

INTERNATIONAL WORK

AFRICA

■ KENYA AND SOUTH KOREA VOICES FROM THE CITIES

Professor Peter Wasamba of the University of Nairobi, Kenya introduces a new joint oral history research project involving universities in Kenya and Korea:

‘This project focuses on people’s perceptions of urbanisation in Kenya and Korea and is led by Professor Peter Wasamba in Kenya and Dr Park Young from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea. The research project is funded for two years, from November 2010 by the Academy of Korean Studies in Seoul; interviewing will start in March 2011.

‘Both Kenya and Korea experienced rapid urban growth during the second half of the twentieth century, and it had a significant impact on both societies. Rapid urbanisation is associated with a number of problems such as deterioration in urban physical environments, lack of shelter, displacement of indigenous populations, inflated land prices, traffic congestion, rise in crime and the decline of general living conditions of the urban poor.

‘We argue that the modification of urban development strategies, occasioned by changes in the global political economy, necessitated urban restructuring in the capital cities of Kenya and Korea from as early as the 1980s. It is in this regard that this study documents memories about urban restructuring in the capital cities using the methodology of oral history.

‘For a long time, the study of urbanisation has largely been dominated by quantitative analysis of statistical data. This is precise in terms of describing patterns of economic and social mobility but less effective at looking into the impacts of urbanisation on the lives of city residents.

‘Significantly the use of oral history will “give voice” to ordinary people in urban settings and particularly to ones whose voices are often not listened to. It provides an opportunity for the perspectives of urban women, the elderly, people with disabilities and youth to take centre stage in the history of urbanisation in the two cities.’

● For more information about the project please contact Professor Peter Wasamba: pwasamba@yahoo.co.uk

■ SOUTH AFRICA PERFORMING STORIES – CENTRE FOR POPULAR MEMORY, UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

The Centre for Popular Memory (CPM) is an oral history based, research, advocacy and archival centre located at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. The CPM trains students and organisations in oral/visual history research, theory and forms of public representation; and runs a publicly accessible multi-lingual archive that contains over 3000 hours of audio and video. It records and disseminates people’s stories to expand the democratising possibilities of public history.

Renate Meyer, Deputy Director of the CPM, reports on the recently completed ‘Performing Stories’ project:

‘This project is part of a larger collaboration between the South African National Youth Commission and the Flemish Community in partnership with CPM and four community centres throughout South Africa in Cape Town, Tsha nchu, Durban and Soweto.

‘The project involved training young people between the ages of 18-35 to conduct and use oral history recordings to create performative outcomes. Over two years (2008-2010) they gathered life stories via interviews in their respective communities, about everyday life of young people now or in the past, during Apartheid. These interviews were



Poster from the Performing Stories project’s exhibition.



A performance of 'Black Box' based on oral history interviews.

digitised and archived by CPM and transcribed by the young people involved. In partnership with the community centres, CPM assisted in creating forms of public output such as audiovisual exhibitions, theatre scripts and performances using the oral history interviews as primary material.

'There has been great appreciation of the benefits of the "Performing Stories" project from all participants. Below are some of the key outcomes:

- This project has directly trained sixty unemployed youths across four provinces, providing them with a range of new communication skills.
- It has developed the capacity of the community centres through their involvement in effective training, management and creation of an end product. Three of the four community centres have initiated related follow-up activities, contributing to the financial and intellectual empowerment of those communities.
- The project produced: one eight panel audio-visual exhibition: 'We couldn't walk together: histories of Nyanga 1960-1980'; and two theatre productions namely: 'The Black Box' and 'Memories of Thaba Nchu'.
- The project has contributed to the Centre for Popular Memory's oral history collection with 120 audio interviews and ninety transcripts in five languages. These have been made available to the relevant stakeholders and community centres.'

● For further information on this project and other initiatives by the Centre for Popular Memory please visit: www.popularmemory.org.za

INDIA AND PAKISTAN SINDHI VOICES PROJECT: SHARING OUR STORIES

Neena Makhija and Natasha Raheja report on the Sindhi Voices Project, a participatory media and oral history initiative which began operating formally in 2010 and is currently under their leadership.

