



Fast Forward: Oral History in a Time Of Change

Oral History Australia
(formerly the Oral History Association of Australia)



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The Journal of Oral History Australia is published annually. Its content reflects the diversity and vitality of oral history practice in Australia, and includes contributions from overseas.

The views expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor, the Editorial Board or the publisher of the Journal of Oral History Australia.

Editor: Dr Sue Anderson
David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research
University of South Australia
GPO Box 2471
Adelaide SA 5001
Sue.Anderson@unisa.edu.au

Editorial Board: Dr Ariella van Luyn, Chair
ariella.vanluyn@jcu.edu.au
Beth M Robertson, Bill Bunbury, Dr Sue Anderson

Reviews Editor: Dr Jayne Persian
Jayne.Persian@sydney.edu.au

Cover and content design and typesetting:
LeighSet Design
18 Hill Street, Plympton Park SA 5039
Phone: 08-82974375
igrunert@bigpond.net.au

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The Editor of the Journal welcomes offers of material for possible publication in the 2016 issue, No. 38. See Call for Papers at the end of this Journal, or the Oral History Australia website, www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au. Suitable items include papers for peer-review, un-refereed articles (such as project and conference reports) and book reviews.

Enquiries: Dr Sue Anderson
Sue.Anderson@unisa.edu.au



Editor's notes

While we endeavour to distribute the Journal at our Biennial conference, due to unforeseen circumstances this was not possible this year and as a result it has been published two months after the event. However, I think that it is worth the wait, as we have been able to accept late submissions, resulting in another rich and eclectic edition.

We are fortunate to have two international contributions from authors who have undertaken new work with significant oral history collections. Randa Kaldas provides the paper she presented at a plenary session of the 2013 International Oral History Association conference in Barcelona on the oral history programme at the Economic and Business History Research Center at the American University in Cairo. Sindiso Bhebhe discusses the oral history programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe and its progression from a collection of the stories of the colonists to include elite Zimbabwean figureheads and finally a more inclusive cross-section of the various minority communities. I look forward to them both providing further articles on the evolution of their programmes in light of oral history scholarship.

Our Australian contributions provide many different topics and perspectives. Wendy Madsen explores the resilience of a Queensland community following two devastating flood events in 2011, while Judy Hughes addresses the benefits of video oral history in a rapidly developing technological era. Sharee Cordes builds on this by sharing her experiences of recording oral histories on her iPad. Bob Reece contrasts this with the story of his conversion from 'historian' to 'oral historian' in his quest to shed light on the history of Aboriginal/colonist relations in the early 1800s.

Brenda Gifford offers a brief history of Indigenous music and its impact on political issues and the younger generations. In contrast, David Sweet provides a window into the life of a pastor's wife and the role photographs played in releasing her memories. Cate Pattison's engaging insight into a local community also contrasts with Elena Volkova's moving discussion of the role of narrative-based theatre, oral history and digital storytelling in building resilience in defence force veterans. Margaret Ridley introduces the

burgeoning world of verbatim theatre and Margaret Dawson brings a local ANZAC centenary project to life.

The contributions to this edition attest to the diverse ways that oral history can contribute to social inclusivity and real life representation. I look forward to further contributions in this regard.

Sue Anderson

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My Experiments with Oral History on the iPad

Sharee M A Cordes

Abstract

I remember when my husband first told me about a new device Apple was releasing called the 'iPad.' He said it was like a laptop that was small enough to fit in your bag and that you controlled with your finger. 'Ridiculous,' I told him. 'That will never take off!' I will readily admit now that I was wrong with that call. Since its release in 2010, Apple has sold over 250 million iPads¹ and for me personally, this is now my most used and most essential piece of electronic equipment. The iPad is now the tool that I use for all of my oral history audio recordings, and in this paper I will discuss the considerations, discoveries, and limitations of this device.² I will also discuss the particular apps that I have found useful, but please be aware that technology and apps are changing so quickly these days, it is important for users to do their own research and experimentation to find the current app that most suits their needs. I have no affiliation with any of the products or apps mentioned.

Of course there are many other tablets and smart phones on the market now, and it may be possible to apply the information in this paper to each of them, but I can only speak about my own experience which is with the iPad. I encourage you to experiment.

Sound quality

Perhaps the most important aspect of any oral history project is the recording stage. We all want reliability, ease of recording and of course, great sound quality. Prior to using my iPad, I had been struggling with an old Zoom H4 recorder, which I was finding confusing; the tiny screen and scrolling menus made it difficult to follow. When I offered my fancy digital recorder to my daughter to use for a recording project, she turned it down, saying she would just use her phone instead. This started me wondering; was it possible that a mobile phone or my iPad could hope to achieve the sound quality needed for a professional oral history interview?



*ipad recording set up with microphone and camera connector plug.
By author.*

The recommended sound quality required for an oral history is generally agreed to be 24 bit at 48 kHz resolution³, so the first consideration when looking for a recording app is to ensure that firstly, the user is able to control the quality of the recording, and secondly that it is capable of recording at this level. I was able to achieve these levels on the iPad; this is discussed when I examine recording apps later in this paper.

Equipment

Another requirement to achieve excellent sound quality is a good quality microphone. There are many microphones on the market today that are designed for use with iPhones and iPads and this was a necessary purchase before I could proceed. The one that I chose was the Rode smartLav+, a lapel microphone that

retails for about \$80 and connects to the iPad through the headphone socket.

When I first started with this project, I was using only this one lapel microphone. I was fairly happy with the sound quality for the interviewee who had the microphone clipped on, although in some situations I did notice a very low background static noise. I also found that my voice was very quiet, except for the time when I was interviewing a gentleman who was a little hard of hearing – then it was perfect! The key was to sit close and speak up when using this microphone.

Further experimenting led me to highjack my son's 'Blue Snowball Ice' microphone, a multidirectional microphone with a USB plug. At \$120, the sound quality was fantastic with this one and easily picked up both voices when placed in the middle of the table. Rather than being connected through the headphone jack, this microphone is connected to the iPad's power socket through the use of the 'camera connector kit', which can be purchased quite cheaply at around \$30. The camera connector kit turns the power connector port into a standard USB connection. I decided that this microphone was an essential addition to my kit.

My readings suggest that it is possible to use a two-microphone set up with the iPad.⁴ This is achieved by having one microphone (such as my SmartLav) plugged into the headphone socket, and a second microphone connected to the iPad's power connector.

To do this requires the use of the 'camera connector kit', and also may require a USB interface device to convert the microphone's analogue sounds to digital inputs and also to convert the plug to a USB plug. This will depend on the type of microphone you are using. My experiments with this method, using the SmartLav and the Blue Snowball microphone, have been disappointing. While I can get both microphones to work, they are quite temperamental, dropping in and out at random, and losing volume, so would not be suitable for making oral history recordings. Further experimentation with different microphones and connectors may give different results.

I have not been using headphones when recording with the iPad. It is easy to keep an eye on the sound level graph during recording, so I am able to monitor by sight rather than listening. Some microphones and microphone connectors on the market do offer the option of having headphones connected however, so look out for this feature if you prefer to use headphones.

Apps

One of the most time consuming aspects of this project, was experimenting with audio recording and editing apps. There are so many out there. I began by searching for 'best audio recording apps' to find some reviews, then downloaded some to try out. I



Screen shot showing the TwistedWave app interface

was looking for an app that would give me full control over the sound while still being easy to use. Some of them, including one made by a prominent recording equipment company, just don't even work properly, while others are obviously more suited to music recording for bands.

It is especially important to find an app that will let you upload your sound recording in a wav format. Some of them don't, and most of them require that you upgrade to a better version of the app, or buy this ability as an in app purchase. Some will only let you upload files in the popular mp3 format, but this is a compressed format, meaning that you will be losing some of your sound quality, so it is not advisable.

Apple do not make it easy to share documents between their 'i' devices and a regular computer, so the consideration of how to get the audio recording off the iPad is particularly important. The best way to do this is to use one of the popular cloud storage sites, for example; Dropbox is the one I use. Another consideration then when choosing a recording app is, 'will it let me upload files to my selected cloud storage?'

The app that I have found works best for me is called Twisted Wave; it only costs \$10 and I have been really happy with this so far. When starting a new recording with this app it allows you to select a frequency range up to 96 000Hz, so the 48 kHz suggested for oral history recording is no problem. It also allows to you select if it is to be a mono or stereo recording. When exporting the completed audio, this app gives you 7 different formats to choose from, including wav and mp3, and allows you to select a bit depth up to 32 bits, meaning that once again, the requirements for a 24 bit wav file are easily met. There are also a variety of places that the file can be sent to from the iPad, including iTunes file sharing, FTP upload, SoundCloud and Dropbox.

When you start recording with the Twisted Wave app, it shows a sound wave diagram along with a coloured input level graph down the side. A slider along the bottom of the screen allows you to easily adjust the input levels from your microphone.

Some important points to remember during recording to ensure the best sound quality...

- Switch your auto lock to 'never' (Settings>General>Auto-lock). Although I found that my iPad continued to record when it auto locked itself, this was very distracting.
- Switch your Wi-Fi off. The iPad will automatically search for a wi-fi network if this is on, causing possible interference in the recording.
- Put your iPad into Aeroplane mode to avoid any incoming calls or alerts.

Editing

One of the great things about recording oral histories on the iPad is that you can easily do edits right there on the iPad in the same app that you have been recording in. If a participant says something that they then wish to retract, or has something they desperately want to add, it is easy to put their mind at ease by simply erasing or adding it there on the spot. It is quick, easy and portable to use, making the sometimes laborious task of editing a little more convenient. Once again, I would like to stress that you need to search around a little and find an app that best suits as things are changing so rapidly in this field, but for me at the moment, I am loving the Twisted Wave app for editing as well as recording. Twisted Wave has a very simple, intuitive interface. Big buttons down the bottom for play, rewind, cut and paste are very obvious. Just drag the sliders over the sound wave to select sections and hit play to hear them and the small x to delete. Normalize, amplify, fade in and fade outs are all easily applied as well. Another app that I have liked for recording and editing, but found not quite so simple to operate, is Hokusai. This one is also worth playing around with.

Photos

An important aspect of the oral history project is to make sure we take photos of the participants, and I will admit that this is one thing I do not use my iPad for. Being an SLR camera user I am never satisfied with the photos taken on the iPad, so I always prefer to take photos using my camera. With the 'camera connector kit' that was used to connect the USB microphone I can also easily transfer photos from the camera to my iPad for editing and to keep everything together.

Another handy device that I have acquired is a portable scanner that can send photos directly to my iPad, so any old photos that participants may wish to share can also be quickly and easily scanned on the spot. I keep everything together by uploading them all to folders in Dropbox – from here it is easy to disseminate them to interested parties and back up storage devices.



Sharee Cordes interviewing Dudley Warhurst

Project Storage

If your organisation is lucky enough to find enough money, an iPad or two can also be used as one form of storage device for the oral history recordings. Storing the oral history collection on an iPad makes it easily accessible for visitors, who can sit in comfort and easily flick through and listen to the stories straight from the iPad.

Another recommendation I would like to make for storing of the oral history recordings is USB memory sticks, also known as a flash drive or thumb drive. These are a quite secure and safe form of digital storage, actually more robust than an external hard drive because they have no moving parts that can be damaged.⁵ They are also cheap enough that you can have one or two or more memory sticks for each oral history recording – I like to attach luggage tags to label mine. Photos and any other information can also be saved onto the memory stick, keeping everything together. This method also makes it easy for visitors and researchers to access the information, and if you have multiple copies you could even set up a loan system this way.

Unfortunately, you cannot transfer the audio recordings from the iPad to the USB memory stick, even if you have the ‘camera conversion kit’ as the memory stick requires more power than this set up allows. To do this transfer I have found the best way is to upload the recordings to a cloud storage such as Dropbox, and transfer them from there, via a computer, to USB memory sticks and external hard drives. This is the only downfall in my plan to be totally free of the PC.

Conclusion

I am not suggesting that people rush out to purchase an iPad, but if you have one already, or even an iPhone, it is well worth considering as a useful tool in your oral history recording kit. I hope that this technology will open up oral history recording to many people who have an interest, but don’t have access to other specialist recording devices. The information and tips I have provided in this paper will give you a starting place for further experimentation and hopefully lots of interesting and fun recordings in the future.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Kastrenakes, Jacob, ‘The iPad’s 5th Anniversary: a timeline of Apple’s category-defining tablet, *The Verge* [Online], 15 April 2015, at <http://www.theverge.com/2015/4/3/8339599/apple-ipad-five-years-old-timeline-photos-videos>.
- 2 See, for example, *Oral History in the Digital Age* [Online], <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/> and Minnesota Local History [Online], <http://discussions.mnhs.org/mnlocalhistory/blog/2012/03/12/using-your-iphoneipad-to-record-oral-history>.
- 3 Levido, Trish, ‘Latest Review of Digital Field Recorders, in *Oral History New South Wales* [Online], February 2011, cited 26 April 2015, <http://www.oralhistorynsw.org.au/some-suggestions-for-digital-equipment-suitable-for-use-by-oral-historians.html>.
- 4 Geerling, Jeff, ‘External Microphones for iPhone 5s, 5, 4s, iPad and iPod Touch Audio input, in *Life is a Prayer.com* [Online] June 2010, <http://www.lifeisaprayer.com/articles/photography/iphone-4-ipad-external-mic-audio-input>.
- 5 Spector, Lincoln, ‘When to buy a flash drive, an external hard drive, or an external SSD, in *PC World, Work, Life, Productivity* [Online] October 2014, <http://www.pcworld.com/article/2686039/when-to-buy-a-flash-drive-an-external-hard-drive-or-an-external-ssd.html>.

Village Gossip - Stories of Napoleon Street and the evolving community role of local shopping

Cate Pattison

Abstract

Shopping is a major component of everyday life that can be overlooked by historians. For many seniors a daily trip on foot to the local shops used to be (and for some still is) an essential element in the fabric of everyday domestic and social practice. This research studies Napoleon Street in Cottesloe, Perth, Western Australia, to explore shifting urban landscapes and social dynamics engaged by the process of suburban transformation and gentrification. Here and elsewhere, local community cohesion was once heavily influenced by the relationships forged between retailers and their customers. Individual shops were often part of the landscape for many consecutive decades; today businesses flourish and die at a much faster rate. Competition from larger shopping centres, rising property values and subsequent rents, national/global distribution, and now the internet, all contribute to this turnover in shops. Conversely, the growth of café culture and service-orientated businesses now taking place engages an increasingly affluent and younger consumer base. The project combines the collection of oral interviews to record intangible local history, and ethnographic exploration of shifting social practice of everyday shopping and its environment. Further research is suggested to explore the phenomenon in greater depth. The project was supported by the Grove Library, Peppermint Grove, Perth.

Introduction and Aim

This oral history research commissioned by the Grove Library (Community History) in Perth aims to capture memories of Napoleon Street, Cottesloe in the twentieth century, the people and places that were known so well to the community. Whilst primarily hoping to record stories and information from a dwindling respondent base, a secondary aim of this primary research has been to explore how the role of the shopping precinct past functioned in social life over this extended period, the impact of gentrification on shopping, and how shopping as social practice is being transformed.

A shopping hub has existed around Napoleon Street in Cottesloe, Perth, for over 120 years.¹ This retail

and service area is still referred to as 'the village' by its local patrons, reflecting a time when suburban communities were more contained and self-sufficient. Interestingly, advertising by local real-estate agents will still refer to 'proximity to the village' (as Napoleon Street is known) in their advertisements, leveraging connotations of community and amenity that some say disappeared a long time ago. During earlier oral history research conducted for the centenary celebration of the Claremont Draper (now located in Cottesloe), its long-standing customers commented how personal relationships and community bonds that once existed between storekeepers and their customers are now rare.

A loose hypothesis was formed at commencement; that the loss of many practical and long-standing businesses to the area has seen a demise of community and social engagement that was once provided by the Napoleon Street shopping strip. Although on one level this was qualified, additional findings have encouraged observations that actually suggest that the 21st century local community does in fact still enjoy plenty of benefit from the village, but gained in different ways, and from new social practices.

Background

The Perth coastal area of Cottesloe, serviced since 1872 by the Perth Fremantle Road, now Stirling Highway, and the railway line built soon after in 1881, is one of Perth's oldest suburbs.² A halfway house (the mid-point on the journey between Fremantle and Perth) has stood on the site of the current Albion Hotel in Cottesloe since the 1860s.³ The adjacent riverside enclave of Peppermint Grove was always a more affluent environment, settled by many of Perth's earliest wealthy families on large blocks with generous homes and gardens/farms. Once the site of many seaside holiday homes, neighbouring Cottesloe grew to be a residential suburb from the 1940s, a time when many families moved to Perth from country areas after the depression and then World War II, seeking accommodation.⁴ Moving from the landlocked goldfields to sleepy coastal Cottesloe was like a 'breath of fresh air'. Suburbs situated

on the railway line attracted the settlement of many workers from the Midland Government Railway Workshops, Perth city and Fremantle Port, who built modest weatherboard cottages that can still be found standing in the string of trackside suburbs - Mosman Park, Cottesloe, Subiaco, Maylands, Bayswater and Bassendean. Between 1940 and 1960 the population of Western Australia grew by half, from 474,000 to 731,000.⁵ It was a time of rapid infill in Perth suburbs. For Gordon Cargeeg:

My wife and I went to Napoleon Street in the early 1950s and took over 36 Napoleon Street, close to the Highway. It had already been a shoe shop, which we bought and kept selling shoes. The previous owner had also operated it as an illicit 'starting price' bookmaker out the back of the shop facing onto the Albion hotel. ... Out the back of the shop was some accommodation, with an old boy living there who kept ferrets when we first took it on.⁶

An influx of permanent residents to Cottesloe saw many new shops open to service the everyday needs of the people in the area. By the 1950s Napoleon Street was a bustling 'village high street' with two greengrocers, a fish shop, a few butchers, bakeries, draper, barber, electrical shop (BYO chair to the footpath for an early TV experience), general retailers, milk-bar, wood-yard, cinema and even a small billiards hall. Today, Cottesloe boasts some of the highest property prices in the country, with average income now double the national average, even higher than neighbouring 'posh' Peppermint Grove.⁷ Not surprisingly, the local shopping strip on Napoleon Street has changed dramatically in character and composition to now be dominated by exclusive and stylish shops, mixed with specialist service-based offerings such as cafes, personal care and property-related businesses. A post-office, newsagent, banks, pharmacy, optician and handful of other services continue to cater for more everyday needs of local residents. Beachside Cottesloe has therefore experienced a process of 'embourgeoisement' on a major scale over the last thirty years, a phenomenon that has become one of some scholarly exploration.⁸ Sydney's Bondi or Melbourne's bayside Brighton could be paralleled, however the former boasts solid 'hipster' credentials (which Cottesloe does not) and the latter has been the home of genteel conservatives since the mid 19th century.

