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The Resilience of Cambodia's Music Through Darkness; An Oral History of The Khmer Rouge Regime and Its Adverse Effects on The Legacy of Cambodia's Golden Era of Music

Justin Kdep

Abstract: In the early 1960's Cambodia was introduced to its "golden era" of music. Unfortunately, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge would overthrow Cambodia's Government, ending the reign of Cambodia's golden era, and leading to a 5-year regime filled with brutality, torment, and thousands of mass atrocities. The purpose of this study was to seek a better understanding of how the legacy of Cambodia's golden era has been impacted by the events of the Khmer Rouge regime. In order to preserve the voices of the survivors of the regime, oral history interviews were conducted with ten different survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. The outcome of this study revealed that music from the golden era was significant to helping those who have endured such tragedy, by providing emotional support. This music has helped many survivors heal from their past traumas while also simultaneously helping to reminisce on their past.

Keywords: Cambodia, culture, golden era, Khmer Rouge, Khmer, music, regime, survivors, genocide

"Please Give Us Voice" by Chanrithy Him¹

When Broken Glass Floats, a nation drowns,
Descending to the abyss.

From mass graves in the once-gentle land,
Their blood seeps into mother earth.

Their suffering spirits whisper to her,
"Why has this happened?"

Their voice resounds in the spirit world,
Shouts through the souls of survivors,
Determined to connect, begging the world:

Please remember us.

Please speak for us.

Please bring us justice.

INTRODUCTION

“When Broken Glass Floats” is a fundamental Cambodian proverb and metaphor which often symbolizes a time when “evil” conquers “good.”² This proverb directly coincides with the feelings of many Cambodians after having endured five or more years filled with brutality, torment, and thousands of mass atrocities under the Khmer Rouge regime. On April 17th, 1975, Pol Pot, who led the Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer), more formally known as The Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), incited a revolution, which in turn catalyzed a massive amount of fear and confusion amongst the Cambodian population. Unfortunately, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were quickly able to overthrow Cambodia’s leader, General Lon Nol who led the Republic of Cambodia (ROC). Just days under Pol Pot’s new regime, he declared it “Year Zero” and soon, migrated thousands of Cambodians from the urban areas in Cambodia into the desolate countryside to undertake agricultural work. This was a secret plot initiated by Pol Pot and his party, in order to establish his goals of creating a classless agrarian society.³ Instead, its outcome would leave thousands of families separated⁴, and over two million fatalities caused by starvation, disease, overwork, and execution.⁵ Pol Pot largely disapproved of the urban and western ideologies which swept through Cambodia during the golden era, so any forms of artistic expression, or signs of intellectualism and professionalism were seen as treasonous. This also meant that religious worship and cultural practices were banned in order to remove any influences from Cambodia’s past.⁶ In turn, this



*Baksey Cham Krong, Cambodia's first guitar group.
Courtesy of Mol Kamach, Argot Pictures*

led to Pol Pot’s decision to ban anything culturally significant to Cambodia’s past, and anyone who was seen as disobeying these new orders was easily punishable by death.⁷

Pol Pot’s focus on the removal of Cambodian culture is broadly defined by anthropologists as the attitudes and beliefs of a particular social group. However, in this situation culture can more narrowly be defined in relation to the arts, such as music, dance, religion, and literature.⁸ The Khmer Rouge believed that anything holding any cultural value, most often forms of music or dance, was a threat.⁹

In the early 1960s, just a decade before the conquering of Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge, many of the cultural norms and practices in Cambodia began to shift vastly. Fortunately, many Cambodians viewed this as a positive change and often referred

1 Him, C., (2000). *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up Under the Khmer Rouge*, A Memoir. W.W. Norton.

2 Him, C., (2000). *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up Under the Khmer Rouge*, A Memoir. W.W. Norton.

3 Kambouly, D., Socheat, N., & Suyheang, K. (n.d.). *Historical Overview of the Khmer Rouge*. Documentation Center of Cambodia.

4 Sa, F., Poole, S., & Senghul, H. (2014). *Memory and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal*. Cambodia Law and Policy Journal, 3(1), 1-6.

