

Threads of Evidence: Textile and Clothing Remains at Tuol Sleng

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From the black peasant uniforms of the Khmer Rouge (KR) to the clothes worn by prisoners entering S-21, textiles have been an overlooked aspect of Cambodia's material culture in the 1970s. At Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (TSGM), textile fragments, garments, and other objects had been abandoned for decades. In 2017, with the support from the US Embassy Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, American textile conservator Julia Brennan devised a unique mass-treatment protocol and training specific to both the climate and the nature of genocide artifacts, working with in-house conservation specialist Kho Chenda and her team. As will be further explained within this chapter, approximately 3,000 pieces of clothing were inventoried, photographed, conserved, and stored in a climate-controlled system. This multi-year textile conservation-training project established the victims' clothing and other objects as a living 'textile archive,' the first in Cambodia.² This terminology accurately describes what it is: a comprehensive body of materials from a specific historical period and place; one that is reactivated and made available through the actions of conservation and repair. Combining a historical and material perspective, this chapter first describes how Khmer Rouge politics redefined the clothing worn by Cambodians in the 1970s and how the TSGM's collection reflects those political effects. It then outlines the specific challenges of preserving the archive in terms of ethics, protocol, and training. Finally, this chapter examines how defining this collection as the textile archive brings this realm of materials in immediate connection to the mass of photographic, internal reports, forced confessions, and other documentation that makes up

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² "U.S. Assistance for Cambodian Cultural Preservation," U.S Embassy in Cambodia, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://kh.usembassy.gov/education-culture/u-s-government-assistance-cambodian-cultural-heritage-preservation/>.

the TSGM paper archive, to inform the individual and collective stories of S-21 and its victims.³

1 Politics of Dress and Textiles in Democratic Kampuchea and S-21

Scholarship on the Khmer Rouge regime has focused on the political, human, and societal cost of Democratic Kampuchea mainly through textual sources and oral testimonies. While there is scholarship focused on the history and dress of Cambodia pre- and post-Khmer Rouge regime, basic inventories and historical studies of victims' clothing and material possessions of the 1970s are virtually non-existent.⁴ Before the Khmer Rouge regime, women would wear a shirt with a colorful Malay-style printed sarong tube skirt as a daily outfit, and an embroidered *aw* (blouse) with a silk *sampot* (tube skirt) for ceremonies, weddings, and Buddhist celebrations. Men wore shirts and pants as everyday wear, and bright silk shirts and silk wrapped pants in the *chawng kben* style for festivities. Imported western clothing was popular among city dwellers with its form-fitting styles and bold 1960s patterns.⁵ The Khmer Rouge dramatically disrupted the social order of the country and restrictions on clothing and personal possessions were strictly enforced.

A 1977 black and white silent newsreel produced by the regime illustrates the glorification of farming and collectivism and shows women in the required national black peasant uniform.⁶ Images celebrate women working together picking cotton in fields, feeding mulberry leaves to silkworms, and operating spinning wheels and looms. This propagandist documentary shows how under the new regime, ancestral handicrafts were championed and expanded into mechanization for cotton.

3 About the paper and microfilm archive recovered in the 1980s, see Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 61–96.

4 Gillian Green, *Traditional Textiles of Cambodia: Cultural Threads and Material Heritage* (Bangkok: River Books, 2003); Sor Sokny, Phat Chammony Ratha, and Som Vannak, *Technique of Natural Dyeing and Traditional Pattern of Silk Production in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: UNESCO & The Buddhist Institute, 2008).

5 Narin Chea, et al. *Seams of Change: Clothing and the Care of the Self in late 19th and 20th century Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Reyum Publishing, 2003), 105–106.

6 Les Actualités Cambodgiennes, “Tissage artisanal et industriel du textile sous le régime khmer rouge”, film, 11:30, 1 January 1977, from INA, <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/vdd06002101/tissage-artisanal-et-industriel-du-textile-sous-le-regime-khmer-rouge>.

