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## **Women's Lives in a Khmer (Cambodian) Minefield**

**By Jean Chapman**

**Keywords:** feminism, making gender doable, Kampuchea, K5 mine belt, landmine clearance, dangerous fieldwork

### **Abstract**

The argument made in this paper is against the view that women and children are disproportionately the victims of landmines. I frame the discussion within feminist epistemology and ethnographic material gathered in a village, Ou Chheu Kroam, in the K5 mine belt in north-western Kampuchea. Ou Chheu Kroam is on the Thai/Khmer border. Gender sensitive methods used in the research are interviews (66 women and 69 men), focus groups (nine school-going children), a case study (of the national demining organisation in Krong Pailin), overt observation, and life stories (13 residents of Ou Chheu Kroam). A subset of data was for 71 fatalities and casualties of landmine contamination during war and peace.

Using the architecture of gender relations, the research examines livelihood practices, the impact of landmines on changing gender identities, institutional power and privilege, and the social values underpinning gender ideology. Disaggregated data is used extensively.

Findings are that, despite the high number of victims landmine explosions have claimed, no children have been injured in Ou Chheu Kroam. The other significant finding is that women and men are fairly equally handicapped by the physical and social impacts of landmines.

Title of the thesis is "A gender perspective on landmine management: A case study from Ou Chheu Kroam, Krong Pailin, Kampuchea"

## **Women's Lives in a Khmer (Cambodian) Minefield**

Landmines, as a legitimate weapon of war, are the oldest explosive device used by warring factions and remain active for centuries. Landmines are a threat to human security and they can act as a barrier to community development affecting services for: health; education; tourism; water; electricity; industrial and commercial development by outside agencies and governments. The presence and perceived presence of landmines are able to destroy lives, livelihoods and livestock.

In the Khmer context, millions of aerially-delivered munitions were dropped by the United States (Owen and Kiernan 2006) when its asymmetrical war with Vietnam spilled into neutral Kampuchea during the Cold War. Manually emplaced landmines came into use in north western Kampuchea with the construction of the K5 mine belt, a barrier between 600 KM and 700 KM long and 400-500 metres wide that ran almost continuously from the south western coast of Kampuchea up to the Thai border with Lao. The K5 mine belt contains an estimated two to three million landmines and was laid and re-laid many times (Bottomley 2003:16). The chronology of landmine use is the record of conflict in Kampuchea. According to Bottiglieri, 10% of the landmines were laid in the early to mid-1970s during the Vietnam War, the Lon Nol coup and the civil war; 5% were laid between 1975 and 1978 during the Pol Pot regime; 55% were laid between 1978 and 1989 during Vietnamese occupation; and 30% were laid between 1989 and 1991 by the Royal Cambodian government (Bottiglieri 2000).

The objective of this paper is to describe the gendered aspects of a community living in a minefield with a view to exploring whether the experiences of that community are congruent with the types of experiences described in the literature. The structure of this paper is the following:

1. Introduction;
2. Methodology;
3. Khmer women in a post-conflict environment;
4. Women and work;
5. Changing identities in a minefield;
6. Access to institutional power and privilege;
7. Gender ideology;
8. Challenging the stereotypes.

## **1. Introduction**

Literature on the gendered impacts of landmines that is based on fieldwork is negligible. Knowledge construction about women's lives, therefore, starts elsewhere. The United Nations is the apex body for the humanitarian landmine management and its briefing note 5 states that evidence from Cambodia illustrates the gender dimension of disability, as disabled men relied on their wives for support, while disabled women were abandoned by their partners or had difficulty in finding one (United Nations 2001:1-4). The Commission on the Status of Women, states that women and children are the victims of landmines (UNIFEM 2003:1). Another source says that "being disabled can affect a woman's chance

of marriage. In many cases, married women with disabilities face immediate divorce and are left with the responsibility of children, and thus a high risk of poverty” (MAC 2007b:1).

The humanitarian mine action sector (the Sector), which emerged at the end of the Cold War, has built an industry on landmine management on the assumption that:

People with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable and poorest groups in Cambodian society; disabled people are generally the poorest of the poor, with very limited access to basic social services, education, skills or vocational training, job placement, and income-generating opportunities. Reportedly, monks or lay people from the pagoda rarely or never visited people with disabilities, who were also often uninformed about village meetings or development activities; the most severely disabled people were not given information about how to register to vote (ICBL 2006:9).

## **2.0 Methodology**

Fieldwork was undertaken from July to December 2005 and again in January/February 2007. The study area comprises three villages, namely, Phsar Prum, Ou Roel and Ou Chheu Kroam. The term “study area” refers to more than one village. The three villages share a common history during conflict and its aftermath. The villages are so small they do not appear on any maps of the country. All are located within the K5 mine belt in northwestern Kampuchea, Krong Pailin Municipality. Phsar Prum is the market town and official international border with Thailand. Ou Roel is seven KM due east of Phsar Prum. Ou Chheu Kroam is 28 KM from Pailin City, 1.5 KM from Phsar Prum, and seven KM from Ou Roel. Ou Chheu Kroam is approximately eight KM long, 2.5 KM wide at its broadest point, with a population of approximately 1,400 people. In the west the village hugs the Chheu Kroam River which is the border with Thailand. Ou Chheu Kroam was a battlefield and was crisscrossed with footpaths before it was settled a decade ago.