5 Onion, A., Sullivan, M., & Mullen, M. (2009). *Pol Pot*. History.

6 Mamula, S. (2008). *Starting from Nowhere? Popular Music in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge*. Asian Music 39(1), 26-41.

7 Linton, R. (1947). *The Cultural Background of Personality*. Appleton-Century Co.

8 Barton, G. (2018). *The Relationship Between Music, Culture, and Society: Meaning in Music: Implications for Classroom Practice*.

9 Delano, D. L., & Knottnerus, J. D. (2018). The Khmer Rouge, Ritual and Control. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 46(1/2), 79–110.



Sinn Sisamouth record sleeve. Courtesy of CVMA

to this period as the “golden era.” This era of pop culture was heavily characterized by western ideologies and was most distinctively known for its new wave of Cambodian music, which was led by notable musical pioneers such as Sinn Sisamouth, Ros Soreysothea, Pan Ron, and many more. As stated by Alex Benson, “Imported Afro-Cuban records coupled with the instrumentation of Filipino marching bands broadened the palette of instrumentation available to Cambodia.”¹⁰ Many Cambodian musicians took it upon themselves to experiment with new styles of music and this allowed them to create a wide variety of ballads from genres such as rock and roll to genres with slow, romantic, and melancholy melodies, all of which were groundbreaking at the time. Their music eventually took Cambodia by storm with all of their greatest hits being heard playing at events such as parties, weddings, and in pop culture productions such as movies. However, because of Pol Pot’s decision to ban music in particular, many of their creative works disappeared during the regime. During this 5-year period, no one could purchase, play, or

sing popular Khmer songs without the fear of being punished by the Khmer Rouge. Even the discussion of music could be viewed as a betrayal of the party’s new customs. Despite all of these hardships, the effort to revive and continue the legacy of the golden era of Cambodian music has been gradual, but it is a process supported by many who believe that Khmer music from the golden era will continue to live on for future generations, and that it will now serve an even greater purpose than before because of its symbolic meaning for the past, present, and future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effects of Genocide on Cultural Heritage

This literature review examines the goals of war and mass genocide in its efforts to conceal, or in extreme cases, eradicate, any potential influences of culture in societies which have had a strong sense of identity. One important aspect of culture which has had a massive influence in shaping one’s identity, is often displayed through performance arts, such as music. Ray Hudson, part of the *Department of Geography and Wolfson Research Institute*, explores this idea by stating that music can be connected to one’s “well-being” as well as their “identity”. He elaborates further by stating that, “music provides people with ways of understanding and developing their self-identity, of connecting with other people, of maintaining well-being, and experiencing and expressing spirituality” as well as providing “strong memories and associations with a person’s life.”¹¹ By suppressing these cultural themes which are displayed in music, a great population of survivors who have faced mass genocide struggle to uphold the legacy of their cultural heritage, as well as traditions for the current and future generations to come.

Petocz, and his colleagues write in the *International Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries*, which sought to determine the importance of cultural sustainability in terms of music, and its benefits to

10 Benson, A. (2018). *The Rise and Fall of Cambodian Rock and Roll*. Medium

11 Hudson, R. (2006). *Regions and Place: Music, Identity, and Place*. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30(5), 626–634.

cultural heritage. In their findings they indicate that, "Cultural heritage refers to the preservation in some form or other of the non-tangible aspects of society in the past" which includes things such as "musical compositions". It is also mentioned that cultural sustainability should be considered to "maximize its impact on the country's social and economic life."¹² Both Hudson and Petocz seem to believe that music plays a vital role throughout cultures. However, Hudson takes a more personal approach to his belief by discussing music's impact on the affected party, such as the survivors of genocide, rather than the perspective taken by Petocz, and his colleagues, who look at music's impact on society as a whole.

Another researcher by the name of Edward Luck highlights the personal recollections of Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer who focuses on the relevancy of cultural heritage, and who also first coined the term "genocide." Luck goes on to narrate Lemkin's first-hand experiences with being at the forefront of genocide. He states, "His personal experience deepened his understanding of the intimate connections between cultural and physical destruction, for the aggressors recognized that the annihilation of a culture or way of life was a more daunting task than mass murder."¹³ Lemkin's experiences encourage a new perspective on genocide; often, associations with this word are paired with the ideas of killings or of mass murder. While this may be true, many of the other implications of genocide, such as cultural and economic destruction, tend to be forgotten. Thus, the findings made by Hudson, Luck, as well as Petocz and his colleagues, all share a common theme, which is that genocide's focus is not only on mass killings of an ethnic group, but it also has a huge role in damaging their identities, cultural traditions, and practices, as well as harming the economic state of a society as a whole.