Unlike many other Australian suburbs which began their gentrification the 1950s, or even North Perth and Fremantle in Perth that have been fashionable since the 1980s, Cottesloe can make little claim to a heritage of rich cultural diversity. Apart from the three generations of Greek fish shopkeepers and an Italian greengrocer, the area has always largely been home to white residents of British descent. There are

however still a number of locals that grew up in the area in the first half of the twentieth century, and have shared their memories of Napoleon Street of years gone by. Oral history interviews from this and the earlier 'Claremont Draper' project have shed insight into intangible social history of the area.



Napoleon Street Cottesloe, 1962. Image: Courtesy Grove Library

Method

Thirteen interviews were conducted between September and November of 2014. Two methods were used to source the sample. Personal contacts and 'word of mouth' engaged the participation of some of the well-known local individuals connected with Napoleon Street shopping. An advertisement in the *The West Australian's* 'Can you help?' column calling for those who had direct experience working in Napoleon Street shops resulted in participants who have since moved away from the area and now live well away from the area, or maybe held junior sales jobs, being included in the research. Participants were interviewed either in their own homes or at the Grove Library, consent forms explained and signed. All individual recordings have been saved and filed in full, and a one-hour edited compilation entitled 'Village Gossip' has been produced which combines excerpts from all participants, organised by topic.

Project Output

As well as recording thirteen individual oral history interviews for the Grove's Community History Library, a one hour compilation was also produced within the project, distilling down the 'best bits' and honing in on themes of 'pioneers,' 'more than just shopping,' 'refreshments... or not' and 'a sense of community.' Transcription notes for the compilation and individual interviews were also prepared, as well as a short summary and discussion paper.

As with all good projects, some valuable learning was achieved from various oversights. With a progressive programme of digital sharing at the Grove, the community librarian was keen to use the compilation as part of her various online offerings, however having used a simple copyright clearance form, permission for full online usage was not acquired at the time of interview. Setting a participant limit at the outset is also a good idea. Most interviewees ended with: ‘oh you’ve GOT to talk to such and such;’ hence the pressure to keep interviewing prevailed. Working to a project budget meant that interviews had to be reined in, unfortunately, as there were potentially many more people that could have shared valuable stories. Finally, having produced the compilation, it occurred that the material could make interesting primary content for a broadcast documentary, however with some interview conditions being less than perfect (plagued by lawn mowing, doorbells and dogs) the recording quality was not up to scratch. More attention to quality and conditions would have been worth the effort.

Discussion

A number of themes emerged from this project: the perception of reduced community ‘glue’ now provided by local shops and their proprietors, a gradual expansion of people’s shopping horizon beyond their local precinct, the shortening life-span of retail businesses, less diversity of services and goods on offer locally, and also, the emergence of café and al fresco culture in the last twenty years. According to Stathios Artelaris, third generation ex-fish shop proprietor:

It was a bit of a gathering point; people would go and look at the fish and stand around and chat. Saturday mornings were always very busy, almost like carnival atmosphere as the whole family came to shop for the weekend. Friday nights was huge as fish and chips was the tradition; Dad and the kids in their pajamas. That continued right up until fast food came in during the 1970s.⁹

Unlike today, the person behind the counter in a shop would in the past frequently be the business (and possibly premises) owner. The relationships established between shop owners and their clientele and other shopkeepers were the building blocks of community connections sustained and deepened, often over decades, through the everyday practice of shopping. Respondents always referred to the shop-owners by name, and often knew them for many years of their lives. Before the days of car ownership and increased mobility, a lively local shopping precinct such as Napoleon Street could provide (almost) the entire range of goods and services anyone within walking distance could require. In early years pre-refrigeration, the need to shop virtually every day to

ensure the freshness of food meant that visiting the shops was practice woven into the household routine. However, it was the less tangible deliverables from a ‘trip to the village’ - social engagement and community connectivity - that became another key driver for shopping locally. Local shops as the ‘third place’ in the landscape of daily life played an important role.¹⁰

Napoleon Street was home to a number of family-run businesses that successfully operated for many decades, where owners established themselves in the community and became local identities. A greengrocer of note is still fondly remembered for his 39 years of service, a business that folded upon his retirement as offspring growing up with wider opportunity chose occupations beyond shopkeeping. As Tessie De Nardi said:

Our sons did not want to serve in the shop, but would help Bruno going to the market. Bruno would go there at 1am to choose and then sleep in his van until he could collect the fruit later. Then he would return to Cottesloe and they would open the shop at 7am. He did that four days a week for all the time.¹¹

The extremely high value of property, in this once sleepy seaside settlement, has now led to much higher rents and costs for tenants so that only those proprietors with deep pockets or businesses attracting the highest-spending customer can stay afloat. The growth of large retail chains for groceries, electrical, hardware and other goods has forced independent operators out of business who can’t compete with the ‘buying power’ of the big operators. Napoleon Street is now dominated by gift and fashion stores, and plenty of service-related businesses. Fortunately the continued existence, for now, of banks, a newsagency and post office mean that routine visits remain important for locals. Just don’t expect to buy a carton of milk there.

Noticeably, a marked difference between today and, for example the 1950s, is the prevalence of cafés and casual dining. Many respondents reflected how in years gone by it was almost impossible to sit down and take refreshment in the village, apart from a beer at the Albion Hotel. A German-born interviewee who emigrated in the early 1960s commented how in Australia eating in public was for many years taboo, something she is happy to now see a thing of the past. Simple observations like this are themselves fascinating descriptors of the evolving Australian sociocultural psyche. Gunhild Marchant stated:

In those days, eating was something you did in private. You did not sit on the street and eat or drink, that was not proper, really. The Australians had a very strange attitude to eating. Al fresco? God! Now everybody sits outside.¹²

Social cohesion, while once maintained with a casual ‘how are you today’ chat in the street, has become an appointment-based practice as people ‘meet for coffee or lunch’ in one of the many cafes. Social engagement has thus shifted from primarily the incidental and casual (yet guaranteed occurrence) of ‘running into people,’ to arranged meetings. The transformation to personal interaction that social media is currently enacting no doubt plays a large part in fulfilling the constant and casual pleasure once delivered by a friendly wave or quick chat whilst out doing errands.



Van's Café, Napoleon Street, 2015. Image: Author. The building was once home to a delicatessen operated by a Dutch migrant and his wife.

Anne Rickman, shop assistant at Van's Deli in the 1950s, described her work:

At night, the last job was to clean the meat cutter. If someone came in late you had to serve them and clean it all over again. The customer is always right. Mrs Van would always say: ‘goods well displayed are goods half sold.’ Good lessons!¹³

Conclusion

This project demonstrates the rich potential of community oral history collection for ethnographic researchers – gathering primary data like this can not only record important recollections but also shed valuable insight into current shifts in our society. The model of this research could be replicated in most urban communities – some of the themes are universal and current for many localities.

On the surface shopping precincts such as Napoleon Street appear to have changed markedly over the last fifty years. A full range of practical everyday goods and produce is no longer available, and new businesses are likely to come and go frequently. Whilst banks and other services remain on the strip, who can say how long these will continue to exist in a suburban environment further into the 21st century. It is a growth in hospitality outlets and personal services that is likely

to ensure shopping strips like Napoleon Street remain a vibrant hub into the future. Although the need to shop every day might no longer exist, a human desire for face-to-face connection and community engagement is not one that is likely to disappear any time soon. These observations and themes are likely present in a myriad of microgeographies, and would benefit from deeper research and recording, and could be of interest to historians, demographers and cultural studies scholars alike.

(Endnotes)

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- 2 Marchant James, 2007, p.46.
- 3 Marchant James, 2007, p.43.
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Wrong Side of the Road Oral History Project: National Film and Sound Archive Indigenous Connections Team

Brenda Gifford

Abstract

Stories are magic; they can transform us and reach people at a level where the intellect cannot. Aboriginal people have used stories as a tool for cultural knowledge transmission and resistance since time immemorial.

This article will look at the Wrong Side of the Road (WSR) Oral History Project undertaken by the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) Indigenous Connections team. It will be looking at how the Indigenous team approached the project through an Indigenous lens and worked effectively with the Aboriginal individuals, community, and industry stakeholders.

Introduction

The Indigenous Connections team of the NFSA seeks to collect, connect and protect the wealth of Indigenous material held by the NFSA in close collaboration with Indigenous cultural custodians, as a living archive for future generations. The team is charged with the responsibility to ensure that appropriate and significant representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories, culture and experiences exist within Australia's audio visual collection.¹

The First Voices Program works towards capturing the multitude of layers within shared stories through the voices of First Peoples musicians, filmmakers, actors, broadcasters and cultural knowledge holders. The program strengthens the Indigenous voice within the national collection, increases accessibility to Indigenous stories, supports indigenous language and culture, ensures the preservation of Indigenous stories and completes professional transcription of our stories. The program films interviews, as well as recording audio interviews.

One of the earliest First Voices projects was the Wrong Side of the Road Oral History Project. This was undertaken in conjunction with the NFSA screening of the digitised version of the film Wrong Side of the Road, screening at the 2013 Sydney Film Festival.

The film is a dramatised documentary, an on the road film showing 48 hours in the lives of members of the Aboriginal bands, No Fixed Address and Us Mob, including the racism, hostility and harassment they received. The film produced in 1981 is as fresh and relevant today as it was thirty four years ago. The featured bands No Fixed Address and Us Mob were the first contemporary Aboriginal bands to record an album, i.e. the soundtrack album. The bands became well known through the soundtrack from the film. They performed the anthemic songs 'We Have Survived' and 'Genocide' for the soundtrack album. No Fixed Address and Us Mob's music gave voice to the Aboriginal communities' hopes, concerns and aspirations of that era. Their music and the film highlighted issues such as land rights, genocide and the issue of stolen generations even before the term was in use.

The project was important because it was a once in a life-time opportunity to get remaining Indigenous cast members and musicians together at the same time and record their recollections of their time in the band, their music and their involvement in the film. I completed a series of interviews for the project that captured their unique stories. The interviews were created in a culturally safe interview space where the participants felt comfortable and relaxed with the space, interview environment and themselves. Sadie Heckenberg speaks about the cultural safety model in



*Interview in progress for Wrong Side of the Road Project
L to R Terry Stuetz cameraman, Brenda Gifford interviewer and
Pedro Butler interviewee. Photo by Sophia sambono*



Group Shot, Interview participants and NFSA Indigenous Team photo, R front row wearing black sunglasses Bart Willoughby, front row wearing No Fixed Address black Tshirt is Les Graham. Photo by Sophia sambono

the Indigenous interview space in her paper ‘Learning from Oral History in Wiradjuri Country,’ presented at the Biennial national conference of the Oral History Association of Australia in 2013.²

Methodology

The NFSA Indigenous Connections team’s established networks and relationships based on mutual respect and trust and the interviewer’s industry background and insider’s perspective were integral to the project. This was important because the participants knew about us before we started the project and this helped them ease into the interviews. The Indigenous team from the NFSA were all Aboriginal which was an essential part of the project in allowing it to run smoothly; originating from a place of shared culture.

The team worked across all areas of the archive and following on from a meeting with the film unit we came up with the idea of doing an oral history project to interview the surviving Indigenous cast and crew, in conjunction with the screening. The team contacted the city of Sydney council and worked with them and the film’s director to set up the Town Hall Mayors’ reception as a way to celebrate the ground-breaking film and its contribution to Australia’s audio visual history.

We worked with the Redfern Aboriginal community, Sydney Film Festival team, and the city of Sydney Council. This included working to the Film Festival’s schedule, whilst undertaking our own interview project and working with Sydney Council for them to host a pre-screening Sydney Town Hall event and post screening celebrations. The town hall pre-screening

event included capturing live vox pop interviews on site on the importance of the film. This involved setting up a camera crew in the town hall reception room and doing interviews live whilst the reception was going. Interviewees were asked a set list of questions and we captured their responses, along with the background noise and excitement of the event. SBS covered the event as well and interviewed the band members, lodging a copy of their material with the NFSA. The team worked collaboratively with the Aboriginal community and industry to achieve our goal of capturing the stories behind the making of the film *Wrong Side of the Road*.

The interviews were structured with a list of standard questions. We wanted to hear about their first-hand experiences as an Aboriginal working band on the road, the challenges, the highlights and low points. Did the film accurately reflect the on-the-road experience? Did they think things have changed for Aboriginal bands today? What legacy did the film leave? The interview themes included: Identity i.e. the stolen generations; racism (the song *We have Survived*); land rights; black deaths in custody; Aboriginal bands’ experiences; and the music industry’s treatment of Aboriginal bands, given that up to that point there were no contemporary Aboriginal bands that had recorded an album. Released in 1981 this soundtrack predated bands such as Warumpi and Yothu Yindi.

The choice of subject was important given the age and stage of the participants in their lives and careers and the importance of their stories as part of the Australian record and specifically Indigenous record.³ Therefore, as part of extensive research on the film and participants, I read everything I could find about the film and bands

and viewed the film several times; I listened intently to the soundtracks. I had experience playing some of the songs from the soundtrack and had an insider's knowledge of the musicians and the music represented in the film because I was a member of singer Bart Willoughby's Sydney band Mixed Relations and this gave me a background on which to base my work on this project with him and the other musicians.

We developed a list of questions for the interviews, but I used my intuition and followed the flow of the interview. My intuition is something I use in all interviews. It is essential to reading the interview situation and gauging how the interview is progressing. In one of the interviews the interviewee was feeling the loss of one of his band mates and this led to an emotional interview with the person getting visibly upset. We stopped out of respect, and restarted the interview once he had recomposed himself.

As a feature of all First voices interviews we discuss family and community ties, as this is central to Aboriginal people. In the interview sometimes the responses led to really interesting facts of their lives that mean a lot to them, such as when the band members talked about how they are all related through family ties, (which is not uncommon in Aboriginal bands). When dealing with personal issues in an interview I was guided by their responses and asked first if there are any areas of their lives they don't want to discuss. I take the view if they don't want to talk about things, they won't. However in several cases participants spoke about very personal issues and I allowed them to talk to these points and the interview progressed naturally.

Before finishing an interview I always ask if there is anything they might want to talk about but was missed in the interview.⁴

In the interview with No Fixed Address, Les, the lead guitarist, used this opportunity to talk about their Royal Gala performance in London. He went on to explain how the band NFA were accused of stealing money from an Australian opera singer on the bill, and the day after the concert the London paper issued a written apology to them. Despite this they met Prince Charles at his insistence and the band was excited to hear he was very interested in their music and the didgeridoo.

In the interview Les Graham said 'one of them accused us of stealing at the end of the night all the performers went out there, at the end of the gig and they would not let us go out there and bow. Prince Charles demanded to go and meet us They took us up to Princes Charles and he shook our hands.'⁵

To film the interviews we hired the Gadigal Studio in Redfern, the local Aboriginal radio station, for a couple of days. The participants felt comfortable in the setting with Redfern being the home of Aboriginal people in

Sydney. For the duration of the project we had breakfast with the group at the local Aboriginal owned café.

Challenges of the Project

Significant project challenges included handling size of interview groups, i.e. four band members at the one sitting, handling the situation of a dominant personality versus others within the group, ensuring everyone in the group had an opportunity to say what they wanted to and get their message across, which made handling of personal relationships part of the process.

Lessons learned included not underestimating the emotional toll the interview process may take on the participant; it was thirty years plus since the participant group were together as one and the losses of original members from the group took its toll on participants. Furthermore, we learnt to allow more lead time for the project given that we pulled the project together in one month.

Outcomes

The official outcome included twelve oral histories, eight vox pop short interviews, eighteen hours of filmed oral histories and five hours of audio only interviews added to the national collection. Another key outcome was the identification of the critical role the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) had in the development of that generation of Aboriginal bands. This eventually informed our next oral history project which was the CASM Oral History Project. The interviews will now form part of the historical record given that CASM has effectively closed.

The end product for the project was series of interviews that show a rarely seen or heard side of Australian music and film industry with our Aboriginal music pioneers' voices heard proudly and clearly and not silenced by the dictates of the industry.⁶

This initial First Voices project was guided by the following principles: respect for Indigenous people, culture and heritage, self-determination, consultation and negotiation, confidentiality, cultural integrity, cultural maintenance, informed consent and attribution. Aboriginal communities want to share their knowledge on their own terms. The Aboriginal oral record can be a process where cultural control is maintained by the knowledge holder(s).⁷ The filmed interviews helped capture not only the verbal but also the physical cues that are an important part of an interview within an Indigenous context. Incorporation of the above principles was reflected in the interview results. The participants felt comfortable in the interview space and happily shared their stories.

Bart Willoughby of No Fixed Address, when asked about the song We Have Survived, said, 'It derives

from boys' home, because I was taken away. To write a song that is spiritually uplifting I was not ready for that, but when they kept on coming it was like an awakening. For the first four years of college they put me in dumb school. I was dumb, that is what you are thinking. Aunt Leilah gave us confidence.'⁸

Bart Willoughby is an Aboriginal music legend - a singer, songwriter, drummer and multi-instrumentalist who has been playing music for over 30 years. Willoughby is a founding member of the South Australian Aboriginal band No Fixed Address, and participated in the 1981 film *Wrong Side of the Road*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, interviewing the mob and capturing their stories is a privilege and a great part of the work we do at NFSA. This is a great example of the work of the Indigenous Connections Team. Indigenous culture is an oral culture and oral history is the unadulterated voice of the individual and a pure reflection of that voice. In this case the First Peoples musicians' and actors' voices were captured as part of this project and put on the official record as a unique audio visual record for the National Film and Sound Archive collection.

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Difficult Homecoming: the use of narrative methods in the study of the Australian Defence Force veterans' cohort.

Elena Volkova



(Ian Hitchcock/Getty Images)

‘Words are often not sufficient. But they are what we have. So we must make them work.’¹

Abstract

This paper reports on two interlinked projects that investigate the capacity of narrative-based theatre, oral history and digital storytelling in building the resilience of military veterans, fostering a better engagement of the veterans with civilian community and building a sense of control over their lives. The paper discusses the use of oral history for the collection of data and outlines the artistic outcomes of the projects.