'The 1947 Partition of British India yielded one of the largest mass migrations of people in contemporary history. The Sindh province, now located in Pakistan, experienced a huge efflux and influx of people and, like the rest of South Asia, continues to fall prey to conflict along the reductive ethnic and religious lines imposed and hardened in the hurried partitioning of the subcontinent. A widespread and systematic documentation of this

ongoing shift amongst Sindhi communities has not been undertaken and dominant, collective memories of the past continue to have a stronghold over generations of Sindhis. The Sindhi Voices Project (SVP) foregrounds individual experiences of Sindhis from diverse class, gendered, geographic, and religious backgrounds through the usage of participatory media and oral history practices.

'At present, we are focusing on listening to the voices of Sindhi elders with pre-partition memories whose stories are quickly leaving us. Committed to engaging and mobilising communities in the production of their histories, we have developed an oral history interview field kit available in several languages. Our field kit is a step by step guide on how to conduct, record, and submit an interview to our collection. In addition to distributing this field kit amongst Sindhi communities across the globe, we are conducting oral history and audiovisual recording workshops for tenth to twelfth standard Sindhi students in India and Pakistan. Key challenges we are currently facing include the equal representation of Sindhis from different backgrounds and the reconciliation of oral history interview conventions with the task of interviewing being so widely democratised.

'We plan to bring together all audio and video recordings of Sindhi life narratives both in the form of a publicly accessible, interactive online archive and the physical circulation of



Students at a school in Rajasthan, India listen to an interview during an oral history workshop.



Grandmother and granddaughter: sharing and listening to life's stories in Rajasthan, India.

an artistic multimedia exhibit. As part of our commitment to extending community participation beyond the recording of oral histories, we will be integrating the narratives collected into a multimedia-based dialogue curriculum for Sindhi youth.

'Lastly, as many of the oral histories illustrate, the drawing of territorial maps and borders too often does not correspond to the complex ambiguity of lived realities. To further explore these intersections, we strive to situate our stories with collections from other communities that are also largely shaped by themes of movement and partitioning.'

● Visit: www.sindhivoices.org
or email: sindhivoicesproject@gmail.com

EUROPE

■ CZECH REPUBLIC ORAL HISTORY CENTRE, PRAGUE

The Oral History Centre (COH) was established in 2000 as a research department of the Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Science in Prague. It is led by Miroslav Vanek, president of the Czech Oral History Association (COHA), recently elected president of the International Oral History Association (IOHA) for 2010–2012, and non-official 'guru' of Czech oral history. Pavel Mücke, senior researcher, at the Oral History Centre, provides an overview of the

centre's work as it continues into its second decade.

'To date, the centre has transcribed, digitised and archived some 700 interviews through various projects, financed mainly by the Czech Grant Agency and Grant Agency of Czech Academy of Sciences. The collection is varied, including interviews with university students today, those who were part of the "youth generation" in the 1980s, communist elites and dissidents, Czech emigrants and re-emigrants, and with workers and intelligentsia class members from 1970s and 1980s.

'The COH has recently received funding by the Czech Grant Agency for a further oral history project (2011–2015). The project aims to document the everyday life of people before and after 1989. The focus will be on members of the following groups: white collar workers, representatives of the financial sector, people employed in the agrarian sector and members of the armed forces of the state (soldiers, security, police and



Miroslav Vanek (right) interviewing Miloš Jakeš, former General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (1987–89).

firemen). The outputs should contribute to the knowledge of the nature and specifics of the normalisation regime and later democratic transformation.

'The grant will support the collection of a further 150 interviews, to enhance the existing COH's collection. The aim is to then analyse the whole collection of 850 interviews as offering a specific perspective on Czech and Czechoslovakian society during the last forty years.

