

Singapore Institute of International Affairs Access to Justice Asia Legal Team - Vinita Ramani Mohan 6 January 2009 (...) A great deal of literature already exists on the Khmer Rouge period (...) But much of the writing has emerged in two disciplinary fields: political science and history. There was and still is a paucity of scholarship on post-conflict, postcolonial countries in Southeast Asia focusing on “muddier” areas like memory/forgetting, identity and informal rule-following, culture, genocide and reconstruction. (...)

Cambodia is an unfortunate exception to the rule in that gathering of nations with unfortunate histories of genocides in their recent pasts. Unlike the relatively more urgent responses of the international community to atrocities in former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, East Timor, Sudan and perhaps Burma in the future, Cambodia’s atrocities occurred nearly three decades ago and have gone largely unaddressed until now.

(...) Almost unanimously, survivors passionately and angrily ask why it is that no one responded when such horrendous crimes were occurring in the country. Memory and accountability, inextricably tied together in this case, remain under-researched in Cambodia.

Yet another factor stood out during interviews with survivors and the children of survivors (whom I subsequently tagged as the “post-conflict generation”): their stoicism was merely a thin layer over the memories of violence and the still vivid sense of personal suffering. (...) Existing tools are insufficiently shaped to understand the particular context of suffering in Cambodia and that even words like “memory”, “trauma” and “reconciliation” become embedded with multiple meanings when they are translated into Khmer. (...)

At any rate, countries like Cambodia and East Timor are now becoming test cases where we are witnessing the impact (or the lack thereof) of post-conflict tribunals or truth and reconciliation commissions. While it’s vital to pay attention to the legal and political implications, scholars would do well to more keenly focus their attention on social memory and the role of civil society organizations in these countries. It’s certainly evident that they are making waves in Cambodia, which has social and cultural consequences for the future.

Source:

<http://www.siiainline.org/?q=programmes/commentary/genocide-memory-and-trauma-asia-on-paucity-research-and-road-ahead>