One of the main architects of Democratic Kampuchea ideology and later president from 1976–1979, Khieu Samphan considered that Cambodian domestic industries including national crafts were being destroyed due to imported mass-products and Western imperialist values. In his 1959 doctoral thesis on the Cambodian post-war economy, he considered that crafts had become an “appendage of large foreign industries” leaving craftspeople in a precarious situation.⁷ He called for a shift to a nationalist and rural self-reliant economy and state-supported cooperatives. In reality, artisanal production, and silk weaving in particular, nearly disappeared fully. Anthropologist Bernard Dupaigne wrote that “villages were ransacked, often abandoned and destroyed” and that as a result, weaving knowledge was lost.⁸ The capacity to produce silk was heavily impacted as well. Sericulture was confined to northern Cambodia in the Phnom Srok district of Banteay Meanchey province.⁹ Mulberry trees were otherwise cut for firewood and sold for export. By 1976, it was forbidden to wear silk or colorful clothing. All the clothes had to be black or dyed in dark muted tones with mud, charcoal, or with dyestuff obtained from *mok chua* (ebony fruit).¹⁰ Limited silk weaving was permitted to produce diplomatic gifts offered to official foreign visitors. Khmer Rouge cadres and ministry officials assigned to greet such visitors were permitted to go to a special storeroom to select clothing for these receptions.¹¹ One revealing example of diplomatic dress practices, was shared by Y Phandara in his memoirs.¹² He recalled attending a propagandist artistic event in 1978 with performers from the DK Radio to entertain a group of international visitors.¹³ Y Phandara and fellow students, dressed in their finest clothes, joined a crowd of colorfully attired attendees, noticing dozens of young

7 Khieu Samphan, “Underdevelopment in Cambodia,” trans. Laura Summers, *Indochina Chronicle*, Issue 51–52 (1976): 5–25, 13, 19.

8 Bernard Dupaigne, “Weaving in Cambodia,” in *Through the thread of time: Southeast Asian textiles: the James H.W. Thompson Foundation Symposium papers*, ed. Jane Puranananda (Bangkok: James H.W. Thompson Foundation, 2004), 26–29.

9 Cambodia Ministry of Commerce, and International Trade Center, *Cambodia National Silk Strategy* (PDF) (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Ministry of Commerce and ITC, 2016), 9.

10 Chileng Pa, and Carol Mortland, *Escaping the Khmer Rouge: A Cambodian Memoir* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2005), 102; Vann Chan Simen, “Back to black fashion stirs memories,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, 31 August 2001, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/back-black-fashion-stirs-memories>.

11 Narin Chea, et al. *Seams of Change: Clothing and the Care of the Self in late 19th and 20th century Cambodia*, 112–13.

12 Y Phandara, *Retour à Phnom Penh: Le Cambodge du Génocide à la Colonisation* (Paris: Editions A.-M. Métailié, 1982), 131–135.

13 The event gathered representatives of the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association, Ambassador Daouda Kourouma of the Republic of Guinea, and the Romanian folkloric group Crown of the Carpathians.

women wearing bright silk *sampot* and fitted bodices. But these costumed events were an anomaly.

Democratic Kampuchea officials pushed their agenda by establishing a uni-sex national uniform consisting of unfitted black cotton pajamas inspired by the peasant garb common to Cambodians and Vietnamese, worn with a checkered red and white *krama*, a cap, and black sandals made from tire rubber. The Khmer Rouge appropriated the *krama*, traditional plaid-patterned cloth, which was an affordable popular item owned by all Cambodians. This new clothing order aimed to erase gender differentiation and embody the new proletarian and collective rule. Men, women, and youngsters enrolled in Khmer Rouge militias became an anonymous army in black uniforms to which common people reacted with fear.¹⁴

The recovery and conservation plan of the clothing at TSGM thus provides a small but significant body of evidence-based material to explore Cambodian clothing in this period. While there are fragmentary examples of many black and dark clothing, there are no known original and complete examples of the militia uniform ensembles with a red *krama*, except in photographic archives, including the records at TSGM. TSGM opened *Children of Angkar* in 2017, a temporary exhibition telling the story of the Khmer Rouge young recruits, which included straw mannequins dressed in reproductions of black uniforms (figure 9.1). Yet, the museum's archive of original textile artifacts tells its own stories of war and hardship.

