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## **Savina Sirik** **NEGOTIATING** **MEMORIES** **Survivor Narratives** **of Victimhood in Post-** **-Conflict Cambodia**

University of Gothenburg. Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Global Studies, Peace and Development Research. Doctoral Thesis (Book – Monograph). 2022, 225 pp.

After having gained independence, Cambodia saw decades of incessant wars, crimes against humanity, and genocide. It started with a five-year long civil war (1970–1975), followed by the mass violence imparted by the Khmer Rouge during the time of Democratic Kampuchea (1975–1979), and ended with yet another civil war, which went on for almost two decades (1979–1998), after the fall of the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror. Local society suffered immensely during these decades of war, oppression, terror, mass violence, expulsion, famine, forced labour, forced marriages, and family separation. The end result was complete destruction of the country's economic and physical infrastructure, along with virulent tension between those who supported the Khmer Rouge and those who did not. In times of conflict, differences in belonging lead to a dissolution of society's communal bonds, which often manifests in polarisation, referring individuals to either one or the other identity group. Identities that arise from armed conflicts and mass violence are, however, often more complex than those suggested by the simple "victim" vs "perpe-

trator" dichotomy. Previous research shows that an individual may often be both victim and perpetrator in a certain situation, and in a series of situations over time.

The distinction between victim and perpetrator may be reinforced through formal mechanisms of transitional justice and national commemorative institutions, since these strive to create a clear-cut representation of what happened and who was responsible for the crimes committed. Such efforts tend to fail to capture the complexity of experiences of violence. Previous studies have shown that the complexity of individuals' identities tend to be overlooked in the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms following wars and mass abuse. This may, in part, be a result of lacking critical engagement in defining what constitutes a victim, which has ultimately led to certain victims being excluded from memorial processes and not receiving legal justice or damages. The book (thesis) points out that these aspects give rise to critical questions as to what dimensions shape ideas about victimhood and who could be seen as responsible for defining victimhood, as well as how individuals identify themselves.

This book analyses how individuals that have been identified as perpetrators from a social and political point of view construct, reconstruct, and negotiate victimhood through narratives following a period of war and mass abuse, and how they are represented in the implementation and narrative of memorialisation. The study starts out from the idea that narratives are not only representations of the past, but a form of discourse in which different versions of the past are constructed through processes of inclusion and exclusion. Narratives thus often represent a discursive device through which what happened in the past is interpreted and reinterpreted by different actors, to serve contemporary and future needs and interests. The present book aims to analyse the relations between individual constructions of victimhood and official narratives about the Khmer Rouge

period, by examining Khmer Rouge narratives in Cambodia after the civil war and genocide. On the one hand, the book explores the ways in which former Khmer Rouge survivors construct narratives about victimhood and claim victim status; on the other hand, it examines the Khmer Rouge narrative and implementation of memorialisation, in order to understand how public and non-public actors represent victims.

The present study is based on semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations conducted during 2018 and 2019, in different locations in Cambodia. It aims to deepen our understanding of the complexity of victimhood, as constructed in narratives, and, more specifically, to examine narrative constructions of victims, by analysing former Khmer Rouge members' memories, as well as narratives and memorialisation practices in post-genocide Cambodia. Keeping the complex context of post-genocide Cambodia in mind, the study builds on the idea of a "complex survivor", which refers not only to individuals who suffered the complexities of war, mass abuse, and genocide – something that has contributed to their multifaceted identities in a post-genocide society – but also to former Khmer Rouge members, who had their own share of suffering and struggling for survival in the period following the fall of Democratic Kampuchea – hardships that may be contributing to transforming them into complex individuals, whose struggles for survival and experiences of victimhood may not have received the same social or political recognition, and which are therefore constantly being negotiated.

This book discusses three research questions. To answer the first question – "How do former Khmer Rouge survivors

construct victimhood in their narratives of the Khmer Rouge period?" – claims to victimhood made by former Khmer Rouge members are analysed. The analysis is based mainly on narratives by a number of former Khmer Rouge members, who make claims to victimhood, and argue for these claims in various ways, for instance by negotiating the Khmer Rouge identity, and challenging the perpetrator label. In the analysis, individual narratives are discussed in terms of official narratives about collective victimhood, and social and cultural reference frames that individuals refer to in their accounts. The author uses theoretical perspectives taken from existing literature on victims and victimhood, along with the concept of an "ideal victim", to be able to discuss the former Khmer Rouge narratives and create a better understanding of how individuals construct their status as victims, and negotiate identities imposed by society.

To answer the second question – "How do former Khmer Rouge survivors construct temporality in their narratives of victimhood?" – the temporal aspects of the narratives are analysed. From an analytical point of view, the temporal theme ties in with the first research question, in that the former Khmer Rouge survivors' claims to victimhood build on narratives of alternative times. By analysing survivors' construction of different kinds of temporality (i.e., the understanding and representation of time), the study sheds light upon the way in which narrators use temporality to construct narratives about victims: namely by challenging time limits for Democratic Kampuchea and generally accepted assumptions about temporal linearity and past/present, or present/future dichotomies. In this discussion, the concepts of "time collapse" and "multiple temporalities" are used as an analytical tool to analyse temporal conflicts that have arisen between individual constructions of temporality and official time.

To answer the third question – "How are images of victims represented in me-

morialisation?" – key aspects of memorialisation of victim complexity are analysed. As part of this theme, the representation of victims in memory narratives and in practice is analysed. The analysis is performed with the help of literature on memorialisation of complex political victims and complex identities, engaging in the critical discussion of whether the complexity of victimhood should be pointed up or brushed aside.

