Crossing Nepantla
Older Khmer Women’s Passage to Healing in Diaspora

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Deakin University
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Crossing Nepantla: Older Khmer Women’s Passage to Healing in Diaspora

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to understand how it is possible for older women living in the Khmer diaspora to heal after enduring the Khmer Rouge genocide and subsequent migration to Melbourne, Australia. In essence, migration is a journey of the self across borders, imagined and otherwise, and often is preceded by an acutely painful and fragmented past.

Using critical feminist border ethnography, the research allows us to stand at an intersection of the perspectives and lives of the Khmer women participants and the journey, pain and life of Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004). Anzaldúa’s revolutionary writings have provided the lens, frame and insights that are at a depth required to understand the process at which healing must occur to free older Khmer women from the traumatic memories that invade their daily existence.

Ethnographic research, including participant observation, was conducted during an eleven-month period at a Cambodian community centre in Melbourne, Australia, followed by in-depth interviews during 2011 - 2013 of twenty-four older Khmer women living in Melbourne. Based on the findings of the research, a conceptual framework was developed to describe the transformative process that occurs when embarking on a journey from immense pain and suffering to one of embodied healing. The intention of this framework was to explore the path to healing of women genocide survivors using Anzaldúaan epistemology as a means of understanding the complexity of healing required at this depth. The thesis also reflects upon how the conceptual framework and undertaking the research have allowed the researcher, who is of Italian migrant background, to conclude that the ‘home’ she herself is yearning is located within.

This thesis will contribute to international feminist justice work in relation to the healing of women genocide survivors living in the western diaspora, and
the decolonisation of taken-for-granted assumptions perpetuated by western academic discourse. It also points to the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing with regard to authentic healing.
DEDICATION
To Those Who Walked Me Here

This thesis is dedicated to four of those who have passed before me:

My mother, Maria Mileo Gallichio, and
My father, Bernard Francis Gallichio.
My uncle and aunt, Tony and Ellen Mileo: “He is the north and I am the south”.

This thesis is also dedicated to the loves of my life, my darling children Annalisa and Julian, and my loving partner, Ilija Ilievski.

All of you are in my heart

Figure 2: Mileo, E. (1987). Wooden block carved and used to make the print of Soul Birds 1.
WITH GRATITUDE

Allowing Me “The Wings of Perception”¹

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the Khmer women who graciously shared their lives with me, a stranger to them. The generosity and wisdom of Mr. Than Thong, key informant and interpreter: your role was pivotal to the success of this research, and this is truly cherished by me.

Thank you to my supervisors, Dr. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli and Professor Bob Pease, my coyotes², who operated with great integrity and generosity to help me bring this thesis to fruition. I am so grateful for your inspiration, belief and care for me and my work. Thank you for stepping in when I needed you most.

I would like to thank my sisters-in-arms, Sue Camier and Marisa Cordella-Masini, who gave me loving and sensitive encouragement throughout this candidature.

Thank you to the family of my late aunt, Ellen Mileo (1934-2006), who gave me permission to use the images of her four paintings and wood carving. Auntie Ellen, who would have known?

Finally, I am most grateful to have had the opportunity to draw upon the wisdom that Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) left for nosotras³ and nosotros⁴. I humbly come forward to claim my place amongst nosotras. I continue to be greatly inspired by her unique, powerful and life-changing work. Her vision, wisdom and spiritual activism are central to my personal and professional life.

¹Castaneda (1974, p. 192); “Wings of Perception” is also title of Figure 9 Mileo, E. (n.d.)
²Valadez and Elsbree (2005)
³Spanish feminine plural of “we”
⁴Spanish masculine plural of “we”
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*Agitado viento, un:* The restless wind that lulls us from a state of unknowing to often greater levels of consciousness.

*Anattā:* Buddhist practice where “the purification of memory” unshackles the limiting and destructive powers that deeply traumatic memories hold (FitzGerald, 2013, p. 22).

*Ângkar:* The Communist Party of Kampuchea (Democratic Kampuchea-Mao-inspired communist ruling party), ruled by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, called themselves ‘The Ângka Padevat’ (Khmer: “revolutionary organization”).

*Animism:* In Cambodia, the amalgamation between ancestral animism of the Khmers and Theravāda Buddhism still exists (Chouléan, 1988, p. 38). Worship of spirits in nature.

*Arrebatamiento:* Literally, a rupture (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 547).

*Autohistoria and Autohistoria-teoría:* An embodying autobiography (Lausch, 2003) that is involved with the search for personal and cultural meaning. Both autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría are informed by reflective self-awareness. This theory developed by Anzaldúa to describe a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life-story and self-reflection on this storytelling process (González-López, 2011, p. 241).

*Baksbat:* ‘Broken courage’; a formal cultural trauma syndrome characteristic of traumatised Cambodians (Khmer).

*Bhikkhunī:* Theravāda Buddhist Nun.

*Bodhisattva:* Term for the historical Buddha Siddhattha Gautama prior to his enlightenment.

*Borderlands Theory:* Stemmed from a movement towards liberation from the colonization and oppression of the Mexican people, originally by the Spanish.

*borderlands:* A space that serves as home to the marginalized by resisting and reconstructing damaging sociocultural constructs such as ‘othering’ for the purposes of unity, communion and progressing humanity. It is a space of pain but opportunity.

*Brāy:* Khmer spirits of women who had died in childbirth, or are spirits of virgins, and considered to be the most dangerous of all spirits, because they
are the most malicious – given their tragic deaths they carry with them extreme impurity (Chouléan, 1988, p. 37).

*Camino de la mestiza, el:* The path of the mestiza is one of immense pain (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 104); pain lies in facing and breaking down colonial paradigms including the suffering imposed during the Khmer Rouge genocide.

*Chamanas:* Shamans have access to other worlds (Blake & Ábrego, 1995, p. 18).

*Chbap:* Didactic codes written in verse providing specific advice for daily living for different yet overlapping social groups (Ledgerwood, n.d.(b)).

*Chbap Srei:* Norms and ideals of Khmer womanhood.

*Coatlicue:* According to Aztec mythology, Coatlicue, whose name means “Serpent Skirts,” is the Indigenous earth goddess of life and death and mother of the gods (González-López, 2011, p. 242).

*Coatlicue state:* The birthing passage to nepantla (Blake & Ábrego, 2000).

*Code-switching:* Use of different ways to resist labelling, for example, Anzaldúa’s encouragement of Chicanos to speak Chicano Spanish and not Castillian Spanish which is the language of the Spanish colonizers (Betancor, 2000, p. 246).

*Conocimientos:* Also ‘ese saber’ is the Spanish word for “knowledge” and “consciousness” that is transformative, leading to radical, non-binary and inclusionary possibilities (González-López, 2011). “It shares a sense of affinity with all things” (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 540). To heal is to attain conocimientos, but “I call conocimiento that aspect of consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained” (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 540). Also referred to as ‘la facultad’.

*Coyolxauhqui:* The ancient Aztec goddess, daughter of Coatlicue, was dismembered by her brother, and her head thrown into the sky to form the moon.

*Coyolxauhqui Imperative:* the yearning to become whole: to search for inner completeness by healing old wounds (Anzaldúa et al., 2003, p. 18). This relates to “putting Coyolxauhqui together”.

Critical Border Feminist Ethnography: Methodology used to study gender inequalities and power imbalances in cultural settings, mostly at the helm of patriarchal societies. Critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in which they study” (Noblit, Flores & Murillo, 2004, p. 3).

Curanderera: A female traditional Mexican or Chicana healer or medicine woman who makes use of ancient rituals and (primarily herbal) remedies known as remedios (Hartley, 2010, p. 137).

Curanderismo: Use of Indigenous knowledge to heal the outcomes of decolonizing practices. Hartley (2010, p. 135) claims Anzaldúa’s main role was as the curandera of la herida abierta (the open wound) created by the borders imposed by capitalism, nationalism, imperialism, sexism, homophobia, and racism.

Dāna: Khmer word for ‘generosity’. Older Khmer women to perform meritorious deeds, known as the primary means of merit-making; It is one of Buddhism’s Ten Virtues (Andaya, 2002, pp. 9-10). It is a means by which Buddhist women can both accrue merit thus contributing to a higher rebirth, and also improve their present lives.

De los otros: Those carrying conocimiento must “embed (our) experiences in a larger frame of reference ... connecting our personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet” (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 542).

Desconocimiento: It is “the opposite of conocimientos. A not-knowing, a refusal to know, an ignorance that damages, miscommunications with irreversible harmful effects that betray trust, that destroy. Desconocimientos are the evils of modern life” (Anzaldúa, cited in Hernández-Ávila (2000, p. 178).

Dhamma: Also known as “dharma”; the Buddha’s teachings in Theravāda Buddhism.

Diaspora: Traumatic exile from an historical homeland and dispersal throughout many lands, whilst consciously maintaining collective ethnic and cultural identity in their new location.

El Mundo Zurdo: Translated as “the left-hand world”, Anzaldúa uses this term to indicate communities based on commonalities and visionary locations where people from diverse backgrounds, often with very different needs and concerns, co-exist and work together to bring about revolutionary change.
**Embodiment:** Negotiation of the self at the intersection of external events (Kinne, 2014). It is the internal response to life events and manifestations of shifting perceptions and positionings that enable us to embody life’s outcomes.

**Encarnación:** Term that is defined as ‘incarnation’ or ‘embodiment’, at a level that embodied pain can be understood (Bost, 2010).

**Éste arrebato:** Related to ‘susto’; an outburst, rupture (Anzaldúa, 2002a).

**Facultad, la:** Anzaldúa’s term for an intuitive form of knowledge that includes but goes beyond logical thought and empirical analysis. That inner sense that only those living in the margins develop to survive. (Rebolledo, 2006, p. 281). See also Anzaldúa (2007, pp. 60-1), ‘La Facultad’. Also referred to as ‘conocimientos’.

**Gkuet cj’rourn:** Khmer cutural syndrome considered a cultural avoidance strategy for coping by not “thinking too much”.

**Kamma:** A central doctrine of Theravāda Buddhism (also known as karma), which is the state of determining one’s present state and future re-birth according to one’s actions.

**Kenosis:** Christian practice of emptying the self of one’s own will and becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will. This is viewed as being similar to the Buddhist practice of Anattā.

**Khmer:** and Cambodian ethnicity used interchangeably throughout this thesis. These terms describe the people, culture and language as the majority of people from Cambodia are ethnic Khmer, and refer to themselves as Khmae (Smith-Hefner, 1999, p. 209).

**Khmer feminine:** A prototype for the virtuous woman (Ledgerwood, 1994), being the mother or the mistress but “never a monk” (Keyes, 1984, p. 223).

**Khmer New Year:** (Khmer: Chaul Chnam Thmey); each year the Khmer gather together and visit temples on the occasion of the Khmer New year. It is an opportunity to worship to powerful gods and trace their ancestors’ heritage.

**Khmer Rouge:** Also known as the Communist Party of Kampuchea, and headed by Pol Pot. The Khmer Rouge were the perpetrators of the Cambodian genocide during 1975-1979.

**La Bruja:** “A female practitioner of spiritual, sexual and healing knowledges” (Lara, 2005a, p. 10).
**La Llorona:** A powerful example of reconstructing the (feminine) self using decolonial and anti-patriarchal narratives and activism in order to transform borders (Elenes, 2010b). The mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of Guadalupe and La Malinche (Anzaldúa, 1999d, p. 80).

**La Malinche/La Chingada:** The raped mother who brings shame, and who we have abandoned (Anzaldúa, 1999d, p. 80).

**La Mestiza:** A woman who is “torn between ways” by overlapping multiple cultures and negotiates contradictory identities, customs, values and realities. La mestiza lives in the borderlands, a space that serves as home to the marginalized.

**La raza cosmica:** The new mestiza consciousness as a result of shifting toward a hybrid identity (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 77).

**La Virgen de Guadalupe:** The virgin, the caring mother, the patron saint of the Mexican people; the virgin mother who has not abandoned us but keeps Indians, Mexicanos and Chicanos oppressed through the Church to make those who have been colonised docile and enduring (Anzaldúa, 1999d, p. 79).

**Language:** Throughout the thesis, I will be using mainly English, but also Italian, Spanish and Náhuatl/Aztec languages and dialects and Khmer, as appropriate. See “Notes to the Reader” for more information.

**Liminality:** Derived from the word *limen*, which means ‘threshold’ in Latin, representing the point of crisis marked by disorientation, a sense of loss and loss of control, and a sense of uncertainty. The state of nepantla.

**Merit making:** (Khmer: *tver bon*) The accumulation of karma as a result of good deeds, acts or thoughts that carries over to later in life or in a person’s next life and other virtuous exemplars (Cook et al., 2009).

**Mestiza Consciousness:** Anzaldúa’s methodology of resistance creates a form of oppositional consciousness that “arises on borders and in margins”. “Together, the Shadow-Beast and la facultad create a mestiza consciousness that allows one to reclaim one’s voice and instinct (the animal soul) in order to name a source or potential source of oppression, even within one’s own psyche. Therefore, a mestiza consciousness also serves as a mode of self-critique. Anzaldúa asserts that by trusting this darker mode of understanding, innocence and the bliss of ignorance are lost.” (Aigner-Varoz, 2000, p. 59).

**Mestizaje:** “Anzaldúa creates a "mythos" of Mestizaje to explore and explode the ways in which socially enforced paradigms are established through surface and conceptual metaphors as well as the ways in which these
paradigms seem to label people as acceptable or unacceptable.” (Aigner-Varoz, 2000, p. 47).

*Mujerista*: A spiritual activist using womanist transformative practices and vision from which social justice emerges (Comas-Diaz, 2008; Medina, 2011).

*Mujerista theology*: Also known as ‘chicana theology’, that Anzaldúa (2007, p. 238) called “spiritual mestizaje”. For Clack (2012, p. 256), “the future is female”, Mujerista theology has a place in social change of the liberationist, feminist and Hispanic theologies (Hernandez-Díaz, 2011) of which Anzaldúa was a part.

*Nagual/Nahual*: A Náhuatl term for a person, usually a shaman, who has the ability to change from human to animal form and has skills to guide people to new areas of awareness and alternate realities just as valid as ours.

*Nagualismo, el*: Another world, uncanny, alien, strange that lies within or parallel (Blake et al., 1995). It is a world that forces attention to different realities.

*Nepantla*: Bridges that span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, a Nahuatl word meaning *tierra entre medio* (middle ground between worlds— the “in-between space”).

*Nepantleras*: Unique women mediators who use transformative actions in response to the (un)natural bridges. They “facilitate passages between worlds” (Anzaldua, cited in González-López, 2011, p. 244).

*New mestiza consciousness*: “By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 102).

*Phchûm bën*: A Khmer Buddhist festival held to commemorate the spirits of the dead – the ancestors.

*Pol Pot*: The term often used by the older Khmer women participants when describing the Khmer Rouge genocide. The leader of the Khmer Rouge.

*Precepts*: The basic code of ethics, based on Buddhist practice of virtue and morality that guides behaviour.

*Prieta / Prietita, la*: Anzaldúa’s nickname as a little girl; La Prieta is the alien force del otro lado (from the other side) that forms a bridge of transformation (Rebolledo, 2006, p. 279).

*Puta, la*: The whore.
**Responsible advocacy**: Protecting and safeguarding vulnerable individuals from exploitation and harm, maximizing capacity for self-determination and protecting their welfare (Smith, 2008).

**Sampeah**: Khmer gesture of respect with hands joined.

**Sangha**: Generally, order of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns (Cadge, 2004).

**Shadow-Beast**: Anzaldúa “uses the figure of Coatlicue/Shadow-Beast to construct and to claim “the power of” the Indigenous in the Chicana” (Contreras, 2006, p. 49). For Anzaldúa, the shadow-beast is the serpentine “rebel in me” (Segura & Zavella, 2008, p. 542), the internalized oppression that must be confronted and deconstructed.

**Shapeshifting**: Shamans have the ability to change shape – from human form into animal form as an example. Analogous to becoming a different person (Caputi, 2005, p. 185).

**Snake symbolism**: Coatl is the Nahuatl word for "serpent/snake". The Serpent is the symbol of the dark sexual drive, the chthonic (underworld), the feminine, the serpentine movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life. In Theravāda Buddhism, the Naga is the King of the Snakes and protector of the Buddha.

**Spiritual activism**: A form of activism that states “spirituality is a tool of the oppressed, the only weapon and means of protection oppressed people have. Changes in society come only after that” (Keating, citing Anzaldúa, in Weiland, 1983, p. 72).

**Subaltern identities**: Those who have undergone colonization, extreme suffering, loss, migration and displacement (Elenes, 1997 p. 359).

**Susto**: Related to ‘soul loss’; Latin American folk illness attributed to having a frightening experience (Glazer et al., 2004, p. 270). Initiation of major life changes — the event of shock that is the driving force of change and awakening (Bobel et al., 2006, p. 335). Initiates separation.

**Teochew**: Term meaning ethnic Chinese-Cambodian ethnicity or language.

**Theravāda Buddhism**: The most ancient school of Buddhism that is practised in Cambodia. It draws its scriptural inspiration from the Pāli canon, which is said to contain the earliest surviving record of the Buddha’s teachings.
The Triple Gem: In Theravāda Buddhism, when a person wishes to become a Buddhist, the first step he or she takes is to go to the Triple Gem: Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, for refuge. Since the time of the Buddha, taking this three-fold refuge has identified a person as a Buddhist.

Upāsikā: Women lay devotees.


War, the: Term for the Khmer Rouge war or genocide.

Wat: A Buddhist temple.

Year Zero: For the Khmer Rouge, Year Zero denotes when all culture and traditions within Cambodian society must be completely destroyed or discarded and a new revolutionary culture must replace it, starting from scratch. All history of Cambodia and its people before Year Zero is deemed largely irrelevant, as it will ideally be purged and replaced from the ground up.

Yiey: Is used as a term of respect. It is the Khmer word for ‘grandmother’.
NOTES TO THE READER

USE OF TERMS ‘KHMER’ AND ‘CAMBODIAN’

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms “Khmer” and “Cambodian” ethnicity interchangeably. These terms describe the people, culture and language as the majority of people from Cambodia are ethnic Khmer, and refer to themselves as Khmae (Smith-Hefner, 1999, p. 209).

USE OF LANGUAGE

Although this thesis has been written in English, I also use Khmer, Italian, Spanish and Náhuatl/Aztec languages and dialects, as deemed culturally appropriate and relevant. Translations are made in-text, in footnotes and are available in the Glossary of Terms. In the spirit of Anzaldúa, I decided to write bilingually and to switch language codes to honour the languages used by others, but also to encourage thinking in ambiguities: “Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having to translate, ... my tongue will be illegitimate.”

Neither my written nor spoken Italian are perfect, reflecting broken connections to my Italian heritage. Therefore, I have left some of my own Italian translations as potentially incorrect.

I have decided not to write words from languages other than English in italics as I consider this a form of linguistic othering.

---

5 Anzaldúa (2007, p. 81)
USE OF PSEUDONYMS

The names of the Khmer women participants in this thesis are pseudonyms. This decision was made to ensure the privacy and anonymity of the women who discussed often sensitive matters and told me stories from their lives for the purposes of this research. Table 1, in Chapter 8, displays the full list of Khmer pseudonyms and their English translation.

Mr. Than Thong, key informant and interpreter, specified that I use his full name throughout the thesis.

I also made the decision to use alternative names for the field settings and locations in Melbourne where the women tend to congregate or live: again, for the purposes of privacy and anonymity.

CITING OF QUOTES FROM THE FIELD

All quotes cited from each of the women participants will be indented and preceded by their pseudonym.

All indented quotes that are cited from field notes, or associated observations made by me during the course of being in the field are followed by (Field Notes).

CITING OF QUOTES FROM OTHER AUTHORS

Unless otherwise indicated, the in-text citations of all quotes referenced from other authors that have been indented have been placed in a footnote on the corresponding page.

HISTORICIZATION OF THE CITED LITERATURE

References from the literature used in this thesis range from 1909-2015. It was important to cite a range of historical and current literature as this was deemed appropriate for the discussion.
REFERRING TO THE OLDER KHMER WOMEN PARTICIPANTS

Throughout the body of this thesis, I have used the terms “the women” or “the participants” to be the generic terms for “older Khmer women participants” of this study. I also use the terms “older women” or “older participants” and “younger women” or “younger participants” to compare different traits of the younger and older Khmer women participants.
CHAPTER 1
Introducing the Research:
The Way to Healing, the Way to Home

Why this Research? “The Whole World is in Flames”\textsuperscript{6}

When the term ‘genocide’ is cited, the Jewish Holocaust is often recalled as
for many people it has become the de facto paradigm for genocide. However,
the genocide of Indigenous peoples during the course of ‘civilisation’ by
settler colonialists is often overlooked. The legacy of colonialism and the
interrelationship between structures and power in Australian society are
viewed as predominant sources of racism in contemporary Australia (Jonas,
2001).

The past extermination of Indigenous peoples, such as Indigenous
Australians, and the continuing discrimination against Aboriginal people
since white settlement have largely become socially accepted norms. Racism
is also based on ignorance, fear and a lack of understanding of cultural
differences, however, the cost of privilege is reflected in:

\begin{quote}
the suffering of the Other, however, (this) is generally
subsumed by the concerns of the self.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

Shifting into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, both sporadic and more frequently sustained
bursts of ethnic violence and civil war abound globally. United States military
occupation in the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan are examples of the
dangers of permanent modern imperialism (Cartalucci, 2015). In the latter

\textsuperscript{6}Narāda (1988, p. 285).
\textsuperscript{7}Edelglass (2006, p. 43).
half of 2015, arrivals by unseaworthy boats to Europe by asylum seekers, particularly from the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan are occurring in unparalleled numbers, and require international protection (UNCHR, 2015). Concurrently, the Western media, anti-Islamic lobby groups, in conjunction with xenophobic governments and related decision-makers, often conduct campaigns of distortion and misinformation to determine what is generally understood about war-torn regions and asylum seeker populations. Asylum seekers suffer persecution from the homelands they are fleeing to being labelled ‘illegal immigrants’ in the lands to which they are fleeing. Labelling people seeking asylum as ‘illegal’ is a contravention of Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948b). Said (1997, p. 110) reflects that we are left with unexamined and hidden assumptions in the wake of “highly exaggerated stereotyping and belligerent hostility”.

In contrast to the above, during 1975-1979, the Khmer Rouge genocide was kept hidden from the rest of the world. The Khmer Rouge formed the Communist Party of Kampuchea in order to liberate Cambodia from the remnants of French colonial rule and its capitalist values. The Khmer Rouge considered all Cambodians were enslaved under French rule (1863-1953) (Chandler, 1997). Yet what followed was a swift, brutal, murderous attack led by Pol Pot intent on revolutionising Cambodian society by employing a Chinese Communist agrarian model inspired by Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution. The history of Cambodia and its people was deemed irrelevant by the Khmer Rouge, and time stopped as every aspect of the people’s lives, including their culture, religion, language, education and the family unit were dismantled in order to make way for Year Zero, a new beginning. The Cambodian people were again enslaved and often decimated by this new regime (Stopford, 2011).

Upon reflection, I realise life ebbs and flows in intricate ways, swirling across layers of complexity and chaos, ever changing over time. Some say there is perfection and order in the chaos, and that all is connected. I suspect we are
more similar to each other than different. We all suffer loss and trauma in our lives, but most of us are deeply fortunate to have never experienced the extreme devastation that genocide survivors have endured and live with.

**Aim and Scope of this Research**

This thesis brings attention to a culture steeped in Theravāda Buddhism from which Pol Pot emerged to execute a war primarily against those country men and women who did not belong to the revolutionary cadre. The protagonists of this research are twenty-four older Khmer women who live in the Khmer diaspora in Melbourne, Australia. An invitation was presented to these women, who had all endured 'Pol Pot', to speak about their lives. Their recorded stories will be employed to theoretically frame how it is possible for women genocide survivors to heal from the living memories of past atrocities.

By telling their stories, aspects of the women’s lives that they wished to disclose during the interviews can now be heard.

I am honoured to be the person who entered their world, albeit briefly. At the time of conducting the research I was 55 years of age, which placed me within the age group of the twenty-four Khmer women participants, most of whom were over 50 years of age.

For the majority of the women participants in this study, their world is still in flames in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge period that commenced forty years ago. Nevertheless, the brightness of the Cambodian moon and other yearnings for a Cambodia that once was remains as an embodied memory for older women living in the Khmer diaspora in Australia (Teo, 2011).

"The whole world is in flames," says the Buddha. "By what fire is it kindled? By the fire of lust, hatred and ignorance, by the fire of
birth, old age, death, pain, lamentation, sorrow, grief and
despair it is kindled."⁸

Note that this quote, cited from the teachings of the Buddha, includes “pain,
lamentation, sorrow, grief and despair”. All of these emotions are felt by the
women participants of this study to varying degrees. In comparison, it is
interesting that the Buddha states these feelings must be released to quench
the flames of the world’s suffering as a major contribution towards the path
of healing for all.

El Destierro: Loss of the Mother

‘El Destierro’ is both a Spanish term and metaphor for ‘the banishment’ of
the women participants from a life and culture they once knew. I consider
‘Loss of the Mother’ to be a dual analogy: symbolising the loss of the
motherland, Cambodia, and also the loss experienced by all of the women
participants who are or were mothers—of their children, husbands, family
members and friends as a result of Pol Pot and his regime.

Ultimately, this thesis also will aim to illustrate the transformative process
that occurs when embarking on a journey such as theirs, crossing physical,
emotional, psychological, cultural and traumatic borders due to factors
outside of their control. However, studying the crossing of these borders at
these levels is not enough.

It became paramount to draw on Anzaldúa’s epistemology to examine the
shifts towards healing that the older Khmer women participants may make,
from the separation from the lives they once had through the time of ‘Pol
Pot’, to the lives they lead today. Throughout this thesis, Anzaldúa’s spiritual
activist tenets (for example, Anzaldúa, 2002a; 2015) will demonstrate a level
of healing understood through metaphorical, symbolic and poetic discourses

based upon her own lived experiences. This is where the connection between her work and life correspond to the lives of the women participants and their connections to the spirit world.

Anzaldúa’s writings enabled me to interpret and direct this research in unique ways, and the importance and relevance of her work will be elaborated upon throughout the thesis. Her epistemology has allowed me to investigate at the deepest, embodied level of humanity, where healing authentically occurs. Consequently, the term ‘embodiment’ is linked to all aspects of the shifts of the women from their past to the present. The analogy of “the way to healing, the way to home” is used to demonstrate that healing often takes place at the level of the inner self.

I cannot completely articulate how and why Anzaldúa’s work has inspired me to the level that it has, in particular “Entering into the Serpent” (2007b) and “Now let us shift... the path of conocimiento... inner work, public acts (2002a). The reason may be that her words reach me at a depth that transcends conscious awareness.

There is an absence of research explicitly targeting the factors that contribute towards the healing of women genocide survivors. As far as I could investigate, I found no published research literature that uses Anzaldúan theory to explore the healing of older Khmer women genocide survivors.

**The Research Question and Objectives: An Overview**

I would now like to introduce a brief outline of the research questions and objectives that support the aims of this research. Questions relating to the research objectives were asked of the Khmer women participants as a means of eliciting conversations about their lives. In Chapter 5, I will elaborate on each of these questions and objectives.
Research Title

Crossing Nepantla: Older Khmer Women’s Passage to Healing in Diaspora

An ongoing theme throughout this thesis is the existence of the liminal space where transformation occurs, known in this thesis by Anzaldúa’s term of the state of ‘nepantla’. Keating (2006, p. 8) describes ‘nepantla’ as:

space/times of great confusion, anxiety, and loss of control. But with nepantla, Anzaldúa underscores and expands the “spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and Indigenous” dimensions.

Consequently, the title of this thesis includes “Crossing Nepantla” as we often weave in and out of the state of nepantla on the path to healing.

The Framing Research Question

How are Khmer women genocide survivors able to heal in diaspora?

Research Objectives and Sub-Objectives:

The objectives of this research were originally designed to investigate four main areas:

Objective 1: Exploring the Khmer Rouge war, and health and wellbeing in Australia;

Objective 2: Being Khmer in Australia;

Objective 3: The women’s relationships to their families;

Objective 4: Where is ‘home’ for the women, and are transnational relationships and connections to Cambodia important to them?
It will become apparent in later chapters that what emerged from the interviews with the women participants revealed a world beyond what I have experienced or expected.

**A Synopsis**

I would now like to provide a synopsis of the chapters in this thesis, commencing with the two literature review chapters. ‘Chapter 2: Entering into the Wilderness: The Embodied Past of the Khmer’ focuses on the history of Cambodia up until the Khmer Rouge genocide and its impact upon Cambodia and its people. ‘Chapter 3: The Wheel Turns: Embodied Change’ examines how the Khmer have transferred their lives and culture to live new lives in the Khmer diaspora.

**The Theorist: Gloria E. Anzaldúa**

‘Chapter 4: La Curandera of Conquest: Introducing Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004)’ places her life and work into the context of this research. Without her border epistemology, the depth of this research could not have been possible. Anzaldúa’s body of work directs the theoretical, metaphorical and metaphysical context of the journey to healing. Her shared connection to the lives, pain and deep association to the spirit world experienced by the women participants is explored.

**Methodology: “By Your True Faces We Will Know You”**

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the methodological framework, and for reasons to be further explained in these chapters, I employed critical border ethnography using a feminist standpoint as the methodology of this research. This type of methodology comprises an interconnection of the ethical and moral principles required when conducting sensitive research of this type. It also allows for the

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privacy of complicated grief suffered by the participants to be acknowledged and respected. In Chapter 6, I will write more about the significance of using a feminist standpoint framework to guide this research.

‘Chapter 5: Cultivating Knowledge and Wisdom: “By Your True Faces We Will Know You”’, in particular states my inspiration of Madison's (2012) critical ethnography framework, and aspects of Relaño Pastor’s (2011, p. 186) critical border ethnography in which she experienced issues with regard to language and cultural identity challenges. She was then able to shift from the “sites of struggle” at the commencement of her research to “sites of transformation”, which was of benefit to both her and the research participants. In Chapter 5, I will also be discussing Mr. Than Thong’s contribution to this research in his role as key informant, interpreter and in many ways research partner.

‘Chapter 6: Developing a Hybrid Consciousness: Broader Ethical and Moral Methodological Considerations of the Research’ views the methodology from the position of the researcher, whereby I will explore the ethics of questioning vulnerable populations. Additionally, I challenge academic research practices that may transcend moral and ethical responsibilities.

A Conceptual Framework for the Passage to Healing

‘Chapter 7: A Conceptual Framework for the Passage to Healing’, illustrates and explains a conceptual framework I have developed to frame this thesis. Together with the rich stories the women participants were willing to impart during the interviews, the examination of their journey to healing is made possible via the construction of the ‘Conceptual Framework: The Progression to Healing of Migrant Women Genocide Survivors’. A combination of authors and Anzaldúa’s epistemology informed the development of this framework.

Forming the basis of the framework, four interconnected phases weave into and out of each other reflecting what could be considered ‘rites of passage’ of the women participants:
A) El Arrebato\textsuperscript{10}: Rupture, Shock and Susto\textsuperscript{11}: Creating Separation during the time of Pol Pot.

B) Un Agitado Viento\textsuperscript{12}: The Liminal Space of Nepantla: Embodied Pain. This is the space of unknowing yet is also the space of transformation.

C) Un Nuevo Arreglo\textsuperscript{13}: Towards Aggregation, Towards Healing: Embodied Change. This is where the hybrid world of diaspora is entered into and life continues to change for the women participants.

D) La Transformada\textsuperscript{14}: Transformation through Spiritual Activism: “The Healing of the Wound”: Embodied Healing. This research considers this to be the authentic inner space of healing.

**The Khmer Women Participants**

Chapters 8 and 9 are devoted to the women participants. ‘Chapter 8: Introducing the Khmer Women: Goddesses Lost, Goddesses Found’ is a dedication to each of the twenty-four women participants. This thesis acknowledges that they are visible, that they exist (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 108). Included in Chapter 8 is a demographic profile of the women. ‘Chapter 9: (Dis)locations and Reclamations: There is Strength in their Silence’ uses words of the women, which ultimately demonstrates their strength and determination to survive.

‘Chapter 10: Canción de la Diosa de la Noche\textsuperscript{15}: A Theory of Hope and Salvation’ discusses from where these women draw their strength, and where their healing exists. Along with determining the strengths and limitations of

\textsuperscript{10}The rupture (Spanish).
\textsuperscript{11}Soul loss as a result of a shock.
\textsuperscript{12}A restless wind (Spanish).
\textsuperscript{13}A rearrangement (Spanish).
\textsuperscript{14}The transformed (Spanish).
\textsuperscript{15}Song of the Goddess of the Night (Spanish).
this research, recommendations for future health policy and practice, health education, and academia are explored.

I have decided to let the world of the spirit speak through the Allegory at the end of the thesis. ‘Allegory of the Earth Goddess, Moon and Stars’, combines the stories of the women with stories from my own life, inspired by Anzaldúa’s poetry, in the style of Autohistoria-Teoría (Betancor, 2000; Keating, 2006).

**The Flight of the Soul Bird**

I am deeply grateful to be in a position to honour my late aunt, Ellen Mileo, the artist who painted the series “Soul Birds”. In the context of this thesis, ‘Soul Bird’ is symbolic of the journey of the Khmer women participants.

I consider the collective works of “Soul Birds” as a cross-border representation largely framed within a liminal environment. Although the political intention of Mileo’s work now remains unknown, I would like to classify these works as a border arte representation of Anzaldúa’s depiction of the mestiza shifting across space and identity, whilst remaining “betwixt and between conventional genres” (cited in Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xiv).

I have placed an image of each of the paintings and a wood carving from this series in related sections throughout this thesis, and each intersects with the phases of the conceptual framework. I included Figure 2: Mileo (1987) ‘Wooden block carving of Soul Birds’ in the ‘Dedication’ section of this thesis, as from this carving emerges not only great beauty, but also signifies the bond she and I had in life.

The Soul Birds series were painted in the year that ‘Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza’ was first published (Anzaldúa, 1987). At the end of this thesis, I also placed the image of a different painting that was my aunt’s ‘gift of knowledge’ to me. I am calling it “The Wings of Perception” (Figure 9). This is an analogy that Castaneda (1974) uses to illustrate teachings of the Don Juan, the Yaqui Indian sorcerer. Don Juan revealed that the sorcerer’s secret is to do
with the unfolding of the ‘wings of perception’. Figure 9 is also steeped in Castaneda’s (1974, p. 18) imagery, where Don Juan states:

Knowledge comes floating like specks of gold dust, the same dust that covers the wings of moths.

In the context of this thesis, the “Soul Birds” (Figure 6: Mileo, 1987a) is all-experiencing and all-seeing, fleeing the horror of the past by taking flight across uncertain landscapes. It is the flight to survival and freedom, leaving behind the bondage of the war. As it flees, its eyes still carry the horror that becomes the embodiment of its existence, an analogy for the living memory of ultimately all survivors of genocide. It symbolises “Separation”.

In “Soul Bird: Crossing Nepantla”, (Figure 1: Mileo, 1987b) the fragments in the bird’s background are analogous to “crossing nepantla”, which is why this image was selected as the cover image of this thesis. It is a state of navigating passages of unknowing, though the bird persists in traveling forward towards an unknown destiny. Like the older Khmer women participants of this research, the bird’s passage traces a circuitous, meandering life of embodiment, of reliving the past, flying in and out of nepantla and settling into the Khmer diaspora.

What I find extraordinary is the final painting in this series, “Soul Birds” (Figure 8: Mileo, 1987c). With the moon shining like a lighthouse in the backdrop, for me this is an image of the Soul Bird finding its home and being reunited with her comadre\(^{16}\), plausibly Coyolxauhqui or La Llorona. For the Khmer women, it may be one of the ancient Khmer goddesses or ancestors. Within the context of Anzaldúa’s own journey through her writing and life, I

\(^{16}\) Godmother.
have been given permission to give this painting a title: “Soul Birds - Putting Coyolxauhqui Together”.

The following passage by Anzaldúa (1999, p. 250) exemplifies the feeling of these paintings, and perhaps Ellen Mileo expressed her own inner knowing into the outer worlds of these paintings.

La naguala is the dreaming body, a mode of consciousness that’s emotionally complex, diverse, dense, deep, violent, and rich, one with a love of physicality and the ability to switch bodies and their expressive codes instantly....For the first time you felt at home in your body. To talk about the work of embodying consciousness you appropriate the word "naguala" from your ancestors, the Indigenous Mexicans, who believed that certain humans could turn into animals.

It is a time of reclaiming the Indigenous as part of the process of healing. What can be realised along the way is that this journey is purposeful: the lesson to be learned and lived is that at the metaphysical level, the goal of existence is to navigate one’s way home, and this navigation is at the behest of the soul. The way home leads us to our healing. The similarity between the story of the “Soul Birds” and the path of the older Khmer women outlined in the conceptual framework is fortuitous, exemplary and opportune.

**Summary of Chapter 1**

This chapter commenced with how colonisation has destroyed Indigenous cultures, and genocide continues to decimate largely vulnerable populations. The genocide of Indigenous peoples had been overlooked, but the media and related institutions profit from the misery that exists. Over time, we have become desensitised to the impact of war and killing, especially by those of us who perceive no direct connection to such events. Indeed, the actions of the Khmer Rouge were kept silent from the rest of the world.

The chapter then proceeded to provide an introduction to the research and offered a synopsis of the thesis chapters. The older Khmer women 37
participants and their stories are central to the research itself. Anzaldúa’s theoretical wisdom is crucial to the success of this research. The chapter also introduced the conceptual framework that traces the women participants’ journey to healing. Finally, the context of the “Soul Birds” (Mileo, 1987; 1987a, b, c, & d) series was explored.
CHAPTER 2
Entering into the Wilderness:
The Embodied Past of the Khmer

Introduction

Chapter 2 is a critical discussion of the literature that demonstrates the ‘embodied past’ of the Khmer, using the imagery of ‘entering into the wilderness’ to signify a point of no return from the past. The intention of Chapter 2 is to explore Cambodia and the Khmer from historical, social, cultural and religious foci, as these are important to understand the people now living in the Khmer diaspora in Australia.

The History of Cambodia and the Ancestry of the Khmer

This section examines the Khmer people and their origins, so it is important to commence by looking at the history and ancestry of Cambodia leading to a general understanding of the Khmer historically, and into the 21st century. Scholars such as Chandler (2000; 2008) and Kiernan (2002) have noted that there are many gaps in the known history of Cambodia, but to understand present-day Cambodian culture, we must still look at what is known about its past (Chandler, 2000). The following is mainly adapted from the work of these two scholars.

Cambodia is officially known as The Kingdom of Cambodia, or Preâh Réachéa Nachâk Kâmpûchéa. According to Chandler (2000; 2008), there is evidence of a Khmer society from as early as 4,200 BCE. Cambodia was a comparatively sophisticated culture, and in 1CE – 1,000 CE the Indianisation of the Cambodian culture occurred. This era introduced new traditions, customs, ancestor worship and folk stories, political perspectives, sociology, architecture, iconography, astronomy and aesthetics that continue to 39
influence Cambodia today. India also introduced Sanskrit and Hinduism to Cambodia (Tully, 2005).

During the period 3\textsuperscript{rd} to 1\textsuperscript{st} century BCE, Theravāda Buddhism, mixed with influences from Hinduism and Indigenous versions of shamanistic animism, predominated in Cambodia (Canda & Phaobtong, 1992, p. 62). Buddhism and the related concept of merit-making as a form of spiritual reciprocity towards their ancestors grew across Cambodia from this time. Merit-making and meritorious behaviour continues to be a major driving force towards the building of kammic inheritance for the next incarnation. The idea that improved personal status could result from an accumulation of merit by performing virtuous acts such as donations of money, food and time to the monks stemmed from this era. Power, ability and social status were viewed as rewards for virtuous behaviour in previous lives.

During the ‘Pre-Angkor Period’ (1\textsuperscript{st}–6\textsuperscript{th} Century CE) the Funan (Chinese) era took place. ‘Funan’ was the Chinese term for ‘Phnom’, or ‘mountain’. Cambodia became a prosperous trading route between China and India.

**Angkor Empire: 802 BCE – 1431 CE**

The extraordinary Angkor Empire was established by Jayavarman II, the ‘divine’ Khmer king at this time, and at its peak, encompassed most of modern-day Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand for more than 500 years. The capital of the Angkor Empire was established near Phnom Kulen by Jayavarman II, a considerable distance of thirty kilometres from Angkor, as the belief existed that gods and spirits dwell on mountaintops. Siamese (Thai) invaders eventually destroyed this empire in 1431, and the Angkor Wat nonetheless remains as one of the most remarkable archaeological sites in the world. The Angkor Wat was built during 1400-1500 as a devotion to the Indian Hindu god, Shiva, highlighting the important connection to ritual acts of Hinduism.
During the 1200-1300, the Indian Sanskrit dialect was increasingly replaced by Pāli, the Buddhist canonical language, and the presence of a great number of Sanskrit words relating to animism remained, thus continuing as a belief system in Cambodian Theravāda Buddhism (Chouléan, 1988).

Post-Angkor Era: 1431 CE – onwards

Although Theravāda Buddhism is the religion of most ethnic Khmers, Islam was introduced to Cambodia during the Champa Empire (192–1832) and is now practiced by 500,000 Chams in Cambodia. Former Brahman influences and foundations during the Angkor period were replaced by the Wat 17 during the post-Angkor era. An introduction to Christianity in Cambodia by the Portuguese had taken place during the reign of King Preah Satha in 1585. This was not successfully embraced until the French colonial period during the 19th century (Liev, 2008), and also post-Khmer Rouge where Christian conversion was initiated by missionaries in the Thai-Cambodian border camps (McLellan, 2009; Smith-Hefner, 1994).

Due to its geographic location and its capital lying at the eastern edge of the Theravāda cultural fault line including Burma, Siam and Vietnam, Cambodia became a victim of civil wars and invasions, and what was known as the “dark ages of Cambodia” persisted between 1593–1863. Chandler (1979) considers the most important contribution to the tragic history of Cambodia is its geographic position between two densely populated, hostile countries, Thailand (Siam) and Vietnam. Cambodia was exploited and colonised by Thailand in 1811-1840.

The French colonised Cambodia during 1863-1953, and in this period Cambodia as a nation state emerged. The transport system across Cambodia

17 Khmer word for a Buddhist Temple.
was revolutionised with the introduction of road and rail, and concurrently rapid social, economic and cultural changes were made.

By the late 1940s, a new political ideology, shifting from cooperation and subordination to one based on resistance and independence, emerged with revolutionary alternatives to the status quo. In 1955, Prince Norodom Sihanouk gained power as Cambodia’s chief of state, finally securing Cambodia’s independence from French colonial rule. By 1970, the Prince was removed from power by General Lon Nol who was made leader of the new Khmer republican government, with support of the United States and Vietnamese governments. This major coup d’état ended 1,000 years of Cambodian kingship. In seeking Cambodia’s protection, American military and financial assistance was accepted after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, when Cambodia also sought to join the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO).

Éste Arrebato: Separation (1975-1979): the Rise and Fall of Pol Pot

The period of 1975-1979 saw the rise and fall of Pol Pot, which also was the time of separation of the Cambodian people from their country and culture. General Lon Nol fled Cambodia upon the collapse of his regime, and before this, the Khmer Rouge were instrumental in working with the Cambodian peasants, achieving the reputation of protecting the oppressed. Saloth Sar, who was given the French nickname of Politique Potentielle, abbreviated to Pol Pot, took over as leader of the regime of Democratic Kampuchea. The Cambodian people generally believed that Pol Pot would protect Cambodia from United States attack. The Khmer Rouge originally purported their

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18 An outburst; rupture (Anzaldúa, 2002a).
19 Brother No. 1.
willingness to end injustice in Cambodia (Peang-Meth, 1991), yet the Cambodians were part of the Khmer Rouge experiment of dismantling Cambodia's cultural, historical, political, religious and economic institutions. As Pol Pot was a follower of Mao Zedong, his immediate evacuation of Phnom Penh was in reality designed to convert Cambodia into a communist agrarian utopia based on the radical Maoist and Marxist-Leninist transformation program at this time.

The three major transformations for which the architects of Democratic Kampuchea, under the Khmer Rouge, were responsible (Ledgerwood et al., 1994, pp. 12-13) were as follows:

- A strategy for rebuilding Cambodia’s economy via agricultural production. Its political ideology transposed new values and codes of conduct based on Pol Pot's Mao-inspired vision of a communist agrarian utopia.
- Disruption to the family unit and reorganisation of the population into work teams.
- Destruction of all religious and cultural institutions, including the state religion of Cambodia: Theravāda Buddhism.

During Year Zero, the term used for the takeover of Cambodia in 1975 by Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge, many of Cambodia’s institutions were destroyed, and the urban population (the new people) were exiled from towns and cities to work alongside agricultural labourers (the base people). There was the abolition of money, markets, formal schooling, Buddhist practices and private property. The Khmer Rouge leadership dealt in secrecy and distrust for outsiders. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Pol Pot sealed Cambodia and its borders from the outside world. This caused the death of 1.7 million Cambodians through overwork, torture, malnutrition, untreated diseases, ethnic animosity and execution (Yale University, 2015).
McLellan (2009, p. 29) joined many others in describing the intense four-year period of the Khmer Rouge as a:

horrific experiment in social engineering that sought to completely eradicate traditional Cambodian society by engaging everyone in state-controlled rural production and by forcibly erasing cultural and social identity. One Khmer-Canadian woman described those who survived as being “leftovers from the dead”.

The “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” was approved and proposed for signature and ratification by the General Assembly of the United Nations resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948, and entry into force 12 January 1951, in accordance with article XIII.” Article 2 states:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

a) Killing members of the group;
b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group20.

Despite Cambodia having submitted their accession of this Convention to the UN in 1950, the Khmer Rouge proceeded to perpetrate one of the worst crimes of genocide against humanity.

20 United Nations (1948a, p. 280).
As an adjunct to further discussion on the Khmer Rouge link to Theravāda Buddhism, I note that DeBurger (2011, p. 2) presents a very interesting perspective about the Khmer Rouge’s attempt to destroy Cambodia’s religious institution by creating a new political ‘counter-religion’. The total physical, social, cultural and emotional transformation of Cambodia named Ângka as its new ‘god’. The leaders of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, from which the Khmer Rouge emerged, called itself ‘Ângka Padevat’ (revolutionary organisation). According to a Khmer man interviewed by Marston (1994, p. 109), “Ângka has the eyes of a pineapple”. This was the metaphor used during the Khmer Rouge period that Ângka knew and saw everything as its spirit was everywhere.

The Khmer Rouge admonished all Cambodians to believe, obey and respect only Ângka, which was to be everyone’s ‘mother’ and ‘father’. A Cambodian refugee wrote down the following Democratic Kampuchean song for Marston (1994, p. 110), which was an example of those written to symbolise the authority taken by Ângka that was originally the domain of the parents and family, using the Buddhist tenet of “loving kindness”:

Oh, Oh, ângka that has loving kindness, the loving kindness of someone great without measure for the race and the people, and especially for the children—someone who has persevered to train the children, just like a raft trying to cross the water, back and forth, so exhausted, it strives until the children have victory.

Ângka disbanded in 1981.
**Un Nuevo Arreglo**\(^21\): from 1979 to present-day Cambodia

Dunlop (2005, cited in Tyner, 2009, p. 10) argues that by percentage of population the Khmer Rouge constituted the most effective mass murderers in modern history, however, the Khmer Rouge genocide is a distant memory in most countries. For the Khmer today, this experience has become an embodied memory and the trauma continues, from post-traumatic stress to cultural bereavement (Eisenbruch, 1991) manifesting in unique cultural syndromes.

Western medical and health professionals often view somatic complaints as psychopathology, while Cambodian survivors see them as authentic embodied pain (Uehara et al., 2000). Again, this harks back to the importance of cultural understandings of health. Although translated for Western understanding, it is important information to consider when researching people from Southeast Asia who are Buddhist. For example, Sumanacara (2012, p. 129) presents a psychological analysis of physical and mental pain in Buddhism.

In the Pāli Nikāyas (from the Buddha’s teaching), diseases (rogas) are considered to be caused by bile, phlegm, wind, bodily humors, and changes of climate, careless behaviour, assault, and kamma\(^22\).

It is also important to understand the meaning of mental illness from a Theravāda Buddhist perspective based upon the teachings of the Buddha. Nandisena (2012) shows us that in the Pāli Canon, there are a number of words used to describe what Western cultures define as ‘illness’, ‘disease’ and 'sickness'. An in-depth knowledge of such representations in the Pāli language is required when researching those with embodied trauma, and Nandisena (2012) note the most common words used are roga, byādhi and ābādha.

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\(^21\) Literally translates to “a new deal” implying a shift to a new life post-Khmer Rouge.

\(^22\) Theravāda Buddhist term for “karma”.
Physical illness is labelled as kāyiko rogo and mental illness cetasiko rogo; however, there are a number of different cultural meanings that do not directly translate into typical Western definitions of mental illness. Mental illness is a form of defilement and affliction classified as unwholesome states (akusalā dhammā). They are unwholesome, as they are perceived to be "(1) mentally unhealthy, (2) morally blameworthy, (3) unskilful, and (4) productive of painful results". Nonetheless, Buddhism classes mental illness as “a state of impermanence” (Nandisena, 2012, p. 139).

The following is a depiction by McLellan (2009) of what initiated the fall of the Khmer Rouge. In January, 1979, an invasion by Vietnamese forces drove the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh. This action was to dissuade growing Khmer Rouge infiltration into Vietnamese territory. Cambodia became the State of Cambodia under a Vietnamese-controlled Khmer government led by a number of defectors from the Khmer Rouge, and Cambodia was at that time known as the People’s Republic of Kampuchea.

Cambodian survivors were now free to search for their families; however, not trusting the new Vietnamese invaders, by April 1979 more than 40,000 Cambodians fled their country to seek asylum in Thailand. Further annihilation awaited them at the hands of Thai soldiers, resistance soldiers and robbers preying upon the extremely vulnerable Cambodian refugees. They were also victims of land mines planted by the Khmer Rouge in Thailand.

When Thailand quickly closed its borders, several thousand people were forced back into Cambodia. The “most catastrophic famine in Cambodia’s history” (McLellan, 2009, p. 30) developed between April and August, 1979, forcing hundreds of thousands of Cambodians to seek asylum, and in September 1979, 500,000 Cambodian asylum seekers prompted international pressure upon Thailand to reopen its borders. This allowed the creation of large holding areas to be managed by The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2000, cited in McLellan, 2009, p. 30).
In September, 1989, Vietnam withdrew its troops from Cambodia under international pressure and Cambodia was renamed State of Cambodia (SOC). A Peace Agreement was signed in Paris in October, 1991, establishing the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), in which Australia played a key international role. In 1993, a new constitution was declared, and Cambodia became a Constitutional Monarchy, which it remains to this day (Marks, 1994-5). After several changes of government marked by warring factions and civil unrest, it was not until the 2008 National Assembly elections when the Cambodian government was determined by a simple majority. This supports Marks’ (1994-5) forecast that the new constitution would neither guarantee human rights nor shift from previous communist or republican versions upon which this constitution was based. It remains that Cambodia’s democratic foundations are fragile at best.

In 1980, Thailand closed its borders again, and the Thai military directed a further 200,000 Khmer refugees into non-UNHCR Thai-Cambodian border camps, with at least twenty camps ruled by Cambodian political and military groups; eleven were controlled by the Khmer Rouge. For the next eight years, these refugees "were used as human shields between Khmer Rouge fighters and the Vietnamese-backed government of Cambodia" (McLellan, 2009, p. 31). McLellan (2009) detailed the massive psychological consequence of this period for thousands of Cambodian refugees who spent years moving from one camp to the next, fearful of being forced back into Cambodia, or families being held as ransom by the Khmer Rouge, until they reached the Thai-based UNHCR camps. Although these camps provided food, clean water and medical treatment, as well as education for children, there was a high incidence of rape by Thai soldiers, with women refugees often targeted at night.