Crucial to fieldwork was the translator who also acted as interpreter of local knowledge, guide, and driver. He made appointments, helped research political and bureaucratic structures in Pailin City, sent e-mails and photocopied original material gathered in the field. The translator was a school teacher in the public school system in Pailin.

Ethical research observed the principle of "do no harm" (Anderson 1999), which is particularly relevant when conducting research in a minefield. Preparatory to departure into the field, meticulous planning for rapid exit in the event of an accident was made with family, friends and colleagues. Telecommunications were purchased, health issues in a malarial environment were addressed, and permission to undertake fieldwork in a minefield was granted by the university. Once in the field, ethical research translated into seeking permission from interviewees and informing them that the purpose of enquiry was for a doctoral degree and publications. Confidentiality and anonymity were options extended to interviewees. Gatekeepers in Phnom Penh, Pailin, Phsar Prum, Ou Roel and Ou Chheu Kroam were met and the research proposal discussed. Assistance was solicited from the Women's Association in Ou Chheu Kroam, which meets to raise and distribute funds to landmine casualties as they deem fit. Interviewees were offered a hammock or family-sized mosquito net as a token of appreciation for their invaluable contributions.

The qualitative methods used were overt observation, interviews, focus groups, a case study, a pilot project, and life stories. An interview guide was designed and refined six times in the field and 135 face-to-face interviews with 66 women and 69 men between the ages of 15 and 77 were conducted. Of those, 95 were residents of Ou Chheu Kroam. The

average time for an interview in Ou Chheu Kroam was 60 minutes. Another interview guide was designed for eight non-resident male landowners in Ou Chheu Kroam, in one case the formal interview lasting over two hours. Two focus groups of school-going children were composed of one girl and eight boys. The subject of the case study was the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC). Thirteen of its personnel and three volunteers provided information on landmine management and the history of Ou Chheu Kroam and Ou Roel. The life stories of ten women and five male residents of Ou Chheu Kroam were gathered. Some of those narratives took two hours to spin and others 60 minutes. Field notes were generated daily. Approximately 16% of the adult population in Ou Chheu Kroam participated in the research as respondents and resource persons or key informants.

Reflexivity continues to be debated but remains a principle of good research practice at all stages of the project. In the field the gulf between the researched and researcher was wide. The respondents were residents of one of the poorest villages in one of the poorest municipalities in one of the poorest countries in the world. The way in which reflexivity was practiced was:

- we were explicit about what people were being asked to consent to;
- in order to minimise harm to respondents and to ourselves, we negotiated our way along well-used paths and before taking short-cuts across the fields in which there were standing crops, we would ask if it was safe to do so;
- we answered all personal questions on our many and various identities;
- we remained poker-faced when gender-insensitive comments were made;
- there was no occasion when our values, concerns and ethical position were at odds with those of the persons being researched: no one walked away from an interview or chance encounter; there was no verbal or physical expressions of dissatisfaction of the form or content, or indeed the length, of the interviews.

A subset of data was made available from the Village Demographer who, among other things, tracks the lives of the 11 women and 64 men who are casualties of landmine

contamination between 1982 and 2007, during war and peace. Data on four female and 34 male amputees was gathered in the field using the interview guide and a supplementary questionnaire for amputees that was administered to three women and 13 men.

With the twin objectives of avoiding gender-neutrality and promoting gender-sensitive research, this paper is organised using the architecture of gender relations that builds on the work of a development expert (El-Bushra 2004), and post-conflict and peace building theoreticians and practitioners (see, for example, Turshen 2002; Afshar 2004; Jacobson 2005; Cockburn 2007; Pankhurst 2007). There are four aspects to gender relations. The first is gender roles, that is, the division of labour between the sexes in the domestic and public domains. The second is gender identities, that is, the expected or idealised characteristics of different sexes further distinguished by age, religion, caste, ethnicity and class. The third is gender institutions, more commonly known as social institutions, that control resources such as households, communities, regions, nations, international actors. Through protocol and practice, institutions decide who gains access or membership to them, contributes to them, are influenced by them, and are protected, rewarded and punished by them. The fourth aspect of gender relations is ideology, a system of values that underpins gender roles and identities, and that validates gender power structures in a system of social relations framed within a particular culture.

Preparatory to stepping lightly into a minefield it is, perhaps, necessary to locate women in a minefield within the narrative on Khmer women in a post-conflict environment.

