

INTERNATIONAL WORK



AFRICA SOUTH AFRICA Land Act 1913 Legacy Project

Catherine Kennedy, director of South African History Archives (SAHA) reports on a current photography, archive and oral history project that is funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

“Awaking on Friday morning, 20 June 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth...” Sol Plaatjie (1916).

‘In 2013, SAHA, an activist archive based at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, is conducting an oral history

Above: Queues to sign petition, Braklaagte, 10 September 1986. Photo by gille de vlieg.

and photographic project exploring the legacy of the 1913 Land Act in three communities in South Africa. Effective from 19 June 1913, the notorious Natives Land Act severely restricted land ownership and freedom of residence within South Africa. By giving the white minority control over most of the land in South Africa, this law effectively led to the displacement of the black majority, forcing them to reside in a mere 7.3 per cent of the country designated to be *native reserves*.

‘The communities identified for this project are Driefontein, Mogopa and Braklaagte, all sites of subsequent collective struggle against attempts by the apartheid government to relocate these so-called black spots forcibly from land demarcated for white settlement.

‘As has been the practice in past projects, SAHA will use the archive generatively within this project. Historic images of these communities are present in SAHA’s existing archives in the Gille de Vlieg collection (AL3274). These were part of her work in the 1980s as a fieldworker with the Transvaal Rural Action

Committee (TRAC) of the Black Sash, a social justice organisation that was active in support of struggles around land issues during apartheid. These photographs from the archives will be distributed as postcards to raise awareness of the project within communities, and to prompt discussion about the people, places and events depicted during interviews.

‘Gille de Vlieg is participating in this project through photographing the oral history collection process within Driefontein, Mogopa and Braklaagte in order to create a body of contemporary images that tell a story of life in each community today. The project team will also be collecting digital copies of personal documents and photographs from members of each community on site as part of the interview process.

‘Similar to other community history projects conducted by SAHA, a virtual exhibition will be created, which will include copies of all testimonies and archival materials gathered in the course of the project. This will be made accessible both online through the SAHA domain and offline as a CD. Portable exhibitions of the project, along with copies of the print report will then be distributed within each community and deposited within local libraries and schools.’

- For more information about SAHA and its work see: www.saha.org.za

ASIA

INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Update on the Sindhi Voices Project

Natasha Raheja, co-director of the Sindhi Voices Project (SVP) provides an update on the project following a project introduction in an earlier edition of the journal.

‘The Sindhi Voices Project (SVP) was conceived and initiated in the summer of 2010. SVP aims to document the varied impact that the fall of the British empire had on the Indian population through the usage of participatory oral history practices and multimedia tools. We are creating a digital archive of oral histories in the hope of sparking dialogue within and across communities that are divided by political and geographical borders drawn during the 1947 Partition of India.

‘In the first three years, the project



Above: Narrator, Daya J, Portrait, Ulhasnagar, India, 2012. Photo by Neena Makhija.

has made dozens of connections with Sindhi communities across the United States, India, and Pakistan. SVP has recorded over eighty interviews and conducted a few oral history training workshops. In the past year we have also delivered a presentation at the 2013 Association for Asian-American Studies Conference, shared Sindhi experiences of partition with undergraduate students studying, ‘Contemporary India and Pakistan’, and participated in a talk-back panel after a play on Partition entitled ‘Parts of Parts and Stitches’ which debuted in New York City in 2012.

‘Most recently, co-director Neena Makhija spent six months meeting with elders in the Indian cities and towns of Adipur, Gandhidham, Bangalore, Bombay, Kolkata, and Ulhasnagar. Neena recorded poignant first hand experiences on: teenage girls protesting colonial rule in the 1940s, Sufism’s dynamic place in Sindhi communities, emotional journeys of reconnecting across Pakistan and India today, and powerful visions for a borderless South Asia. Despite not being the most active internet users themselves, many of the elders that she interviewed felt hopeful about the internet as a key platform for reaching out to youth.

‘At present, we are working

towards listening through, translating, and editing the life narratives that have been recorded so that more people can hear them. We will start uploading subtitled clips of interviews by early 2014. We are hoping to build a network of passionate listeners who will organise listening events to share the interviews with others’.