Terry (2002) confirms that humanitarian aid at the time paradoxically caused harm as Khmer victims and Khmer Rouge oppressors were bound together in the camps post-genocide. These groups were indistinguishable when seeking relief from aid agencies. Consequently, there was always the threat of reprisal
by the Khmer Rouge, as it was known that these camps were “the primary source of sanctuary and supplies” stored for use by the Khmer Rouge (Terry, 2002, p. 114).

As late as 1991, 286,000 displaced Khmer were held in Thai-Cambodian border camps with no opportunity to seek resettlement in third countries (Ledgerwood et al., 1994). McLellan (2009, p. 32) described a huge hurdle facing Cambodians seeking resettlement in Canada “was the perception they were not good candidates” as they were from rural cultural settings, perceived to be an incompatible match with urban Canadian society. There was a groundswell of criticism from religious and private organisations that pushed for higher admission rates of Cambodians into Canada based on humanitarian grounds.

In comparison with other Indochinese refugees, Cambodians had the highest rates of unaccompanied minors, female-headed households, very poor physical health, and extremely high rates of social, emotional and psychological disorders (especially Cambodian women without spouses). They endured elevated levels of sustained trauma, inhumane living conditions, regardless of their demographic status. In Cambodian communities today, almost all adults over the age of 35 years remember enduring “multiple catastrophic events” (McLellan, 2009, p. 34). As life remained uncertain in Cambodia, many Cambodians made the decision to leave and are now resident in different Khmer diasporas across the world, including Australia, United States, France, Canada and Spain.

In his report as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Subedi (2014) urges the Cambodian Government to continue to strengthen the legal and institutional framework for human rights protection. This is in relation to deeply entrenched social, political problems, corruption, extreme poverty, ecological damage, landlessness, prostitution and child trafficking, and an HIV/AIDS pandemic in the post-Khmer Rouge era. Gottesman (2003), adds that there are many indications of a budding civil
society, including a number of human rights organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs), governments and foreign aid organisations, and the Cambodians themselves, working to build this nation.

Un Agitado Viento\textsuperscript{23}: The Tragedy that is Cambodia

Earlier in this chapter, Chandler (1979) was cited describing Cambodia as historically being a tragic country. He expanded upon why the word ‘tragedy’ springs to mind in writing about Cambodia, as this country suffered through the effects of colonisation, religion, a hierarchical society, and the actions of Pol Pot that all blended with outcomes of poverty and powerlessness. As previously discussed, Cambodia has been a land of invasions, commencing in particular with the “Indianisation” of Southeast Asia (Mabbett, 1977). Temples with inscriptions in Khmer and Sanskrit and correspondingly beautiful sculptures and carvings echoed the majestic Angkor period. The calamitous impact of the Khmer Rouge on its own country, as well as the Vietnamese invasion that followed, have contributed to the continued perpetuation of poverty and corruption in Cambodia today.

Thus, it is clear that there were a series of complex, ongoing conflicts that severely affected Cambodia beyond the Khmer Rouge era. Evans (2012, p. 2) advises us that the continuing conflict in Cambodia played out at three distinct levels:

1. The first level was that of the warring internal factions, with Hun Sen’s current Government waged against a fragile coalition of the non-communist Sihanoukists, the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front, the strongest of the country’s non-communist resistance forces, and the

\textsuperscript{23}Spanish for “A restless wind”.
communist Khmer Rouge. It is not surprising that each group was immensely distrustful of the others.

2. The second level was regional, with Vietnam supporting Hun Sen and ASEAN supporting his opponents.

3. The third level involved the great power patrons of the warring factions – with China supporting the Khmer Rouge and Prince Sihanouk (as he then was); the Soviet Union supporting the Hun Sen government; and the United States supporting the two non-communist resistance groups.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore these important events in detail, but it is nonetheless important to document that the ‘tragedy’ of Cambodia continued beyond the Khmer Rouge period.

**Seeking Justice**

I want you to know that everything I did, I did for my country ...
My conscience is clear. - Pol Pot.

Thayer (1997) cites the above quote from his interview with Pol Pot. This reflects his complete lack of remorse, and that he still claimed Cambodia as his country. He was unrepentant to his death in 1998. When Pol Pot became available for prosecution in 1997:

(n)o state was willing to seek his extradition for crimes committed during his savage leadership. His death one year later forever denied Cambodians the justice of hearing him answer for his depredations\(^{24}\).

When discussing Cambodia’s past and how it has impacted upon the present in particular for the Khmer Rouge survivors, what must be mentioned is the lack of bringing the Khmer Rouge perpetrators to justice. What has complicated the prosecution of the Khmer Rouge in the past is that there

\(^{24}\) Orentlicher (1998, n.p.)
remains a lack of culture of respect for both the judicial system, the law in general, combined with a lack of competent and qualified judges. What remains is a biased and corrupt criminal justice system (Luftglass, 2004).

Given one focus of this thesis is about healing in the context of Buddhism, it is worth noting the outcome of Greene’s (2015) exploration of the healing, resilience and survivorship among Khmer Rouge survivors. In 2007, thirty research participants participated as civil parties by giving testimony at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal during the trial of ‘Comrade Duch’, a senior Khmer Rouge leader. The outcome for these participants was one of resilience, closure and a sense of justice. Hancock (2008) added that if the Khmer Rouge Tribunal is to bring healing and reconciliation to Cambodia, the Tribunal’s actions must also be compatible with Buddhist tenets. The Venerable Yos Hut Khemacaro states:

Forgiveness ... is needed to put an end to discussion and accusation. In Buddhism, when something is done, we say the past is past, the future we don’t know.25

Nonetheless, other monks have, at times, advocated harsh and immediate retribution, and popular opinion about how the Khmer Rouge perpetrators should be brought to justice is also mixed. Ledgerwood and Un (2003) agree that Theravāda Buddhist concepts were successfully employed by Cambodian NGOs to bring cultural meaning to notions of universal human rights. This is in opposition to the Cambodian government’s concept of human rights which became unclear, threatening and politically motivated.

Winter and Ollier (2006, p. 1) confirm that presently “Cambodia stands encapsulated within two dominant, and somewhat contradictory, narratives”; one based on despair and anguish, following the “irrevocable damage” of the

period of civil war and genocide with Pol Pot at the helm; the other on hope and optimism whereby there is a groundswell of opinion that Cambodian culture is being “restored, rejuvenated and ... even enjoying a renaissance”.

**A Revival of Cambodia**

In Basso’s (1988, p. 292) discourse, the trickster is described as

> the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries ...
> (demonstrating) pervasive ambiguity and independence from all social order. This character is the “selfish buffoon” who ludicrously and compulsively acts in violation of the most fundamental social values.

The catastrophe orchestrated at the hands of the Khmer Rouge key players—the trickster King Norodom Sihanouk and his minion and buffoon Pol Pot—still live as an embodied memory in older Khmer women living in Melbourne, Australia.

The mythical ideal Buddhist king possessed “extraordinary virtue ... purified the sangha26 ... ensured the Dhamma flourished and the realm would prosper” (Kent, 2008, p. 109). The failure of the god-king has also contributed to the ruinous state of Cambodia. King Norodom Sihanouk was the last Devajara27 of Cambodia. He was Cambodia’s monarch during 1941-1955, and then 1993-2005. However, the contradiction was that although the Khmer practised complete loyalty and allegiance to the Devajara, this god-king essentially was corrupt and ultimately sided with the Khmer Rouge and its propaganda. Symbolically, a return to the state of Buddhist kingliness is a return to human and spiritual order (Kent, 2008, p. 110; Marston 2008, p. 102). King Norodom

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26 The Buddhist monastic order, including monks, nuns, and novices.

27 Devajara was the Indian Brahamic cult of the god-king, as established in CE 802 by the Khmer King Jayavarman II.
escaped Cambodia and went into exile soon after Pol Pot occupied Phnom Penh.

This is important information as it strongly relates to the importance of a revival of the former Cambodia through “a return to human and spiritual order”. This will be discussed in the context of the conceptual framework and the outcomes of the research in Chapter 10.

**Summary of Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 explored the history of Cambodia and the ancestry of the Khmer. Cambodia was colonised by India, China, Thailand and France, and suffered the greatest of tragedies under the Khmer Rouge. Reference to the Khmer Rouge is made throughout both Chapters 2 and 3 as this genocide at their hands changed the world of these survivors. This review also details the series of complex, ongoing conflicts that have severely affected Cambodia and its people beyond the Khmer Rouge era.

Seeking justice for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge is difficult as the perpetrators have hardly been brought to justice. Although it was noted that Khmer Rouge survivors found the experience of being involved in the trial of ‘Comrade Duch’ as empowering, Buddhist tenets are to be observed during the tribunal’s decision-making processes. However, due to the immense suffering and trauma experienced during this genocide, popular opinion is mixed about how the Khmer Rouge perpetrators should be brought to justice.
CHAPTER 3
The Wheel Turns: Embodied Change

Introduction

The title of Chapter 3, “The Wheel Turns”, refers to dramatic and irreversible change post-Khmer Rouge regime to the lives of the Khmer people, nevertheless, the term ‘wheel of the revolution’ has a different meaning. It is of interest that whilst the Khmer Rouge were in power, there was a tendency for its regime to reconfigure and re-employ Buddhist symbolism and modes of thought as a means to confuse the Khmer and harass Buddhist institutions. One example of this, the ‘wheel of the revolution’, originally held traditional Buddhist symbolism representing the eight-fold path, yet the Khmer Rouge distorted the wheel to mean:

The wheel of revolution . . . never stops and . . . will crush all who place themselves in its path”.  

Chapter 3 focuses on ‘embodied change’, with the duration and the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge genocide leading to unexpected disconnections from the past. The Khmers’ decisions to migrate are explored, and migration is viewed as a liminal space of transition as well as a rite of passage (Mackenzie & Guntarik, 2015; Sutton, Vigneswaran & Wels, 2011): essentially the Khmer were facing new borders. A brief account of Australian Immigration Policy is given, as Cambodians seeking refuge in Australia were once labelled as ‘boat people’.

28 Harris, 2005, p. 184.
'Creating Khmer’ is an opportunity to take the culture into diaspora, yet it is noted that cultures do not remain the same. Cultures and gender roles change, and this will also be explored.

Gender roles are pivotal to this research, and related discussion encompasses gendered constructions of culture and cultural maintenance. Older Khmer women act as cultural bridges, gatekeepers and boundary markers, a role they consider central to the transmission of the Khmer culture to future generations (Lewis, 2005). Notwithstanding, it remains that Khmer women’s culture and their roles in culture are framed by patriarchal boundaries and gatekeeping. Whose culture is being transmitted? The women themselves may have been taken out of the equation in a principally patriarchal society (Kent, 2011a).

Equally, Theravāda Buddhism is viewed as being an intrinsic part of being Khmer, nevertheless some Khmer have decided to convert to Christianity, especially since the Khmer Rouge era (Douglas, 2003; Smith-Hefner, 1994). In the context of memory and embodied stress, experiences of culture-specific meanings of health and healing are discussed. The chapter concludes with exploring the Khmer today.

**Unexpected (Dis)connections: Bleeding into Nepantla**

Why ‘unexpected (dis)connections’ and why ‘bleeding into nepantla’? The disconnection from their past by the Khmer Rouge was swift and unexpected. The ‘bleeding’ is a metaphoric image of traces of former lives bleeding into the present and the future, corresponding to the risks experienced living in unknown territories. This is akin to being placed at symbolic, unknown crossroads of change. The ‘bleeding’ also relates to the Cambodian survivors of the Khmer Rouge era being vulnerable to abuse in the Thai-Cambodian camps, as highlighted in Chapter 2.
When migrating to the comparative freedom of life in diaspora, life is still fraught with pain, loss and great uncertainty, however, new connections are plausible.

**The Practicalities and Challenges of Entering the Khmer Diaspora in Australia**

According to the 2011 Australian Census of Population and Housing, there were 28,330 Cambodian-born people living in Australia, which was a 15.5% increase from the 2006 Australian Census. Victoria had a population of 11,355 Cambodian-born people in 2011, which was the largest number for any Australian state or territory (Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship, n.d.).

In terms of entering Australia, current exclusions built into visa applications often dissuade the reformation of migrant families in Australia. Prolonged disruptions to the family unit for unknown time periods erase markers of family identity such as rituals, celebrations, and routines, especially significant in view of the fact that family unity is a core value in the Cambodian culture (Catolico, 1997). Newly settled Khmer families contend that life in diaspora provides a secure foundation for present and future generations (Lewis, 2010). For those with families willing to support older Khmer people in Australia, the practicalities and challenges of entering Australia from Cambodia depend on these types of visa requirements and Australian immigration policies. Currently, older Cambodian people can now enter Australia via the:

1. “Aged Dependent Relative Visa (Subclass 114) visa”, a permanent visa for aged persons who rely on a relative in Australia for all, or most, of their living costs;

2. “Remaining Relative Visa (Offshore) (Subclass 115), for people to join their brothers, sisters or parents who are their only near relatives and are usually resident in Australia; or
3. Carer Visa (Subclass 116), for people required to care for an Australian relative or a member of their family unit who has a medical condition (Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2015).

Connections to Australia – Australian Immigration Policy

The relevance of xenophobic immigration policies stemming from dominant societies have deleterious health consequences upon different migrant groups. This is particularly relevant for refugee and asylum seeker populations, which was introduced in Chapter 1.

Although it is not my intention to explore the history of Australian Immigration Policy in depth, it is interesting to note that in 1989 mandatory detention centres were established to detain those seeking asylum. However, during the first wave of Cambodian migration to Australia in 1989, the Hawke Labor Government accused Cambodian ‘boat people’ of being economic migrants, whereas they were in reality legitimately seeking asylum post-Khmer Rouge. The government did this for two reasons: their fear at the time that if they allowed Cambodian refugees into Australia then more boats would arrive, and that it may appear there was a loss of control over the Cambodian settlement arrangements through the Paris Conference on Cambodia in 1989 (Evans, 2012; Nethery, 2009). Consequently, several hundred Cambodian refugees were locked up in detention for four years and denied access to legal advice. This marked the start of the politicisation of boat people and refugees in Australia.

There was a discussion at the commencement of Chapter 1 on the campaigns of distortion and misinformation about asylum seeker populations perpetuated by the media and xenophobic governments, among others. Pickering (2001, p. 169) states that news discourses routinely construct asylum seeker/refugee populations as both problematic and deviant,
underpinned by the language of politics and exclusion”. The connection to the Australian Immigration Policy discourse is evident in that the media and the Australian government have served to problematise and normalise these groups as being threats to the integrity of the nation state, race and burden of disease.

The Australian government has received continued local and international criticism for its policy of mandatory immigration detention for a number of years. Its contravention of its human rights obligations to asylum-seekers (Creek, 2014), and its violation of international law whilst legitimising its actions (Mankowski, 2014) continues into 2016.

**Migration and Liminality as Rites of Passage: shifting Khmerness across Borders**

The stages of migration have been compared to what van Gennep (1909) refers to as ‘rites de passage’. Van Gennep (1909) and Turner (1969, p. vii) use the term ‘rite of passage’ as a liminal metaphor for describing the transitions experienced by people moving from a major stage of life to another, often marking significant change.

Unlike any other time in its pre-revolutionary history, migration has become a feature of Cambodian sociocultural landscapes since the impact of the Khmer Rouge (Kidron, 2009a, p. 209). Chandler (2008) considers migration to be a significant change for the Cambodian people as he claims that little appeared to have changed in Cambodian life and thought from the 9th to 15th centuries; it was also made known by the French colonisers that Cambodians were ‘asleep’ for 2,000 years. I propose changing the lens through which we view culture, so I challenge both Chandler’s description and the French colonisers’ view of Cambodian life throughout this era, as this example of ‘fossilisation of culture’ acts to place the Cambodian culture into an obsolete and essentialised state (Harris, 2013, p. 22). Even though there is not a lot of information available about this era, it is simply not helpful to buy into sweeping cultural
assumptions like this. “Culture is always being formed and reformed” (Kalantzis & Cope, 1989, p. 19), so it is reasonable to state this, too, is the case for Cambodia.

As Cultures Change

Various scholars state that cultures are never static, change from moment to moment and reinvent themselves (Eller, 2009; Waters, 1990). Hein (2006) describes four aspects that influence migrants’ racial and ethnic adaptation in the host country: religious values; kinship norms, with ancestry being a focal point; nation-state formation and political schisms. For example, Khmer communities in diaspora are actively engaged in the process of nation-building of Cambodia. Cornell (1996) comments on the collective identity which continuously varies – from low to high – along three dimensions, which are shared interests, institutions and culture.

Ethnic groups thus vary over time, depending on circumstances within and outside of their group. This is linked to the porous nature of ethnic boundaries, allowing groups to persist, constrain or transform their ethnicity from pre-existing ethnic constructions (Cornell, 1996). Cambodian ethnic origins are also characterised by a “porous ethnic boundary and a liminal ethnic identity” (Hein, 2006 p. 33). Hence, the Khmer have experienced these boundaries within their own ethnicity, and for almost 40 years their culture has overlapped with broader dominant cultures in diaspora.

Belonging, and Creating a Cultural Space

Like other ethnic groups living in diaspora, it has been important for the Khmer to create place and space that they are able to relate to within a different social climate. In the light of this, Van Dyk (2007, p. 6) notes that people who are living in diaspora reside in quasi-liminal hyphenation as a result of being displaced, where migrants live in an intersection of home, and:
between here and there, a liminal space of betweenness and transition, where internal and external worlds, here and there, past and present, intersect. This intersection point, marked by hyphenation, always performs across multiple borders and thereby emphasises a spatial-temporal liminal region experienced by many transnationals.

Hence, the Khmer in diaspora are linked to and located across multiple worlds as transnational migrants with redefined cultural identities (Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991). For the Khmer, creating a sense of belonging in diaspora is to create a new cultural space and thus new cultural identity. Like Breckon (1999), Lewis (2000, p. 1) labels the phases of cultural identity transformation as “permeable aggregates of disassemblies, reconstructions and redefinitions of Khmerness”.

The Khmer Identity

When Cambodians speak of their identity, they speak of culture, including Theravāda Buddhism, the Khmer language, 'proper' behaviour, customs and the heritage passed to them from their elders (Mortland, 1994a). The fear of the Khmer losing their culture is evident (Mortland, 1994a), and given the realities of life beyond the borders of their country, the perception that as a people they will cease to exist continues to be pervasive (Ledgerwood, Ebihara & Mortland, 1994).

Jacoby (2011) takes a psychoanalytic view that survivors of genocide fear losing themselves, as they have been victim to violence that comes from inside the fold rather than outside. This adds another layer of complexity regarding how the Khmer could trust each other to survive as a culture. This is linked to and exemplifies that the pain of being in nepantla is cultural in origin (Anzaldúa, 1999, cited in Román-Odio, 2013, p. 51). It is the pain that results from the violent encounter and clash of “las culturas que traicionan” (cultures that betray): “cultures that take away our ability to act” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 37); and cultures that sever its victims from their source of life. As will be
discussed further in Chapter 4, nepantla is a thinking space of possibilities and healing.

Older Cambodian people in Australia continue to place great importance on preserving Khmer culture for their survival as a people. As previously mentioned, their experience as migrants reflects their fear of losing their Khmer culture, thus their identity (Mortland, 1994b), so for them it is important to teach their children and grandchildren Cambodian ways or they will disappear. Elder Khmer still worry that most Khmer American youth receive no formal Buddhist instruction, and wonder how Theravāda Buddhism will survive in the future; for instance, the issue of who would be left to pray for the ancestors and lead the rituals still persists (Smith-Hefner, 1999, p. 199).

McHugh (2000, p. 85) posits the theme of the “elusive notion of identity” in migrant ethnography, as it is tied to “gender, class, ethnicity, age and styles of living”. It is also bound to place, whereby shifts between the homeland and the migrant home describes one’s place in the world as defined by borders and boundaries (Sarup, 1996; Tuan, 1996, both cited in McHugh, 2000). Markovic & Manderson (2002) describe how recent immigrant women from the former Yugoslavia cannot return to their native identity as new identities are developed when crossing the border into Australia. They then face new borders, such as economic, educational, language and relationship boundaries within Australia.

Through immigration, relocation and displacement, Mazumdar et al. (2000) linked ethnicity to people and place. They explored Vietnamese immigrants’ developing sense of place in the United States when they used “architectural design, socialisation and the celebrations of rituals” (p. 23) as contributing factors to their relationships with place, which is similar to the experiences of the Khmer in diaspora.

Like all dislocated communities, re-establishing a sense of continuum in their lives is a key preoccupation especially of
first-generation refugees. Emerging from a history of devastation and disconnect, this struggle to recollect and heal the fissures is, for Cambodians, an integral part of the overarching struggle to survive as a people\textsuperscript{29}.

Breckon (1999) contends that Khmerness is a dynamic process that is translocal, transtemporal and negotiated within specific contexts that result in altered cultural identities. Added to this, Su (2003, p. ix) asserts that as part of their shifting identity reconstruction, the Khmer continue to draw upon the various traditions, folktales and stories to make sense of their new positions as members of a different society – “by recognizing the old within the new (and vice versa)”.

In order for the Khmer to continue to adjust to life in diaspora, it is important for older Khmer migrants in particular to anchor themselves to their Khmer identity: their ‘Khmerness’ continues to be their point of reference (Mortland, 1994b). Lewis (2000) found that Khmer adults in her United States sample reconstructed strong identities based on solidarity of the constructed Khmer community. For older Khmer migrants, this is through retaining their kinship networks, and it is known that Khmer women have been central to the maintenance of these networks (Ledgerwood, 2009).

**Cultural Values Orientation and the Threat of the West**

The westernisation of Khmer generations both in Cambodia and in diaspora challenges religious and cultural hegemony. The significance of cultural values orientation in migrant groups needs to be noted to understand the Khmer culture. “Cultural values shape and justify individual and group beliefs, actions, and goals ... whilst “giving emphasis” (to) shared conceptions of what is good and desirable in the culture, the cultural ideals” (Schwartz, 2006, p.

\textsuperscript{29} Um, 2006, pp. 87-8.
In health theory and practice, the development of an understanding of an individual’s and group’s cultural value system is paramount (Galanti, 2008).

Reflective of Theravāda Buddhist virtues, the Khmer hold collectivist values, which involve holding in high esteem group loyalty, consensus and harmony (O’Leary, 2006). Further, the cultural practices of Cambodian communities value saving face, maintaining family bonds, and respecting elders, authority, peers and the self (Schwartz, 2006). Migrating to a country such as Australia can be problematic for Southeast Asian immigrants in general, as Western societies demonstrate a different cultural values orientation, scoring high in individualistic values with less emphasis on tradition and respect (Inglehart, 2006; Schwartz, 2006). Consequently, the shift of younger Cambodian Australians towards Western cultural values is evident (Chhuon et al., 2010).

Although Hein’s (2006) ethnic origins hypothesis focuses on how experiences in one’s homeland affect patterns of integration and adaptation in the new land, in the 21st century globalisation is westernising immigrants before they even leave their homelands (Bayart, 2005; Skrentny, 2008). Social capital has become global: some view cultural globalisation and worldwide diversity as developing “into a pandemic western consumer culture, within a back-drop of cultures continuously transforming and renewing cultural forms” (Kraidy, 2005, p. 16). As an example, there is evidence of “Africanisms” in Cambodian popular music, and a domination of “superficially diverse genres heavily linked to western pop styles both current and past” (Mamula, 2007, p. 35). As with the continuing rebuilding of Cambodia post-Khmer Rouge, it is unknown how popular culture will develop; for example, popular music bearers may “continue to rekindle vital connections to their past and re-establish Indigenous popular music as a unique cultural phenomenon” (Mamula, 2007, p. 39).

Lack of a nuclear family, and the absence of extended family support and extensive change in or loss of traditional cultural values, frequently leads to
confusion in parents and adolescents regarding proper behaviour expected of each generation (Boehnlein et al., 1995). The desire to fulfil family obligations, ambiguity regarding loss of economic power and family members’ status and loss of cultural traditions can strain intergenerational relations between young and old (Lewis, 2005). Children acculturating to Western societies’ expectations for developing independence, lowered respect and deference to authority can conflict with traditional cultural expectations to provide financial support for elderly parents or to provide supportive care for ill or parents with a disability (Chhuon et al., 2010; Zhou, 1997). Intergenerational cultural dissonance occurs so often it is regarded as a normative experience (Choi, He & Harachi, 2008). In her study of Latino-American refugee youth, Camino (1994, p. 50) reminds us that ethnicity is a social construct, relevant to refugees undergoing rapid cultural change. She concludes that

...for refugee youths undergoing culture change, ethnic identity is a phenomenon that can be fashioned into innovative constructions, rather than a set of traditions carried from former homelands and deposited in new ones.

An example of the tenacity and persistence of older Khmer women to transmit their culture lies in their support of the practice of Khmer-Australian men marrying young Khmer women. These women are expected to bring Cambodian traditions and culture to Australia, be ‘good’ daughters-in-law, and look after the older Khmer (personal communication with Dr. E. Hoban, October 2010). This both corresponds to and contrasts with the findings of Pallotta-Chiarolli and Skrbiš (1994, p. 259) about the degrees of compliance by second generation migrants from Europe in the face of “parental, communal and societal authority”, and the decision to be compliant or otherwise. Nonetheless, this is supported by Lalonde et al. (2004) in their work on the role of culture in interpersonal relationships. They found a cultural influence on ‘traditional’ partner attribute preferences in second-generation South Asian Canadians. Tajima and Harachi (2010) highlight that Vietnamese and Cambodian participants’ beliefs in hard work, obedience, and
helping others are consistent with literature suggesting that such communitarian values are core among Asian cultures (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Nguyen et al., 1999; Schwartz, 2006). In particular, Cambodians were more likely to emphasise obedience compared to Vietnamese participants.

**When Gender Norms Change**

The experiences of the Khmer since the genocide of the 1970s have given rise to not only an attachment to their past, but at the same time an ambivalent questioning of taken for granted basic cultural concepts (Ung, 2009). But there is a time when the traditional ideals of Cambodian womanhood is required to be resituated when traditions are contested in diaspora (Brickell, 2011).

An uncertainty and to an extent a fear of a shift in gender roles is related to Ung’s previous statement. Every social institution is marked by its own borders and boundaries. These borders define who is in and who is out; who belongs and who does not; who is visible in the eyes of society and who is invisible (Hammer, 2008, p. 8). Yeatman (1997) states that when subjective positions of power are either taken for granted or remain uncontested, they cannot be transformed. Examples of this are persistent gender roles and power relations in religious institutions which are often gendered, such as the role of women in Theravāda Buddhism. For instance, only men are eligible for ordination to monkhood, and traditionally women serve in subordinate, often voluntary yet expected positions in administration or household duties in the temple, including preparation of food for the sangha (Cadge, 2004).

Traditionally, the ‘silence’ of Khmer women is a result of a traditional patriarchal society where women are still not permitted to become monks. Andaya (2002, p. 3) suggests in early Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhism, female spiritual inferiority was offset by allowing women to become lay devotees (upāsikā) as well as affirming their nurturing and maternal role.
Khmer values espouse that women are to maintain a moral, pious and virtuous character (Cook et al. 2010; Øvrelid, 2008).

When examining the legal validity of the revival of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī ordination, Anālayo (2013) states according to canonical Vinaya set by the Buddha that only (male) bhikkhus are permitted to ordain (female) bhikkhunīs.

In other traditional religions and value systems such as Islam, Judaism and Christianity, women have rights secondary to those of men. In Khmer culture, if a Khmer woman is unmarried, she is expected to live the life at least equivalent to that of a Buddhist nun and/or look after the monks, her family, and the Khmer community (personal communication with Dr. E. Hoban, May 2010). In traditional Khmer society, women and mothers who are divorced and/or unmarried are both outside the construct of the traditional family and potentially outside the construct of feminine virtue. This corresponds to Anzaldúa (2007a, p. 39) who speaks of culture as being based on patriarchal values:

The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels she is a mujer mala (bad woman). If a woman doesn’t renounce herself in favour of the male, she is selfish ... For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother.

Linked to social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990) in Cambodian society it is the responsibility of women to 'hold' the culture

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30 A fully ordained Buddhist nun, i.e., a woman who has taken higher ordination (upasampada) in the Buddhist monastic community.
31 The Vinaya is the regulatory framework for the sangha or monastic community of Buddhism based on the canonical texts called the Vinaya Pitaka.
32 Buddhist monks or devotees.
(Ebihara, 1974, cited in Kulig 1994). This research will examine the proposition that older Khmer women in Australia are the creators of ethnic boundaries, with some having a "gate-keeping function protecting ethnically generated resources", while others have a "bridging function encouraging greater intergroup association" (Cornell 1996; Sanders 2002, p. 348). The response to this will be discussed in Chapter 10.

**Religion as Culture: Continued Links to Theravāda Buddhism**

The thread that binds this discussion is the key religion in Cambodia, Theravāda Buddhism. Buddhism has always been much more than a religion in Cambodia; it is a social doctrine encompassing all aspects of Khmer life. Historically, the lives of Khmer people have been steeped in traditional values based largely on Theravāda Buddhist precepts, founded on self-purification, merit-making and acts of filial piety, with the goal of reaching a higher reincarnated form (Smith-Hefner, 1999). Nirvana is a state most Khmer believe is not possible to achieve in one lifetime, as this requires “many lifetimes of meritorious behavior” (Smith-Hefner, 1999, p. 47).

As Buddhism has been the main focus of Khmer culture for over 2,500 years, it is likely that this culture will evolve and continue to be recreated by the moral landscape of Theravāda Buddhism, including merit-making and other virtuous exemplars (Cook et al., 2009). It is important for the health and research communities to understand the role these virtues play, and in particular, how older Khmer people construct their healing in the context of Buddhist traditional values (Canda et al., 1992; Cook et al., 2009). Besides, it remains to be seen how devotion to Buddhism by future Khmer generations living in Australia evolves.

Theravāda Buddhism and Buddhist Wats continue to be of traditional significance for Khmer Buddhists in Australia (Vasi, 2011, p. 97) and a major source of cultural capital for the Khmer community living in Australia.
Buddhism is a religion of place and space, with the Wat (Buddhist temple) described as the sacred and ritual centre of Cambodian life (Cook et al., 2009). When religious practices such as merit-making or rituals performed as a part of Buddhist ceremonies become regular or habitual, they become forms of what Bourdieu (1993) defines as 'habitus', as these help convey and reinforce Buddhist bonds. Habitus is not fixed or final; it occurs “through bodily memories, shared social experiences and stories told about these experiences” (Moschella, 2008, p. 142).

Habitus is intertwined with ritual, which provides powerfully emotional ties binding people with their families, friends, society and origins from the past. Habitus appears to be linked to cultural, societal and gender constructs of one’s position in social space and the creation of social power (Bourdieu, 1989) according to one’s gender. For instance, for migrant women, the preparation of traditional foods is a way of staying ‘viscerally connected’ with their ‘old home’, and creating this domestic space where “the body feels ‘at home’ can help resituate and reconstitute the diasporic subject” (Longhurst, Johnston & Ho, 2009, p. 333). Although Bourdieu’s habitus is not part of the conceptual framework highlighted in Chapter 7, it is nonetheless pertinent to the connection to ‘home’ in diaspora.

Appadurai (1997, p. 18) contributes a different view. He contends that the world is in “cultural flux”, and the search for steady points of reference can be difficult, whereby the

invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship and other identity-markers) can become slippery, as the search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication.

However, when examining future generations, ethnic identity search by adolescent migrants and ethnic labelling amongst immigrant families, Phinney & Alipuria (1990) realise adolescent student minority groups (African-American, Asian-American and Mexican American) considered their ethnicity 69
to be of extreme importance in the search for who they are. For them, there is often the return to a familiar traditional past, which remains a feature of the development of ethnic entities. More recently, Gummadam, Pittman and Ioffe (2016) state that college students from similar ethnicities reported the highest levels of self-worth when they were connected to their college and ethnic group. Speaking on the future of ethnic groups in America, Gans (1979) advances his theory of symbolic ethnicity, where future generations seek symbols that relate to primordial bonds of the homeland, the culture, and the traditions of the past.

DeMiglio and Williams (2008) frame ‘sense of place’ within the context of health. They link ethnicity to people and place. Through immigration, relocation and displacement, they cite a study by Mazumdar et al., (2000, p. 23) who explore Vietnamese immigrants’ developing sense of place in the United States when they used “architectural design, socialisation and the celebrations of rituals” as contributing factors to their relationships with place, which is similar to the experiences of the Khmer in diaspora. Sense of place can also have negative connotations. Relph (1997, cited in DeMiglio and Williams, 2008, p. 222) labels sense of place as “poisoned” when discrimination and xenophobia are used against the diversity of cultures in another land.

For Khmer women who continue to make merit when they help in the Wat, habitus is the essence of the sacred, social space and symbolic power (Bourdieu 1989) from which women derive their kammic status. The symbolic significance of building Buddhist temples in Cambodia by Cambodians in diaspora helps them to both symbolically preserve aspects of Cambodian culture that were perceived as threatened in the post Khmer Rouge period, as well as orienting in particular older Khmer people to their next life. For these diasporic communities, the importance of building Wats in Cambodia has provided great symbolic, merit-making and kammic significance to help both stabilise and develop local communities as well as rebuilding and preserving
aspects of Cambodian culture (Cook et al., 2009). As Jones (2000, cited in Cook et al. 2009) states, “temples orient people to the next life while commemorating the past” (p. 332). It was noted by Overland and Yenn (2007) that contribution to the rebuilding of Cambodia by Norwegian Khmer contributed to their own resilience. The reasons for this are grounded in their religion.

Following on from the previous discussion on the cultural and religious construct of Theravāda Buddhism being gender-based (Muecke, 1995), according to orthodox Theravāda Buddhism, in order for women to reach nirvana, they must first be reborn as men (Guthrie, 2004b). Men are eligible for monkhood, hence are in a position to emulate the Buddha’s life and maintain the Dhamma (Buddha’s teachings) (Smith-Hefner, 1999). However, an interesting depiction of Guthrie’s (2004b) 1996 trip in Phnom Penh to visit two Buddhist women ascetics demonstrates an alternate belief that their religious practice would lead them to nirvana in their present life.

In Chapter 2, I outlined how the history of the Pāli language being interspersed with the more supernatural Sanskrit dialect altered belief systems within Khmer Buddhist practice. In Theravāda Buddhism it is customary to speak of animism as a religious alternative to Buddhism. They are at times viewed as rival ideologies, yet interestingly Brohm33 (1963, p. 155) states that the “social elite” possessed a greater share of the “Great Tradition” of Theravāda Buddhism, yet their rural counterparts held less understanding of the Pāli scriptures, were more superstitious and tended to believe in the spirit world.

33 Where I have used earlier references such as Brohm (1963) and Keyes (1983a,b; 1984), it is because these are both historically relevant to the thesis’ discussion and that these views have not significantly shifted since.
Keyes (1983a, p. 858) states that historically, the “kammic legacy of each individual born into the world is different”. However, contrary to the arguments by some scholars that Theravāda Buddhism serves to oppress women in Theravāda Buddhist societies, Keyes (1984) offers the perspective that gender symbols differ. For instance, female images throughout Buddhist texts denote women as having a nature to bear children and realising their nature as mother-nurturers. Men must reject their nature (their sexuality) to pursue the Buddhist path. In contemporary rural Thailand, women are more consistent in attending to their religious faith, whereas men tend to fluctuate between their faith and intense worldliness, and this appears to be acceptable by the culture. Keyes (1984) follows by noting that women are more diligent in their support of the offering of daily food to the monks than are men, but sees this not so much as a distinct act of merit-making as an act of nurturing through providing sustenance, not only for their children but also of their religion.

Keyes (1983b) states that in Thai culture men often spend at least one period of fasting (lenten period) as monks or novices, and that women acquire a similar status when they become mothers. This status commences with the pain of childbirth and the traditional postpartum act of “lying by the fire” (yū fai), entailing a minimum of several days’ duration involving the mother resting next to a constantly kindled fire and drinking medicinal broth heated on the fire. Keyes (1983b) advises that this act by women is “being in kamma” which improves the kammic status of women. Nevertheless, in Theravāda Buddhism, women continue to have different gender roles to men (Cadge, 2004), and Cambodian women continue to seek refuge in Buddhism (Kent, 2011b).

I would like to add Kent’s (2011b, p. 193) view about different discourses surrounding the gender divide. I appreciate and concur with her bridging view, where “Cambodians may negotiate and even invert social order in ways that can be transformative, emancipatory and healing”:
Attention is often focused upon the misogynistic aspects of gender differentiation. Proponents of this kind of discourse tend not to concern themselves with how women and men may actually transcend rather than challenge gender order or with how they may commune with one another in ways that generate security.

**Christian Conversion: “To be Khmer is to be Buddhist”**

Until 2007, five per cent of Cambodians (in Cambodia and in the United States) converted to Christianity, with a number becoming Christian either in border camps following the Khmer Rouge period or after migrating to new countries (Cook et al., 2009). However, it is likely that as a reaction to the dramatic changes that had altered the refugees’ lives and in opposition to their systems of belief and behaviour, some explored an alternate religion (Ledgerwood et al., 1994). For others, it was an act of distancing themselves from the Cambodian culture after the Khmer Rouge genocide.

Mortland (1994b, pp. 76-7) sees three important reasons for the Christian conversion of the Khmer following the Khmer Rouge period and during their time in the border camps. First, Christianity was perceived as alternative belief system offering more advantages and protection than Buddhism; second, assimilation to the host culture led to survival and progression in their lives; and third, it was an act of respect and gratitude to Western Christian organisations who sponsored them.

Cook et al. (2009) discovered religious and cultural differences between the Cambodian-American Buddhists and Cambodian-American Christians whereby each group shared a common culture but different religions, still the effects of both on their identity are strong. In Cambodia, however, Baird (2009) witnessed social conflict between younger north eastern Cambodians who converted to Protestantism refusing to engage in important Buddhist rituals and traditions in which their parents and grandparents participate. Keyes (1996) wrote one reason Protestant conversion occurred in Thailand and Indonesia is that the converts feel local animist practices are at odds with 73
a modern and globalised world, and this is particularly true of younger Cambodian people.

Religious beliefs delineate their own sets of boundaries and differences. Difficulties in Christian conversion arise due to the symbiotic relationship between the Khmer culture and Theravāda Buddhism. Historically, the Wat was central to most Cambodian villages, serving as a “school, religious shrine, and social center” (Smith-Hefner, 1994, p. 26). In diaspora, most Khmer live either a considerable distance from the nearest Wat and are not always privy to the same social support (Smith-Hefner, 1994).

Cambodian people who convert to Christianity are often subject to accusations of having turned their backs on the Khmer culture or wishing to align with a non-Khmer identity (Smith-Hefner, 1994). Smith-Hefner (1994, p. 26) tells of a Khmer Catholic lay leader living in the United States who stated Cambodians who convert to Christianity are admonished by their friends:

    Why did you convert? You forgot your culture! You are Cambodian and you are supposed to believe in Buddha. If you believe in Jesus, that’s the religion for Americans or the French!

The Christian missionaries were persuasive in asserting that the Buddha could not help the Khmer in their suffering and grief, and that by praying to God the past could be forgotten (Smith-Hefner, 1994, p. 34). Panikkar (1981, p. 32) criticises and disputes the longevity of converting to a different religion. He alludes to the substitution of one religion for another to be “not only impracticable and utopian … (as this) would create only disorder and confusion on both sides”. Using the example of Christian conversion from Hinduism, he then criticises the role of the missionary who acts to undermine “the foundation on which Hinduism rests (that) would not only be dishonest and contrary to the principles of Christianity, but it would also be doomed to failure.”.
But the Khmer who do embrace Christianity in the long-term “reshape the practices and commitments of their (changing Khmer) identity in the future” (Smith-Hefner, 1994, p. 34) by distancing themselves from Khmer Buddhist practices. Nonetheless, the total number of Khmer who have converted to Christianity is negligible, as most Khmer still identify with being Buddhist. “We Khmer are all Buddhist” is still a strong identification (Smith-Hefner, 1994, p. 26). Also, Theravāda Buddhism is the main expression of cultural solidarity which is so important for the Khmer: Buddhist holy days, wedding ceremonies, and in particular the Khmer New Year (Col Cnam).

There are implications regarding Cambodian health beliefs and practices relating to end of life care (Keovilay, Rasbridge & Kemp, 2000) and the rites of death. For example, most Cambodians prefer cremation, but Christian religions such as Catholicism have historically tended to only allow burials. Even if a Cambodian person has converted to Christianity, Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy continue to strongly influence the approach to dying and death (Keovilay, Rasbridge & Kemp, 2000).

As Theravāda Buddhism is a way of life for the Khmer – their purpose for living, especially later in life – it is appropriate for this thesis to weave into its narrative a deep understanding across cross-cultural and interfaith terrains. A melding of spiritual and Christian faith is my way of life and purpose for living. For the Khmer women, la facultad34 could be a result of a shifting in the experience of their Buddhist faith as a result of their experiences during and following Pol Pot. This is feasible as in her examination of the recreation and redefinition of Asian Buddhist identities of over sixty Buddhist communities in Toronto, McLellan (1998) states that although adherence to traditional

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34 Anzaldúa’s term for an intuitive form of knowledge that includes but goes beyond logical thought and empirical analysis. That inner sense that only those living in the margins develop to survive. (Rebolledo, 2006, p. 281). Also referred to as ‘conocimientos’.
beliefs and practices play a dynamic role in the adjustment of Buddhist immigrants and refugees in their diaspora, Buddhist identities tend to have been significantly altered and redefined within the various communities. McLellan (1998) concludes that this calls into question the authenticity and representation of the Buddhist faith over time; however, this may well be a result of life-transforming experiences, such as the Khmer Rouge war upon the Khmer women, as well as their journey to conocimiento. McLellan (2004) continues to state that Cambodian refugees in Ontario have the legacy of surviving the Khmer Rouge war, as well as shifting identity and roles in diaspora by challenging traditional religious identities and creating rifts within the community. However, their transnational linkages to Cambodia remain in kin, cultural and Buddhist contacts, which is the case in the Cambodian community in Melbourne.

Smith-Hefner (1994) examines the phenomenon of Khmer conversion to Christianity, exploring why some Khmer convert despite the strong association of the Khmer with Theravāda Buddhism. In particular for many women, Christianity offered a new life, hope and a new Christian family in the absence of their own families at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. Smith-Hefner (1994) found that for older Khmer women and widows in particular, conversion to Christianity was typically linked to relief from anxiety, pain and loneliness as a result of the traumatic loss of family members.

**The Khmer as Transmigrants**

As mentioned, the Khmer are to varying degrees transmigrants (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007), and whether or not they literally return to their homeland, they have familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political relationships that span the borders of nation-states (Clifford, 1994). As

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35 Transnational migrants who maintain ties to their homelands whilst in diaspora.
Breckon (1999, p. 6) states, the Khmer in diaspora have “settled into lives that are simultaneously local, regional, national and global”.

Dunn (2010, p. 1) describes embodied transnationalism as an appropriate approach in the study of transnational migrants, as its focus is on “migrants rather than migration flows, and upon transnationals rather than upon transnationalism”. This type of analysis enables us to view transnationals as being “simultaneously mobile and emplaced” (Dunn 2010, p. 1). Embodied transnationalism, where “effective and emotional geographies of transnationalism are more palpable” (Dunn, 2010 p. 1), enables ways of living across space, including practices of tradition.

**Health and Migration**

There is a strong link between health and factors that precipitated the need for Cambodian people to migrate to a different land. The point of this thesis is to put aside the dominant Western medical focus to instead explore ways of healing and sociocultural needs that are pertinent to Khmer people living in diaspora. From a Western medical perspective, it is difficult to establish adequate treatment regimens for Asian migrants, taking into consideration the cultural variations in the expression of mental health problems (Rhee, 2009). For Cambodian migrants, it has been reported more than 90% of those who had migrated to the United States after having survived the Khmer Rouge period have been given the Western diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Blair (2000) reported Khmer Rouge survivors who migrated to Utah in the United States had experienced a greater number of war traumas, such as loss of immediate family members, and a greater number of resettlement stressors compared to immigrants who had not had the same experiences.

It is significant to relate feminist and critical trauma theory to this research. Herman (1992) wrote about the importance of trauma theory being informed by feminism, although mainstream trauma theory became no longer centred 77
on feminist values and intentions. Instead, trauma theorists became preoccupied with medically-oriented issues concerning diagnosis and standardised treatment (Tseris, 2013, p. 156).

Critical explanatory frameworks of trauma, guided by feminist and post-colonial principles, have since emerged explaining sociocultural beliefs and practices that legitimize violence, rendering some groups more vulnerable to violence and ultimately to traumatic stress (Suarez, 2016). In her research on trauma among First Nations citizens in Canada, Gagné (1998, cited in Suarez, 2016, p. 146) adopts a sociological stance that the Western dominant trauma paradigm is a “neo-colonial imposition that tends to silence or marginalize local meanings of mental health, in particular those of indigenous populations worldwide”.

Consequently, this thesis aims to focus on cultural syndromes as a pertinent lens through which to understand post-traumatic related illness in Cambodian women related to the Khmer Rouge genocide, in order to make meaning from the women participants’ experiences. This focus will facilitate a more genuine engagement with these women to reclaim the voices that were silenced within the context of trauma. Their stories will allow social change for this group. The search for meaning is often of even higher importance to survivors of trauma because their experiences have denied their human rights to safety and dignity (Tseris, 2013 p. 160).

Nicholson and Kay (1999) have used a culture-specific needs-based approach in their group mental health treatment of traumatised Cambodian women. Their view reflects a number of other authors who state that mental health services for Cambodian women should be in keeping with their customs and cultural values (Rousseau, Drapeau & Platt, 2004; Rozée & Van Boemel, 1990; Van Boemel & Rozée, 1992; Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 2004).

Pickwell (1999, p. 171) describes three causes of sickness in Cambodia: first, natural causes that are treated with herbs, medicines, diet and hygienic
measures, and family folk remedies; second, traumatic and germ-caused illnesses are treated by medical doctors, injectionists, and native bone setters. The third cause of disease that is “supernaturally caused” is treated by the Krou Khmer (the Shaman), at home by cupping, and dietary regulation of hot and cold foods.

The following is an example of the importance of health practitioners using appropriate methods based on their experience of working with people who have suffered and continue to suffer deep trauma in their lives. Herbst (1992, p. 141) worked with a group of fourteen Cambodian women through her clinical psychology practice in Chicago, Illinois. The treatment she used was an oral history method, whereby she helped the women disclose forgotten memories, which led to their traumatic experiences being relived. She was able to assist them develop trust, acceptance, release of anger, and re-establish a supportive network.

Detzner, Senyurekli and Xiong (2008) use a life history approach to determine the experiences of forty Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Hmong and Vietnamese) elderly refugees. With regard to the Cambodian participants in this study, their escape was typically impulsive, dangerous, and chaotic, and frequently occurring during periods of invasions and heavy fighting. During the war they either left their children behind, nursed their sick children, or watched their children being executed. For the Cambodian participants, it is clear that their narratives of escape were motivated by overlapping, and complicated factors that have an impact upon health and levels of distress post-resettlement. A vast number of Khmer suffer traumatic memories including frequent nightmares and a “paralysis of fear” (Bit, 1991d, p. 77) that there will be a recurrence of the war in Cambodia (DePrince & Freyd, 2002; Skidmore, 1996).

Catolico (2005, p. iii) studied the healing of Cambodian women who are living in the United States. Their healing is achieved via four core processes that culminate in the women's overall life goal, which is “seeking life balance”:
emerging from chaos; patterns of knowing; caring for oneself and reaching a turning point.

For the Khmer today, their experiences have become an embodied memory, and the trauma continues: from post-traumatic stress to cultural bereavement (Eisenbruch, 1991) manifesting in unique cultural syndromes. Western medical and health professionals often view somatic complaints as psychopathology, while Cambodian survivors see them as authentic embodied pain (Uehara et al., 2000).

An examination of the literature identifies some Cambodian idioms of distress recognised as formal cultural trauma syndromes being distinct from the Western medical model identified as PTSD (Chhim, 2013, p. 160). These include a series of trauma-based cultural syndromes such as Batsbat (broken courage) (Chhim, 2013); Kyol goeu (a wind-related panic disorder) (Bracken, 2002; Hinton et al., 2001a; 2001b) and wind overload and orthostatic panic among Khmer refugees (Hinton, 2002); the sore-neck syndrome, which is a unique panic-disorder presentation among Khmer refugees (Hinton et al., 2001a); fear of spiritual and physical attack, leaving the victim with no means of protection (Hinton et al., 2009); and Khmer cultural views about the causation of postpartum complications (White, 2004).

**Memory and Embodied Distress**

I will now discuss the literature in regard to the connection of memory and its loss with embodied distress. Memory-related trauma, in particular cultural syndromes relating to the health of Cambodian genocide survivors, involve flashbacks, catastrophic cognitions causing reduced blood pressure (Hinton et al., 2010). Among Khmer refugees, there is a fear of death from cardiac arrest based on symptoms leading to heart palpitations (Hinton et al., 2002).

The concept of the ‘scattered self’ is pivotal to the way the Khmer have led their lives post-genocide, but it is also noted that the scattering of the self is universally human. The scattered self (Basso, 1988; Tuhkanen, 2013) has its
place in both diasporic and liminal studies. There is an interesting psychoanalytic link between the conceptual framework (refer to Chapter 7) and its integration of the shock of change, liminality and embodiment. Tuhkanen (2013, p. 61) speaks of a “human temporality” of a person driven by shock, which makes the original state “inaccessible”; it displaces the person as follows:

a human temporality (exists) whereby becoming is driven by the shock of an origin inaccessible except as its displaced, contingent, compensatory reenactment and translation.

This is another way to describe the shock of separation, thus thrusting a person into the state of nepantla.

Tuhkanen (2013, p. 61) tells us the hominisation process focuses on both the human other (presumably the conscious self) and importantly on the inhuman other (the unconscious self). It is a process “marked by strangeness, lost origins, unlearned languages”. Interestingly, it is both an evolutionary and liminal process. But here is the key. Psychoanalytic scholars such as Tuhkanen (2013) and Bersani (1977) locate its origin in “intensive shattering”, so accordingly, “the psychoanalytic self is a temporally, spatially, ontologically disoriented being, a scattered, partial self” (Bersani, 1977, p. 78). Tuhkanen (2013) notes that Bersani’s ontology is a theory of “scattering being”. This scattering of self is “a human universal: “dispersion” (Tuhkanen, 2013, p. 61) that Dufoix (2008, cited in Tuhkanen, 2013, p. 61) tells us “is written into humanity’s very soul”.

Herein lies an alternate yet plausible theory of the journey of the inner self. If the journey of the self is scattered, this highlights that the notion of the homeland with its associated dominant culture, exclusivity, legitimacy and stability is inevitably temporary. The Khmer Rouge experience catapulted the hominal process of the Cambodian people (as well as the Khmer Rouge themselves), propelling them into the unknown, liminal state. It also paved the way for the scattering of a people into diasporic life. People who have endured
the Khmer Rouge genocide may well remain scattered between living in the past – their homeland – and in the present, in the Khmer diaspora. Their Cambodian homeland has altered and the past is no longer at the least physically accessible.

The Khmer live in a state of embodiment: of memory and pain. When studying those who have endured genocide, Segal (1984, cited in Bersani & Dutoit, 1980) compels us to step down from our privileged position into the frame of those enduring great suffering, even if it is beyond our own temporal and spatial experience. As surviving genocide is in no way my own lived experience, this can only be done through the narratives of the older Khmer women who are the participants of this study.

Muecke (1995) provides an account of Cambodian women who survived the Khmer Rouge regime, which typifies the importance of being culture-specific when working with traditional cultures such as the Khmer culture. Muecke (1995) explores how trust and mistrust is framed by Theravāda Buddhism and folk belief: since trust is attached to worldly affairs, it causes suffering. Also, as refugees, they fear rather than trust their home government (Muecke, 1995, p. 38). Trust as a Khmer issue is still compounded by fear of the Khmer Rouge war recommencing; that during the war, all Cambodians were at risk of being murdered; and there is a fear of extinction as a country and culture (Muecke, 1995, p. 40). Talking about one’s family troubles with those considered as outsiders is discouraged in the Khmer culture (Nicholson & Kay, 1999). Chapter 5 will examine trust and mistrust from a methodological perspective.