### **3.0 Khmer Women in a Post-Conflict Environment**

The present research has set out to explore the gendered aspects of a community living in a minefield. In an attempt to establish the status of women in a minefield, a review was undertaken of the status of Khmer women in the wider context. An issue that comes up in the literature on post-conflict environments is the targeting of women for physical abuse and using women's bodies as an extension of the battlefield (Amnesty International 2004; IRIN 2004; Cockburn 2007). In Kampuchea a 300 word report, (based largely on (Marcus 1996))<sup>1</sup> claims that women were subject to rape by Khmer Rouge officials from 1975 to 1979; rape and looting were frequently committed by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces; sexual torture was inflicted on female prisoners by the Khmer Rouge; female refugees were "often victims of sexual violence, either during their flight or in Thai refugee camps"; and peacekeepers, former inmates without proper training, raped Khmer women during the UN mission (Bastick, Grimm et al. 2007:93).

Domestic violence has been found to increase after war (Farr 2006:114) and "studies in Cambodia in the mid-1990s indicated that many women – as many as 75 per cent in one study – were victims of domestic violence, often at the hands of men who have kept the small arms and light weapons they used during the war" (cited in Pankhurst 2007:8). In some countries a woman dies every hour from domestic violence, but campaigners believe that the situation is far worse as violence is considered "normal" and many women don't report it (Amnesty International 2008). In South Africa, the incidents of femicide, or the murder of women by a present or former partner, is such that one woman is killed every six

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<sup>1</sup> Authorship is attributed to Byrne (1996) and not to Marcus.

hours by men known intimately by the victim (Farr 2006:118). Countries in which domestic violence and repression perpetrated by the State, non-State actors, family and community members against women is endemic are Iraq, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Niger, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Iran, Uganda, Zambia, Nigeria and Nepal (WAN 2008). That list of countries represents an equal mix of warring States and those that are not. Kampuchea is not listed among them. The issue of (under)reporting of gender-based violence in ethnographic writing has been noted, and violence against women consistently occurs in industrialised and industrialising nations (Howell 2004:324).

In contemporary Kampuchea women constitute 52% of the population of 13.4 million, of which 85% live in rural areas. 23% of Khmer women have suffered physical domestic violence. Of the 436 cases of domestic violence reported to the Gender and Development Network office in one year, 69% involved families classified as “poor” and 60% of the cases were reconciled at the commune and district levels of government (GADNet 2004; GADNet 2005). The data in those reports are not disaggregated for urban and rural women. In Ou Chheu Kroam there were seven cases of domestic violence (Pailin Municipality 2004:33) which is treated separately to crimes of murder, theft, robbery, kidnapping and rape (*op. cit.* 32).

In celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the modern Geneva Conventions, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) undertook a study on people on war. A question asked by the ICRC to its Khmer respondents across the country is: “Was there anyone close to you raped by enemy combatants?” Four per cent of the respondents said “Yes” (ICRC 1999:5). Assuming that the finding on rape by enemy combatants tells us

something about the status of women in society, the same question was posed during fieldwork almost a decade later, in February 2007, to 16 women and 29 men. One woman and one man said "Yes". Again, that represented 4% of the respondents.

The follow-up question was "Why". Responses are: "because we were of a community we were afraid of the law that said that women could not be raped and the penalty for rape was death. People were afraid." "There were three groups, the Khmer Rouge, the government and the Paras. There were rumours that everything was being destroyed by government troops and the Paras, so the KR was welcomed warmly. There might have been rumours about rape, but the Khmer Rouge was very strict about everything including how women should be treated"; "because people understand the law, customary law, and people are afraid to break the law under which people have rights, and men have to respect women. During the KR regime it was disciplined and the penalty for rape was death when it was witnessed and reported. It was never a KR strategy to rape women, and I don't know what the government strategy was"; "because of Khmer culture women have the same rights as men and that was the political culture then, and it is government policy now."

There are three factors that lead one to believe that domestic violence is somewhat of a rarity in Ou Chheu Kroam. Firstly, there are no small arms in the village. Second, the noise level in the village is muted. Landmine explosions shatter the silence and take place on both sides of the border due to accidents and planned detonations. Otherwise, noises are the occasional *moto*<sup>2</sup> going by, and the voices of women, men or children. Raised voices were rare. The third reason for believing that domestic violence is uncommon is because

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<sup>2</sup> A light two-stroke motorbike

houses in Ou Chheu Kroam are lightweight and close together. Had violence against women been a common practice, there was every possibility that the information would have been shared at some point over the life of the fieldwork.