The present book makes an empirical and analytical contribution to our knowledge about victimhood, survivor narratives, and memorialisation in the context of post-genocide Cambodia. It presents the reader with detailed and expressive narratives about the complex dynamics of survival in post-genocide Cambodia, and analyses these narratives about victimhood from the perspective of former members of the Khmer Rouge. Previous research on the memories of former members of the Khmer Rouge has focused on the tension between these individuals' understanding of the past, and the narrative about justice and reconciliation in post-genocide Cambodia. The present study analyses narratives about victimhood by former members of the Khmer Rouge, focusing on their self-identification as victims.

In contrast to much previous research in this context, the present book does not analyse the Khmer Rouge narratives only as stories that oppose official memory. Rather, it analyses these narratives as a discursive device by means of which the former members of the Khmer Rouge negotiate their memories relative to different parts of the current official narrative about collective victimhood and Khmer Rouge demonisation, stigmatisation, and discrimination, so

as to construct and reconstruct their own status as victims and challenge the perpetrator label.

Furthermore, the book contributes to our understanding of victimhood in the context of transitional justice, by shedding light on how a plurality of temporalities may be used to articulate, redefine, and expand the definition of victimhood. The analysis shows that victimhood can be better understood by contextualising individuals' experiences beyond the strict temporal boundaries of Democratic Kampuchea – which have dominated proceedings in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia – and looking instead at victimhood as a continuous and dynamic phenomenon that does not know temporal limits. The analysis aims to show that victimhood may be contextualised to better capture the continuity of violence and suffering, and the coexistence of these experiences in the past, the present, and the future.

Another contribution that the present book makes has to do with the previously mentioned concept of an "ideal victim". The complexity of victims is analysed by examining how survivors engage in the discourse about ideal victims. The analysis shows that traits such as innocence, helplessness, vulnerability, and morality, which are included in the idea of the ideal victim, are used by survivors as a means to claim victimhood. That is, in contrast to previous research, the present study shows that rather than opposing the idea of the ideal victim, the former Khmer Rouge members' constructions of victimhood seem to be compatible with the attributes of the ideal victim. Not only do the former Khmer Rouge members represent themselves as victims – they also draw on social and cultural reference frames, such as the Buddhist concept of karma and merit, the collective identity of the Khmer, tales of heroism, and parts of the official narrative about collective victimhood.

Finally, the book contributes to the study of victim representation in post-war

memorialisation, by pointing out the ambivalence inherent in the representation of victims that have themselves both suffered and committed genocide. At the same time as the many nuances and complexities of victims are recognised in memorialisation, the representation of victimhood is influenced by the traits of the ideal victim, which focus on innocence and inability to act. In exhibitions, the representation of the Khmer Rouge – of their experiences and assumed victimhood – is reduced to a homogenous representation of ideal victims.

Using the above-mentioned analytical/theoretical starting points for the analysis of the collected empirical material in the form of documents, qualitative interviews and observations has its limitations. It turns out that certain concepts have high relevance to the field and one can indeed see many empirical sequences that are successfully analysed with the help of previous research and theory. But sometimes the analysis is almost limited by the theory, where one would have liked a more elaborate idea for the social life, victimhood and reconciliation in post-genocide society that Sirik writes about. The attempt at the analysis of photographs in museums as a narrative of victimhood and genocide is interesting and could possibly be a contribution for further research. In the book, however, it is difficult to fully see the strength of the analysis, especially what it adds beyond talking about the unsaid narrative that must be described first before the said narrative is created. Overall, Sirik's contribution to the understanding of a complex field of post-genocide studies is welcome and indicates a drive and creativity that will be exciting to follow in the future.

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## **Sanja Tatalović Vorkapić i Jennifer LoCasale-Crouch (Ur.) SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S WELL- -BEING DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITION TO SCHOOL**

IGI Global, Hershey, 2021., 432 str.

U sklopu serije knjiga *Napredak u ranom djetinjstvu i obrazovanje K-12* u izdanju IGI Global 2021. objavljena je knjiga *Pružanje podrške dobiti djece tijekom prijelaza u vrtić i školu*. Navedenom knjigom urednice prof. dr. sc. Sanja Tatalović Vorkapić i prof. dr. sc. Jennifer LoCasale-Crouch obogatile su stranu stručnu literaturu koja se bavi dobiti djece tijekom prijelaznih razdoblja, konkretno prijelaza u dječji vrtić i osnovnu školu, koje neka djeca shvaćaju kao svoja prva velika prijelazna razdoblja. Prijelazna razdoblja pružaju prilike i izazove osobnom rastu i razvoju djece i mogući su izvor raznih anksioznosti i nesigurnosti, kako za samo dijete, tako i za njegovu obitelj.

U knjizi se iskustvo prijelaza pružava prije svega iz perspektive djece, no ni perspektiva roditelja i odgajatelja nije zanemarena, jer oni mogu omogućiti proces adekvatnoga prijelaza. Urednice navode kako su knjigu zamislile kao alat čija je funkcija preispitivanje suvremenih teorijskih modela prijelaznih razdoblja, provedenih istraživanja i implementiranih praksi.

Knjiga je tematski organizirana u četiri sekcije, svaka ima četiri poglavlja, u kojima su stručnjaci iz raznih dijelova svijeta i kulturnih pozadina pružili svoj doprinos kroz teorijski i empirijski pristup te primjere dobre prakse. Knjiga sadrži i predgovor, uvod, priznanja, popis referenci, poglavlje o suradnicima te indeks pojmova.