Ultimately, it is important for genocide victims and their families to gain trust, as there is evidence that there is the transmission of trauma, fear and mistrust across generations. Rowland-Klein and Dunlop (1998) show that like the Khmer, their Jewish research subjects have an ongoing fear of renewed persecution. They cannot trust non-Jewish people’s loyalty in the event of another Holocaust, as they believe the world is primarily anti-Semitic. The
children of the research subjects were taught by their parents to be wary of
the non-Jewish world. According to one research subject:

I sometimes look at people that I know who aren’t Jewish and
wonder … would you be protective towards me if something
like that [the Holocaust] happened? Would you hide me?
(Subject 4, p. 11)\(^{36}\)

U Sam Oeur, a Cambodian poet, born in 1936, survived the entirety of Pol Pot’s
genocide by feigning illiteracy and destroying the manuscripts of his literary
work. He was actually a member of the neak thmei, the Khmer term for “new”
people who were originally from urban areas in Cambodia. He was also
educated and therefore considered a further threat to the Khmer Rouge. He
has since labelled himself an “Itinerant Poet” in honour of the traditional poets
who were itinerants, wandering the countryside, bringing the news
throughout Cambodia before Pol Pot. Oeur’s poetry is largely symbolic, and
the following poem, which powerfully illustrates why lack of trust exists in
the Khmer as a whole, ends with an element of hope and reference to the
fundamental tenet of Buddhism: The Triple Gem:\(^{37}\) This is based on the true
event of Oeur’s newly born twin girls choked and wrapped in black plastic by
two midwives in October, 1976:

The Loss of My Twins

Cringing as if I’d entered Hell,
I took the babies in my arms
and carried them to the banks of the Mekong
River. Staring at the moon, I howled:
“O, babies, you never had the chance to ripen into
life-only your souls look down at me now.
Dad hasn’t seen you alive at all, girls …

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\(^{37}\)In Theravāda Buddhism, when a person wishes to become a Buddhist, the first step he or she takes
is to go to the Triple Gem: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for refuge. Since the time of the Buddha, taking
this Threefold refuge has identified a person as a Buddhist.
forgive me, daughters; I have to leave you here. Even though I’ll bury your bodies here, may your souls guide me and watch over your mother. Lead us across this wilderness and light our way to the Triple Gem38.

The Khmer Today

Theravāda Buddhism continues to be a way of life for traditional Khmer people in particular, but it is feared that traumatic memory interferes with this practice. For the Khmer living in diaspora today, survival of the Khmer Rouge genocide, as well as losing their culture that once was, has developed into chronic embodied traumatic memory and pain, and the trauma continues. Continuing the discussion under the section ‘Health and Migration’ above, this trauma is compounded by cultural idioms of post-traumatic stress to cultural bereavement (Eisenbruch, 1991) manifesting in unique cultural syndromes.

In relation to intergenerational communication, disclosing the events of the Khmer Rouge genocide tends not to occur. Cambodian families tend to live in a matrix of familial silencing of past atrocities (Kidron, 2009b) whereby future generations are at risk of losing knowledge of their ancestral history (Taum & Hum, 2005).

Cambodian government responses to collective violence in Cambodia leading to a policy shifting from collective memory to collective amnesia are considered by various researchers as inadequate and inappropriate. Most forms of national remembrance in Cambodia are state-sponsored representations, where they are deliberately manipulated by more recent authorities to gain political support (Chandler, 2008; Taum & Hum, 2005).

Summary of Chapter 3

The review of literature was organised into two thematic chapters.

Chapter 3 presented the research literature centred on the post-Khmer Rouge era to the present time. Passage to life in diaspora was not straightforward as is imagined. Often extended periods of time in the Thai-Cambodian border camps preceded migration, and unfortunately the Cambodian people living in these camps were at heightened risk of further trauma. Some of the Khmer converted to Christianity, which is culturally paradoxical as “to be Khmer is to be Buddhist” (Ledgerwood, J., n.d.a).

Chapter 3 also detailed the processes surrounding migration to Australia, and there was some discussion about the impact of xenophobic migration policies upon social acceptance of those from different ethnicities.

Life for the Khmer will never be the same, however, it is evident that cultures change, regardless of the circumstances under which this happens.

Chapter 4 will be an account of how the main theorist of this research, Gloria Anzaldúa’s life and body of work, transformed the landscape of this research. She wrote as a healer and a shaman (Anzaldúa, 2007a), and through her work, she takes the reader through a transformation from oppression to healing. She is noted as having prominent academic influence through her literary practice, but generally remains under-theorised in a predominantly white feminist academia (Keating, 2006, 2008, 2011; Koegeler-Abdi, 2013). It is also observed that her faith has been especially under-reported and under-theorised in academia (Lioi, 2008, p. 73).
CHAPTER 4
La Curandera of Conquest\textsuperscript{39}: Introducing Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004)

Introduction

Anzaldúa’s epistemology is her conocimiento\textsuperscript{40}, and in locating her Indigenous past as an act of rebellion and decolonisation, this allowed a shift in how normative and cultural acts of oppression from which inequities are formed are analysed. Her inner works allowed a post-colonial oppositional consciousness to generate global, transborder alliances and transcultural understandings that Galván (2014, p. 135) refers to as fostering “glocal”\textsuperscript{41} relations.

Hartley (2010, p. 135) believes Anzaldúa’s role was the:

curandera\textsuperscript{42} of conquest, the healer of la herida abierta (the open wound) created by the borders imposed by capitalism, nationalism, imperialism, sexism, homophobia, and racism.

Therefore, this chapter introduces a new avenue of understanding pain and healing from different yet connected perspectives. An exploration of the shared pain of the Khmer women participants with Anzaldúa’s analysis of and life of pain also signifies the collective pain of humanity.

In this thesis, Anzaldúaan borderlands and post-borderlands epistemologies have been used as frameworks to understand the specific context of the lived

\textsuperscript{39}Hartley (2010, p. 135).
\textsuperscript{40}Spanish for “knowledge” or “consciousness”. It is the knowledge of truth.
\textsuperscript{41}Local and global.
\textsuperscript{42}The female healer.
experiences of Khmer women genocide survivors. It allows exposure to the discourse of those who have endured immense suffering, and whose identity and culture are in states of constant upheaval. It is the language of “subaltern identities”—those who have undergone colonisation, extreme suffering, loss, migration and displacement (Elenes, 1997 p. 359).

In an interview with Anzaldúa, Weiland (2000) was able to garner her perspectives on why events occur in life. From small daily concerns to the genocide of Indigenous peoples are collectively being experienced by humanity as a whole, “in conjunction with the creative life force” (Weiland, 2000, p. 74). All is designed to advance evolutionary consciousness. We are then able to make sense of the “chaos, turmoil, oppression, and pain” (Weiland, 2000, p. 74) in our lives and in the lives of others.

The Khmer women participants did not choose to cross borders. Due to their history of genocide and separation from a land that had changed considerably, these women “did not originally cross the border, but the border crossed them ... (they did) not always have the privilege to decide whether to cross a border or not” (Elenes, 2010a, p. 22). Like Elenes, I argue that in order to realise the importance of reconstructing and reconceptualising new discourses and social signifiers around the border and borderlands, ways of knowing for women genocide survivors living diasporic lives is to use borders and borderlands as “symbolic and metaphorical signifier(s)”.

Crossing borders often leads to the development of ‘Mestiza consciousness’, which is a term Anzaldúa derived to explain the progress towards oppositional consciousness and resistance. It is “a method to struggle and resist the multiple axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality, within the matrix of domination” (Martínez, 2002, p. 166). Mestiza consciousness arises from the borderlands, and allows the reclamation of voice and instinct, and sources of oppression (Aigner-Varoz, 2000, p. 59). As a strategy, developing mestiza consciousness allows all to be “reunited at the crossroads” leading to that
“great alchemical work” that is “some kind of revolutionary step forward” towards becoming the mestiza (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 103).

This chapter has three major purposes:

1. To write about Anzaldúa’s life and work contributing to a relevant epistemology for this thesis;
2. To explore the meanings behind her work;
3. To demonstrate the intersections and applications of her life and work to the lives of the older Khmer women participants of this research, in particular regarding both their connections to their ancestors and the spirit world; lives of considerable pain and suffering; feminine power and being silenced; using silence as a form of agency; and living with the encumbrances of genocide.

“Her path was one of light”43: A Brief Account of Anzaldúa’s Life

In 1942, Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa was born in south Texas to Urbano and Amalia (García) Anzaldúa, sixth-generation Mexican-American rancher-farmers, and was the eldest of four children. I will use in part Anzaldúa’s (1981) essay to chronicle the events of her life, commencing with imagery of the striking contrast of her physical appearance to that of her family upon her entry into the world. This is a description of her grandmother:

Mamagrande Locha (Spanish, part German, the hint of royalty lying just beneath the surface of her fair skin, blue eyes and the coils of her once blond hair)44.

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44 Anzaldúa (1981, p. 198)
Nonetheless, her grandmother loved her despite her being “morena”\textsuperscript{45} and “so dark and different from her own fair-skinned children” (Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 198):

Because I have a face como una penca de nopal\textsuperscript{46}, because I was a dark brown girl who had darker skin than my siblings and other Anzaldúas, my family started calling me la "Prieta," the dark one.\textsuperscript{47}

From such an early age, Anzaldúa started to develop defence strategies in order to protect herself from others. The metaphor of the “nopal” is used as it has needles and razor-sharp spikes, which she cultivated to protect herself from others (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 67). She also learned to fear who she was; still, who she was reminded everyone of their own Indigeneity that they chose to keep secret. In her mother’s words filled with scorn:

“You don’t want people to say you’re a dirty Mexican.” It never dawned on her that, though sixth-generation American, we were still Mexican and that all Mexicans are part Indian.\textsuperscript{48}

She learned to feel verguenza (shame) for who she was. She was diagnosed with a rare hormonal disorder whereby at three months of age “tiny pink spots began appearing on my diaper” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 199), including menstruating from six years of age. This further differentiated her from those around her, and she felt punished by her mother for the “deep, dark secret” between them: her mother was pregnant with her before her marriage. “She made me a victim of her sin” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 199):

In her eyes and in the eyes of others I saw myself reflected as “strange,” “abnormal,” “QUEER.” I saw no other reflection.

\textsuperscript{45}Brunette (Spanish).
\textsuperscript{46}Like a prickly pear cactus leaf (Spanish).
\textsuperscript{47}Anzaldúa et al (2003, p. 8).
\textsuperscript{48}Anzaldúa (1981, p. 198).
Anzaldúa’s life of oppression and exclusion continued as a result of her feminism, and her lesbian sexuality, leading to further estrangement from her family, her community and her culture. During her adolescence, she also experienced her father’s death, poverty, and severe menstrual bleeding with high fevers. Moreover, all of these events led her to realise her place of belonging and her people: Aztlán, the mythical place of origin of the Aztec peoples.

One of her greatest fears was to betray herself, and she made it her quest to remove the guilt experienced from a very young age (Anzaldúa, 1981). For instance, she stated “It was a pity I was dark as an Indian”, but in the face of this denial of the Indigeneity of her Chicano/Mexican culture, she emerged to teach us to reclaim our identity in order to help heal the embodiment of our pain. She taught us to “stand and claim [our] space, making ... una cultura mestiza” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 44), the metaphorical “shared space of multiple belongings”.

Through her writing, Anzaldúa became “shape-changer ... a nahual, a shaman” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 88). It is through her written word that she unravels her politics of la mestiza which aims to broaden rather than restrict other ways of knowing, giving opportunity to change. Her literary activism was “bound to her rituals, sacrifices and mystical and spiritual practices” (Corbin, 2006, p. 240). Her corpus includes books, essays, edited volumes and book chapters; she also published fiction and children’s literature. Her autohistoria was a theme across her works.

From her writing, we learn that:

spirituality is a tool of the oppressed (and the) only weapon and means of protection oppressed people have. Changes in society come only after that.49

49 Weiland (2000, p. 72).
Anzaldúa states it is when forces of oppression throw us back onto our own resources, with our backs to the wall, we often have no choice but to surrender “to the will of universal consciousness, to God” (Weiland, 2000, p. 73). Anzaldúa views the:

strategies of the oppressed self ... (as) helpful for survival, the resistant, the liberatory, the positive whereas others may have a tendency to experience or see defeat, despair, incompetence, demoralizations.50

Anzaldúa died unexpectedly at her home in Santa Cruz, California, in May, 2004, from diabetes-related complications. As she was within months of submitting her completed doctoral thesis when she died, in 2005 she was posthumously awarded a Ph.D. She left an extraordinary legacy that is embodied in her struggle of “I exist” and “we exist” (Bacchetta, 2007, n.p.), that brings light to our humanity.

“¿Qué eres?”51: A Rebirth of Humanity

The reason for choosing this title may not be obvious. When exploring the deeper realities52 beneath the surface phenomena of Anzaldúa’s writing (Anzaldúa, 2007b, p. 60), there is a need to understand her political and spiritual intentions. This chapter is devoted to capturing the inner meaning of her work that will reveal why her epistemology embraces resistance, inclusivity and transformation. The knowledge she left demonstrates that a continued resistance to oppression can ultimately lead to an awareness of the inner, spiritual self.

50Weiland (2000, p. 88).
51Anzaldúa (2007a, p. 84): “What are you?”
52This exploration is also known as la facultad, the ability to capture the depth of the inner self – the soul, often experienced by people who have endured great trauma and suffering.
There is a myriad of literature written about the meanings behind Anzaldúa’s writing, but as a person who is neither Chicana nor a woman of colour, García’s (1997) essay on Anzaldúan feminism deepens my understanding of her early work. He establishes that her work represents not only a Latina rebirth, but also the important rebirth of mother earth and humanity. This is an important parallel to the lives of the Khmer women who have the opportunity for the rebirth of their own identity and lives.

**Anzaldúa’s Theories of Oppositional Consciousness**

Anzaldúa’s theories of oppositional consciousness explore sites of resistance that emerge from sites of oppression, deprivation and domination. Resistance leads to radical transformations initially linked to inner change, redeeming the “most painful experiences” by “shaping new dialogues” (Keating & González-López, 2011, p. 2). Sandoval (1991; 2000) describes sites of resistance as contrasting ideologies creating different manifestos. They comprise novel ethics and new moralities that act to contest taken-for-granted oppressive ideologies and the practices they create. This politics of resistance articulates with Anzaldúa’s spiritually-driven worldview that initiates healing the wounds of social violence, oppression and marginalisation, forming the framework for her bridging metaphor.

The following is pivotal to the understanding of Anzaldúa’s meaning behind the representation of the border in connection to trauma and healing. It is a quote from Steele (2000, pp. 41-42; p. 45) demonstrating that Anzaldúa’s “open wound” and the solution provided by mestiza consciousness are directly related to the experiences of the Khmer women participants:

> The border functions as a marker of an open wound—the marker of a collective historical traumatic history...sites where there arise positive possibilities for healing from the effects of traumatic events, both individual and collective, both separate and shared...what makes an experience traumatic is the fact of survival through departure: survival by leaving, by living on, by going on after loss, by leaving behind the experience. And this comes back, returns to claim the survivor through flashbacks,
nightmares, and repetitions...Mestiza consciousness provides a vision for future survival.

She also uses the term “La Pérdida”\(^5\) (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 137), capturing the pain of being trapped in the borderlands between different countries, cultures, sexualities and ethnicities. The despair the Khmer have felt in losing their country, culture, family and identity is shared as a loss to every person who crosses equivalent borders; yet healing lies in the realm of the new mestiza and conocimiento (which will be discussed later in this chapter).

I would like to use Anzaldúa’s (cited in Hernández & Anzaldúa, 1995, p. 9) distinction between the use of the term “mestizaje” and her preference for the term “new mestiza”, which forms the basis of her inclusivity whilst living across different worlds:

I use the term “new mestiza” to distinguish it from the traditional mestizo or mestizaje. Though in the “new mestiza,” the mixture is biological, it can also be cultural and intellectual. It is a cultural mestizaje in that we are constantly crossing into different worlds—we go from the ethnic home world to the world of the academy, to the job world, to the feminist community, to the different communities of other peoples of color.

What now follows are three interconnected assumptions upon which Anzaldúa’s arguments and discourses are based (García, 1997).

**Assumption 1: ‘Feminine’ and ‘Masculine’ and Other Labels are Social Constructions**

The first assumption states that ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ as sociocultural categories are not linked to biology, so gender roles are dualistic constructs that have shifted over time. Other labels relating to race, ethnicity, sexuality,
disability and class, are constructs that contribute to oppression. These are collectively linked to her theories of multiplicity.

By eschewing labels that separate us, Anzaldúa’s philosophy of multiplicity expressed by the autohistoria of her own multiplicities connect with multiple and hybrid selves (Keating, 2005b). In contrast to the essentialist use of labels, she nonetheless adopts a lesbian activist’s intellectual position. Relative to earlier discussions on Buddhist conceptions of gender, I would like to add here that there can be multiplicity and heterotopic spaces (Foucault, 1986), that is, holding opposing views at the same time in the border.

Anzaldúa believes that by virtue of their gender, women in particular are required to shift away from the parameters defined by patriarchy and colonialism that has removed their power. It is time to reclaim a new identity through the process of self-resignification (Garcia, 1997, p. 35). “¿Qué eres?”: “What am I?” A broadening of the existence of women of colour, for example, is to shift to become a ‘borderland woman’, or the new mestiza.

**Assumption 2: Time and Space are Gendered**

The second assumption is based on the anthropology of gendered time. Linear time is historically related to the masculine, while cyclical time is linked to the feminine, the sacred and the Indigenous (Hurley, 2003, pp. 127-8). This assumption relates to Anzaldúa’s use of female archetypes, the sacred, and recalling her Indigeneity.

Anzaldúa reclaims in-between spaces, or borders, that exist at the edges of dominant cultures – as a dividing line between safe and unsafe, and us and them. The borders are in constant transition and “a constant state of mental nepantilism” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 100). “Psychic restlessness” creates inner conflict, “a struggle of borders” and a clashing of multiple cultures: the price to pay for developing a new mestiza consciousness, the cosmic race where a new value system connects us to each other and to the planet. It is also an opportunity for us all “to see through serpent and eagle eyes” (Anzaldúa,
She not only uses metaphors of both eagle and serpent as a way to illustrate crossing borders, but the eagle is symbolic of the masculine while the serpent is the symbol of the feminine.

In the context of this thesis, the historical past, ancestors, and related myths and archetypes are crucial to understand who the Khmer are today. Anzaldúa yearned to piece together her ancestral Indigeneity in order to shift the constructs that marginalise (Flores, 1996). She achieved this through anti-colonialist writing in her struggle to locate how to put us back together again, also known as componerlas. By reinterpreting the myths of old Mexican Indigenous beliefs, Anzaldúa reclaims the power of the feminine and indigeneity of the Chicana (Vargas, 2012, pp. 11-12), however, this is also a "renacimiento de la tierra madre" (the rebirth of mother earth). This corresponds to the rebirth of Mother Cambodia, the mother the Cambodian people had lost.

Anzaldúa credits the use of metaphors and archetypes, which underscore her discourse on creating a mythos of the new mestiza, with the archetypal psychology of Hillman (1975). His quest was to re-vision "psychology from the point of view of the soul" (Hillman, 1975, p. iv). Hillman (1975, p. 156) writes:

Archetypes are semantically metaphors...they are full of internal oppositions, positive and negative poles; they are instinct and spirit...every statement regarding the archetypes is to be taken metaphorically.

Related to Assumption 1, the uniqueness of Anzaldúa’s argument is she believes in a state of historical consciousness via archetypes that are matriarchally-linked (Garcia, 1997). The destruction of the feminine and the cultural degradation of women are main themes in Anzaldúa’s work, and her rebellion is against the slavery of obedience, of silence and acceptance.
(Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 225). This quote sums up the oppression of women who are labelled ‘alien’ in their own country, which links to the situation of the Khmer women in their country and culture and as forced refugees:

La mojada\textsuperscript{55}, la mujer indocumentada\textsuperscript{56}, is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe home-ground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain.\textsuperscript{57}

This links to the loss of the Indigenous and the loss of female deities. Disempowering forces change “their attributes” by splitting the feminine into dark and light binaries (Anzaldúa, 2007b, p. 49). This represents traditional patriarchal concepts of appropriate and inappropriate womanhood (Elenes, 2010d, p. 9), which reflects the traditional ideals of Khmer womanhood explored in Chapter 3.

\textit{The Symbolism of Coyolxauhqui}

I will now discuss the main female archetypes that feature strongly in Anzaldúa’s writing and link them to Khmer archetypes and myths, namely the Khmer goddess, nān ganhīn. Anzaldúa’s use of linguistic, cultural and spiritual borderlands act to revise patriarchal exploitation of Indigenous icons, Coatlicue, La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Llorona and La Malinche. This is symbolic of placing subaltern women and their mythical representations at the centre of history (Ohmer, 2010).

Before the Aztecs became a militaristic, bureaucratic state where male predatory warfare and conquest were based on patri-lineal nobility, the principle of balanced opposition between the sexes existed...Before the change to male dominance, Coatlicue, Lady

\textsuperscript{55}La Mojada is slang for female illegal alien; literally translates to “wet”.
\textsuperscript{56}Undocumented woman.
\textsuperscript{57}Anzaldúa (2007a, pp. 34-5).
of the Serpent Skirt, contained and balanced the dualities of male and female, light and dark, life and death.58

 Coatlicue features broadly across Anzaldúa’s work. Coatlicue, which is Nahuatl for ‘Serpent Skirt’, is the earth goddess of life and death and mother of the gods. In Mexican culture, life and death are intimately related to the earth and the cosmos (Helland, 1990). Anzaldúa traces the Chicana condition as reflected in the myth of the daughter of Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui’s death at the hands of her brother Huitzilopochtli, symbolic of the beginning of patriarchal Aztec culture and the weakening of feminine power, influence and control.

 Huitzilopochtli, sprang as a fully armed warrior from Coatlicue’s womb. When he realised Coyolxauhqui’s plot to kill their mother, he proceeded to kill his 400 half-brothers who became the stars, and hurled Coyolxauhqui’s severed head up into the sky to create the moon. For Anzaldúa, her aim is to “put Coyolxauhqui back together again” (Keating, 2005a, pp. 11-12), which is symbolic of being “the healing of the wound” (Anzaldúa, 2009c, p. 303). It is also a metaphor of transition toward rediscovering the feminine self, and thus the inner path to healing.

 Coatlicue was feminised, stripped of her ‘cosmic powers’ and:

 then split into two: as Tlazolteotl/Coatlicue, she was banished to the underworld where she became the embodiment of darkness, materiality, and female evil; and as Tontantsi/Guadalupe, she was purified, christianized, “desexed,” and transformed into the holy virgin mother.59

 La Virgen de Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico, and has been referred to as a “role model for womanhood” (Álvarez, 2008, p. 119). She has also emerged as a powerful synthesis of the Spanish Catholic Virgin Mary and the


**The Khmer Earth Deity, Nān Ganhūn**

The legend of Coyolxauhqui is deeply connected to reclaiming the Cambodian earth deity, nān ganhūn\(^{60}\) in order to recover female power in Khmer culture (Jacobson, 2008; Likhitpreechakul, 2012), a power denied across Cambodian history.

Just prior to the Buddha’s Enlightenment, Māra, the Lord of Death and his army of warriors, his daughters and wild animals, aimed to destroy the Bodhisattva\(^{61}\). Upon their approach, the Bodhisattva stretched out his right hand and touched the earth, from which an earth deity, nān ganhūn, rose from underneath his throne. In doing so she twisted her long hair, and there emerged a deluge of water collected from the Buddha’s good works across the ages forming a raging flood, washing away and defeating Māra and his followers. The Bodhisattva was then free to reach Enlightenment, under the Bodhi Tree (Guthrie, 2004a, pp. 1-2).

Images of this nān ganhūn are found across Southeast Asia, yet she is absent from the Pali Canon, the texts upon which Theravāda Buddhism is based (Guthrie, 2004a, p. 2). Crosby (2013) explores the invisibility of women in the production of the Pali Canon. It can be argued that as Buddhist texts and related commentaries were recorded and preserved by members of the male sangha, the omission of women from these texts are a consequence of patriarchal systems denouncing women’s power.

\(^{60}\)Lady Princess (Khmer).
\(^{61}\)Term for the historical Buddha Gautama prior to his enlightenment.
La Llorona and La Malinche: Connections to the Khmer women participants

The trauma that is experienced as a result of the wounds perpetrated by colonialism and genocide is felt every day by the Khmer women, “like a repetition of the invasion, the genocide, the exploitation of nature” (Lara, 2005b, p. 51). According to Elenes (2010d, p. 8), “La Llorona represents mother earth, the all-sorrowing mother of an entire people to the Mexicans”. The deep, “collective bereavement” of what has been destroyed and lost, and the “trauma of the conquest” is personified by La Llorona, the dark mother-archetype who forever searches for the children she killed. She is also a symbol of Anzaldúa’s oppositional consciousness signifying the loss of the feminine. I acknowledge La Llorona as the drifting spirit who spends her time understanding who she is and where she belongs.

Importantly, Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 543) teaches us that La Llorona is “not the root of all evil, but instinctual knowledge and other alternative ways of knowing that fuel transformation”. This is an example of a female deity’s attributes being disempowered and feared by the Mexican people. This is contested by “Perhaps she is not what others think she is,” said Doña Lola”, la curandera, in Anzaldúa and Gonzalez’ (1995, n.p.) children’s story ‘Prietita Y la Llorona’. In this story, La Llorona gave Prietita the forbidden knowledge of locating the healing herb, rue. She also led Prietita safely back through the woods to Doña Lola.

La Malinche was labelled a traitor, whore and symbolic mother of an illegitimate mestizo. She was indicted for not conforming to the ideal notions of womanhood. She refused to allow Hernán Cortés to take their son back to Spain, and was plunged into an eternal grief so extreme, that her soul escaped

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62 Cortés was the Spanish Conquistador who led an expedition that caused the fall of the Aztec Empire.
her body. She symbolised the “treachery of femaleness”, the price to be paid if women are neither chaste nor subservient (Elenes, 2010c, p. 140).

Mothers wail when their sons are sent to war; the Khmer women who lost their children at the hands of Pol Pot were swept into a terrain of silent grief (Vargas, 2012). La Malinche’s historical voice became absent (Elenes, 2010c), and this is collectively symbolic of the silence of the Khmer women. This underlines the importance of research as an avenue for the voices of women who live with trauma to be heard.

Anzaldúa reveals through redeeming and reconstructing Coatlicue she will create the new mestiza by syncretising Coatlicue (the original mother), La Malinche (the traitor-la puta), and La Llorona (the weeping woman) with La Virgen de Guadalupe (the virgin) (Jacobs, 2011, p. 121). As a reaction to “the Coatlicue depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness”, the call of the dark mother and Serpent woman, La Llorona, incites us to change (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 242). Through this, a third space can be created by developing a hybrid culture of the feminine, through the reversal of the denial of female power.

I’ve always been aware that there is a greater power than the conscious I. That power is my inner self, the entity that is the sum total of all my reincarnations, the godwoman in me I call Antigua, mi Diosa, the divine within, Coatlicue-Cihuacoatl-Tlazolteotl-Tonantzín-Coatlalopeuh-Guadalupe—they are one.63

I was always intrigued to learn about the history and place of the Black Madonnas in Italy, and how they were not typically celebrated in Italian Catholicism. They emerged from 12th century in Europe at a time which coincided with the suppression of honouring feminine aspects of the deity by the Western church. Renewed interest for the integration of the sacred

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63 Anzaldúa (2007a, p. 72).
feminine into religious practices has given rise to current interest in Black Madonnas (Morton, 2013). In Sicily, the memory of the primordial “dark mother” and her values of nurturance, justice and transformation have survived into the present. In Italy, she is called ‘la dea madre’, god the mother. She is linked to the Black Madonnas, and transmitted in Italian culture by women called le comari (the godmothers). These women are bonded with each other in memory of la dea madre, and helped one another in birthing, caring for children, the sick, the elderly, and the dying, and resisting injustice in particular the violence of patriarchy (Campbell, 1995).

It is no surprise that Anzaldúa was a fervent critic of the Catholic Church’s exploitation of La Virgen de Guadalupe. In contrast, in Anzaldúa’s world:

> Guadalupe is a guide, drawing worshippers back to the Indian past, to the Aztec god Tonnantsi. The god joins the old and new to become a border image, and through this hybrid past represents tolerance for ‘people of mixed race[s]’, acting as a mediator between different cultures.64

Relevant to the Indigenous serpent imagery that is used throughout Anzaldúa’s work (for example, 2007b, p. 49), here is a poem by Oeur (1994f, p. 67), called “Water Buffalo Cobra and the Prisoner of War”. The symbolism of the black cobra is reminiscent of the serpent deity Nāga, who is purported to have protected the Buddha:

> Work, work—hacking at trees, uprooting them, clearing bushes, Transplanting rice, no time to rest. At noon, alone, as I cleared the canebrake, a beautiful black cobra opened his hood before me, displaying his power. He thought I was his foe. “He’s beautiful, just like in the Indian movies!” I exclaimed to myself while my knees knocked.

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“O, cobra! Your flesh and blood are truly Buddha’s flesh and blood. I am just a prisoner-of-war, but I am not your food.

You, cobra, are free, and if my flesh is truly your blood, plead my case with the spirits of the swamp to lead me to Buddham, Dhammam, and Sangham.”

The cobra stared at me with loving kindness then lowered his head. He slithered into the swamp to the south, and I went back to my work of surviving.

—Boh Leav Concentration Camp, Kratie, November, 1976

A point of interest is that the Khmer consider female spirits to be the most dangerous of all. Chouléan (1988, p. 37) states that “a female spirit of inauspicious death arrogates, so to say, Buddha’s supernatural powers to herself.” For this reason the brāy spirits (women who had died in childbirth, or are spirits of virgins), are considered to be the most dangerous and most malicious of all spirits. Given the nature of their deaths, they are seen to carry with them extreme impurity (Chouléan, 1988, p. 37). In the context of Buddhist tenets, the women tortured and murdered at the hands of the Khmer Rouge are perceived to be the result of their kammic inheritance (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Kidron, 2012).

**Assumption 3: The Struggle is Within**

I have added a third assumption that is connected to Anzaldúa’s roles as la curandera65 and spiritual activist, as she realised healing, at a holistic level,
takes place within. The importance of her work to this thesis is that she was able to convey ways of healing la herida abierta (the open wound).

In anticipating a shift towards holism, Anzaldúa (2007a, p. 109) states “the struggle has always played out in one’s psyche, and then “played out in the outer terrains”:

our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. 66

The following quote defines the heart of Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism. Her work also speaks of my own existence of striving for an authenticity that deeply connects me to the spirit. Here she cites how her book, ‘Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza’, relates to her own life:

This book, then, speaks of my existence. My preoccupations with the inner life of the Self, and with the struggle of that Self amidst adversity and violation; with the confluence of primordial images; with the unique positionings consciousness takes at these confluent streams; and with my almost instinctive urge to communicate, to speak, to write about life on the borders, life in the shadows.

Books saved my sanity, knowledge opened the locked places in me and taught me first how to survive and then how to soar. 67

At an unconscious level, if authenticity is absent, a mask of authenticity is worn to escape the threat of shame and fear. Compulsive, repetitive behaviours are performed as a distraction from seeing beyond the pain. At this point, Anzaldúa states seeking the true self is lost. What arises from the interplay between oppression and resistance is resistance occurs when the internalised pain of oppression becomes too great.

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For the Khmer, engaging in too much thinking and worrying endangers their health. Victims of extreme acts of terror often internalise their grief, loss, trauma and experiences of the past (Laub, 2005b), which is one reason why the term ‘embodiment’ is used throughout the thesis. At the level of encarnación, a term that is defined as ‘incarnation’ or ‘embodiment’ (Bost, 2010), the world of the older Khmer women who are walking “el camino de la mestiza” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 104) can be understood.

Anzaldúa’s causes of struggle have been the perception of others that occurs at an internalised level, known as the Shadow-Beast: of racism (her culture and Indigeneity), sexism (her sexuality), and psychological oppression attempting to control and define her.

Yet, it is this “Shadow-Beast” inside her that is the catalyst for change. It forces her to deal with her inner consciousness. In her weakness, she finds her strength.\(^\text{68}\)

The struggle with the Shadow-Beast, the “rebelt in me”, refuses to take external orders or from the conscious will (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 38). It emerges as a form of resistance, rebelliousness and agency to change inner, multiple selves (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 545). Only then is Coyolxauhqui able to be put together (Anzaldúa, 1999). In Chapter 6, I describe being faced with a series of challenges that necessitated this depth of resistance. This is detailed under “Challenging Academia”.

**Nepantla: Awakening to the “land in the middle”**

Nepantla is one of Anzaldúa’s key theories, and has been introduced as a major theoretical focus of this thesis. I call nepantla in part an awakening to the

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\(^{68}\) Garcia (1997, p. 38).
possibility of change. Anzaldúa’s concept of nepantla is the Nahuatl word for ‘land in the middle’, the liminal, transformative state of in-betweenness:

I use the concept of nepantla to describe the state or stage between identity that’s in place and the identity in progress but not yet formed. Nos/otras and new tribalism describe the formation of personal and collective identity.69

In Chapter 3, I briefly explored the empowering role of nepantla when faced with betrayal within cultures. I like Román-Odio’s (2013, p. 51) reflection of Anzaldúa’s definition of nepantla as not only a “thinking-space of possibility”, but also the space where “activism and spirituality converge to produce new knowledge that seeks cultural healing and decolonization”.

Intertwined with the Shadow-Beast, it is the state of active subjectivity, a “resistant sense of agency” which makes transformation from the border into the borderlands possible (Lugones, 2005, p. 86).

Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla es tierra desconocida70, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in nepantla so much of the time it’s become a sort of ‘home’. Though this state links us to other ideas, people, and worlds, we feel threatened by these new connections and the change they engender.71

Conocimiento and Healing

Anzaldúa (2002a) offers the post-borderlands theory of conocimiento, and as stated earlier, this forms the basis of her epistemology of transformation. She defines ‘conocimiento’ as being derived from:

69 Hernández-Ávila (2000, pp. 177-8).
70 Is an unknown land.
71 Anzaldúa, 2002b, p. 1).
cognoscera, a Latin verb meaning ‘to know’ and is the Spanish word for knowledge and skill. I call conocimiento that aspect of consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained. Keating (2006, p. 10) terms conocimiento as a “holistic epistemology”, as an expansion of the transformative elements of the mestiza consciousness and la facultad, and develops a deepening of perception:

(It) incorporates self-reflection, imagination, intuition, sensory experiences, rational thought, outward-directed action, and social-justice concerns.

Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 540) describes the path of conocimiento as being “inner work” with “public acts”, a personal path leading to communal knowledge. To reach conocimiento comprises a complex series of awakenings that builds upon the foundation of social justice. For her, reaching conocimiento means it is possible to “act on the knowledge gained” along the path of la mestiza allowing the development of a new awakening to a higher, embodied level of awareness (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 540).

Relating to the older Khmer women participants, conocimiento emerges from a foundation of violence, cross-cultural penetration, and internal fragmentation (Bost, 2010, p. 79). Symbolically and powerfully, Anzaldúa (2007a, p. 25) states:

The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.

Groups continue to reinforce their borders, yet Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 540) elicited an invitation to shift along the path to conocimiento. Ultimately, this

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72 Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 577).
73 Is an open wound (Spanish).
74 Anzaldúa (2007a, p. 25).
evolves into an intensely personal way of healing, a process of ‘coming into
being’ after deconstructing the boundaries and meanings that demarcate
subjective selves in relation to others (Foucault, 1997) thus creating a
process of ‘coming home’.

Weaving the Sacred Tapestry

I noted from the El Mundo Zurdo 2015 Conference proceedings that one of the
roundtable panel discussions was titled “Goddesses, Spirits, and La Tierra:
Gloria Anzaldúa's Sacred Tapestry”, moderated by Associate Professor Amelia
Montes. This title strongly resembles the relationship of the lives of Anzaldúa
with the older Khmer women participants of this study. This also signifies
the tapestry the Khmer women participants weave from their lived
experiences of devastated lives and their yearning to connect with their
ancestors. Their lives are usually governed by the sacred: their connection to
their ancestors, the Buddha, their traditions, God, and often the spirit world.

A vitally relevant application of Anzaldúa’s extensive corpus is that it reflects
an embodiment of her own life of extensive pain and illness, and
encompasses the journey that she had taken for the awareness of mestiza
consciousness. Anzaldúa has a unique perspective on the origin of pain: that
oppressive forces produce “internalized colonization” which then produce
trauma-related illness (Hartley, 2010, p. 136).

The following highlights the importance of bringing discourses on genocide
to the fore. Anzaldúa et al. (2003, p. 10) tell us the old “wounds of genocidal
colonization and marginalization ... have never formed scabs because they've
continued to bleed for centuries”.

75 "El Mundo Zurdo 2015: Memoria y Conocimiento, Interdisciplinary Anzaldúan Studies--Archive,
Legacy, and Thought.” conferences took place May 27-30, 2015 on the campus of the University of
Texas at Austin and was hosted by the Center of Mexican American Studies.
The Healing: Putting Coyolxauhqui Together: Reclaiming the Feminine

Rechtman (2006, p. 1) provides us with an understanding of how the Pol Pot regime legitimised mass murder by using a rhetoric of extermination, leaving the survivors as the living dead by removing the symbolism of their existence:

The survivor’s paradox is undoubtedly one of the principal consequences of this will to deprive prisoners of their human condition. It is a kind of interiorization of the perpetrator’s rhetoric.

The survivor in this context does not feel safe in their inner life and are then compelled to change. In the above example, the Khmer were broken up into pieces that were rearranged to fit into the constructs of dominant hierarchies (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), in this case at the hands of the Khmer Rouge.

I would like to align the ‘healing’ of older Khmer women with the metaphor of completing the ‘sacred tapestry’, and reaching conocimiento by undoing internalised damage committed by oppressive forces is also a rebirth. Discussed in Chapter 3, the following quote relates to the fear that the Khmer have lost their own culture, and this fear came to a head at the culmination of the Khmer Rouge genocide.

To have an Indian ancestry means to fear that la india in me that has been killed for centuries continues being killed. It means to suffer psychic fragmentation. It means to mourn the losses—loss of land, loss of language, loss of heritage, loss of trust that all Indigenous people in this country, in Mexico, in the entire planet suffer on a daily basis. La gente indigena suffer a loss that’s cumulative and unrecognized by the masses in this country, a loss generations old, centuries old.76

76 Anzaldúa et al. (2003, pp. 8-9).
Anzaldúa’s writing is a reminder of how the women participants are located in diaspora and as transnational migrants:

it’s not enough for anyone to base their identity on race, gender, class, sexuality, or any of the traditional categories….The new tribalism is a social identity that could motivate subordinated communities to work together in coalition.77

Ultimately, the spiritual activism of Anzaldúa forms the inner work of this thesis, using the central metaphysical wisdom that is the driveshaft behind Vasconcelos’ ‘La Raza Cósmica’78. Like Vasconcelos (1999), Anzaldúa sees the creation of La Raza as the new mestiza consciousness, being a result of shifting toward a hybrid identity (Anzaldúa, 2007b, p. 77). I view this as the journey of the self, breaking the dominant, colonial-enforced “silence of those who live in between” (Conannon, 1998, p. 436).

This melds beautifully with Poks’ (2008) essay on Father Thomas Merton, Vasconcelos and Anzaldúa who collectively re-vision a new world at intercultural borders, through pain and salvation, leading to worlds of unity and wisdom. Merton understood that humanity is undergoing major changes resulting in a broadening of perspectives, “until it (becomes) synonymous with a truly new reality … that has always been … present in the confusion of history” (Poks, 2008, p. 571). Panikkar (1981, p. 47) joins this conversation by stating that

whatever may be our (religion) we will all ultimately meet”, either “at the end of our journey … or at the very beginning … It is only in the “interregnum” of our earthly pilgrimage that the rivers go their different ways.

77 Anzaldúa et al. (2003, p. 9).
78 The cosmic race.
Anzaldúa wished to create her own religion “not out there somewhere, but in my gut” (1981, p. 208), which relates to the world of the spirit as described throughout this thesis.

Those carrying conocimiento refuse to accept spirituality as a devalued form of knowledge, and instead elevate it to the same level occupied by science and rationality.79

Interconnected worlds are demonstrated through Keating’s (2009a, p. xi) statement of gratitude—“and finally, as always, I thank the spirits, orishas80 and ancestors”. The animist world of the Khmer link meaningfully with Anzaldúan mythology. Nagual81 and Nagualismo relate to animism, the world of the spirits, a world in which the older Khmer women are not permitted to engage. Like Anzaldúa, the faith of the Khmer “is rooted in indigenous attributes, images, symbols, magic, and myth” (Anzaldúa, 2007b, p. 52).

**Definition of Healing**

Connected to Anzaldúa’s philosophy of spiritual activism, ‘to heal’ spans the healing of “personal and group heridas82 of body, mind and spirit” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 89). I would like to conclude this chapter with the definition of healing for this research, which is Anzaldúa’s definition. Positioning ourselves at the level of the spirit to heal is an appropriate analogy for the healing of Khmer women genocide survivors. As can be seen from this definition, based on two citations, healing is not only a solitary endeavour. Healing is also aligned with desconocimientos:

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79 Anzaldua (2002a, pp. 541-2).
80 Orishas are spirits that reflect one of the manifestations of God in the Yoruba religion (Jacobs 2011, p. 118).
81 The Náhuatl word for “shape-shifter”.
82 Wounds.
desconocimientos and health

I don’t define health as the absence of disease, but as learning to live with disease, with dysfunction, with wounds, and working toward wholeness...Health also has to do with holism.83

I define healing as taking back the scattered energy and soul loss wrought by woundings. Healing means using the life force and strength that comes with el ánimo84 to act positively on one’s own and on others’ behalf.85

This definition allies with the conceptual framework (Chapter 7), which is based on Anzaldúan epistemologies. Acknowledgement that the open wound exists is triggered by separation and falling into the space of nepantla; the pain itself enables an intention to heal. It is “through nepantla’s disorientations” that wholeness is able to be achieved (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 89-90).

**Summary of Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 introduced the life of Gloria Anzaldúa, the principal theorist of this research. Her extraordinary body of work and life are strongly connected to the Khmer women participants’ lives, and this was demonstrated through their shared lived experiences of pain, a history of genocide and colonialism, dominant patriarchal values and practices, and being othered, oppressed and violated by ‘their people’.

This chapter also provided more detail of Anzaldúa’s borderlands theory and post-borderlands theory; her related theories such as nepantla and conocimiento are central to the analysis of this research.

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84 The spirit.

85 Anzaldúa (2015, pp. 89-90).
Comparisons between the Aztec, Nahual and Khmer archetypes and myths exemplify the similarities, whilst bridging connections, across cultures. For these cultures, the feminine power has been and continues to be repressed, yet the power of the new mestiza leads to resistance and transformation.

The definition of healing for this research is based on Anzaldúa’s definition of healing, which aligns with her activism of “inner work and public acts” (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 540), the path to conocimiento.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the methodology chapters of this thesis. This research’s methodology is critical feminist border ethnography, aligned to Anzaldúa’s wisdom in action. This is especially with regard to the ethical responsibility of the critical feminist border ethnographer to take “us beneath surface appearances”, to disrupt the status quo, to unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions created by the obscure operations of power and control by shifting towards “what could be” (Madison, 2012, p. 5) to “what should be” (Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 208).
CHAPTER 5
Cultivating Knowledge and Wisdom: “By Your True Faces We Will Know You”

Introduction

Chapter 4 introduced Gloria Anzaldúa, the main theorist of this research. It identified aspects of her life that closely relate to the history and experiences of the older Khmer women participants. This helps our understanding of the importance of Anzaldúa’s borderlands and post-borderlands epistemologies to this research.

Chapters 5 and 6 unveil the methodological framework of this thesis. Chapter 5’s title denotes the intention of this research. “By Your True Faces We Will Know You” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 108) is about making the invisible visible by revealing the situation of women living in the borderlands following their experiences during and after the Khmer Rouge genocide.

The qualitative methodological framework used by this research is critical feminist border ethnography, employed to ‘cultivate knowledge and wisdom’ from the lives of the older Khmer women participants by furthering the understanding of the stories and lives of these women (Bäärnhielm & Ekblad, 2002). Through this methodology, women silenced by dominant sociocultural and political structures have the opportunity to reveal themselves on their own terms, as research of genocide survivors is often limited by what the participants are willing to divulge to those outside of their culture (Fujii, 2010). Anzaldúa also brings to light the importance of connecting with others.

“one-on-one” by listening and learning from each other in a reciprocal manner. As such, both the women’s willingness to tell their stories, and Anzaldúa’s strategy, were important methodological approaches to adopt in this research.

It’s so rare that we listen to each other. The interviewee and the interviewer are sort of a captive audience to each other. I like to do one-on-one talks because I discover things about myself, I make new connections between ideas just like I do in my writing. Interviews are part of communicating, which is part of writing, which is part of life. So I like to do them.

—Gloria E. Anzaldúa

Chapter 5 is divided into two main sections:

- Exploring the appropriateness of and use of critical feminist border ethnography for researching older Khmer women living in diaspora in Australia.
- The methods.

Chapter 6 discusses the methodological ideology of this research based on the following:

- The position of the researcher in the conduct of sensitive research.
- A critique of academic practices that may inadvertently create moral and ethical dilemmas and outcomes for the research participants and the researcher.

**Reunidos en La Encrucijada**

**Critical feminist border ethnography**

The methodological context of this research is based on ethical and moral principles, and as such the critical ethnography framework of Madison (2012)

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<sup>87</sup> Anzaldúa (cited in Keating, 2000b, p. 3).

<sup>88</sup> Anzaldúa (2007a, p. 102): Spanish term for ‘gathered at the crossroads’.
was chosen. Critical ethnography is used to study gender inequalities and power imbalances that often take place at the helm of oppressive societies (Koro-Ljungberg & Greckhamer, 2005).

Critical Ethnography is defined as:

an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain. By ‘ethical responsibility,’ I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being and, hence, a compassion for the suffering of living beings 89.

This methodology also addresses “the metaphor of the border as a fluid, hybrid, multifragmented space where individuals negotiate linguistic, ethnic, and gender identities” (Relaño Pastor, 2011, p. 186). The opportunity of gathering at the crossroads where negotiation of multiple positionings across whiteness, academia, cultural identity and values is enabled.

In this type of ethnography, "strategic turns" are used to meet the complexity of diverse populations, cultures and their lived experiences (Koro-Ljungberg & Greckhamer, 2005, p. 285). These ‘disrupted ethnographies’ allow the ethnographer to declare their ideological and ethical positions and locate ways to deconstruct factors that have led to social injustice. Each strategic turn enables a reflexive stance central to critical ethnography to understand the position of those being researched, to document the nature of oppression whilst questioning why and how women are more likely oppressed, and what solutions are possible (Skeggs, 2001). Therefore, they allow for otherwise prevailing sociocultural binaries to be replaced by different understandings of the ‘Other’.

89 Madison (2012, p. 5).
Deconstructive approaches to ethnography add elements of multiplicity, fragmentation and rebuilding as cultures evolve over time. A case in point is the Khmer Rouge genocide considered different to other genocides in that an ideology existed of generalised dehumanisation of both women and men. Like the role of women in the Rwandan genocide, the Khmer Rouge genocide saw women and men cadres kill, torture and brutalise others: they were both “agents and objects of genocide” (Sharlach, 1999, p. 387; also von Joeden-Forgey, 2012). It is unknown whether any of the Khmer women participants of this research were members of the Khmer Rouge. Nonetheless, caution, vigilance and indeed compassion needed to be exercised when listening to and then presenting the voices of these vulnerable research participants (Liamputtong, 2006a, p. 47).

**Accessing the Field**

A number of mandatory requirements were fulfilled prior to being eligible to access the research field. Human ethics approval and the completion of a memorandum of understanding were required to conduct this research.

**Seeking Human Ethics Approval – Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee**

In order to ensure that the values and principles of ethical human research conduct would be met, human ethics approval was sought via a completed online National Ethics Application Form (NEAF) submitted to the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (DU-HREC) via the NHMRC Human Research Ethics Portal. Ethics approval was granted (Project ID HEAG-H 10_2011) in April, 2011. I commenced eleven months of participant observation at the Cambodian community centre in Melbourne from November, 2011.

Ultimately, when designing and conducting sensitive, cross-cultural research, the ethical responsibilities of the researcher shift beyond a university
approved research ethics application. Research ethics is often much more about institutional and professional regulations and codes of conduct than it is about the needs, aspirations, or worldviews of marginalised and vulnerable communities (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2007, p. 96).

**Memorandum of Understanding**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was written by the Deakin University Solicitor’s Office to formalise the research partnership between the Cambodian community centre (research setting pseudonym) and me as the Ph.D. researcher. I provided a signed copy of the MOU to the Welfare Coordinator of the Cambodian community centre to seek acceptance and co-signature of this document. The MOU specified logistics such as how often the groups meet at the Cambodian community centre, how often I can attend these sessions and over what timeframe.

**The Research Field**

Entering the field was facilitated by a colleague who introduced me to the Welfare Coordinator of the Cambodian community centre. This centre’s provision of services and activities for older Khmer people living in Victoria operates from Theravāda Buddhist philosophy.

The research field constituted a number of settings. These comprised: the Cambodian community centre; two Buddhist Wats and associated buildings and residences; a Catholic church; homes of the women participants or their relatives; and other settings, such as community gatherings during Khmer New Year and Phchûm bĕn⁹⁰ celebrations.

⁹⁰ Khmer feast festival for the ancestors, celebrated annually in October.
Relationship with Cambodian community centre, key informant and interpreters

As a gesture of respect, I requested the Welfare Coordinator to ask the older Khmer women members on my behalf for their permission to attend their group sessions, such as during the Khmer Elders Group meetings held at this centre. This was accepted and assisted my transition into this community.

Employment and Training of Interpreters

The use of interpreters during cross-culture and cross-language studies requires strategic planning by the researcher (Squires, 2008). It was necessary to employ a bilingual research assistant, fluent in Khmer and English, to improve access to and communication with the older Khmer women living in Melbourne (Liamputtong, 2010). I had originally intended to employ a female middle-aged Khmer interpreter. This was considered pertinent from a gender and age-relationship perspective, and necessary as 51.5% of Khmer people over 45 years of age who live in Australia speak Khmer only (Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014). I initially invited the Welfare Coordinator to act as key informant and/or interpreter for the interviews. She was unable to take on either of these roles due to her heavy work schedule. She instead introduced me to Mr. Than Thong who is central to the Khmer community, and was very willing to be both key informant and interpreter. I developed a research relationship with Mr. Than Thong, who eventually assisted me to gain access to recruit participants for this study.

As a consequence of being an outsider, I was very reliant on Mr. Than Thong, key informant and interpreter for 23 out of the 24 women who were
interviewed for this study. I also employed one young Khmer woman, Peou\(^{91}\), to interpret the final interview.

In order to acquaint both interpreters with the aims of the research, to build rapport, and to assist both interpreters to understand their role, an induction process took place prior to the semi-structured interview phase. I addressed the aims and objectives of the research and types of questions to be covered in the interviews, the confidential and sensitive nature of the interviews and the interpreter's role during the interviews (Edwards, 1998). I also instructed the interpreters that I would like to ask the questions in English during the interviews, and he or she will interpret what is said to each of the women participants in Khmer, and importantly, to translate to me as accurately as possible what was said by the participants in English (Liamputtong, 2010).

**Funding and Participant Compensation**

An important challenge of this study was to identify a funding source. I was fortunate to be awarded sufficient funding from the School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, to pay each of the interpreters $AUD50 per hour for each interview, which all parties decided was an equitable payment.

