**Panel submission**

**Reading the S-21 traces: towards new archival assemblages of Khmer Rouge crimes**

Convener: Anne-Laure Porée, EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris), [alporee@gmail.com](mailto:alporee@gmail.com)

The participants are academics and practitioners from Cambodia and Europe who have been engaged in research on S-21 archives for several years. They will present their findings to the public, and the panel is a well-adapted format for the proposed discussion. The notion of ‘archival assemblage’ will provide the framework for the participants’ conversation. It will reflect the cross-fertilization of different disciplinary approaches (sociology, anthropology, history, and medical science), facilitate knowledge exchange between the participants, and in the process contribute to the production of new elements of discussion.

The Vietnamese army entered Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979 after a two-weeks blitzkrieg against the Democratic Kampuchea forces. When a patrol came across the Khmer Rouge prison S-21, the men found thousand and thousand pages of prisoners’ ‘confessions’, execution lists, photos, and cadres’ notebooks the S-21 staff had left behind. Early one, this ‘bureaucracy of death’ (Kiernan and Boua, *New Statesman*, May 1980) was seen as S-21’s specificity. When the new authorities established the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (TSGM) onsite a few weeks later, it was with a double mission: expose the cruelty of the Khmer Rouge regime and organize the S-21 documents for the prosecution (in absentia) of Democratic Kampuchea leaders Pol Pot and Ieng Sary (Phnom Penh, August 1979). Thirty years later, these archives played again an evidentiary role in the trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders. Furthermore, in 2009, the UNESCO inscribed the S-21 archives as ‘World Documentary Heritage of International Significance’. Since then, nearly half a million pages have been digitized.

The proposed interdisciplinary panel will explore the richness and complexity of this crucial material. Obviously, the S-21 archives have never been static: documents have disappeared, others reappeared (eg, donation of 1,500 photos of S-21 prisoners in 2012). Over time, they have known different types of intervention for either preservation or reuse. Concurrently, there have been, at the global level, changes in the way researchers approach archives (eg, ‘archival turn’, ‘archive-as-process’, decolonial archives).

In light of this, the participants will address the methodological, epistemological, and ethical challenges that arise from: 1) the use of the S-21 archives in the judicial context and beyond; 2) the integration of new materialities of sources (eg, graffiti, textiles) into the S-21 archives. They will propose novel research perspectives on a range of issues, including ways of reading the ‘confessions’, the organization and categorization of the S-21 archives, and the functioning of the prison itself. Through this conversation, the panel will situate these researches in the continuity of the studies conducted from 1979 onwards (eg, David Chandler, Steve Heder, Ben Kiernan), and at the same time, take stock of the impact on interpretive frameworks of major transitions such as the post-Cold War transition and the impending closure of the Khmer Rouge tribunal.

Single session with a discussant: Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier, University of Nottingham.