

# 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  
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.*



## ABOUT THE BOOK:

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 wide spread 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.

# ABOUT THE EDITORS:

**BETH VAN SCHAACK** is Associate Professor of Law with Santa Clara University School of Law, where she teaches and writes in the areas of human rights, transitional justice, international criminal law, public international law, international humanitarian law, and civil procedure. For the academic year 2009-2010, she is a Visiting Scholar with the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law at Stanford University. She also served on the United States delegation to the International Criminal Court Review Conference in Kampala, Uganda.

Prof. Van Schaack joined the law faculty from private practice at Morrison & Foerster LLP. As a Senior Associate at “MoFo”, Prof. Van Schaack practiced in the areas of commercial law, intellectual property, international law, and human rights. In particular, she was trial counsel for *Romagoza v. Garcia*, a human rights case on behalf of three Salvadoran refugees that resulted in a plaintiffs’ award of \$54.6 million. She was also on the criminal defense team for John Walker Lindh, the “American Taliban.”

Prior to entering private practice, Prof. Van Schaack was Acting Executive Director and Staff Attorney with The Center for Justice & Accountability, a non-profit law firm in San Francisco dedicated to the representation of victims of torture and other grave human rights abuses. She was also a law clerk with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Since 1995, she has served as a legal advisor to the Documentation Center of Cambodia, an organization dedicated to staging a legal accounting for the crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge era in Cambodia. In 2006, she served as Prosecutor for the International Citizen’s Tribunal for Sudan, presided over by Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, which presented the case under international criminal law against President Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan.

Prof. Van Schaack is a graduate of Stanford University and Yale Law School.  
(contact: [bvanschaack@scu.edu](mailto:bvanschaack@scu.edu))

**DARYN REICHERTER, M.D.**, is a Clinical Assistant Professor at Stanford University, School of Medicine’s Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

He is dedicated to providing a combination of administrative and clinical services in the area of cross-cultural trauma mental health. In addition to chairing the Board of Directors for Survivors International, he is the Director of Cross Cultural Psychiatry at the Gardner Mental Health Care Clinic where he works with Cambodian survivors of genocide. He is a Psychiatrist at the Center for Survivors of Torture, Asian Americans for Community Involvement. He works locally with refugee survivors from around the world.

Dr. Reicherter is involved with the movement for promotion of trauma mental health and human rights issues spanning countries including Cambodia, Haiti, Zimbabwe, and Indonesia. He serves as consultant to the Documentation Center of Cambodia for the Victims of Torture Project.

Dr. Reicherter has also been involved in the creation of clinical mental health programs for the underserved the San Francisco Bay Area.

After receiving degrees in Psychobiology and Philosophy from the University of California at Santa Cruz, Dr. Reicherter completed his doctorate in medicine at New York Medical College. He completed internship and residency and served as Chief Resident at Stanford University Hospitals and Clinics.

He lives in Palo Alto, California with his wife and their children.  
(contact: [reichertermd@yahoo.com](mailto:reichertermd@yahoo.com))

**YOUK CHHANG** is the Chairman of the Sleuk Rith Institute, Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), and a survivor of the Khmer Rouge’s “killing fields.” DC-Cam grew out of Yale University’s Cambodian Genocide Program and became an independent Cambodian NGO in 1997 under Mr. Chhang’s leadership. Mr. Chhang received the Truman-Reagan Freedom Award from the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in Washington, DC in 2000. He was named one of Time magazine’s “60 Asian heroes” in 2006 and one of the “Time 100” most influential people in the world in 2007 for his stand against impunity in Cambodia and elsewhere. (contact: [dccam@online.com.kh](mailto:dccam@online.com.kh))

### FRONT COVER PHOTO & CAPTION BY ENG KOK-THAY

Phan Srey Leab Holds a Photo of Family Members Imprisoned by the Khmer Rouge regime

At nine years old, Phan Srey Leab is a quiet and docile girl with piercing eyes. She is a granddaughter of Chan Kim Srun and Sek Sat. As a member of the military, Sek Sat rose quickly through the ranks, first commanding the I8th Company of Region 33 and then the I2th Regiment in 1973. By 1977, Sek Sat was a secretary of Koh Thom district and, by 1978, a secretary of Region 25.

On May 13, 1978, the Khmer Rouge arrested Sek Sat, his wife, and their newborn baby boy. They arrived at Tuol Sleng Prison (S-21) the next day. Forty days later, Sek Sat wrote a sixty-seven-page confession, in which he admitted to traitorous activities dating back to 1965 when he joined the United States Central Intelligence Agency. According to the confession, his main goals were to oppose the monarchy and communism, and to “hide in the revolution to build force.”

Documents from Tuol Sleng prison do not indicate whether Chan Kim Srun wrote a confession before she died. The only prison document directly concerning Chan Kim Srun is a short biography and a portrait, taken upon her arrival at S-21, of her carrying her sleeping baby. Her brief biography, obtained by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), indicates that she managed a handicrafts workshop in Region 25 where her husband was chief. This portrait of Chan Kim Srun and her son graces the cover of our book. In the original photo, which is on display at Tuol Sleng Museum, it is possible to see tears dropping from Chan Kim Srun’s eyes.

Chan Kim Srun and Sek Sat had three children. At the time of their parents’ arrest, Sek Say was eleven and her younger sister, Chreb, was only nine. While the newborn son was imprisoned with Sek Sat and Chan Kim Srun, both of the girls and their aunt were jailed in a low-security prison in Koh Thom district. Chreb & Sek Say escaped with the aid of the Vietnamese in late 1978, but Chreb died of disease before reaching safety. Sek Say survived and moved to Kampong Speu where she remains today in Kong Pisey district.

Sek Say resembles her mother. She has five children, of which Phan Srey Leab is the third. Srey Leab likes to play in the kitchen when she can find a spot of her own. She only manages an average performance at school, but after school, she helps her mother cook, do household chores, and look after her younger sisters. Srey Leab has heard her mother blame their poverty on being orphaned at a young age. The young girl asked once about her grandparents and what had happened to them. Srey Leab listened to their story, but—quiet as she is—she has never again talked about it. (contact: [truthkokthay@dccam.org](mailto:truthkokthay@dccam.org))

---

Funding for this project was generously provided by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) with core support from U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).

The views expressed in this book are the points of view of the author only.  
Copyright © 2011 by the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover and book concept: Youk Chhang | Graphic design: Yvonne Wong | Photo credits: Eng Kok-Thay

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)

P.O. Box 1110

66 Sihanouk Blvd.

Phnom Penh, CAMBODIA

t: +855 (23) 211-875 f: +855 (23) 210-358

e: [dccam@online.com.kh](mailto:dccam@online.com.kh)

w: [www.dccam.org](http://www.dccam.org), [www.cambodiatribunal.org](http://www.cambodiatribunal.org)

Printed in Cambodia