I gave each of the women participants one $AUD20 supermarket gift voucher at the end of each interview. Liamputtong (2007) states that researchers need to compensate vulnerable research participants for their time, not as an inducement or type of coercion, but instead as a crucial and culturally appropriate payment. As noted by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), payment for their time should be seen as equalising the relationship between research participant and researcher. The gift voucher signified my appreciation for

\(^{91}\) Pseudonym: 'youngest one' (Khmer name).
their participation, time and material that has informed my research. I paid for the gift cards using personal funds, and used my own vehicle for transport to and from each visit to the field including interviews.

**Sampling**

According to the 2011 Census (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2014), most Cambodian-born Victorians (93.1%) spoke a language other than English, and 40.3% assessed themselves as speaking English not well or not at all. Due to resource restrictions, I could only interview either English or Khmer-speaking Cambodian women. Chinese-born women who had lived in Cambodia were included if they could speak English or Khmer.

Purposive sampling strategies were selected as they specifically target individuals who can provide information that cannot otherwise be obtained and who comply with the inclusion criteria characteristics of this study. It is appropriate to use these types of strategies in difficult to access refugee and immigrant communities (Spring et al, 2003). The inclusion criteria for this study were Khmer-speaking women who came to Australia in the waves of migration following the Khmer Rouge period, and who had direct experience of this genocide. In order to fit the category of ‘older’ women, participants needed to be over 45 years of age to be eligible for the study, as this age group was more likely to have endured the Khmer Rouge genocide.

Maximum variation sampling (MVS) involves purposefully selecting a wide range of variation on the dimensions of interest (Liamputtong, 2009). MVS involves finding heterogeneous samples across wider sample groups. A large proportion of the Cambodian population live in the City of Greater Dandenong, Victoria (Museum Victoria, n.d.), in particular, Springvale, Noble Park, Keysborough and Dandenong. After a period of participant observation and developing rapport with members of the Elder Khmer women’s group, I was fortunate that Mr. Than Thong recruited older Khmer women that cut across all demographics (besides age) within the parameters of the inclusion criteria.
The women were recruited from the Cambodian community centre, but also from outside of this centre. Coupled with MVS, opportunity sampling techniques allow for opportunities emerging during fieldwork to be used. Snowball sampling was used for the purposes of recruiting a woman participant for the final interview.

Yiey Ponnleu was recruited by Peou through her mother’s contacts (Liamputtong, 2009; Spring et al., 2003). I did not have as close a relationship with Peou as I had with Mr. Than Thong, so the issue here is the risk of this research assistant divulging aspects of the interview to her mother, even when confidentially was assured (Ford et al., 1997). I will discuss this matter further in the “Threats to Rigour in Cross-Cultural and Cross-Language Research” section of this chapter.

**Collections from Research Encounters**

I contend that it is only by immersion in the culture that researchers may have an in-depth and accurate understanding of the cultural groups.92

According to Fetterman (1989), the ethnographer ideally needs to spend six months to one year in a community to engage and view the participant group at many levels, including the beliefs, fears, hopes and expectations of the participants themselves. Language barriers aside, this is shaped through developing a holistic perspective, contextualisation, emic accounts, thus learning about new views of reality. Only then can the ethnographer understand and portray the cultural landscape and its inhabitants to a meaningful extent.

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As mentioned earlier in this chapter, immersion in the field commenced November 2011, and the intention was to gather all research information for a period of 12-18 months. This time-frame is also considered by de Laine (1997) to be a best-case scenario; however, I ended up extending this period to 24 months. Nonetheless, this was on a part-time basis, and therefore equivalent to a full-time field access of 12 months.

The ethnographic methods of this research are discussed as follows.

**Method 1: Participant Observation**

This type of method is characteristic of most ethnographic research, and is crucial to effective fieldwork. It involves participation in the lives of the people being studied, yet it is important for the researcher to also maintain adequate distance from the ‘group’ to allow suitable observation and recording of the knowledge obtained. I was also mindful of the importance of exhibiting an acceptable level of morality, virtue and modesty congruent with that of Southeast Asian cultural values (Mahloch et al., 1999). For example, it was appropriate for me to wear modest clothing whilst being in the presence of the women.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when introduced to the group members of this organisation, I proceeded to ask their permission for my presence in their group. I outlined the purpose of the study through using a Plain Language Statement, and then gave an invitation to those present to express any issues about being observed (de Laine, 1997). This was interpreted by both Mr. Than Thong and the Welfare Coordinator.
Initially, I sat and shared lunch with the women to get to know them, and assist with activities at hand such as ‘Bingo’. I anticipated that conversations during these lunch sessions would help to informally frame some of the issues important to the women, providing me with some direction for the interviews I would later conduct. Due to the casual nature of these sessions, there was difficulty accessing appropriate translation. Therefore, although I did not understand the conversations that were conducted in Khmer, my aim was to still build a sense of familiarity, trust, and acceptance between the women and myself. To expand the field, I attended Khmer New Year at a Buddhist Wat and a Khmer Catholic church service honouring Phchûm bên.

Information collected during the initial participant observation set the scene for the other methods I used: collecting a demographic profile of and conducting semi-structured interviews of the 24 women participants.

**Method 2: Demographic Profile**

Demographic questions consisting of simple enquiries targeting background information of each participant were elicited at the beginning of each of the semi-structured interviews. The purpose of collecting a demographic profile for each woman was to provide a framework within which participants' life events could be described, and where appropriate, compared to other participants.

**Method 3: Semi-Structured Interviews of Older Khmer Participants**

Semi-structured interviewing is less structured than formal or in-depth interviewing. In this research, the questions were based on an interview

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93 Bingo is a game in which players mark off numbers on cards as the numbers are drawn randomly by a caller. The winner is the first person to mark off all their numbers.
schedule that was informed by a broad review of the literature and participant observation outcomes (Minichiello et al, 1990). De Laine (1997, p. 170) calls this interview schedule an “aide memoire”, being a reminder of the research questions and objectives of the study. Therefore, I used the interview schedule as a basis for prompting my questioning, whilst ensuring the same topics were covered with each of the participants. I sought approval from each participant to record the interview discussion, upon which I used a digital recorder to record each interview. I made written notes throughout each interview to support the recordings. Following each interview, I transcribed each of the recorded interviews verbatim, and checked the transcriptions for accuracy of the transcription with the interpreter only.

The interview questions were predominantly open-ended to give the participants an opportunity to discuss the research topics. Ideally, the individual transcripts in either Khmer or English (as appropriate) were to be returned to each of the participants to verify the accuracy of the content and for further clarification or comments about the content (Castleden & Garvin, 2008). However, given the majority of the participants were illiterate and generally tired of the interview questions, I was unable to read the content to the women for their feedback at the conclusion of each interview. I was unable to do follow-up interviews with the women participants for this level of clarification due to time and financial restraints. Nonetheless, information was collected from the women participants until data saturation occurred (Saldaña, 2009, pp. 161-2).

**Interviewing Key Informants and Other Related Parties**

I intended to interview a number of Cambodian key informants living in Melbourne, with a focus on their perspectives of older Khmer women’s processes of healing. The Khmer Mayor from a local council originally agreed to be interviewed, but he became very unwell and was unable to oblige. Although Teshuva (2008) had consultations with a number of key Cambodian 124
experts based in Melbourne, which may have provided relevant information for my research, I was unable to make connections with these organisations through time and resource constraints and their lack of availability or willingness to participate. I interviewed Mr. Than Thong as a key informant, using a similar semi-structured approach used for the women.

**Threats to Rigour in Cross-Cultural and Cross-Language Research**

In accordance with conducting ethnography involving cross-cultural and cross-language research, I was mindful of what Berman and Tyyskä (2011) conclude about what commonly emerges in the field:

- Ambiguities and ownership of translated language content;
- Assumptions about community familiarity and cultural similarity;
- Negotiation of power and authority in the research process.

González y González and Lincoln (2006) stress the risk of conducting research where the ethnographer is unfamiliar with the first language of the participants, therefore, a language and cultural divide may develop. There are too many intricacies of language, culture, context, nuances and meaning potentially lost in translation. In this event, do we serve both the interests of Western research as well as the needs of those from different cultures from whom information is gathered? This is unfortunately a methodology which can end up being marginalising as:

... failure to know and understand the first languages of participants can leave us with misunderstandings, inaccuracies, and possibly harmful information...the ethnographer who cannot take the time to understand either the significant variations in cultural practices or the languages that frame those
practices is likely to produce data that may well have little standing in the non-Western world.\footnote{González y González and Lincoln (2006, p. 198).}

Using local interpreters in cross-language and cross-cultural research may transgress political, social and gender borders of which the researcher is unaware (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Issues related to breaches of confidentiality and compromised security when employing a local interpreter from a community of interest are potential risks to research outcomes and cannot be dismissed from this discussion. As alluded to earlier, Yiey Ponnleu was known to Peou’s family, and even though the importance of keeping the discussion of the interview confidential was communicated to this interpreter, it is unknown whether the information arising from Yiey Ponnleu’s interview were confided to family or friends (Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007).

A limitation of this research is that Mr. Than Thong was only identified in the field after the research protocols were established. Following this, ongoing consultations (face-to-face, via telephone, mobile text messaging and email) between Mr. Than Thong and me took place. Berman and Tyyskä (2011) note the importance of discussing the development of the research protocols and incorporating feedback. Rather than taking full academic ownership of this research, this is invaluable to the cultural appropriateness of the research as well as understanding the types of questions that are suited to this population of women, the settings in which to conduct the interviews, and the cultural mores that are not understood by others.

It is often not known if the interpreter has specifically summarised or modified the responses (Kapborg & Berterö, 2002) in place of verbatim translation. It was not initially apparent to me whether or not Mr. Than Thong’s translations from Khmer into English were from his own perspective, for example,
responding to questions on behalf of the women through his own social and political locations (Edwards, 1998). To address the shortcomings of using an interpreter, I employed a transcriber who is fluent in Khmer and English to transcribe five interviews from the recorded interviews. As I had already transcribed these, I was able to compare precisely what was interpreted from English-Khmer-English, and how suitable a match this was from the original translation. There were some minor anomalies, but generally speaking, Mr. Than Thong had interpreted the women’s responses with relative consistency and accuracy.

**Safeguarding a Rigorous Research Process and Outcomes**

To ensure this research process and outcomes were as rigorous as possible, I undertook the following steps (Castleden & Garvin, 2008):

- Piloted my interview schedule with Mr. Than Thong and the Welfare Coordinator of the Cambodian community centre for cultural appropriateness and relevance to this group of women;
- Prolonged immersion in the field to establish rapport, relationships and networks with the participants and key informant, whilst building my understanding of their lives;
- Employing triangulation involving the use of multiple and different methods, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Triangulation of research information collection methods has been achieved via the use of the complementary phases of participant observation and semi-structured interviews and data sources via the Khmer women participants and key informants as previously listed (Sofaer, 1999). For example, I had a discussion with a Khmer general practitioner in Melbourne for a comparison of his experiences of care for older people with information that had emerged from the women participants’ interviews (Silveira & Allbeck, 2001). This is also important to build a thick description of cultural
understanding (Geertz, 2002), however, the conversation ended up being about his own journey of healing rather than that of Khmer women.

During each of the interviews, I asked for each participant's permission for them to check the interview transcripts at a later date to confirm authenticity and accuracy. As they were unavailable to participate in this process, I have left their sections of the transcript unmodified. (See discussion under “Method 3” above.)

Wrote summaries of personal reflections of the research information collected in a field journal, which was crucial to bracketing my own feelings and etic interpretations.

**Validity and Trustworthiness in Cross-Cultural and Cross-Language Research**

The previous discussion regarding employing an independent transcriber, fluent in Khmer and English, to transcribe five interviews that had already been transcribed by me is one strategy of ensuring triangulation, rigour and trustworthiness.

In order to determine the trustworthiness of the outcomes of this study, interpreters conceptualised as partners in the research process has value (Edwards, 1998; Wallin & Ahlström, 2006) as their competence in this role and style of interpreting impact the findings. As appropriate, Mr. Than Thong and I conducted post-interview debriefings and reviews in order to confirm that the information that was collected during the interviews was understood in the context of the interview questions (Baker et al., 1991; Freed, 1988, both cited in Edwards, 1998). For the final interview interpreted by Peou, I spent some time with her before this interview reminding her of the aims and ethical considerations of this research, including the importance of privacy and confidentiality.
Mr. Than Thong is central to the Khmer community in Australia and Cambodia. Being mindful of my previous discussion on the dimensions of the relationships between genders in “intragroup” settings, I was very much led by Mr. Than Thong in terms of, for example, the appropriateness of the questions being asked, and when to stop a particular line of questioning: so we did work in partnership. This assisted building my understanding of Khmer nuances both in language—both verbal and non-verbal—Theravāda Buddhism and the Khmer culture in general.

In Chapter 10, I will address the issues of a male interpreter's gendered subjectivity as a limitation during the conduct of feminist cross-cultural research.

**Determining the Quality of the Research Information**

Buch and Staller (2007) consider the analysis of feminist ethnographic research information starts immediately as information is collected, and is an ongoing process throughout collection of information. Emergent themes were analysed via inductive content analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) through an iterative process of comparing and contrasting (Miles & Huberman, 1994) within the context of the conceptual framework employed by this research.

The following is a discussion on how I collected and analysed the research information composed of field journaling, demographic information and the semi-structured interviews. Statements were coded and summarised using thematic key words so as to obtain significance and meaning. Patterns emerging from the research information were examined to determine salience with the phenomena of interest (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Formulation of meanings from statements were achieved through discussions with Mr. Than Thong as a further step to enhance the rigour of this research (Silveira & Allbeck, 2001).
Field Journaling

I wrote a field journal to make notes of my observations of both the settings and the participants’ activities and all discussions. The date, time, location and page number of all field notes were recorded (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) taking into account the actors, settings, activities and the content and flow of conversation between those present (de Laine, 1997), as well as my own thoughts and responses. Any information relating to questions in the interview schedule were especially noted.

Analysis of field notes followed the instructions by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 263-4), in which description and analysis run together. Questions such as “what is going on in the setting?”; “am I moving too fast from description to analysis?; “am I spending too much time at the level of description”; “what is this piece, what does it mean and are there other pieces like this?”.

Hughes (cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) also suggests the following be documented in a research diary, which I undertook:

- A summary of what happened each day I conducted research in the field.
- Stories of conversations, discussions, interviews, planning sessions, and so on with the women participants, Mr. Than Thong, Peou and my Ph.D. supervisors.
- Questions and topics for further study or investigation.
- Diagrams.
- Observations and reflections upon what I witnessed.
- Reflections on re-reading the diary.
- Plans for future action and research.
Demographic Profile

As this research favours naturalistic inquiry and embraces inductive, qualitative reasoning, a matrix of demographic information was developed and used to form a frame of reference giving a living identity of the women participants historically and currently (Williamson, 2006). The questions elicited background information such as year of birth, country of birth, marital status, employment, education, language(s) spoken, the year of arrival in Australia, family status, cultural identity and religious status (Kopinak, 1999).

Semi-Structured Interviews: Transcriptions and Coding

A major factor in this research was the ongoing process of the discussions taking place in Khmer and then having them translated and transcribed into English. The English translations of all of the interviews were transcribed in English, and the collected information corresponding to each of the research questions were coded accordingly. Analysis was conducted using the conceptual framework (Chapter 7) that guided specific thematic outcomes.

Saldaña (2009, p. 15) questions what actually gets coded, and suggests “quality” research information incorporating participant activities, perceptions, specific responses to the research questions, information collected from key informants, and the researcher’s “reflective data in the form of analytic memos”. This approach was undertaken across all research information collection methods. Appropriate first cycle coding methods included attribute coding for the management of all research information; structural coding embracing an holistic overview of this information; descriptive coding, for field notes, documents, diagrams and photos; in vivo, initial, emotion and values coding (for interview transcripts) (Saldaña, 2009, p. 48). I then employed the following secondary coding methods as recommended by Saldaña (2009): pattern coding, appropriate for grouping summaries into smaller numbers of sets, themes and constructs; and focused
coding, both for categorising the coded research information as part of the initial analytic strategy.

Research Questions, Objectives and Sub-Objectives

This section elaborates upon the introductory listing of these questions in Chapter 1, and were used as a semi-structured interview method of enquiry.

The framing research question for this research is:

How are Cambodian women genocide survivors able to heal in diaspora?

In other words, how is it possible for older Khmer women living in the Khmer diaspora in Melbourne, Australia, to heal after enduring great trauma, loss and suffering that have continued at an embodied level throughout their lives?

What do the women participants reveal through the interview process that agree with or contradict the conceptual framework of this research?

These research questions strongly link in with the conceptual framework of this research:

Are the older Khmer women oppressed by their embodied memories and abandoned by the destruction of their culture? To what extent do they feel at home in a Western dominant society?

How do they live their lives in diaspora, and what does their hybrid cultural identity resemble? What do they do to forget the memories of the past? How are they Khmer and how are they Australian?
Objectives and Sub-Objectives

The objectives of this research were designed to cover four main, interrelated areas:

- The older Khmer women participants’ past, including the war;
- Their present, including: life in diaspora; what brought them to Australia; their interactions with their families; the status of their religious faith; their health status and what they do to maintain their health or heal?
- Their future: what are their expectations of their future?
- Linking back to the past: their current cultural identity and how being Khmer fits into their lives now.

I have included the four objectives and their respective research questions in Appendix 1.

The following section discusses the methodological considerations for the following:

- The contribution of the older Khmer women participants;
- The involvement of Mr. Than Thong in this research, including issues surrounding working with key informants and interpreters;
- My role in conducting sensitive research as well as being a sensitive researcher, and the application of Autohistoria-Teoría as an embodying autobiography that connects my life to the women participants (Lausch, 2003, p. iii).

The Older Khmer Women Participants

The youngest woman participant, Yiey Thida, was born in 1964, and the oldest, Yiey Serey, was born in 1924. As mentioned, pseudonyms were allocated to each of the women as, in small-knit communities such as the Khmer diaspora, 133
there is the added risk of participants being identified from published research results. This satisfies the requirements of human ethics and personal information privacy protection according to the Australian Privacy Act (1988). Fictitious names were also given to the research sites (Melrose, 2002).

Another reason to give each woman participant a pseudonym is that some Cambodian survivors changed personal information in order to facilitate their migration to Australia (Teshuva, 2010). This pattern of concealment emerged from the time they hid their identities during the Khmer Rouge period, so this is a further reason to ensure their identity is hidden.

As a means of de-identifying each of the women, I took the liberty to assign each of them with a beautiful female Khmer pseudonym, as I only saw beauty, grace and honour in each of the participants. For a full list of the pseudonyms given to each woman participant, and their meanings, please refer to “Table 1: List of Pseudonyms” which is located in Chapter 8.

Most of the interviews took place in the women’s homes or homes of their relatives; several were conducted in a local Cambodian community centre, and a number of the interviews were conducted in the Monks’ residence on the grounds of a Khmer Buddhist Wat. Four interviews were conducted in the ‘Yieys’ house’, also located on the grounds of a Wat.

In terms of providing the women with information about this research, it may have been advantageous to have the Plain Language Statement (PLS) and Informed Consent forms available in both English and Khmer; however, the majority of the women were illiterate, or had simply forgotten how to read and write. Nevertheless, a copy of the PLS was given to each of the participants, and each of the Informed Consent forms were either signed, or verbal agreement was noted.

Each of the interviews ranged from twenty minutes to one and a half hours. On a number of occasions, two participants would be present at each other’s interview, and it was not uncommon for either monks, friends or family 134
members to be present or walk in and out of the interviews. On one occasion we had to contend with one of the young monks doing his laundry during the course of an interview, so flexibility, understanding and focus are key when interviewing people from other cultures.

**The Risk of Disclosure: The Courage to Tell and the Courage to Remain Silent**

During any research project, unanticipated intimate knowledge is likely to be divulged (Liamputtong, 2006a, p. 27). In the process of in-depth discussion, an ostensible or real power imbalance between the researcher and the participant may result in disclosure due to a perceived obligation to respond to the questions. It was important to remind the participants they had the right not to answer the questions at any time. Alternatively, this may allow the participant to open up about unspoken events in their lives.

**Speaking Across the Divide**

I have already alluded to my outsider status in terms of culture, community and language, and I would like to further this discussion by using Anzaldúa et al’s (2003, p. 7) metaphor “speaking across the divide”. To invite Khmer women to participate in this study, I used the pathway of least resistance by employing someone who is part of the culture and appears to be valued by the participants as a confidante. Mr. Than Thong enabled me to enter this community of women through the backstage, a term Goffman (1959) uses as a metaphor for gaining access to closed communities. It is unknown whether backstage truths were revealed through the interview process (Goffman, 1959).
Primum non nocere95
Trust and Mistrust as key considerations

The traditional Cambodian sense of trust is still in flux, and being linked to the trauma of their past, a protective suspiciousness has been added to the Cambodian personality (Bit, 1991d). The multiple impacts of war trauma and abuse on older Khmer refugee women has further eroded their trust of others (Rozée & Van Boemel, 1990), resulting in the trauma-based Khmer cultural syndrome Baksbat (broken courage) (Chhim, 2013, p. 165). The symptoms are a lack of trust in others, submissiveness, feeling fearful, and being mute and deaf, which in Khmer is ‘dam-doeum-kor’.

As explored in Chapter 3, it is understandable that survivors of trauma and torture are threatened or unwilling to speak about the past (Belardi, 2014; Teshuva, 2010), or do not trust researchers due to fear of legal repercussions, exposure or reminders of being interrogated during the war (Laub, 2005b; Minow, 1998). Muecke (1995) states that Khmer trust and mistrust are grounded in Theravāda Buddhist orthodoxy and folk belief. As such, it was essential to reduce anxiety-based triggers for traumatic memories as much as possible during the conduct of this research. Therefore, consideration of trust of the participants is pivotal for ethical and moral outcomes, and for these reasons alone, the methodology must reflect this (Bit, 1991c; Gross, 2004; Miller, 2004; Muecke, 1995; Procter, 2006).

95 First, do no harm (Latin).
Mistrust in Action: Outcomes of this Research

When Peou attempted to invite several additional older Khmer women to participate in this study, the majority of women refused for one or more of the following reasons:

a) Fear of being reported to the Australian Government. Some groups may be vulnerable due to their so-called ‘legal status’, and may well be undocumented immigrants (Birman, 2005; Muecke, 1995). If illegal, they are denied access to health and social services.

b) Refugees may feel vulnerable in taking part in any research due to their past experiences of dealing with authorities (Birman, 2005). This is likely for older Khmer women living in Australia, not only during the war but also during their life in the Thai-Cambodian border camps.

c) Not wishing to tell their life story to a stranger. Lee and Renzetti (1993) state that research intruding into private lives or deeply personal experiences of the research participants is problematic.

d) Being too busy, or are uninterested in being interviewed.

Role of key informant in securing community trust

In order to avoid activating traumatic memories, Tewksbury and Gagné (2001, p. 78) demonstrate the importance of having:

a visible and respected individual who holds a position of authority, high respect, or leadership to introduce the researcher to the group, to act as a bridge to link into a new social world, as a guide who points out ... how culturally different actions are locally meaningful, or as a patron who helps to secure the trust of community members.

Birch (2013) emphasises the importance of developing trust when connecting with Somali women living in the diasporic borderlands in Melbourne (Valadez & Elsbree, 2005, p. 174). Fadumo, a young Somali woman, became her key
informant, and was pivotal to Birch’s success in building trust and developing reciprocity with the Somali women research participants in her study.

Even though as previously mentioned there was risk of potential power imbalances using a male key informant and interpreter in what is critical feminist border ethnography, it became clear that the proper way to approach these women from this community was through Mr. Than Thong. Due to his involvement, at least some if not all of their ‘true faces’ were revealed during the course of the research. The importance of his role in this research is also underscored by his lived experience of being Khmer, and having survived the Khmer Rouge period, followed by migrating to Australia in the early 1980s.

**Mr. Than Thong: Khmer Buddhist Psychologist: “Call me Ten”**

I met Mr. Than Thong during my first visit to the Cambodian community centre. Mr. Than Thong held up both his hands with fingers splayed exclaiming “Call me Ten!” (the pronunciation of ‘Than’). He then gave me his business card. Even though he does not have formal qualifications in psychology, upon his business card was written “Mr. Than Thong, Counselor and Psychology”.

Mr. Than Thong was born in Cambodia in the late 1950s, and was homeless from the age of three when his parents had passed away from an unknown illness. He told me he was just old enough to learn that the sun rose in the sky when this happened; he then had no parent to hug and comfort him. The eloquence of Mr. Than Thong meets the awareness of existence at this age by Hawkins (2007, p. 19):

> Prior to age three, there was oblivion. Then out of the void of nothingness, there arose a sudden and shocking awareness of personal existence, as though a strong light had been turned on.

From the age of three, Mr. Than Thong’s life comprised mainly of thinking from where his next meal would come. He survived the Khmer Rouge genocide, and when he eventually crossed the border into the Thai-Cambodian border 138
camps, in 1982, the Red Cross arranged for Mr. Than Thong to fly to Melbourne. He told me as the plane was about to touch down in Melbourne, he looked through the window and he cried. It was freedom. He has told his children about his life in Cambodia, so they know and understand.

Trimble et al. (2010) note researchers from different ethnocultural groups either belong to the group, or incorporate people in the research as key informants. Like Murillo Jr. (1999, p. 8), it ultimately was not possible for me, the white academic from an Italian background, “to locate myself in the discursive “we” in the exact same fashion” as it could have been had I been deeply entrenched in this culture, its language, and had over time gained the trust of these women without the assistance of an interpreter or a key informant.

Throughout this thesis, I will be including some of the conversations that Mr. Than Thong and I had in the context of the older Khmer women’s experiences. This is not as a means of replacing what the women stated in the interviews, but more to explain the cultural and social mores of the Khmer that contributes to the research in general terms.

**Issues of Working with Key Informants and Interpreters in Cross-Language Research**

I am extremely grateful Mr. Than Thong was involved in this research. He has taught me in-depth understandings of the experience of being Khmer, Buddhist, the lived experiences of surviving the Khmer Rouge genocide, the chaos and passage to Australia, and life in the Khmer diaspora. He was generally able to fill in the gaps, generally speaking, of the state of mental health of the group of participants.

He guided me throughout the research process using ethically and culturally sensitive approaches regarding interviewing the older Khmer women participants, as well as educating me in aspects of the Khmer culture and in particular Theravāda Buddhist practice. Some examples were removing shoes
prior to entering a Khmer home and the practice of the Sampeah,\textsuperscript{96} and modest ways of dressing, especially when entering the Wat and the homes of the older Khmer women participants. This led to the creation of a safe and respectful space rather than extenuating the pain and trauma most of the women endure.

It is important to be mindful of recognising and negotiating potential power imbalances in research. For example, Mr. Than Thong, a male key informant and interpreter, holds a gendered subjectivity that may impact on how he understands trauma from the specific perspective of the women participants. Lentin (2006, p. 466) cites Horowitz’ (1998) work on memories of women’s Holocaust experiences as often being:

refracted through men’s testimonies that depict women as peripheral, helpless, fragile, morally defective or erotic in their victimisation … The categories ‘women’, or ‘women survivors’ are thus homogenised, even though, as Ruth Linden reminds us, the term ‘Holocaust survivor’ is problematic in that no one survived the Holocaust per se, but rather ghettos, deportations, concentration camps, hiding places, or resistance acts.

The homogenisation of women’s experiences of a genocide and their related memories is clearly problematic as a ‘one size fits all’ approach decontextualises individual traumatic experiences. In an attempt to capture the silent voices of women, Laor (1993, cited in Lentin, 2006, p. 466) reminds us:

\begin{quote}
What I want to remember, I have to remember without words, otherwise, it will be someone else’s memory.
\end{quote}

When I commenced the participant observation phase of this research Mr. Than Thong told me that it is common for some of the Khmer women to be

\textsuperscript{96} A form of greeting. The Khmer traditionally greet each other with palms together, in a manner of prayer.
secretive about their mental anguish and “lie” to him. On this basis, it was not possible for me to delve into the lives of these women with probing questions. Mr. Than Thong tells me they do everything to forget (the war and their loss).

Therefore, it is plausible that the women may not wish to confide fully to any Khmer man (or non-Khmer women), who is considered more privileged culturally and karmically than the women, thus using their silence as resistance and agency against telling their full story. The position of the women at the intersection of remaining silent or exposing all of who they are reminds me of Pallotta-Chiarolli’s (2004; 2010, cited in Pallotta-Chiarolli & Pease, 2014, p. 2) term “interweaving’ to describe how these multiple axes of difference require multiple and interwoven strategies of resistance, resilience and agency” between ‘intragroup identities’.

The Interpreter as a Nepantlero and Research Partner

The heading of this section is borrowed from Anzaldúa’s term “Las Nepantleras”, who she defines as:

The supreme border crossers (who) act as intermediaries between cultures and their various versions of reality and like the ancient chamanas97, move between the worlds. They serve as agents of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater conocimiento, serve as reminders of each other’s search for wholeness of being98.

Nepantlera/os live within and among multiple worlds and, often through painful negotiations, develop what Anzaldúa describes as a:

“perspective from the cracks”; they use these transformed perspectives to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics,

97 Shamans.
98 Anzaldúa et al. (2003, p. 19).
enabling them to reconceive or in other ways transform
the various worlds in which they exist.\textsuperscript{99}

In the context of border epistemology, I consider Mr. Than Thong a nepantlero, which is a unique, visionary cultural worker, or as discussed by Anzaldúa, a unique type of mediator who “facilitate[s] passages between worlds”. Unlike Anzaldúa, however, he continues to align himself exclusively with a single belief system that is primarily Buddhist and Khmer.

Mr. Than Thong assisted my journey as a researcher throughout the research process. He believed that it was right for him to help me to finish my Ph.D. He was also open to me asking him questions related to my thesis until it was submitted, all of which I am grateful.

\textsuperscript{99} González-López 2011, p. 244).
CHAPTER 6
Developing a Hybrid Consciousness: Broader Ethical and Moral Methodological Considerations of the Research

The Position of the Researcher

In order to study the lives of older Khmer women participants, I was required to also interrogate and understand my own journey and myself in the context of the lives of the women participants, and certainly in the context of what they had endured. In doing so, I was able to view the similarities and differences of our life experiences to form an intersection of understanding.

Research Relationships: Connections through Hyphen-Spaces of Opportunity

The following are four hyphen-spaces of research relationships and the quandaries of positionality, identity and the nature of the research relationship. These relationships help researchers become more informed and ethical in practice, whilst being interested in engaging in different methodologies (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). The following are the four hyphen-spaces of research relationships that are important framing reflections of this doctoral research:

• Insiderness-Outsiderness: How the researcher is perceived by the participants; i.e., is the researcher ‘one of us’ or ‘one of them’? The involvement of Mr. Than Thong as key informant and interpreter was
pivotal in allowing me, a white outsider researcher, entry into the world of the Khmer women participants.

- Sameness-Difference: A way for the researcher to engage is to establish rapport by communicating empathy for the group based on similar values, philosophies or world-views (Tewksbury and Gagné, 2001). This relates to the importance of establishing rapport and being empathetic when conducting sensitive research.

- Engagement-Distance: Is the researcher engaged with the research participants’ activities, or is the researcher largely observant? I was involved in the women participants’ activities when I spent time with them at the Cambodian community centre, as well as attending the Khmer New Year festival, an important occasion for the Khmer. Complete immersion in the Khmer culture was compromised by a number of factors, including my full-time employment and other commitments. I was also the outsider attempting to understand the older Khmer women’s inner world by using the context, the depth and the discourse of Anzaldúa’s world. Colic-Peisker (2004, p. 86) states “the insider status . . . has to be granted by the community”.

- Political Activism-Active Neutrality: Is the researcher involved in social/organisational change or political action? This will be important either directly (with the Khmer community) or indirectly (in feminist social justice work) in my post-doctoral phase. I observed the political activism of Mr. Than Thong in relation to his involvement with the Cambodian government with regard to helping the poor in Cambodia.

Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) present Fine’s (1994) theory that illustrates as researchers, we can tend to work in the hyphen between self-other. This has consequences for the lives of the women participants, depending upon how their lives are depicted.
Using the language of conocimientos (Anzaldúa, 1991, cited in Hernández-Ávila, 2000, p. 178), this research became a largely reflexive endeavour for me. This involved “turning inwards towards” myself (Lugones, 2005, p. 86) in order to question my own view of the social world in connection with the Khmer women participants.

My own life as an Italian-Australian woman is spent straddling across a number of cultures and sociocultural groups. In Chapter 8, Yiey Kaliyanei and Yiey Sorpheny describe themselves as “half-half” with regard to negotiating the Khmer and Australian worlds in diaspora. I, too, feel “half-half”. A resistance emerged within me to remain at a distance from being more deeply involved in the local Khmer culture. It may be because as a second-generation Italian-Australian, I have not found my ‘home’ as yet, not completely.

In their focus on migrants, generations and the negotiation of belonging post-migration, Skrbiš, Baldassar and Poynting (2007) introduce the concept of “doing belonging” (p. 262). This relates to how individuals negotiate their place in a particular culture. These authors state that this process of belonging shifts across time, and it is their view that “the discussion of belonging and migrant generations can hardly be separated” (p. 262). In her earlier work, Baldassar (2011, p. 187) states “a collective national sense of belonging is intrinsically related to family culture”.

In her earlier exploration of family culture, ethnic identity and cultural transmission in second generation youth in Perth, Baldassar (1999) found that some of their parents’ traditional values were embraced by this youth. But not all traditions were embraced, and it was dependent upon the sociocultural status of the subjects concerned, such as level of education. For instance, tertiary educated youth were less likely to participate in Italian diasporic community events and its culture than less educated second-generation Italian youth. Like Baldassar (1999, p. 16), I grew up with parental messages
based on “quegli Australiani sono orribile”\textsuperscript{100} and are to be avoided. Later in life more than ever, I am searching for my ethnic identity: to re-connect and belong to my ethnic roots. This links to the loss of my mother, the grief associated with the rupture of belonging and intimacy to my mother and my culture, and the breakdown of the family since her death. I was exceptionally close to my mother, and through her, I was able to maintain links to the Italian culture, be it local or transnational. Through her, our family had moral, cultural and emotional points of reference, and following her death, some breakdown of family tradition has resulted in shifts in celebrations of our Italian-ness with some disappointment related to this.

Given this instability I have with my own cultural identity, it was important for me to protect myself against taking on the psychological burden of the women participants’ stories (Liamputtong, 2006b; McCosker, Barnard & Gerber, 2001), so I used Anzaldúa’s epistemology as a border between myself and the women, their culture and their pain. It is not my role to step into their open wound as my experiences preclude me from theirs; so to remain on the edges of their wound was appropriate. So the question remains: how to connect? One solution was information that emerged from each of the interviews was then framed by the conceptual framework, located in Chapter 7. The other was to be mindfully and genuinely respectful of the women with Mr. Than Thong’s guidance.

The above discussion emphasises that the hyphen-spaces are the multiple spaces of possibility and opportunity. They are fluid and agentic in that both the participant and researcher shape each other’s identities, positionalities, boundaries and connections throughout the research process.

\textsuperscript{100} Italian phrase for ‘those Australians are horrible’. 

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The Ethics of Questioning

I agree with Pease (2010, p. 32) when he writes:

Academics rarely focus their critical gaze upon themselves. They rarely seem reflexive about their own privileged position. Yet they are enmeshed in the social relations of dominance and subordination that they criticise.\(^\text{101}\)

Consideration of the impact of questioning sensitive populations is imperative, and the ultimate question is "should we be 'mining the minds' to further disempower people for our own research purposes?" (Liamputtong 2006a, p. 25). This is pertinent as Khmer research participants are known to demonstrate an obligation of deference and obedience to authority figures, such as obeying perceived expectations of the researcher (Schwartz, 2006, p. 160).

During the research process, a dilemma emerged that interviewing Khmer genocide survivors borders on the ethical/unethical divide. In hindsight, I should have realised that these women who are largely silent about their suffering had been interrogated throughout the Khmer Rouge period and beyond in the Thai-Cambodian border camps. So with utmost respect for these women, I have come to conclude that there must be a deeper connection that I can at least theoretically frame. Recommendations regarding alternative methods for interviewing sensitive populations will be covered in Chapter 10.

Responsible Advocacy and Gaining Consent

Vulnerable individuals may 'experience real or potential harm and require special safeguards to ensure that their welfare and rights are protected.'\(^\text{102}\)

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\(^\text{101}\) Pease (2010, p. 32).
\(^\text{102}\) Liamputtong (2006c, p. 2).
'Responsible advocacy' means protecting and safeguarding vulnerable individuals from exploitation and harm, maximising capacity for self-determination and protecting their welfare (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008). Addressing the intricacies of conducting sensitive research, language and cultural barriers affecting people's understanding of what research participation entails may exist (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). The following quote is a reminder of what it is like to feel “abused and violated” by the process of the research and the publication of the research findings:

I had this feeling of being violated and betrayed, then I went into shock, and then I went into denial. I thought, ‘oh well they don’t know who I am. I was just a research subject.’ After I participated in the study, I had no idea or didn’t even realize what all it was going to entail in the future. And then I come to find out that all the results have been ‘shared’ through journal articles and publications. The realization for me was ‘Oh my god, I’ve been abused and violated because I had no idea that they would talk about us like that. Now we’ve been labeled like we’re just a bunch of people walking around with diseases on reservations.

— Anonymous Native American research participant103

This reflects the issue where English is neither spoken nor written impacting upon gaining consent from the research participant with their full understanding (Liamputtong, 2006a). When working with an interpreter, it is important that when the ‘informed consent’ information is translated, it is followed with a narrative that explains the information at a level understood by the participant. Some of the women participants were able to sign their

103 Casillas (2006, cited in Trimble et al., 2010, p. 73).
names in consent to participating in the research, some signed with an 'X', and some gave verbal consent.

The following is an excerpt from my field notes that relate to the importance of doing justice by the women participants. For me, the analogy of "eyes wide shut" refers to going into each interview thinking I knew about this culture and the women, yet realising how little I actually knew and how reliant I was on Mr. Than Thong:

Often, I went into interviews ending up with eyes wide shut. I depended strongly on Mr. Than Thong’s presence to help protect the women in the interviews, as I knew he would act in a responsible, ethical, integrous and deeply respectful manner for all present. He taught me cultural aspects along the way, such as taking my shoes off before entering a Khmer house and greeting the Khmer women with Sampeah, a gesture of respect with hands joined. He was my ongoing point of reference (Field notes).

When conducting sensitive qualitative research, the lives of others can be viewed from a particular standpoint. Feminist standpoint theory proposes that marginalised women occupy a unique position, which enables them to view the culture within which they are marginalised. It elevates the women participants’ standpoint and knowledge in resistance to otherwise patriarchal views. It also allows us to critique dominant conventions and defend feminist epistemologies (Lovell, Wolkowitz & Andermahr, 1997). It is, therefore, considered a standpoint of resistance. Fraser (2007) and McQueen (2015) allude to feminist theory in general as encompassing a politics of recognition via consciousness-raising: making known the multiple oppressions women face; breaking the universalist paradigm of gender and oppression by developing a standpoint; and giving an opportunity to rethink gender. In these ways, there is an ability to develop a solidarity when oppressive social constructs are reassembled.

My standpoint is to critique existing power relations and the inequalities they can produce (Wood, 2005). In doing so, standpoints, per se, are “earned
through political struggle that creates oppositional stances based on recognition of and resistance to dominant worldviews” (Wood 2005, p. 62). My standpoint recognises the subjective “multiplicity of positions” within the feminist movement and within culture, as reflected in the following:

We are the colored in a white feminist movement. We are the feminists among the people of our culture. We are often the lesbians among the straight. We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words. 104

This position has allowed my voice to emerge to tell my story in the context of the Khmer culture, which is not my own.

**Challenging Academia: The Morality of Opportunity**

Writing can become a contradiction to the original intention of researching marginalised groups, as the writing may well exacerbate the othering of the group being studied. What had originally set out to be emancipatory becomes exploitative. In giving the researcher the participants’ stories, the potential power the researcher can wield in the research process is evident, and the participants ultimately depend upon the researcher’s interpretations, ideologies and writing style (Armstead, 1995). However, what the critical feminist border ethnographer seeks is the creation of new paradigms of reality based on ethical and moral grounds, rather than purely seeking research outcomes as self-interested opportunities:

The major paradigms for reality—the scientific paradigms, the democratic paradigms—were constructed by those in power. We need a new paradigm that comes partially from the outside and partially from inside the dominant paradigm. 105

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Ultimately, it is envisaged this research is instrumental in building such new paradigms by penetrating borders to protect and reflect the voices of the participants, as well as challenging “institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities” (Madison, 2012, p. 6).

With this in mind, two major challenges emerged where I was required to defend my research on two occasions to an academic panel. During this process, my main aim was to defend the women participants, their community, and me, against recommended academic practices that were incongruent with the ideology of this research.

The following quote reflects the “inner works and public acts” that were required for me to successfully defend my research:

In the final reckoning it comes down to a matter of faith, trusting that your inner authority will carry across the critical threshold. You must make the leap alone and of your own will. Having only partial knowledge of the consequences of crossing, you offer la Llorona, who regulates the passage, a token. You pray, repeat affirmations, take a deep breath, and step through the gate. Immediately, a knowing cracks the facade of your former self and its entrenched beliefs: you are not alone; those of the invisible realm walk with you; there are ghosts on every bridge.106

I successfully defended the research, and as cracks appeared in the former dominant academic discourse about how to research older Khmer women living in diaspora, an opportunity was presented to create a new deconstructed paradigm for reality, also known as “creating a new mythos” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 102).

Apart from the challenges of researching vulnerable populations addressed in this thesis, as mentioned above, I was placed in a position to defend the older Khmer women participants. Firstly, I decided to resist a recommendation to use probing questions when interviewing the women participants, and secondly, I resisted the suggestion to use what I considered to be inappropriate recruitment strategies.

**Resisting the Use of Probing Questions**

The dilemma in this research was to locate a balance between researching the women participants for information about their experiences during genocide, and being very mindful not to cause further harm (Liamputtong, 2006a, p. 47). "Ethically speaking, how far should researchers probe their participants?" (Liamputtong, 2006a, p. 40). During the interviews, whenever the topic of Pol Pot or the 'war' arose, it was pre-empted by asking the women's permission to discuss these types of sensitive matters.

It was strongly recommended that I employ probing questioning during the interview process in order to add richness and depth to the information I had already gathered from the field. Upon my refusal to do so, my Ph.D. was labelled 'at risk', and I was required to face a specially convened Ph.D. panel to defend why I considered the use of probing questioning to be an inappropriate method to use in this type of sensitive research.

Barnard (2005, p. 14) warns researchers must "balance the interests of the research with those of the participants". Barnard (2005) contends that if the participant is willing to disclose events that were painful, it is likely that the researcher will continue to probe and ask for more details. She argues that there is a limit to researching sensitive issues. In her research, there were a few occasions when both Barnard and her colleague deliberately avoided asking for more in-depth details as it was unethical to probe the research participant further.
A crucial contribution for the case against using probing questions is:

time-honored forms of narrating (the events that took place during the Holocaust and genocide) no longer suffice to capture the horror, pain, loss, and destruction suffered by those afflicted.\textsuperscript{107}

Added to this, with older participants, Wenger (2002, p. 265) states "it is never appropriate for the interviewer to push too hard."

\textit{Resisting Recommended Recruitment Strategies}

Upon receiving advice from a colleague suggesting alternative strategies for recruiting older Khmer women living in Melbourne, I had immediate concern that the strategies would use inappropriate cultural pathways for accessing participants. One example was to hire Peou to assist me to approach Cambodian women in order to recruit them for my research while they do their shopping, or using this same approach whilst eating in a Cambodian restaurant. I sought Mr. Than Thong's advice on this matter, and he agreed with the reasons behind my decision not to progress with this type of recruitment.

In most cultures, and unequivocally in the Khmer, gkuet cj'roun, 'to think too much', is a key culture bound syndrome and strategy for coping. It relates to avoiding sad thoughts that were mostly associated with memories of the Khmer Rouge regime (Frye & D'Avanzo, 1994a, p. 71) which creates poor mental health outcomes. The management of gkuet cj'roun is central to the cultural theme of equilibrium used as the basis for health-seeking behaviour by the Khmer (Frye & D’Avanzo, 1994a, p. 65). For this reason, I consider the

\textsuperscript{107}Laub (2005a, p. 253).
use of probing questions in interviews, or any Khmer woman being approached by strangers to participate in the research, as inappropriate.

Therefore, I now acknowledge the existence of a dynamic multiplicity of standpoints at any one time: the standpoint of the women living in the Khmer diaspora post-genocide, and my standpoint when interacting with the women participants against a backdrop of academic privilege, boundaries and expectations. Ultimately, Like Téllez (2005, p. 46), this is an opportunity to build bridges between scholarly activism and “the creation of bridges between the production of knowledge in the academic world with communities struggling for social justice”.

The Ph.D. panel deemed my case against the use of the abovementioned probing questions and recruitment strategies to be appropriate, but I remain straddled across the academic divide. Through this research I realise my alliance with and faith in traditional academic research methods have been fragmented.

**Contingencies for the Unexpected**

The importance of making contingency arrangements in the event of unanticipated issues and outcomes arising when conducting sensitive research cannot be underestimated. This includes an awareness of the emotional impact of transcribing sensitive personal narratives of participants (Kiyimba & O’Reilly, 2015; Lalor et al., 2006). Relating to ethical principles that essentially call upon the researcher to “first, do no harm”, Liamputtong (2006a) advises how to deal with distressing situations and how to end difficult interactions or occurrences. An example of this in relation to Yiery Mealea’s interview is given in Chapter 8.

These anxiety-based triggers for traumatic memories and distress (Belardi, 2014), is another reason why working closely with Mr. Than Thong during the process of the research was crucially important. This thesis is as much about
my responsibility as a researcher to locate information from those who have endured great suffering in their lives, in moral and ethical ways, as it is about their road to healing.

**Sensitive Researchers and Responsible Research**

There are dangers when interviewing people who are sick, injured or dying. Not only can researchers have difficulty obtaining information from the field, there may also be instability in the reality of the participant. However, in this type of sensitive research, the researcher is also at risk of sharing the suffering of the participant. Relating to the discussion earlier in this chapter regarding connections through hyphen-spaces of opportunity, Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) recognise that researchers conducting sensitive research have multilayered challenges. Those that I recognise in my own experience during this research were: listening to untold stories, feelings of guilt and vulnerability, and insufficient debriefing during and post-research.

Morse (2000, p. 540) has labelled this phenomenon "compathy", also defined as "the contagion of physical distress" (Morse and Mitcham, 1997, p. 649). Is the participant delusional? Do some participants have a memory lapse? There were a number of instances amongst the older Khmer women participants where memory loss is already an issue, therefore, what is the validity of the information that has been collected? This adds to the debate regarding who should be collecting information from ageing women who have endured a genocide, and at what cost is collecting information from people who experience chronic suffering?

It is also common for researchers to be unprepared to deal with sensitive research experiences (Lalor et al., 2006). Kiyimba and O'Reilly (2015) state that what is not often accounted for in the design phase of the research is listening to the participants’ often sensitive or distressing narratives that can create secondary traumatic stress, not only during the process of collecting information, but also during the transcription process.
The risk of discussing or divulging painful experiences during the research is very real, and it is vital to monitor the emotions of the participants, and to aim for them not being left with painful experiences. This is also true for negative impacts upon the interpreter, key informant, and transcriber. This requires heightened levels of ethical and moral responsibilities to limit the risk of increasing an already vulnerable state. Recalling Laub's (2005a & 2005b) psychoanalytic work with survivors of the Holocaust, the state of preparedness and experience of the researcher to investigate people who have endured extreme life experiences must also be questioned. I question my own position as a researcher dealing with people with deep suffering, as my actions may exacerbate the research participants' vulnerability.

In light of Laub’s Holocaust survivor research, there are various conflicting schools of thought regarding researching sensitive populations. For instance, Becker-Blease and Freyd (2006) state that by overemphasising the vulnerability of survivors of child abuse than the costs of not asking about their experiences of abuse harm them in other ways, as the authors believe this may reinforce social avoidance of abuse. I agree with the authors in the context of the cost versus benefits of reporting of child abuse, but even then, I believe that unless there is a positive, therapeutic benefit for the research participant (Laub, 2005a, 2005b; Rossetto, 2014), in addition to appropriately qualified researchers conducting the research, that the risk of causing harm is heightened.
Performative Writing: Linking into Autohistoria-Teoría\textsuperscript{108}

Spry (2006, p. 339) offers “performative-i” writing as a means of shifting from the researcher-observer to the embodied participant sharing her multiple positions through writing. Performative writing in this manner is to evoke and embody “Other-wise worlds”, stemming from an intersection between bodies shifting in space across time (Madison 2011, p. 227). “We are writing from memories (and observations) of our embodied space and impressions in the field...the act of writing becomes the enactment of an embodied voice” (Madison 2011, p. 228). It is a locating, honouring and listening to the ‘voice within’ (Madison 2011, p. 228), in order to be able to recognise, comprehend and listen to the inner voice of the ‘other’. This ‘voice within’ has not traditionally been acknowledged by those who adhere to the Western medical model as a valid dimension of experience (González, 1994).

It became apparent that Autohistoria-Teoría, referred to as “an embodying autobiography” by Lausch (2003, p. 1) was an appropriate method to use as a sensitive researcher conducting sensitive research. Introducing the writing conventions of Anzaldúa and Moraga, Lausch (2003, p. 1) explains that they:

\begin{quote}
write within and without the conventions of traditional U.S. autobiography and mainstream feminist theorizing, transforming these discourses through purposeful amalgam of personal narrative and poetry with historical and political prose.
\end{quote}

In this thesis, I chose to speak an embodied, personal language whilst relating the stories of the women. The following strongly highlights several of the themes of this research, being an embodiment of forming one’s spiritual

\textsuperscript{108} (Blanchard, 2005; Lara, 2005b; Méndez, 2005; Neile, 2005.) Autohistoria-Teoría is a theory developed by Anzaldúa to describe a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life-story and self-reflection on this storytelling process (González-López, 2011, p. 241).
identity, through awakening from silenced, internalised oppression and prejudice, and being motivated to shift away from traditional academic standpoints:

I began to explore, through my ethnographic research, questions of spiritual identity (González, 1997), of silenced voices (González, 1995), and the role of hegemony and internally motivated oppression in the perpetuation of prejudice (González, 1998). Precisely because I was so unmotivated by the traditional rationales for our scholarship.109

Like De La Garza110 (2004, p. 606) above, the motivation for conducting this research culminated in guiding me along my life’s larger, spiritual journey. The reason for my reference to the Buddha and God is to illustrate my spiritual journey as part of my Autohistoria-Teoría. It is also due to most of the women participants following the Buddha, and some following God. This corresponds to the discussion earlier in this chapter on the four hyphen-spaces of research relationships, of which the following three are relevant: insiderness-outsiderness, sameness-difference and engagement-distance.

De La Garza (2004, p. 607) claims the following:

It was through the encounters with the academic interruptions of reflection upon ontology, epistemology, and methodology that the socially constructed nature of my assumedly rock-solid identity became increasingly apparent. Spirit began to replace religion in my life... The methods for engaging in this autoethnographic process became the initial emphasis of my central work (González, 2000), continuing the deep relationship with spirit that began to unfold in my earlier work.

In order to understand the context of the women participants’ lives, it was appropriate for me to evaluate my own positionality within the crossroads of

110 De La Garza was formerly known as González.
multiple encounters with the women participants. This is given the challenges of limited language, cultural and experiential congruence between myself and the majority of the participants. Anzaldúa's Autohistoria-Teoría (Keating, 2005b) is employed to personalise yet theorise my life as an Italian-Australian woman, with my own story occasionally interwoven with the stories of the Khmer women.

