Social stress, structural symbolic interactionism, and healing in Post-Conflict Cambodia: Can we achieve restorative justice?

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In this research project, medical sociologist Leakhena Nou explores the psychosocial causes of violence in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge and today as well as the outlook for achieving restorative justice through the application of the sociological methods of structural symbolic interactionism (SSI). Nou’s research records genocide survivors’ first-hand, experiential insights on stressors (e.g., past and present negative life events and “daily hassles”) and stress mediators (e.g., social support and positive coping strategies) that affect their psychosocial wellbeing both mentally and physically. A key focus of this work is how the five related themes of the SSI approach (symbols, definition of the situation, social roles, socialization and role-taking, and the “self”) might be similar for survivors and former perpetrators of the genocide, and how their exposure to PTSD or other traumas might be risk factors for violence in the past or present.

Leakhena NOU, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Sociology at California State University, Long Beach, and the founder and director of the Applied Social Research Institute of Cambodia. As a Cambodian medical sociologist, Dr. Nou’s major research interests are the sociology of trauma; human rights, peace, and conflict studies; Cambodian American studies; and Asian/Pacific/American studies.

Dr. Nou’s research centers on the epidemiology of social stress and health/illness, political sociology, and the intersection of gender studies, human rights, and international law. In her research with Cambodians in the United States and Cambodia, Dr. Nou explores how cross-cultural and cross-ethnic research can inform policy development and social science knowledge development. Nou is also conducting research on the current Khmer Rouge Tribunal and on issues of reconciliation, reparation, and healing justice.