'The growing popularity of using interviews to interpret the past is an exciting moment. It is important however that oral history is not used to politicise history by prioritising the stories of certain individuals. In current times in the Czech Republic we are witnessing a great return of ideology and forced attempts to limit academic and scientific freedom. We believe the best response is a social science research project, based on methodologically sound oral history, undertaken in a transparent, non-ideological way, with a focus on dissemination and educational activities.'

● For more information on the COH please contact Pavel Mücke, mucke@usd.cas.cz or visit the website at www.coh.usd.cas.cz

LATIN AMERICA REGIONAL ASSOCIATION LAUNCHED

The Latin American Network of Oral History (RELAHO) was launched in December 2010. RELAHO is an academic organisation for the communication of research, using oral history carried out across Latin America. In addition to providing a supportive network for those involved it also aims to advocate for the use of oral sources in the study of the history of the recent past. Rubén Kotler, the association's administrator, reports:

'In 1992 oral historians from Mexico, Argentina and Brazil got together in Sao Paulo, Brazil to discuss the need and the possibility of organizing periodical meetings. Since then this group has grown to include oral historians from other countries and since 2005 there have been three Latin American oral history conferences. At the most recent of these conferences in Recife, Brazil, in April 2010, the regional network became a reality with the creation of a website.

‘The Latin American Network of Oral History (RELAHO) website – www.relaho.org – serves as a virtual space to bring together researchers across the continent who are using or interested in oral history. It serves as a window through which we can strengthen our bonds and meet up every time we have a need for it.

‘Currently, the network is made up of various regional and national associations, workgroups, researchers and any individuals interested in this subject. Its purpose is to share information on local, regional and national archives relating to the safekeeping of oral testimonies, to encourage the creation and preservation of oral archives, and to give coverage to relevant publications on the subject of oral history. The newly launched website will also be a way of sharing information on conventions, symposiums, conferences and any virtual sites on these subjects.’

● For more information please visit the website: www.relaho.org or email relaho@relaho.org

NORTH AMERICA

■ **USA AND MEXICO**

ORAL HISTORY OF MEXICAN MIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA

Anthropologist Juan José Gutiérrez, from California State University in Monterey Bay reports on a current research project he is involved with.

‘At the beginning of this year I was starting to work on a research project, the “Making of the Transnation”. This

was aimed at exploring the role of memory in the creation of transnational spaces – where individuals and communities from Mexico and California exchange cultural, economic, social and political assets across, and regardless of international boundaries.

‘While carrying out initial interviews for this project with migrants in the agricultural valleys of California, I shared my interest with Ana Isabel Roldan and Gabriel Muro from the University of Queretaro, Mexico. We decided to work together to expand the project focusing on the entrepreneurial aspects of the experience of migrants in the host country and/or their home country.

‘Our intention is to explore, understand, and highlight the relevance of the entrepreneurial impetus of the migrant experience, and from a multi-regional and interdisciplinary perspective. Working collaboratively with colleagues from the University of Laval in Canada we submitted a trilateral proposal to the Colegio de Mexico. Our proposal was awarded and we will work together during the next two years towards a collaborative publication scheduled for 2012.

‘While this new phase of the project takes the initial proposal to a different conceptual focus, the scope and multiregional approach brings new challenges and reach to it. One thing remains unchanged from the initial intent: the end result will enable the reader to explore the different aspects of transnational life as enacted

by Mexican migrants in California, bringing to the forefront the role that memory and culture play in the creation of transnational spaces, perhaps the most salient and complex aspect of the human experience in the twenty-first century.’

● For further information on the research project, email juan_gutierrez@csumb.edu

OCEANIA

■ **AUSTRALIA** **NOONGAR VOICES**

Ivy Penny, Strategic and Cultural Development Manager at CAN WA (Community Arts Network Western Australia Ltd) reports on a current radio, education and arts project with the Noongar people of Western Australia.

‘Community Arts Network Western Australia facilitates community arts and culture funding, advocacy, youth arts and nationally recognised training programs for community wellbeing. Our two Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Development Units in Kellerberrin and Narrogin engage Aboriginal communities in self-determined arts and cultural activities to contribute to the cultural, social and economic vitality and sustainability of these communities.