Background

A decade of armed conflict has left many Australian troops battle-scarred and traumatised. Almost four thousand Australian soldiers, or one in five veterans, have returned home from active service in Iraq, East Timor and Afghanistan suffering from combat stress and mental health conditions.² Veterans returning to civilian life face a difficult transition. Many veterans often suffer from ‘silent wounds’ of post-

traumatic stress: recurring memories, sleep disorders, depression, homelessness, alcohol and drug abuse, and family breakdowns. Some will develop these symptoms only several years following their return. Re-entering civilian life often implies a significant shift in cultures which requires a new set of life skills in order to become productive members of society. Military researchers are warning that a new generation of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and severe mental health disorders will emerge in the next five years.³ However, veterans traditionally find it difficult to ask for help.

Mental health issues in the Defence Forces often exist within a culture of stigmatisation, with many service personnel reluctant to admit to having a problem. Military personnel may not seek treatment for psychological illnesses because they fear it will harm their careers. Even among those who do seek help for PTS or major depression, only about half receive treatment that researchers consider minimally adequate for their illness (Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008).⁴

Research shows that military service can lead to profound changes in identity, affecting both soldiers’ perception of themselves and their relationship to the world. These perceptions of the world include disillusionment about human nature in general and a more specific rejection of civilian life.⁵

Qualitative analysis reveals that the veterans perceive the world as malevolent; they report estrangement, with the dominant theme being left ‘out in the cold’ after leaving the forces and returning to civilian life. Some speak of ‘living deliberately,’ ‘living to the full’ while others describe themselves as feeling as if they were dead. Emotional fragility and a loss of confidence and self-worth is evident.⁶

The Australian Research Council/Griffith University project The Difficult Return (2011-2014) was the first international project of its kind to use arts-based methods to break down the stigma of mental health issues in the military, namely PTSD, which one of the participants labelled as a ‘cancer of the mind.’ At the first stage of the project veterans shared their life stories through oral history interviews and short digital

films. The second stage of the project saw these stories developed into a script for a play performed by a mixed cast of professional actors and former service personnel focusing on the issues and strategies of dealing with the difficult return home.

The project Operation Homecoming Australia (Creative Industries, Queensland University of Technology, initiated 2013) investigates the capacity of storytelling to assist female Defence Force personnel in their integration into civilian life by helping them recognise, embrace and articulate their new identity, and fosters self-representation and confidence. The project is at its initial phase. It will employ a mixed methods approach. Oral history interviews will lead to the creation of several digital stories and will help to shed light on the experiences of women in the military.

Both projects examine the therapeutic angle of arts-based approaches that have storytelling at their core. Many claims have been made about the impact of artistic and narrative practices in trauma therapy. Some have been more rigorously researched or evidenced than others. The overall scarcity of data suggests that the field is not yet fully defined and the borders are transparent. We operate within the nexus of psychology, psychotherapy, art therapy and artistic practice, borrowing from each other the vocabulary and methods of data collection and interpretation. And in that, both projects are truly interdisciplinary.

Projects' theoretical framework

The projects employed Participatory Action Research methodology and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. While Participatory Action Research approach seeks to understand the world by trying to change it collaboratively and following reflection, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is concerned with trying to understand lived experience and with how participants themselves make sense of their experiences. Operating within this theoretical framework the projects have been conducted using in-depth interviews and facilitated workshops. This approach enables the participant to provide a full, rich account and allows the researcher considerable flexibility in probing interesting areas which emerge.

Interviews are audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and subjected to detailed qualitative analysis.

Common approaches of the cohort

Using the narrative approach in therapy for returning combat veterans has been studied by the researchers for

the past two decades. They hypothesize that traumatic memories can be organised and their emotional charge reduced through the development of a 'coherent trauma narrative.' Implicit and declarative memories of an event can become disconnected due to trauma. Narrative therapy facilitates the process of placing traumatic memories in declarative memory so they can be reinterpreted and integrated into the person's life history.⁷

Ron Capps, a military veteran himself with an MFA in Creative Writing (Johns Hopkins University), reflects on the cathartic value of storytelling that writers have long known. He says that, going back to the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Gilgamesh* and the like, the oldest existing stories are tales that speak of war and return. Studying the phenomenon of *memory*, Capps concludes that memories of some traumatic experiences, especially experiences of war, may never become fully integrated with other memories.⁸ Those memories - those stories - stand apart from other life experiences because they might involve actions antithetical to what is perceived as accepted human interaction. The violence and destruction that occur in war, the inhumanity and hatred that it provokes, can often be outside of our ability to understand. We sometimes cannot fully process what we witness because it is incomprehensible, and what we cannot comprehend, we cannot express.

So, one would argue, why do we want to access those memories at all, yet alone make them public through creative writing, oral history or digital storytelling? Because, Capps argues, they are going to come out sooner or later and it is better to bring them out on your own under conditions you can control than to have them start oozing out when you are not ready.⁹ He says that trying to capture the stories of what he saw and experienced in Afghanistan, Iraq, Rwanda, Kosovo and Dafhur, seemed hard at the beginning but every time he did try, he gained a little more control over the memories: 'I began to feel like I could control each particular memory a bit more. Gradually, I began to feel like I was getting more control over my life.'¹⁰

For a generation weaned on a multimedia confessional society, and at ease with blogging and Facebook, it makes sense that sharing war experiences and fears would be an effective, or at least familiar, way to examine and overcome what Capps describes as the 'powerful sense of isolation' that greets most veterans once home.¹¹

The shift from analogue forms of narrative to digital is signified by the emergent form of self-expression - digital storytelling (DS). The therapeutic value of DS has been described by practitioners and scholars alike. Democratic and participatory by nature, DS addresses social issues and enables previously untrained and 'unheard' people to produce personal stories spoken

in their own voice. This experience is empowering; it allows the participants to renegotiate their notion of self.¹²

In Australia DS workshops are used in a broad variety of settings and present rich data that allows making assumptions in regard to the validity of the method in the work with military veterans. As evident from the research, DS workshops create significant outcomes that are not always tangible. Participants report a change in attitudes in their immediate family and the larger community resulting from the viewing of their digital stories. People in their community become more engaged and interested, thus creating a sense of self-worth for the creators of the stories.¹³ On the other hand, researchers observe the revival of skills and the capacity to survive and thrive demonstrated by the participants of the DS workshops.¹⁴

Although clinical data is unavailable, it is interesting to look at the ways DS and creative writing are integrated in the work of the veterans' welfare organisation *Young Diggers*.¹⁵ The *Young Diggers* website is an example of an open forum for veterans and their families, including children. This approach creates dialogue between the peers and within a family unit that might be otherwise difficult to achieve.

Young Diggers created a platform that is democratic by nature by inviting the authors, who may vary in skill and ability, to interact. The selection of prose and digital stories published on its website makes the dry information on compensation, transition and welfare more personal and creates feelings of trust and shared experience. As mentioned previously, it also creates an opportunity for non-combatants to learn about the human cost of war. We believe it is very therapeutic for the veterans too.

'Storytelling does what science cannot,' claims Hartley in his chapter on digital literacy and the growth of knowledge.¹⁶ Quoting Beinhocker, Hartley outlines that stories are vital to us because they help us to process information and they give us material to find patterns in what surrounds us; ultimately, stories are a way in which we learn.¹⁷ It appears that stories are also our way to retrieve our true selves from the chaos of a traumatised mind and in doing so they can be profoundly therapeutic.

The process

In terms of the practical side of the projects, the participants were recruited through various veterans' support organisations such as 'Young Diggers,' 'Mates4Mates,' and, in the case of the Operation Homecoming, through Queensland University of Technology and a Facebook page dedicated to the project.

In-depth oral history interviews were conducted during the first phase of the projects. They were eye-opening for both the researchers and the veterans. The process of *telling* the story of their lives led the participants to focus on what was important, filter out unimportant information and sometimes chart the road to recovery. Telling the story to the interested and compassionate 'other,' who was not a friend or a family member, allowed the narrator to create a safe distance between them and the traumatic events. They were able to look at it from a distance. At that point the traumatic event started to release its distractive power and became a memory. Moreover, these interviews revealed the hidden blocks to seeking help that the veterans experienced and suggested ways this can be addressed.

Another important outcome of the oral history interviews was the ability to let emotions out in a safe environment, share the burden and reach all-important closures. It was an opportunity for the veterans to test the waters too and decide whether they are willing to participate in the workshops. Military veterans have an inherent distrust of civilians, especially people from academia. Through these series of oral history interviews we reached a breakthrough. Veterans felt that they can trust the researchers and they were willing to go further.

Both projects have a workshop segment in them but the nature of these workshops is different. The workshop that was delivered by The Difficult Return project was conducted together with Canadian colleagues from the University of British Columbia. Named The Veterans Transition Program (VTP), it is a group-based intervention that leverages the power of veterans helping veterans in providing a strength-based, non-stigmatizing approach to help veterans 'drop the baggage' of their invisible wounds and launch into successful civilian lives. The workshop consisted of a series of enactments by the veterans of the episodes they chose to work on. It was the *telling* by means of theatre.

During the enactments the participants re-visited the traumatic events that led to the development of post-traumatic stress symptoms. They picked other members of the group to play specific parts in the enacted event. These people - the 'doubles' - included researchers. We had to act on behalf of the real people in these stories. The participants worked fearlessly through their stories but created a different, positive, ending. The impact of this work was life-changing.

As researchers, we gathered valuable data through this process. It allowed us to assume an ethnographic stance while playing significant roles in other people's stories. We were able to reach a deeper understanding of the underlying issues in the lives of our cohort. All the enactments were videotaped. Firstly, we thought that we would use this material as research data. But

then, observing the keen desire of the participants to improve their lives and make a difference for other veterans suffering silently, we decided to change the way we analyse and interpret data. We analysed it together with the participants. A veteran and two researchers watched the recorded enactment and the veteran reflected on the impact of the storytelling through performance and the impact of watching himself performing his story.

The next step was the creative development of the play. It was based on the oral history interviews that were recorded at the beginning of the project. The purpose of the production was to raise awareness about the 'difficult' return and transition from military to civilian life, and motivate those experiencing difficulties to seek help. As a veteran- participant of the project and a member of the cast, Dean West said: 'If I can motivate one person to seek help earlier than I did, I will have done my job.'

Stigma that surrounds mental health prevents veterans from seeking help and creates straining relationships within family and professional units. It was one of the most significant insights that emerged from the oral history interviews. It was 'picked up' and artistically interpreted in the play. The production had a clear remit – to communicate the felt reality of living with PTSD and the issues of return from multiple perspectives. While the performance was designed to 'tell it like it is' the follow up Q and A forums after each show facilitated discussion about positive pathways for support.

Other positive outcomes included experience of the healing capacity of the narrative-based theatre and a possibility to build new relationships with the civilian community through interactions with the audience. Through the medium of the performance military veterans were able to tell their story as it happened and it resonated with those who had never experienced war first-hand.

The follow-up sessions with the participants produced more food for thought.

1. All of them admitted that storytelling 'unlocked the door,' letting out what was buried in their minds for years. They felt safe telling their stories and it gave them a sense of agency. They could tell their stories from now on much easier.
2. For Richard, being a 'double' in enactment for another participant was very beneficial. It allowed him to examine feelings expressed and compare them with his own experience in Vietnam. He said, it was like 'telling another person's story as your own.'
3. Chris said that writing would work best for

him because it is safe, it is done in his own time, pace and terms. It is honest, as 'paper doesn't judge,' and you can go as deep as you are prepared to.

4. The notion of 'a driver and a passenger' emerged when the enactments were discussed. Although all of them felt safe in the presence of a psychologist (driver), Richard and Chris think that his grip was too tight on them (passengers). Richard and Chris think that he took them on the road well-travelled instead of letting them explore on their own. They consider the oral history medium more suitable for this kind of work.
5. After telling his story for the first time Dean didn't notice any difference but his family members said that he became much calmer. For the first time he was able to talk to his children about his experience in the Defence Force and especially about the accident that caused PTSD.
6. Enacting his story and then watching the video recording of his enactment was eye-opening for Dean. He now felt that he was not alone. Indeed, this experience turned his life around and he became an advocate for PTSD therapy in the military.
7. Contrary to Chris and Richard, Dean doesn't consider writing a potent exercise. 'Soldiers are lazy,' he said with a laugh. But *telling* the story would be different. Both Dean and Mick said that telling the story the way they see fit and on their own time to someone 'outside the wire' (i.e. not a psychologist or a psychiatrist) would bring validation to their lives.

The diversity of data with some respondents seemingly contradicting each other shouldn't be discouraging. The results of this study point out that there is no single 'fix' that will fit all members of the military veterans community. What we should look for is the best *fit* for an individual or a group with similar characteristics.

What is more, an important element was missing. The researchers acknowledge the absence of the voice of women-members of the ADF. The silence was deafening. Therefore, the project Operation Homecoming became the logical continuation of the work that was begun three years prior by The Difficult Return.

The percentage of women in Australia's Defence Forces is increasing, with women now comprising 13.5%. James Brown, chairing the forum and a Military Fellow at the Lowy Institute, says:

We need more discussion of what's been

happening in modern wars. We need to look at how to deal with women who are combat veterans because a lot of the existing structures are very male dominated, such as the RSL and the Vietnam Veterans' Association. The RSL still has a women's auxiliary, that's very, very old school - the wives who help to make the scones - they do more than that but not a lot of veterans' organisations are set up for female veterans.¹⁸

Problems have also been associated with a lack of identity for female veterans returning to civilian life. Researchers emphasise the need to devise practical strategies to assist female veterans to carve out an identity within the existing veteran community. There has been little research exploring a sense of self and identity for women in the military today. However, what the researchers do know suggests that such a sense of identity can have an impact on women's health and influence their access to services.

The project Operation Homecoming is at its initial stage of oral history interviews. What emerges from these interviews is a story of female heroes who were not recognised at home. They are heroes not only because of their contribution to military action, but because they also have had to prove themselves while working in a male-dominant profession. These women have to negotiate conflicting roles in their lives, such as the roles of a warrior and a mother.

At the same time, women in the military don't identify themselves as 'veterans.' As they say, that was a description more applicable to 'cranky old Vietnam veteran blokes.'¹⁹

So far, I can conclude that narrative reconstruction transforms the participants' traumatic memory into manageable forms. The digital storytelling workshop that will follow will allow the exploration of the capacity of creative writing and digital art to break the silence around women in the military profession and to facilitate their reconnection to a new future. This points to the importance of *telling* as a means of not only reflecting on one's life but reconnecting with a coherent sense of self.

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Busselton oral history group (inc): ANZAC centenary project

Margaret Dawson

Abstract

The Busselton Oral History Group has been active in recording local stories that would otherwise be lost and disseminating them through publications, CDs and events. The work has been carried out by a dedicated group of volunteers who have a passion for community history. In this article I discuss the latest project, the 'ANZAC Centenary Project,' an ambitious project for a small group, but one that was fully supported by the Busselton community and which has produced some rewarding results.

Introduction

The Busselton Oral History Group (Inc) began as part of the Busselton Historical Society then in 2009 became incorporated in its own right. While there are eleven financial members of this group only three or four are interviewers. The Group has undertaken the publication of a book commemorating the 140th anniversary of the longest wooden jetty in the southern hemisphere, *Reflections of the Jetty*¹ in 2005 and in 2012 the reprint of Rodger Jennings' historical book *Busselton: Outstation on the Vasse 1830 -1850*² which required considerable research corrections of typographical and factual errors and standardisation of the text and index.



At the present time the Busselton Oral History Group has approximately 450 hours of recording consisting of 207 interviews on a wide variety of subjects. There have been eight specific projects: Augusta Busselton Heritage Trail;³ Australia Remembers;⁴ Busselton Oral History 1985 –2013;⁵ The Busselton Health Study;⁶ Busselton Wildflower

Jack Dodd



Peter Perry

Show;⁷ Communications in the Vasse Region 1830 - 2004;⁸ Development of Holiday/Tourism Accommodation, Geographe Bay Region⁹ and Ray Village Aged Care.¹⁰ In co-operation with the Busselton Library we are in the preparation stage of putting our interviews and transcripts online. All of our interviews have been transcribed by volunteers many of whom have come to us through our local Volunteer Centre.

A number of our interviews are already accessible to listeners throughout Western Australia as the State Library has made some of these available online. At present the Busselton Oral History Group is working with the City of Busselton Library to put all of our collection online and we envisage that could happen within the next twelve months.

The ANZAC Centenary Project

In 2014 our Group undertook a ninth oral history project to celebrate the Centenary of Anzac. The idea for the project came about when Lotterywest announced the availability of grants to celebrate the Anzac Centenary. Our group members believed this would be a way we could make a contribution to the community by recording oral histories of ex-servicemen and women giving personal accounts of



Jim Lavender

events not usually recorded in history books. The insight provided through these stories may enable listeners to augment their understanding of what the ex-servicemen and women had to face on a day to day basis. All Anzac Centenary recorded interviews and transcripts will be made available for borrowing to the local community through Local Government libraries in Busselton and Dunsborough and through the State Library in Perth.

The project comprised around twelve months from early 2014 of concentrated effort starting with the grant application and applying to the Department of Veteran



Gerry Stretch

Affairs for the use of the official Anzac Logo on our CD box wraparounds and transcript covers. We began by compiling information required by Lotterywest to apply for a contribution to the funds required for the project.

We approached referees and with letters of support from our local Members of parliament, the City of Busselton Mayor and the local RSL President, Bob Wood, we were successful in receiving a Lotterywest grant of \$12,775. As President of Busselton Oral History Group I was invited to attend one of the RSL weekly evening functions to talk to ex-service personnel and, with further assistance and encouragement from the Busselton RSL we were able to source the names of local ex-service personnel and the conflicts in which they had served, as well as approaching other individuals in the community already known to us.



Bob Glover

Researchers prepared for the interviews by reading broadly to understand the scope of various conflicts which assisted in preparation of a list of general questions. Most of the research for the individual interviewees was undertaken by the interviewers who selected those ex-service personnel they would approach.

After the recording of the interview came editing; tracking; word processing transcripts; initial checking of transcripts; verification by interviewees; final checking of transcripts before printing; printing and binding of individual transcripts and bound volumes; preparation for burning of sound files to CDs; preparation of summaries for CD labels and printing of labels with Anzac Official Logo. All interviewees signed consent forms which also included a page indicating whether they agreed or disagreed to publication, internet access and lodgement with the State Library of Western Australia.

A 'Presentation' function was planned followed by lodgement of CDs and transcripts into local libraries;



Melanie Sorokine

preparation and forwarding letters of thanks to people involved and acquittal of the grant with Lotterywest.