There had been no inventory of the textile artifacts, which were left behind after liberation day on 7 January 1979, until the appointment of Chhay Visoth as the director of TSGM in 2014. Hastily abandoned on site, all these objects became the museum's property by default. At the 1980 official opening of the museum, the clothing remnants were displayed in a large pile on a platform. The garments were gathered from all around the vast prison site, and the early museum work team washed several thousand articles of clothing.¹⁵ Nonetheless, visitors commented on the stench, and the piles were scavenged for much needed clothing.¹⁶ By 1991, the piles of clothing had been moved to the top

14 Pa and Mortland, *Escaping the Khmer Rouge: A Cambodian Memoir*, 68.

15 The S-21 facility was five times larger than it is today. In a Tuol Sleng internal document from the Ministry of Culture (1979–1980, translated 2020), it is stated that the site was not considered a museum but a place to show international guests the torture of people at S-21. Work started in March 1979 with 37 personnel and cadres, who washed and boiled several thousand articles of clothes.

16 Pen En worked on site from 1980 and recalls clothing, which was scattered in many buildings and compounds, was brought to the main “museum” building and put on the floor. Outside visitors picked through the piles of clothing and took pieces that had value or



FIGURE 9.1 'Children of Angkar' temporary exhibition at TSGM
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floor of Building B. In 2011, following a massive storm that damaged the building and clothing, piles were separated for storage into plastic bags and crates, and a small amount cleaned for display in the two cases that remain as of 2020 (figure 9.2). Chhay Visoth stumbled upon the bags of rotting clothes infested with rodents and eaten by termites. A first triage step conducted by volunteer

use. The same happened with plates, cutlery, furniture and other useful items. Pen En, personal correspondence with Julia Brennan, 2018.



FIGURE 9.2 Garments displayed in window cases of the permanent exhibition in Building B, 2018

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students from the Royal University of Fine Arts was the sorting of the textiles into categories, and temporary storage in open plastic crates: shirts, shorts and trousers, shoes, belts, wallets, backpacks, full garments, and tattered scraps. To prevent further harm, the termites were eradicated. Textile conservator Julia Brennan was then brought in in order to design and implement the first-ever efforts to conserve the clothing as material artifacts of the prison's history and the history of the genocide.

2 The Textile Archive: Conservation, Innovation, and Training

Preserving genocide clothing offers a particular suite of challenges. Since blueprints for conducting this work are non-existent, protocols for triage and care adapted and integrated western conservation strategies, archeological approaches, and local values.¹⁷ The treatment protocol necessitates retaining as much contextual information as possible and interventions cannot inhibit

¹⁷ Lilian Garcia-Alonso and Laura Lacombe, personal correspondence with Julia M Brennan, 2016–2018.

future research or interpretive use.¹⁸ Moreover, Tuol Sleng's policies mandate that artifacts cannot be altered in any irreversible way. The resulting plan determined that each piece of clothing would be surface cleaned with gentle mechanical action only, in order to identify details more readily. More invasive measures such as wet cleaning were ruled out, as they have the potential to irreversibly remove important information. The quantities of small textile fragments and plastics were batch-processed with a protocol that prioritized soil reduction and repeated sifting to identify unique artifacts. So far, the museum has counted about 3,000 pieces, some whole and some fragments. The inventory of the collection reveals a fairly homogenous group of clothing. Nearly three quarters of the material is Khmer Rouge military. In total, the archive has roughly 1,300 recognizable pieces and 2,000 fragments, including approximately 270 one-of-a-kind items.

As of 2020, all 1,300 pieces of recognizable clothing have been surface-cleaned, tagged, inventoried into a searchable database, and placed in a stable storage system. An innovative low-cost, passive microclimate storage system, DryBox and DryBead technology, ensures that all the organic materials are continuously maintained at a stable relative humidity and temperature, and accessible.¹⁹ Though many of the fragmentary pieces cannot be identified, small personal objects such as toothbrushes, earrings, wallets, and historic fabric fragments were found within the collection and cataloged as part of the archive. Written and photographic documentation and a searchable bilingual database provide a record of each artifact, whole or not. The low-intervention protocols unique to the preservation of degraded textiles devised by Julia Brennan through months of research and simulations in the USA, Rwanda, and Cambodia, are at their core driven by respect, suitability to the tropical climate, sustainable practice, and consideration of future use and study. Brennan emphasizes the need to prepare for the harsh reality of this work by learning as much as possible about the relevant history so as to put it in context. For her part, Kho Chenda, conservator, has acknowledged the difficulty of handling these objects without feeling sadness and discomfort. She uses the term *slack snaam*, which means "stain" or "scar," also defined as a mark of the past, to describe the traces of suffering embedded in the fibers.²⁰

18 Mary Brooks, et al., "Artifact of Information? Articulating the Conflicts in Conserving Archaeological Textiles," *Studies in Conservation* (41: sup1): 16–21.

