

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### **Gender Justice in the Vernacular: Victims' Participation and Empowerment at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)**

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This dissertation highlights the flow of the transitional gender justice cascade in Cambodia. The richness of global knowledge is reframed and vernacularized to fit within the local setting. The research used qualitative research methods based on semi-structured interviews and participant observations to seek answer to two main questions to what extent has transitional justice empowered victims, especially women, and what are the roles of civil society organizations in the process of empowerment? The court proceedings presented unique and creative TJ mechanisms, which had the potential to empower survivors of the KR, enabling them to heal their trauma through meaningful participation.

The dissertation argues that the degree to which TJ mechanisms can empower women is determined by politics and power relationships surrounding the judicial process and the connections between global and local norms of gender justice. It is important not to neglect the influence politics and the power dynamic playing between different levels on the ground since they have the potential to shape and distort TJ.

The research found that due to the delayed establishment of the Victims Support Section (VSS) and investigation of GBV and rape, the court not only missed the opportunity to provide justice to victims and survivors of the crimes, but also never fully considered the complexity of traditional gender roles within Cambodian society. Through victim participation schemes, the NGOs and the ECCC provided a safe space and a favorable environment for survivors to gradually build trust in the process and ultimately share their past experiences. Inclusiveness and a victim-centered approach within the VSS of the ECCC and the NGOs were essential elements in enabling survivors to exercise their rights and use their agency to express their needs and concerns. The research contributed to define a concept of empowerment in TJ. The research also found that TJ practitioners and vernacularizers played very important roles in empowering survivors through their programs and creative projects; however, they became mired in the TJ imaginary, while many resilient survivors had already moved on with their lives by relying on traditional Buddhist beliefs. As a result, the vernacularizers missed the opportunity to create projects most responsive to the current needs of survivors. The TJ practitioners also made promises to survivors that they could not fully keep. As a result, though most victims of GBV felt empowered through their participation in the ECCC's processes, some survivors became disappointed and lost hope in the ECCC. They thought the ECCC should have done more to improve human rights and democracy in the country and also enhance survivors' living conditions.