The interviews are stored on external hard drives, one drive for unedited files and another for edited. A master drive stores all sound files and transcripts. The Busselton Oral History Group (Inc) has a room in the local Community Resource Centre and backup copies of all files are stored there, including a master copy.

Interviewers included Margaret Dawson (10 interviews), Margaret Tickle (10 interviews), Patti Bolt (3 interviews) and Dawn Prus (1 interview). Transcribers for the project were Lyn Gulberti (17), Barbara Lang (3), Heather Hill (2), Sue Perrin (1), Margaret Dawson (1). Richard Liston compiled final transcripts, organised the burning of CDs and the printing of labels and Colleen Liston prepared CD summaries. Colleen Liston, Richard Liston, Garry



*Guard outside Prison Camp 57, Gruppignano, Italy
(photograph courtesy Jack Doddd).*



Norman Gomm

Prus and Margaret Dawson proof-read and checked accuracy of the materials.

The aims of the Anzac Centenary Project were to:

- ask interviewees about how their experiences in conflicts had affected them in their lives and what impact it had on relationships, their work and health,
- allow interviewees to share their stories with other ex-servicemen and women,
- inform the public of the war experiences of local residents in the Busselton region,
- provide resource and educational material for researchers and students,
- create records that would otherwise be lost.

The interviews

Some interviewees had never talked about their feelings in such a way and many found the process helpful – as did their families who were able to gain insight into their loved ones' experiences which they had not understood before. The funding covered travel expenses by one of the interviewers. The interviewing itself was the Busselton Oral History Group (Inc)'s 'in kind' contribution to the project. The grant also covered paid research time for internet and library searches, checking of place names, circumstances and other aspects of the various conflicts, transcribing, checking transcripts as well as purchase of materials (CDs and printing costs). Lyn Gulberti, transcribed 17 of the interviews, which was a mammoth task that took many hours of work.



Front: WWII, Korean UN Peace Keeping Back: Iraq, Somalia Operation Restore Hope, UN Peace Keeping - Iraq, Sinai, East Timor.

In retrospect this was a very ambitious project because the Busselton Oral History Group is small and this meant a heavy work load for a few people. As all interviewers would know, in a project like this a lot of research is undertaken to obtain background knowledge and some understanding of the subject. I think all of the interviewers will agree that we know a lot more than we did when we started.

The outline of our grant application was to capture ‘the reflections on the experiences of Australians in fields of conflict from World War II to more recent conflicts.’ Twenty four people were interviewed (23 men and one woman). Only one female was interviewed although we tried to find others to participate. Initial contact was made with another female who at first agreed but as she was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at the time and not in the right frame of mind, then declined to be interviewed.

There were many more with interesting experiences but within the time frame it wasn’t possible to interview them all. The interviewees were very open and frank, sharing their experience and relating the problems they suffered as a result of the conflicts. Lyn Gulberti remarked after transcribing the interviews that she thought all school children should read the transcripts or listen to these experiences. She believed that many school children



Libby Mettam, MLA (Member for Vasse), Bob Wood (President of Busselton Branch, RSL), Margaret Dawson, (President Busselton Oral History Group).

would not be aware of the sacrifices made by our ex-service personnel and the sound files are easy to listen to and the transcripts very simple to read.

We recorded interviews with ex-service personnel from the Australian Army (14), Navy (6) and Air Force (2). Two of our interviewees served with the British forces but have been included as our brief covered Australians who served in fields of conflict.

We interviewed five men from World War II including William Gerald (Gerry) Stretch who was 94 years old and he recalled his experiences in Syria, New Guinea and Borneo. His bravery, for which he was awarded a Military Cross, is mentioned often in the book *The Second Twenty-Fourth Australian Infantry Battalion: A History* (RP Serle Ed Jacaranda Press 1986).¹¹ He spoke about his post war nightmares which today would be labelled Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. To quote from him:

Looking back I thought I was all right, but actually I was as ‘bomb happy’ as you can make it I realise it now, and I used to have shocking nightmares. Once or twice a week you’d wake up covered in sweat and shaking like mad and screaming.¹²

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was very common amongst most of our interviewees but, of the World War II men, only Gerry mentioned this and another touched on it. Perhaps they may have suffered but they were from the era when you ‘just got on with it’ and it wasn’t talked about, memories were too painful to revisit or with the passage of time these feelings have diminished.

Another WWII veteran Gordon Clair (Jim) Lavender had been transferred from the HMAS *Sydney* about two months before she was torpedoed off the West Australian coast. He recalled:

You know what the feeling was? I wished I’d have been on the ship. It was my home you see, I’d been there three and a half years, it’s like my home, and I’d wished I’d have been there, you know. Well every now and again it comes back, even now you still get that memory, it will be a flash, you think about it or something. It’s not so bad now I don’t think, now that they’ve found her.¹³

Another WW II soldier, prisoner of war and escapee John William (Jack) Dodd said he had no problems when asked if he had nightmares on his return:

No I never [did]. I just couldn’t sleep in a nice soft bed for a little while. I used to hop out of bed, well I was married by then, and I’d hop out of bed and sleep on the floor for awhile. It was just that, that’s all. I never let things worry me. I suppose it could do if you allowed it but I wasn’t



Jack Dodd, second from left front in Syria (photograph courtesy Jack Dodd).

the worrying type. I was more the adventure type because, I was escaping out of a camp and I was hiding out in Italy and I was escaping over the mountains to Switzerland. It was good fun at the government's expense. Then I got fed and I got paid while I was in Switzerland.¹⁴

One of our Vietnam veterans, Peter Robert Perry, a 'tunnel rat', related:

So I stopped drinking, and I haven't had a drink in 20 years. But the problem didn't stop. I still couldn't sleep. At least when you're drinking you get a good night's sleep. When I buried my dog one day I saw [sighs] the eyes of my dead soldiers going past saying. 'Yeah, we trusted you too, you bastard.' And that was the end of me. Oh well it knocked me; totally knocked me. I think what happens is that you come back ... and I had the shutter down. You couldn't get emotion out of me and I remember the night I did it, when I had to crawl amongst my boys and say, 'Well four of your mates are dead; three really badly wounded' ... and not show any emotion. Blocked it out! Totally blocked it out, it took me ten years I suppose before that shutter went up – partially. But in the meantime it was alcohol, long work hours (not so much the sport because my knees packed in), until I made the decision to stop drinking. Mind you I was smoking 60 cigarettes a day too until I give that away, cold turkey.¹⁵

The largest proportion of interviews was with Vietnam War Veterans, 11 in all. They indicated overwhelmingly that they felt the heavy burden of being often derided and certainly not recognised as having served their country for a cause. One of the interviewees, Robert Malcolm (Bob) Glover, who was 20 years old and a National Service conscript, best expressed this sense thus:

We decided we'd have a feed at Sydney airport and in those days you had to just walk up one level in to the restaurant. So we walked up in to the restaurant and we walked in there and we walked up to the top and sat down and people started moving away. And this waiter wouldn't come

over to our table so this skipper from Tasmania went, 'Mate, we'd like a feed.' 'Oh would you?' 'Yeah, we'd like steak and eggs and chips.' 'Oh, right oh.' So he came out and he said, 'No, I can't serve you.' And he [the skipper] grabbed him and he said, 'You will serve us.' So they did, but people moved away like you had measles or your bloody fingers were falling off or something like that, they just moved away from us, like a big circle.¹⁶

Another who expressed his frustration and disgust at the way they were treated was Raymond John (Ray) Carroll, another 'tunnel rat' who said:

I think I could say half the problem was the way a veteran was treated when he came back to Australia. Me, as a veteran, after I got out of the army, travelled intensely around the state with Telecom, staying in hotels every night and you would go in and the people at the bar would say 'Oh don't talk to that bloke down there, he's a nutter; he's a Vietnam veteran.' This was quite common. Most country towns was where veterans would go to get the quietness and away from the fast city life if you like. So, yes, they got listed as they were 'nutters'; they were mad.¹⁷

A veteran, Norman Frederick (Norm) Gomm who worked with the US Army Secretive section experimenting to see how new weapons and equipment operated in battle conditions stated:

There were a few people that treated me like that in the early days; even later in life when I got a job in the Science Department there were a couple of women there who looked upon me as a baby killer. You know, they looked back and they saw me as an ex-Vietnam veteran, as someone who would kill babies, but they were feminists, very rabid feminists, and I guess that was part of their psyche.¹⁸

The only woman interviewed, Melanie Sorokine, was 28 years old when she was sent to Iraq with the Royal Australian Navy aboard HMAS *Stuart* patrolling in the Persian Gulf. As a medic she treated badly wounded US sailors injured as a result of a dhow blowing up as Americans sailors boarded. Melanie had no problems when I interviewed her but recently has had flash backs of that incident. It was interesting to get a female point of view of navy life aboard ship. She said:

There were about 180 [crew], there were about 30 women on the ship. The actual sub lieutenant of the ship, she was a female. She was actually like a bit of a role model I guess, because she had worked her way up to that rank and was real career minded. ... I really didn't know about the rules until things happened, but as far as I know if a female member got together with a guy on



Jack Dodd in Syria, standing 3rd from right (photograph courtesy Jack Dodd).

the ship, that was really scorned, so the rule ‘no fraternisation’, that was hammered in to us at recruit school. But you know, because [laughs] you’re in a working situation like that it still used to happen, you know; it’s your work. Yes the rule there was that the junior sailor had to leave, and usually the junior sailor was a female, so she would have to leave, and I did see that happen.¹⁹

Other arenas of conflict which interviewees experienced included United Nations Peace-keeping missions in Korea, Sinai, Somalia and East Timor. Two other young men served in Iraq with the British Paratroopers.

The culmination of the project was a very successful presentation function hosted by the RSL at their headquarters in Busselton with most of the interviewees present as well as a large group consisting of dignitaries, including State Members of Parliament, interviewees’ family members, and RSL and Busselton Oral History Group members.

Unfortunately two of our interviewees had passed away before the ceremony and another in May this year. Two were World War II veterans aged 93 and 95 and the other, quite unexpectedly, a Vietnam Veteran aged 67.

Each interviewee received a boxed set of their CDs and a bound transcript, each with Anzac covers. Copies of the CDs were also given to the RSL, Busselton and Dunsborough Libraries. As well as individual transcripts we had four bound volumes of the transcripts published which were divided into the following conflicts and presented to the RSL, Busselton and Dunsborough Libraries.

Volume 1 covers World War II and the Korea United Nations Peace Keeping Force; Volumes 2 & 3 are on the Vietnam War and Volume 4 presents interviews on Sinai - UN Peace Keeping, Somalia - UN Operation Restore Hope, East Timor - UN Peace Keeping and the Iraq War.²⁰

Since the presentation we have received many orders for extra copies of the CDs and transcripts from the families of the ex-service personnel and have filled these orders.

We are very grateful to everyone who participated in this project. Their experiences are very interesting, sometimes shocking, often moving, and it makes one realise the enormous sacrifice these people made in serving their country.

(Endnotes)

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- 3 Busselton Oral History Group (Inc), *Augusta Busselton Heritage Trail Rediscovery, Preparation, Bi-Centennial Walk*, Printed by office of Hon. Adele Farina MLC, 2012.
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- 12 Busselton Oral History Group (Inc), *Anzac Centenary Project 2014*, Volumes 1-4, South West Precision Print, Busselton, 2014, Vol. 1, p. 225.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- 14 *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 43.
- 15 *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 73-74.
- 16 *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 168.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 19 *Ibid.*, Vol 4, pp. 211-212.
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Vida – a pastor’s wife

David Sweet

Abstract

When recording oral histories, family photographs have not been a well-utilised resource. Many people have considerable collections of snapshots squirreled away in cupboards and overflowing in photo-albums and shoeboxes. Each of these photographs is an inducement – a memory-maker. They prompt a rich and detailed oral history as a legacy for future generations. However, they need to be interrogated and the stories recorded for their true worth to be realised. My research methodology commences with the traditional approach to oral history and then employs what I call ‘photographic autoethnography.’ This is where the research participant uses family photographs to tell their story. ‘Vida – a pastor’s wife’ is such an example.

Before the beginning

When and how does the idea of an oral history project become a reality? Vida Liebelt is an 85 year-old great-grandmother, who I have known for almost forty years. Born Vida Heinrich, she was raised, went to school and married in Freeling (SA). She is the second eldest of five children to fourth generation (immigrant) German farmers. At twenty-one, in 1951, she married recently ordained Lutheran Pastor, Dudley Liebelt and moved to outback Queensland. The role of a pastor’s wife in the second half of the 20th century was not easy. Her family often survived on the generosity of parishioners who provided them with gifts of food. From Gin Gin, Queensland, to country South Australia, Vida juggled the demanding and dual roles of mother and pastor’s wife.

During the past decade I have heard each of her four surviving children, and a few of the older grandchildren implore her to write her history, the story of her life. One grand-daughter has even given her a journal to write in. However, Vida has not entered anything in the journal, or made any other notes, or jottings of her life. I volunteered to help; well I think I did? Given my interest in family histories each time one of her children mentioned their mother’s history, in my presence, their gaze fell on me and the silent request

became the unspoken plea. When oral historians engage with someone’s life story, we cannot be fully objective and often we are drawn into their narrative.¹

Methodology

I approached Vida in late 2014 and proffered the idea of undertaking an oral history of her life. There was not an immediate agreement and I could see that she wanted to think about it over time. Her initial reply was questioning as to why, because she did not consider her life to be all that different to others of her era. From the small amount I already knew of Vida’s background I pointed out some of her unique experiences and how they would be of interest to her family and the wider community.

While her immediate family had encouraged Vida to write some of her memories, undertaking an oral history is more personal and intimate and I had a sense that her adult children were a little reticent. Given the earlier pleas by her children, this appeared to be incongruous. Then when discussing the project with them I could not obtain a clear understanding as to why there was some reluctance for their mother to be interviewed. There were vague questions of what was going to happen to the recordings, could they (the children) listen to them and what if their mother changed her mind? Time was on my side and I did not immediately try and justify an oral history of Vida. During November 2014 and through to January 2015, I used the occasional family gathering, where I was in attendance, to raise the matter and let the family talk about it. With reassurance, by myself, that the proper protocols and ethical guidelines to the interviews and subsequent recorded material would be followed, general agreement was established.² Once that decision was made, the family became keen advocates of the project and I have regularly been asked about the interviews and the various stages.

The initial plan was to commence a series of interviews in early February 2015, for about one hour duration over a six-week period. This was delayed for more than a month as one of Vida’s teenage grandsons died

in a drowning accident in Sydney in the first week of February.

While the aim of this project is to record Vida's oral history and to provide her story as a legacy for her family and others who may be interested, my approach is slightly different to a regular question and answer interview.

Background to the Project

Some five years before this project commenced I was a guest at Vida's home. The occasion was her eightieth birthday celebration. Vida's family, her older husband, Dudley, her younger sister, Alison, and Alison's husband, Lloyd, with Vida's eldest daughter, Pam, were quietly conversing amongst themselves. Earlier in the day the two sisters, with their husbands, were joined by their older brother and had spent part of the afternoon exploring the family's former farm at Freeling,³ north of Adelaide. Most of their time that afternoon they agreed transpired as 'a nostalgic visit to the old homestead.' It is now in ruins. A collapsed tin roof, broken local stone and pug walls⁴ is all that is left, and the once flourishing garden now non-existent. Their conversation was a romantic reminiscence, nothing overly critical, or dwelling on the personal hardships; those challenges were just accepted as life 'back then.'

On this occasion I was not interviewing the three women. I was quietly listening to them talk amongst themselves. On the floor, between them, was a medium sized plastic storage box about two-thirds full of black-and-white photographs. Some were packaged in plastic sleeves, or large brown paper envelopes, and assembled in some order known only to Valmai. Most of the paper envelopes had a brief description – 'the farm,' 'Deb Ball,' or 'family 1950' – written in pencil across the front. As their musing progressed, Valmai's hand would dive into the box, retrieving another random selection of pictures, a lucky dip for the next accidental story or memory.

For the younger sister, Alison, the family gathering appeared to be more about a discovery of her past than just memories. The memories and nostalgia are present, but there are numerous exclamations of: 'I don't remember ... [or], I never knew that photo existed.' It was not that Vida had kept them hidden; she just had not often shared the photographs with anyone. Daughter Pam sat quietly listening to the stories. Occasionally Pam asked a question or commented on one of the photographs, as they passed between the three women.

Held almost in awe, the very small black and white contact prints, or photographic 'Art Post Cards by Marchant's Studio Tanunda and Gawler, SA' were



Taken at Marchant's Studio, Gawler, SA, this is one of few photographs of Vida under two-years of age.

selected and studied.⁵ The stories unfolded. There did not appear to be any embellishment to the memories. Often an item or object in a photograph was commented on – a cardigan and who knitted it, a confirmation cross, or the old lathwork rendered rainwater tanks at the back of the house, which seemed to be the preferred backdrop for family group photographs. The stories flowed. I listened as their snapshots conjured a rich and warm journey of their past, reconstructed memory, and happiness.

There were photographs of those long dead, strangers to everyone but Vida. These well-preserved images were being treated with reverence as the dead were momentarily resurrected. It is suggested that we are subject to nostalgia, particularly where a photograph of a dead parent or lost lover, creates an emotional attachment or memory⁶. To me, as the detached observer, this emotion was obvious as the minutes ticked by and the others in the room talked of different things, while Vida, Alison and Pam continued travelling through their history. Their conversation did not jump time and burst back to the present. Names were remembered, details of these former lives were spoken of with affection, some nostalgia, and at times longing. Their conversation was of memories, passionately stirred up by these valued photographs, of known and unknown people and of times past.

Throughout the almost two hours, as this photographic autoethnographic and oral history evolved, I sat, listened, observed, and became the silent and unrelated

voyeur. There were no photographs on permanent display in this room. In the adjacent dining room and kitchen there is a wall of family groups and portraits, and the refrigerator has a few colour prints attached to it with button-shaped magnets. Later, the plastic box with its treasured memories, capturing the photographic punctum,⁷ was returned to its storage, under the bed. Once again readied for the next unplanned opportunity to view its contents, or as mused by Vida,⁸ ‘for Pam and the others [her children] to sift through when I die.’