A Subaltern Production of Knowledge

With particular reference to the Allegory which is located after Chapter 10, this thesis has evolved to utilise Autohistoria-Teoría to present subaltern perspectives that split scholarly paradigms into alternative discourses which are closer to the language of la mestiza (Ohmer, 2010, p. 143). Anzaldúa's (1999; 2007a) works have given me the inspiration to combine scholarly discourse with other worlds, truth with fiction, allegory and theory, languages and ideas. This genre of writing allows multiplicitous ways of presenting scholarly information and narrative as a unique production of knowledge, thus reflecting new mestiza/nepantla consciousness (Ohmer, 2010 p. 143)

Summary of Chapters 5 and 6

Chapter 5 introduced and elaborated upon the appropriateness of using critical feminist border ethnography when researching older Khmer women living in diaspora in Australia. It was pertinent to employ the ethical, moral and reflexive critical ethnography framework of Madison (2011; 2012) and the feminist border epistemology of Anzaldúa.

After a somewhat formal descriptive analysis of the methodology and methods of this research, the research questions, objectives and sub-objectives were outlined. I then discussed methodological considerations for the Khmer women participants, and introduced Mr. Than Thong, key informant,
interpreter and nepantlero. My role as a sensitive researcher conducting sensitive research, and my use of Autohistoria-Teoría were also explored.

Trust is an ongoing theme throughout this thesis, and developing trust with the women participants was crucial in developing relationships and approaching the women to participate in this research project. This is because trust and mistrust are grounded in Khmer cultural beliefs, and are particularly pertinent given their experiences of genocide.

This chapter critiques the dominant academic worldview and in its place recognises that research can be a field whereby academic privilege can potentially be wielded at the expense of those being interviewed. I addressed being placed in a position of “straddling the academic divide” using reflexivity to acknowledge that multiple standpoints exist in the field.

A number of central ethical and moral considerations were outlined in Chapter 6, which influenced the outcomes of this research. This chapter made explicit the challenges and complexity of conducting sensitive research with populations who have endured genocidal trauma. This is also an opportunity for the sensitive researcher to advocate against practices that may inadvertently harm sensitive research participants.
CHAPTER 7
A Conceptual Framework for the Passage to Healing

Introduction

The conceptual framework (Figure 4) is this chapter’s focus. It has been constructed to frame the direction and discussion of this research and its outcomes. The phases of the framework approximate the journey to healing of Khmer women genocide survivors living in diaspora.

Before I proceed with the approach I undertook to develop the framework, it is appropriate to explain how this framework evolved across my doctoral candidature. Figure 3 is an illustration of the original framework constructed during the first half of my candidature. The original framework was based on the impact of shifting cultural identity upon the well-being of the women participants. The intention was to explore the migratory rites of passage of shifting from the past to their current life in diaspora, and as transnational migrants. I added transnationalism as a factor contributing to shifts in cultural identity and well-being.

Both frameworks explore the lives of the Khmer women participants, before and during the Khmer Rouge genocide, where they travelled to rural localities to undertake forced labour under Pol Pot, followed by external migration where asylum was initially sought by many of the survivors of the genocide in the Thai-Cambodian border camps (Davenport et al., 2003). This followed with eventual migration to Australia.

The original framework was adapted from Van Gennep's (1909) theory of the liminal, transitional phases of 'rites de passage', in which he terms people going through these phases as 'ritual subjects'.
The following describes the four phases of the framework in Figure 3:

**Phase A: Separation**

This phase symbolised the exposure to significant adversity causing detachment of an individual or group from an earlier fixed point in a sociocultural structure. Describing the transformation of the Khmer identity, Lewis (2000, p. 1) refers to this phase as circumstances leading to the “disassembly” of Khmerness.
Phase B: Margin/Liminal phase

The ‘threshold people’ who enter this phase exist in an ambiguous realm where few if any past attributes or oncoming states are known. This marks a state of oblivion, nevertheless of great transition. For older immigrants, this liminal phase works in space across borders, time and now ageing and sociocultural change. This is the marker of the “reconstruction” of Khmerness to which Lewis (2000, p. 1) refers.

Phase C: The Aggregation Phase

This holds potential for reaggregation, nonetheless also incorporation into the hybrid state of diaspora. During this phase, van Gennep (1909) declares the passage is consummated. The ritual subject is in a relatively stable state once more but has rights and obligations to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and standards relating to their place in their culture and the new dominant culture.

Phase D: Transnationalism

The Khmer living in diaspora are transmigrants, and for this reason I added an additional phase beyond that of van Gennep (1909). With the advent of globalisation, Khmer migrants are now very much transnational migrants who are able to live across multiple worlds, where “group identities are no longer spatially or territorially bounded” (Demmers, 2002, p. 89; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; McHugh, 2000). Bailey (2001, p. 425) views the importance of the connection of transnationalism to migration studies, as a shift from the “fixity for the concepts of nation-state and territory” to incorporate transnationalism to “theorise the roles of migration, community, territoriality, national borders and space”.

It was and still is my contention that the phases within the passage of migration are indeed circular, flowing, changing and enduring, and as with
cultures and societies they constantly evolve. This is supported by theorists such as Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) and McHugh (2000, p. 71) who state that studies on migration as a one-way journey are inadequate, as individuals and groups now “forge connections and social fields across expanses of space and time”, with a concurrent dearth of attention upon the understanding of migration as “cultural events”.

When I became familiar with Anzaldúa’s body of work, I experienced a ‘lifting of the veil’ to reveal a brand new way of perceiving the world. I quickly realised her border epistemology would add the spiritual depth and a different dimension I knew this framework required. Therefore, the current framework (Figure 4) displays a strong connection to Anzaldúa’s path to conocimiento. This path to healing corresponds with the path of la mestiza, involving “work that the soul performs”. This offers opportunities to “enlarge the depth and breadth of consciousness causing internal shifts and external changes”, shifting from ignorance (desconocimiento) to awareness (conocimiento) (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 544-5).

The ‘Passage to Healing’ as illustrated in Figure 4 is not a linear process with specific steps (Anzaldúa, cited in Ohmer, 2010, p. 143). Mestiza consciousness, which in particular aligns with (D) Transformation of the Spirit, in Figure 4, is painful, involves constant transformation and requires these phases to be in constant motion. Hence, the rites of passage or transition points from the rupture of genocide to healing largely fluctuate, are situational and fluid, as lived circumstances change and shift across time and space. They may not occur in this order depicted in Figure 4, yet are arranged in this order for illustrative purposes. This framework also represents life events as being cyclical, which is indicative of Anzaldúa’s assumption of the feminine as being cyclical in time. This was discussed in Chapter 4.

Again, all phases are interconnected (see red arrow in Figure 4), overlapping, multidirectional and cyclical. The cycle does not end at Phase (D), rather it develops into a next cycle. The path to healing can be viewed as a path of 164
progression towards the discovery of the self. According to this viewpoint, it is realised that the true self is linked to the world of the spirit, where the breaking down of dualities that serve to imprison allow transcendence beyond what has no purpose (Anzaldúa, 1987, cited in Lockhart, 2006, p. 16).

I would like to clarify that death, birth and rebirth correspond to the phases of death of the past (A), birth of the new (B-D), and rebirth (from one cycle to the next). It is a continual, repetitive cycle until Samsāra\textsuperscript{111} is attained. In Christianity, the resurrection leads to the ability of seeing the Kingdom of God (John 3:3). The cycle of death, birth and rebirth also mirrors the development of la facultad, which according to Anzaldúa, is the faculty that connects us to the soul, which is where the true self resides (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 38).

\textsuperscript{111} The person continues to be born and reborn in various realms and forms.
Conceptual Framework for the Passage to Healing Post-Genocide of Older Khmer Women Living in Diaspora

Figure 4: Conceptual Framework: The Process of Healing of Migrant Women Genocide Survivors (Gallichio, 2015); adapted from van Gennep 1909; Turner 1969; Lewis 2000; Bailey 2001; and in particular Anzaldúa (1999; 2002a; 2007) and Anzaldúa, et al. (2003).
(A) El Arrebato\textsuperscript{112}: Separation (Embodied\textsuperscript{113} History)\textsuperscript{114}

Phase (A) signifies the rupture, shock or susto creating separation from what was. The phase of embodied history is entered. This research examines the susto initiated by the Khmer Rouge upon Khmer women survivors, causing the most powerful rupture from their ancestral and historical past. The Cambodia they knew ceased to exist; the separation marked the beginning of the disconnection from what they identified with. Tyner (2009, p. 9) refers to this as an anti-geography process “designed to ‘smash pre-existing spaces in an attempt to construct a new space’, whereby “the concept of ‘erasure’ was paramount in the ideology of the Khmer Rouge.”

This was the beginning of an imposed new life, and each arrebatamiento\textsuperscript{115} (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 547) releases a susto that knocks a soul out of the body. Estrangement between culture, family and self eventuates, corresponding with the formation of an internalised ‘open wound’\textsuperscript{116}, hence the remedy for healing lies within. What we are separated from essentially is our true self, and the lessons that emerge to heal this wound are always shifting, crossing, and transforming, until a new way is to be learned. Hence, El Arrebato also marks a new beginning by causing a deeply emotional and spiritual moment of dissonance and disconnection from one’s established world and self-view. It is a catalyst for nepantla, which is a phase where the focus is no longer solely external, but shifts to a place within.

\textsuperscript{112}The rupture.
\textsuperscript{113}The theme of this theoretical framework is transformative phases of embodiment; commencing with embodied history, leading to embodied pain, embodied change and embodied healing.
\textsuperscript{114}NOTE: when I refer to “we, us, our” etc., this is referring to those on this particular passage to healing. However, it is noted that this may not be the path of all to follow.
\textsuperscript{115}Sudden shocking event.
\textsuperscript{116}Hartley (2010, p. 135-6) calls Anzaldúa “la curandera de la herida abierta” (healer of the open wound), given her ability to diagnose the social and especially colonial forces of oppression, leading us to heal the open wound that exists.
The next section reflects upon how, after the sudden and abrupt annihilation experienced by the Cambodian people at the hands of Pol Pot, the creation of embodied pain, terror and memories are understood to exist. Wright (2012, p. 254) explored the Dhamma in the context of the accumulation of actions experienced by people as a result of the actions of “unwelcome intruders” reaching breaking points of trauma or tragedy. I believe it is this statement that brings understanding to why the Khmer have lost a sense of who they actually are:

In Buddhist language, the circumstance has mutated from the impermanent process of normal life to a fixed sensation induced by the delusion of permanent reality.

B) Un Agitado Viento: The Liminal Space of Nepantla (Embodied Pain)

But, oh, like Sor Juana, like the land-crossing Spanish, like so many Mexicans who have not recovered from the conquest, I lived nepantla—a spiritual isolation.¹¹⁷

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) is considered the first great Latin-American poet and advocate for the education of women. She, like others, had not recovered from conquest, and remained in nepantla, a space of spiritual isolation. During this phase, embodied pain is experienced as a result of being thrown into a border space of unknowing, yet also a space of transformation.

‘Liminal’ comes from the word ‘limen’, the Latin word for ‘threshold’. It occurs when individuals are thrust into this space of ambiguity, passing through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or oncoming states, a space wherein lies change. It unfolds within oppressive contexts and

entails a deepening of perception: it is the “prelude to crossing” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 70). For the women participants, this liminal phase works across space and borders, time, ageing and sociocultural change. This is the marker of the reconstruction of Khmerness to which Lewis (2000, p. 1) refers as being “past and continuing disassemblies, reconstructions and redefinitions” of the Khmer identity.

The Indigenous Nahua people originated the term ‘nepantla’ as being destructive of the old, creative of potential opportunities, so is thereby transformative (Maffie, 2007, p. 11). It both centres and destabilises us; it is a field that contains opportunity yet chaos and change. It is a space of reconciling the past and living in the new present; a space of the new emergent identity yet of embodied pain and memory. It may not be obvious when an individual is living in or out of this space.

**The Coatlicue State: Desconocimiento and the Cost of Knowing**

Most of the Khmer women interviewed for this research appeared to be ‘stuck’ in nepantla (Anzaldúa, 2007a p. 100). The border is in a constant state of nepantla, and as border people, they are torn between either maintaining or breaking free from an embodied past. A process of self-awareness is entered into which can be deeply disturbing as one encounters aspects one does not want to see, acknowledge or integrate. After being torn from the past, there follows the chaos caused by the guilt of surviving the genocide where so many did not. Anzaldúa called this “the Coatlicue depths of despair, self-loathing and hopelessness” (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 545). Overwhelmed by chaos caused by living between stories, a person can break down, descend into this third space (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 545), the place of desconocimiento.

All the while, new realities and opportunities descend to make meaning of the past yet there is a cost to this new knowledge. Depression, fear, anxiety, despair and anger can be overwhelming and it is tempting to turn away and
deny possibilities for new realities and to descend further into an emotional abyss. This can relate to the women participants being stuck in their embodied pain through memories of their great loss and victimhood.

What I consider most empowering is that the individual is actually in control of the states of depression and anxiety that are holding patterns created to avoid shifting forward to new ways.

You’ll need a contingency plan to deal with the cycles of stress, turmoil, and depression that you create for yourself, (making way for the) inner stream of archetypal consciousness to flow.118

Anzaldúa deals with these cycles by turning inward towards herself where her inner self represents “a historicised people who live in resistance in the midst of oppression” (Lugones, 2005, p. 87). In the nepantla phase, archetypal consciousness is represented by the Coatlicue state, a necessary pathway to acquire new knowledge and consciousness, or conocimientos (expanding the vision).

(C) Un Nuevo Arreglo: Towards Aggregation, Towards Healing (Embodied Change)

This phase is one of embodied change, where the hybrid world of diaspora is entered into and developed by the women. It is an “inevitable unfolding” of the inner self as a call to action enables “some kind of evolutionary step forward … We have become the quickening serpent movement” (Anzaldúa, 2007a, p. 103). There is a breaking of the habitual coping strategies, which involve escaping from realities we are often reluctant to face. This is the beginning of a rebirth, shifting one step away from painful embodied

118 Anzaldúa (1999, p. 243-244).
memories. Nonetheless, for those women participants experiencing chronic embodied pain and memories, this continues to be a precarious time as there is a feeling of no security in the inner life of the self.

It is Coyolxauhqui that represents a rebirth by rejecting the boundaries and barriers imposed upon self, and between self and others; but also imposed by the dominant culture, pushing people to be marginalised and remain within structured boundaries. Aligned with this, it remains to be seen in Chapter 8 how the women participants view their diasporic identity, and how their traditions and rituals change in diaspora.

**La Transformada: Transformation through Spiritual Activism (Embodied Healing)**

As already stated in this thesis, Anzaldúa saw herself as a spiritual activist and a curandera (Anzaldúa & Gonzalez, 1995), and it is through the “Coyolxauhqui Imperative”, a process of embodied self-healing, shifting from a scattered self to one of wholeness takes place.

Like Coyolxauhqui, let’s put our dismembered psyches and patrias (homelands) together in new constructions.¹¹⁹

It is a place of becoming, and a finding common ground by forming holistic relationships based on multiple perspectives. However, it is very important that this is a time to protect the self during the process of developing la facultad, the awareness of when to open to others (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 574). It is a time to practice resistance to traditional cultures that teach women to forego their power and truth. How the women participants living in the Khmer

¹¹⁹ Anzaldúa (2009c, p. 314).
diaspora practice their religiosity and/or spirituality will also be discussed in the final chapters of this thesis.

Summary of Chapter 7

Chapter 7 has described the conceptual framework constructed to make sense of the journey towards healing of Khmer women genocide survivors. The framework's phases are fluid and interconnected, yet for illustrative purposes, it is structured into four main phases. The framework was formulated based on a combination of Anzaldúaan writings corresponding in particular to the information collected whilst in the research field.

What now follows are Chapters 8 and 9, which are centred on the outcomes of the research. Chapter 8 introduces the older Khmer women participants. A vignette has been written for each of the 24 participants to give an insight into their lives. Chapter 9 then proceeds to analyse the research findings, to contextualise the women's lives and healing using the perspective of the conceptual framework (Figure 4).
CHAPTER 8
Introducing the Khmer Women: Goddesses Lost, Goddesses Found

Introduction

This chapter formally introduces the Khmer women participants of this study. The metaphor “Goddesses Lost, Goddesses Found” relates to ‘the end being the beginning’, or a way of return to the feminine, the sacred and the Indigenous, as discussed in the context of gendered time in Chapter 4. The notion of “Goddesses Found” will be further discussed in Chapter 10.

This chapter commences with a general demographic overview of the women, giving perspective to who they are. Like Birch (2013, p. 148), I believe that as ethnographers, it is important to ‘humanise’ the participants, representing them as individual women who have a story to tell. Individual vignettes have been written to provide a snapshot of each of the women.

The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places.

Hemingway’s (1957, p. 249) abovementioned quote underscores the frailty of humanity, and in the context of his novel, the world was designed to indiscriminately kill the good, the gentle, the kind, and the brave. In this section of the chapter, I wish to honour the women who have endured the Khmer Rouge genocide and its associated trauma and loss. Some were strengthened from the war, but some are left weak and broken.

In each vignette, I have highlighted individual quotes from the interviews, and through these narratives, tragedy, loss and happiness are exemplified.
The Characteristics of the Women

I commence by introducing the twenty-four women participants from a demographic perspective, which illustrates their background and historical context using semi-traditional socio-demographic variables such as age, level of education, and marital status. The demographic questions were also designed to give an idea of place of birth, languages spoken, sensitive questions of interest such as loss of close family members during the Khmer Rouge war, as well as whether they now consider themselves “Aussie” and/or “Khmer”.

**Age Range:** At the commencement of the interviews, the oldest woman was 87, with the youngest woman being 47 years of age. The reporting of one’s age is not precise amongst the Khmer in general, as either age was adjusted for the purposes of entry into Australia, or some of the women did not have precise certification of their date of birth. A majority of the women respondents did not know their birthdate (Kelly et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 2009).

**Place of Birth:** Apart from one woman born in China and another in Laos the other participants were born in Cambodia. The Yiey from Laos moved to Cambodia when she was 19 (in 1951) and the Yiey from China moved to Cambodia at 17 years of age with her mother (in 1946). Seven of the women were born in Phnom Penh, and nine others were born in one of the 25 provinces. These provinces were not specified by the women. The remaining four women were born in rural areas of Cambodia.

**Language:** Most of the women's knowledge of English was limited, with all women speaking predominantly Khmer at home. Other languages spoken are Chinese, Teochew\textsuperscript{120}, varying levels of English, French, Thai and Vietnamese.

\textsuperscript{120} Chinese-Cambodian language or ethnicity.
Most of the women have reverted to speaking Khmer as their memories have failed them with regard to speaking the other languages. Even if they had learnt English in the past, it was common for them not to sustain their spoken and written English language. Only three of the women stated they could write English, or could only write "a little bit".

**Level of Education:** Eight of the women did not attend school, as they were in charge of looking after younger siblings during the absence of their parents at work, or after their parents died. Seven women completed from Year 3 to completing primary school. One woman had completed Year 9, and two women completed the Diplôme (Year 10 equivalent). The reasons why one of the women was tutored from home, and three other women had attended Chinese and Cambodian schools for two years only, remain unknown.

**Migration:** Upon arrival in Australia, the women's ages ranged from 18 to 75. The earliest arrival was in 1980, and the most recent was in 2005. Most of the women had lived in the Thai-Cambodian border camps before migrating to Australia. They cited reasons for migrating to Australia as being sponsored by relatives; having their passage to Australia organised by welfare or religious organisations at the border camps; or wishing to come to Australia for freedom.

**Marital Status:** Fifteen of the women are widows, and six of these women’s husbands died during Pol Pot\(^\text{121}\). One woman’s husband died before Pol Pot, and five others’ husbands died after the war. It is unknown under which circumstances the remaining three women’s husbands died. Eight of the women are married and live with their husbands, with one other woman recently becoming divorced.

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\(^{121}\) Pol Pot is the term used by the women participants as reference to the Khmer Rouge war.
**Family:** Knowing precisely how many children had died as a result of the war is contentious. For example, one of the women stated seven of her children had passed away during the Khmer Rouge war, as well as her husband, yet in a separate conversation, she revealed her husband had passed away prior to Pol Pot. This is very much reflective of loss of memory and undisclosed levels of dementia among this group of women. From the information gathered during the interviews, nineteen children had passed away, mostly due to starvation or being executed during the war. Several children died at the border camps. This loss does not take into account the hundreds of parents and grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunties, nieces and nephews, cousins, friends and communities who were lost during this war. Most of the women have family members in Melbourne and other states of Australia, but also have family in Cambodia, United States, France and Laos.

**Residence:** The woman who is divorced lives on her own. One of the widows also lives on her own; her husband and only child died during Pol Pot. The remaining women mostly live with either their daughter and family or son and family. Three of the women who are widowed have taken the option of living on the grounds of the Wat, making a decision not to live with their children. One of their responsibilities is to prepare food for the monks on a daily basis, and to raise donations for the local and Cambodian communities.

**Cultural Identity:** Questions were posed as to what extent the women perceived themselves as being “Australian” and/or “Khmer”. This is an interesting indication of shifts in cultural identity over time since living in diaspora. Fourteen of the women consider themselves "Australian" or "Aussie". Four of the women consider themselves Khmer, one as Khmer-Chinese, and only one considers herself as Khmer-Australian. My observation of their lives indicate they are predominately living Khmer or Teochew lives in diaspora.

**Religious Status:** There are varying levels of Buddhist identity and practice, and this often relates to the number of precepts being adopted. Typically, lay
people keep five precepts, and those who are novices, lay devotees or Bhikkhunīs adopt eight to ten precepts (Ledgerwood, n.d.a).

Seventeen women are Buddhist. A number of the women follow five precepts, one follows eight, and one lay devotee adopts ten precepts. Two women consider themselves both Buddhist and Christian, one woman has never followed a religion, and six women are Christian. Most of the women who had converted to Christianity still respect the Buddha, and most still attend Buddhist ceremonies such as Phchüm bĕn and Khmer New Year.

**Health Self-Belief**: Eleven women consider themselves well, even though they may have diagnosed illnesses such as diabetes, arthritis, insomnia, hypertension and osteoarthritis. The remaining women who believe they are not well have hypertension, diabetes, hypercholesterolemia, chest pain, memory loss, glaucoma, mild to severe arthritis, depression, cancer, osteoarthritis, and cardiac issues including heart attack coupled with severe anxiety.

**The Khmer Pseudonyms Used for the Women Participants**

As indicated in Chapter 5, in order to abide by the ethical standards governing research conduct, pseudonyms were applied in place of the actual names of each participant, and female interpreter, in order to safeguard their identity (Liamputtong, 2006a). During the interview process, I did not consider asking each participant to choose a pseudonym. In future cross-cultural research, I intend to ask research participants for their own choice of pseudonym. After the interview process, I asked Mr. Than Thong, who has regular contact with the women participants, to inform the women that I would be using a Khmer name for each of them instead of their own names, for the purpose of protecting their identity. The pseudonyms for this research are listed in Table 1.
Table 1: List of Khmer Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YIEY’S KHMER NAME</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bopha</td>
<td>Beautiful flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champei</td>
<td>Red or white frangipani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channary</td>
<td>Moon-faced girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhean</td>
<td>Meditation, contemplation, to step forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorani</td>
<td>Radiant jewel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaliyanei</td>
<td>Beautiful, lovely, attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolab</td>
<td>Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolthida</td>
<td>Daughter of respectable family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanfen</td>
<td>Chinese orchid fragrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maly</td>
<td>Jasmine flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mealea</td>
<td>Floral garland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mony</td>
<td>Crystal ball that holds the power of rain; precious stone such as a gem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearidei</td>
<td>White four-leafed flower fragrant in the evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuon</td>
<td>Soft, tender, pleasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phary</td>
<td>Beautiful; good flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pheakdei</td>
<td>Loyalty, honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponnleu</td>
<td>Light; Illumination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serey</td>
<td>Beauty, charm, splendour; peace, prosperity; power, authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinuon</td>
<td>The colour white mixed with a little yellow; a type of flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sokyanya</td>
<td>Peaceful lady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorpheny</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thida</td>
<td>Angelic girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanna</td>
<td>Golden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peou</td>
<td>Youngest one (pseudonym for female interpreter)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The headings of the following vignettes contain the Khmer pseudonym given to the participant. The women are presented in alphabetical order, with the exception of Yiey Pheakdei, whose vignette finalises the list of these vignettes.
Introducing the Khmer Women

Bopha

Like so many of the women, Yiey Bopha lives with her daughter, and like a number of the women, she considers herself "Australian". Her life is dedicated to being a student of the Dhamma, and to merit-making through serving the monks and giving donations to her community. She believes that we have a choice in the religion we practice, but her hope is for the younger Khmer generations to take the time to come to the temple and learn about the Dhamma:

The new generation have forgotten a lot of Khmer culture. I hope here a lot of children if they got time they would come to temple, very often, they will find out the Dhamma, practice the Dhamma, tell the right way for the human being how to live, and calm, patient, loving kindness.

Yiey Bopha acknowledges the existence of poverty in Cambodia, in particular in rural areas, but is concerned about the Khmer tradition being passed on:

The new generation have forgotten a lot of Khmer culture because a lot of Western music has come in [laughing].

Champei

Yiey Champei has a hands-on approach regarding passing on the culture to her family:

I teach my grandchildren how to respect everyone and to do the right thing. I also teach them Khmer.

She is one of the few women who lives with her husband, and was fortunate not to have lost any of her five children during the war. She depicts her health as being on the border:

I have diabetes, cholesterol, normal blood pressure. I don’t feel that well, just on the border.
The Dhamma is the priority in her life, but she also recognises that she gains social and cultural capital when attending the Wat:

Socialising with people here at the temple helps me stay well.

**Channary**

Yiey Channary embraces the Khmer culture fully in diaspora, and although she prefers to live in Australia for practical purposes, is very much “Khmer”. She has no children or family, and became a widow in 2003. She is looked after by living on the grounds of the Wat, and sees her future there. She serves the monks traditional Khmer food on a daily basis, and her Buddhism is her strength.

For her health, Yiey Channary subscribes to traditional ways, such as the importance of staying out of the wind (Hinton, 2002). Yet she embraces Western ways by exercising and swimming each week, to the extent that her arthritis and leg pain permits. She also believes in the following role for women in Khmer culture:

Practice Dhamma. Women in Khmer culture look after children, husband, cooking and teach the children to do the right thing. This is the part of the culture. And Buddhism.

**Chen**

Yiey Chen was born in Cambodia, but she is unsure of her age. She thinks she was born in 1940, even though her passport states 1944. As mentioned earlier, under the Pol Pot regime many Cambodians destroyed their birth registration documents in order to hide their identities and escape persecution. Consequently, after the Khmer Rouge war, less than five per cent of the population were registered (Plan International, 2012), and Yiey Chen alluded to this as follows:
My birth papers were lost during the war, and I do not know my real age.

She identifies herself as “Australian”, even though she is of Teochew ethnicity. She attends a Cambodian Christian Church, although she identifies with being Buddhist. For her, going to church is an outing:

Sometimes I go to church and sometimes I go to the temple. My friend takes me to church. On the weekend I get bored. Also, the Cambodian church has transport but the temple does not.

This is another example of the importance for older Khmer people in general to develop cultural capital (Vasi, 2011, p. 100). This will be discussed further in Chapter 9. Nonetheless, Yiey Chen’s priority is that her family are “settled” into a life of Buddhism and Khmer culture.
Chhean

Figure 5: This is a photo of Yiey Chhean and her granddaughter in front of a Wat in Cambodia. From this photo, I see structure, order, cleanliness, strength and connection to the Buddha, and to family. There appears to be a French influence in the colours of the ground, the steps and the door, perhaps remnants from the French colonial period in Cambodia.

Yiey Chhean was the only participant who offered me a photo. Although Yiey Chhean considers Buddhism is “everything to me”, her discourse was centred
on the generosity of the Australian government, and ways she could raise
money for the monks and Cambodia. This included her hugging me and
calling me her daughter, and then asking me for a donation.

Her strength lies in the Dhamma, and this was also true during Pol Pot:

I believed in doing good during the war, and I received a lot
of support during the war. I was strong living the Dhamma,
even during the war. And the same now.

I admire her tenacity; she lives her life to make merit and to build up her
beloved Cambodia. She commenced practising the ten precepts from 1982
when her children were old enough.

Yiey Chhean’s interview exacerbated my frustration and regret at being
unable to fully communicate with the women participants in their own
language. The following statement by Yiey Chhean alludes to the likelihood
that had she been able to speak directly to me rather than through Mr. Than
Thong, she may have told me a lot more:

Annemarie, I wish you could speak Khmer because I have a lot
of stories to tell you.

Jorani

As I entered Yiey Jorani’s home for her interview, the Khmer culture and
Christian faith sat side by side in her home’s decor. She had a very beautiful
print of Angkor Wat facing the mantelpiece in the sitting room, but the
mantelpiece was dedicated to a large framed print of Jesus.

She converted to Christianity, and her life is lived through the Presbyterian
Church. Her whole family had converted to Christianity, and she and other
women who had shifted from Buddhism are examples of la mestiza:

In Cambodia I was Buddhist; in Australia I became Presbyterian.
Because sometimes I pray and I can see the truth and the real
life in my faith.
Kaliyanei

In 1987, Yiey Kaliyanei and her husband migrated from the Thai border camp to New Zealand, and in 1994 they came to Australia. She emphasised that they came to Australia for freedom. Her cultural identity is both hyphenated and hybrid (Pedraza, 2008; Van Dyk, 2007), as she describes herself as “half-half: half Khmer and half Australian”.

She is a devout Buddhist, and learnt about the precepts at the age of 10 from her mother and grandmother in Cambodia. During the war, Buddhism was very important to her, “Inside yes, but outside no”, given that Buddhism was banned by Pol Pot. She said she cannot stop the memories of the past, but her Buddhism is her strength. She believes that the war has made her stronger.

When she returned to Cambodia after living in the Khmer diaspora, it was exceptionally difficult for her as almost all of her relatives had passed away during the war. Yiey Kaliyanei and her husband now make donations to the poor, and especially the children in Cambodia. Yet, they only go to Cambodia as visitors, as she is worried that the war might recur.

They both also ensure the passing on of the traditions to their children, and ensure their children know about their experiences during the war. They believe this has taught them gratitude for what their parents had done for them, and an understanding and admiration of how their parents had survived Pol Pot.

Her name reflects the beauty of the garden that surrounds her family’s home, a fusion of magnificent Cambodian plants and other flora from all over the world. Birds of Paradise, succulents and orchids are often resplendent in Khmer gardens in Melbourne. What was truly magnificent were two identical plants from which one large flower, perhaps three metres in length, emerged forming a pale green, feathery arch. One was located in one corner of their front garden, the other in the diagonal corner. They were surreal, and I
imagined if I passed under one of the arches I would be transported to an era long past.

Kolab

Yiey Kolab is symbolic of the archetype La Llorona’s shadow side. She specifically reminds me of the all-sorrowing mother who under the Khmer Rouge lost her three children from starvation. She is also divorced, which is uncommon in the Khmer community, but large framed photos of her parents-in-law and her former husband as a young man prominently remained on her wall. Her only surviving child, a daughter who is 37 years old, decided to live on her own away from her mother, but visits her once a week.

From the other women’s interviews, it is apparent that faith in either the Buddha or God gives meaning to the war and their lives. Yiey Kolab has never participated in a religion, yet praying to her ancestors is important to her as this is a common cultural practice:

No. I have never gone to the temple. I only worship my ancestors at home.

She continues to watch dubbed Thai movies about fairy tale princes rescuing princesses from frightening, winged monsters, and the following field notes explain why this may be the case:

Upon entering her home, Yiey Kolab was watching a Thai movie, full of fantasy, magic, monsters, a Prince, his wife, a palace, and their baby. It was dubbed in Khmer. “I go for a walk or watch movies so that I don’t think about them (her three children).” The movie was about a four-headed monster stealing the baby from the Prince’s arms.

She was the first woman I interviewed where I witnessed a flash of the profoundly acute, excruciating pain at the loss of her three children under Pol Pot, even though this was a momentary glimpse of what she must still be enduring for the past 40 years.
I believed at this moment she and I truly connected, but for her the tragedy is she can never forget her great loss [Field Notes].

The grief of Yiye Kolab was a very powerful observation and extremely palpable once recognised, especially because when meeting these women research participants, it is not immediately apparent that they have endured genocide.

**Kolthida**

Yiye Kolthida’s interview took place in her house which was a mansion, pristine with marble and chandeliers. She was dressed impeccably and was on time at the door. I told her how beautiful her home is. She shares it with her daughter and son-in-law, and their two children. There was a glamorous photo of her on the sitting room wall. Tea was poured from a fine bone china pot into beautiful matching cups and saucers.

This was in stark contrast to surviving the war, where her strategy for her family to survive was to be honest and work very hard:

I had nine children, but two passed away during the war. Seven children survived because they worked very hard. They had to be honest with the Khmer Rouge. If not honest, they would be taken away and beaten or killed.

Her children are now very well educated and hold positions in dentistry, accountancy and engineering. However, she made it known that they had worked through their education to support themselves. She is pleased that although her daughter-in-law is from the Ukraine, she knows she will look after Kolthida in her old age. Her husband passed away during the war from food poisoning; there was no medicine available to help him.

Throughout the war she was given the job of being in charge of digging wells. Now, she is able to fly to Cambodia each year and pay for this job to be done.
It is very important for her to give generously, as merit-making is very important to her:

I go to donate money to every temple, to dig wells and build toilets, and to build water systems for the toilet for the temple.

Lanfen

At the Cambodian community centre, Yiey Lanfen awarded me with the duty of calling out the Bingo numbers in English, and she would follow by translating the numbers into Khmer. This was certainly a way for the women to take me into their fold. I turned a blind eye when I realised on occasion a couple of the yieys had called out “bingo” when they didn’t have all of the numbers, but if they weren’t caught in the act, I was happy to award them with a much-prized cake of Lux soap\textsuperscript{122}. If Yiey Lanfen caught them, a fiery exchange in Khmer would swiftly ensue; yet the transgressor would join in the next game as if nothing had happened. No-one was omitted.

Yiey Lanfen is a fastidious, commanding woman. She is a leader, yet her strength conceals the grief that exists as a living memory for her – of the children and family members she had lost in the war. Like Yiey Kolthida, in order to survive she spoke of the need to work hard and be honest to be trusted during the war:

I worked very hard to make them to trust me. I had to be very honest to the leader to trust me.

It was unnerving for me to feel her profound grief when she spoke about not knowing where the bodies of her parents are buried, both victims of Pol Pot.

\textsuperscript{122} A product brand of soap.
Interestingly, during the interview, she showed me a photo album. The first few pages had photos of Princess Diana, and for some reason former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett. Although I did not ask her, I suspect these may have been popular images at the time she, her husband and remaining children migrated to Australia from Cambodia. She then proceeded to show me photos taken in the past of her family.

Like most of the other participants, she very generously donates money to rebuilding efforts in Cambodia.

**Maly**

Yiey Maly was born in China, and moved to Cambodia when she was 17 with her mother who heard Cambodia was a better place to live than China. Remaining within her ethnic group, she married a Chinese man in Cambodia when she was 23. Her family sponsored Maly and her husband to live in Australia:

> There was not enough food to eat in Cambodia, which is why we came to Australia. I have a pension here.

She and her husband had seven children, but they lost two daughters, one 18 and one 20. This happened after the fall of the Khmer Rouge and both were killed in the crossfire by Vietnamese soldiers. When she was interviewed, her whole family was present as if to cocoon her from her past. Her husband passed away in recent years. When exploring her faith, her comment was:

> Christian. Any God is good for me; when I need to, I go to the Church. When I don't need to go, I don't go. I like the Buddha too.

This contradicts her later comment when her family surrounded her in her interview:

> I follow Buddhist traditions and want my family to do the same.
I will explore this further in Chapter 9.

**Mealea**

Yiey Mealea was one of the youngest participants in this research, and had a massive heart attack in 2007. Due to severe anxiety, her blood pressure rises, especially when she expresses her frustration at being unable to achieve her goals in life due to her health.

Their garden was almost a shrine to that which is charming and colourful. As in Yiey Kaliyanei's garden, the plant exhibiting the massive arching flower was there, with smaller shoots growing at its base. The garden was resplendent with orchids and succulents, and her husband has been nominated the 'green thumb' of the family. Small cute statues dot the garden. It appears that this garden is a dedication of a loving husband to his sick wife.

Prior to the interview I was unaware of her severe state of health. During the interview, her blood pressure and levels of anxiety rose dangerously, and I stopped the interview when she had laid down. Had I known about her health I would not have conducted the interview at all. The breach of ethics when conducting an interview with someone who has a life threatening illness coupled with severe anxiety is obvious. The following is an example of her frustration at her state of health:

> Sometimes when I want to say something, I want to express my feelings. Gee I hate it when I get like this. I want to give so much to others. This stupid heart. Now I must rest.

**Mony**

Yiey Mony has formally dedicated her life to the Buddha. She was born in Laos, and migrated to Cambodia at the age of 19. She lost her husband under Pol Pot, as well as losing five children to starvation during this war. She prefers to live next to the Wat, rather than with any of her three adult children.
Yiey Mony lives her life by the spirits, and Buddhism is her salvation. The Khmer community frown upon her fortune telling services, yet she openly practices the gift given to her by the spirits:

I read cards and tell fortunes. At the age of 29 the spirits told me in my dreams to help people by reading cards and being a fortune teller. When the dreams came they trained me how to read the cards. I have been practising this for over 50 years now, but under Pol Pot there were no cards, so I could not read the cards. I now very busy – especially when there is a full moon. I see people from Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Australia.

Nearidei

Yiey Nearidei walked into the room very slowly. She suffers from chronic, debilitating arthritis in both knees. She was wearing a yellow printed cotton sarong, and a black and white checked cotton shirt. Her hair was dyed black. Most of her teeth were missing, and those remaining were black. I am wondering if this was due to lack of oral hygiene, or as a result of betel nut chewing. Pickwell et al. (1994) explore the culture and dangers of this practice by Cambodian women in the US. Her eyes appeared to be dark blue, but this may be due to a milky cataract glaze over them.

In 1987, Yiey Nearidei’s son sponsored both his parents to live in New Zealand, but in 1997, their daughter sponsored them to live with her in Australia as the climate in New Zealand was too cold for them. Yiey Nearidei and her husband have continued to live with their daughter ever since.

Prior to this, she was Buddhist, but became a Christian at the Thai-Cambodian border camp:

The neighbour in the camp asked me if my husband wanted to join the religion. He said “Buddha is good, but Jesus is good too”.
She is no longer able to go to church due to her arthritis. Nevertheless she practices her faith as follows:

In my heart I pray to God. Yes, God gives me good feedback when I pray at night-time.

She and her husband have told their children about the brutal experiences they had both suffered during Pol Pot:

When I told my children my story, they cried because they felt regret for me and for my husband.

She longs to go back to Cambodia, but is unable to due to her health issues:

My daughter wants to go with me again, but it’s very hard for me to walk. I can’t take it. This makes me feel very sad.

**Nuon**

Yiey Nuon’s daughter sponsored her and her husband to migrate here in 1996. Although she was born in Cambodia, she feels like an ‘Aussie’ now.

Yiey Nuon and Yiey Sinuon are best friends. They live close to each other and visit each other often. During summertime they exercise together and go walking. Even though she has a “little bit of cholesterol and blood pressure”, her wellbeing lies in exercising frequently, including swimming, and she uses an exercise tape to exercise every day at home.

Her experiences during the war made her very weak, and she is only now recovering. She now has the ability to eat well and has the time to exercise. Like so many others her experience during the Khmer Rouge period was:

Overwork, hard work, not enough food. No medicine.

According to Yiey Nuon, it is understandable that she considers Australia as:

Very good – number one. A good country. I feel like Aussie now.
Phary

Yiey Phary, like many of the women participants, was graceful and humble in her approach. She is married and has one daughter, and is a devout Buddhist. She was assisting Yiey Chhean by preparing food for the monks. When I asked her about her experiences in the war, she asked “Which one?” In 1970, Prime Minister Lon Nol overthrew Prince Sihanouk, whereby the Cambodian Civil war commenced. Despite being in two wars, the Buddhist tenet of forgiveness is apparent when she stated:

Lon Nol not as hard as Pol Pot. A little bit hard but not as hard. I just forgive; it is now in the past.

When asked about her current health, it was the death of her sister in 2005 that resulted in a major health crisis for her:

I thought about my sister in Cambodia who was sick and died, and left four children behind. She died in 2005, which is when I lost my memory from grief and worry about my sister’s children. My sister was younger than me. I have two brothers and one sister in Cambodia.

Although her sister’s children are now working and she no longer worries about them, she remains close to them by telephone. Her memory is slowly improving. She still prefers to live in Australia.

Ponnleu

As was the case with Yiey Thida’s interview, Yiey Ponnleu decided to be interviewed with her sister present, and like Yiey Thida, Yiey Ponnleu and her sister are very close. Yiey Ponnleu was at her sister’s house as her sister has chronic heart issues and just came out of hospital after heart surgery. Yiey Ponnleu was nestled in a comfortable looking couch testing her blood glucose level, and then proceeding to inject an insulin epi-pen into her abdomen. She
stated her blood glucose level was 8.5, which was high. A ‘good’ level is 5, but I noticed this did not bother her in the slightest. I suspect her experiences in the war have given her the resilience to endure her illness in Australia. However, she does not link these experiences to her current state of health.

The following quote from Yiey Ponnleu is reminiscent of Oeur’s (1994d) poem ‘Season of Transplanting Rice’, which follows after her quote:

> It hasn’t affected my health now, but the hard work made me sick during Pol Pot. I worked hard in the field and I left my children for whole days to work the field. My children had no milk. They were starving. My children were in the war. Four of my sons carried and dug the soil, and the youngest one did not work.

> Mothers left their babies with the elder women, The mothers’ breasts were full of milk, causing pain to the point of tears, while others had gone dry … By evening, when the mothers were released, some babies had starved to death, others were unconscious.123

In Australia, due to ill health, Yiey Ponnleu has not been to the Wat for two years, yet fortunately she still feels a part of the Cambodian community. She used to go to the Wat whenever there is an occasion such as Khmer New Year and Phchûm bên days.

She does not wish to tell her experiences to her family, but it is important for her that they know about the Khmer Rouge war:

> Maybe if they watched a movie about the Khmer Rouge war they would understand.

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123 Adapted from Oeur (1994d, p. 79) ‘Season of Transplanting Rice’.
Serey

From what I observed of Yiey Serey, the eldest of the women participants, she was all of the things that her pseudonym describes, even in the wake of losing her husband, seven siblings, and seven children to the war.

In her generation in Cambodia, it was common for girls to be prohibited from going to school:

I didn’t go to school, but I helped my sisters and brother cooking, and I asked them to teach me to read and write.

She came to Australia almost 20 years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, in order to assist her daughter with her children:

I first came here as a visitor for six months in 1998 [aged 74] and went back Cambodia. I came here again in 1999 when my daughter had her first son. Then they applied for permanent residence for me.

Yiey Serey’s strong Buddhist faith keeps her alive, and this quote is an example of exchanging “thinking too much” with the Dhamma:

There is nothing in my mind besides the Dhamma. I just take care of my health. I don’t worry about my son and daughter as they already have their own businesses. Even thinking too much cannot help them.

One thing that struck me about Yiey Serey was the importance not to kill and instead to give life. She believes the Buddha saved her life as she allowed the birds to eat the crops she was employed to guard during the war; she praises her son-in-law, who is Australian:

My son-in-law is a good person, and honest. When he saw a mouse in the kitchen, he didn’t kill it, but just chased it out of the house. To me, he is the one who practices the five precepts too. We do not kill animals. They come in just to get food the same way that humans want food.
During the process of catching and killing a fish to cook for her family, an act of caregiving, she did not realise the impact of this action upon her young son. Related to the above quote, the following is both a striking and tragic quote about the death of her son, which she believes was directly related to her killing a fish on that day:

One day, I noticed my young son was dizzy and swaying when he was walking home. When I went back home, he had died, and I realised that was because I had killed a fish during the day.

Sinuon

Yiey Sinuon’s parents passed away when she was very young, so she was unable to attend school. Like a number of other women interviewed for this research, she was in charge of looking after her siblings. She migrated to Australia to “escape the war”, even though the war had ended. She now has six children and 17 grandchildren, and they all live in Australia. She lives with one of her daughters.

Interestingly, both Yiey Sinuon and Yiey Nuon are Buddhists, yet do not practice the precepts. According to Yiey Sinuon:

You have to follow the rules, and you have to be ready before you should follow the precepts.

Although she reported her health as being good, she also believes the war has affected her health now, and the weather in Melbourne keeps her unwell. In the war she had to be strong, and pretend to be strong even if she was sick, because otherwise they would take her away and kill her. This was one of the most frequently reported experiences by the women participants during their interviews. Now, she has a strict exercise and diet regimen that assists her to maintain a good level of health.
Sokyanya

Her garden was pristine as if from a bygone era. She came to the door, unsure at first who her visitors were. She recognised Mr. Than Thong, and then it took her a few moments to recognise me, as we saw each other at the Khmer community centre most Mondays. For the first time, I recognised her loss of memory.

Yiey Sokyanya welcomed us into her very tidy home, a common feature of most of the Khmer households I would visit. We hugged each other, and I thanked her for inviting me. She had a large doll to the left of the entrance to her unit. Quite a few little ornaments dotted the boundaries of the rooms (little bunnies, small Buddhas and tiny dolls), almost creating a space for magical childhood dolls and creatures. She has so much dignity and is so quietly spoken. She used to speak French as a girl, and she asked me if I spoke French. I replied “Un petit peu\(^{124}\)“, and she was quite amused at this. However, she has forgotten a lot of this language.

Yiey Sokyanya has experienced great loss in her life. Pol Pot took away her husband and only child. She has also lost her knowledge of French and English, and is now losing her memory. She was also a dressmaker, but now because of poor eyesight she is unable to sew. She believes her current state of health is attributable to the war:

\[\text{I am getting weak and my brain can’t remember properly.}\]
\[\text{I always get lost.}\]

She is one of the most devout women I interviewed, and her home is a shrine to the Buddha. Her garden is a floral fortress surrounding her home:

\(^{124}\) A little bit.
Living in Australia is peaceful and free, but being Khmer is still in my heart.

She has lived in her home for more than 35 years, but was initially worried about the spirit of the woman who had previously owned the home bothering her in her sleep:

It is the tradition in Cambodia to pray and worship the dead. I prayed to the owner of this house who had passed away to allow me to live safely here. Now I am not scared of being alone. That’s also because Dhamma protects me.

**Sorpheny**

In Cambodia, Yiey Sorpheny, one of the younger participants, had completed her secondary school education. She had a family at a young age, and needed to work to contribute to raising them:

Before the war, my ambition was to be a teacher. My English is not good because I’ve been working too much. I’ve been working since I’ve been here for more than 30 years.

It is common for the Khmer women participants to believe their English is of a poor standard, although I considered Yiey Sorpheny’s spoken English to be of a good standard. She has two children; one was born in Cambodia, and the other in the Thai-Cambodian border camps. This was an extremely difficult time for her, and during her interview she did not elaborate on this experience. Now she fully embraces her work as a carer and has great empathy and dedication to her job:
I work a lot. I work permanently in a supported residential service\textsuperscript{125}, and I’m a carer for one boy who is 20 years old. He is from India, and suffered a car accident here. He became a paraplegic. He stays in Australia. My heart breaks to work with this boy. I love him.

She had previously worked at a chicken factory and used to earn more, but working as a carer suits her:

I enjoyed working at the chicken factory. I loved working with the chickens. But as a carer, that’s what I want in my old age. I like people and I like helping people. If I go to work in the chicken factory, I can earn more. But I say, okay, I can do this caring job. The boss at the chicken factory wants me back now, but I said, no, I am staying here in this job.

Even though she receives criticism from the Khmer Buddhist community, she maintains it is her choice to attend the local Catholic Church each Sunday.

Like Yiey Kaliyanei, Sorpheny too describes herself as “half-half”:

With my children, and when I talk to my friends, I have to be Aussie. When I meet my friends from high school when I was young, I have to be Cambodian, and speak to them in Khmer. So I am half-half. Because with my children if I am Cambodian, they will not like me. They will all run away and they will not talk to me.

**Thida**

When I arrived to interview Yiey Thida, I saw two young women walking away together in the rain, in addition to the family dog barking both excitedly and

\textsuperscript{125} Supported Residential Services are privately operated services registered with the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services to provide accommodation and support for people who need extensive support in daily lives, for example, people who are frail or have a disability.
protectively. Yiey Thida’s husband said she would be back in 20 minutes. They looked like two mischievous schoolgirls, still holding onto each other. Their faces belied their true ages: Yiey Thida was 47, and her sister some years younger. “Thida wants to be with her sister, no matter what”, her husband said. Thida was the youngest of the women participants.

During the war, Thida and her sister were children, and stuck together. Yiey Thida still considers herself Khmer “in her heart”, but when asked if she would prefer to live in Cambodia or Australia, her response was:

> I came to Australia to find a peaceful place. After the communists, I went to the border camp just across the Thai border. It was a refugee camp. I came to Australia from there. We are both happy to live here. We are very happy to live here, and we never want to go back.

It was interesting to note that any reference to “we” referred to Thida and her sister, rather than Thida’s husband and their two adult children.

As Thida could not understand the scriptures read from the Pāli Canon in the Wat, she started going to a Catholic church in Melbourne, where she could understand what the priest was saying. She wanted a message of hope to live by:

> I go to church, because when I go to the temple, I don’t understand. And when I go to church I understand what the priest says more.

She also believes in the rights of women, which is a different perspective from the more traditional, older women interviewed for this research. She is in the process of shifting away from the Khmer traditions as she believes living in diaspora is an opportunity to shift away from the negative gender practices of old:

> Like for me, if my daughter marries, and then isn’t happy with that man, I will tell her, “If you are not happy, you divorce, and
make yourself happy, because we only have one life. Don’t suffer and stay there and sit in one spot.”

Vanna

Like most of the participants, Yiey Vanna spoke no English. I was drawn to her calming wisdom and gentleness. Yiey Vanna’s hair was below shoulder length, straight and semi-grey/brown. Yiey Vanna was very fit, and had the grace, style and vibrancy of a dancer. Her simple cotton bag was slung from her right shoulder on a diagonal across to the left side of her body.

Vanna was 67 years of age when her daughter sponsored her to live in Australia. This was ten years after her husband had passed away, presumably in Cambodia. She relates her arrival in Australia as follows:

When I first came here, I got only a dollar in my pocket, so I worked in farm for two years until I got the pension from the government. Then I quit that job.

This did not seem to bother her; in fact she appeared to view this as an achievement.

After she arrived in Australia, she converted to Christianity. Here is Yiey Vanna’s dialogue on how God helped her during and after the war:

I prayed to the Buddha, Lord, and angel to bless me and family. God helped me, and that’s why I survived. Before there was not enough food, so my only thoughts were about ways to get food. Now God gives me everything, and I don’t care about anything. At this moment, I just want peace.

She did not say this in so many words, but like the following quote from Smith-Hefner (1994, p. 28), she may have converted to Christianity for similar reasons:

In the camp I felt a lot of suffering. I could not forget my husband, my parents, and my only daughter. They [the
missionaries] told me I have to pray to God to ask for peace. So I started to believe in Jesus and slowly I could forget about the past, about my daughter and all of my suffering under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. So I repented and I entrusted my life to God [Widow, age 47].

For Yiey Vanna, Cambodia represents the Buddha, pain and loss, and Australia represents God, freedom and plenty:

I can tell now. If I go to Cambodia, I won’t get the pension. In Australia, God gives me everything.

**Pheakdei**

I decided to leave Yiey Pheakdei’s vignette last. This presents a longer vignette for her, as there are elements from all of the women’s interviews contained in the following, as well as unique perspectives from Yiey Pheakdei. Unlike the other women, Yiey Pheakdei was open about her intention to withhold information about her life.

Yiey Pheakdei greeted me at the door. I made sure to join my hands with the traditional Cambodian greeting, Sampeah, to demonstrate my respect to Yiey and her culture. I have now learned that this is a cultural and a Buddhist greeting, so this is welcome regardless of whether a Khmer has undergone religious conversion.