#### 4. WOMEN AND WORK

Attitudes to women in occupations other than farming were requested. The majority of the respondents said that women enjoy the same status as men as teachers, government workers and doctors, but where women have lower status are politics (the role of chief), religion and the military. According to key informants the principal livelihood activities disaggregated by gender and age are:

- Married women and men with no children: *chamkar*<sup>3</sup> and going to Thailand as wage labour;
- Married women with children: child bearing; child rearing; food shopping and preparation; harvesting; cleaning the home and homestead; *chamkar*; and going to Thailand as wage labour;
- Married men with children: *chamkar*; going to Thailand as wage labour; bamboo cutting; helping with food shopping; harvesting; cooking; cleaning the home and homestead; and rearing the children;
- Children: attending school, otherwise girls work in the house, do *chamkar*, and go to Thailand as wage labour. Boys go to school, do *chamkar*, go to Thailand as day labour, and help in and around the home.

The **division of labour** is as follows:

<i>Division of labour in Ou Chheu Kroam, 2005</i>				
Activity	Women		Men	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>In the Home and on the Homestead</b>				
Did you build your home	16	20	9	32
Do you do repair/ maintenance	18	17	2	38
Do you do the cooking	0	36	11	30
Do you help with your kids	3	33	9	30

<sup>3</sup> *Chamkar* is the Khmer equivalent of shifting cultivation, swidden agriculture, or slash-and-burn, and is a style of forest-based land use practiced by migrant farmers.

<b>Division of labour in Ou Chheu Kroam, 2005</b>				
Activity	Women		Men	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>In the Home and on the Homestead</b>				
Wash clothes	1	35	12	28
Are you responsible for keeping inside/around the house clean	2	33	29	12
Plant fruit trees	17	19	9	33
Plant vegetables	6	30	13	29
Fertilise fruit/vegetables	23	13	32	11
Spray insecticide on fruit trees/veg	23	5	13	19
Spray herbicide on fruit trees/vegetables	13	5	6	11
Water fruit/vegetables	8	28	13	29
Weed around trees/veg	2	34	4	38
Harvest fruit and vegetables	2	34	13	29
Prepare fruit and vegetables for storage	15	20	26	15
Take fruit and veg to market	23	13	25	14
<b>Activities undertaken on Chamkar</b>				
Break ground manually	18	18	9	25
Use a tractor to break the ground	28	8	34	7
Plant crop(s)	8	28	9	34
Weed	7	29	10	33
Fertilise	32	4	34	9
Spray insecticide	22	7	14	18
Spray herbicide	17	5	9	11
Water	31	5	34	9
Harvest crop from <i>chamkar</i>	8	28	9	34
Processing for later use	25	10	39	4
Take to market	0	4	0	7
Produce picked up at home	4	22	7	24

The only job that all women do is the cooking. Some, albeit a few, do not look after children, wash clothes or clean in and around the house. There are no jobs that at least some men don't do.

Landmine clearance is one of the many activities that are linked to the agricultural process in a minefield and the present research looks at the gendered aspects of the community at work clearing landmines. The division of labour for landmine clearance is the following. The numbers in brackets in the "Total" columns are the percentage of the total number of respondents that are represented in the last column.

Questions	Yes			No			Total
	Fem	Males	Total	Fem	Males	Total	
Cleared landmines?	19	29	48 (60%)	17	15	32 (40%)	80
Demined for others?	0	8	8	36	34	70 (90%)	78

For money?	0	0	0	35	42	77 (100%)	77
How many landmines did you clear?	758	597					1,355
Do/did you defuse landmines yourself?	2	11	13 (17%)	34	28	62 (83%)	75
Do/did you use explosives from landmines for fishing?	0	5	5	32	28	60 (92%)	65
Have you caught landmines in your fishing net?	1	2	3	31	31	62 (95%)	65
Do/did you sell landmines/UXO as scrap metal?	5	7	12 (16%)	31	31	62 (84%)	74

*Note: "Fem" means females*

Sixty per cent of the female and male respondents said that they had cleared landmines, and 90% said that they had not demined for others. Sixteen per cent had sold landmines as scrap metal prior to 2005, the reason for stopping was because there were no more landmines.

The finding that women cleared more landmines than men should not be misinterpreted: it is not a competition that women won. Women are war veterans, and skills learned as munitions carriers and living off the land have found application in peace.

With respect to the division of labour for the four women amputees, one was hired on account of her landmine accident to be a seamstress in a co-operative shop in Phnom Penh. She had no immediate plans for changing either her profession or her home base. In Ou Chheu Kroam, one young lady had been a farmer up to the time of her accident, and did the tasks identified in the above table. The other two women amputees also engaged in all activities, except that one did not apply fertiliser, spray insecticide and herbicide, or take the produce from *chamkar* to market. All three of them live with their families in Ou Chheu Kroam.

It can be concluded that household and agricultural tasks are shared by the family irrespective of gender and landmine casualties. Further, there is evidence of the inclusion of

women in the agricultural process and there is little evidence that points to women amputees as being unproductive members of their community.