19 "DryBead and Drybox technology developed by Rhino Research Systems & Dry Chain America," Rhino-Research (website), accessed March 20, 2020, <http://www.rhino-research.com>.

20 Kho Chenda (conservator, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum) in discussion with Magali An Berthon, Phnom Penh, January 2020.

This multifaceted project was designed to provide preventive and textile conservation instruction to deepen the collections care capacity of the TSGM staff through on-site hands-on workshops, classroom lectures, and remote support (figure 9.3). Kho Chenda and three graduates with BA's in archeology actively participated in the multiple years of comprehensive training. The project also provided opportunities for cross training of other museum staff and fostered relationships between departments. Kho Chenda stated, "the training was really enriching for all of us. I am gaining all the knowledge I need to preserve historical textiles and I would love to share my knowledge with others to make sure no evidence will get lost in the future."²¹

The curriculum was tailored to the needs of the collection, the skill level of the participants, and the locally available resources. To broaden knowledge about this particular genre of textiles, initial lectures addressed global genocide memorials and how textiles are interpreted and preserved. The images of materials from other genocide memorials reinforced that as stewards of cultural heritage, the TSGM staff is not alone, and confront the same challenges of climate, resources, staffing, training, long term exhibit and storage goals as the others. English was the primary language. Documents were also translated



FIGURE 9.3 Julia Brennan and TSGM staff member Chheang Sokpenh sorting textile fragments in protective garbs, TSGM conservation (2018)

21 Kho Chenda, personal correspondence with Julia M. Brennan, 2019.

into Khmer. All bilingual informational materials, such as cleaning steps, workflow, local insect charts, glossary of terms, and mechanical directions, were illustrated, printed, laminated, and posted for easy reference. Learning to examine textiles and describe them in common terminology was a primary objective. The training components directly supported the development of the protocol used to establish the textile archive. For example, the object examination methods and bilingual terminology used to describe objects' condition, in turn, informed cataloging. Kho Chenda now runs the conservation department with a team capable of managing the TSGM textile collection within these specialized protocols, continuing to inventory, monitor the clothing (for humidity, pests, or other problems), and conduct environmental monitoring for the site overall (figure 9.4).



FIGURE 9.4 Julia Brennan and Kho Chenda examining together a patched man's blue linen shirt at the textile conservation lab, TSGM conservation (2020)

3 Initial Findings: Significance of the Collection and Reconstructing Identity

Historian Richard Sennett has stressed the importance of material culture in revealing new layers of understanding: “Because cloth, pots, tools, and machines are solid objects, we can return to them again and again in time; we can linger as we cannot in the flow of a discussion.”²² In the absence of the prisoners themselves, the clothing’s significance is defined by how it connects visitors on a deeply personal scale with the intimacy of real lives destroyed. Victims are no longer anonymous: their clothes are tangible, relatable, and evoke powerful emotional connections. They smell and they carry the DNA of the dead. Thus, Tuol Sleng’s textile archive provides new evidence for researchers completing and expanding the narratives associated with this memorial site. In a typical decorative arts or art museum, textile artifacts in the poorest condition would either be discarded or de-accessioned, only to keep the ‘best’ examples. The conservation plan here cannot follow the same logic. Each object, even at its most fragile, worn and torn, needs to be saved. It is both evidence and connection to the S-21 prisoners and victims of the Khmer Rouge genocide. The collection is a byproduct of the site itself; a tangible result of the daily life and atrocities carried out at the prison, as well as the acquisition and incorporation of textiles post conflict during the early years of the museum.²³

The photographic records established by the Khmer Rouge at S-21 show that many prisoners were photographed in what they arrived in – most are in dark blue or black collared shirts with chest pockets or green military fatigues. Others were wearing everyday clothing, including t-shirts, patterned blouses, and shirts. Some had a *krama* scarf or a *sarong* wrapped around their shoulders. After the mug shots, the prisoners were stripped of their belongings. Disrobing prisoners was an obvious way to deprive them of their humanity and denoted their subjugated status as prisoners.²⁴ Men wore only undershorts. Women were permitted to keep their tube skirts. Clothing was also a privilege and could be earned by working at the prison. For instance, one of the few survivors, Chum Mey, testified that he got a black uniform when he started to fix his jailers’ typewriters and sewing machine in the prison workshop. With

²² Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 15.

