

**For US-Cambodians, a Questions of Healing**  
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Cambodian-American youths who may know little of their parents' pasts had a chance to learn more about the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge recently, following a forum in Lowell, Mass., on Sunday. The Khmer Rouge Tribunal and Genocide Education forum also offered a chance for people to consider what healing means in the Cambodian context.

Thousands of Cambodians now live in Lowell, many of them after having fled Cambodia's civil war and the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. Some suffer post-traumatic stress and other trauma from the time, and many are reluctant to share their experiences with their children. This can lead to a gulf between parents and their children, one that is hard for the young to fathom.

"When I was young, I did not understand why my parents seemed unhappy, even though they smiled," said Milissa Lach, 21, who attended Sunday's forum at Lowell's In Stoklosa Middle School. "My father would say he did not know how to hug me. He did not come close to me."

She shed tears as she tried to explain her father's behavior. She said Cambodian children in the US do not understand what their parents went through, including the troubles that met them when they emigrated to a new land without speaking English and with few job prospects. As a result, Cambodian youths resent their parents, skip school and sometimes join gangs, she said. "If we understood what our parents faced in Cambodia in the past, then we could help them, and not hate our parents," she said.

Tola Sok, a 27-year-old student at the University of Massachusetts, who grew up in Lowell, said his parents did not want to talk to him about the past, and he would not want his own children hearing about his struggles, either.

“From my experience growing up here, with such a population, I observed and realized that a lot of survivors nowadays do have a hard time adjusting to society, because of what they went through, what they experienced,” he said.

Survivors of the war and the Khmer Rouge may still live in fear, he said, remembering what happened to their families and friends, or what happened under the regime to those who spoke out.

Kent Mitchell, a dean at Middlesex Community College, who participated in the forum, said non-Cambodians, too, should remember the experiences of Khmer Rouge survivors.

“America was part of that, American policy was part of that,” he told VOA Khmer. “Before the genocide, there was the Christmas bombing back in 1972 that was part of the dislocation. That was the turmoil that allowed this. And we have some responsibility.”

A participant in Sunday’s forum who gave his name as Kowith K said the UN-backed tribunal underway in Phnom Penh was another important means of understanding the tragedy, especially the leaders behind the killings.

“If you know the reason, and who [did it], then there is peace of mind,” he said, adding that Cambodians abroad want to know if mid-level Khmer Rouge cadre will also be tried.

Alex Hinton, a professor of Rutgers University and director of the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights, said healing and reconciliation were different from person to person. Some sought accountability, while others look to the rule of law.

“And so a lot of people have to some degree healed, and that is also in contrast with some other cases,” he said. “But I think it’s important to provide some sort of healing for people.”

John Ciorciari, a public policy professor at the University of Michigan, said reconciliation can come in different forms.

“The political or military reconciliation of the 1990s was based on a model of not prosecuting people,” he said. “But the type of reconciliation that happens at a deeper level, where people are willing to come to terms with the past, and live side by side with the former Khmer Rouge, it’s probably difficult to achieve that type of reconciliation through a trial of just a few people.”

The trials may promote some reconciliation, but other societal processes need to take place, he said.

“People, whether at the festival of Pchum Ben or whether at their local [pagodas], or their schools, or their community organizations, people talk about it, learn about it, hopefully have opportunities to express their moral outrage or their sufferings, and other people have the opportunity to apologize or accept responsibility,” he said. “I hope that those types of processes go alongside the trials and then can help people to feel reconciled.”