Legacy of the Khmer Rouge

One notable group of people who were impacted by the extreme beliefs of genocide were the Cambodian people. George Chigas and Dimitri Mosyakov, who are both apart of the "Genocide Studies" program at Yale University, outline the experiences that many Cambodians endured under the CPK. They stated that many groups of people were targeted by the Khmer Rouge such as, "Buddhist monks, ethnic minorities, and educated elites." The party also had a "Four-Year Plan", which read that it would "Continue the struggle to abolish, uproot, and disperse the cultural, literary, and artistic remnants of the imperialists, colonialists, and all of the other oppressor classes."¹⁴ Likewise, Estelle Bockers and their associates explain that "Every Cambodian alive during the regime experienced on average 10 traumatic events, such as starvation, lack of shelter, being close to death, forced labor, torture, or witnessing the death or killing of family members or friends."¹⁵ Similar to the findings presented by Hudson, Petocz, and Luck, both Chigas and Mosyakov, along with Bockers and their colleagues, determined similar tendencies when specifically focusing on the goals and practices of the Khmer Rouge.

For many survivors, the return to "normalcy" after the regime has been a slow and grueling process. Casey Quackenbush, a writer for Time Magazine, presents the findings of David Chandler, who is a Cambodian historian. Chandler claims that most Cambodians who are under their 50s do not have a direct experience of the Khmer rouge regime. This means that the "legacy of the genocide is extremely limited."¹⁶ Kate Hodal, who writes for The Guardian, adds that Cambodia was once home to an "important music scene," led by musical pioneers such as Sinn Sisamouth and Ros Soreysothea. Hodal believes that in a nation where 90% of artists, musicians, dancers, as well as intellectuals had been targeted by the brutalist Khmer Rouge regime, "remembering the past is a vital

12 Petocz, P., Reid, A., & Bennett, D. (2014). *The Music Workforce, Cultural Heritage and Sustainability*. International Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries, 1(2), 4-16.

13 Luck, E. C. (2020). *Cultural genocide and the protection of cultural heritage*. Getty Publications.

14 Chigas, G., & Mosyakov, D. (2022). *Literacy and Education under the Khmer Rouge | Genocide Studies Program*. Yale University.

15 Bockers, E., Stammel, N., & Knaevelsrud, C. (2011). *Reconciliation in Cambodia: thirty years after the terror of the Khmer Rouge regime*, 21(2), 71-83.

16 Quackenbush, C. (2019). *40 Years After the Fall of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia Still Grapples with Pol Pot's Brutal Legacy*. Time Magazine.

aspect of safeguarding the future.”¹⁷ Although there has been a huge loss of musicians and dancers who have been an important symbol of Khmer culture, with the help of the very few artists who are still alive today, it has helped many younger Cambodians who have faced a “cultural barrier” within their lives, grasp the idea of their cultural identity and help to pave a legacy for the many future generations of Cambodians to come.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study aims to answer the question: *In what ways has the Khmer Rouge genocide influenced the cultural legacy of Cambodia's golden era of music in the present day, for survivors of the regime?* It is important to understand that the question already implies “In what ways has the Khmer Rouge genocide influenced” rather than “has.” This is because past research has already addressed the fact that the genocide has already inflicted harm on Cambodia's society in a number of ways, and this study aims to discover the significant effects from the event which took place. It is hypothesized that the methods used by the Khmer Rouge to eradicate Cambodian cultural practices and expressions, erased many of the survivors' memories of music from the golden era and limited its legacy which continues to affect the Cambodian population up until modern day.