Although the three women did not exclude the others in the room from their memories and stories, there was a tacit acknowledgement that this was their personal reminiscence. The husbands of Vida and Alison talked of beekeeping, honey and gardening. I did not participate in any of the conversations. I sat and listened to the three women talking amongst themselves. Later that evening I wrote about this event in my journal. After reviewing the notes and thoughtful recollection I accept that not everything was recorded. What has been noted is just one version of the truth, but it is how I have remembered the evening, interpreted the activities, and selected those aspects, which I found to be worthwhile. Arguably the ethnographer reconstructs memories as written extracts depicting people’s lives through selected, integrated details.⁹ This concept of story-telling is also described as truth not being fixed and that everything we say and mean about the past is a form of modification and review.¹⁰ Correspondingly for those telling the stories, or having stories told about them, it becomes a renewing of their lives. My observations from this evening of reminiscence further confirmed my observation that there is a desire by many older people to engage in a reflection of their lives. They use their family photographs to help resurrect those memories.

Later, talking with Pam, she confirmed that her mother’s photographs stirred up her own past. Yet her memories differed. They were of being a young child, visiting the family farm and exploring the old farmhouse, before it became a ruin. Her thoughts drifted from the long drive to the farm in an FJ Holden,¹¹ being the peace-maker between her younger and squabbling siblings, to playing with her cousins at the farm and reflected that they were nice thoughts, kind of nostalgic for her. This family gathering became the early motivation for me to develop an oral history of Vida and this project.

Scholarly review

Looking through family photographs not only prompts commentary from the interviewee, but also can provide illustrations for the interviewer’s publications.¹² In the past, photographs have primarily been used by researchers to view and assist in the cultural and social interpretation of an individual or a group. Also the photograph has been used to discuss its currency, to interpret the image(s) and to then form an opinion of what

they represent.¹³ Often photographs have been inserted into the interview, i.e. by outsiders as the ‘authority,’ determining what will be viewed and interpreted within the group being researched.¹⁴ This project reverses that method and allows the individual (Vida), to tell her story using the family photographs in the process. Hence the resulting narrative from the interviews is based on her selected photographs, which become the primary prompt for her oral, social and cultural history.

Specifically, this project also provides an example of an alternative means of research where oral historians can use family photographs as a conduit to oral history, augmenting life writing, story-telling and memory making. The research demonstrates the importance that photographs deliver in reinforcing or prompting oral history and the special relationship that many individuals have with their family photo-collections. I argue that these family photographs can offer an understanding and interpretation of the nostalgic, social and cultural aspects of family life. Our ability to accurately document these family photographs, combined with the related oral history is time-specific and if not recorded it weakens a tradition of generational transference of myths, values and the associated narratives. Without this history family members, and others, may experience a sense of individual loss and a breakdown with a connection to their past.¹⁵

Oral historians find little guidance in their literature on the use of photographs in oral history.¹⁶ While family photographs have been available for biographers, and auto-biographers to include in their writings, the photograph has had a very limited use in scholarly recording of family and oral history. I note that in the 2011 Oxford Handbook of Oral History,¹⁷ there are forty contributors, only five of whom briefly mention photographs. Photography has been around since the 1830s – 180 years. In comparison the Internet, which has been publically available since August 6, 1991 (twenty-four years), has fourteen scholars discussing it in this edited publication.

Similarly, in Australia there are few scholars who call on this relatively untapped resource of the family photograph in their research. Historian, Alistair Thomson¹⁸ states, ‘Most oral history publications do not include photographs, and if they do, they often serve only as illustrations.’ However, this edited publication provides an excellent insight to the marriage of oral history and family photography.

Vida

Vida was born in 1930 in the small hamlet of Freeling, some thirty-five kilometres north of Adelaide. Then it was a self-contained country town, with three churches, a hospital, school, and Institute hall and a thriving shopping strip. In more recent times the

hospital has become an aged care facility, petrol now has to be purchased in Gawler some fifteen kilometres away and the school has long since closed. This once bustling town has changed. However it became better known around the turn of the century for the location of the Australian television drama series, McLeods' Daughters.¹⁹

For the interviews, Vida selected more than one-hundred photographs as the foundation to her story. These photographs became the primary means for her to recall her memories and tell her story. Many of these images are from her photo-albums, but also there are some photographs that she has inherited from her parents. Obviously photographs do not hold memories, however, they are prompts to times past, stimulate the recall of her family's oral history and reinforce family myths; they are memory makers. Photographs are more than physical artefacts; they provoke, prompt and sustain memories.²⁰

While holding a small black-and-white photograph of her mother, Vida explained,²¹ 'Now my mother, I always considered a lady, not in the hoity toity way, but she was quiet-ish and I loved her dearly. My dad and I didn't always see eye to eye. I always thought he was lazy. He didn't like getting out of bed early, or anything. I guess he wasn't, but I just, I didn't have a closeness with my father, but I did with my mum.'



Vida's parents, Edna and Carl 'Hugo' Heinrich. This was a formal photograph to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary in 1951.

Living on a farm meant that the children all had their small jobs to do around the home and it was expected that as children they contributed to the family. Vida enjoyed school and was excited to move from the primary school in Freeling to the high school in nearby Gawler. The one-penny train ride each morning and afternoon was an adventure. However,²² 'at fourteen I was dragged out of high school after one term. Mum was sick after my youngest sister was born – I guess you'd call it postnatal depression now – but kids then didn't have any teen years. I was the eldest daughter

and yeah, I was expected to work on the farm, or at least in the home. I loved school and cried all the way home that day. But you just accepted it as part of life then.'

During this part of the interview and looking at some of the photographs of her parents' home the conversation drifted into discipline and Vida explained, 'I only remember my father using his razor strop on my bottom once [laughing] and that was because I cheeked him and I suppose I deserved it – I dunno, but yeah I respected them though as my parents.' Other hardships of life in the pre-war years were occasionally touched on, but without any significant recriminations. Her attitude was that it was just accepted as part of life,²³ 'I don't suppose that we children even realised that there was a depression. We always had a car; first car dad had was a 26 Chev, so you know, we had a car. My mother never ever learnt to drive.' Continuing, Vida explained, 'The farm was a mixed farm and so we had sheep, pigs, cows, fowls (which I detested) ... and I was very proud of myself because I didn't mind cows and I learnt to milk when I was six.'

One of the cultural and social events in the first half of the 20th century was the debutante ball or coming out - certainly a different understanding of this term today than it was fifty or more years ago. There are a number of photographs of her debutante ball and as she mulled over these images Vida quietly spoke of this significant social event in her life. It was held at the Freeling Institute Hall in 1947 and the partners for the girls were bussed in from an air Force Base near Port Wakefield. However, the three or four photographs were more than memories for Vida. They depicted the formality of life in the 1940s. In the fashion of the day, each of the debutante's gowns were hand-made, either by the young girl, her mother, or a family friend. 'Lady Mawson the wife of Sir Douglas Mawson was the guest of honour and we had to make a little bow to her,' Vida²⁴ recalled. These reminiscences (and others) are the narratives that add to the richness of her story.



The 1947 Freeling debutante ball, held at the Freeling Insititute hall. Vida is in the front row, second from the left and next to Lady Mawson.

In 1951 Vida married, went from a comfortable home and life style in Freeling, to almost substandard living in outback Queensland. She was also the wife of the very new, local Lutheran Pastor. At twenty-one she had to take on the responsibility of managing a home as well as meeting the expectations of the local parishioners. Within two months of being married Vida was pregnant. Over the next eleven years she and her husband had three daughters and two sons. Cathy, the fourth child and youngest daughter, died of breast cancer in 2000 and Vida, the grandmother, became the part-time mother to Cathy's four children, a role she still takes pride in.

In the 1950s, and especially in Queensland, the Lutheran Church did not provide any transport for their pastors, so Vida's husband bought an old Chevrolet Tourer to travel the hundreds of 'miles' between churches in the Queensland outback. The 'church' paid their Pastors (in Queensland) two-hundred pounds a year, and a good weekly offering was two pounds. So a week's income was around six pounds ten shillings, below the basic wage, which in October 1951 was nine pounds five shillings²⁵.

Their first house was a basic 'Queenslander'. Timber, built on posts, but it was so old and dilapidated, nothing was square. 'We didn't complain,' explained Vida,²⁶ 'but yeah ... it would have been nice to have a hand basin in the bathroom, but it was just a cupboard with a dish and I needed to heat our water for a bath, there wasn't a shower. We had to heat the water on the stove or in the copper out in the laundry. But see, a lot of the people, that was only what they had.'



Vida holding her first born, Pam, at Gin Gin Queensland, 1952.

We can gaze at the adjacent image and it will mean different things to each of us. However, there are stories within this image. The photograph was the family's first home in Gin Gin, Queensland. It was taken level, but the house is on an angle because it was old, and the prevailing winds gave it a lean; nothing was square. According to Vida, the kerosene fridge would not stay alight and when it did it would vibrate across the floor, causing the flame to go out. The FJ Holden may look new; however it was second hand, and continually broke down – not a good option for travelling on the rough dirt roads of outback Queensland in 1952. While the people

and place of this photograph are interesting, the richness is in the memories it generates and the background stories to the locality and lifestyle of the day.

The challenges of an interview

No matter how well you prepare, when you are in someone else's home, background noise can be an issue. On the day of our first interview the local council had decided to undertake some noisy reconstruction work on the road nearby. Then there are the individual's quirky habits. I knew that Vida was often physically animated when she spoke, moving her hands and fiddling with anything at hand, so I had prepared for that. However, foot tapping and a squeaky chair I had not counted on. Then there were the phone calls, not that the ringing phone caused a problem, but Vida's husband has a booming voice that carried through their home. Three sessions had to be re-scheduled because of sickness. However, a gap of fourteen days between interviews made my role as the interviewer more challenging as well. It was not a matter of just picking up from where we had finished with the previous session; often we had to backtrack for Vida to relax and become familiar with the interview process again. The interviews were conducted weekly on Thursday afternoons, but Vida found an hour of concentration tiring.

I anticipated more intervention from her children. I had prepared for requests to hear the recording, to read the raw transcripts, or to correct any 'facts' that they disputed. However, other than general questions as to how the project was progressing, they have made very little comment. I had clearly pointed out to them that this is their mother's story and they can, if they wish, record their own memories and life story.

The fact sheet

Vida and I met eleven times over fifteen weeks to record her story. With a little more than eleven hours of interview material this equates to approximately 80,000 words transcribed. I am fortunate to have a friend who is a professional transcriptionist and she undertook the bulk of the typing. However, the responsibility of checking the transcript against the spoken word, confirming the correct spelling of German names, places and other facts is time consuming. The Historical Society of South Australia Inc. provided a small grant to assist with the transcription of the interviews. Still, transcription is only one step in the analysis and interrogation of the data. .

Whilst there are numerous packages for transcription and analysis I have used Inscribe to time-code the transcripts and HyperResearch for coding and analysis.

Coding and analysis I find both challenging and immensely valuable as it allows me as the researcher to follow themes, or collate data under specific headings. Each researcher has his or her own approach or workflow when engaging with the data. However, no matter how powerful a computer system an oral historian uses, the thinking and detailed analysis is still the researcher's (my) responsibility.

Then what do I do with all this data?

This project is very much a work in progress. I have discussed a number of options with Vida. With her strong Lutheran background, the Lutheran Church archives are an obvious choice for a repository. Its archivist informed me that Vida's oral history would add to the collection, as there is nothing in the archive that looks at the life of the wife of a pastor. Also the recordings are in the format and meet the State Library of South Australia's oral history collection requirements, although I have not progressed that as yet.

Family members are interested in their mother's and grand-mother's narrative, but I have not had any formal discussions with them. Nonetheless, they are aware of the considerable size of the data collected. To address any future concerns that her children may have on the content of Vida's oral history, I planned for Vida to select a series of photographs, and then have her and each of her children tell their story based on those images. This will produce complementary narratives of those images.

Publications are time consuming to produce. A detailed market analysis would be needed to gauge viability – however, using technology and an eBook concept makes this possible. There have been enquiries from Probus clubs, Lutheran Ladies Guilds, Seniors Australia, and history groups for engaging presentations. Also there are a number of out-takes from the data that will develop into academic presentations and articles. A significant lesson from this project is that the responsibility of the oral historian does not stop with the turning off of the recorder and providing a digital copy to the person interviewed.

(Endnotes)

- 1 D. A. Ritchie, *Doing oral history: a practical guide*, 2 edn, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p. 27.
- 2 D.A. Ritchie, (ed.), 'Introduction: The evolution of oral history' in *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 3-22.
- 3 Freeling is a country hamlet, about sixty kilometres north of Adelaide, made popular by the Australian television drama: *McLeods' Daughters*, (see endnote 19).
- 4 In South Australia pug walls were generally constructed by using

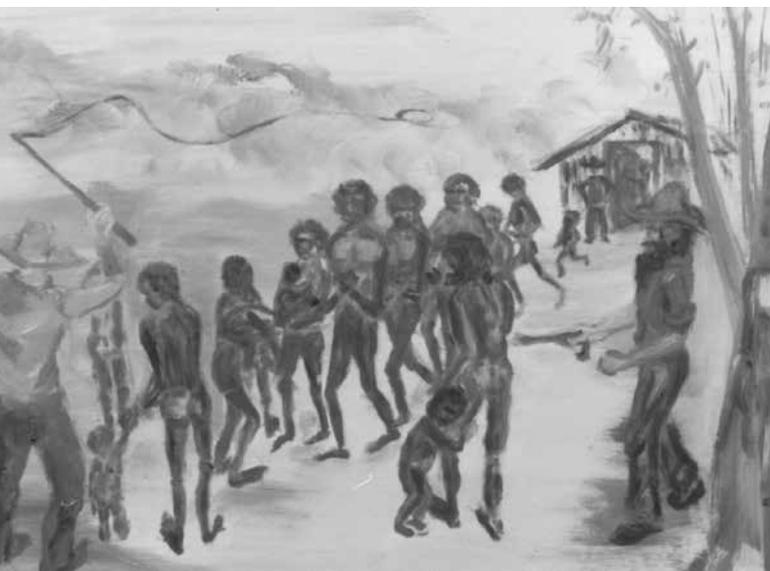
- local native saplings and tree trunks (stringy-bark was quite popular) to construct the walls of a building or house. The gaps between the lengths of timber were filled or 'pugged' with mud and clay, which was sourced locally.
- 5 Marchants's Studio, in Gawler, remained a family business until it was sold in 1975. More than just a [photographic] studio, the business also catered for snapshot photographers, operating a successful developing and printing service with about fifty agencies in the country towns north of Gawler: R. Noye, *Dictionary of South Australian Photography: 1845-1915*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2007.
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- 12 Ritchie, *Doing oral history*, op.cit.
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- 14 D. Harper, 'Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation', *Visual Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2002, pp. 13-25.
- 15 H. L. Sacks, 'Why do oral history?', in D. M. DeBlasio et al eds, *Catching stories: a practical guide to oral history*, Swallow Press, Athens, Ohio, 2009, pp. 1-19.
- 16 A. Freund, & A. Thomson, eds, 'Introduction: oral history and photography,' *Oral history and photography*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2011, pp. 1-23.
- 17 Ritchie, (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, op.cit.
- 18 Freund, & Thomson, op.cit., pp. 1-23.
- 19 *McLeods' Daughters*, was an Australian drama series, commencing in 2001, and set in the Freeling area of South Australia <http://mcleodsdaughters.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=4364> Accessed October 15, 2015.
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- 21 Vida Liebelt, interviewed by author, op.cit.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 S Solomon, *The Queensland year book*, Government Printer, Brisbane, 1952, p. 325.
- 26 Vida Liebelt, op.cit.

How I became an oral historian without even knowing it ¹

Bob Reece

Abstract

In this article, veteran historian Bob Reece explains how, despite his own prejudices, he came to make use of oral testimony in his early research on the June 1838 Myall Creek massacre near Bingara in the Liverpool Plains district of northern New South Wales. Re-visiting the area after his document-based work, he discovered a rich vein of white settler traditions about this and other, unreported, incidents that were also to be found, but to a lesser extent, in Aboriginal traditions held by people associated with the Terry Hie Hie government reserve of early last century. He suggests that the normal criteria of evidence-based historical writing need to be relaxed to accommodate situations where the evidence was destroyed and a conspiracy of silence maintained.



Anonymous Aboriginal artist's impression of massacre at 'Myall Creek', 10 June 1838 Photograph: Roger Whittaker

Background

As an historian practising for forty years across a number of research areas, I can legitimately call myself a polymath. Beginning with a University of Queensland M.A. on Aboriginal-European relations in early colonial New South Wales that focused on the



Anonymous Aboriginal artist's impression of 'Davey' observing the massacre at 'Myall Creek', 10 June 1838 Photograph: Roger Whittaker

Myall Creek massacre of June 1838, I subsequently worked as a journalist in Hong Kong and South East Asia and went on to write my doctoral thesis at the Australian National University on the 'White Rajahs' of Sarawak.² Then, during my three years at University College, Dublin in the late 1980s, I became interested in Irish convicts transported to New South Wales from 1790 and went on to publish three collections of convict biographies.³ More recently, I returned to Aboriginal history in my work on early Swan River Colony and New Norcia Benedictine mission and its Aboriginal cricket team.⁴

The Oral History Debate

I am by training an archives-based historian in the tradition of Leopold von Ranke, the so-called 'father' of the academic discipline of History, believing that it is possible to get close to what actually happened in history and that written and pictorial records generated *at the time of the event* are the most reliable sources. In the debate in the 1980s between the late Professor Patrick O'Farrell and the late Professor Geoffrey Bolton on the validity of oral history as a source, I tended to take the more sceptical O'Farrell line that oral historians sometimes produce their own sources. Nevertheless, I have found myself on many occasions in my career collecting and making good use of oral accounts of past events from individuals who were

either participants or had inherited stories from people who had been. How could this have happened to an oral history sceptic?

First of all, there was the historian's daydream of meeting someone who was not just a major participant in events but could tell the whole story in detail from beginning to end from every possible angle and then interpret its significance. In other words, I needed a God-like figure who would do the whole job for me - but of course be properly acknowledged in my footnotes as 'Jehovah. Personal communication' of such and such a date. Needless to say, that God-like oral historian never materialised and I had to do the job myself. In the process, however, I met people who had been actors in the events that interested me and whose oral testimony not only threw more light on these events and their connections but, almost as importantly, brought home to me the *human reality* of the past in a way that made me want to get to the bottom of things. Photographs and objects also played a vital part in this.

There is only space in this article to discuss my research in Aboriginal history: the Irish and Sarawak episodes will have to wait for another occasion. It suffices to say that in Ireland I made use of the archives held by University College, Dublin and gathered by the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1920s and 1930s for my work on the Connery Brothers of Co. Waterford who were transported to New South Wales as *rapparees*, or outlaws, in the 1830s. As for the two Sarawak projects, the first on the end of White Rajah rule and the second on Japan's wartime occupation of Sarawak, I interviewed most of the surviving Brooke government officials in England, together with Dayaks, Chinese and Malays who had been in Sarawak during the war, and Japanese civilians who were with the occupying force.