²³ It is possible that some of the garments were brought after the fall of the regime, or gathered from the neighborhood and left on the pile of clothes.

²⁴ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 98.

clothing, he was partially reintegrated into the system, not as a cadre, but as an aide, a position that distinguished him from the other prisoners.²⁵

At TSGM, the collection of identifiable artifacts includes the clothing and accessories of women and men, children, military, Khmer Rouge and lay. The items in the archive can be generally categorized as pants and shirts (short and long), t-shirts, children's clothing, socks, shoes, boots, sandals, small and large carrying pouches and militia bags, bag straps, wallets, and underwear. All clothing is in poor condition, showing not only original use from the wearer, but decades of decomposition, discoloration, staining, and infestations. Because it is so degraded, evidence of torture or violence cannot be easily diagnosed; only one item, a military boot, with a perfectly round hole, appears to raise questions of a purposeful injury to the foot.

Most of the clothing appears to be cotton, but the collection does include a significant quantity of synthetic, mostly polyester blend, 'parachute' nylon, and polyester knit. There are almost no manufacturer or tailor labels in any of the clothing. Most of the clothing is machine stitched and either local or of presumably Chinese manufacture.²⁶ A smaller group appears to be homemade. There are some American military manufacture marks on selected pieces, including a US Army issue medical bag. There are a few examples of the indestructible sandals in the *sangraik* style with straps, an emblem of the KHMER ROUGE, fashioned of car tires and pieces of inner tubing lacing them together. As noted, three quarters of the items are identifiable as Khmer Rouge military, cadres, including S-21 guards clothing and accessories. They include pants, shirts, the signature Chinese *kadep* (caps), backpacks, canteen holders, "kit bags" and ammo pouches, straps from bags, boots, and belts. Dark shirts and pants were standard uniforms for Khmer Rouge cadres. It is evident that some of these items were over-dyed: the seams, stitching, fade patterns and damage reveal the original lighter-colored and patterned fabrics. In addition, there is a large number of the dark green military fatigues indicating that many soldiers from the Khmer Rouge regiments were brought to the site as well, especially during the mass purges towards the end of the regime.²⁷ What is notable is what is not there. There is not a single *krama*. While *krama* are present in many of the S-21 mug shots, it is believed that these emblems of the Khmer Rouge

25 Chum Mey, *Survivor: The Triumph of an Ordinary Man in the Khmer Rouge Genocide* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2012), 36–7.

26 Nhem En and Dara Duong, *The Khmer Rouge's Photographer at S-21: Under the Khmer Rouge Genocide* (Cambodia, 2014), 36.

27 Nhem Boraden, *The Khmer Rouge: Ideology, Militarism, and the Revolution that Consumed a Generation* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013), 61.

uniform, as well as other good quality clothing, were likely immediately recycled by the regime organization and redistributed to living cadres.

Within the collection today, examples of colored or fancy clothing, remnants of common life before the dictatorship are few. An unforgettable and stylish 1970s knit frock has a label from Tokyo. A proper lady's handbag, made of European-style tapestry fabric, and a pillow upholstered in a pattern idealizing Prince Sihanouk's period of Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community) evoke a previous era. A few unique textile pieces include two small fragments of *krama saut* (silk krama) and a piece from a classical dance costume; the sole evidence of Cambodia's rich luxurious textile traditions. There is one typical camisole with hidden pockets and a flowery cotton day-wear sarong, its motifs obliterated by mold and stains. Several pairs of boys' corduroy shorts and three girls' dresses represent the innocent children of S-21.