Oral History Interviews

The design of this study takes on a qualitative approach for the methodology, which takes into account data that will help to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions.¹⁸ For the purposes of this research, a qualitative approach will best fit the means, because it uses data to account for historically significant events, and the impact it holds in present day, as well as looking into possible effects on the future.¹⁹ The methodology chosen for this study is oral history because it allowed the researcher to

conduct open-ended interviews, in order to help “preserve the voices, memories and perspectives of people in history,” as well as capturing “unique perspectives.”²⁰ The use of this method allowed survivors to share their unique and untold experiences, related to the period of the golden era in Cambodia. In the context of this study, ten individuals, who are all survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide, and ranged from the ages of 50 to 80 were selected to be interviewed by the researcher. These interviewees were chosen based on their membership in the *United Cambodian Development Association (UCDA)*, a non-profit organization based in the Northwestern region of the U.S, whose main focus is working towards the development of the Cambodian community and helping to provide support to the newer generation of Cambodians. Those who agreed to be interviewed received an informed consent form (refer to Appendix A), as well as a list of guided questions, prior to the day of the interview (refer to Appendix B). Each interview lasted about 30-40 minutes, and the list of guided questions was set up in a chronological fashion, meaning that each question was set to follow each survivors' experiences starting from their early childhood life, and then later moving on to their current adult lives. These questions pertained to any first or second-hand experiences of the golden era of Khmer music, as well as any memories about the Khmer Rouge. The researcher was allowed to ask any follow up questions if necessary, and throughout the interview, each interviewee was also allowed to share any photos that were significant to their personal experiences. Any faces of people in the shared photos were blurred out for privacy purposes, as well as if they did not give consent to the researcher.

Thematic Analysis

While analyzing the results of the interviews, a method of thematic analysis was applied to the research. Thematic analysis is often used in qualitative research to determine relationships between shared experiences. As for the purpose of this research, an oral history methodology was used in which survivors

17 Hodal, K. (2012). *Cambodia's art of survival*. The Guardian.

18 Pathak, V., Jena, B., & Kalra, S. (2013). *Qualitative research. Perspectives in clinical research*, 4(3), 192.

19 *Qualitative study design*. (2023). Deakin University.

20 Henson, P., Hobbs, H. (n.d.). *How to Do Oral History*. Smithsonian Institutional Archives.

of the Khmer Rouge regime shared their individual experiences with the researcher. After transcribing and analyzing these different stories told by the interviewees, any overarching themes that appeared more than four times throughout each interview were chosen as fundamental themes within this study. After completing all ten interviews, themes were revised to provide a consistent analysis to the topic of research.

Validity

The use of this methodology has helped to address a gap in the research because previous research has been limited to a small number of studies about the experiences surrounding the golden era of Cambodian culture, such as music. Research on this topic also tends to be generalized after focusing on one specific group. John Pirozzi was the film director for *“Don’t Think I’ve Forgotten: Cambodia’s Lost Rock and Roll.”* In this film, Pirozzi explores a wide range of information related to the golden era. However, he barely acknowledges survivors who do not have any previ-

ous musical knowledge.²¹ In doing so, the methods used in this study will allow for a broader and unique range of different perspectives. The age range (50-80) in this study helps to eliminate any broad generalizations that have been made about a small population of Cambodian survivors in the past. As well it, allows the researcher to interview younger survivors, who might have had experiences that were second-hand, which should not be dismissed within the field of research because they still provide a greater view on any valuable information that has not yet been discovered about this topic.

Limitations

A plausible number of limitations to this study must be considered before coming to a final conclusion. The most significant of these is that the sample group of this study, (United Cambodian Development Association) consists of mostly male members (70%). This created difficulties with a wide range of representation with the selected interviewees. Furthermore, since the target

Figure 1: Themes and Definition

Themes	Operational Definition(s)	# of occurrences throughout all interviews
Self-healing	The process to help oneself recover from past tragedies. In this case, an experience with using music to help heal from past trauma.	8
Reminiscence	Experiences where an interviewee used music to help reflect on past memories.	6
Perseverance	An experience where the interviewee mentioned a time they pushed through and recovered from a difficult period in their life.	9
Social class	Experiences related to socioeconomic status	8
Conformity	An instance in an interviewee’s life, where they felt like they had to conform to societal standards in order to “fit in”.	10
Sense of Community	Using music to help connect with others within their community.	7