The lounge room features a very large television perched upon a matching TV cabinet in the far corner. The lounge suite reminded me of some Italians and other Europeans who cover their furniture with either plastic, or fabric, to keep it ‘new’. In this case, the lounge suite and kitchen chairs were all covered in the same orange and green floral cotton fabric, which was kept pristine and clean. This colour scheme seemed to reflect the colours in the front garden. The floors were immaculate, and the house was very clean and tidy, with not one thing out of place. Brown and beige artificial flowers cascaded down the living room wall in a number of places.
Yiey Pheakdei led the interview with this first statement:

My story is 100%, but I tell you only 1%.

She made the above statement before we were even seated at her kitchen table. She made it very clear what she wanted Mr. Than Thong to tell me. It was very important for her to be given a voice to tell her story, but she was only willing to divulge 1% of her story to me. She stated an extra 1% would take a full day to relay:

Annemarie: I wish I could know your story, because it is a very important story. You have a very important life.

Yiey Pheakdei: When I crossed the border into Thailand, I gave birth to my daughter in the bush, no doctor, no nothing, and it rained and rained.

Annemarie: I know I am a stranger to you, but I would imagine that it would be so interesting to write a book on your life, but I understand your life is very private. Maybe it is something you don’t want to tell, so I understand that you would only wish to tell 1%. Please know that whatever you tell me, your name does not go with it.

Yiey Pheakdei: You can write the book, but my name is for no one to know.

Annemarie: All the ladies, I give a different name. Everything is private, and no one except Mr. Than Thong knows I spoke to you because these interviews are private.

Yiey Pheakdei: I only told 1%.

Annemarie: That’s alright. Ninety-nine per cent is private. I am very happy to meet you and I respect you a lot.

In 1976, Yiey Pheakdei, heavily pregnant with her second child, and her husband, took a chance to cross the Thai border in 1976—with no visa—five months into the Khmer Rouge war. Her eldest child at six years of age had already died under Pol Pot due to starvation. They were shot at when crossing
the Thai border, and she went into labour and gave birth in the jungle in torrential rain. She then later lost her baby of six months in gunfire.

She and her husband were able to gain passage to France. Her husband passed away in France at the age of 37 from liver cancer, dying very quickly after his diagnosis. She lived in Paris for nine years, and loved the lifestyle there. She learnt to drink café au lait\textsuperscript{126} and still enjoys it on occasion. She had a son and daughter in France, and moved to Australia from France in 1985.

In 1992 she returned to Cambodia to visit. She became aware that all of her friends had perished in the war. Her remaining family, thinking she had died, would pray for her in particular during Phchům bên. To their great surprise, she had returned, as if from the dead, to visit after a sixteen year separation.

During our interview, it was clear that Yiay Pheakdei is exhibiting strength of character in revealing only part of her story. I understood that this may well be related to ghuet cj'roun\textsuperscript{127}, keeping the past within the family system as a culturally-appropriate means of communicating life's difficulties (Catolico, 1997). She was only prepared to tell her story if a pseudonym was provided, which is a way to keep her past private, even from her own community.

\textsuperscript{126} A French version of coffee served with hot milk

\textsuperscript{127} In this thesis, the terms koucharang (Frye & D'Avanzo, 1994b) and ghuet cj'roun (North, 1995) are used interchangeably to mean ‘thinking too much’, a culture-bound syndrome characterised by intrusive thoughts and memories (Catolico, 1997).
Summary of Chapter 8

This chapter introduced the older Khmer women participants. What is noted is that despite the individual differences in their lives, having Khmer ethnicity and especially their experience of the Pol Pot regime have given them an enduring and inexorable link.

A general demographic overview gave perspective of who they are as people. What followed were vignettes of each of the women participants, illustrating their lives. Quotes from the interviews and information from the field notes were used in each of the vignettes to provide examples of the rich meanings each of the women gave to the often complex situations that they continue to experience.
CHAPTER 9
(Dis)locations and Reclamations: There is Strength in Their Silence

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to represent an account of the outcomes from discussions with and observations of the women participants, drawn from their own unique perspectives. Also included are comments from Mr. Than Thong that relate to the findings. I also continue to use the field notes I wrote as my own observations, feelings and contribution to this discussion. I will now proceed with the discussion of the research findings, using the conceptual framework as the guide to this discussion.

As a preface to this chapter's discussion, I would like to reiterate that each of the four phases of the conceptual framework are embodied states being created in conjunction with the embodiment of history, loss and grief, change and healing.
A) El Arrebato\textsuperscript{128}: Separation. Creating Embodied History

Figure 6: Mileo (1987a) Soul Birds

\textsuperscript{128} Rupture or outburst.
For women genocide survivors, this phase is one that initiates the process of dramatic change in their lives. Their disconnection from the past was sudden and shocking, requiring the Khmer to leave behind a homeland and culture that were irreversibly altered as a result of Pol Pot, to create a new life in the Khmer diaspora in Australia. The painting in Figure 6 (Mileo, 1987a) is symbolic of taking flight into the future whilst leaving one's past behind.

**A Legacy of Lost Dreams**

In honour of Yiey Serey, the eldest of the participants, I would like to lead this section of the chapter with an extraordinarily moving quote translated from Khmer into English during the interview with her. She is a very devout Buddhist, and believes the Buddha “gave her life” throughout Pol Pot. As presented in Chapter 8, during the Khmer Rouge genocide she lost her husband, seven of her siblings and seven of her 12 children. This quote is a living memory for her, a powerful example of one of many losses experienced by Yiey Serey and the women participants as a whole. For her, she reached the point of no turning back:

> I begged them please don’t bring him (her youngest son who was an infant and who had died) to anywhere. At that time, I don’t know why I keep laughing. All my children said it is really stupid when I laugh like this. Then, I stopped laughing. My youngest child was buried at the backyard of a house. From that time, I never looked back at all.

Related to this quote, the following is a powerful depiction taken from Anzaldúa’s poem “En el nombre de todas las madres (que han perdido sus hijos en la guerra)”: on behalf of all mothers (who have lost sons in the war). This resonates so powerfully with Yiey Serey’s lived experience at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. The poem is a lament to La Virgen de Guadalupe129

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129 The symbol of the mother and the protector of the Mexican people.
("Madre dios"— Mother God) from a mother who lost her children presumably
during the US-Mexican war in 1846, and is holding her dying child:

What shall I do, Mother God?
... From here I'm not moving,
in this corner of my land I stay,
here I leave my fate.
Here I stay
until my son becomes dust ...

... Yes, Mother God,
I tried to protect my children. The
eldest was killed in the plain. The
second was killed on the hill.
And last month they killed my daughter in the
woods. Aya they ran (to) their destination.
And nothing more was my boy,
covered here with my skirt.
Yes, with these cold little feet.”

Yiey Serey’s loss of her youngest son, Anzaldúa’s lament to la Madre dios, and
the poem “The Loss of My Twins” (Oeur, 1994e, p. 55) equally project the
anguish of loss at the hands of perpetrators who were deliberate, sadistic
and inhumane in their actions against their victims.

Trauma and Loss

The women’s experiences are all based on a commonality, which is the swift,
traumatic destruction of their country, identity and lives under the Khmer
Rouge. Cambodia’s political unrest, socioeconomic struggle and traumatic
genocide disrupted and destroyed most of the country’s foundations, such as
health care and education systems. Normal patterns and habits of daily life
were torn apart by the Khmer Rouge, leaving behind profound sociocultural

130 Translation into English of Anzaldúa (2007a, pp. 183-185).
and religious legacies, including the severing of Buddhist and animistic
traditional practices that were a way of life for Cambodian people. This has
formed the basis of the Khmer’s concern about losing their culture.

This is the rupture or susto of the Khmer, to which Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 547)
refers, culminating in the separation from a life of what was to a life that is now
lived in diaspora. All the participants have experienced brutally disrupted lives
through the upheaval of the genocide, and now endure periods of attempting to
reconcile themselves to the events of the past. Stories of trauma and loss came
through as strong themes across all interviews.

Yiey Serey told me she cannot cry anymore because she has run out of tears.
She begged every day for the guards to kill her during the war. She did not do
her share of work either, and she even laughed about it, but somehow she felt
protected by the Buddha. The following are quotes from the interviews of
women who had lost children during the war:

Yiey Serey: When my two children died with the hunger, they
died in my arms. I cried a lot, I cried then I laughed. And people
said I’m crazy, I got dementia, and everything.

They cried for food.

Yiey Maly: Two children passed away during the war. I lost
two daughters. One 18 and one 20. When the Vietnamese came
in after Pol Pot, they were caught in the crossfire.

Yiey Pheakdei: When we crossed the border with no visa, the
Thai shot at us like animals. I was separated from my husband
for a couple of days when we ran away. My daughter passed
away on the border.

I note from the above words interrelated phrases which are emblematic of
genocide: “died in my arms”; “people said I’m crazy”; “They cried for food”;
“caught in the crossfire”; “shot at us like animals”; “separated ... ran away”;
“My daughter passed away on the border”. The women’s narratives bring
their experiences to life.
The next major theme that emerged from the women’s interviews is ‘survival’. It was difficult for some of the women to speak about the war, and for others who spoke about their experiences under Pol Pot, their discussion was brief. I always asked their permission to speak about the war, nevertheless, what they did openly discuss were the jobs to which they were assigned. Without exception, it was important to work very hard and to be seen to be honest and trustworthy during the war. There was a great sense of either pride in their ability to work hard and be honest, or dread that they would be taken away and tortured or killed if they did not contribute to the commune to which they were allocated.

Yiey Serey revealed information that had been crucial to her experience during the war. This was previously unknown to a member of her family present during the interview, which demonstrates that aspects of her life have been kept silent from her family. This corresponds with Kidron’s (2009b) comments about familial silencing of the events of the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodian families.

Yiey Serey: In Pol Pot they give me a job to look after a farm. A rice farm. To protect the crop from birds. But I just stood and let the birds eat [we all laugh]. All my friends working with me in the field, they [Khmer Rouge] took them away one by one and killed them. I was the last one, and I begged, “When are you going to take me?” They said, “Later on, later on”, because I believed in kamma and because I did good feeding all the birds. Now I got someone else who feed me back, you know. Like I come here to Australia and I now got a lot of food.

Yiey Serey’s son-in-law: I hadn’t heard that stuff about the farm before!

What is important to recall is that the Cambodian people laboured under the most brutal of conditions, including forced labour, starvation, physical and sexual abuse and the execution of loved ones (Clayton, 2006; Lilja, 2012; Rozée
& Van Boemel, 1990). It is not surprising that a number of the women participants quickly devised strategies of survival during this war. Honesty, very hard work and being liked and respected were important ways they and their families were able to survive the Khmer Rouge, although death still occurred, as Yiye Kolthida states:

We had to be honest with the Khmer Rouge; if not honest, then we would be taken away to be killed. It was very hard. Sometimes we were sick. I taught my children during the war they should always be honest. I had gold during the war. I would swap the gold jewellery for food because there was no money.

It was also important to work harder and faster, or be picked upon, taken away or killed by the Khmer Rouge guards. In addition, if the workers were seen to be idle, this gave the Khmer Rouge cadres the impression that they were lazy:

Yiye Sorpheny: It was important to work very hard, so the guards don't follow you or watch you. If you don't work hard they pick on you. I had a boss, a woman boss, and I'm not a big head, but I worked harder and better than her, so she could not pick on me. If she made products, she made 10, and I made 12, so she cannot pick on me, because of my hands, when I do something I do it fast. I stuck with her. She liked me.

Yiye Sinuon: If you couldn't work, then the guards would say you are lazy. So they would put you in prison or somewhere. If you are very sick it's okay – but if you are a little sick, then they say you pretend, and will take you away. That was the communist way.

Looking at her diminutive physique, I found it impossible to think of Yiye Vanna undertaking the back-breaking job of carrying soil to assist in dam-building. Her stature surely defies her strength:

I worked hard in the field, building the dam, carrying the soil to build the dam.

There also appeared to be a sense of pride in the work that was conducted, with a corresponding development of strength and survival:
Yiey Kolthida: The Khmer Rouge gave me a sewing job as a dressmaker. Because everyone in the commune liked me, they brought me more food, including sweets and everything, because I was honest. I did everything good for them, sewing, making dresses, and I worked very hard. I made everyone satisfied in the commune.

Yiey Maly: I worked in a manual textile area to weave scarves by hand. Some of the people looked after the animals, some made coloured textiles. Everyone in the family had to work but they didn't have enough food. I had nine children, but two passed away during the war. Seven still survived because they worked very hard. Right after the war I found out that two were missing and passed away.

Yiey Nearidei: I worked on the farm; and had to work very hard, to be honest, or they would take me to the bush and kill me. No time to sit. Even if I sit they would take me away. The practice during the war was the break up families. For example, the older children were separated from their mothers.

During an interview with Mr. Than Thong, he reflected upon the common practice of splitting up families during the war:

They split everyone from the family because they don't want them to contact each other. If you contact each other maybe you create a problem. You can escape, which is why they separate everyone. Even the children. The children they put in one camp, mothers and fathers in separate camps, and like me, I was a teenager and was placed in a different camp too. No-one was allowed contact each other.

Again, for some women, the war made them stronger, yet this hard labour created deleterious health outcomes for Yiey Chen:

I worked very hard for Pol Pot which is what kept me strong. If you work hard you survive. I worked in the farm. This is why I have arthritis now. This is what the doctors told me.

The following conversation demonstrates that honesty, and having a generosity of spirit aligned with contributing to the commune, also became a useful protective strategy for Yiey Kolthida and her family:
When I worked in the commune, they had to put the number who ordered first, but one of the leaders put the number last, and he said, "This is not fair to everyone. So go and work in the field on the farm". I went to work in the field for three days, and everyone said, "Bring her back", and then I came back. When I worked in the field, they asked someone to replace me, but the new dressmaker did not know how to sew as well as me, so they asked me to come back. Normally they bring one piece of material to make clothes. If I had some left over, I would return it. That's why everyone knew I was honest. The new worker kept the material.

I was lucky. My son would catch a lot of fish during the war, and I passed some of the fish to the commune. I kept a little bit for me, and gave the rest to the people. We lived in the commune with about 1,000 families. I had to draw water from the well. My son knew how to make the pump, climb up and bring the fruit down for me to make the sugar from the sugar palm. When I made the sugar, I made enough to keep for the family, and the rest I gave to the commune.

Following on from Yiey Serey's words about her belief in kamma, in order to survive this genocide, for some women, the Buddha and the spirits were their only strength:

Yiey Serey: Even though at night I prayed to the Dhamma, my refuge, I also volunteered to die in order to spare someone else from dying. I believe that the Buddha had protected me and refused my many pleas to die.

Yiey Mony: I received messages from the spirits in my dreams since I was very young. I began practising Buddhism in 1979 at the age of 47, when the Khmer Rouge fell. I dreamt about the Buddha, who encouraged me to observe the Triple Gem and practice meditation, which makes me feel better and helps me to keep going.

During Pol Pot, it was important for Yiey Kaliyanei, Yiey Sinuon and Yiey Nuon to practise Buddhism on the ‘inside’. A lot of the time the women’s faith needed to be put aside as survival was their priority, as in the case of Yiey Sorpheny:

I had to work hard so no-one can pick on me. I spent little time thinking about my faith.
The younger women interviewed for this research were children during the war, and have different recollections of survival. Allwood, Bell-Dolan and Husain (2002, p. 450) confirm the additive effects of the violence and deprivations of war act to “overwhelm the coping skills of children and leave them vulnerable to externalising and internalising adjustment difficulties and symptoms of PTSD”. Where the older women saw their jobs as an opportunity for survival with some positive focus, for Yiey Thida and her sister the horror of the war was all-consuming. The following are important depictions of genocide through a child’s eyes:

Yiey Thida: That time, I don’t know, I didn’t think of anything during that time. Day by day, whatever we found, we just ate it. We never think of tomorrow or the next hour. Never thought of anything. Just like a chicken that looks for food on the ground, and they fill up their stomach, but we never filled up our stomachs. So we kept on going like that. If you die, you die. It was terrible. We never expected things like that. And most of the family, they died, the whole family. They starved to death. That’s why we had no hope for our life, and we thought we wouldn’t live long. We thought maybe one day we will die just like one family there. Yes, in our heart, we already prepare for it. Me and my sister were together. One day, we could not walk, we just lie down, and wait for the death.

Yiey Sorpheny: For me, the war made me stronger. When I lived with my parents before the war, I only went to school. I did no physical work, because my mother wanted me to go to school to study hard. My parents loved me. During the war, I did physical work in the factory, day and night. When I came to work here in Australia, they wanted me to work day and night, and I said, “It’s not hard!” When I went to work in the chicken factory, they said, “Oh, this job is too hard!” Lots of people complained, but for me, because of my experiences in the war, I haven’t found it hard here!

Recalling the Past in Positive Ways

Many women felt it was also important to recall positive times by reminiscing about life before the war. During Yiely Maly’s interview, we went through lots
of photos. She showed me with great pride a wedding portrait of herself and her husband, who passed away a number of years after their migration to Australia. Her glamorous headdress included white flowers cascading to her chin on either side of her head. They looked like large white magnolias. Both were dressed in white, and they looked just like Hollywood idols of the 1940s.

Yiey Maly showed me a beautiful family portrait of her children taken before the war. Her sons were formally dressed in what appeared to be white French colonial suits, and her daughters in white dresses with matching big white bows in their hair. Her granddaughter told me she always talks about her two daughters. She tells everyone about them. Yiey Maly pointed to the two daughters in the portrait who were killed by the Vietnamese invasion into Democratic Kampuchea in 1979:

My daughters went to search for food and never came back. They were 18 and 20 years when they died.

There are no words to describe the mixture of great pride, love, sorrow and grief felt by Yiey Maly as she showed me these photos. I had never witnessed such joy, cohesion, and love in the presence of a woman and her family. Such great respect and care was evident and fully reciprocated between all family members.

**Dhamma and Kamma**

The third theme to emerge from the women’s stories about the separation from their past was the importance of the Dhamma as a source of solace and guidance during and after the war, and the purpose of kammic inheritance as a reason for this genocide.

It is vitally important for older Khmer people to piece back their culture, including connecting with their ancestors. I would like to include a quote from Anzaldúa that relates to the yearning of the Khmer to reconnect the previously severed bonds with their ancestors, including and the genocidal dead (Kidron, 215
For Anzaldúa, the rupture caused by genocide sparks a transformative link back to spirit:

Remolinos (whirlwinds) sweep you off your feet, pulling you here and there... home, family, and ethnic culture tug you back to the tribe, to the chicana indigena you were before"131 ... the call towards transformation from the shadow side that the rupture the genocide has created acts to reveal the light.132

Then with feather, bone, incense, and water you attend the spirits' presence: Spirit embodying yourself as rock, tree, bird, human, past, present, and future, you of many names, diosas antiguas133, ancestors, we embrace you as we would a lover.134

In contrast, it is common for authors such as Dannenbaum and Kinnier (2009, p. 100) to label the connections that the elderly have with their deceased loved ones as being “imaginal”, their term for engagement with the dead is a “one-sided” relationship. The imaginary nature of this relationship is nonetheless “intimate and emotively intense”. This type of reporting in part lacks understanding of the Khmer’s connection to the spirit world, and the experiences that a number of the women participants have had in relation to this world.

During the war, a number of the women sought solace in the Buddha, the Dhamma, or were guided by the spirits. Reference to the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha in reference to the problem of human suffering, has been made in Chapter 3 in relation to Theravāda Buddhist orthodoxy. The following is a translation taken from the Buddhist Liturgy Majjhima Nikaya

133 Ancient goddesses.
134 Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 574).
(MN70) in the Pāli Canon, regarding the path to Dhamma that ultimately leads to Enlightenment:

Having grown close, one lends ear. Having lent ear, one hears the Dhamma. Having heard the Dhamma, one remembers it. Remembering, one penetrates the meaning of the teachings.\(^{135}\)

Yiey Serey continued to heed the Dhamma’s teachings, trusting this would assist her through the war, whilst Yiey Lanfen sought solace in the Buddha only at night:

Yiey Serey: At night time I listened for the Dhamma, and I volunteered to die. No-one took me. I volunteered to die every day. Because all my best friends working with me had gone, I asked, why don’t you take me? The Buddha protected me.

Yiey Lanfen: At night time during Pol Pot, I prayed to the Buddha. Buddha helps.

In the following, it is interesting to note that it was ‘the spirits’ that helped Yiey Mony; there was no direct reference to the Buddha:

The spirits helped me to survive under Pol Pot.

The following was Mr. Than Thong’s response when I asked him from a Buddhist point of view why he believed the war happened. His belief is that one’s kammic inheritance must be paid in full:

After the war, I think in 1980, I saw a Khmer Rouge cadre who committed a lot of crimes. He escaped to the Thai border camp and I thought, “Oh I’m surprised to see him!” He ran away and now he can’t stay in this village because people know him, and they will find him. One day, he went fishing. You know, twenty people were there, but he walked amongst them, and a snake bit him! Powerful, poison snake. The snake killed him because he got kamma.

\(^{135}\) Thanissaro (2001, n.p.).
I believe about kamma the Buddha teaches in the bible, because if you do something wrong in the past life, or he did something wrong when he was young or killed a lot of animals, he has to pay back in his life.

The engagement of the women participants with the spirit world will be explored further in this chapter, in particular under Section D: La Transformada.

136 Reference to the Buddhist Pāli Canon.
B) Nepantla: Un Agitado Viento\textsuperscript{137}. Creating Embodied Loss and Grief

Figure 1: Mileo (1987b). Soul Bird [2]

Learning from the Silence: Linking Arms with La Prieta

A majority of the Khmer women's experiences of crossing the border into Thailand, often being shot at to escape the Khmer Rouge or the Vietnamese in the late 1970s/early 1980s, further alienated them from who they were. Those who have experienced this depth of terror would understand it is entering el nagualismo, "an otherworld, uncanny, alien, strange that lies within or parallel to the everyday "real" world" (Anzaldúa, cited in Blake & Ábrego, 1995, p. 19). It is a world that forces attention to different truths and realities. Figure 1 (Mileo, 1987b) is a metaphor for crossing nepantla: taking flight over unknown places and spaces and towards unknown terrains.

In the case of the women participants, to link arms with La Prieta is to make sense of the impact of the multiple oppressions of culture, gender, colonisation and genocide. These act to undermine, alienate and ultimately internalise the shame, grief and memories, which collectively silence the women. Anzaldúa (cited in Blake & Ábrego, 1995, p. 17) advises us that La Prieta has been written for us to learn about and thus reveal the causes of the silence, as we reflect upon:

- what is happening in women's lives, the oppressions, the traumas, but also the positive, what is strong about us, and giving the readers different options as models, the strong woman, the sensitive woman, the intellectual, the activist, the spiritual person, *la curandera* (the healer)...reflected in the wholeness of their being.

Theravāda Buddhism teaches that to reach Enlightenment, "the mind develops gradually, until it is ripe to make that sudden leap to Awakening" (Thanissaro, 2001, n.p.). This is analogous of the path to conocimiento, where the path itself

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138 The brown girl Symbol of feeling alien in a dominant world. Also entering the world of Nepantla.
is the process. In this section of the chapter, reaching the nepantla state is
likened to making a sudden leap into a “hellish” phase of the journey. Being
called to give birth to a new emergent mestiza identity by the wail of La
Llorona is petrifying. It is the choice of remaining the stranger, or choosing to
heal by returning home.

For Those with Embodied Grief

Yes, that’s how it is for us. The genocide lives in us.\(^{139}\)

Frye & D’Avanzo (1994b, p. 94-5) state the Khmer consider confrontation as
being highly offensive, and neither introspection nor verbalisation are valued.
One of these authors’ Khmer informants stated, "It’s best to keep quiet and
keep inside the problems." Linked to this is gkuet cj’rourn, the state of
rumination over and preoccupation with intrusive thoughts and memories.
Agger (2015) reports Cambodian approaches to healing trauma employ
Khmer Buddhist practices to calm their minds in order to cope. Discussion
about this Khmer cultural syndrome first took place in Chapter 6, and will
feature throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Here is a quote from Mr. Than Thong that illustrates avoidance that is used,
particularly by older Khmer women who have sought counselling from him:

When the women see me to counsel them, they do not want to
admit to me that they are troubled. They keep their worries and
fears close to their chest. They hide the truth from me, even
though I can see their problem. This builds and builds until it
explodes internally, leading to get medication or be admitted to
hospital after having a nervous breakdown. This usually
happens to older Khmer women, not the younger generations.

\(^{139}\) Burnet (2012, p. 10).
The following narrative demonstrates how past trauma experienced during the Khmer Rouge genocide can immobilise the women, and thus impact on their health. Yiey Sorpheny attributed the cultural syndrome of gkuet cj’roun as a reason for her friend’s present state of mental health, and the importance of keeping busy to avoid thinking:

One of my friends is still scared and she’s still angry a lot, because she nearly got killed in the war. The guards took her away to kill her, but she survived. She is now a Jehovah’s Witness. She lives in Australia. She has got trauma that has affected her life and she’s still scared. She thinks too much. Her husband is a rich man and he can support her, so she doesn’t work. But I work a lot and I don’t have time to think, so it is very important to work.

Yiey Sokanya’s health is deteriorating, manifested as memory loss related to dementia. For her as with most Cambodian people post-genocide, intrusive thoughts are commonplace, especially in the form of nightmares that lead to panic attacks, fear of bodily dysfunction, flashbacks and difficulty returning to sleep (Boehnlein, 1987; Hinton et al, 2009). Culbertson (1995) reasons that flashbacks of traumatic events are frightening as they emerge from other levels of reality of which we are not consciously aware. Nonetheless, during the war, praying to the Buddha was Yiey Sokanya’s salvation:

I still remember the war. It’s still in my mind. This is about a lot of trauma, because I dream every week about the war. It wakes me up and I start shaking. Three times during the war they took me away to kill me, but because I prayed to the Buddha, this protected me and they released me. But now these memories keep going on, because I remember being on the street during the war and I keep shaking.

For Yiey Thida, loud noises activate stressful memories of the war, and even her children do not wish her to remind them of her past. This was her response to the question, "Would you prefer to live in Cambodia, or are you happy to live here in Australia?"
Yiey Thida: Yes, I do like to go and visit, but not to live. I went to Cambodia last year, and I stayed at my cousin’s apartment, a condo. Just like here, her house is very clean. But last year I heard a bullet shooting from the other side of the river. Straight away I was shocked; I was so scared. I thought maybe something happened like during the war; but then I realised the noise was made by fireworks [she laughed]. I was so scared! It brought back a lot of memories.

Annemarie: What do you do to try to forget the war? Can you forget?

Yiey Thida: Oooh, maybe I won’t be able to forget at all in our lives [hers and her sister’s]. No, never.

Annemarie: Have you talked about the war to your children?

Yiey Thida: They sort of don’t want to know much about it. If I start to tell them a little bit about it they start to get scared and say, “Mummy, mummy, don’t talk about it to me anymore!!”

The following women were directly asked whether ‘thinking too much’ is bad for the health:

Yiey Kolab: I ignore a lot, because if I think a lot I become worse in my health.

Yiey Sorpheny: I think it’s bad when you think too much. So in the war I just thought day by day. Now? Not any more, not day by day any more. When I came to Australia I changed my thinking. I worked, I wanted to buy a house, and I wanted my children to have a good education.

Yiey Vanna: In Cambodia I used to think a lot because I was poor, but now that I am here in Australia, I don’t need to think a lot because I have everything. Now I don’t worry about anything.

Yiey Pheakdei believes she is now free from getting chronic migraines by avoiding thinking too much. The following is a description of her avoidance and coping strategies:

From the time I was a young girl, I used to have migraines. I have in recent years prevented migraines from occurring by not thinking too much. Before I had to take medication, but while in Queensland, I was able to stop them. I stopped them by
withdrawing from thinking deeper and deeper. I was able to control them by stopping thinking too much. I withdrew from thinking by going out, going into the garden, seeing the flowers. I don’t keep on thinking so the migraines have gone.

Before, I needed to turn off the light, and I used to have to go into a dark room, but my brain was still bright. I also use music or TV to distract me. It didn’t matter what was on TV; it was a distraction. Sometimes when I had a headache, the music would make me feel better. Sometimes if the music didn’t work, I tried the TV. I couldn’t move. The migraine was very painful. It used to take me 24 hours to get rid of them. Now I am free!

In order for her to be free from her migraines, she needed to free herself from being in a state of gkuet c’jourm.

**War Affecting Current Health**

Yiey Mealea’s current state of health is an example of the Khmer Rouge genocide affecting the long-term health of older Khmer women survivors, and for this reason the interview was terminated early. According to her husband, Yiey Mealea had a massive heart attack five years prior to her interview, but now her blood pressure skyrockets due to the anxiety and frustration when she expresses what she wants to do in life. This was documented in Chapter 8; and during her interview her blood pressure climbed to 188/130.

Yiey Mealea’s chronic health issues are almost a mirror image of that experienced by Victorine, a woman who had survived the Rwandan genocide:

> Since 1994 Victorine often had episodes when her heart raced inexplicably and her blood pressure rose to dangerous levels. After extensive testing at the National University of Rwanda Hospital in Butare, the doctors told her that her physical problems were due to “psychological trauma”. Despite these

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140 Burnet (2012, p. 10).
precautions, Victorine continued to have episodes of dangerously high blood pressure followed by...exhaustion.

This interview made me realise how vulnerable people can be, especially those with a history of experiencing severe trauma. In extreme cases such as surviving genocide, battling the shadow side\textsuperscript{141} was often a lifelong occupation. Where Yiey Pheakdei had to dim her brain that “was still bright” to rid of her persistent migraines, Yiey Soknya’s brain is failing her:

Yes. I am getting weak and my brain can’t remember properly. I always get lost. A few times I walked into the wrong house, then I stood a while and I realised that was not my house. When I get off the bus, I couldn’t find what way to Essendon station. Sometimes, I wanted to go to Richmond, but when I get off the train, I get confused which way I was heading or where I was going.

When asked whether the war and almost forty years of suffering had affected their health, some women such as Yiey Kolab stated it had definitely done so, and she does everything to forget the memories of the loss of her three children:

I am still reminded of the war. I still have memories of my three children who were killed. This is why I watch these [dubbed Thai fantasy] movies to take my mind off of them, to forget.

The memory of almost losing her youngest daughter in the Thai border camp still fills Yiey Nearidei with deep anguish:

I gave birth to my youngest daughter in the Thai border camp in the jungle. I am still traumatised by this, even though my daughter survived. Now we live in the same house as my

\textsuperscript{141} The shadow side is a Jungian term used to describe the dark and unknown aspects of personality that cannot be perceived at a conscious level. Culbertson (1995, p. 170) refers to the shadow side as a “paradoxical unreality”. The shadow is experienced at a level that is unintelligible to spoken language yet can be deeply felt at times of great anxiety.
daughter and grandchildren. When I gave birth there were
no nurses, no doctors, but she survived. [She cried again.]

Her daughter was cooking in the kitchen whilst the interview took place. She
did not come out to introduce herself, presumably because she was involved
in the business of providing a different kind of parental nurturance that is
necessary to cater for her thriving family.

In contrast, one of the most devout Buddhists I interviewed held a different
view:

Yiey Chhean: The war is in the past. It’s important to give
it away.

Her attitude implies the importance of scanning “the inner landscape” to
which Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 545) alludes, in order to shift from the trauma of
the past to a new way of being. In order to reach this stage, we must confront
our own desconocimiento rather than meandering, almost in a serpentine
fashion, between holding onto the pain of the old and embracing the new. Mr.
Than Thong agrees that it is important to forget the past and the bad, and the
road to be taken is straight ahead:

Yeah ... I don’t think about the bad. I have forgotten the past –
Pol Pot? I had a lot of problems. Pol Pot has passed! Don’t worry
– my kamma – maybe I do something wrong in my past life,
that’s why I suffered for a couple of years. But now I feel better!
I try to help people, and think about what I’m going to do
tomorrow. Yeah, that’s it, nothing about the past. If you walk
backward – you have no eye to see! [We both laugh]. Careful!
The war behind, and car behind going to hit you and knock you
down! Just straight forward!

Mr. Than Thong’s continuing discourse about kamma is strikingly similar to
the following passage by Obeyesekere (1968, p. 21), who discusses that
kamma is the Buddhist law of causation in that an individual’s kammic
inheritance in one life is indeterminate as it is the direct result of past lives’
actions:
In Buddhism ... I cannot know what the future holds in store because I do not know what my past sins and good actions have been. Anything could happen to me; sudden changes or alterations of fortune are to be expected, for my present existence is determined by past kamma (regarding which I know nothing). I may be a pauper today, tomorrow a prince. Today I am in perfect health, but tomorrow I may suddenly be struck down by fatal disease.

C) Un Nuevo Arreglo\textsuperscript{142}: Aggregation: Toward Healing. Creating Embodied Change

During this phase, I use the term ‘aggregation’, which occurs by taking the old and inserting it into the new, creating a ‘rearranged’, hybridised version of Khmerness in diaspora. This phase also leads to the “inevitable unfolding” of the inner spiritual self as a call to action (Céspedes, 2011, p. 77) to create a new way or space of being:

Find the scattered, missing parts of yourself and put them back together\textsuperscript{143} ... by straddling the new and remaining in the ethnic tribe.\textsuperscript{144}

Munt (2012, p. 555) explains the emotional geographies of refugee women and their relationship with space and place, concurrently reflecting “forward and back on their life journeys, real and metaphorical”. This perspective shifts away from the pathology of trauma theory towards “journeys of resilience”, whereby the refugee women Munt interviewed identified “landmarks of recognition” of significant life events. This gives voice to otherwise unheard women and their experiences.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{142} A rearrangement. \\
\textsuperscript{143} Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 546). \\
\textsuperscript{144} Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 560).
\end{flushright}
Dual attachments exist between what life in Cambodia was like when compared with life in diaspora (Parla, 2006, p. 543). The Khmer women interviewed for this research tend to revert back to the set-point of their culture, regardless of how “Aussie” they perceive themselves to be. The women accept the dislocation from their home, and at varying levels identify with being ‘Australian’; however their lives in Australia are very much otherwise.

The identity of being "Aussie" is certainly attached to freedom, safety, material abundance and the generosity of the Australian government in paying them an aged pension. No pension is paid to the elderly in Cambodia. Several of the women participants pray for the Australian government and taxpayers! Most of the participants believe all they need is in Australia and thank the Australian government for paying them the pension.

**The Love of Traditional Food**

There were a number of emergent themes about the relationship of the women to the preparation, sharing and consumption of traditional Cambodian food that involve both individualistic and communitarian values orientations:

*Individualistic Values Orientations*

Limited daily food consumption relates to disease prevention (Frye, 1991), and adherence to the Buddhist tenet of abstinence from greed. Most of the women knew about healthy food options as recommended by their Western medical practitioners, especially upon diagnoses of high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure and diabetes, which were commonplace amongst them:

- **Yiey Bopha:** I look after my diet. Always take care of all the food I eat.
- **Yiey Nuon:** I eat more veggies and fruit – kiwi, apple, orange, banana in the morning. Vegetables.
- **Yiey Chen:** I have changed my diet because of my diabetes. I reduced sweet foods in my diet. I liked sweets before.
The following relates to a common thread of eating a little bit to avoid
temptation, which relates to the Buddhist tenet of avoidance behaviour based
on greed. From a kammic perspective, “greed is the cause of poverty, while
generosity, including giving alms to monks … is the cause of wealth and high
status” (Keyes, 1983b, p. 263). The older women learnt of this practice and
belief in Cambodia during pre-Khmer Rouge times:

Yiey Mony: I limit the food I eat. It is important not to eat too
much food. We even have to limit how much fruit we eat and
to not go overboard.

Yiey Sokyanya: I reduce the amount of food I eat to
resist temptation.

Yiey Serey: The doctor asked me why I limit my food. I do this
to avoid temptation, to control my temptation. This is part of
Buddhism.

In contrast, Yiey Thida, the youngest woman participant, had different
experiences in Cambodia which influenced her present belief in Khmer
cultural practices. She has a different approach that is not based on
Theravāda Buddhist orthodoxy:

I didn’t learn much to cook when I was young. My Mum used to
cook for us. And when I was 11 years old and the communists
came, we don’t know how to cook good food.

Her husband, who was present at the interview, told me that although she
needs to watch her diet, she doesn’t care at times. Her reason is because of the
suffering under Pol Pot which included starvation, so she does not see why
she cannot eat anything she likes now.

Individualistic values orientations also encompass a number of cultural
behaviours that perpetuate the ritual of the preparation and consumption of
Khmer family food:
Yiey Phary: Sometimes I eat Cambodian food, sometimes Australian. I mix them up. But Cambodian food is ‘number one’.

Yiey Mony: I eat what I prepare for the monks: dried fish and dried meat, a lot of home-grown vegetables, rice and low protein.

Yiey Vanna: I cook for myself. Cambodian food.

Communitarian Values Orientations

Communitarian values orientations include sharing of food with others. These values also encompass the sharing of recipes, preparing food the “old way” and a crossing of cultural food traditions.

Mr. Than Thong had said it was important that if the women offered me food, that it must not be refused, otherwise they become offended at the refusal. Offering food to others is part of merit-making, adding to the generosity of their culture. Also, Khmer women continue to be the gatekeepers of food consumption in the home (McIntosh & Zey, 2004, p. 125). At the Cambodian community centre, one woman kindly offered me dried fish, which was really tough and salty, and one piece of sardine-type fish that I was told is cooked over a long period of time with added sweet and sour flavourings. I accepted the food and found the sardines were quite delicious.

Food is the vehicle through which we can understand each other: it creates nos/otras. There is an Italian saying “prima noi mangiamo, e poi facciamo tutto il resto”, which translates as “first we eat, and then we do everything else”. At the Cambodian community centre, the ritual of eating first, followed by playing bingo was firmly entrenched. No time is wasted in between.

Yiey Sokyanya was one of a number of women who told me that in Cambodian cooking, it is important to use the “more delicious and tender” Angkor Laar (Cambodian rice). I asked her if she cooks bitter melon with pork which is a dish I had seen her eat.
The juxtaposition with Italian cooking, using ingredients imported from Italy, plays an integral role in remembering and belonging to a home of the past. In my family, delicious Italian food is ‘in the blood’. In honour of my beautiful Zio Tony\textsuperscript{145}, his recipe for ‘sugo con costine di maiale’ (pasta sauce with pork ribs), always accompanied with crusty Italian bread and a glass of Lambrusco, is located in Appendix 2.

Typically, the quantities are not entirely precise, but I am very familiar with this recipe as I learnt it watching my Zio cook. I adored him, so watching him cook and tasting his food made the pasta so much more delicious. Like the Khmer, we are very particular about the ingredients we use; it is my experience that Italians do not trust ingredients that do not come from Italy. It seems that food is equally as important to the Khmer for similar reasons. I have also included the recipe that was given to me by Yiey Sokyanya, which is also very special: Bitter Melon with Pork. This is also included in Appendix 2.

I was given another recipe by Yiey Thida. This reflects the way she prepares food for her family, such as espousing the use of health-related practices such as using less oil to cook fish. Her recipe is also available in Appendix 2.

Abarca’s (2006, p. 61)\textsuperscript{146} depiction of a conversation between three women describes what it is like to prepare food with an inner way of knowing that defies description:

\textbf{Irma:} The rice needs to be fried, but only until it is light brown. Then, once the rice has reached its exact degree of frying, you just add the tomato sauce and water. Well, you have to know how much water to add, because if you add too much water the rice will have a watery texture. And if you do not add enough water, then the rice will not cook.

\textbf{María Luisa:} How do you know the amount of water?

\textsuperscript{145}Italian term for ‘Uncle Tony’, also known as ‘Zio Totonn’.  
\textsuperscript{146}Reflecting Abarca (2006, p. 61) use of italics for this quote.
**Irma:** Well, I think that is something you learn because I never measure anything. I just add water, and the rice comes out perfect. I guess I learned well. I feel it. I stir the water in the frying pan, and I know.

**Meredith:** You can calculate just by seeing the water, right?

**Irma:** No, I think it is in my hand because I just mix the rice [with a spoon] and I know when it needs more water or when it has enough. When I add the water, I stir it. I know. I don’t know how I know. That, I could not explain to you.\(^{147}\)

This allows for a deeply loved family ritual to bleed into the one in diaspora, with agency, empowerment and knowledge. This is a sensory triumph only known by insiders of the culture.

After spending a period of time having lunch on Mondays with the older Khmer women's group, I wished to reciprocate their tradition of sharing. I decided on one occasion to bring home-cooked European rice with chicken, baked pumpkin and a cob of corn for lunch. Immediately I spooned some onto Yiey Serey's rice without asking her, as I felt comfortable enough with her to do this. I then offered some to Yiey Sokyanya and a lady next to her, and they declined. I added some to Mr. Than Thong's plastic lunch box; he was probably too polite to decline. I also brought in a big box of chocolates, three each per lady. They were very appreciative. In return, I was given some Khmer sweets; green coconut jelly cake, a white rice sweet, and a small sour fruit grown in Yiey Chen's garden. The sharing of food is always reciprocated in this community. Even the women who eyed my lunch with suspicion were grateful for the chocolates, and put them away to give to their children or grandchildren later.

\(^{147}\) Author's original quote in italics.
I intuitively understood why these women had refused the offer of my food and had eyed my lunch “with suspicion”. Mares (2012, p. 334) suggests there is a direct link between “immigrant identity through the plate and the palate”, however, equally as important is the notion of ‘cultural arrogance’. It is understandable to be confused by the “signals, symbols and style” of a different culture (Pearce, 1995, p. 144). Pearce (1995) spoke of the importance of considering the host culture’s sensitivities rather than behaving in a manner acceptable to one’s own culture. I was aware not to refuse food offered to me out of respect for the women, but like them, I did view some of their food with suspicion out of lack of experience with the various dishes presented. Yet I privately regarded my own culture’s food as being superior to all other cultures. I am sure the women felt the same away about their traditional food.

Most prevalent in the Khmer community is the preparation of food for the monks, which also serves as acts of honouring the ancestors, merit-making and worship. On three separate occasions I observed the ritual of the preparation of food for the monks and for feast days. The first time was during Khmer New Year at a Wat in Melbourne. Located just outside the entrance to the Wat, the older women were involved in making a traditional fruit cake, and were very happy to do so. Everything was pristine, and all the women worked with military precision. There was great excitement about the New Year celebrations to follow, including dancing and feasting.

The next time was in preparation for Phchûm bên, where women were preparing elaborate Chinese-inspired nom chang, which is sticky rice wrapped in bamboo leaf bundles. Interestingly, they were preparing food in the Wat itself. Unlike other religion where churches, temples and mosques are used to worship, my experience of life in the Wat is an avenue for prayer, learning the Dhamma, creating a social space, and used for practical purposes such as food preparation.
The food is ultimately made to appease the hungry ghosts, the ancestors of the Cambodian people. It is common for favourite dishes of the deceased to be prepared and offered to the monks, as an act of merit to be passed on to the ancestors. It is unknown whether their parents or ancestors have been reborn or are ‘still in hell’, but offering food during this festival will ease the suffering of their ancestors. A woman interviewed by Smith-Hefner (1999, p. 58) stated that this act of bon (the offering) will also prevent the ancestors from getting “very angry and jump down to earth and curse us and give us bad luck. Everyone is afraid that their ancestors will do that”.

Finally, when I interviewed Yiay Chhean and Yiay Phary in the Yiays’ house, I realise they prepare food on a daily basis for the monks who live at the Wat, including use of a diversity of vegetables grown in limited spaces around the house’s periphery. As I walked toward the house, I noticed a platter of intricately peeled and sliced winter melon, left outside in the sun. Inside, there were bowls of beautifully cut up pumpkin to be used in the steamed pumpkin cake recipe.

These types of observations remind us of Cambodian communitarian values orientation, including strong family and community identity and respect for the ancestors (Kinzie, 1988). This research did not explore the place of food in healing, and adherence to Khmer medical rituals associated with equilibrium of yin and yan balances in food among the women participants (Pickwell, 1999).
The Significance of the Garden

There were several things that struck me about the Khmer women whose interviews were held in their homes: cleanliness and hygiene, hospitality and pride in the garden that reflected their Khmer heritage. There is a joy and wisdom inherent in replicating a traditional culture’s garden as a way of preserving the heritage and demonstrating a reconnection to food, family and the earth.

There were attempts to create a lifestyle similar to the one they followed in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge regime. The women preferred to maintain small vegetable, herb and flower gardens, an activity they consider contributes
to their health. There were also snippets of knowledge imparted during the interviews on the healing properties of some of the plants:

Yiey Mony: I eat a lot of vegetables. I grow my own, which is good exercise. I stop gardening if I get too cold.

Yiey Kaliyanei: We grow two pomegranate shrubs and the fruit is good for cholesterol.

There was regret expressed by a number of women participants who could no longer tend to their gardens. Yiey Kolab pays a gardener to manage her garden:

I pay someone to do my garden. It is filled with orchids, succulents, and some roses. I cannot grow vegetables because I have bad knees.

Yiey Lanfen: I used to but not now. I am too old, because of my knees and back.

Yiey Pheakdei: I love the garden, but now I am a bit tired because I am ageing, and I care for my son and grandson who have autism. I love seasonal flowers because of the colours.

Apart from a reference to ageing, Yiey Pheakdei’s words reflect that her family is her priority over her love of seasonal flowers.

I appreciated the gardens of the Khmer participants, and saw similarities and diversities. The most impressive garden belonged to Yiey Kaliyanei and her husband who were also exceptionally hospitable. Her husband served us ginseng tea in espresso cups. His brother lives in San Francisco, and sent him a tin. In Australia this tea costs $50, but from there it costs $28. This was an important point, and I am guessing, like in many other cultures, buying products at a ‘good’ price is very important.

The gardens represented the ability to turn great loss into something beautiful and enduring. After the interview, I asked if they grow their own vegetables. They kindly offered to take me on a tour of their garden. There was a simple backyard, very tidy and productive. As it was winter, many seasonal
vegetables were being grown, however, there were different types of lettuce
growing in both empty foam fruit cartons filled with soil, curly leafed parsley,
and a very healthy crop of coriander. There was a substantial rosemary bush,
and Yié Kaliyanei’s husband asked me if Italian people make tea out of it. I
replied this herb is instead used in cooking and for marinating food. There was a
massive loquat tree bearing lots of fruit, a mandarin tree with two fruit on it, a
lemon tree behind the cumquat, and a young feijoa tree, a fruit I love. Yié
Kaliyanei was very proud of her red plum tree, and it looked like they had an
apricot tree at the back of their garden. They even grow a very productive
avocado tree which is unusual due to the cool climate of Melbourne. Their home
had a peaceful, calming energy and was full of love. Taking pride of place in the
front yard was a magnificent Cambodian flowering tree. The flowers were just
starting to appear, pale yellow, not unlike a closed frangipani, with a magnificent
perfume. I realise it is called Pka Champa, and they generously broke off two of
the flowers as a gift to me (see Figure 7).

Following her interview, Yié Sokanya broke off three white Calla lilies
growing in her garden for me to take home, very caringly wrapping two of the
leaves around the base and then in a plastic bag so the sap from the broken
stems would not stain my clothing. According to Yié Sorpheny, the Khmer love
orchids and succulents. From her garden I observed the secret of growing
orchids: space and shade. The orchids were nestled between the garage, the
pergola and the house. I noticed the use of space was very productive.

Knowledge of English: The Willingness to Speak

It was interesting to observe and listen to the women participants in their own
terrain, and in this context Anzaldúa’s theory of “geography of selves” came to
mind: the development of identity as a layering of selves made up of living
amongst different communities (Betancor, 2000, p. 238-9). Even being part of a
different, dominant culture, they maintain their Khmer identity in many ways,
including language. Taking an Anzaldúan perspective, it is important for
first generation cultures to resist the pressure to conform to the dominant culture; and like Anzaldúa, the women had varying abilities to use a number of languages, an example of a switching of codes (Betancor, 2000, p. 246).

A number of women have forgotten how to speak English, with only a handful of the women speaking fluent English, but I gather some chose not to speak English at all. To place this into context, Herbst (1992) reminds us that memory problems of older Khmer women were revealed in their difficulty to learn English. Yet, when they arrived in Australia, their motivation was survival, especially to make a living to raise their families. Now Yiye Mealea is unable to learn English:

Five years ago I had a heart attack, but I still want to work. Two years ago, I went to learn English while my husband was working. I cannot do heavy work anymore. I want to work with disabled children, and I need English.

Due to her high levels of anxiety and frustration at her inability to work, she is unable to improve her standard of English. Her husband has retired due to a diagnosis of lung cancer, which contributes to the level of stress and guilt she feels at no longer being able to contribute financially to her family. She desperately wants her life to have purpose:

My sister-in-law went overseas, and they asked me to take their son to school. Then when I went there I saw children with a disability, and I saw the teachers working very hard. And my nephew, oh my goodness, I wanted to help. First I didn’t ask, I just stayed a bit longer. Then the teacher saw I was interested, and I helped out, just one day a week. I realised maybe that is something I could do because I couldn’t cope with my business anymore. Maybe I could change something to do myself so I could earn some money too. I can then help the children too. Two years ago, when I went to English school, I found my health got worse; it was too hard.
As an aside, what had originally startled me was the comment Mr. Than Thong had made when I first met him. I asked him whether the women were interested in learning English, and he relayed their opinion as being:

We are over 70, and are waiting to die. Why would we be interested in learning English?

I would like to place Mr. Than Thong’s comment into context: he was specifically referring to the Khmer women who attended the weekly lunch held at the Cambodian community centre. These women were generally older than most of the women participants and although a number of these women participated in this research, not all of the women were participants. His opinion may be true for some of the women, but contradicts comments made by younger women participants such as Yiay Mealea who is frustrated at her lack of ability to learn English to her satisfaction.

**Keeping Well in Australia**

This research has demonstrated that the healing and/or keeping well in Australia, in particular for a number of the more traditional older Khmer women participants, depends to an extent upon a successful level of adjustment to the Australian culture in diaspora, combined with the maintenance of the values, norms and expectations that are “familiar to insiders” (Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991, p. 225). Lewis (2010, p. 5) finds that Cambodian refugee families in the United States are continually “bending the tree to fit the environment”, yet Gupta & Ferguson (1992, p. 7) assert:

finally, there are those who cross borders more or less permanently - immigrants, refugees, exiles, and expatriates. In their case, the disjuncture of place and culture is especially clear: Khmer refugees in the United States take ‘Khmer culture’ with them.
Theravāda Buddhists are taught to go to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha for spiritual replenishment; those who have converted to Christianity pray to Jesus and God to keep well.

Yiey Serey: I think about the Dhamma only. I think about my breath, in and out, to stop worrying.

Yiey Mony seeks the Buddha for healing too:

It is very important because when I sit down and practice meditation, this makes the mind calm down; because the good, the bad, it arises up in our mind. I believe nothing else. Only Buddhism. To do this way makes me happy, because I do the meditation half an hour every night. This releases all the stress and everything makes me happy.

Keeping well in Australia for most of the Khmer women participants is connected to adherence to Western medicine. They tend to go to a Western general practitioner or specialist for their physical health and wellbeing. North (1995), in her study of Khmer immigrants who settled in New Zealand after the Khmer Rouge war, also recognised that the Khmer access Western medicine in preference to Cambodian medicine. Yiey Nuon gave an example of how the women participants report that they follow Western doctors’ orders by exercising frequently to prevent illness or to improve their health and wellbeing.

The most devout Buddhist women tended to rate themselves as being ‘healthy’ regardless of whether they had one or more illnesses. Yiey Mony, Yiey Sokyanya, Yiey Serey, Yiey Kolthida, Yiey Kaliyanei and Yiey Chhean are all devout Buddhists, and they all reported themselves as being healthy, even though one of the Yieys is recovering from cancer, and another Yiey has diabetes and is on hypertension medication.

Yiey Mony prefers to let go of negativity that may cause illness or insomnia. She simply does not worry:
That’s why I never have any worry or trouble about sleeping. If you think of things at bed time, just let them go. All other Australians, everyone can learn from this. You don’t have to be Buddhist to let go of troubles. Sometimes I sleep only a couple of hours, and then I spend more time listening to the Dhamma talk. When I wake up, I feel fresh after only two hours of sleep!