- For more information on the Sindhi Voices Project, see: www.sindhivoices.org

EUROPE

FRANCE

Report on the Memories of the War Conference May 2013

Lindsey Dodd, Research Fellow at the University of Huddersfield and a member of Huddersfield’s Centre for Visual and Oral History reports on a conference she attended in France 21-22 May 2013:

‘This international conference took place at the University of Caen Basse-Normandie on the theme of ‘Témoignages de guerre: perspectives croisées et transdisciplinarité’ (Eyewitness accounts of war: comparative perspectives and transdisciplinarity). It was part of a series organised by Viviana Agostini-Ouafi and her colleagues at the university and beyond, as part of their current project on the collection, translation and analysis of accounts – oral and written – of war.

‘These multi-lingual accounts can be accessed at www.unicaen.fr/

Right: Poster for the Memories of War Conference.

memoire-guerre and provide an excellent corpus of material for those interested in the lived experience of the Second World War. One goal of the project is the valorisation of narrative and individual memory that is truly European and active in its promotion of democratic values. The conference went some way to achieving this goal, with papers from French, Italian, German, Russian and British speakers, and other researchers with mixed backgrounds providing fascinating cross-cultural insights, and subjective dimensions which were sometimes translated into research practice.

'Psychology (social and clinical), literature, autobiography, archiving, translation, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, pedagogy and film, and history were all represented in one way or another. Themed sessions dealt with witnessing war on the Eastern Front, bombing and trauma, auto/biographical accounts of war from a literary perspective and Franco-German prisoner-of-war encounters on German and later on French soil. In connection with the latter, the community memory group *Mémoires et Terroirs* (www.memoiresetterroirs.com) has already begun collecting elderly French POW stories. There was also a photographic exhibition curated by Guerogui Chepelev of photographs taken by soldiers of the Wehrmacht in Russia. A real highlight of the conference was the screening of the film made as part of the project *Il Coraggio dell'Europa*, a bilingual (French-Italian) project undertaken by historians and filmmakers in Rome in collaboration with secondary school children (<http://ilcoraggiodelleuropa.com/>).

'French researchers have seemed rather absent from the pages of *Oral History* and within the international oral history community more broadly. This conference was, therefore, a real delight as it demonstrated that oral history is alive, kicking and indeed flourishing in Normandy, and that the doors of international communication may well be opened wider in the future.'

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COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL
UNIVERSITÉ DE CAEN BASSE-NORMANDIE

TÉMOIGNAGES DE GUERRE : perspectives croisées et transdisciplinarité

21-22 mai 2013
MRSH salle 027 – Campus I

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21 MAI
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Enzo LAFORGIA
Louise LE GALL
Marie TASSEL
Valentin SCHNEIDER



Ukraine, automne/hiver 1942 : Le lieutenant Perugini.
Photo prise par le Major Guido d'Amico.
© Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia (INSMLI, Milan).

Exposition photos de Gueorgui CHEPELEV :
« Le Front de l'EST vu par les soldats de la Wehrmacht (1941-1945) »
MRSH - Hall plan de Rome

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FRANCE Railway workers' stories and reminiscences

Myriam Fellous-Sigrist of the French Railway Historical Society (AHICF) reports on a three year project on the memory of the Second World War, commissioned by the French national railway company (SNCF):

'The company's former employees and their families were asked to share their recollections of the war. This oral history project, carried out by the AHICF, took as its starting point an appeal for witnesses published across France between January and December 2012. This appeal has been a real success. Seven hundred people responded and by its deadline, and by 31 December 2012 we had planned more

than 200 interviews. Half of the interviews have already been recorded and filed in a collection entitled *Daily life and work during World War Two: Railway workers' stories and reminiscences*.

'Several hundred unpublished documents, including photographs, diaries and letters, have also been shared by the witnesses. The SNCF's Records and Documentation Department is in charge of their preservation, digitisation and long-term storage. Our rigorous editing and archiving methods aim to make the recordings available for the general public as well as enabling the long-term storage of the collection and its use in future research.