Len Payne

In the mid-1960s when I was working on my M.A. thesis on Myall Creek, it did not occur to me at first that there might be Aboriginal and settler traditions. Then I came across a typescript in the Mitchell Library by a Mr Len Payne of Bingara, now the closest town to what was then Hunter River landowner and squatter Henry Dangar's 'Myall Creek' cattle outstation on the Liverpool Plains where the 10 June 1838 massacre took place. Len Payne had an acquaintance, Cecil Wall, who was brought up on the station and played at the stockyards as a child, claiming it was possible then to see dark bloodstains on the timbers. In my subsequent correspondence with Len Payne, I obtained more settler traditions gathered by him from Cecil Wall and other 'old timers' which I was able to incorporate in my thesis. However, I did not pursue the question of Aboriginal traditions, having formed the impression that after the massacre, Aboriginal people avoided the area.

In January 1969, just before my M.A. thesis was completed, I got in touch with Len Payne and arranged to visit the site of the Myall Creek stockyards where it had all happened. Len, who was the retired film projectionist in Bingara, had placed prominently in the local newsagent's window a pair of hand-forged 18 1/2 pound iron gate hinges that he and Cecil Wall found at the site on 'Myall Creek' station in 1964, together with an explanatory note about the massacre. Finding the hinges confirmed the existence of a large central swing-gate designed to trap the cattle herded into its 'wings'. Also found were the decaying remains of fence posts and railings which had probably been part of the stockyards.



Len Payne with 'Myall Creek' stockyards hinges, 'Bimbimbe', Bingara, January 1969
Photograph: Roger Whittaker

The Bingara Memorial

Len Payne's suggestion to the local Apex Club that the massacre be properly commemorated by erecting a memorial in Bingara was met with angry resistance from some sections of the community. It became a hot topic, with a prominent local pastoralist in a letter to the *Bingara Advocate* of 17 January 1965 regretting that the story of the massacre had been revived and describing the idea of the memorial as ill-conceived, unconsidered and an insult to the Bingara people. Why should we carry the stigma of an event which occurred 130 years ago and for which not one of us could be held responsible? The person responsible [i.e., Len Payne] should study the case more closely, and not rely on his imagination for his facts nor on the old wives' tales that are handed down from one generation to another and become distorted in the telling.

The writer emphasised that the perpetrators of the massacre were brutalised convicts and that only one *Australian-born* man had taken part. According to oral tradition, this man, John Fleming, was overseer of his father Joseph Fleming's nearby 'Mungabundi' station and was deeply involved in the massacre. He was said to have been spirited out of the colony to Tasmania where he lived in anonymity for the rest of his life.⁵

A member of the Apex Club defended Len Payne's proposal in the newspaper but it was subsequently dropped.⁶ Dismissing the existence of the stockyards (and by connection, the massacre) as nonsense, the then manager of 'Myall Creek' station reportedly dumped a load of scrap iron on the site, claiming that the hinges were no more than station rubbish. In a possibly related incident, the Bingara cemetery headstone of John Blake, one of the four convict stockmen acquitted of having been involved in the massacre, was smashed to pieces as if to obscure his embarrassing identity. Nevertheless, the hinges could not be so easily disposed of as evidence.

In the mid-1960s there was still a climate of opinion in Australia that denied there had been frequent Aboriginal massacres on the frontier, asserting that colonial settlement had been a largely peaceful process, unlike North America and New Zealand.⁷ However, 1965 was the year of Charles Perkins' 'Freedom Ride' which brought him and other Sydney University student activists to Moree, not far from Bingara, to expose systemic racism in northern New South Wales. Two years later came the 1967 constitutional referendum which brought Aboriginal issues to the national political stage for the first time. Historians, myself included, were part of a new consciousness which prompted a critical re-examination of what had happened on the pastoral frontier.

'The Bushwack'

Len Payne was prompted by the controversy over the hinges and the memorial to collect the stories told about what was variously called in the Bingara district 'The Bushwack', 'The Drive', 'The Outbreak' or 'The Rampage', an organised and concerted campaign by convict stockmen and hutkeepers over more than a month in May and June 1838 to 'get rid' of the local Aborigines after attacks on cattle and the deaths of two white men. These stories suggested that other massacres in the district had been perpetrated earlier that year by the same party of convict stockmen but never reported to officialdom. 'Vinegar Hill,' 'Gravesend' and 'Slaughterhouse Creek' were the grim names given to the places where these events were believed to have taken place. I was later taken by Len Payne to see Slaughterhouse Creek where a steep ravine, according to the story, had made it possible for the stockmen to trap a fleeing group of Aborigines and shoot them. It all sounded like what we would today call 'ethnic cleansing.'



Len Payne and Bob Reece and old stockyard posts, 'Myall Creek' station, January 1969
Photograph: Roger Whittaker

Edward Denny Day

What made the Myall Creek massacre unique was that it came to official notice at a time when Governor George Gipps of New South Wales was under strict instructions from the Colonial Office in London to investigate and prosecute any case of the wanton killing of Aborigines by whites. Henry Dangar's overseer, William Hobbs, who was away from the station at the time of the massacre, had returned after a few days to find the charred remains of at least twenty-eight Aborigines, most of them women and children. A passing squatter, Frederick Foot, was so horrified by what had happened that he rode 150 miles to Muswellbrook on the Hunter River to inform Police Magistrate Edward Denny Day, going on to Sydney to report it in person to Gipps.

Day was promptly ordered to visit the Liverpool Plains and interrogate the convict and ex-convict stockmen involved, eleven of whom were subsequently put on trial twice in Sydney and nine of them hanged in December of that year. Day's bench books, now in the Mitchell Library, recorded the men's statements denying that they had taken part in the massacre.⁸ However, as reported by Henry Keck, the Sydney gaoler put in charge of them, they 'were not aware, that in destroying the Aborigines, they were violating the Law, or that it would take cognisance of their having done so, as it had (according to their belief) been so frequently done in the colony before'.⁹ Needless to say, subsequent unofficial reports indicated that more care was taken from that time onwards by stockmen and hutkeepers to destroy the evidence of similar crimes and maintain a 'conspiracy of silence' that thwarted any further official attempts at prosecution.

While I could point to the contemporary story (reported by Day) of similar massacres taking place before Myall Creek, I could not say that they had happened as a result of Major James Nunn and his mounted police



Len Payne and old stockyards post, 'Myall Creek' station, January 1969

Photograph: Roger Whittaker

party's visit to the Gwydir river area in early 1838, culminating in a massacre at what was subsequently called 'Waterloo Creek' on 26 January. Known as 'Major Nunn's Campaign,' it was most likely regarded by white stockmen as an object lesson in how to deal with 'the blacks' with impunity. However, Roger Milliss' detailed investigations of Waterloo Creek and subsequent massacres including Myall Creek had not been able to produce any more traditions than those collected and related by Len Payne, to which he referred in his book as 'the Bingara tradition.'¹⁰

Terry Hie Hie

Setting aside my earlier doubt that stories about Myall Creek had also survived among Aboriginal people in the district, I was anxious to interview descendants of the former residents of a government reserve, or 'mission' as it was called by them, at Terry Hie Hie, fifty kilometres south of Moree, where Aboriginal people from the surrounding district had been collected when it was officially gazetted in 1895. Through an unexpected connection at Albany in Western Australia in 1981, I had come upon the photographs taken by a young United Aborigines' Mission catechist, Rodolph Schenk (later of Mount Margaret Mission near Laverton in Western Australia), of 'King Billy

Barlow' and other Terry Hie Hie personalities with his Box Brownie camera in 1918. In his diary of that visit, Schenk recorded that a young Aboriginal man from the reserve, Bert Draper, had 'embraced Jesus Christ' and committed himself to working as a catechist among the 'inveterate gamblers' of Terry Hie Hie.¹¹

All that remained of the Terry Hie Hie settlement in early 1969 was a derelict graveyard and a few sheets of rusting iron, but Schenk's photographs bore testimony to a lively little community of about one hundred people that was broken up in the early 1920s when government rations were withdrawn. Historically, Terry Hie Hie could be seen as representing the intermediate social stage between Aborigines' dependence on local station owners and becoming 'fringe dwellers' on the outskirts of Moree.

Of particular interest to me was Schenk's photograph of 'King Billy Barlow' (his real Aboriginal name is not recorded) sitting outside his bough thatched hut at what was called 'the mission'. Coincidentally, when I first visited Terry Hie Hie in 1969 I had met a local pastoralist, Ted Cory, who showed me the inscribed brass 'king' plates his grandfather had presented to 'Billy Barlow King of Terry-Hie-Hie' and to 'Maggie Barlow Queen of Terry-Hie-Hie' on 1 January 1914.¹²

The Draper Women

In January 1976, two years after the book based on my M.A. thesis was published,¹³ I enlisted the help of David and Judith MacDougall, ethnographic film makers from AIATSIS, to go back to Bingara and record conversations with Aboriginal informants linked to Terry Hie Hie. Among them were the wife, daughter and grand-daughter in law of Bert Draper, a Kamilaroi man from Pilliga Scrub who was reputed to speak seven Aboriginal dialects.

So it was that I gathered the oral testimony of three generations of Draper family women, Bert's wife Sarah Draper, their daughter Phyllis Draper, and Phyllis's daughter-in-law, Ellen Draper. Ellen also showed me her statement about the massacre to anthropologist Howard Creamer and her typescript short story prepared for the *The Sydney Morning Herald* writing coach, the late Olaf Ruhen, but rejected by him as being 'too far-fetched.' She wrote that her story was 'based on what happened in theory only. The true story was never written because the shame of it prevented it from ever being written.'

The Draper women's oral accounts of a massacre, probably based on what Bert Draper had told them, seem to have been drawn from a number of different but overlapping stories. As well as a massacre of Aborigines at 'Slaughterhouse Creek,'

there was the career of ‘Cobra Ball,’ an Aboriginal bushranger whose secret cache of gold provides the white men with a motive for the massacre when they fail to find it. One detail of particular interest is the story of a young Aboriginal child who escapes the slaughter by hiding in a hollow log or in long grass. Some of my informants were even able to name the survivor and say what had become of them.

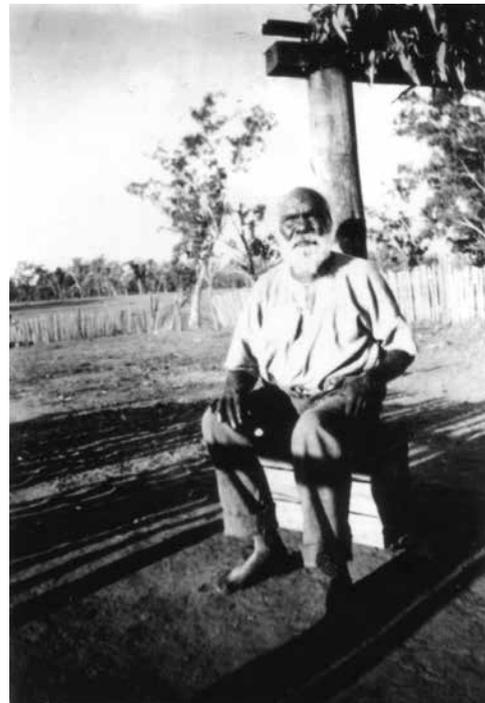
The story of ‘the one who got away’ was confirmed by the written record. According to documents from the Sydney trials, a Peel River Aborigine called ‘Davey,’ employed by Henry Dangar to drive cattle to ‘Myall Creek,’ witnessed the massacre from the safety of a tree and rescued one of the children. He was to have been called as a Crown witness at the second trial but mysteriously disappeared before the event, making it possible for four of the stockmen, including the one believed to have been the main instigator, to be acquitted by the court for lack of evidence. The story of the young boy or girl escaping the massacre is a *leitmotif*, or recurring theme, in other massacre stories from different parts of Australia that give it an almost mythical quality. One such story from the Barwon River was recorded by a white stockman, W.G. Scott, and published in *The North-West Champion* newspaper in the 1950s.¹⁴

The final element in the Aboriginal oral tradition is the acquittal of all eleven convicts by an ‘English court’ and judge, but just as they are celebrating their liberty, they are re-arrested and convicted by an ‘Australian’ court and judge.

Cobra Bold

In all probability, there was a separate Aboriginal oral tradition in the Liverpool Plains about ‘Cobra Ball.’ According to the Draper women, he was speared in the leg by one of the men who wanted to find where he had hidden a nugget of gold as big as a man’s head. ‘Cobra Ball’ could mean ‘bald head’ (‘Baldie’) or someone who had been wounded in the head by a musket ball. The latter meaning may suggest the invulnerability to white man’s weapons that might be expected of an Aboriginal ‘*mobarn*’ or ‘clever man’ who could use his magical powers to outsmart the whitefellow.

Another Aboriginal version of the story calls him ‘Cobra Bold,’ a bushranger who escapes from arrest after spearing a police horse and finds a gold nugget but is eventually recaptured and then shot and killed when he again tries to escape.¹⁵ As it happens, there is said to be a mention in the historical record of an Aboriginal bushranger called Cobra Ball Johnson who was shot dead by the police near Bingara some time in the 1860s. Surely he was the same person.



‘King Billy Barlow’, Terry Hie Hie reserve, 1918
Photograph: Rodolph Schenk

‘King Billy Barlow’

On reflection, my search for specific Myall Creek stories was narrow and blinkered in relation to other Aboriginal traditions, influenced by an expectation that Aboriginal people would be keen to regale me with massacre stories. Instead, what the Terry Hie Hie folk wanted to talk about most was the period of relatively settled community life on the ‘mission,’ where intermarriage, shared privation and bullying managers helped to create a strong sense of community. On the negative side, there were stories of managers who tried to stop the gambling, of girls employed as servants on neighbouring properties who became pregnant to the owners, of sheep-stealing, and of the little church and bush funerals during the disastrous Spanish ‘flu epidemic of 1919. Sporting events loomed large in people’s memories, with stories of bare-knuckle boxing and foot-running. ‘King Billy Barlow’ was celebrated for running thirty miles to Moree and back for half a crown. Rather than any unwillingness to relate massacre stories, it seems more likely that what little my informants knew about Myall Creek had been overheard from their grandparents’ talk of long ago.

Boss and Jacky

An oral tradition of a more robust kind turned up in the least expected place, a country pub at Singleton I visited on my way up to Bingara with a photographer friend in early 1969. It was Saturday afternoon and the pub wireless was blasting out racing commentaries while one of the ‘regulars’ related stories from his extensive ‘Boss and Jacky’ repertoire. Like ‘Dad and



King plates for 'King Billy Barlow' and 'Queen Sarah Barlow',
Terry Hie Hie, January 1969
Photograph: Roger Whittaker

Dave' jokes but racist in flavour, 'Boss and Jacky' stories have been told and re-told by white people in country pubs in Eastern Australia for generations, reinforcing a negative image of Aboriginal people. Significantly, the only 'have you heard the one about ...?' that I recall from that afternoon at Singleton was one where Jacky got the better of Boss for once.

Nor are Boss and Jacky jokes a white monopoly. Victorian Aboriginal activist, the late Ruby Langford, told one about Jacky Jacky running over a 'pig' that was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 16 June 2007 as 'Did You Hear The One About The Black Stirrer?' with a comment on what it revealed about Aboriginal-police relations. 'Jacky Jacky' is also the protagonist in a humorous Aboriginal song sung by the late Jimmy Little's father of Wallaga Lake and recorded by linguist Janet Mathews in 1965.¹⁶

The role of oral history

I am not an anthropologist or a folklorist, so my ability to theorise about white settler and Aboriginal oral traditions is limited. As an historian, I inevitably return to the question of how useful these oral traditions were to me in getting to the bottom of what was happening in Aboriginal-white relations on the Liverpool Plains in the 1830s. Had it not been for Magistrate Day and the sworn statements of the Myall Creek men, there would have been no trials, and the historian would be hard put to prove that the massacre ever took place. The December 1838 prosecutions were already impaired by the inability of the prosecution to identify by name any of the twenty-eight Aboriginal people who had been killed, other than a big old man known only as 'Daddy.' Without Day's notebooks, Myall Creek would, like Slaughterhouse Creek and other likely but unprovable massacres, have been relegated to the category of unsupported oral tradition, lacking the documentary basis required by empirical standards of historical research and writing.

Hard-nosed empiricist historians like Keith Windschuttle claim that many massacre stories are no more than that – stories – unless there is sound documentary and/or forensic evidence to support them. Most historians of the pastoral frontier, however, apply less stringent standards of historical proof, pointing out (as I have done) that after the Myall Creek prosecutions, there was a general 'cover-up' of violence by the white perpetrators.¹⁷

For some historians there is a feeling of responsibility, even guilt, as descendants of the white invaders. For many Aboriginal people there is anger about what they believe to have been massacres perpetrated on a national scale, accounting for more population loss than epidemic disease. What should we make of all this? The answer, it seems to me, is to recognise that there was localised conflict, bordering sometimes on undeclared war or genocide, on Australia's shifting pastoral frontier where Aborigines and white settlers competed for the same resources, land and water. The settlers won this undeclared war and its history has largely been written by them. Aboriginal tradition adds little in the way of information but can suggest the stark human reality of events.

At the national level, *The Myall Creek Massacre and Memorial Site* was added to the National Heritage List in June 2008, sixteen years after Len Payne had nominated it in 1992. At the community level, for some years the massacre has been locally commemorated by a reconciliation ceremony held near the site each 10 June and attended by members of both communities, including descendants of those involved. However, there are still signs of persistent denial. The fine stone memorial unveiled there on 10 June 2000 was vandalised in January 2005 by someone who chiselled from a bronze plaque the telling words: 'murder,' 'women' and 'children.'

(Endnotes)

- 1 This paper is based on 'Aboriginal Community History: A Cautionary Tale,' a paper given to the Australian Historical Association conference, University of New South Wales, 26 August 1982.
- 2 R.H.W. Reece, *The Name of Brooke: The End of White Rajah Rule in Sarawak*, Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1982.
- 3 Bob Reece, ed., *Irish Convicts: The Origins of Convicts Transported to Australia*, Dublin: UCD, 1989; Bob Reece, ed., *Exiles From Erin: Convict Lives in Ireland and Australia*, Basingstoke [UK]: Macmillan, 1991; Bob Reece, ed., *Irish Convict Lives*, Sydney: Crossing Press, 1993.
- 4 Bob Reece, *The Invincibles: New Norcia's Aboriginal Cricketers 1879-1906*, Fremantle: Histrionics Publishing, 2014.

