

Proposal: Memories and Legacies of Cham Genocide in Cambodia: Testimony and Witness through Diasporic Documentary

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The Cham are an ethnic minority with historical ties to Champa, a kingdom that occupied present-day Viet Nam for over 1,000 years before initial conquest by the Vietnamese in 1471. Many Chams fled violence by seeking refuge in neighboring Cambodia. However, during Democratic Kampuchea, the Chams were again persecuted mercilessly because of their ethnicity and Islamic beliefs. On September 15th, 2010 (more than 30 years after the fall of Pol Pot's regime), the UN backed Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, signed the Closing Order for Case File 002 indicting the four surviving senior Khmer Rouge leaders: Ieng Sary, Ieng Thirith, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea for their roles in genocide against the Cham.

In Summer 2010, two Cham American graduate students with research assistance from the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), traveled from California to Cambodia to collect Cham genocide survivor testimonies in Khampong Chhnang and Khampong Cham provinces. This film documents the travels of Asiroh Cham (M.A. candidate at UCLA) and Julie Thi Underhill (Ph.D. candidate at UC Berkeley) as they seek justice for genocide against the Cambodian Cham. In addition to interviews from two Cham communities, the documentary incorporates interviews with the UN tribunal's co-prosecutor Andrew Cayley and researchers from DC-Cam, and footage from former Khmer Rouge strongholds and mass graves. The Cham testimonies are significant because the genocide charge is specifically for the targeting of Chams and Vietnamese. This film also investigates Asiroh Cham's and Julie Thi Underhill's longtime efforts to research and document Cham history and culture. This complex heritage is often overlooked, not only in mainstream reports of the trials but also in Southeast Asian history and Asian American studies, despite a 2,000 year presence in Southeast Asia and over three decades living in the U.S. as war refugees.