## **5. Changing Identities in a Minefield**

At the present time there is little scholarship on how landmine casualties affect the identities of women and men. Consistent with the research up to this point, which explores the gendered aspects of a community living in a minefield, this section relies on data gathered in the field. Eleven women and 64 male residents of Ou Chheu Kroam between 1982 and 2007 have been casualties of landmine contamination, during conflict and its aftermath.

According to Farr "one's identity can shift over time and place. A fundamental premise of gender analysis is that it is *because* gender identities shift that the political project of female emancipation has been, and is, possible: if we are better able to understand and explain patterns of subordination and domination, we are better able to design new interventions and support positive change" (Farr 2006:109-110).

Examples of changing identities from Ou Chheu Kroam are the following. A male amputee was abandoned when he lost his foot when he stepped on a landmine. He was a family man with a daughter and four sons, the eldest being 12-years old. He was a landowner, farmer, and the village policeman in possession of the only firearm in the village. He remarried, has two sons and together with his second wife, assumes responsibility for all his children.

A 22-year-old farmer lost both her legs when planting soya. She is now a shop keeper, and she and her father farm half a hectare of land on which the shop is situated. She

and her 70 year old father live on the edge of the school property, she in the shop and her father in a separate temporary dwelling within a few feet of the shop. Her siblings and their families live in the house that the young woman owns. The family farms the land attached to the house. She also owns the *moto* used to provision the shop. Following the accident, she became engaged, and her partner, a full-time, able-bodied, head school teacher, lived with her family which is a characteristic of matrilocality. She broke off the engagement after a year and a half.

It was rumoured that a young woman and her two month old baby had been abandoned following a landmine incident. The young lady confirmed the story. A fortnight later she asked that her husband be interviewed. He too is an amputee. He denied having abandoned his wife and daughter. Rather, he preferred to live with his mother in Battambang. He said that the inadequate drainage on the path in front of his in-law's house, waterlogged during the monsoon, impedes mobility for users of prosthetics and crutches that stick in the mud. By 2007 her husband had left her and she assumed another identity. She was hired on contract as a deminer. The UK-based organisation that hired her showcased her to the British media in Phnom Penh. None of the other female and male recruits (all able-bodied) were accorded the same treatment.

A veteran-turned farmer, sister, wife and mother of two remained a veteran-turned farmer, sister, wife and mother of two following the amputation of a leg, and an ill-fitting prosthetic.

A government soldier with a wife and three children lost a leg to a landmine accident. He built a house for the family and a shelter for ducks. He said there were

advantages to living in Ou Chheu Kroam. In his home town few people were landmine casualties, whereas in Ou Chheu Kroam, because amputees were everywhere, he was reluctant to leave the village. Secondly, he said that if he was not lame he would not have as much time as he does rearing the ducks. By 2007 he was running a profitable operation that used family labour.

The last example is a person who has taken all his landmine accidents in his stride. He is literate, a war-veteran-turned-farmer, moneylender, landlord, political leader at the village level, husband and father of four children, all born after his amputation and the loss of an eye.

Children in the focus group identified gendered changes and said that women suffer more than men on account of amputations of the leg because women are responsible for feeding the children; women have to also work outside the house; women are weaker than men so being handicapped must be harder for women.

“Poor” is an identity assigned to disabled persons in Kampuchea by, among others, the Sector (ICBL 2006:9). Material wealth in Ou Chheu Kroam came with the ownership of land, a television, a mobile phone, a tractor, a *moto*, a plough and food, or some combination thereof. Food was used as a measure of wealth and poverty. The question asked was “for how many days could your family survive with the food that you have in the house today”? Fifty-five percent of the respondents said that they could survive for two weeks or more. For landmine casualties, 66.6% said that they could survive for two weeks or more.

The foregoing demonstrates that gender identities do change, but not always negatively. There is evidence to suggest that there might be reasons for divorce that have something to do with the design of prosthetics and a path. Similarly, the young, female, amputee was given membership to the Sector and a salary for a year and a half. Other evidence is the poor are not all landmine casualties, and that all landmine casualties are not poor. A key informant said that one can have plenty of food or money but the village itself is poor. Food and other goods are usually substandard, and no services are provided by the government.

## **6. Access to Institutional Power and Privilege**

Integral to the architecture of this paper that explores the gendered aspects of a community living in a minefield, are social institutions. Institutions have been selected for their presence in Ou Chheu Kroam. Those institutions are education, religion, the Sector and the family.

### ***Education***

The primary school is a 5-roomed brick and mortar structure, in which there is no electricity, running water, or toilets. Of the total of 360 children registered in school, 75 are girls and 285 are boys. There are no amputee registrations because there are no children who are casualties of landmines. There are six grades in primary school. Three rooms are used as class rooms, one as the living quarters for the all-male teaching staff, and one is unoccupied.