21 Pirozzi, J. (Director). (2014). *Don’t Think I’ve Forgotten: Cambodia’s Lost Rock and Roll* [Film]. Argot Pictures.

age range was 50-80, there was a greater population of younger survivors to interview. This meant less access to older age groups, and with the problems with being inclusive of older age groups there also came a difficult task of combating a language barrier, because most older interviewees only spoke in Khmer, which is the national language of Cambodia. Since the methods of this research only strictly include qualitative interviews, there is a higher probability of improper translation, which could reflect on the results of this study. Finally, these themes were subject to misinterpretation because the creation of the six commonly occurring themes was purely based on the researcher’s judgement. However, an effort was made to clarify each event with the interviewee, in detail with the use of follow up questions. In turn, this will help to eliminate any false subjectivity on the part of the researcher.

FINDINGS

When using thematic analysis to help develop common themes which have appeared from the ten different interviewees experiences, a total of 12 themes appeared. However, these themes were only characterized by six commonly reoccurring themes, which are: self-healing, reminiscence, perseverance, cultural expression, conformity, and a sense of community. These themes and their definitions are depicted below.

Discussion

Just years leading up to Pol Pot’s reign over Cambodia, the golden era was known to be one of the most important cultural scenes to take place at the time. The influence of music continued to rapidly spread to all areas within Cambodia. Interviewee #1, resided in the western part of Cambodia, known as the Batt-

Figure 2: Song Titles & Artist Names

Corresponding #	Song Title	Why They Chose This Song:
Interviewee #1	“Prot Phnom Sampov” by Sinn Sisamouth	Reminds him of his birth village, Phnom Sampov
Interviewee #2	“Sro Em Phalla” by Sinn Sisamouth, Pen Ron	It helps to lift his spirits
Interviewee #3	“Kompong Thom Chom Rom Chet” by Sinn Sisamouth, Ros Sereysothea	It allows him to revisit his childhood memories
Interviewee #4	“Dai Knong Dai, Pnek Knong Pnek” by Sinn Sisamouth	Reminds him of his wife
Interviewee #5	“Dorng Steung Sonkaeh” By Sinn Sisamouth	Reminds him of the scenery in Cambodia
Interviewee #6	“Yop Dob Pi Kal” by Sinn Sisamouth	His favorite song to listen to
Interviewee #7	“Kon Srek Rok Meh” by Sos Mat	She listens to this song in remembrance of her mother
Interviewee #8	“Romdoul Dorng Steung Songaeh” by Sinn Sisamouth	This song combines both Western and Cambodian influences which she enjoys
Interviewee #9	“Moha Sangkran” by Sinn Sisamouth	A very sentimental song which makes her feel happy
Interviewee #10	“Kouk Kam Procham Kay” by Sinn Sisamouth	A song to commemorate her parents and her husband

ambang Province. He vividly remembers being highly influenced by the music of the famously known artists during the time of the golden era. For instance, he stated, “We called him the king of the golden voice... Mr. Sinn Sisamouth. The male singer who is known to be the ‘Elvis of Cambodia’” Interviewee #10 adds, “I like all of his songs [Sinn Sisamouth], there were about over 10,000 songs he sang, and I love all of them.” Many other survivors shared similar stories related to artists from the golden era. As a matter of fact, almost all of the ten interviewees frequently responded with the names of these notable musicians (refer to Figure 2), which displays how critical of a role that these artists had with their influences on Cambodian culture during that time period. However, unlike Interviewee #1, Interviewee #3 coupled with a few others, have had little to no experience with the golden era of music in their early life. Interviewee #3 states, “I recall just listening briefly to it [Khmer music] and how I liked the sound of the music and the melody... But back then I didn’t know their names [Sinn Sisamouth and Ros Soreysothea].” Many Interviewees had also faced different living conditions and family upbringing prior to the regime. Interviewee #6 exclaims, “My father was a doctor, and my mother was a teacher, so I grew up in what I would consider a middle-class family”. On the other hand, Interviewee #5 stated, “My dad would pretty much trade and resell stuff, alongside being a famer... and my mom was a stay-at-home mom.” This led to the realization that wealth and status was a huge contributing factor on whether an interviewee had exposure and experiences related to the golden era.