In her examination of the correlation between health beliefs and behaviour of thirty Khmer refugee women in Southern California, Frye (1991) noted that the causes of their illness were mainly attributed to humoral imbalances, and illness avoidance behaviour reflected these beliefs. In her study, this parallel existed mainly amongst the older women who were somewhat more traditional than the younger participants of this study.

A number of the women avoid being exposed to the wind. A Khmer cultural syndrome called Kyol goeu, or ‘wind overload’ exists whereby the sufferer exhibits “orthostatically induced panic” (Hinton, 2001b, p. 403). Ambient temperature is also important to health. When asked about the Khmer cultural belief that the wind is a contributor to ill health, Yiey Thida replied:

My sister and I have heard this, but I don’t believe.

Yiey Champei and Yiey Channary have similar interpretations of the effects of wind and temperature on health, again emphasising the importance of maintaining equilibrium:

Yiey Champei: I stay out of the wind because wind and cold have flu, and is bad for us. Very hot weather is no good too.

Yiey Channary: I always takes care to stay out of the wind. It is good to keep warm: not too hot or too cold.

In their study on physical activity beliefs of a group of Cambodian Americans, Coronado et al. (2007) discover that central to these beliefs is the importance of sweating. The Cambodian American respondents stated that sweating releases toxins from the body, improves cardiovascular health and is a way to increase energy:
Yiey Channary: Yes, it is important to sweat for the toxins to come out of the body.

Yiey Nuon has a daily exercise regime, and she uses windy days to encourage sweating:

If it is a windy day, I try harder to do more exercise. If you sweat you become better.

Most women in this research also believe in the health benefits of sweating, but state that Melbourne does not have a climate conducive to effective sweating when compared to Cambodia where it is easy to sweat. Yiey Mony has been advised by the spirits that she will move to Cambodia at the age of 85, and she views this as being important for her health:

I walk around the park here in Melbourne but it’s different. I walk just a couple of minutes in Cambodia, and sweat comes out. In Australia, one hour, and only then the sweat comes out. At 85 I will move to Cambodia, because the weather in Melbourne is cold. In Cambodia I exercise and sweat every day, and I will climb up the mountain to be with the spirits.

The following quote from Yiey Channary’s interview is one shared by most of the women, if they are physically able to exercise regularly:

Cambodian women always look after their diet and control their temptation, and that’s why they are living well. This is what the Buddha says and teaches you. This was the same in Cambodia. I try to exercise and go swimming every week – every Friday, and I exercise Mondays and Wednesdays.

According to Yiey Channary “everyone is different how they take care of themselves”. Most of the women take Panamax\textsuperscript{148}, and always bring cartons

\textsuperscript{148} A brand of paracetamol
of it to give to the poor when they visit Cambodia. They take it upon themselves to educate those living in poverty in Cambodia regarding how to take this medication. Yiey Pheakdei explains the way she instructs those living in the Cambodian countryside to use Panamax:

I go into the countryside to seek out poor people, because people in the city can normally survive. I bring about 140 packets of Panamax at a time. The Cambodians love Panamax. The customs department there allow this, so people are free to take Panamax into Cambodia. Panamax is made from ‘Paracetamol 500mg’. Paracetamol is a French word, so they know how to take it. I teach them to take one every four hours. One is enough because in the countryside they never use medicine, so two tablets would be too strong for their bodies. They know how to take herbs though for poisoning and diarrhoea. The herbs help them.

Lewis (2007) examines the ways Khmer refugee elders in the United States use traditional herbal medicine with Western biomedicine in the treatment and prevention of illness. In contrast to what the women participants reported in their interviews, Lewis found that the Khmer elders in her study heavily rely on traditional herbal treatments, and use Western medicine as supplements to traditional Cambodian preventive and curative practices. Although those living in Cambodia tend to adopt more traditional ways of healing, a number of the women participants of this research take and trust Western medicine, even though they have the knowledge to use traditional methods. Yiey Lanfen prefers Western medicine:

I am worried and scared about Chinese and Cambodian medicine because they are herbs, and the herb is a raw material. Sometimes these herbs can cure, but sometimes if it is not right the problem can get worse. Some people use it here in Australia, but mainly in Cambodia. Modern medicine is expensive in Cambodia. Only traditional medicine in Cambodia is cheaper, and they can find it in the wild and in the bush.

Yiey Sinuon’s distrust of Cambodian medicine has extended to her distrust of family. Although Yiey Sinuon’s brother is a doctor in Cambodia, she goes to a Western doctor here and takes Australian medicine:
I went to Cambodia and my brother is a doctor. He wrote a prescription for me but I didn’t accept it because I have a prescription from my Australian doctor.

In Cambodia, it is likely the older women participants have grown up having taken part or observed healing ceremonies and rituals that do not take place in Australia. Also, the complexity of traditional ways of healing in Cambodia are more holistic than the focus of Western medical practices. For example, Eisenbruch (1992, p. 286) noted from his fieldwork of the traditional Cambodian healer known as the kruu, that “three worlds” make the patient vulnerable to illness:

Illnesses from the world of humans are straightforward and include disorders of brain and body, and those brought on by human intervention. The disorders in the other two worlds are more difficult to ascribe to the upper or lower worlds since there is some ambiguity between ancestors, for example, who might usually be considered as belonging to the world above but, in some cases, may more properly belong to the world below, in the company of the evil spirits.

A systematic review on the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) among refugees in the United States conducted by MacDuff, Grodin & Gardiner (2011) conclude that it is important for medical clinicians to recognise traditional practices of refugees, thereby opening up conversations about otherwise undisclosed methods of healing including CAM.

**Forgiveness as a Way to Healing**

It is natural for the immature to harm others. Getting angry with them is like resenting a fire for burning.\(^{149}\)

\(^{149}\) Shantideva was an 8th-century Indian Buddhist monk.
Forgiveness is a very subjective thing, depending on culture and the individual person. So it is very personal for the victims.\footnote{Eng (2010, p. 1).}

The two quotes above are very different in their perspectives on forgiveness, with the first quote taken from an 8th century Indian Buddhist monk. The second quote is more contemporary and diverse in its outlook. As part of the reconstruction of individual and social healing following genocide, forgiveness is considered a social determinant of healing. There appears to be a connection between forgiveness, hope and mental health in the context of depression (Toussaint et al., 2008). Forgiveness is a coping strategy that can act as a determinant designed to reduce the risk of poor health as a result of stress reactions to various transgressions. It is hypothesised to promote health resilience (Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

The notion of healing from the point of forgiveness in the context of reconciliation and healing in peacebuilding efforts remains controversial outside of theological and spiritual contexts. This is especially true in relation to sexual abuse and rape. The factors surrounding the forgiveness of those who committed heinous crimes against women genocide survivors and their families are multifactorial and certainly very complex.

The Rwandan Gacaca village tribunals\footnote{The Gacaca court is a system of community justice inspired by Rwandan tradition.} were designed to enhance reconciliation following the Rwandan genocide (Brounéus, 2008). Examination of the impact of these proceedings upon the women who attended to testify against their perpetrators revealed they were severely re-traumatised by being threatened and isolated before, during and after the court proceedings. The women were left with aggravated mental ill-health and insecurity, and certainly an inability to heal.
How is it possible for victims of major traumatic events to forgive? When introduced to the group of older Khmer women who meet each week at the Cambodian community centre, I was told by Mr. Than Thong that these women must keep busy to avoid “remembering”. On their path to healing is forgiving perpetrators of gross human rights violations the salve that brings these victims peace and then healing?

Forgiveness is not only an individual act. The view of Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) is that forgiveness is essential for a nation to recover from its traumatic past, and that the state of ‘unforgiveness’ was associated with poorer psychiatric health. In Cambodia, forgiveness may be of value at the individual and national level.

The tenets of religion espouse forgiveness. For Cambodians, it is unlikely that the perpetrators of the Khmer Rouge regime will ever be brought to justice. In line with Buddhist philosophy, forgiveness may be the sanction to pardon the perpetrators without denying their culpability (van Oosten, 2008). Moulard-Leonard (2012) recounts her life as a child abuse survivor, and like Anzaldúa (2009c, p. 303), forgiveness that is immanent may be one factor leading to the “the healing of the wound”. Yiey Serey and Yiey Sinuon take a Buddhist approach, and with reference to forgiving the Khmer Rouge, “... you get nothing back” is referring to building kamma for the next life:

Yiey Serey: I forgive, because it has passed. Because if you try to kill him, you get nothing back. Because everything passed, just forgive.

Yiey Sinuon: Don’t kill them, just keep them there their whole life, because the precepts tell us we are not allowed to kill anyone. Just put them in jail and keep them there. Let the law be the judge.

Yiey Sokyanya aligns her views on forgiveness with her Buddhism, which is extraordinary given her great loss:
In my mind, because I strongly believe in the Buddha, it is up to the law. I have forgiven him (Pol Pot), but the people in Phnom Penh cannot forgive him. Pol Pot\textsuperscript{152} is being taken to court at the moment. I had eleven members in my family, with now only two left. They are here in Australia.

Yiey Kolthida had a very generous approach towards forgiving the Khmer Rouge, even though her husband had died during Pol Pot. She saw good and bad in the perpetrators:

\begin{quote}
It depends on kamma, because I forgive. If I went back to Cambodia and saw a Khmer Rouge, I would give money to him. Not bad all of them, but some were good too. Not everyone was bad.
\end{quote}

Yiey Sorpheny can forgive, but can never forget:

\begin{quote}
I can forgive but I cannot forget, because I lost my parents, my two brothers, and I don’t know how many uncles and aunties, lots and lots of my relatives, so I never, ever forget.
\end{quote}

Yiey Vanna took a Christian approach to forgiveness:

\begin{quote}
I have to forgive because God said to forgive in the Bible.
\end{quote}

At one level, these views concur with Anzaldúa’s discourse on either engaging with the oppressor to seek revenge, or to decide on a different way of being. Her solution is empowering and aligns with her inner knowledge, la facultad:

\begin{quote}
But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a dual of oppressor and oppressed...But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{152} In this context, ‘Pol Pot’ refers to the Khmer Rouge.
serpant and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory...The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react.¹⁵³

Notions of revenge were not evident throughout the participants’ interviews, yet for some women it is inconceivable to forgive. This is Mr. Than Thong’s view in response to the question of forgiveness:

About half the survivors of the Khmer Rouge are able to forgive, but others just can’t. Forgiveness is an important part of Buddhism. Often a mother may say “if my son was alive he would be 35 years old and have a family now”. Lost to the Khmer Rouge.

From the interviews, pressure from the community upon those women who cannot forgive was not apparent. The women were adamant regarding their ability to forgive or not, yet I was not given an insight from the field about how frequently the issue of forgiveness in relation to the Khmer Rouge war is discussed.

In Cambodia, opinion among monks and lay Buddhists is mixed regarding forgiveness, yet the general opinion in Cambodia is the perpetrators of the Khmer Rouge can only be forgiven through an international tribunal. The following quote may lend an insight into the culture’s view on forgiveness in the context of the trial of the Khmer Rouge leaders:

Buddha said we should forgive now and show compassion. But the people will wait and decide about forgiveness, depending on whether there is a trial or not. They should not be forced by outsiders to decide.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³Anzaldúa (2007a, pp. 100-1).
The following statement regards Gen, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge war (Hinton, 1998, p. 368):

Some Cambodians, like Gen, say that Pol Pot will be reincarnated as a bret, perhaps the most hideous, despicable, and evil spirit in the Cambodian religious cosmology.

Returning to Cambodia

Under the layers of historical trauma, and despite the visceral resistance of the forcibly uprooted, the "home-land" for many Cambodians becomes a hyphenated notion, problematized by physical and psychical dislocation, by memories too painful to relive and even more painful to let go ... tugging at, and being tugged simultaneously by the bond and the disconnect.155

The question “What was it like when you visited Cambodia for the first time after the war?” had the most profound effect on Yiey Lanfen. I found this very confronting:

When I go back every year, I give donations and money, but memories bring it back. Sometimes I cry in the car because I can see the past. “Oh, my parents passed away here, and my cousin passed away there”. Three months after the burial of my parents, they demolished the land to build a farm to grow the veggies. I don’t know where my parents’ bodies are. I had a lot of emotions for the first time I visited the place where my parents passed away, but I couldn’t do anything about it. [She started crying].

Realising the impact upon Yiey Lanfen, I did not pursue this question in future interviews. It was not my intention to broach such memories with the women.

As already discussed, a majority of the women send remittances to Cambodia to assist family, the monks, to build temples, or to give donations to help rebuild Cambodia. In December, 2013, a group from the Khmer community

centre led by Mr. Than Thong went to Cambodia to deliver $31,000 in donations from a local Melbourne fundraiser for families affected by the 2013 floods. About 190 families who were already extremely poor received 20 kilos of rice, a box of noodles, bottles of sauce including fish sauce, and a box of Panamax, which was appreciated. It was interesting to note from photos taken in Cambodia that one member from each family was seated in rows with their gift next to them. It was delivered to each family with great precision, and there was nothing casual about this ceremony. The Cambodian government invited the Melbourne-based donors to return the following year.

Reflecting a neo-liberal approach that blames the individual, Yiey Pheakdei has her own perspective on why people remain poor in Cambodia, and decided to ask me a question during the course of the interview:

Yiey Pheakdei: I have a question to ask you, Annemarie. How come people are getting poorer and poorer in Cambodia?

Annemarie: Is it because of the Cambodian government, and the country hasn’t recovered from the war?

Yiey Pheakdei: Sometimes it is not the government; the problem belongs to the poor to solve. Some are lazy people, not enough land and no support. I know. Some work very hard. They work to live for one day at a time. No time to grow anything in the backyard.

In relation to Yiey Pheakdei’s statement: “They work to live for one day at a time”, Mam and Murray (2012, n.p.) give an example of life during the Khmer Rouge period:

Like my own father and a host of my friends, many starved to death or died of disease. Even more were executed for crimes as slight as continuing to wear eyeglasses—which signified elitism in the minds of our leaders—or stealing barely enough food to live for more than one day.

Yiey Pheakdei continued with a sustainability-based solution to reverse poverty in Cambodia:
I don’t give money, because money can last for only one day at a time. I donated 25 coconut trees to poor families. Once the coconuts grow and become ripe, they can pick them, sell them at the market and buy rice. I go to see where there are no trees, because I know no well in the area. I built 30 wells to give to poor people in the countryside. I give one well to each family. When the parents pass away, the children still use it.

Yiey Phary’s preference for living in Australia as opposed to Cambodia is summed up very well here:

No, I am here! It is very safe here. No pension; the government is too poor there and are a lot of robberies there. After Pol Pot the country changed a lot.

**Questioning the Faith: Christian Conversion**

Christian Conversion prior to the Khmer Rouge war was unsuccessful amongst ethnic Khmer (Ebihara, 1968). Although Yiey Maly had converted to Christianity (“I am Christian, but I respect the Buddha too”), we are reminded that Khmer women are still the gatekeepers of the Khmer culture, which is imbued with Buddhist guiding principles. It is also a time in these women’s lives to accumulate merit which will grant them enormous respect in their community, as well as positive kammic inheritance in the next life.

Despite Christian conversion, it is unlikely that the Dhamma does not lie at the heart of older Khmer women, as Buddhism is still deeply interconnected within traditional Cambodian social systems (Ebihara, 1966). Even though Yiey Maly had converted to Christianity, she would like her children to be Buddhist. This points to the likelihood that Yiey Maly converted to Christianity due to a sense of obligation towards the support systems that offered new Christians in the Thai-Cambodian border camps the opportunity to migrate (McLellan, 2009). Whilst the laughter and conversation took place between Yiey Maly and her family during her interview, her youngest son took me aside and explained to me the truth behind his mother’s faith that links in with Ebihara’s (1966) research:
She follows Buddhist traditions and wants her family to do the same. She wants us to be Buddhist. She is getting old now and she follows Buddhist traditions now. With her age, she has adopted a little bit of Australian ways, but she brought the traditions here. She always reminds us of the special calendar\textsuperscript{156} days, and will follow them. We just go to work and will then follow her according to what she tells us about the calendar.

During her interviews of nine Cambodian survivors living in the United States, Welaratna (1994) witnessed Christian missionary attempts to convert Cambodian refugees to their churches as coercive. Instilling fear as a subtle form of manipulation for such vulnerable people to change their religion and cultural practices is oppressive. Based upon a Eurocentric notion of Christianity, rather than representing an appropriate cross-cultural hybrid of religious beliefs that supports the continuation of meaningful cultural tradition (Moalosi, 2007), these practices are inappropriate in the context of how Theravāda Buddhism is a way of life for the Khmer.

Smith-Hefner (1994) adds to this discussion by posing the question: what otherwise motivates the conversion of that minority of Khmer who do convert despite the strong Khmer identification with Theravāda Buddhism? Her responses include “validation of life change” (p. 34) and “a notable tendency toward strict religious orthodoxy” (p. 24).

Chapter 8 discussed the importance for older Khmer people to develop social and cultural capital in the Khmer diaspora. Cambodian temples in Australia act to contribute to the welfare of the Khmer (Vasi, 2011, p. 100), however, temples are not always accessible to the women participants. For example, Yiey Chen indicated she would go to a Christian church in place of a Buddhist temple. This is an example of the inability of older Khmer people in diaspora to be able to rely on their families to take them to important culturally

\textsuperscript{156} An annual Theravāda Buddhist calendar which specifies Buddhist holy days, seasons and related events.
appropriate events often due to work and family commitments, or due to intergenerational barriers to effective communication. Additionally, because of illness and an inability to take public transport, they are reliant on others, even if this means they change religious centres. This is also an example of negotiating and resisting stereotyping via ‘self-ascription and personal agency’ as follows:

...acknowledging the subjective perceptions, definitions and agency of the persons who have been assigned labels and slotted into categories, and their efforts to resist and negotiate them.\textsuperscript{157}

Yiey Vanna differs from the other participants in that she has found her truth in Christianity, a different way to Buddhism. When asked whether she prays, she responded:

I pray every day and night time for my health, and I want to see God. I pray for everyone, even someone not living – everyone. Also the government for the pension! I pray, because I believe in prayer. I prayed to the Buddha at the time (during the war). Now I pray to the angels.

When I asked Yiey Vanna if she attends Khmer festivals like Phchêm bèn, her response reflects her obedience to what she is told in the Christian faith:

I don’t go because God said not to attend these events as they do not represent what is real.

In Theravāda Buddhism services, Pāli is the spoken language. Yiey Thida attends a Khmer Catholic mass as she is able to understand what the priest is saying. She could not understand the Buddhist services conducted at the Wat, and her views on living and passing on the traditions are now quite different to that of her parents, who had died during Pol Pot.

\textsuperscript{157} Pallotta-Chiarolli (2004, pp. 294).
Discussions regarding Buddhism and Christian conversion will continue later in this chapter.

**Making Way for a New Khmer**

There was a fundamental difference in belief of traditional ways, including Buddhism, by some of the younger participants compared to the older women participants. Yiey Champei and Yiey Thida were the only participants who mentioned the treatment of women in Cambodia:

Yiey Champei: In Cambodia women are not happy. The husbands need to be honest to each other, one by one.

Yiey Thida has let go of Khmer traditions when she experienced other ways when living in Australia. Her opinion differs from other participants, as she believes her children should decide themselves whether or not they follow a religion, as long as “they don’t do anything bad”:

Yiey Thida: I don’t understand anything. But when I go to Cambodia that’s the way my parents used to do; cook the food, give to the monk, and we believe it, when the monk, what they call, give a blessing. Chanting, that food can, the spirit can come (like our ancestors), then they can come and they can bless their food. Before I really believed it, now not really.

Now I don’t really believe it, because I ... (laughs). Before I really believed it when I was young, I do believe it very much. Yes, that’s the way that you knew. That was the way you learned from your parents. When I brought up, that’s the way I brought up. But when I grew older now, sort of different, different country, and I see different things, different religions.

For my children they don’t believe at all. Any religion. But they don’t do anything bad. They work, they earn money, they spend their money. If they don’t work they don’t earn any money. So they don’t do anything bad but they don’t believe anything. I let them find out themselves because now they believe in computers more than parents.
Yiey Thida and her younger sister are also openly critical of unspoken gender-related violations in Cambodia. Although Yiey Thida and her sister are much happier living in Australia, they are still very much in touch with aspects of the Khmer culture that upset them in relation to the rights of women and children, (including blaming women for marriage break downs) arranged marriages and child abuse. The following is in response to whether it is important that her children know about Khmer tradition and culture:

Not really. To me, they are Australian, they are living here. They don’t know anything about Cambodia. So even if they keep the traditions, they won’t respect it, I know, they won’t do it. I reckon there is nothing worse than Cambodia. Even now I don’t like Cambodia. Even myself, some parts of the Cambodian customs I don’t like, like arranged marriage, and child abuse, and women’s rights; even now there are no rights for women. Even in a separation, they always blame women for everything. Women have more freedom here in Australia. Australian people have different ideas. When you are living around Khmer people, blame still occurs. Still Khmer people reckon it is all the woman’s fault.

As is seen from the above statements, those who were children during the war are making way for the new in diaspora. Zhou (1997) contends that immigrant children lack meaningful connections to the ‘old country’, and consider their new country as their point of reference. They now question the beliefs they grew up with, and as Yiey Thida had commented, they realise that their children are now a major part of the global technological age.

Growing Old in Australia

There has been much published on Cambodian people dying away from home, for example, Becker, Beyene & Ken (2000), the meanings of place and displacement in older Cambodian immigrants, and intergenerational reciprocity in Cambodian groups (Becker, 2003). In particular, the article by Becker (2003) elucidates the findings of this research that although the Khmer social fabric had broken down as an outcome of the Khmer Rouge genocide,
the family as an integrative unit continues its core values of respect and care for their parents in old age (also Smith-Hefner, 1999).

A number of distinct themes emerged when the question “Who do you think should look after you as you get older?” was asked. First, it is common for daughters-in-law in particular to look after their parents-in-law. Yiey Bopha believes her daughter should look after her, but interestingly she believes the local Wat administration should look after her too: “When I come here, some people look after me too.” Yiey Channary is looking forward to a nursing home being built on the grounds of this Wat, and would like to secure a place in the nursing home when built. Smith-Hefner (1999) speaks about the importance of Buddhist institutions in the resettlement of Cambodian refugees in diaspora that certainly have helped the majority of these women adjust to life in Australia.

Related to the theme of being taken care of in their old age, looking after the grandchildren is a reciprocation of being cared for by their children, as well as being a cultural imperative. Certainly, this enables their children to work, so this assists in the economic status of the family (Becker, 2003; Treas & Mazumdar, 2004). My observation of Yiey Chen’s requirement to oversee her grandchildren is further illustrated by Becker (2003) and Lewis (2009), who discussed the notion that loss of power through role loss may worry some older Khmer people.

A very distracted Yiey Chen oversaw her three adult grandchildren who walked in and out of the interview. It was fairly evident that although she had her eye on them, they were looking out for her as well. One grandson stayed during the interview and read the plain language statement in depth. When I asked Yiey Chen about her Christian religion, and whether she goes to Cambodian Christian church on Sundays, her grandson interjected using a defensive tone: “We are not Christian, we are Buddhist”. He then stood up and left. This corresponds to the discussion in Chapter 8 about Yiey Chen’s need to develop social and cultural capital, her difficulty in accessing the Wat and
her ability to access the Christian church. Yet as her grandson confirmed, this family is Buddhist.

Yiey Mony provided a different response to most. She does not wish to be a burden on her family, and feels that they now “have enough”: presumably financially. Yet her future is in Cambodia, where she will have the freedom to practice her beloved Dhamma. Her final comment in the interview made me wonder about the burden the older Khmer women take on for being cared for by their children:

I depend on the Dhamma, and later in Cambodia with the warm weather. I want to raise money to build the Wat. My children and grandchildren have enough. I practice loving kindness, and my family respects me. I don’t want to ask my family for money, or be a burden on them. My independence is very important to me – so I don’t need to be questioned. Many other Yieys do not have independence.
D) La Transformada: Transformation through Spiritual Activism: The Healing of the Wound. Creating Embodied Healing

Figure 8: Mileo (1987c). Soul Birds. “Putting Coyolxauhqui together”.

The final section of this chapter presents the world of the Buddha, God and the spirits as the women participants had described throughout their interviews. In the discussion and conclusion of this thesis, I will then elaborate on how their beliefs have led them to their conocimiento, or keep them in a state of desconocimiento.

Figure 8 is a poignant and symbolic depiction of “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 259), the end point of this period of transformation, yet it marks the beginning of the next period of change:
Dreaming another story, comiencas a empollar otro huevo.
You head back home. Largo camino te queda.\textsuperscript{158}

As part of her spiritual practice, Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 553) maintained certain Mesoamerican rituals linking her Nahuatl ancestry with her devotion to La Virgin de Guadalupe and as a means to rid the pain of the past:

You light la virgen de Guadalupe candle and copal\textsuperscript{159}, and, with a bundle of yierbitas (ruda y yerba buena), brush the smoke down your body, sweeping away the pain, grief, and fear of the past that's been stalking you, severing the cords binding you to it.

I would like to link this practice of worship with a deeply symbolic and spiritual experience I encountered at the Cambodian community centre one Monday during lunch with the Khmer women. When I entered the Cambodian community centre that day to join the women for lunch, they were already seated at what reminded me of a long wedding table that was set up in the centre of the room across from the makeshift Buddhist altar. It was an opportunity to reproduce a sense of place and belonging in an environment that exudes Khmerness. Yet this setting brought a whole new level of understanding to me, as the design of this space was strongly symbolic of the Last Supper. The women shared food in the context of their culture and tradition, united by their genocidal past, positioned in front of the altar. Given my Christian heritage, the sacrificial overtones of their meal made sense to me. Although imbued with their cultural past, they are striving to maintain their faith, and seek comfort from it. They may have already paid their kammic inheritance. Does it matter what path we take, as long as we reach God, or follow the path of the Dhamma?

\textsuperscript{158}Anzaldúa (1999, p. 259): You have travelled far, and the new knowledge gained will allow you to "dream another story". The change for this new story has already been initiated.

\textsuperscript{159}Copal is a name given to tree resin that is particularly identified with the aromatic resins used by the cultures of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica as ceremonially burned incense and other purposes.
One woman bought in the most exquisite spray of yellow orchids for the altar. She bowed several times in front of the altar with her hands joined in Sampeah, and then gracefully added the orchids to the other beautiful flowers already adorning the altar. The other women appeared to pay no attention to her whatsoever, as they were busy with the ministrations of Bingo. This private moment of worship appeared to be observed only by me. Since this occurred, I realised that the woman who brought the flowers to the altar was Yiey Sokyanya, a very devout Buddhist who does not participate in Bingo as this is against Buddhist tenets.

As can be observed from the description above, the Buddha lives in the lives of all the women participants to varying degrees. Some of the women take on the cultural responsibility of praying at the Wat, serving food to the monks and taking part in Buddhist ceremonies. But my interest lies in those women who embody their faith by going outside of the Buddhist norm and speak with the spirits. For them, they have had to confront their shadow side that emerged from their embodied suffering to embrace the change that assists the development of la facultad (Sandoval, 2000; Weiland, 2000).

Events presenting themselves in our lives sharpen our awareness to what we need to do to progress our own journey. Often the traumatic, the unexpected, and the unplanned occur until we “shift” (Weiland, 2000, p. 72). This role is deeply important in the process of healing. Perhaps to heed the call of our inner muse, such as La Llorona for Anzaldúa, is to reveal the true purpose in our lives:

Tu camino de conocimiento requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you’ve programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid

---

160 Your path to knowledge.
(deconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades.\textsuperscript{161/162}

Anzaldúa (2002a) describes her connection with the ancestors "tus muertos" (the ancestors) and "los espiritus" (the spirits) in her writing, and this so strongly corresponds with the most devout of the Khmer women in terms of their celebration and worship of the ancestors, but also those who venture to communicate with the spirits:

By redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir\textsuperscript{163} or share with others so they too may be empowered. You stop in the middle of the field and, under your breath, ask the spirits-animals, plants, y tus muertos\textsuperscript{164}-to help you string together a bridge of words. What follows is your attempt to give back to nature, los espiritus\textsuperscript{165}, and others a gift wrested from the events in your life, a bridge home to the self.\textsuperscript{166}

**In the home – “There is Faith inside her Body”**

When I visited Yiéy Sokyanya’s home for her interview, her living room was a shrine to the Buddha. It was an extraordinary space. There was an altar dedicated to the Buddha to the right of her living room fitted snugly in a corner alcove. She had coloured lights surrounding a picture of the Buddha, and a leaf that I did not dare touch that came from a tree planted from the original Bodhi Tree\textsuperscript{167}. On the facing wall, Yiéy Sokyanya had a framed image of the Pagoda

\textsuperscript{161}Powers.
\textsuperscript{162}Anzaldúa (2002a, pp. 540-1).
\textsuperscript{163}Something to share.
\textsuperscript{164}And your dead.
\textsuperscript{165}The spirits.
\textsuperscript{166}Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 540).
\textsuperscript{167}The Bodhi Tree was a large and very old and sacred Fig tree (Ficus religiosa) located in India, under which Siddhartha Gautama, the spiritual teacher later known as Gautama Buddha, is said to have achieved enlightenment.
Kyaiktiyo in Burma, with a massive golden rock perched on the edge of a cliff, purportedly held in place by a strand of the Buddha's hair.

Everything Yiey Sokyanya had created in her home reflected the mystical and supernatural nature of the Buddha. She showed me a picture of the Buddha's teeth (located in both Sri Lanka and China), and that his bones had transformed into diamonds, gold nuggets and small gems. Reminiscent of the venerated holy relics of Catholic saints held in reverence in various Catholic cathedrals across the world, she also had a picture of a golden casket containing one of the Buddha's teeth. However, her world is dedicated to her love of the Buddha, which I feel goes beyond the usual merit-making activities of Khmer elders. Yiey Sokyanya practices the eight precepts. The extreme suffering of losing her husband and only child to Pol Pot, with a number of attempts threatened against her own life, has left her frail, delicate, with bouts of dizziness and memory loss. On these occasions she is unable to pray to the Buddha. She fasts during the Cambodian rainy season (Vassa – the Buddhist Lent) a three-month period during which she only consumes one meal per day. Yiey Sokyanya commented about her faith:

In my faith, if I don't have the faith inside my body, I can't stay by myself as I am scared someone can do bad things to me. The Buddha protects me. Yes, yes, it's true.
Living by the Dhamma or God’s Guidance

Like a number of the other participants, Yiey Chhean reminds me of Guadalupe, “the mother who will not abandon us”, and the symbol of rebellion against wealth and oppression. She unites all and mediates between cultures, as well as between humans and the divine (Anzaldúa, 2007b, p. 52). All the work Yiey Chhean does appears to contribute to the Buddha, including giving donations to rebuild Cambodia as acts of merit-making:

For donations I give to poor people, the monks, and to build temples everywhere in Cambodia.

As mentioned previously, Yiey Mony and Yiey Chhean are the only upāsikā amongst all of the women participants. A number of the women had indicated that in order to keep well or healthy, it is important to meditate. Yiey Chhean simply stated “meditate”. Yiey Mony expanded upon this, stating the importance of sitting down to meditate in order to calm her mind. For her, Buddhism is the only truth, and it appears from the following words that emptying the mind through meditation is the key to releasing stress and obtaining happiness:

Yiey Mony: I believe nothing else. Only the Buddhism. To do this way makes me happy, because I do the meditation half an hour every night. After that, I release all the stress and everything makes me happy.

Yiey Champei: Learning the Dhamma and exercising helps my mind calm down.

There is opportunity in the following quote to embrace the ways of God, and a number of the women have done this in their conversion to Christianity:
But as it is written, the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard and the heart of man has not conceived the things which God has prepared for those who love him.\textsuperscript{168}

Those women who follow Christianity converted either in the border camps, or in diaspora. Further to the previous discussion regarding those women who had converted, such as Yiey Sorpheny, they usually did so out of gratitude for being assisted whilst in the border camps, or with their passage to Australia:

I became Catholic in the camp in 1980. At the camp, I worked for the mother’s centre run by the Red Cross and World Vision, and the Catholic Church also helps at the centre. There were Catholic missionaries there. World Vision is Baptist, but I worked for the mother’s centre which was Catholic. After that I became Catholic.

Yiey Ponnleu had originally migrated to New Zealand from Cambodia before migrating to Australia in 1996. Her passage to New Zealand was sponsored by a woman named Mary\textsuperscript{169}. Mary wanted Yiey Ponnleu to accompany her to her church in order to be a ‘good Christian’:

In New Zealand, I went to church for two or three months but I didn’t call myself Christian. After then I went to the pagoda, but Mary took me to the church and I couldn’t refuse. Mary wanted me to be good, so I just followed Mary. Mary wanted me to know something about being Christian. When we went to church I wanted to learn, and when they brought the book in Cambodian I still could not understand. I prefer Buddhism.

In Australia, it is important for me to go to the temple and listen to the monk’s Dhamma. When I listen it gets into my mind. I have not been for two years to the temple as I have bad arthritis in my knees. I cannot sit properly in the kneeling position to pray.

\textsuperscript{168} 1 Corinthians 2:9 (Lamsa Bible—New Testament).
\textsuperscript{169} Pseudonym.
As stated previously, some of the younger women started attending Christian services as they did not understand the Buddhist services in Pāli, and wished to receive the comfort that religious messages can offer:

Yiey Sorpheny: I can’t understand the Pāli at all.

At the border camp, it was common practice for Christian missionaries to give Cambodian people a Bible from which to learn English. Their conversion to Christianity soon followed. Yiey Mealea and her husband converted to Christianity, yet her husband attends both the church services as well as services at the Wat. It would have been interesting to explore where his true allegiance lies—with the Buddha, with God, or both:

When I came here, my husband was reading the Bible in the camp because someone gave him the Bible. We stayed in the camp for one year. He wanted to practise English too because the Bible was in English. For him, he studied English in Cambodia, not me. The language of the Bible can be strange! Because he didn’t have any other English book, only the Bible and the missionaries gave it to him to read. Now he goes to the Temple and the Church too. My husband, because he was more believed in Buddhism, because he lived in the temple with the monks for ten years when he was young man.

It was very special for me to spontaneously share my love of God with Yiey Jorani. In her very neat sitting room, everything she had on her mantelpiece was dedicated to Jesus, including a large framed picture of Jesus. When I entered the room I went straight to this photo, and told her I inherited this same picture from my mother, and that I was raised as a Catholic. She immediately showed me a very beautiful large diamond looking cross she wore as a pendant. I don’t think she valued it as a piece of jewellery. It appeared it was her representation of Christ who died on the cross, which I perfectly understood.
Most of the women attend Buddhist ceremonies, and these are perceived to be important regardless of whether they remain Buddhist, or have converted to Christianity.

**Service and Merit-Making**

It is of utmost importance for older Khmer women to make bon (merit) by performing meritorious deeds, known as dāna\(^{170}\), the principal means of merit-making and one of Buddhism’s Ten Virtues (Andaya, 2002, pp. 9-10). It is a means by which Buddhist women can both accrue merit, thus contributing to a higher rebirth, and also improve their present lives. It is a matter of reaping what they sow:

\[
\text{Tver bon}^{171} \text{ ban bon, tver bap}^{172} \text{ ban bap.}
\]

Merits beget merits, demerits beget demerits.\(^{173}\)

As part of their daily preparation of food for the monks, Yiey Mony and Yiey Chhean in particular also contribute part of their pension to buy food. Yiey Kaliyanei also prepares food for the monks, but it is unknown how many other women do so as a regular part of their lives.

Yiey Mony became very animated when speaking about her extraordinary desire to assist the poor and the monks in Cambodia:

\[
\text{I have been back too many times! I bring money there to build the temple, to give donations to poor people - $10, $5 to very poor people. I am happy to give donations to the poor people. The pension I get from Australian government I give to poor people. I am going soon to build another two Monk residences.}
\]

\(^{170}\) Generosity.
\(^{171}\) Good.
\(^{172}\) Bad (evil).
\(^{173}\) Ear (2008, p. 16).
Yiey Vanna, who is a devout Baptist, is the only participant who sends donations to Cambodia for the purpose of building a church in a province in Cambodia. She would like to return to Cambodia in order to “see what happened about the church”.

The Call of Animism: “The Whispering of La Nagual”\(^\text{174}\)

Don Juan speaking to Carlos Castaneda:

“The nagual was masterful in guiding you. Believe me, only an impeccable warrior can do that. I felt very good for you.”

Don Juan put his hand on my shoulder and I had a gigantic urge to weep\(^\text{175}\).

When interviewing the two upāsikā in particular, there were indications that they are naguala, the female shapeshifters who commune with the spirits by using a “… spiritual knowledge system where the practitioner searches for spirit signs” (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 542).

In their social anthropology of ghosts in contemporary America, Baker and Bader (2014) suggest that there could be a link between liminal periods of life and heightened interest in supernaturalism. What is of interest here is the role of liminality and seeking connection to the spirit world. These authors conclude by stating “We argue that the inherent liminality of spirits as cultural constructs accounts for their persistence, power, and continual recurrence” (Baker & Bader, 2014, p. 569).

Although frowned upon by the Buddhist community, it appears the practice of communicating with the spirit world is a reclaiming of Indigenous identity by the Khmer women. Anzaldúa and those who have been a part of the Chicana

\(^{174}\)Castaneda (1974, p. 177).
\(^{175}\)Castaneda (1974, p. 188).
movement were so passionate about developing their own mestiza consciousness through their relationship with the spirits (Vargas, 2012):

At the crack of change between millennia, you and the rest of humanity are undergoing profound transformations and shifts in perception.176

I argue mestiza epistemology provides a method and place for Chicanas to become agents of their own spirituality, creating spaces of inclusion.177 ... (whilst rejecting) dominant religious expectations.178

The only other woman who discussed communicating with the spirits is Yiey Sokyanya. Lanzetta’s (2005) exploration of the inner path of the feminine, a contemplative, transformative and mystical way, also reflects upon the importance of the freedom for women who have been oppressed to “pursue the mystical [inner] center of her being ... integral to her self-worth, dignity, and empowerment” (Lanzetta, 2005, p. 62). For some of the women participants, their integrity and their ability to be fully present to their spiritual life is to maintain their connection to the spirits.

Anzaldúa’s writings concur with Lanzetta (2005) that it is through the inner healing of these deep spiritual and ancient wounds by the forces that oppress women that enable the embodied pain and memories the women endure to be healed (Anzaldúa, 2009c, p. 311). She reminds us that “the prophecies of ancient Indigenous cultures, which predict that the materialistic present cycle is coming to an end and a more spiritual cycle is commencing” whereby we are forced to face our Shadow-Beast, splits in our culture, whereby conocimiento calls us to engage with the spirit world for transformation to take effect. This opportunity is the chance to deviate from the state of desconocimiento.

176Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 541).
177Vargas (2012, p. 5).
178Vargas (2012, 1).
In Culbertson’s (1995) discourse, memories of trauma come from other levels of reality that cannot be detected by the five senses, but by embodied sources such as the spiritual mind located to the interior of the body. These levels of reality come from a space where the past and living in the new present are reconciled; a space of the new emergent identity.

The process of healing never ends; we continually deconstruct and then put the pieces back together (Anzaldúa, 2009c, p. 312). I liken this to locating the pieces of the puzzle across my own lifetime, and the completed picture is the final prize being the outcome of my life’s journey. For Anzaldúa it is the process of “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” (1999, p. 241). Now is the time for La Llorona, the “goddess of origins” and a symbol of alternative ways of knowing and therefore of healing (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 543). It is easier to ignore the call of conocimiento, but for those on this path, to heed it is an imperative. “La Llorona’s wail rises, urging you to pay heed” (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 552). Like La Llorona, the Khmer women may symbolically reclaim the earth deity, nān ganhīn, previously referred to as the symbol of reclaiming the lost female power in Khmer culture and for women living in the Khmer diaspora (Jacobsen, 2008b):

You are not alone; those of the invisible realm walk with you; there are ghosts on every bridge.\(^{179}\)

Yiey Mony and Yiey Sokyanya spoke of their experiences with the spirits at length. During Pol Pot, Yiey Mony pretended to be insane, a successful strategy to keep Khmer Rouge cadres away from her. She also referred to territorial spirits that only dwell in Cambodia. Although she did not name these, it is assumed they are similar if not the same spirits referred to by Men (2002, p.

\(^{179}\) Anzaldúa (2002a, p. 557-8).
Neak ta, arak sruk and arak prei are protective spirits living in the Cambodian mountains.

Mae Chee Kaew (Silaratano, 2009) spent years living in the mountains to enhance her meditation practice. She increasingly gained expertise with the realm of sentient spirits and therefore gained access to non-physical existences. Clearly these phenomena are usually beyond the range of human sensory experience; Anzaldúa (1999, p. 247) refers to this ability as walking “between realities” and when accomplished, “You felt powerful, otherwordly, and privy to secret knowledge” Anzaldúa (1999, p. 249). The following are examples of Yiей Mony’s experiences with the spirits:

The spirits helped me to survive under Pol Pot. I pretended I was crazy – everybody believed it. I used to swear at the Khmer Rouge. They used to ignore me and tell others to do the same. I got away with it as they believed I was mad. My husband was a big chief in Lon Nol’s army. I stayed “insane”. They said I was crazy and to just leave me alone, even after I swore at the Generals. I didn’t care. They killed my husband and four children.

There are a lot of good and bad spirits in the mountains in Cambodia. The spirits live in the mountains there – they are sheltered there. This is why the monks pray in the mountains. They are there because they come from the tradition.

It appears "the tradition" refers to the rich animistic beliefs that still exist in conjunction with sacred mountain sites in Cambodia. The tradition closely corresponds with sacred and cultural sites of traditional Aboriginal groups, and are places of power, approached through rules of conduct, customs, rituals, ceremonies and offerings (Buggey, 1999). The following are Yiей Mony’s experiences with the spirits:
I had a dream at 17 where a woman spirit told me I would pass away at 74. On my 74th birthday, I fell ill, and took a Panadol[^180], I felt better. I am led by the spirits in everything. In a dream I was told when I am 85 I should move to Cambodia. I since had a dream that I would die at 90, and I believe this will happen.

When I was in Cambodia, I was sleeping in the temple. I built this temple, and a group of men were going to rob me as they thought I was wealthy as I wear a lot of golden bracelets. A snake spirit was at the entrance of the temple to protect me and stopped them from entering the temple.

In preparation for her life in Cambodia:

I was able to buy land at the base of a mountain in Cambodia where I can live and pray. I will feel protected there, because if you have a pure mind and heart, the spirits will protect you.

Yiey Mony prays in Australia yet she believes her prayers are heard by the spirits in Cambodia; she gives gifts to the monks and poor alike, prays to the Buddha and dreams about her life in Cambodia. When asked whether she feels different to other women her age because of her gifts, she responded that “other Yieys have limitations but what I have I pass on”.

Yiey Mony recognises her ‘gifts’ as her points of difference, and feels it is her obligation to pass on their benefits to others. Regardless of the criticism she receives from the Khmer community, as fortune telling is frowned upon in this culture, surely her generosity of spirit in itself is an act of merit-making. Her gifts are her capital, and these gifts give her joy. She may have already reached her conocimiento.

The only other meaningful discussion about communication with the spirits was with Yiey Sokyanya. Unlike Yiey Mali, Yiey Sokyanya feared retribution in

[^180]: A brand of paracetamol
a dream in which the spirit of a recently deceased woman who had previously owned her new home appeared to her. Her experiences somewhat relate to what Hinton et al. (2009) interpret as a meaning of nightmares for Cambodian refugees.

Taking a multilayered approach, nightmares may signal that a protective layer of the self is flawed in that weakness and a dislodged soul could ensue. In the case of Yiey Sokyanya, her dream signalled a threat to her security. It was very important for her to appease this spirit in order to consolidate her sense of “ontological security” (Hinton et al., 2009, p. 222). Also, her life dedicated to the Dhamma is her peace, protection and salvation:

I would like to tell you something. When I come first to Australia this housing commission unit was available. The lady who lived here in this unit before went to hospital and passed away. When I first moved in, normally in our culture we have to pray to ask permission from the owner, even though she passed away, so I prayed. Then at night time she seemed to look real. The lady who was a spirit came with a stick and said:

“Why did you come to stay here?”

I begged, “I’m a good woman and I don’t harm anyone. I just asked you before I came here, I just asked permission from you. I’m a good person and I want to stay here.”

And then the lady spirit agreed and said, “Okay, you can stay, now you can have that stick to protect you!”

When asked whether the spirits still appear in her dreams, Yiey Sokyanya responded:

She looked like a bit of a dream, and looked a bit real because I was half asleep. But since then the lady spirit did not come back any more. It is quite peaceful now. I am not scared of anything. I live by myself because I live by the Dhamma.
Summary of Chapter 9

The older Khmer women participants continue to be the gatekeepers of their culture (McIntosh & Zey 2004) although their adherence to traditional ways vary: usually the older participants are more faithful to traditions that are more familiar to them compared with the participants who were children or adolescents when they left Cambodia.

Every participant held family as their priority, with a number of the women more central to the family unit than others (Canniff, 2000; Catolico, 2005; Manoogian et al., 2007), and most uphold their duties of caring for their family. Two of the participants interviewed for this research, Yiey Mony and Yiey Chhean, decided to become upāsikā after their families were grown, settled and prospering financially. Yiey Mony in particular did not wish to be a burden on her family, and although she did not elaborate on this point in her interview, this may in part have influenced her decision to lead the life of an upāsikā.

The discussion of this chapter was framed by the four states of the conceptual framework of this thesis. The El Arrebato phase demonstrated that Cambodia, members of their families, and their cultural identities became an embodied past for the participants. The main themes for this phase surrounded trauma and loss, survival during the Khmer Rouge genocide and the Theravāda Buddhist context for the reasons of this genocide.

Three main themes came out of the research information that related to the second phase, the liminal space of nepantla, Un Agitado Viento\textsuperscript{181}, being the cultural syndrome of gkuet c’j’rourn as a major contributor to this phase. This was followed by and linked to poor health outcomes and memory loss.

\textsuperscript{181} A restless wind.
The third phase, Un Nuevo Arreglo\textsuperscript{182}, is the phase where the women participants settle into the Khmer diaspora in Australia. It is a hybrid world for them, and themes that emerged include: their cultural identity; a shared celebration of traditional food; the garden and its significance to the women; English language acquisition; what it takes to build health in Australia; whether the forgiveness of the Khmer Rouge is a possibility and a contribution to the healing of the women; conversion to Christianity by some women; the younger participants in particular creating a ‘new Khmer’; and growing old in Australia.

The final phase, La Transformada\textsuperscript{183}: Transformation through Spiritual Activism, is considered by this research to be the authentic inner space of healing. For this reason, discussion was centred on following the Buddha, worshipping God and/or the communicating with animistic spirit world.

Given there was most likely more that was not stated in the interviews than what was actually stated, at this point it can only be surmised whether the lives of the women participants are healed at the level of the spirit. Conclusions based on this and other aspects relating to the outcomes of this research will be explored in Chapter 10.

\textsuperscript{182} A rearrangement.
\textsuperscript{183} The transformed.
The following excerpt is taken from Anzaldúa’s (2007a, pp. 218; 220-221) poem, ‘Canción de la diosa de la noche’184. I use it to reflect upon the beginning and the end of this thesis as meeting at a place where paths cross. At the crossroads, we are brought to a higher yet interconnected state of awareness: an opening to a sacred way of knowing (De La Garza, 2013). It is a crossing of borders into spiritual and other realities, individually and in communion with others.

At the crossroads where her spirit shocks she comes sweeping through the night … It begins where it ends, I descend into black earth, dark primordial slime, no longer repellent to me, nor confining. The four winds fire welds splinter with splinter. I find my kindred spirits.

The crossroads analogy has been cited in ancient texts. Reflecting this thesis’ recurrent theme of connection, Rivera (2008, p. 186) compares Anzaldúa’s poem cited above to Proverbs 8:1-2:

Does not [Sophia185] call, And does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way,

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184 Song of the goddess of the night.
185 Hebrew word for “wisdom”.
At the crossroads she takes her stand...

This thesis explored the lives of twenty-four older Khmer women who live in the Khmer diaspora in Melbourne, Australia. All of the women endured the time of 'Pol Pot', and this research presented an opportunity for them to speak about their lives. It was also a chance for me to conceptually frame their stories to understand how it is possible for people to heal from past atrocities that continue to plague them.

This final chapter concludes this thesis with important outcomes that relate back to the aims and objectives of the research. Findings that have emerged beyond the original questions are also vital to this discussion. I would like to add that major discussions of the outcomes of this research have also taken place, in particular in Chapters 8 and 9.

How is it possible for older Khmer women living in the Khmer diaspora in Melbourne, Australia, to heal after enduring great trauma, loss and suffering that continue at an embodied level throughout their lives? It was evident from the interviews that those women who were the most devout in their faith were in a space of healing that relates to the path of conocimiento. The more precepts the women practiced, the greater their coping ability, although this was not the case with some women, such as Yiey Sokyanya who is suffering memory loss.

The responses to the following research questions will be linked to the conceptual framework of this research. The older women often feel 'half-half' in a Western dominant society, and since migrating to Australia discussion of what their hybrid cultural identity resemble in the Khmer diaspora has taken place. They are often oppressed by their embodied memories and abandoned by the destruction of their culture, and they avoid memories of the past by not 'thinking too much'. Their avoidance strategies were also touched upon throughout this thesis.
These discussions connect to the following objectives, being: the older Khmer women participants’ past, including the war; their present, including life in diaspora; what brought them to Australia; their interactions with their families; the status of their religious faith; their health status and what they do to maintain their health or to heal.

What can be said about the participants in general, and what do they have in common? The women have a culture which is steeped in Theravāda Buddhism, the Khmer Rouge genocide, and now life in the Khmer diaspora in Australia. What differs is when faced with cultural transition during the process of migration and resettlement, the older participants tend to adhere to Khmer traditional values more so than the younger participants.

The demographic profile of the participants was highlighted in Chapter 8. This illustrated that an age gap of approximately 40 years exists between the youngest and oldest participants. Their knowledge of English relates to this age gap, where the younger women tend to express themselves to varying degrees in English more so than the older women, who either have never learned English, or are losing their memory of the English language. These two characteristics contribute to the development of the ‘new Khmer’ hybrid cultural identity by the younger participants in particular, as highlighted in Chapter 9. Cambodian people who were children or young adults when they migrated to countries like Australia, or were children born in the Khmer diaspora, are increasingly westernised.

Due to the cyclical, symbiotic nature of the conceptual framework, to apply the outcomes of this research to this framework is neither linear nor straightforward. Although my endeavour is to discuss the outcomes of this research according to the four phases of this framework, it is apparent that the emergent themes could very well fit across a number of the phases. For the purposes of this thesis, I made the decision to categorise each of the outcomes.
El Arrebato\(^{186}\)  
Separation, Rupture, Shock and Susto\(^{187}\):  
Creating Separation leading to an Embodied History

This section relates to:

Objective 1: Exploring the war, health and healing in Australia (in context of a fractured past). The following themes emerged:

a) Trauma and Loss: of Cambodia and the past, and the impact of the war.
b) Survival: during the war and in transit to life in the Khmer diaspora.
c) Dhamma and Kamma: the teachings of the Buddha, and the Theravāda Buddhist doctrine of causation and effect. Kammic inheritance is often cited as the reason Khmer Rouge war happened.

Three main themes emerged in the participant accounts of being separated from life as they knew it, and in the process, having developed an embodied history of their past is still powerfully present. These themes are interconnected and have no inherent order, but I have placed them into the following categories:

**Trauma and Loss: of Cambodia and the Past, and the Impact of the War**

The events of the Khmer Rouge genocide left a legacy of mass loss and trauma: of their country, culture, family, community and identity. The women were separated from a life that once was, and they now attempt to reconcile the past whilst living in the Khmer diaspora.

\(^{186}\)The rupture.  
\(^{187}\)Soul loss as a result of a shock.
Survival: During the War and in Transit to Life in the Khmer Diaspora

Although it was difficult for most of the women to speak about the war, they were content to convey that being seen to be working hard and efficiently, being honest and therefore being liked and respected were important aspects of surviving the war. This was under conditions of brutality, forced labour, starvation, physical and mental abuse, and the execution of loved ones. There was a sense of pride in working hard, and for the women this further corresponded to the strength and survival of their families. Most of the women had their families split up over the course of the genocide, but those who managed to keep their families together developed useful, protective strategies for their families. For example, Yiey Kolthida shared fish and sugar with the commune, and her son made a pump for the commune’s access to water.