Disaggregated data on literacy by sex and education level are as follows:

<i>Education level of respondents in Ou Chheu Kroam, 2005</i>				
<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
No education	14	7	21	30
Grade 1	2	4	6	7
Grade 2	7	8	15	18
Grade 3	6	6	12	15
Grade 4	2	4	6	7
Grade 5	2	5	7	9
Grade 6	1	1	2	2
Grade 7	1	3	4	4
Grade 8	0	4	4	4
Grade 9	1	1	2	2
Grade 12	0	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>36(44.5%)</b>	<b>45 (55.5%)</b>	<b>81 (100%)</b>	<b>100</b>

By most standards, the literacy rate is low. From observation and information gleaned from key informants low literacy rates are attributable to:

- the absence of a secondary school in the study area;
- education and text books are free, but there are insufficient books to go around;
- teachers work as wage labour on *chamkar* on either side of the border at least twice during the school year;
- school is not compulsory, and parents neither encourage nor discourage attendance;
- students young and old study together to the embarrassment of most;
- students work on *chamkar*;
- parents say that they have no money even for chalk and pencils, slates and books, and feel that they are not able to equip their children properly for school, so rather than add to the burden of poverty, they keep children out of school.

Attitudes to education were solicited. The overwhelming majority of respondents want their daughters and sons to be better educated than they are. The theory and practice of educating children are clearly at variance, which has long-term consequences as, according to Translator Sen Hourn, there is no infrastructural support for adults to make up lost school years anywhere in the country.

### ***Religion***

According to Lee, Khmer Buddhism privileges men and subordinates women. A woman commits a transgression if she touches a monk, polluting his sanctity, and damaging her social prestige and her spiritual store of merit. Women are not permitted to be monks hence cannot earn either spiritual merit or social prestige from monastic service (Lee 2007:11). Men in Khmer Buddhism monopolise social and material goods taking for themselves spiritual merit and special clothing (the high-prestige saffron robes), special food (ceremonial offerings), and men make the decision about which gender has more and less prestige (*op. cit.* 10). That is the theory. In practice of the 95 respondents two had been educated in a *pagoda*. Respondents were asked if they would send their sons to the *pagoda* for an education. Six women and 12 men said that they would, and 24 women and 25 men said that they would not. Their reasons are “kids will decide” (3 women and 5 men); 15 women and 20 men said that they will send their sons to the school for an education rather than to the *pagoda*. Other comments were “it is too far,” “my children are not going to be monks,” and “during the war education was given at the *pagoda*, not now.” Girls are unable to get an education at a *pagoda*.

The *pagoda* was built on four hectare of private property owned by a Phnom Penh female entrepreneur who collected funds for the construction of the *pagoda* for which she can accumulate merit. Funds were also raised by the then Chief of Ou Chheu Kroam in the study area. Funding was in place for CMAC to demine. What was not available was funding to clear access routes for safe passage of CMAC's heavy equipment. Fifty baht

(US\$1.25) was collected from poor families and 100 baht (US\$2.50) from less poor families to make up the very obvious gap in funding.

The monk-in-residence is in his mid-50s and is illiterate. His sister-in-law, a citizen of the United States, raised funds for the construction of two permanent structures on the compound of the *pagoda*, one for the monks' living quarters, and the second to serve as a library and study area. The administration by elderly, male village residents was replaced in November 2005 by a *pagoda* committee to which the Chief, among others, was elected.

Male amputees in Ou Chheu Kroam face religious discrimination on other grounds. Respondents had this to say about amputees and gave reasons why equal membership is not conferred on all men by Buddhism: "they [amputees] are incomplete," "an amputee cannot walk long distances and cannot beg," "an amputee is afraid that the villagers and old people would not trust Buddhism if he became a monk," and the monk-in-residence said "No, they cannot become monks because they cannot beg for food for the monks".

Attendance at the *pagoda* in Ou Chheu Kroam is as follows:

<i>How often do you or members of your family go to the pagoda?</i>		
	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Daily	1	1
Weekly	9	8
Fortnightly	7	4
Monthly	2	3
Big festivals	14	30
Rarely	1	5
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>51</b>

Fifty-nine per cent of the respondents go to the *pagoda* on "big festivals" or "rarely". The finding on the degree of religiosity exhibited by Ou Chheu Kroam residents tends to put into question the thesis that it "has been written many times that Khmer civilization was essentially religious" (Thierry 1997:105).

### ***The Sector***

The Sector controls communities through humanitarian landmine management. It decides when, where and how to clear landmines. It designates private land as a minefield and forbids entrance into it. State investment is more likely to be made in land that the Sector says is clear of landmines. CMAC and other humanitarian demining operators are integral to the Sector in Kampuchea. For the years 2001 to 2007, donor funding to Kampuchea has been generous if somewhat erratic: US\$27.3 million in 2002; 17 million the following year; cresting to 41.7 million in 2004; declining to 23.8 million in 2005; 29.5 million in 2006 and US\$30,785,285 in 2007. In 2007, CMAC's share was approximately 35% received from 14 foreign governments, the European Union, and, for the first time, the Khmer government (ICBL 2008a). CMAC was in Ou Chheu Kroam for 135 weeks between 1 January 2002 and 31 March 2005 engaged in seven projects, and has not returned. One UK-based organisation went to Ou Chheu Kroam in March 2006 and the other on 21 August 2006. Both were there in February 2007.

