of appreciating the prepolitical and mundane nature of everyday peace. Many forms of relationship building in local communities were promoted based on various motivations such as personal sympathy, religious (Buddhist) teachings, fear of the negative consequence of their actions, family disciplines, or desire to follow what others do. The forms of such actions are likely to look mundane, episodic, or invisible. Community members often take such actions as intuitive responses or daily routine without realising the significance of them for peacebuilding. Nevertheless, these actions have significant implications as the indicators as well as promoters of everyday peace. They collectively have formed important conditions in which local communities experience the level and type of everyday peace. Moreover, the repeated patterns of these actions frequently reflect the mechanisms of social activities which are embedded in the wider context in the country. These findings call for revisiting the trend in some recent studies on everyday peace that tends to narrowly understand everyday peace as the actions based on political motivation and to interpret everyday peacebuilding as political acts (Åhäll, 2019; Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Tellidis & Glomm, 2019; Väyrynen, 2019). While the contribution of these studies should be fully appreciated, too much focus on these areas of everyday peacebuilding may mean that the academic discussion undervalues the significance of the fluid and organic practices as important sources of peacebuilding from the academic examination (Millar, 2020).

Finally, the findings related to subtlety offer an empirical foundation for further research on *victims' silence*. Recent studies challenge the views that identify silence as suppression of voices imposed as a result of the political marginalisation of the victims. Instead, they propose that silence can be a choice of people to deal with challenging realities in their societies and pursue their objectives (Cohen, 2001; Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012; Govier & Verwoerd, 2002; Selimovic, 2020). The above findings confirm the validity of these studies and call for more nuanced analysis of the cases that have been identified as silence. As evidenced by how everyday peace is manifested in Cambodia, the situation that looks like silence at the superficial level may in fact represent many subtle actions deliberately

mobilised by actors. Moreover, such silence and avoidance of interaction may be a strategically chosen and culturally sensitive mode of communication that reflects local actors' agency and may have a strong influence on the dynamics of peacebuilding.

## Appendix

### Interviews

Interview I—A village leader living in Svay Rieng (January 2019).

Interview II—A resident of the KR violence living in Battambaing whose father and two close relatives were killed by KR (January 2019).

Interview III—A former village leader in Phnom Penh (December 2019).

Interview IV—A resident in Svay Rieng whose uncle was killed by KR (January 2019).

Interview V—A local researcher whose hometown is Svay Rieng but living in Phnom Penh (December 2019).

Interview VI—A former village leader in Battambang (January 2019).

Interview VII—An NGO practitioner who had operated social reconciliation programmes (December 2019).

Interview VIII—A researcher living in Phnom Penh (January 2019).

Interview IX—A former PRK soldier who lost a leg during the civil war, currently living in Phnom Penh (January 2019).

Interview X—A community resident in Svay Rieng who lost two siblings (January 2019).

Interview XI—A village leader living in Battambang (January 2019).

Interview XII—A community resident in Phnom Penh whose three close relatives were killed (August 2020).

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### Notes

1. The group's self-claimed official name is the Party of Democratic Kampuchea and it is often called *Khmer Krohom* (KR, red Khmer in the Cambodian language) within local communities. However, this chapter uses the Khmer Rouge (meaning red Khmer in French), which is most widely used in the academic studies.
2. More details of the distinctive forms of local communities' actions can be found from Lee (2021).
3. In this regard, one interview participant mentioned: "I am not brave enough to make comments on the government's intention. But, I am sure you also can sense it" (Interview XII). Moreover, two interview participants briefly touched upon KR's nationalist propaganda that might have appealed to some of the population but both later demanded the deletion of these statements from the interview scripts.
4. Sangha denotes Buddhist order or community that usually consists of professional priests (monks and nuns) but occasionally includes lay leaders.

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