'The stories told by the interviewees, who are either retired railway



Above: Interviewee, Mr Degueurce, during his apprenticeship, 1940 or 1941. Photo courtesy of Mr Degueurce.

workers or their close relatives, constitute a valuable corpus depicting many aspects of daily life and work between the 1930s and the 1950s. Among the various topics covered, the recordings deal with life in company towns, the experience of being an apprentice, the black market, forced labour in Germany (*Service du travail obligatoire*), Youth work camps (*Chantiers de jeunesse*), the presence of occupying forces, family life, bombings, resistance activity and post-war reconstruction.

'We are pleased to announce that the first interviews have recently been

made fully accessible on the website *Mémoire orale de l'industrie et des réseaux* available via the following link: www.memoire-orale.org More interviews will be regularly uploaded in 2013 and 2014 during the collecting and editing phases. Eventually, the whole collection will be accessible online. This online launch is one of a series of scientific and cultural events based on this new oral history collection and scheduled for 2013-2015'.

● For more information, contact Myriam Fellous-Sigrist: +33 (0)158 205186, email archives_orales@ahicf.com or contact@hifc.com; websites: www.memoire-orale.org and www.ahicf.com

LATIN AMERICA

MEXICO

Oral history project of the Magdalena River

Graciela de Garay, historian from Instituto Mora in Mexico City, and Marisa Mazari and Angela Caro, biologists specialised in environmental sciences and engineering from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), report on the oral history project of the Magdalena River and its environs in the twentieth century.

'The study is part of a wider inter-institutional investigation that evaluates the quality of the ecosystems services provided by the Magdalena River basin located southwest of Mexico City within a protected conservation area. The Magdalena River is the only living river that survives from the forty five rivers the Capital city had. For this reason, the Magdalena River is a high priority for the city providing a previous ecosystem within the broader urban landscape.

'Our use of oral history enables us to draw on collective memories for factual ecological information but above all seeks to document the diverse meanings and values local people have attributed to the river and its environs over time in a changing world.

'The project team has consulted historical, geographical and meteorological archives, specialised journals and newspapers, in addition to continuous monitoring of water quality to contrast, enrich and contextualize the oral histories. The team believe oral histories are essential to understand the community's relation to the river and to promote the ongoing involvement of local inhabitants in environmental protection in the long term. It is the combination of the positive methods of natural sciences and the qualitative approach of oral history which makes this project innovative.

'The findings derived from six months of ethnographic work and several recorded interviews with elderly natives of the region reveal that the river was a driving force for the development of the textile industry (1900 -1967). Since the closure of the textile factories the damage inflicted by unregulated growth of the city has transformed Magdalena town and its natural area into a peri-urban zone affected by housing, wastewater

discharges, irregular settlements and unrestricted tourism (1967-2000). Nostalgia and disenchantment permeate people's memories because they feel the river as a source of life died out a long time ago. It appears that, environmental idealism, regulations and privatisation for better management of natural resources are not enough to overcome society's apathy to recover the Magdalena River as a source of life and beauty as it was for centuries.'

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NORTH AMERICA

USA

Threshold Collaborative and Community Stories for Change

Alisa del Tufo founder and director of Threshold Collaborative introduces three current projects which use oral history alongside other participatory methods:

'Threshold Collaborative uses story as a catalyst for change. Our methods are designed to deepen empathy and ignite actions in order to build more just, caring and healthy communities. We have developed a set of participatory strategies that integrate engaged storytelling, photography and video to document, explore and learn about issues from the perspective of *resident experts* – the people living, working and going to school in our communities. By surfacing and sharing the stories and ideas of people who are typically marginalised we nurture leadership and identify community focused change strategies. Rather than *professionals* making decisions for others, community members themselves are the heart of decision making and change.

'1. Food Justice: Threshold and Wholesome Wave have partnered to use stories and participatory action research to contribute to strengthening connections between local food economies and low-income consumers and ultimately making fresh, locally grown food more accessible and affordable. We have conducted interviews with over twenty low-income consumers whose ideas, experiences



Above: Lucy, participant in the I-Lead project. Photo copyright: Janice Levy 2015.

and insights formed the foundation of this project. These have been shared through a national conference in Washington DC, the development of a SoundCloud page dedicated to this work and the creation of a Tool Kit. Please listen to some of our stories at <http://wholesomewave.org/stories/>

'2. Youth Leadership: Threshold and I-LEAD have created a program to harness the values, ideas and passion of low income and marginalised high school students. Using oral history, writing, photography and community engagement we are helping these young people become leaders.