The Sector's physical presence in the village is at two levels. The first is its temporary dwellings. CMAC's personnel built two dozen or so temporary shelters for their families on the periphery of the *pagoda* at the time of its first landmine clearance intervention in 2002. All its personnel were male. At the end of each project, teams would leave and a guard was retained to prevent those homes from being occupied. By 2007 a fire swept through them. Most of them are now uninhabitable. The UK-based organisations in Ou Chheu Kroam since 2006 rent properties from Ou Chheu Kroam residents.

The Sector's other institution is the Community-Based Mine Risk Reduction (CBMRR) network introduced to Kampuchea in 2001, and functional in Ou Chheu Kroam from 2002-2005. Its two male volunteers are the focal points for issues related to landmines in Ou Chheu Kroam. Residents contact the CBMRR when there are active landmines. The CBMRR informs CMAC in Pailin. CMAC detonates or removes the landmines, or requests other demining organisations closer to the site to dispose of live ordnance. The UK-based organisations have neither used the CBMRR network, nor replaced it with an alternative structure.

### ***The Family***

Cambodia has been tortured by years of war and genocide. Basic familial relationships were irredeemably traumatized during the Pol Pot regime, when children informed upon parents and parents upon their children. The fundamental building blocks of Cambodian society were torn apart as families unraveled. They have not yet recovered. This legacy makes the sale of children, and the buying of people, that much easier (Brown 2001:59-60).

Brown makes a convincing case that the sale of children and the buying of people are integral to the modern-day commercialised sex industry. What is less convincing, however, is the link that she makes between the Pol Pot regime and the breakdown of families. Mam maintains that the Khmer Rouge policies were designed to weaken family structures but were unsuccessful because (a) they were not in power long enough, and (b) individuals used small acts of resistance and engaged with family members anyway (Mam 2006:120).

In Khmer Buddhism women earn spiritual merit and social prestige through motherhood, and the most meritorious act is to offer her son as a monk (Lee 2007:12), which is not a common practice in Ou Chheu Kroam. To unpack relationships within the family, respondents were asked for their opinions about hierarchy within their own families.

Forty-eight per cent (25 women and 19 men) said that fathers have higher status than mothers; 40% (18 women and 19 men) said that the mothers and fathers have the same status, and 12% (6 women and 5 men) said that fathers do not have higher status than mothers.<sup>4</sup> At least two-thirds of the respondents said that all other relationships were the same.

Respondents were asked what brought them to Ou Chheu Kroam, a minefield. The most important reason was for land, and the third reason was proximity to the international border. The second reason was for family. Sixty-two per cent of the respondents have at least one parent and for almost half, both parents are alive. Ten per cent of the respondents have their in-laws living in Ou Chheu Kroam

In summary, evidence points to the privileging of males over females in education, religion and the Sector, and there is evidence to suggest that women are subordinate to their husbands. There is also little evidence to point to the unraveling of family relationships in Ou Chheu Kroam.

## **7. Gender Ideology**

This section looks at the ideology that holds the community living in a minefield together. To project as balanced a view as possible the starting point in this section is the single example found in the literature of amputee women having children out of wedlock (Mitchell 2003), and since it is such a major ideological shift it was tested in the study area. Juxtaposing attitudes to amputee women and men, it was felt, would uncover the privileging

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<sup>4</sup> The terms 'mothers' and 'fathers' were used in preference to the more abstract 'women' and 'men'.

of men over women. The first following table is data from Ou Chheu Kroam and the second from Ou Roel:

	Women		Men		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b><i>Is it OK if a single female amputee takes a husband for a night for a baby?</i></b>						
No	18	43	24	57	42	56
Yes	4	21	15	79	19	25
Don't Know	7	50	7	50	14	19
Total	29	39	46	61	75	100
<b><i>Is it OK if a single male amputee takes a wife for a night for a baby?</i></b>						
No	8	36	14	64	22	31
Yes	19	44	24	56	43	60
Don't Know	2	28	5	72	7	9
Total	29	40	43	60	72	100

Data for Ou Roel are the following:

	Women		Men		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b><i>Is it OK if a single female amputee takes a husband for a night for a baby?</i></b>						
No	13	68	6	32	19	49
Yes	8	50	8	50	16	41
Don't Know	2	50	2	50	4	10
Total	23	59	16	41	39	100
<b><i>Is it OK if a single male amputee takes a wife for a night for a baby?</i></b>						
No	6	75	2	25	8	21
Yes	17	57	13	43	30	77
Don't Know	1	100	0	0	1	2
Total	24	62	15	38	39	100