‘As part of a current project the Noongar people of the Central Eastern Wheatbelt of Western Australia have shared their life stories in a three part radio documentary series, *Noongar Voices of the Central Eastern Wheatbelt*. The series draws on extracts from oral history interviews conducted by Mary Anne Jebb and Bill Bunbury. The aim of the story-sharing project is to assist Noongar people to record their life stories and provide opportunities for the broader community to gain an insight into Noongar life in the Wheatbelt.

‘The stories span the generations of families who have experienced living and adapting to Wadjella (white man) ways including those who were part of the Stolen Generations. By sharing their stories, participants have created a moving account of family and community life, Noongar beliefs and connection to the environment.

‘Our forefathers are dying out...’ said participant Pam Jetta, ‘...we need to listen to the voices, go back to the land and find out about our people.’



Monument to the returned immigrant in Queretaro, Mexico.

Two sisters Hazel Winmar and Irene Jetta interviewed by Bill Bunbury in Kellerberrin, early 2010.



Australia's provisional Parliament House in the 1950s. (Photo courtesy of the Museum of Australian Democracy).

'The initiative provided the opportunity for the Noongar community to record and preserve the life stories of their Elders as well as capture the reflections of some of the younger members of their community. As part of the project, community members also brought together and shared photos from their family albums, as well as accessing and acquiring archival images and materials from the state's collections.

'The resulting three radio programmes, entitled: *The end of the beginning*; *Holes in the tin*; and *You can hear the ants breathing*, were aired in September 2010 on ABC Radio National's Indigenous arts and culture programme, *AWAYE!* They will also form the basis for school-based activities and a public performance at the Keela Dreaming Festival, hosted by the Kellerberrin Aboriginal Progress Association on March 12th 2011.

'The project is funded by Healthway, promoting the *Respect Yourself, Respect Your Culture* message; Australia Council for the Arts and Department of Culture and the Arts.'

● For further information on the project contact CAN WA at

admin@canwa.com.au or visit www.canwa.com.au where you can also listen to the radio series.

MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY

Historian Dr Barry York reports on a growing collection of oral histories documenting the history of Australia's parliament.

'The recording of oral history interviews at Old Parliament House in Canberra began in 1995. Over the next decade former workers and staff who worked in the building during the period 1927–1988 were interviewed. However, in 2007, following a review of the Oral History Program, the Old Parliament House decided to focus on three new categories: former parliamentarians, individuals who personally knew Australian Prime Ministers, and activists of political parties that were represented in the provisional Parliament House, as well as continuing to conduct interviews with former staff and workers.

'This broadening of scope reflected the creation of a new research centre in the building, the Australian Prime Ministers Centre, and a task force to

redevelop Old Parliament House as a Museum of Australian Democracy. The Museum was launched in May 2009.

'The earliest interview in the collection dates back to 1995, featuring an elderly building worker who had helped to build the Provisional Parliament House in 1927. Other interviewees since then include parliamentary staffers, journalists, construction workers, stenographers, police, drivers, managers, librarians, typists, gardeners, waitresses, caterers, paymasters and hairdressers. There are also interviews with individuals who attended the opening ceremony in 1927.

'The new Museum has also entered into an agreement with the Australian National Library to cooperate in the recording of interviews with former federal parliamentarians and political party activists, known as the 'Old Parliament House Political and Parliamentary Oral History Project'. As of September 2010 the holdings in this project total twenty-seven former federal members of parliament.

'There are now more than 200 interviews in the Museum's Oral History collection. Interviews with former federal parliamentarians are substantial, ranging from three to fifteen hours, and take the life story approach while emphasising their political careers and experiences.

'In interviews about the building, we focus on the daily routines of labour and leisure, the ways in which physical spaces were used, political processes and the people who were here.'

● The Museum's website is at: <http://moadoph.gov.au>. For more information on the oral history collection contact Barry York, Barry.York@moadoph.gov.au