In the same way the photographic archives were digitized to aid in the identification of victims by matching names to photographs, the cataloging of the textile artifacts is part of the same "attempt to restore the individuality – and thus the humanity – giving new life to the victims."²⁸ For instance, a number of otherwise-identical green caps have first names written or stitched onto the brims. This follows the common practice of embroidering names onto school uniforms, to identify important clothing. One such example is a khaki green cap (Object 0265) embroidered at the back in synthetic factory fuzzy thread in three colors, blue for the first name, red for the middle name or nickname, and green to create a cartouche. Names found on clothing could be cross-referenced with confessions, prisoner numbers and photos, military data, and Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia Tribunal testimonies.

Charles H. Twining, former US ambassador to Cambodia, explained, "the rule of thumb in Democratic Kampuchea seems to have been one set of new clothing per person per year. Clothing not made in cottage industry or taken off persons who were executed came presumably from the operating textile factories."²⁹ Clothing was valued as a commodity and used as currency to barter for food, cans of rice.³⁰ The history of hardship and scarcity under the Khmer Rouge is borne out by the many repairs found on the artifacts in the TSGM archive. The patterns of wear indicate how rare cloth was during the regime. A few of the garments display a long history of repair, patched again and again over time. The details of these repairs provide a sense of determination and survival.

²⁸ Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable*, 88.

²⁹ Charles H. Twining, "The Economy," in *Cambodia 1975–1978: Rendez-vous with Death*, ed. Karl D. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 122.

³⁰ Pin Yathay, *Stay Alive My Son* (Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1987), 28.

A handful of admissions portraits from the TSGM archive show the prisoners wearing shirts mended with unusual materials. In this picture, the man is wearing a torn shirt closed at the bottom with a tied *krama* ribbon instead of a buttonhole in a fashion similar to the woman's shirt described below. This woman's black shirt (Object 0017) in a medium twill canvas has two added blue pockets and patched cuffs in fine grey cotton, combining hand-sewn and machine-made repairs (figure 9.5). Fasteners made of a *krama* fragment at the collar and the cuffs replaced button-holes and buttons, while a patched yellow flowery sarong fragment reinforced the whole piece on the inside. These materials were typical of the pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodian daily attire. This object



FIGURE 9.5 Woman's black shirt, reference object 0017, courtesy of TSGM
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is a remarkable example of adaptability and survival for a woman who most likely owned only this one shirt. The lack of consistency in the repairs with different techniques, choice of patched fabrics and threads certainly indicates that fabrics were extremely scarce, and that any available material was used as people were forcibly relocated. This points to the owner possibly being part of the 'New People.' Her shirt alone, bears witness to the upending of an entire culture, a material connection to the historical record. An interface between the intimate and the social body, clothing is a resilient repository of memories and identities for individuals and society.

4 Conclusion

Archaeologist Lynn Meskell has taken from historian David Lowenthal the idea that monuments and historical sites are “mnemonics that may serve both as reminders of the past and harbingers of the future.”³¹ If the former prison site becomes the mnemonic device to remember the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge, then, the clothing from the textile archive have become mnemonics of the prisoners' lives. The inherent nature of textiles, their tactile quality and direct proximity to the skin, amplify their sensory dimension and turns them into emotional repositories. The artifacts of genocide embody emotional, cultural, and preservation challenges for preservation professionals. Inherently, however, the physical act of conservation and repair, is to prepare and make whole and living again. The living archive provides placeholders for the now-disappeared bodies of the victims—still impregnated with blood, tears, sweat, dust, and hair. In spite of their fragmentary form, these objects help to provide a pluralistic perspective on S-21 history and heritage.

This project established a template and invitation for future conservation and research, opening the way to a new group of heritage professionals who embrace the physically and emotionally arduous work. This is a compelling example of the struggle to balance memory, authenticity, and access with long-term safeguarding of material culture that memorializes victims. Establishing a formal inventoried textile archive is the first step to facilitate the story-telling capacity of these objects, shedding new light on the historical narrative of the Khmer Rouge period and the lethal activities of S-21. The

31 Lynn Meskell, “Negative Heritage and Past Mastering in Archaeology,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75 no. 3 (2002): 558.; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country - Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

intensive training and collaborative efforts have elevated the significance of the clothing collection as historic documents and, by extension, Cambodian textile heritage for TSGM, and ultimately for the public.

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