Almost half (49%) in Ou Roel and 56% in Ou Chheu Kroam find it unacceptable for a female amputee to have a child out of wedlock. On the other hand, 77% in Ou Roel and 60% in Ou Chheu Kroam find it acceptable for a male amputee to have a child out of wedlock. The reasons for acceptability and unacceptability are: “we don't allow that” said a 44-year-old woman alluding to female amputees; “if it is her choice, it's OK, but if she is being exploited, then it is not OK” said a 30-something male. Another male said “Never in Kampuchea. A man can decide to have a baby, but I don't think women can”; “she is not

complete so no one will want her”; “he has to continue his family line”; “men can do anything with money”; “a man can support the family even if he is an amputee”; “no, because women discriminate against male amputees”; “it is OK for pleasure but not for babies” said a male in his mid-forties speaking about amputee males. Three respondents invoked “tradition” and one said that it is against Buddhism. One said “it’s OK if they love each other.”

The question was who, if anyone, has lower status than single amputee fathers and mothers.

	Women		Men		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b><i>Who, if anyone, has lower status than single amputee fathers?</i></b>						
Beggars	4	57	3	43	7	29
His children	4	66	2	34	6	25
Mother of his children	1	100	0	0	1	4
Poorest of the poor	1	50	1	50	2	8
No one	2	100	0	0	2	8
Drug addicts and thieves	2	50	2	50	4	16
Old abandoned women	0	0	1	100	1	4
Abandoned people	0	0	1	100	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b><i>Who, if anyone, has lower status than single amputee mothers?</i></b>						
Beggars	6	46	7	54	13	39
No one	3	38	5	62	8	24
Elderly abandoned women and men	0	0	1	100	1	3
Prostitutes	4	100	0	0	4	12
Her children	6	86	1	14	7	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>

No one has lower status than amputee women for 24% of the respondents and amputee men for 8% of the respondents. What is notable is the low status accorded to the children of both single amputee women and men. In no circumstance was it said or implied that beggars, the poorest of the poor or the abandoned are amputees

## **8. Challenging the Stereotypes**

The objective of this paper was to describe the gendered aspects of a community living in a minefield with a view to exploring whether the experiences of that community are consistent with the types of experiences described in the literature discussed in Section 1.0 above.

Challenging the stereotypes means challenging the rhetoric that women and children are the victims of landmines; that amputees are vulnerable, poor, and have little access to services provided by governments; that monks and lay people rarely or never visit the disabled; and amputee women's status is affected by landmine casualties.

From an examination of gender roles, no one appears to be excluded from the agricultural process that includes landmine clearance. Gender identities change as a consequence of landmine casualties, and no evidence was found that women and children are disproportionately the victims of landmines. One can conclude that women and men are equally handicapped by landmines. In Ou Chheu Kroam no children were landmine casualties. An exploration of gender structures reveals that the primary school privileges boys over girls as students, and men over women as teachers. The *pagoda* is a male preserve and relies on women for donations, food, their sons to become monks, and their participation in temple ceremonies. Women are polluting. Monks and lay people may or may not visit the disabled, but monks were seen on more than one occasion visiting an extremely sick relative in Ou Chheu Kroam. The Sector, on the other hand, makes a point of visiting landmine casualties. The Sector was instrumental in de-legitimising landmines as a weapon, and in so doing controls landmine management and decrees who can and who cannot enter minefields. Within the institution of the family, men are the heads of

households and all other relationships within the family are relatively equal. There was little evidence that points to the imminent unraveling of the family in Ou Chheu Kroam, and data are available from which an analysis can be made of Khmer families over the past century so acute is memory of family. An examination of gender ideology through attitudes to amputee women having children out of wedlock revealed a double standard: it was less acceptable for amputee women than amputee men to have a child. Similarly, a finding in Section 3.0 above is that it is unlikely that domestic violence is endemic in Ou Chheu Kroam.

An alternate representation of amputee women is proposed. A double amputee is the youngest in the family; illiterate; enterprising; and in control of her life. The shift in identity from farmer to entrepreneur, while an occupational shift, opened the door for her to exert control over her own life and extend her influence over her family and within the community: she extends credit for food and drink to customers to her shop. It was she who terminated the relationship with the non-amputee head school teacher. Similarly, an alternate representation of amputee men could profile the Village Demographer who has tremendous stature in the village as a war veteran-turned-farmer, a scribe, Deputy Chief, home owner, the husband of a war veteran-turned-front line medic, and father of four since the amputation of a leg and the loss of an eye.

An alternate projection from a minefield are the institutions that are being built by Ou Chheu Kroam's residents, the amputees and the able-bodied, the women and the men, in the almost total absence of the State. Those institutions provide water to the home, malaria

diagnosis and treatment, maternity services, housing and homesteads, farm animals, money-lending services, TV and video for entertainment, grocery shops, and landmine clearance.

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