Unfortunately, The Khmer Rouge or CPK quickly began to gain more power, and under the control of Pol Pot, every Cambodian was forced to migrate to the countryside. This meant essentially “starting over” to rebuild the entire economy without any urban or western influences. Interviewee #1 pointed out that, “The Khmer Rouge came in, so we had to abandon our village, which meant the schools or the public services, hospital, public markets, banking place, [were] all banned and all abandoned.” Just days after arriving to the countryside, refugee camps were set up, and within these camps thousands of Cambodians



A family at Khao I Dang Refugee Camp. (1985)

often faced unbearable, and unethical living conditions. Interviewee #2 adds to that by stating, “There are times when we have personally gone through days without enough food to eat... Each person doesn’t matter what age you are, was only allowed to eat two meals a day.” In order to survive during the regime, many Cambodians took to conformity in order to “fit in” with society around them and to not face the potential backlash from the Khmer Rouge.²² However, this deeply suppressed many memories that survivors had about their former life, which was something that was observed throughout all the interviews. Interviewee #10 who was a schoolteacher prior to the beginning of the Khmer Rouge regime claims that, “They [Khmer Rouge] kidnapped me and asked me if I was a teacher...I had to lie and say I could not read or write.” In addition to this, Interviewee #7 exclaims

22 Hickey, R., Killean, R., (2021). *Property Loss and Cultural Heritage Restoration in the Aftermath of Genocide: Understanding Harm and Conceptualizing Repair*. International Journal of Transitional Justice, 15(3), 468–489.

“In the morning, at exactly six o'clock, you would hear the whistle blow, which meant you had to get up and be ready for your assignment of the day.” The Khmer Rouge had also forbidden any personal possessions because it went against Pol Pot's ideologies. Interviewee #3 explains “If you had watches or gold jewelry they'll take it from you... basically all you had left was plain working clothes.” The singers of the golden era were seen to be the easiest scapegoats during this time due to their fame and status, as well as their significant contribution to Cambodian culture. So, considering that one of the goals of the Khmer Rouge was to attempt to eliminate any known literate and educated people, it ultimately allowed these musicians to be one of the first targets of the Khmer Rouge killings. Interviewee #2 recounts the tragic scenarios that one of these artists faced during this time period. He reveals that “They basically exiled her to some sort of small village to work in the rice field” he elaborates further by explaining that “This very famous singer [Ros So-reysothea] died of starvation, and her kids also died of starvation too.” Additionally, many interviewees have described not being able to listen to music during this time. Interviewee #3 claims that, “They would not allow any music. And not just that, also [listening to] radio and stuff like that. If they caught you listening to music, they would kill you...I just followed them, whatever they said.” Interviewee #6 adds “We are not allowed to listen to the former music. So, a lot of the music was propaganda, all about how wonderful the regime was, and all that kind of stuff.”

In present day, many interviewees have reflected on their past experiences during the tragic time of the Khmer Rouge genocide. Based on the wide array of individual experiences which are described by all of the interviewees, it is a telltale sign that the Khmer Rouge has had such a distinct impact on all these survivors of the regime, and their remembrance of their own cultural heritage up to this day. Interviewee #2 stated: “You can't even listen to music during that time. So, it really affected you growing up, you know, like not being able to listen to your favorite song, and always being fearful about getting caught doing something that you know you're not supposed to do.” Similarly, Interviewee #9 claims, “I remember that majority of [Khmer]songs used to be sentimental... after the war it all became songs of remembrance or mourning.” In contrast, many survivors have also claimed to



A Family Arrives to Philippine Refugee Center. (1987)

use Khmer music as a safe haven and have stated that this particular type of music helped them to reflect on their past memories. Interviewee #3 describes, “When they [the singers] describe something, say like a river, I can imagine seeing myself walking along the same river and everything. So, it takes me back to my childhood memory of what I was doing then.” Interviewee #1 also mentioned, “When I listen to a song, I can imagine a lot of things. I reconnect to the place where I grew up, connect to the memories that I have with my relatives, siblings, my family, the happy times, and the sad times.” Furthermore, Interviewee #8 states, “Music, art and culture really empowers individuals and gives them their own personal identity.” Unlike the original hypothesis of this study which claimed that the Khmer Rouge policies would have erased survivors' memories of music from the golden era, interviews revealed a mix of results. Some interviewees did forget music from this era, while others remembered both songs and artists before the Khmer Rouge and clung on to those memories in order to survive and to reinforce personal, community and national identity.