- 5 Subsequent research at the University of Newcastle has instead traced John Fleming as having returned to the Hawkesbury River where his family lived. Professor Lyndall Ryan, personal communication, September 2015.
- 6 *The Bingara Advocate*, 27 January, 1965.
- 7 For a discussion of the old orthodoxy, see R.H.W. Reece, 'The Aborigines in Australian Historiography,' in J. Moses, ed., *Historical Disciplines and Culture in Australasia*, University of Queensland Press, 1979, pp. 253-281.
- 8 Muswellbrook Bench Book, Archives Office of New South Wales, 4/5601, pp. 85-149. The statements were transcribed and published, together with Brenda Wilson's discussion of Day's investigation, by Alan Atkinson in *The Push from The Bush*, No. 20, (April 1985), pp. 58-88.
- 9 Cited by R.H.W. Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists: Aborigines and Colonial Society in New South Wales in the 1830s and 1840s*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1974, pp. 158-9. Emphasis added.
- 10 Roger Milliss, *Waterloo Creek: The Australia Day massacre of 1838, George Gipps and the British conquest of New South Wales*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1992.
- 11 Diary of Rodolph Schenk, in the possession of his daughter, Mrs Margaret Morgan.
- 12 'Billy Barlow' was an English music hall character transformed into a luckless 'new chum' immigrant whose colonial misadventures were celebrated in a popular song. For the origin of 'king plates,' see R.H.W. Reece, 'Feasts and Blankets: the history of some early attempts to establish relations with the Aborigines of New South Wales, 1814-1846,' *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania*, 11, no. 3 (1967), pp. 190-206. See also, Jakelin Troy,
- 13 Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists*.
- 14 'When the scouring was going on at "Murgan" there was an old gin there who must have been seventy or perhaps more. She remembered the first white man on the Barwon. She said "Me little fellow, picanniny that time.' She was tall and slim and had been good looking for an "Abo" in her time and was sprightly still at this time. She had witnessed a "Dispersal" of her tribe. "That fellow whiteman," she said, "been sneak along a camp, daylight in morning, shootem blackfellow, gin, picanniny run a longa scrub, climb tree, anywhere. He [me] get up tree, bushy top, me little fella they no see me. By and by white man go away. I get down. Blackfella dead, lie all about everywhere, dead man everywhere. That night me run away, go long way, Tallwood up that way. Thirty miles or more." Later on she was captured by stockmen and chained to a tree for three or four days. First time she said "I no eat, two three days. By and by I tastem damper beef, I no like him. I spillem out. By and by I eatem alright. Then she said "by and by I see whiteman no kill me, then I go quiet fellow." 'Reminiscences of W.H. Scott', typescript, pp. 235-36, *North-West Champion* office, Moree, n.d.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 16 See Martin Thomas, 'A Very Human Survey: The Cross-Cultural Inquiries of R.H. Mathews,' Lecture delivered at the National Library of Australia, 24 October, 2002.
- 17 Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists*, p. 162.

Based on a True Story

Margaret Ridley

Abstract

Doug Boyd refers to the interview as ‘the thing.’¹ ‘The thing’ is being used in myriad ways. Donald Ritchie refers to this use as ‘presenting oral history.’² While practitioners of verbatim theatre may not describe their work as being oral history, these plays often use recorded interviews. I volunteered as an interviewer for David Burton. David is a verbatim practitioner and author. He wanted to write a play about the community of St Mary’s in Exile, South Brisbane. The former Catholic community followed their priests Peter Kennedy and Terry Fitzpatrick after they had their priestly licences removed by the Archdiocese. I wanted to chart David’s project and interrogate it to raise issues about using ‘the thing,’ that is, presenting oral history. I interviewed interviewees, I interviewed David and I reviewed literature about verbatim theatre and how it described its ethics.

History of the Project

In 1866, a small wooden Catholic church with an adjoining school stood on a rise at South Brisbane. A more robust church had its foundation stone laid in 1892. In 1980, there were fewer than fifty regular attendees and St Mary’s was deemed to be too small to be a parish. Father Peter Kennedy moved into the presbytery as administrator of the church combined with his duties as prison chaplain. By 1995, attendances at the week-end liturgies numbered around eight hundred with people coming from all over Brisbane. The community established a social justice organisation in 1998. Kennedy’s appeal was his willingness to encourage the community to challenge the patriarchy of Catholicism and to commit itself to social justice. He was joined by Terry Fitzpatrick who had left the Archdiocese of Toowoomba following a relationship with a parishioner. The two priests formed a unique bond of shared disillusionment. They continue to work and live together.

The community followed the Christian ethos of inclusion and acceptance. It blessed unions between homosexual couples, allowed women to preach and

welcomed former priests, brothers and nuns. Until 2004, the Archbishop had chosen largely to overlook the radical approach of the community. In 2004, complaints were made about the form of baptism being used. Significant media attention was given to the stoush which culminated in a declaration by Rome that these baptisms were invalid. In February, 2009 Peter was removed by the Archbishop for continuing to contravene Catholic doctrine. It was the end of protracted and often emotional exchanges between the community and the Archdiocese.

The community left the church of St Mary’s in a procession that ended at the nearby Trades and Labour Council Building. It has been continuing to hold liturgies in that building, calling this community St Mary’s in Exile. Its social justice organisation is a separate entity called Micah Projects which has annual funding of fifteen million dollars to pursue social justice initiatives.

Verbatim Theatre

The community attracted the interest of playwright David Burton. Among his previous work is *April’s Fool* which is about the death of a Toowoomba teenager Kristjan Terauds. Kristjan died following his use of illicit drugs. The work drew upon interviews and writing from Kristjan’s community. David was drawn to the community of St Mary’s in Exile because it too had experienced trauma and grief. Initially, he wanted to explore the dynamics of the post-trauma community. David identifies both works as being within the genre of verbatim theatre.

Verbatim theatre covers a spectrum of dramatic practice. Verbatim ‘is understood as a theatre whose practitioners, if called to account, could provide interviewed sources for its dialogue, in the manner that a journalist must, according to the code of ethics, have sources for a story.’³ Often, this theatre has given a voice to the oppressed or marginalised. The plight of refugees in Australia has underpinned several productions including *Through the Wire* and *In Our Name*. What sets verbatim theatre apart from other

dramatic works is its grounding in 'truth.' Audiences are positioned to distinguish this theatre from works of fiction.

Verbatim theatre raises complex ethical questions because of its use of interviews and its purported representation of 'truth.' There are ethical parallels for oral historians because their interviewees are often marginalised and possibly the subject of trauma. Equally, when interviews are used to produce something documentary such as a digital story, interviewers are making claims to authenticity. Ethical concerns arise both in conducting the interview and its use in a fashion that purports to tell the true story of the interviewee.

The drive to give a voice to the interviewee is often associated with a perception that they have been overlooked, marginalised or misrepresented. Their qualifying characteristic makes potential interviewees vulnerable. Caroline Wake describes the potential to re-traumatise asylum seekers by having them tell their story in circumstances that echo the bureaucratic processes that led to their detention.⁴ Perhaps the interviewee may view the interview as being therapeutic. Omitting or combining stories in the telling may be a double silencing for an interviewee. How does the ethical interviewer shield their interviewee from further harm?

Janet Gibson argues that 'verbatim practitioners have, at the very least, responsibilities to negotiate with the subjects who provide the source material for their productions.'⁵ A tension arises from the need for creative freedom. To what extent is the creator of a piece using testimony obliged to represent the 'truth' as it has been told or heard? How is this negotiated 'truth' realised? The path from the recorded interview to the presented piece is never straightforward. It is twisted and turned by such issues as:

- Unconscious bias favouring some aspects of the story and discounting others,
- The creative process, underpinned by a desire to make an engaging piece,
- Legal concerns around defamation or being sub judice,
- Logistical compromises such as time and budgetary restrictions,
- The power dynamic between interviewer and interviewee, where the first has choices and the latter may be excluded.

If the distance between the story and the creative piece is too distant, where the teller's truth has been subverted to the artist's product, have they failed ethically? Can this ethical dilemma be reduced as Gibson suggests through negotiation? To what extent does this process of negotiation need to be revealed to the audience to

show how this 'truth' was created? David Burton has engaged with these issues in the process of producing his play about St Mary's in Exile.

David Burton's Project

David cites the old adage that 'truth is stranger than fiction' when he explains his attraction to verbatim theatre. He believes that it has the power to reveal a 'deeper sense of humanity.'⁶ Collecting the interviews and conducting the research for such a production gives him a unique helicopter position and an unrivalled perspective on the events described to him.

David was attracted to the story of St Mary's because it was the history of a community experiencing trauma. Its dramatic appeal was associated with the community's conflict with the Catholic Church and with the circumstances of Peter and Terry. The community was radical, committed and controversial. When Peter and Terry were removed as priests, there were protests, refusals to hand over keys, huge congregations at liturgies, threats of legal action, mediation and a procession reminiscent of Christ's walk to Calvary. Peter and Terry's disillusionment with the Catholic Church was shared and they offered an alternative that had resonance for many. The community supported the priests' need to challenge dogma and exclusion. David saw that there was passion, courage, conflict and love in this history. St Mary's in Exile was a dramatist's dream.

After securing the co-operation of Peter and Terry, David asked for interviewees from the community. He made direct approaches to the key players and listened to anyone who wanted to talk. He describes his approach as a 'spider's web of interviews.'⁷ Each interviewee signed a release but was assured of anonymity excepting Peter and Terry. The perspective of the Archdiocese has not been available through interviews because Archbishop John Battersby is suffering from dementia. David lamented the lack of Battersby's voice.

The interviews were recorded using a Zoom H4n at archival quality. However, few of the interviewees agreed to have them saved. David holds the recordings and will deposit those with releases at the State Library of Queensland.

No one expressed any discontent with David's interviewing style. He had a 'spine of questions'⁸ and a thematic starting point. His focus was the human journey within the themes. His filtering process towards creating something that was cohesive was related to his sense of 'trustworthiness'⁹ of the interviewee.

The interviewees' first encounter with the use of their interviews came at a reading. Peter and Terry sanctioned the script prior to the reading. The first part

of the play as read focuses upon the characters of Peter and Terry in a linear narrative leading to the dismissal. The second part of the play foregrounds the community dynamics and responses. While some community members were identifiable despite pseudonyms, most characters were amalgams of several personalities.

David described his greatest dilemma in crafting verbatim theatre as being the authentic representation of the interviewees' stories against the need to make a piece compelling dramatically. He was emphatic that the play was not to be regarded by the interviewees as a vehicle to resolve their hurt or grief; 'I can't write a play, as some people would like me to, called 'How Peter Kennedy was Wrong' or 'Ways some people think St Mary's should run from Now On.'¹⁰ He drew a distinction between community theatre and verbatim. An editorial lens needs to be applied in verbatim and it does not carry community theatre's obligation where everyone needs to be represented.¹¹

The initial response from the community members who attended the play reading was shock. A small group stood on the footpath outside the theatre. There were several reasons proffered for this reaction:

- The revelation of unknown pieces in the drama.
- Exposure of fractures within the community.
- Affront at the characterisations based upon combined voices from several interviews. The feeling was that the juxtaposition of opinions gave a different meaning from the individual stories.
- The voices heard were not representative of the general sentiment of the community. They did not convey the spirit of St Mary's in Exile.
- The piece was wrong factually.
- Peter and Terry's relationship and the revelations of the play were a distraction from the community's experiences.

Several community members offered their reactions after they had had more time to reflect. X thought the combination of their words with someone else's created a fictional character and that this character should not be identified as someone from St Mary's as this was not the truth. Y disagreed believing that the new voice was an effective vehicle for 'getting the point across.'¹² However, they were both distressed by the suggestion that there were to be extensive revisions to the play. It seemed to X and Y that if the rewrite presented the community as harmonious and settled, this would invalidate their testimonies. R felt that David had not captured the spirit of the community in the second act. She offered that the self-selection of the interviewees may have resulted in a disproportionate number of the dissatisfied or the disappointed. There were many

surprises in the content that were quite shocking. It felt like looking in the mirror and discovering wrinkles.¹³

Peter and Terry offered their responses. Terry's reaction was poetic:

I suppose one of the overriding feelings, emotions etc., is one of being flattered, surprised and ego-caressed at thinking someone thought something in my life, our life, was worth doing a play, a theatrical presentation about. It is a little weird watching details of our life appearing before you in a drama, play setting. Like being wide awake during a dream, and like the dream, it is all happening and you have little or no control over the outcomes.

Some parts were very private and it was difficult to have people you know see stuff that was happening in your life in the past that they knew very little about. Some re-telling was not exactly how it was and fighting the desire to get up and say, 'well it wasn't exactly like that, I did not say that, that did not happen or it did not happen in that sequence.' And like in real life we often have to sit back and let it all happen.¹⁴

Peter focussed more upon his emotions:

To my surprise, at least to some extent, there were times when I was overwhelmed by emotion – when 'Peter' sang the song, for example. Both times – I guess it means that some of the pain that people felt at what was happening to the community and that I felt at the time as well, was still just below the surface.¹⁵

David offered everyone at the reading the opportunity to complete feedback either in writing or by contacting him directly. He felt that the interviewees understood the process of his taking their words and crafting them into a dramatically appealing piece. The shock and anger was not directed towards him but about how the community was presented.

David had the play peer reviewed. It has been rewritten extensively in response to this feedback as well as the community's. He has moved away from using the interviews directly. The second act has three characters who carry the drama towards the establishment of the new community. Each character is an amalgam and is intended to be representative of the journey to St Mary's in Exile. It focuses the lens on the struggle to challenge the Catholic Church.

David is adamant the piece is 'based on a true story' not that it is the true story. He says that many of the interviews do not feature directly in the dialogue. However, he argues that every interview informed the play.¹⁶

There will not be another reading for the community before the premiere. The play's program notes will

describe the process of creating the work without detailing the community's reaction. To this extent, the negotiation of the work will be revealed.

Oral History

Valerie Yow reminds oral historians that they should observe Immanuel Kant's guide to ethical behaviour where 'people must be treated as ends in themselves and not as means to an end.'¹⁷ This injunction has particular resonance when oral history purports to give a voice to those overlooked in historical narratives. Erin Jessee warns that:

To contextualise these narratives by locating them within the larger historical or political landscape within which they are produced, or by drawing upon secondary sources that critique the informant's perspectives detracts from the oral historians' ability to give voice to those typically absent from history.¹⁸

Some of the ethical concerns about verbatim theatre echo Jessee's concerns. Since we describe the interview as 'history,' we tell our audience that the product is grounded in 'truth.' It is arguable that our ethical responsibility is to negotiate with our interviewees about how we tell their story. Such negotiation aligns with a shared authority about the narrative. It may give some protection against the interviewer moving from oral historian to creative artist during the interview. Oral historians have a growing repertoire of creative methods to present the interview, be they theatrical, digital or artistic. Care must be taken to place our interviewees' welfare and perspectives at the forefront.

Conclusion

St Mary's in Exile premieres for the Queensland Theatre company in September, 2016. Perhaps it will provide its audience with a greater understanding of the people and circumstances of this community. It is hard to anticipate how the community will receive its final iteration. There is no question that the work will be compelling and insightful. Perhaps it may increase our understanding of the human condition. However, it will not be a historical artefact nor will it be an agent of community development. It may have been preferable to have articulated the difference to the interviewees before they stepped forward.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Doug Boyd, keynote address, *Fast Forward: Oral History in a Time of Change* Oral History Australia Conference, Perth, 9 – 12 September 2015.
- 2 Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, p. 234.

- 3 Mary Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations, and Ethics,' in Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst (eds), *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2008, pp. 200-222.
- 4 Caroline Wake, 'To Witness Mimesis: The Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics of Testimonial Theatre in Through the Wire,' In *Modern Drama* no. 1, Spring, 2013, pp. 102 – 125.
- 5 Janet Gibson, 'Saying it Right: Creating Ethical Verbatim Theatre,' In *Journal for Higher Degree Research Students in the Social Sciences and Humanities* vol. 4, 2011, pp. 1 – 18.
- 6 David Burton, interviewed by author, 21 April 2015, tape held by author.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 David Burton email to author, 29 July 2015.
- 11 David Burton, interviewed by author, 21 April 2015, tape held by author.
- 12 Unidentified community members, interviewed by author, 23 March 2015, no recording.
- 13 Unidentified community member, interviewed by author, 7 March 2015, no recording.
- 14 Email to author, 17 April 2015.
- 15 Peter Kennedy letter to author, undated.
- 16 David Burton email to author, 29 July 2015.
- 17 Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 2nd edn., Altamira Press, Lanham, 2005, p. 129.
- 18 Erin Jessee, 'The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings,' In *Oral History Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, p. 300.

Egyptian Business History: A glimpse into the Economic and Business History Research Center's Contribution

Randa Kaldas

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Abstract

The spark of the idea that led to the creation of The Economic and Business History Research Center (EBHRC) at the American University in Cairo (AUC) came from AbdelAziz EzzelArab, Professor in the History Department and AUC and EBHRC founding director. EBHRC was established in June 2004 by the combined efforts of Professor AbdelAziz EzzelArab and four other Middle East history scholars from Harvard (Roger Owen), Princeton (Robert Tignor), University of Pennsylvania (Robert Vitalis), and University of Washington (Ellis Goldberg), as well as the enthusiasm of a cohort of fresh and recently graduated students with interest in this field.¹

Background

EBHRC's mission centres around the creation of research and teaching material, dissemination of the material, and providing training for promising students and new graduates. The above targets are reflected in EBHRC's activities, including through its undergraduate course, 'Business and Politics: A research seminar in Public and Enterprise in Egypt' and an annual forum. The Center compiles oral narratives of people who played a pivotal role in Egypt's public policy and enterprise since the 1950s. To date 475 hours have been recorded and over 200 hours transcribed. EBHRC's collection criteria have been guided by its founding director and the founding team's adoption of an interdisciplinary broader definition of business history as an approach to studying economic and social history. Therefore, the focus of narratives taken at the Center is more on the context that business occurs in, specifically on the decision-making process rather than on the nuclear firm itself. This is clearly reflected on the spectrum of backgrounds of narrators interviewed ranging from former government officials and technocrats, bankers, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs to mention a few.