'In the Spring of 2013 Threshold's team travelled to Reading PA, a poor rustbelt town about ninety minutes outside of Philadelphia. We inter-

viewed all twenty-two students who were participating in the leadership class. An award-winning photographer took photographs of each learner together with photographs that visually reflected student's goals. Linking the stories with the photographs has been a powerful element of this project. Sharing these stories with the wider community will help to build connections between school and community and demonstrate the power of the vision these students have for the future.

'We have designed a curriculum that weaves together readings and oral history interviews with inspiring social activists from around the world. This will enable the project to be replicated and support thousands of learners all over the country leverage their vision to support individual and community change.

'3. Community well-being: Threshold and the rural community of Woodstock Vermont are working together to create a community-wide engagement initiative to strengthen health and well-being. An important aspect of this project will be the use of inter-generational oral histories. Pairing of youth and elders will result in an array of powerful stories and the creation of profound relationships between groups that do not usually see themselves as having much in common.

'Our work is funded through grants from private foundations, subcontracts with other NGO's and individual contributions, although we constantly face the challenge of too few resources: time and funding in particular!'

For more information on Threshold Collaborative, see website at: www.thresholdcollaborative.org

OCEANIA

NEW ZEALAND

Describing the Wave: Perspectives on making and interpreting oral history in the digital age

The National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ) was established in 1986. It shares a newsletter with members three times a year, publishes an annual journal and runs a biennial conference for practitioners to come together to share projects and develop networks.

Committee member Ann Packer reports on the NOHANZ's recent regional symposium held in Auckland in May 2013:

'The Auckland symposium showcased ways oral history is used and managed post-production – including books, academic writing, and digital storytelling – in Aotearoa New Zealand.

'Supported by NOHANZ and Auckland Libraries, the theme, *Describing the Wave*, reflected the many and varied ways writers, historians, librarians, archivists, academics, artists and storytellers engage with oral history – and was a playful nod to the .wav format that oral historians now use.

'In the opening plenary, under National Library oral history curator Linda Evans, government, academic and library-based oral historians told how they use and promote oral history within their organisations, and engage



Above: Dominion Road Stories volunteers Megan Hutching, Rebecca Kunin, Ruth Greenaway and Sue Berman. Photo: Robyn Mason, Auckland Libraries, 2013.

practitioners and the public in their day-to-day work.

'Alison Parr, senior oral historian, Manatū Taonga, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, introduced the annual Oral History Awards – funded from Australia's Sesquicentennial gift – to support OH practice and development in the community. Anna Green, Associate Professor, Stout Research Centre at Victoria University of Wellington, offered insights into theoretical trends and challenges for oral history within an academic setting; Cathy Marr, Principal Research Analyst at the Waitangi Tribunal illustrated the dynamics of oral history as used in evidence in Treaty Settlement processes. Lastly, Sue Berman, Oral Historian with Auckland Libraries, related connections being made between community development projects and the libraries' arts and heritage collections.

'Day two's plenary, chaired by oral history documentary-maker Ruth Greenaway, focused on the design and delivery of community-based projects. Rebecca Amundsen from the deep south of New Zealand talked about the Southland Oral History Project; Megan

Hutching and Sue Gee explained their role in the Auckland-based Dominion Road Project – with one of the interviewees relating his experiences; Emma Kelly worked with her father on the project *Queer Stories our Fathers Never Told Us* and Taina McGregor, oral historian Māori, Alexander Turnbull Library – the national repository for oral history – shared her experience of working with Māori on community oral history projects.

'Symposium organiser Claire Hall, says the two-day event successfully brought together a diverse range of views and experiences on making and working with oral testimony. "The programme was designed to offer both creative inspiration and hands-on advice to fledgling and experienced practitioners alike, in response to some of the most common questions and training demands out there in communities," said Claire.

'The next NOHANZ biennial conference will be held in Wellington in 2014'.

● For more information: www.oralhistory.org.nz

International Work is edited by Siobhan Warrington who welcomes all contributions by email to siobhan@oratestimony.org