

CAMBODIA'S HIDDEN SCARS: TRAUMA PSYCHOLOGY IN THE WAKE OF THE KHMER ROUGE

AN EDITED VOLUME ON CAMBODIA'S MENTAL HEALTH



EDITED BY:

Beth Van Schaack, Daryn Reicherter, and Youk Chhang

MANAGING EDITOR: Autumn Talbott

Documentation Series No 17 – Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2011

This book is dedicated to the Victims and Survivors of the Cambodian Genocide. To the children of Sophany and Sarit Bay:

Sophanouvong (Paul) Bay (1969-1976)

Botum Kunthea (Pine) Bay (1970-1976)

Lilavodey (Pomme) Bay (1974-1975)

Murdered by the Khmer Rouge.

The Khmer Rouge Standing Committee aimed to ensure compliance and eliminate dissent by oppressing the people through psychological dominance. The defilement of Khmer religion, Khmer art, Khmer familiar relations, and the Khmer social class structure undermined deeply-held societal assumptions. The Khmer Rouge also destabilized the mass psychology that was secure in those realities. Cambodia's psychology was thus altered in damaging and enduring ways. In societies that experience war and genocide, trauma significantly impacts the people's psychology. The ripple effects of this damage are often incalculable. There are well-established statistics demonstrating a higher prevalence of trauma-related mental health disorders in post-conflict societies. This book considers the mental health implications of the Khmer Rouge era among the Cambodia populace. Specialists in trauma mental health discuss the increased rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression, among other major mental health disorders, in the country. They also discuss the staggering burden of such a high prevalence of societal mental illness on a post-conflict society. Legal experts discuss the way in which the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia can better accommodate victims and witnesses who are traumatized to avoid re-traumatization and to ensure a meaningful experience with justice. The text also offers a set of recommendations for addressing the widespread mental health issues within the society.

This book engages these issues in three parts. Part I draws on the expertise of several experts on psychology and Cambodia to consider trauma's effects on human psychology. It offers a statistical and theoretical overview of the mental health consequences at the individual and societal levels, examines the multigenerational effects of severe trauma, and demonstrates the way in which such effects continue to impact the nation and its development. Part II features the work of legal experts as well and explores the interplay between trauma psychology and the ECCC. In particular, it looks at the psychological effects of the work of the Court on participants, witnesses, and civil parties and examines the concept of justice as it relates to trauma psychology. Several submissions are critical of the Court's reaction to the psychological state of the survivors. Finally, it raises questions about reparations as a form of accountability for the mental health of survivors. Part III examines the resources for interventions and for the treatment of mental suffering in Cambodia. It assesses the public and private mental health system in Cambodia as it relates to the treatment of trauma-related mental health. This is accomplished through a series of inclusive studies extracting the opinions of mental health providers and administrators struggling to meet the incredible need in a complicated and highly burdened system.