As the youngest woman participant, Yiey Thida was a child during the time of the Khmer Rouge, and her recollections regarding survival differed; for her, the horror and hopelessness of the war was all-consuming. In contrast, Yiey Sorpheny, who is seven years’ older than Yiey Thida, recalled working very hard in a factory during the war. This experience allowed her to work hard later in life.

It was possible for one Yiey to recall the past in positive ways by reminiscing about times before the Khmer Rouge, which is a source of comfort for her and her family. Photos of her wedding day and a beautiful family portrait of her children taken before the war demonstrated the grandeur of their existence prior to Pol Pot. Although two of her daughters were killed by the Vietnamese invasion in 1979, the photos represent a living memory of the family that once was.
Dhamma and Kamma: the Teachings of the Buddha, and the Theravāda Buddhist Doctrine of Causation and Effect

For a number of women, the Dhamma was a source of solace and guidance during the war. For others, their strength to survive was linked to communing with the spirit world. These practices were conducted “on the inside” as they were not allowed to openly practice their faith. However, other women did not focus on their faith as other means of survival, such as working hard, were their priorities.

What appears to assist the older women participants is they tend to place the past and the memories of the Khmer Rouge and life in the Thai-Cambodian border camps in the context of their kammic inheritance. Through the lens of Buddhism, they have learned that the nature of life itself is the essence of suffering. Their purpose in life is to do the right thing, but there is also enormous, unresolved grief and memories that cannot be fully expressed or released. Their connection to the spirit world, in particular their ancestors, are important factors in their path to healing.

The next section of this chapter examines the important liminal state of nepantla, and its relationship to change and healing.
The Liminal Space of Nepantla: Embodied Pain: The Space of Unknowing yet the Space of Transformation

This section relates to:

Objective 1.1: How do older Khmer women perceive, experience and articulate their wellbeing whilst living in Australia?
Objective 1.2: How has Pol Pot and over 40 years of suffering affected their health, wellbeing and healing from the past?

a) Gkulet cj’roun (thinking too much) as a major contributor to this phase.
b) Poor health outcomes and memory loss.
c) Stuck in Nepantla.
d) Mistrust.

Four themes emerged in the participant accounts of being in the nepantla state. The cultural syndrome of gkulet cj’roun is a major factor in this phase, followed by and linked to poor health outcomes and memory loss. Being stuck in nepantla and trust and mistrust are characteristics arising from the initial shock of the Khmer Rouge war.

**Gkulet cj’roun**

The experiences of the women during the war and crossing the border into Thailand alienated them from their past, and propelled them into nepantla. This is entry into facing different truths and realities, and leading to new ways of being (Anzaldúa, 2002a).

Nonetheless, manifestation of the Khmer cultural syndrome, gkulet cj’roun, the state of preoccupation with intrusive thoughts and memories, can

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188 A restless wind.
immobilise the women. Experiences such as nightmares and insomnia, panic attacks, and fear of bodily dysfunction are both common and frightening. Loud noises can activate memories of the war, especially when visiting Cambodia.

Avoidance of this type of introspection is important to this culture, and one strategy to avoid ‘thinking too much’ is to ‘busy’. Being in Australia is an opportunity for the women to alter their thinking; Yihey Vanna no longer needs to think a lot as she has everything in Australia. In order to avoid long-term chronic migraines, Yihey Pheakdei used strategies to free herself from being in a state of gkuejt c'roun. Her term for thinking too much was that her migraines were the result of her brain being “too bright”. One of the most devout woman’s solution to ending memories of the past is to “give it away” as the concern is now in the past.

**Poor Health Outcomes and Memory Loss**

Examples of the war affecting current health were evident from the interviews. Unpredictable elevations of blood pressure related to anxiety and frustration, arthritis, memory loss and avoidance strategies, such as watching dubbed Thai fantasy movies were ways of forgetting past loss and trauma.

**Stuck in Nepantla**

In Chapter 3, there was a discussion on hominisation, which is the allied theory to the ‘scattered self’. This may explain why living in diaspora can perpetuate the state of being ‘stuck in nepantla’, driven by the intensity of the initial shock of separation.

Metaphorically-speaking, nepantla takes us to the shadow side from which we often cannot see the existence of light. Mr. Than Thong stated the women lie to him (when they seek his counsel) and in his words, hold their depression and grief close to their hearts. To have survived the Khmer Rouge and life in the border camps, the women must have used enormous inner strength.
Trust and Mistrust

Trust and mistrust were discussed at length in Chapters 5 and 6. The theme of mistrust emerged throughout the interviews, even if inadvertently. This links to Lewis (2007) who states resulting from the ordeal of escaping and becoming refugees in the wake of surviving the Khmer Rouge genocide and life in the border camps, deep mistrust has pervaded their encounters with people they perceive as holding a position of power.

Mistrust may also be due to a well-known fear of authority figures by the women. If they disclosed too much information during the interviews they believe an act of reprisal may follow where they are sent back to Cambodia. This may be the reason that the women did not disclose their use of traditional medicine to me, as detailed in Chapter 9. In contrast to Lewis’ (2007) findings that Khmer refugee elders resisted the advice of American doctors, this study demonstrated the women used Western medicine principally at the exclusion of traditional ways. In her study, Lewis (2007, p. 159) concluded that Western doctors “need more patience and understanding of Khmers’ experiences with Western powers”.

Connected to this legacy of fear and retribution are the participants becoming silent about their knowledge of traditional ways of healing, as for them it has become a symbol of forbidden knowing. This reflects the tale of ‘Prietita Y la Llorona’ (Anzaldúa & Gonzalez, 1995) highlighted in Chapter 4, where La Llorona became the heroine by giving Prietita forbidden knowledge of healing whilst leading her safely back home. The participants’ ongoing discourse about having a preference for Western medicine is in contrast to maintaining Indigenous ways of knowing and healing (Anzaldúa & Gonzalez, 1995).

I share Lewis’ (2007) belief that in order for Khmer elders to impart their knowledge, beliefs and behaviours surrounding their health management, building trust and rapport is vital in the first place.
Towards Aggregation, Towards Healing: Embodied Change.

Objective 2: Being Khmer in Australia

Objective 2.1: To explore whether the women participants regularly practice traditions based on their Khmer culture (e.g., rituals associated with their religion, Chbap Srei, Buddhism), which link them to the strong threads of culture that they identified with in Cambodia.

Objective 2.2: What is the role of older Khmer women in the transmission of sociocultural aspects of Khmer traditions (e.g., culture, values and rituals) to future Khmer generations in Australia and Cambodia?

Objective 3: The women’s relationship to their families

Objective 3.1: To ascertain which aspects of the Khmer culture and traditions, including values and rituals, must future Khmer generations in Australia and Cambodia continue, and who in their culture is responsible for passing the culture on to these generations?

Objective 3.2: Are they able to care for themselves, and if not, who is responsible for caring for them?

Objective 4: Where is ‘home’ for the women, and are transnational relationships and connections to Cambodia important to them?

Objective 4.1: Do they call Australia ‘home’, or is Cambodia their true home, and if they had a choice, where would they live? Is life in Australia comfortable for them?

Objective 4.2: How do these women maintain transnational relationships with family and social networks in their home country, and does this influence their wellbeing?

a) Being “Aussie”.
b) The Celebration of Traditional Food.
c) The Significance of the Garden.
e) Keeping Healthy in Australia.
f) Forgiveness as a Path to Healing.
g) Questioning the Faith: Conversion to Christianity.
h) Making Way for a New Khmer.
i) Growing Old in Australia: The Cost of Being Cared.

189 A rearrangement.
This third phase represents where the hybrid world of diaspora is entered into and life continues to change for the women participants.

Older Khmer women in Australia are the creators of ethnic boundaries, with some having a “gate-keeping function protecting ethnically generated resources”, while others have a “bridging function encouraging greater intergroup association” (Cornell, 1996; McIntosh & Zey, 2004; Sanders 2002, p. 348). However, their adherence to traditional ways vary: usually the older participants are more faithful to traditions that are more familiar to them compared with the participants who were children or adolescents when they left Cambodia.

Two of the participants interviewed for this research, Yiey Mony and Yiey Chhean, decided to live their lives as upāsikā, the Khmer term for female lay devotee, after their families were grown, settled and prospering financially. Yiey Mony in particular did not wish to be a burden on her family, and although she did not elaborate on this point in her interview, this may have influenced her decision to lead the life of an upāsikā.

In the Khmer diaspora, do women remain subordinated or use their collective voices as an act of decolonialism, thus transcending culturally created norms? The expectation for women to fulfil traditional roles that tie them to domestic rather than national concerns are changing, particularly since Cambodian women have been required to undertake employment for the survival of the family. The younger participants leave it up to their children to make choices about the personal religious and cultural directions they wish to take in their lives: provided they are good people, do no wrong, and are able to support themselves financially. For example, Yi ey Pheakdei believes it is very important for her children to embrace the freedom to make their own decisions in life.
A number of themes emerged in the participant accounts of building a life and home in diaspora, indicating a hybrid world for most since leaving Cambodia and/or the border camps.

**The ‘New Aussie’**

Although most of the women consider themselves “Aussie”, some still label themselves “Khmer”, or the hyphenated “Khmer-Australian”. There are also “New Zealander-Australian” and “Khmer-Chinese”. This is an interesting shift in cultural identity. Dual attachments exist between their homeland and life in diaspora, yet their connection to being ‘Aussie’ is to do with freedom, safety, material abundance, and the Australian aged pension.

**The Celebration of Traditional Food**

The preparation and consumption of traditional Khmer and Chinese food were linked to both individualistic and communitarian values orientations.

Individualistic food values are based on disease prevention (choosing what are considered healthy food options) coupled with adhering to the Buddhist tenet of avoiding greed and temptation by eating small amounts. Yet the youngest woman participant believes that she should eat what she wants – with some modifications for healthy eating – as she was starving during the war.

Communitarian food values involve the ritual of preparing and consuming Khmer food with their families and for the monks, thus maintaining their tradition of sharing. This involves the sharing of recipes, preparing food in traditional ways, but for some crossing cultural food traditions in order to cook food using Western ways, in particular for their children. Having been brought up in an Italian household in diaspora, I understood many commonalities between traditions, such as the importance of using Khmer ingredients, using recipes with unknown quantities, and the importance of eating first before anything else is accomplished.
What differs between the traditions I am familiar with and those practiced by the Khmer relates to the preparation of food for the monks, through which is also a means of offering food to the ancestors. This is connected to both merit-making and worship, and food prepared and offered at festivals such as Phchûm bèn are for appeasing hungry ghosts which are the ancestors of the Khmer people.

The Significance of the Garden

There was a commonality across a majority of the households in which the interviews took place: cleanliness, hygiene, hospitality and pride in the garden in which Cambodian plants are commonplace. This is also a means of reconnection: to growing food and connection to the earth.

Most of the women maintained small vegetable, fruit, herb and flower gardens. Several woman who had physical ailments such as arthritis either employed a gardener or called on family members for the upkeep of the garden. A number of the women consider the garden contributes to good health. It is also an opportunity of turning their loss into something beautiful and enduring. I learnt of the Khmer love of orchids and succulents, and was the recipient of beautiful flowers from the gardens of several of the women participants.

The Knowledge of English: The Willingness to Speak

Although a number of the women had once learnt English, their ability to speak English has largely been forgotten. Still for some this is a source of frustration, and according to Mr. Than Thong, others “are waiting to die so why would they be interested in learning English?”

Keeping Well in Australia

Those women practising both Buddhist and/or Christian faith devote their prayers to good health, including to stop worrying. Of interest was that most of the devout Buddhist women in particular rated themselves as ‘healthy’, regardless of whether they had one or more chronic illnesses. A number of
other women participants rated themselves as ‘unhealthy’, and some directly attributed their health condition to their experiences throughout the Khmer Rouge genocide.

However, the discussion by the women focused largely on their adherence to Western medicine in preference to the Cambodian humoral medical model. One of the women admitted to being fearful of taking Khmer or Chinese herbs, as if not taken correctly, these may exacerbate the health issue.

Related to Khmer cultural beliefs, a number of the women state that being in the wind and extremes in ambient temperature are related to ill health. Other women find sweating to be an important contributor to good health. In contrast, the younger Yieys do not believe in cultural syndromes contributing to health outcomes.

When visiting Cambodia, a majority of the women bring cartons of Panamax to distribute to the poor. They believe it is their duty to educate the recipients of this medication, its dosage and when it is appropriate to take.

Forgiveness as a Path to Healing

Connections have been made between forgiveness and healing, nonetheless this is complex in relation to genocide survivors. Anzaldúa (2009c, p. 303) states that forgiveness contributes to the “healing of the wound”. The more devout women are able to forgive, otherwise not forgiving will contribute to negative kamma. One Yiey forgives, but stated it is not possible for those in Phnom Penh to forgive Pol Pot. Yiey Kolthida suggested that “not everyone was bad” during the war, one Yiey forgives but cannot forget, and another Yiey is able to forgive as “God said to forgive in the Bible”. There are other women participants who cannot forgive regardless of what Buddhist tenets advise.

Returning to Cambodia

Discussing returning to Cambodia was both profound, emotive and confronting. It pronounced the irretrievable changes experienced, where the
both the physical and psychical dislocations between past and present are too painful to relive, yet even more painful to let go (Um, 2006, p. 90). For Yiey Lanfen, her return to Cambodia was marked by a sense of hopelessness at not being able to locate where her parents were buried.

The participants either send remittances to family in Cambodia, or to assist the monks to build temples by giving donations to rebuild Cambodia. Yiey Pheakdei was adamant that sustainable measures need to be employed to reverse the trend of poverty in Cambodia, including building wells and donations of coconut trees to poor families, whereby they can in turn sell the coconuts at the market to buy rice. Yiey Phary wishes to remain in Australia where she feels safer, is provided for, and no longer considers Cambodia as a safe place.

**Questioning the Faith: Conversion to Christianity**

The women who had converted to Christianity did so as either a gesture of thanks to those people who had assisted their passage to Australia, or that their social and emotional needs were fulfilled by attending Christian services. Some women were Christian ‘on the outside’, whereby their allegiance was to the Buddha. Several women such as Yiey Vanna did not elaborate upon why she converted to Christianity, yet she made it clear that she was dutiful to God.

Nonetheless, visiting the Catholic mass in honour of Phchûm bën was a testament that Buddhist and Khmer cultural traditions are intertwined with Christian orthodoxy.

**Making Way for a New Khmer**

The age range across the participants indicated that the older participants generally wished to embrace the traditions of the past, yet this was not necessarily the case with the younger Yiey participants. The younger women tended to be more openly critical of issues relating to social justice, including the rights of women and children in Cambodia. Life in Australia is now their
main point of reference, and their children have the freedom to choose their religion, provided they ‘do good’ and have the capacity to be financially independent. The ‘new Khmer’ corresponds to the transformation of Cambodian culture in future generations, which is fuel for future research.

**Growing Old in Australia: The Cost of Being Cared**

The family continue to be a core unit for all the women participants, and respect and care for parents in old age appears to be a strong consideration in the Khmer diaspora. Some women believe their families should care for them, yet others do not wish to be a burden on their families, so consider the Wat community should care for them in their old age. Apart from enacting their Buddhist faith, Yiey Mony and Yiey Chhean may have become lay devotees so that they are cared for by the Wat, but equally contribute to its community.

The cost for being cared for has a cultural imperative, but there is the expectation of reciprocity, as by caring for the grandchildren, they enable their adult children to work.

Ultimately, they call Australia ‘home’, and most do not wish to live in Cambodia. There is a recurrent belief that the war may resume, or that Cambodia is a corrupt country, which is why they prefer the security of life in the Khmer diaspora. Overwhelmingly, appreciation for the Australian government paying them a pension was very evident. As mentioned earlier, most of the participants continue ties with Cambodia by either sending donations, or visiting and assisting the redevelopment of the country.

Objective 4.3: How do they express their Buddhist faith whilst in Australia and in Cambodia, and is this more important towards the end of life?

a) In the Home: “There is faith inside her body”: how one woman in particular has developed a shrine to the Buddha in her home.
b) Living by the Dhamma or with God’s guidance: how the Dhamma or God contributes to these women’s healing in diaspora.
c) Service and Merit-Making: how important is the Buddhist tradition of merit making in the lives of the women?

The final phase, La Transformada: Transformation through Spiritual Activism, is considered by this research to be the authentic inner space of healing. For this reason, discussion was centred on following the Buddha, worshipping God and communicating with the animistic spirit world. The following are themes that emerged from the interviews with regard to faith, merit-making and animism. For a number of the women who are still Buddhist, communicating with the spirits is central to their faith.

For most of the Khmer women interviewed, the social fabric of their lives is still imbued to varying degrees with Theravāda Buddhist orthodoxy, regardless of whether they had converted to Christianity or have no religion. This ranges from making merit and praying to the Buddha, the ancestors and the spirits, to wishing to learn from Christian services, as the spoken Pāḷi texts from the Theravāda tradition are unintelligible for younger participants in particular. Even with no religion, it is important for Yiey Kolab to follow the

\[190\] The transformed.
cultural practice of praying to her ancestors. The remaining participants wished to find meaning in life and to learn from the sacred.

The older participants are entrenched in the Dhamma and in many ways follow the traditions of old as their culture had dictated. They aim to perpetuate Buddhist and Khmer rituals and ways of life, in particular through their families. Most of the women and their families attend the important Buddhist festivals and special days held at the Wat. McLellan and White (2015) advance that the development of spirit-based capital is an important compensatory role for first-generation Cambodian and Lao Buddhist communities in Ontario, yet attending the Buddhist festivals and special days also build their social, cultural and religious capital.

**In the Home: “There is faith inside her body”**

Symbolically, Yiey Sokyanya created a powerful space of prayer, having transformed her home into an almost magical world mirroring her deep piety for the Buddha. She acknowledges that if she did not have faith inside her body, she would not survive. Her inner life has become her refuge, reflective of developing an inner space of healing.

**Living by the Dhamma or with God’s Guidance: How the Dhamma or God contributes to these women’s healing in diaspora**

Reflective of Buddha’s tenets, meditation was noted as being important to health, and prayer was particularly important for the Christian participants. This all corresponds with the meditation, prayer and devotional practice by Anzaldúa (2015, p. 173), which became more consistent the year prior to her death.
Service and Merit-Making: How important is the Buddhist tradition of merit-making in the lives of the women?

Meritorious deeds, including making merit, is definitely important for the older participants. The ultimate purpose is to improve their present lives as well as evolve the kammic inheritance in their next life. For the Buddhist women, preparing food for the monks and sending donations to Cambodia for the purposes of building temples and assisting the monks were at the forefront of their merit-making activities. The Christian women also sent donations to Cambodia, but for them, it was to build Christian churches or to assist the poor.

The Call of Animism: “The Whispering of La Naguala” – Listening to the Spirits

For a number of the older Buddhist participants, communicating with the spirits is central to their faith and healing. The spirit world did not arise in conversations with Christian participants, though further investigation may reveal otherwise. This thesis concludes that although animistic practices are in opposition to gender expectations of women by the Khmer culture, their practice of communicating with the spirit world is in part a reclamation of their Indigenous identity and the power of the feminine by the Buddhist women.

Authors such as Baker and Bader (2014) link liminality with seeking connection to the spirit world, corresponding to being in nepantla. This ability enables the women to shift beyond the oppressive structures in Buddhism and their culture, allowing them to reclaim their own space of healing. Yiery Mony yearns for the time when she is able to reconnect with “the tradition”, being the sacred animistic mountain sites in Cambodia.

Goddesses Found

The assumption that the women had lost their power before and during the Khmer Rouge genocide does not hold much credence at the level of the spirit.
Jacobsen (2008a, p. 286) argues that although pre-Khmer Rouge gender roles given to Cambodian women were steeped in powerlessness and subservience, at the level of the spirit the presence of female power continues to be unbroken over time. Jacobsen (2008c) gives the example of the supernatural significance of women in the cult of kanlong kamraten an\textsuperscript{191}, and the many neak ta\textsuperscript{192} and brai\textsuperscript{193}, who remain firmly engrained in the lives of most Cambodian people today.

**Solidarity through Silence**

Given silence is their agency, what do the women participants reveal through the interview process that agrees with or contradicts the conceptual framework of this research?

The women fiercely protect their past in silent ways, and it is likely that less rather than more was revealed during the interviews. This thesis has demonstrated the presence of stressful memories that tend to plague the older Khmer women, including memory loss, insomnia, dementia and mental illness, yet the women do not espouse victimhood. From my observations, their pain remains private, yet the Khmer use public means to acknowledge the past, to honour those they have lost, and for those for whom the Khmer culture and associated traditions are important to continue their practice. For example, festivals such as Phchûm bën not only honour their ancestors, but also are a means of building social and cultural capital for the Khmer in diaspora. This is important as this community does what it can to both build and recover resources, and enable its own diasporic community to act on behalf of those in Cambodia who remain in abject poverty.

\textsuperscript{191}Title given to deceased women of the royal family during the Angkor period.
\textsuperscript{192}Ancestor spirits.
\textsuperscript{193}Ghosts of dead women.
La Transformada: The Purification of Memory

Buddhist principles propose suffering is the expected order of life (Bit, 1991d). This links to the discussion in this chapter under “Assembling a New Khmer in Diaspora” that relates to some of the older women’s proposals that the suffering they have endured in life is related to their kammic inheritance. Yet, the Khmer culture has not provided socially acceptable ways of expressing and releasing anger and frustration, supported by the belief that such emotions do not fit with Buddhist principles (Sareth et al., 2012).

To what extent it is possible for these women to place their past entirely within the domain of their kammic inheritance, therefore, remains unclear. A clue may be in their ability to forgive and accept the past.

Their survival of the present is linked to releasing the memories of the past, avoidance of gkuet cj’rourn, and finding salvation in the worship of their beloved Buddha or God. This is part of an inner awakening of the self whilst following the Dhamma, which gives them renewed hope in their next incarnation. The state of gkuet cj’rourn contrasts with the Buddhist practice of Anattā, the Buddhist self-emptying doctrine of non-self, the path to liberation and enlightenment. Gkuet cj’rourn sits in the liminal borderland between developing and retaining embodied suffering, or healing, and this in itself is explained so well by Frye (1991) as being rooted in Buddhist beliefs. North’s (1995) observation of gkuet cj’rourn is really the Khmer term for mental illness. I have related gkuet cj’rourn to the state of desconocimiento. The ravages of memory permeate into the present, and redemption through Buddhist or Christian practice appears to hold a key to healing. It is important for this research to at least introduce the idea that for Khmer genocide survivors, by releasing memory and redefining the self through the Buddhist practice of Anattā, “the purification of memory”, unshackles the limiting and destructive powers that deeply traumatic memories hold (FitzGerald, 2013, p. 22).
It is not within the scope of this thesis to explore at any depth the relationship between Christian contemplative prayer (kenosis) and Buddhist prayer (Anattā), however, as this discussion is pointing towards communion with others, it is important to note that a key connection between Christianity and Buddhism involves the emptying of the self. FitzGerald (2013) draws on the work of Lanzetta (2005), who takes a radical feminist theological approach called via feminina, the way of St. Teresa of Avila, which is a:

...radical emptying out of woman’s constructed selfhood (that) is so profoundly united with the kenosis of Jesus, this dispossession in the feminine memory effects a solidarity that reaches far beyond the personal into the communal, into the souls of all women; then deep into the human spirit. ¹⁹⁴

This is what may be the way back home and the way to healing for women who have endured unimaginable trauma, whether Buddhist or Christian. Nevertheless, I acknowledge there are many people with neither religious faith, practice nor share an identification with spiritual life, for which healing in this context may be incompatible. Nonetheless, this research is based upon Anzaldúa’s spiritual practice of reclaiming the Indigenous that intersects with the wisdom of Christianity and Buddhism. It is about crossing bridges to develop mestiza consciousness, where embodied pain and memory truly lead to salvation and the creation of connection.

**To Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness: An Inevitable Unfolding**

The previous section demonstrated from religious perspectives how change can occur. The following section returns to the role of the spirits when discussing her process of writing, Anzaldúa calls for the assistance of both inner and outer “guides“ who have access to la facultad:

¹⁹⁴ FitzGerald (2013, p. 29).
I don’t write in a vacuum. I have helpers, guides from both the outer realm like my writing comadres and invisible ones from the inner world. I write in-community even when I sit alone in my room. Whatever I do I have to put my trust in a deeper order, an unknowable trapo (fabric) of divine and creative plan. I must trust in unseen helping guides, must surrender to the mysterious forces that guide me. I rely on the part of myself that has this ability to connect with these forces, to the imaginal world. I call this daimon "la naguala". I rely on others who access esta facultad.\(^\text{195}\)

The conceptual framework generally traced the journey of the women from separation to their lives in diaspora. Due to their silence and mistrust, it can only be surmised that their healing is achieved at the level of the spirit. Further research needs to be conducted to conclude whether they believe that healing occurs at this level, or whether their embodied pain, their wound, cannot generally be healed. From Anzaldúa’s writings, I was at least able to approximate the women’s journey to healing through the world of the spirit. Nevertheless, I believe this research has contributed to new ways of viewing healing, and to their sacred tapestry.

Even so, the conceptual framework may well be on the right track. Towards the end of Chapter 2, there was a depiction of King Norodom Sihanouk and Pol Pot as the trickster and buffoon. Kent (2008) interviewed two Cambodian women: one a lay woman, and one a lay nun about their views on the religious revival in Cambodia, post-Khmer Rouge. Their central focus was a return to the royal state of kingliness, being a return to spiritual order and cosmic balance in Cambodia. One of the women, Sophea, spoke of the state of Cambodia and its lack of wise leadership:

\[
\text{duped by tricksters, unvirtuous leaders give away Cambodia's riches and, with it, her integrity. (The women) see their world being dismembered...it is only when the leader...submits to}
\]

\(^{195}\) Anzaldúa et al. (2003, p. 19).
the powers of the earth and spirits that his power will be life-sustaining and legitimate.196

Enabling Resistance in the New Khmer

Masculine authority is a “paradox of doxa” (Bourdieu, 2001, cited in Jacobsen, 2008a, p. 287). Its “domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices” easily perpetuate itself, despite outcomes of intolerable conditions of existence that can be mistaken for being an acceptable culturally created norm. Ledgerwood (1994) writes of Khmer changing views of gender as an overall part of cultural change. Regarding Cambodia, Roeun (2004, p. 74) states:

If people still keep the old ideas that women should adhere to the code of women’s conduct which was composed in the 19th century or before, then it will be difficult to improve women’s status. Men have to recognize women’s rights as well as women’s duties at home.

The destabilisation of fixed cultural standpoints makes way for new hybrid identities. Regardless of the extent to which the women uphold the traditions of old, all the participants are to lesser or greater ways involved in creating the new hybrid Khmer identity. This is possible as former cultural frames of reference have become incompatible with new ways post-genocide (Koegeler-Abdi, 2013, p. 74). It is unclear whether Mr. Than Thong maintained fixed cultural and gendered standpoints throughout the fieldwork. This is fuel for future research.

Is the challenging of old beliefs part of the process of deconstruction of colonialist and oppressive practices, of reclaiming and rebuilding the self?

Using the Republic of Botswana as an example, Moalosi (2007) recognises that building postcolonial cultures involves the recognition of Indigenous ontology in the construction of hybrid cultures.

**Relating to the Definition of Healing (Anzaldúa)**

Reflecting upon the definition of healing outlined in Chapter 4, the outcomes of the research correspond with desconocimiento linked to poor health and conocimiento to healing. Living in diaspora, a number of the women appear to have learnt to live with disease and dysfunction. It is a reformation of scattered energy and soul loss at the moment of separation, akin to “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 241). It is the inner life force that enables us to heal, and act on others’ behalf to also heal.

This definition of health uses a different paradigm based on resistance to outdated, oppressive ways. Radical transformations are able to be made, initially linked to inner change, redeeming our “most painful experiences” by “shaping new dialogues” (Keating & González-López, 2011, p. 2). The women participants prefer Western medicine to traditional ways of healing. Ultimately, this can be construed as using resistance in the context of Anzaldúa’s definition of health. It is also part of the new Khmer hybridised version of health and healing that is being developed in diaspora.

**Appropriate Health Practice and Methodologies for Sensitive Research**

I would like to place the outcomes of this section of the chapter into the context of health policy and practice, health education, and academia. The importance of understanding tradition, cultural differences, religion and spirituality in cross-cultural health and end-of-life care particularly for migrant, refugee and asylum seeker populations cannot be underestimated. The understanding of individual and community centred religious practices by health care providers is strongly encouraged.
Based on the process and outcomes of this research married with related findings from the research literature, I would like to make propositions and recommendations for future research with highly sensitive populations. These health propositions, procedures and practices regard current and future asylum seeker, refugee and migrant health, and by aligning Anzaldúa’s work within academia involves the application of Anzaldúan epistemology.

Ultimately, I am referring to feminist transitional justice research (Henry, 2016), using cultural understandings and Anzaldúan epistemology to deconstruct oppressive dominant discourses to create new, postcolonial paradigms. In Chapter 4, Anzaldúa’s ‘Assumptions’ were detailed: to deconstruct gender norms, that time is gendered, and time relative to the feminine, the sacred and the Indigenous is cyclical, and our ‘struggle is within’ are the guiding principles for change. The following quote is an example of this new way of thinking and being, where membership of the borders “is a state of soul”:

> Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.197

This thesis does not focus on Western biomedical models of health that account for the impact of cultural factors. Nonetheless, I believe it prudent to note a number of ways that culturally-appropriate therapies have been used in the treatment of Khmer Rouge survivors. I believe it is useful for Western health care providers to consider Priyadarshana’s (2012) analysis of the psychotherapeutic value of the Visuddhimagga, the Manual of Theravāda Buddhist Psychology. Although this is used to treat complicated post-genocide health conditions of Khmer people, I would like to caution its use by Western

197 Anzaldúa (2007a, p. 84) – borders of oppression.
health practitioners as it is best used in the hands of practitioners who are highly knowledgeable and experienced with this type of therapeutic approach.

Chapter 3 explored critical explanatory frameworks of trauma, guided by feminist and post-colonial principles that elucidate colonial influences used to silence and marginalise cultural and Indigenous meanings of mental health (Suarez, 2016). These frameworks aim to shift from the usage of PTSD as an international diagnostic tool of psychiatric disorders towards more local Indigenous cultural meanings of the aetiology of trauma.

Reflecting upon the conduct of sensitive research, this research led to deep considerations about the ethical dilemma when outsider researchers interview people with deep, embodied trauma about their wellbeing. This in itself has led towards a critical discussion of academic boundaries, privilege and expectations, and a call to a state of awareness of the complex moral issues that inform research with women who have endured massive trauma.

Finally, I have found another researcher who questions the appropriateness or even the effectiveness of conducting, in her words, “psychological and psychiatric interviews (with Cambodian people), thus affecting survey findings and psychiatric diagnoses” (North, 1995, p. 202). For North, this is more to do with Western practitioners’ application of the Western medical model to diverse cultural syndromes such as gkuet cj’roun.

**Considerations for Future Research**

If I were to conduct similar research again, I would use entirely different ways to collect information from sensitive populations. Mutually transformative research outcomes are desirable, and for this reason the inclusion of participatory-centred research as an ethnographic method in health promotion (Meyer et al., 2003) is a strong option. Also, using Indigenous methods when employing Anzaldúaan theory to research is considered appropriate (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010; Birch, 2013).
I like the ‘yarning’ method as described by Bessarab and Ng’andu (2010) in their Indigenous research with Indigenous Australian and African peoples. Their methods act to elicit conversations with the participants as a transition away from the more formal interview setting, and is strongly encouraged in cross-cultural research involving people who have suffered severe life trauma. It uses a culturally relevant form of conversation as a means of collecting information about the lives of the participants, but also as a means of deepening the relationship between participants and researchers through their storytelling. In retrospect, this would have been an appropriate way to collect information from older Khmer women.

In stating this, there were times when the women and I were distanced from each other through language and culture. There were also times of connection and alignment. For example, to know of Yiya Chhean’s yearning to merge her world with mine, at least via the stories she wished to tell me of her life, meant a lot to me.

Certainly, Lewis’ (2007, p. 153) approach to researching Khmer elders’ beliefs and behaviours resonated with me, as she was also involved in the ‘doing’ rather than the ‘asking’:

Integration of fieldnotes and narratives form a more comprehensive view of elders’ beliefs and behaviors. Fieldnotes gathered throughout the three month period of the study provided more data than did narratives. This project involved daily opportunities for participant observation (e.g., tours of herb gardens, demonstrations of herbal preparations, meal preparation, shopping, and events at the local Buddhist temple). Much of the time, I was involved in the actual preparation and labor: Therefore, fieldnotes were my main form of recording the encounter. Narratives from the 26 people were used to make the fieldnotes “come alive” through the voices of the elders as demonstrated in the linking of fieldnotes and narrative (above) that both correspond to one afternoon’s visit. Both fieldnotes and narratives were subjected to the same type of coding and analysis. That is, they each were read as a whole then open coding was applied followed by focused coding to arrive at themes.
Like Lewis (2007), it would be interesting to interview Khmer people living in Australia regarding, for example, their gardening practices for health. Lewis’ respondents heavily use traditional herbal treatments as opposed to the participants of this study. An understanding of the complexity of shifting from a diametrically opposite healing system to another is beyond the scope of this study (Eisenbruch, 1992, p. 286). Lewis (2007) recommends further, in-depth investigations of the extent of the use of traditional versus Western methods of healing in diaspora for the purposes of understanding why these traditions are upheld, disbanded or combined to form new hybrid ways of healing.

Neumann (1997) speaks of “ways without words” as a means of learning from the silence and stories of post-Holocaust survivors. I have learned that it would have been a far greater experience to have communicated in non-verbal ways in a language that tends to be universal. As an example, helping the women participants prepare food for the monks does not necessarily require words; it would be enough to communicate using hands and facial gestures, and observations, as a method of teaching me how to prepare Khmer food. What the women and I have in common is that food is our expression of identity and an expression of connection (Murcott, 1996). This is a language that I perfectly understand, and the language of preparing traditional food also links us to memories of the past where family met and shared delicious food always made more delicious as it was mostly cooked ‘from the heart’. Following the work of authors such as Frye (1991) and Pickwell (1999) there is an opportunity to explore food rituals and beliefs in healing conducted by Khmer in diaspora. Importantly, information could have been collected that would otherwise be missed during the more formal process of traditional research discourse. This method will be an obvious one to be explored in future.

Lastly, a method of trauma healing, referred to as ‘Dadirri’, can be employed when interviewing genocide survivors (West et al., 2012). This is an
Indigenous and cross-cultural approach based on “repeated and deep forms of relational mutuality happening through listening circles” (Lederach & Lederach, 2010, p. 56). Hence it is a way of sharing knowledge, which enables Indigenous people a voice. Secondly, Dadirri is also a means of promoting change within traumatised communities. Thirdly, it also honours and promotes the power of stillness and awareness, as follows:

Dadirri is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us... It is something like what you call ‘contemplation’.

—Mirian-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, Ngangiwumirr Elder

Strengths and Opportunities for Change

Strengths of the Research

I acknowledge engaging with Anzaldúa, her life and her work as a major strength of this thesis. It is a unique application to the analysis of women genocide survivors. Her work enabled me to develop the conceptual framework. An examination of these women’s lives at a depth that marries with Anzaldúa’s work was important to this research. My hope, like Martínez’ (1996), is that this thesis is a step forward towards affirming the significance of Anzaldúa’s epistemology as a tenable knowledge base to explore the lives of older Khmer women and other groups of women who have endured genocide.

My original intention for this thesis was about “risking the personal”. The use of Anzaldúa’s theory of Autohistoria-Teoría (Keating, 2006, p. 8) was to be the vehicle used to disclose aspects of my own life as a search for personal and

198 Cited in Davis (2015, n.p.)
cultural meaning. I did use aspects of my life, albeit in a more limited manner. Instead I chose to use poetic license to interweave myth, theory and metaphor into the personal, in particular in the Allegory located at the conclusion of this thesis.

Although not detailed in the words of this thesis, this research was a personal process of intersecting my own journey with the journey of the women. It also forced me to quickly shift into the nepantla state when presented with likely ethical and moral situations, and from this I rose to challenge questionable academic research practices designed to sabotage my own integrity and in turn the position of the women in this research. Like Anzaldúa (1981, p.205), I became the “wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds”. This made me question my own positionality, and with whom I should invest my allegiance.

At this point, I would like to revisit the dilemma of employing a male key informant in what significantly constitutes feminist research. Reid (2002) stresses the importance of addressing the intersection of gender and culture in research rather than taking male-centric or ethnicity/culture-centric approaches, or even enter into dialogue that violate cultural norms (Trimble et al., 2010). With Mr. Than Thong, the interviews took place; without him, they were unlikely to take place. It is known that gender can be an important factor shaping whether or how an interview takes place. Turner and Martin (1985, p. 271) comment:

... social characteristics of an interviewer and a participant, such as age, race and sex are significant during their brief encounter; different pairings have different meanings and evoke different cultural norms and stereotypes that influence the opinions and feelings expressed by participants.

The Khmer community in Melbourne is led by the male sangha and male administrators. Locating a Khmer woman key informant was not possible. To employ a Khmer man as key informant and interpreter posed some interesting
complexities. Were gender, ethnicity and other social divisions exacerbated as a result? Were the women mindful of what they divulged in the presence of a key and influential member of this community who is a man in a patriarchal culture?

When considering the methodology and positionality of interviewing in cross-cultural settings within the economic geography domain, Mullings (1999) uses the common situation where the gender of the interviewer and interviewees impact upon who is the ‘holder of power’, and how this impacts upon the type of information and the interpretation of collected information. Is there an asymmetrical distribution of power within the context of the interpreter being a key leader within a patriarchal culture where Khmer women are being interviewed? Therefore, a limitation of this research may be that gender, class, racial and ethnic position of the participants (older Khmer women), the interpreter (male and central to the Khmer community) and the researcher (a “white” but ethnic woman researcher and an outsider), may well have influenced the type of information that was collected during each of the interviews.

Using local interpreters in cross-language and cross-cultural research may transgress political, social and gender borders of which the researcher is unaware (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Issues related to breaches of confidentiality and compromised security when employing a local interpreter from a community of interest are potential risks to research. For example, Yiey Ponnleu was known to the family of the female Khmer interpreter, and even though the importance of keeping the proceedings of the interview confidential was communicated to this interpreter, it is unknown whether the interests of Yiey Ponnleu were confided to family or friends (Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007).

Not being able to speak Khmer, and thus not understanding any of the nuances communicated in the women’s responses, large or small, was certainly a limitation of this research and a source of regret for me. I was grateful to have 306
someone of the calibre of Mr. Than Thong to translate for me, and guide me in terms of cultural appropriateness and Buddhist ways; however, I am unsure of how much of the women's perspectives were guided by him.

Yiey Chhean wanted to share a lot more with me, but perhaps did not feel comfortable in the research setting created for the purposes of collecting information from her, nor did she see the value in telling her story through another person's translation and potentially their interpretation. I deeply wished to hear her stories about her life and how her experiences as an upāsikā has changed her life.

**A Theory of Hope and Salvation**

I did not anticipate that the struggles of my own life, albeit as different as night and day from what the women had experienced, would lead to both epiphanies and self-healing. My hope is this thesis will at least plant a seed for the realisation that the path to healing is indelible to the universal experience of humanity.

What is it about pain and suffering that connects us all? For the women, and for Anzaldúa, it is the pain and suffering leading to healing that we all knowingly or unknowingly realise is our connection. What I am striving for in my own life is to further my understanding and experience of that often shadowy shamanic space central to the imagery woven in and out of Anzaldúa’s writing (Carrasco & Sagarena, 2008).

It was important for this research to locate how we as members of humanity continue to rise after each fall, as an analogy of the rising of humanity to healing and a blurring of boundaries across multiple positionings, of the women, of Anzaldúa, of me the researcher, to understand and learn from the wisdom inherent across cultures. This will then allow us liberty to use our own past, myths, religious, spiritual beliefs or other beliefs, arm in arm.

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I wrote the following Allegory as my tribute to the women, my family, and to the work and life of Gloria Anzaldúa. It is also a tribute to my life. It commences with a series of acknowledgements that framed the writing of the Allegory, in addition to a series of explanatory notes following the Allegory.

**Acknowledgements: An Allegory of the Earth Goddess, Moon and Stars**

I would like to acknowledge the following as key influences in the construction of this Allegory:

A) The Khmer women participants’ stories of their experiences in the Khmer Rouge genocide;

B) My personal experiences of the death of my mother in 2008, the death of a young family member, and of loss in general;

C) Oeur’s (1994) poetry, and Buddhist and Khmer traditional and historic references;


E) Anzaldúa’s writings about her shamanic, spiritual journey, using metaphysical and deeply symbolic, Indigenous myths. This allegory was also influenced by her following works:


An Allegory of the Earth Goddess,
Moon and Stars

The child’s gaze shifted to the moon. Yiey Chanmony\(^1\) spoke tenderly:

“My darling Chavy\(^2\), my little Love! You want to learn about the moon?” “Long ago, on the night of the shadows, with loving kindness Neang Preah Dharani\(^3\) was hurled from the earth to become the moon. The female bodhisattva, the sister of the Buddha Tibangkar\(^4\), joined the goddess, flinging herself into the sky to become the stars.”

In the stillness\(^5\), Yiey glimpsed Naga\(^6\) nearby, his eyes staring, and with a look of shame flashed his tail and slithered away into the jungle, leaving traces of the Buddha behind in a stream of disjointed images. “Buddham\(^7\)...!!!!!” Yiey screamed, whilst in the same breath she tried to stifle her voice.

Yiey fell into a dream about how the prophecy of Amrita\(^8\)’s destruction came to pass. When the King of Swans\(^9\) fled, the blackcrows\(^10\) swooped causing the grave whirlwinds that blew all Cambodians\(^11\) to the wilderness of no return. From the edge of the shadows, Mother Cambodia\(^12\) shrieked for her children\(^13/14\).

The Khmer lost all of their senses, as they staggered in darkness along a knife’s edge. Brutally evacuated, separated, scattered. “We dared not look back”, dreamt Yiey, yet she recalled the fading fragrance from the Cham Pa\(^15\) somehow lingered, its ancient trees remaining steadfast next to Preah Ang Thom\(^16\). They refused to bend in the howling wind, as they watched brother Giant Ibis\(^17\) weakly dive and stumble at the feet of sister Royal Turtle\(^18\). The chbap\(^19\) was carried away as billowing echoes in the wind.

The Khmer became the living dead, and witnessed many things. Even during Year Zero\(^20\), young pregnant women were sacrificed for the powerful neak ta\(^21\) to be satisfied before any work could proceed. “Once I knew this”, dreamt Yiey, “their blood stained my hands.” “They say female blood is dangerous,” hissed
the spirits; “don’t listen—we will guide you.” “Dhammam??” Yiey whimpered.

Yiey's voice then rose to make herself heard: “We are the walking dead. The child cadre pointed the gun. I was given a plot of land to toil, no food, no water. Having eyes that could not see, I was to protect the rice paddies from the hungry birds, but Almighty One, I let them eat their fill, I gave the birds life; I begged you to please take mine! My friends went one by one, but not me. Why not me? My ears could not hear above the blazing fires that covered our land, but the cries of Cambodia still ring in my ears. My children, my husband, seven plus one, all gone. To the spirits within: Of my children—

(I beg you please don’t bring them to anywhere—I beg you let me find them.”). My darling husband – you are the lucky one. I cried, and then laughed until I can laugh no more. Their blood and the blood of Cambodia have stained my hands, and have covered the rest of me. “Sangham.” Why not me—I beg you!? Who will heal this child?.....”

Awakening to the child’s stirring, Yiey finally began to hear the voices of the spirits of the trees, the wind, and the birds, directing her attention to a bright light. She gently whispered, for one last time, “Look, my love! Look up to the heavens, my darling, can you see the light streaming towards the river? It is shining on us! The moon is full, and, can’t you see? The light coming from across the river is the beautiful lady. She rides on the back of Naga, and she is waiting to take us home. We are finally safe”.

With trembling hands, Yiey closed the child’s unseeing eyes, tenderly covering her head with her skirts, whilst trying to warm her cold little feet and hands. “I will never leave you in this place, my love”, and as those words were pronounced, Yiey and the child became one with the earth as their souls in the form of tiny swirling lights were accompanied to the heavens.

“Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa”
Notes for The Allegory

1. Khmer female name for “shines like the moon”. “Yiey” is the Khmer word for “grandmother”.
2. Khmer female name for “little angel”. Yiemy Chanmony’s granddaughter.
3. The Earth Goddess who was thrown from the earth by the Buddhist patriarchal culture (Jacobsen, 2008b, p. 79).
4. The forgotten sister of the Buddha Tibangkar who performed good deeds for him (Jacobsen, 2008b, p. 78).
6. The Pure One, the King of Snakes, protector of the Buddha. “In a vision, I was told whenever I came face-to-face with a poisonous snake, I should recall Buddha, for Buddha was once born as a snake named Phuritatd” (Oeur, 1994a, p. 220).
7. Buddham saranam gacchami: I go to the Buddha for refuge.
8. The prophecy that Cambodia would fall; Amrita is “the nectar of life, the water of bliss, peace” (Oeur, 1994b, p. 11).
11. The terms ‘Cambodians’ and ‘Khmer’ has been used interchangeably.
13. Analogy of Anzaldúa’s reference to la Llamada, who issues the call of change and La Llorona, the snake woman, who forever cries searches for her children.
15. A white fragrant Cambodian flower. In Cambodia, it is said “the nature of flower would make people release from stress and smile at their beauty.” Several of these flowers were also given to me after interviewing a Yiey in home in Australia.
16. The giant reclining Buddha carved into sandstone forming part of the
temple mountain in Siem Reap, Cambodia.
17. The National Bird of Cambodia.
18. The National Reptile of Cambodia.
19. The cbpab provided models of behaviour for a harmonious society,
   based on the correct observance of action for all its members
   (Jacobsen, 2008b, p. 75).
20. The time of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge.
22. Reflects the shift away from patriarchal and colonist perspectives
   against women. Khmer Buddhist women are prohibited from
   contacting the spirits or communicating with them.
23. Dhammad saranam gacchami: I go to the Dhamma for refuge.
24. The Buddha.
25. Khmer translation – when Yiey was communicating with the spirits
   within.
26. This is with reference to survivor guilt (Grodin, 2011, p. 543).
27. Sangham saranam gacchami: I go to the Sangha for refuge.
28. Neang Preah Dharani – the return of the Earth Goddess from the moon.
29. Written in Pāli: "Praise be to Him, the Blessed One, the Fully-Enlightened
   One." Most of the Buddhist women who were interviewed for this
   research were still devout Buddhists, and this prayer was included here
   as Yiey Chanmony's final, meritorious prayer to the
   Buddha.
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APPENDIX 1 – Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Objective 1: The War, and Health and Healing in Australia

Objective 1.1: To explore how older Khmer women perceive, experience and articulate their healing whilst living in Australia.

Health and Healing Questions:

- What is the cultural and personal meaning of healing for the women, and do they perceive themselves as being well or not?
- What strategies do older Khmer women use to heal and maintain their wellbeing?
- What do they do to keep well? For example, do Khmer traditions help them, including Buddhism?
- Who do they seek help from to recover their health and wellbeing?

Using the Khmer culture and/or religion to assist health:

- Do they use Khmer traditions and rituals to assist their health, including Buddhism or Christianity?

Social Networks:

- Do they build upon their ability to heal from Australian cultural and social factors, such as through the development of Australian social networks, or predominantly Khmer networks?

The Time of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge:

- What job did they have during the war?
- How did they keep strong during the war?

Objective 1.2: To assess the extent the Khmer Rouge genocide has affected their health, wellbeing and healing.

- Is there a need to heal from the past?
- Were they strengthened or weakened as a result of the war?
- Do they believe the Khmer Rouge and its cadres are able to be forgiven?

Objective 2: Being Khmer in Australia

Objective 2.1: To explore whether the women participants regularly practice traditions based on their Khmer culture.
Do they identify as being Khmer, Chinese or Australian, a combination of these?

Essentially, does healing for Khmer older women depend on successful adjustment to a new culture in Australia, or the maintenance of the values, norms and expectations that are “familiar to insiders”? (Phelan et al. 1991, p. 225).

Is it apparent that providing food for the monks is an act of merit making, or what Keyes (1984) has referred to as an act of nurturing through providing sustenance?

Using the Khmer culture of the women participants, and my Italian culture as examples, how are these two traditional cultures similar and different?

Objective 2.2: To understand the role of older Khmer women in the transmission of sociocultural aspects of Khmer traditions to future Khmer generations in Australia and Cambodia

Objective 2.3: To demonstrate whether the women communicate with the spirits and their ancestors, and how this contributes to their healing.

- Are they Buddhist, Christian or do not follow a religion? How do they practice their faith?
- If they are Christian, were they ever Buddhist?
- Why did they become Christian?
- Is merit making more important to these women as they age?
- Do they attend the Khmer festivals, such as Khmer New Year?

Objective 3: The relationship of the women participants to their families

Objective 3.1: To ascertain which aspects of the Khmer culture and traditions, including values and rituals, must future Khmer generations in Australia and Cambodia continue, and who in their family is responsible for passing the culture on to these generations.

Objective 3.2: To determine the extent to which they are able to care for themselves now and in the future.

Objective 4: To assess where ‘home’ is for the women, and whether transnational relationships and connections to Cambodia are important to them.
Objective 4.1: To what extent is Australia or Cambodia 'home'

- What aspects derived from their cultural memory are these women able to weave into the new [Australian] framework where they now live? (Liev, 2008).
- How do the women maintain transnational relationships with family and important social networks in their home country, and to what extent is this important?

Objective 4.3: To understand the extent to which they express their Buddhist or Christian faith whilst in Australia and in Cambodia.

- Is the extent of their faith of greater importance towards the end of life? Does their life in Australia give Khmer women the opportunity to develop autonomy in their lives? Ledgerwood (1994) states once older Khmer women's marriages are secure, it is not uncommon for them to re-establish personal autonomy, which Smith-Hefner (1999) comments is “a central theme in Khmer socialization” (p. 183).
APPENDIX 2 – Recipes

RECIPE: Zio Totonn’s Sugo con Costine di Maiale

Add one finely chopped red onion to a pan with 1cm of olive oil. Add lean pork ribs and fry, adding 2-3 bay leaves. Cook until ribs have browned. Add a small glass dry red wine, 3T tomato paste, 400g can Annalisa-brand whole tomatoes and 680ml passata.

Cook for at least 1½ hours. If the ribs stick while cooking, add boiling water to thin the sauce.

Fold through pasta (preferably linguine) that has been cooked *al dente*.

NOTE: Make sure to use a brand of dried pasta manufactured in Italy.

RECIPE: Yiey Sokyanya’s Bitter Melon with Pork

Wash the bitter melon well and slice in half lengthways. Scoop out the seeds.

Mix together minced pork, salt, garlic and onion and scoop into the melon. Place in a steamer and cook until melon is tender.

NOTE: Serve this with steamed Cambodian rice (Angkor Laar). Yiey Sokyanya advised me Indian rice was too hard, and that Cambodian rice was more delicious and tender.

RECIPE: Yiey Thida’s Healthy Barramundi

With barramundi, we like to steam. I got ginger, garlic, and fry them in a little bit of oil. I never use a lot of oil like my mum used to; just a little bit of oil, and then I put oyster sauce, about two spoons, a little bit of fish sauce, and then sesame oil. Then I add to the fish the ginger and garlic I’ve been frying. I steam the fish until cooked. We serve the fish with a little bit of rice and cucumber.

NOTE: The barramundi is cooked whole.

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199 Sugo con costine di maiale: Italian name for ‘sauce with pork ribs’
Figure 9: Mileo, E. (n.d.) Oil on canvas. “The Wings of Perception”.

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