Conclusion

The findings of this study portray the enduring power of music in the face of atrocity and the resilience of the Cambodian people. After having overcome thousands of obstacles and facing a great amount of trauma and devastation in their lives, many Cambodians continue to deeply hold on to their experiences related to their cultural backgrounds. These interviews help us to understand that the golden era still holds an immense amount of importance to the Cambodian community, and although many of the musical pioneers of the golden era have unfortunately passed during the regime, their influence alongside their legacy, continue to live on within the culture that surrounds Cambodia to this day. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the golden era and its music now serves an even greater purpose than before, which is by providing emotional support to survivors of the regime. It allows those who have faced plenty of hardships in their life to reminisce on their past, heal from the trauma they have endured, or even use this music to connect with people who have experienced the same as them. Even though some of my findings were consistent to those of past studies, I believe that this study helps to address the past issues of generalization related to the experiences with the golden era. The results that were generated help to further the understanding and importance of music and its existence in these survivors lives and will help to preserve the voices that have once been kept quiet. Further research on this topic should identify what steps Cambodians have taken to start the process of preserving their cultural traditions such as music. Projects such as the Documentation Center of Cambodia²³ and The Royal University of Fine Arts²⁴ have been helping to revitalize and preserve the legacies that many influential music artists and dancers had on the culture of Cambodia.²⁵ In contrast, I also encountered interviewees who has a strong passion for classical Cambodian dance, which was something that was also culturally significant to the golden era. Neang Visal claims, "Cambodian folk dance is a visual

form of storytelling, about religion, nature, weddings and funerals."²⁶ This displays the sheer importance of understanding all aspects of culture whether it be music, dance, religion, or literature. Overall, the exploration of these two areas of interest would also provide great contributions to research on this topic and will bring light to the struggles that many Cambodians are still facing, while also portraying the amount of support and strength the Cambodian people have shown in recent years past the regime, with to trying to lead on the legacy of their past into the future.

23 Etcheson, C. (1995). *Documentation Center of Cambodia*. Yale University.

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26 Hodal, K. (2012). *Cambodia's art of survival*. The Guardian.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Research Participants name:
Research investigator:

This interview will take (30 mins to 1 hour).

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken for the AP Capstone program require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and told how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation.

We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Would you therefore read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- the interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced
- you will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors
- the transcript of the interview will be analyzed by as research investigator
- access to the interview transcript will be limited to _____ and academic colleagues and researchers with whom they might collaborate as part of the research process
- any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- the actual recording will be kept until analysis and transcription of recordings are complete
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

_____ I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.

_____ I agree to be quoted directly.

_____ I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.

_____ I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

All or part of the content of your interview may be used;

- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles
- In other media that may be produced, such as a spoken presentation

By signing this form, I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
4. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
5. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Printed Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix B: Guided Interview Questions

Question #1	Please State Name, Age, Place of Birth (POB)
Question #2	Can you describe the area in which you grew up?
Question #3	How many members are in your family? (# of siblings)
Question #4	Growing up what was the occupation of your parent(s)?
Question #5	At a young age, do you remember being surrounded by Khmer music of the golden era?
Question #6	If so, are there any specific times that you remember hearing/listening to music?
Question #7	Are there any influential artists (golden era) who you remember the most?
Question #8	Approximately what age were you during the invasion of the Khmer Rouge (KR)?
Question #9	Could you provide a brief background about any significant experiences you experienced during the regime?
Question #10	Do you remember what the (KR) controlled or forbid you against doing?
Question #11	Could you provide any information you may have about what happened to (Khmer) music during this time period?
Question #12	Were there any other challenges you faced during this time?
Question #13	How has your current life been impacted by the events of the Khmer Rouge?
Question #14	Are there any Hobbies/Jobs that you have which are related to your cultural background (Cambodian culture)?
Question #15	In what ways has Khmer music made an impact on your life (Current/Past)?
Question #16	Could you provide a song, both the title and artist that you feel has been the most impactful on your life?
<p>Note: A number of responses to interview questions were anonymized in order to meet ethical research guidelines.</p>	