Also, since 2004, in EBHRC's quest to disseminate information, it has held an annual forum on the economic and business history of Egypt and the Middle East, and published *the Chronicles*. The annual forum serves

different purposes; a dissemination tool of the work of the Center, an additional avenue for the collection of information through its individual narrative sessions and panel/roundtable discussions, and a platform for young scholars (undergraduate and graduate) to present their work and get feedback from faculty and their peers in a young scholars' conference. Additionally, the EBHRC publication, *The Chronicles*, '... creates a forum for the dissemination of knowledge; it is a space for research in the making, a venue for the work of young scholars and a brainstorming platform among academics.'² Selections of the archives (audio, forum sessions, and transcripts) have also been repeatedly used as the sole teaching material of narrative-based courses offered by EzzelArab.

A peek into our archives

The 1952 revolution marked a major economic transformation in Egypt from *laissez faire* to state intervention and control. From the 1970s onwards, there were attempts to liberalize the economy in different ways. The resulting inaccessibility or absence of official government records makes it difficult to interpret the policy-making process of all of these major transformations. On the other hand, the lack of a culture of keeping business records makes it equally difficult to understand how entrepreneurs operate with such transformations. EBHRC resorted to taking narratives of people who played a direct role in enacting change in the post-revolutionary period since 1952. A full digest of narratives and forum sessions available at EBHRC goes beyond the scope of this article. Hence, in this section, some highlights from select narratives are presented to shed some light on the process of decision-making behind the formulation of some of the major transformative policies adopted during this era. In this section, a glimpse into the narratives of actors who all played different key roles in industry is presented so as to help trace the decision making process, distortions in its implementation, and the role 'planning' played in the adoption of Nasser to the industrialization program in the second half of the 1950s, of Sadat to shift to the open door policy in 1974, and Mubarak to the privatization program in 1991.

Some reflections on these narratives are also presented at the end of this section.

Selections are meant to explore the research potential of the use of EBHRC primary material that can be gleaned from the narratives to form the basis of future analytical studies of the rationale and process of these policies. More specifically, four of the six narrators selected played various direct key public/government roles, thus providing a more comprehensive picture about the process of decision making behind policy transformations and their effect on the industrial sector. The four ex-government officials' narratives⁴ used are those of Adel Gazarin, former director of Al-Nasr automotive company, Aziz Sedki former minister of industry and former Prime Minister, Mohamed Abdel Wahab, former Minister of Industry, and finally Samir Amin, former research officer, Economic Institute. Furthermore, highlights from the narratives of two non-government officials, both prominent Egyptian entrepreneurs, Hussein Sabbour, founding CEO of HSCB (Hussein Sabbour Consulting Bureau) and Mohamed Taymour, founder of EFG Hermes are presented.

The industrialization program of the 1950s

To Aziz Sedki, what ignited the spark of the industrialization program in Egypt in Nasser's mind was his determination and will to develop Egypt following the 1952 revolution. Nasser opted for young well-educated bureaucrats to carry out this mission with him. Sedki's selection as first minister of industry in Egypt in 1956 was the by-product of Nasser's awareness of Sedki's vision evident in his PhD thesis on the industrialization of Egypt, coupled with Nasser's thorough follow up of the latter's work in planning in *Magles elkhadamat* (Services Council). The second step was to set a five-year plan in 1957.⁵

This brings us to the perspective of Adel Gazarin with his long career in EL-Nasr Automotive, one of the industries that emerged as a result of the industrialization five-year plan. For Gazarin, placing self-sufficiency as a priority national goal in Egypt meant industrialization was to proceed regardless of the economic viability of projects. With respect to planning, he participated in several committees charged with the selection of certain projects to be included in the first five-year industrialization plan. With the goal of import substitution, members of these committees used very basic feasibility studies to radically reduce imports. Additionally, in several cases, certain projects were implemented notwithstanding the economic losses. The car production was a clear example of the latter where it was much more expensive to produce the car locally than import it, but again the final decision

to proceed with its production still was a strategically political decision, not an economic one.⁶

Contrary to Gazarin's prioritization of the economic profit, Mohamed Abdel Wahab sees industrialization from an entirely different perspective. Starting his career in the military industrial complex, he attests to the importance of military industries that go beyond providing military needs in times of war as they act as the driving force behind industrialization because they are integrated industries with the unique goal of achievement/non-achievement rather than civil industries' goal of profit/loss. Indeed, he talks about the fundamental problems in Egypt's industrialization strategy inherent in the almost non-existence of investment in research and development, its dependence and spending on licenses to produce certain goods without attempting to invest money or interest in developing or renovating the knowhow.

Abdel Wahab also sees that the head of state is the most important person in Egypt and that his full support is behind the success of the passing of any major project.⁷ On the issue of the top leadership's overruling power, Adel Gazarin and Samir Amin demonstrate the importance of the demands of Gamal Abdel Nasser through two different incidents. In one of the many anecdotes in his narrative, Gazarin gives a vivid example of how nobody dared to say 'No' to Abdel Nasser during the first contract with Duez signed in 1960.

The initial negotiations with Duez to produce lorries, the project was divided into eight stages to be implemented in eight years. In my negotiations with Duez, I succeeded in reducing the stages and years to seven only. To me, this was a very good and ambitious production plan to create an industry from scratch. Having said that, Aziz Sedki was even more ambitious, requesting that the project was to be completed in five years. But, when the project proposal was in the hands of Abdel Nasser, he was even most ambitious and insisted on finishing the project in three years only. While it was clear to both of us, the Egyptian partner and our German counterparts that a three-year period was a practical impossibility, we could only all agree to Nasser's order and promise to try to fulfill it.⁸

The adverse effects of the overruling power of Nasser's command and orders, and the lack of a proper planning experience in Egypt were covered in Samir Amin's narration of his direct work on Egypt's first five year plan and his perspective on the planning experience during the period he worked with Dr. Ismail Sabry Abdallah, for the period 1957-1960. He worked with Dr. Abdallah following the latter's appointment as the general manager of the then newly established

Economic Institute in 1957. To Amin, there wasn't a proper planning experience in Egypt in this period. As with Sedki's testimony, Amin agrees that Gamal Abdel Nasser had a personal desire to have a plan for Egypt's economic development. However, in Amin's opinion, this was not possible because of a lack of the suitable political environment necessary for the success of an economic plan. More specifically, there was no strong political party that believed in socialist ideology and in the importance of a planning strategy coupled with the concentration of power and decision-making in the hands of the free-officers. The latter had two main problematic characteristics; they did not conform to a socialist ideology, their economic vision was limited to the military management mindset of direct orders, and they were influenced by their affiliations to the middle class.

With the nationalization of foreign companies and later of Egyptian companies such as Bank Misr and others, these same army officers became the heads of these nationalized companies. Then, they in turn hired a younger constituency of technocrats that did not have a genuine vision of the goals of a real socialist economy using planning as a tool. Each company head had a direct command line with President Abdel Nasser granting him independence and the power of veto in the case of conflicting decisions. Ismail Sabry AbdelAllah fought hard against this direction until his arrest in 1959 and following that the Economic Institute completely ceased playing any decisive role. As for the ministry of planning itself, Amin proceeds to assert that its role focused on the creation of economic models of production that were not related to management of the current economic system and hence could not be implemented. All models did not offer an alternative comprehensive plan that had a political and social component that clearly defines the term development, the targeted constituency from this development, the level of equality that should be achieved, and the recognition of the conflict between classes. The dominant ideology of the ministry of planning was a foreign perspective and hence was independent from its socialist perspective, leading to the failure of the Ministry of Planning to act decisively in the decision making process.⁹

While not directly related to the main argument of this paper, it is worth noting Mohamed Taymour's recollection of how politics interfered in everything during his earlier days working in El-Nasr between 1963 and 1965. He recalls the visit of China's Prime Minister in 1964 when Taymour was responsible for the car painting cabins in El-Nasr. A French company installed these cabins but the chemical material used for the anti-rust component in the paint was missing. Not only was the production in the factory put to a

halt for a week to prepare for the visit, Taymour used hot water to clean the cabins and that led to the cars' chassis rusting, at the expense of 20 cars so that the Prime Minister of China could inspect this section amongst applause from the audience. Taymour comments how devastated he was as a result and how this led to his decision to leave the company.¹⁰

Open Door Policy 1974

Anwar El-Sadat's motivation behind adopting the open door policy, as Aziz Sedki reminds us in his narrative, is Sadat's public announcement following the 1973 war of his open door policy on imports. Sadat saw that the open door policy would create an opportunity for investors to make millions and contribute to the economy through taxes. However, the open door policy led to drastic outcomes as noted by Sedki, Gazarin, and Abdel Wahab. Sedki believes that the open door policy is the reason behind the current catastrophe in Egypt's economy. First, there were those who made millions out of the open door policy but did not pay the taxes. In addition, Sadat appointed Eissa Shahin as director of one of the companies of the Ministry of Industry and asked him to issue an order to all Egyptian industrial companies to depend on foreign expertise only. As a result, several expert company directors confronted Shahin stating that foreign investor would not find local industries profitable enough to invest in. Shahin's response was that it was out of his hands as the President had ordered the policy. As a result, the total budget dedicated to public sector-owned business concerns was withheld on the basis that foreign investment would cover this cost. It is well known that businesses cannot survive more than a few years without an input of funds. Therefore, with this presidential decree, the economic development process came to a halt in Egypt during the period between 1974 and 1981.¹¹

To Gazarin, the problem with the open door policy was that it was not seen as a strategy or plan. Rather, everybody did as they pleased for the sake of profit. An example is how companies dealt with the law restricting companies that receive exemption from customs to those who have 40% local manufacturing. In the case of car companies, they did not manufacture the engine, cabin, or gearbox, but resorted to buying batteries, wires, glass, and other components to reach the required 40% local production so that they would receive customs exemption and benefit from the profit they gain.¹² Mohamed Abdel Wahab agrees with Sedki and Gazarin that the open door policy was very harmful to the public sector, the dominant sector in Egypt at the time of its implementation. He adds that facilitating public sector borrowing resulted in some public sector officials finding it easier to borrow say 50 million dollars to build a new factory or to unnecessarily

expand an existing factory rather than them thinking of solutions to some of the production problems the sector was facing.¹³

Privatization Program 1991

Adopting the same logic of Samir Amin in attributing the lack of success of the ministry of planning to the domination of a foreign ideology independent from its socialist perspective,¹⁴ the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund imposed the privatization program, clearly an idea deriving from outside Egypt that the government was unable to reject, says Mohamed Abdel Wahab.¹⁵ In a roundtable that EBHRC organized as part of its annual forum in 2009¹⁶ on 'The Policies and Practices of Privatization,' Adel Gazarin started the session off by asserting that there was no clear strategy for privatization in Egypt and to date the rationale behind it was unclear.

On the other hand, Hussein Sabbour talks about his membership of the government-formed committee Partners in Development Committee. The committee comprised four ministers: Yousef Wali (Minister of Agriculture and Secretary General of the National Democratic Party), Amal Osman (Minister of Social Affairs), Maher Abaza (Minister of Electricity and Energy), and Fouad Sultan (Minister of Tourism), in addition to four businessmen from the private sector: Farid Khamis, Tarek Helmy, Omar Mehany and himself. The purpose of this committee was to prepare the country to accept the privatization program. Meanwhile, state leadership announced that there would be no privatization of public sector assets at the same time as the committee was regularly meeting to prepare for selling them off. In answer to a question to the committee on the selection criteria of the government, Sabbour said:

Ask them – those who formed the committee, not me - and also ask them why the Minister of Industry at the time, Mohamed Abdel Wahab, was not selected to be part of this committee particularly when most [public sector] companies were industrial. ... Who chose these names? Certainly the President, based on recommendations from someone, who is probably Yousef Wali, who also was the Secretary General of the National Democratic Party and chaired this committee. The committee continued its work till selling the public sector was publicly announced and Prime Minister Atef Sedki established an office in his Cabinet charged to selling the public sector ... We worked in secrecy till the establishment of a formal sector responsible for privatization ... This entailed studying the experiences of other countries in privatization. I traveled to the UK for a week and the Egyptian Embassy prepared

a comprehensive agenda of meetings with people involved in the privatization program of the UK.¹⁷

Several accounts of eye-witness public officials in office at the time of privatization reinforce the adverse effects of privatization on public sector companies. Indeed, '... Abdel Hadi Qandil, former minister of petroleum, stated that at the beginning privatization was interpreted as a way of getting rid of successful public sector companies first exclaiming that if there is a successful company, why ruin it?'¹⁸ Mohamed Abdel Wahab reinforced the same perspective as he saw that:

[Privatization] was a fatal mistake ... [as] it had [an] adverse effect on industrial production. ... The state could have achieved control over production by undertaking new investments without touching existing private entities ... The private sector should have been encouraged to acquire an increasing share in production, as we tried to do in the 1987–1992 plan, without large scale sale of the public sector. But the new slogans in the '90s hailed privatization as an end in itself rather than a tool for industrial betterment. ... The way privatization was practiced resulted in the liquidation of the public sector without creating new industrial capacity. ... Starting the 1990s, public sector companies were forbidden from reinvesting in their plant [on the premise that they would be imminently sold]. ... I had a first-hand experience with this as an industrial consultant after leaving the ministry.¹⁹

Mohamed Abdel Wahab reminds us of how important the head of the state is in the Egyptian system and how his full support is vital in the success of anything. All transformative policies in Egypt in the last few decades seems to have been as a result of the top man's determination and will to adopt one policy or the other rather than on scientific planning, which seems to have had little impact on any of these policies. While some of these policies could have led to the betterment of Egypt's economic development, the lack of planning and vision resulted in a distortion in the interpretation and implementation of these policies leading to catastrophic outcomes for Egypt's economy.

I would like to end this section with a reflection on some of EBHRC narratives from two different perspectives: those of AbdelAziz EzzelArab, as founding director who conducted most EBHRC interviews (particularly the earlier years), and Zeinab Abu elMagd, Associate Professor of History and the most recent researcher using the narratives. Both perspectives were presented at a recent talk by AbdelAziz EzzelArab on 'The State and the Market in Egypt, 1981-1993: A Reading in the Narratives of EBHRC.'²⁰ EzzelArab reflected on some anecdotes in

the narratives concerning privatization and how they raise strong doubts as to the mainstream narrative that privatization occurred without careful preparation. The anecdotes, he noted, allow for the construction of a comprehensive picture that complements the domestic narrative that privatization was the sole outcome of pressures from the World Bank and IMF. Additionally, EzzelArab argues that there is solid ground to conclude that the informal dynamics in decision-making play a more pivotal role than the formal channels, thus shifting the cabinet's role from one of policy formation and deliberation to the simple role of a clearinghouse.

On the other hand, Abu elMagd reflected on how the narratives challenge and undermine the whole perceptions of periodization in Egypt's economic history during the last six decades. She argues that the narratives allow us to revisit our categorizations of different eras of this history, such as associating the 1950s/60s with socialism, the 1970s with the open door policy, the 1980s with a slowing down of the open door, and finally the 1990s with privatization. Just as the role secrecy played in the 1980s in paving the way for privatization amidst public assertions that public sector assets would not be sold off, similar conclusions can be drawn from the 1950s/60s in that they did not involve anything that could be labeled 'pure socialism,' as was asserted. This is because many of the key figures that played a major role in socialism in the 1950s/60s were not actually socialists. In fact, during socialism's last phase in the 1960s, it was these same people who initiated the open door policy.

Indeed, it can be said that the open door policy was not applied by Sadat in the 1970s but actually began following the 1967 defeat. Additionally, some key figures among the Free Officers and Ministers who were applying socialism before 1967, were really questioning socialism while asking for some degree of transition following the 1967 defeat that led to the transition to the open door policy in the 1970s. By adding this to the discussions on privatization in 1980s/90s, we undermine the whole periodization in Egypt's economic history during the last six decades.

Conclusion: EBHRC: An Outlook to the future

As mentioned earlier, the spark of the idea of EBHRC in the mind of AbdelAziz EzzelArab coupled with the support of four other international Middle East Historians is behind the creation of EBHRC. The contagious inspired and inspiring persona of EzzelArab created a synergy between the founding team²¹ and the interviewees resulting in the latter entrusting EBHRC with their experience and life stories. Working at EBHRC has also provided young scholars a nurturing

research environment '... firmly grounded in local institutional history and actively participating in a global heterodox intellectual project.'²²

Glimpses from first-hand accounts of people who had a direct role in the formation and implementation of major transformative policies in Egypt since the 1952 revolution can add to our knowledge and understanding of the decision-making process in a way that no other source can provide. Indeed, the uniqueness of the use of narrative as a research methodology lies in that it 'offers answers to questions that no other methodology can provide. ... [T]he reasons why ... people made decisions that in the aggregate influenced history but are nowhere written down can also be ascertained.'²³

One can also argue that EBHRC research initiatives may provide a distinct critical voice from mainstream development discourse in Egypt.²⁴

The use of EBHRC archives has been mostly by researchers working at the Center or by affiliated researchers who have learned about the work from the cCenter's local or international networks. The use of EBHRC archives as teaching material has to date been limited to EzzelArab. One of the longest narratives at the center is that of Hussein Sabbour with more than 19 hours of narrative ranging from his early years to his adult contributions to society, but with the main emphasis of the story on his success in building his business in times of major political and economic transformative policies in Egypt. One possible future path for EBHRC is to focus on the stories of businessmen that can provide an invaluable unique source for the study of Egyptian business history.

(Endnotes)

- 1 For a full account of EBHRC's history, please refer to: AbdelAzziz EzzelArab, 'Overview and History: The Story of EBHRC: A Personal Account of the Center's History,' in Randa Kaldas, 'EBHRC: From Inception to Sustenance (2002 onwards),' *The Chronicles*, summer 2013.
- 2 *The Chronicles* mission statement. Retrieved on April 7, 2015 from: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/research/ebhrc/publications/Pages/TheChronicles.aspx>.
- 3 For a full list of narrative projects and access information, please visit <http://www.aucegypt.edu/research/ebhrc/archives/Pages/default.aspx>.
- 4 Names of narrators are in alphabetical order.
- 5 Aziz Sedki, Interviewed by AbdelAziz EzzelArab, Omar Cheta, and Wael Ismail on four occasions from 25 March to 20 April 2004 in Cairo, Egypt. Economic and Business History Research Center, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.
- 6 Adel Gazarin, Interviewed by AbdelAziz EzzelArab, Omar Cheta, and Wael Ismail on three occasions from 22 March to 6 April 2004 in Cairo, Egypt. Economic and Business History Research Center, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.
- 7 Mohamed Abdel Wahab, Interviewed by AbdelAziz EzzelArab,

- Omar Cheta, and Wael Ismail on five occasions from 23 March to 14 April 2004 in Cairo, Egypt. Economic and Business History Research Center, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.
- 8 Gazarin, *op.cit.*
 - 9 Samir Amin, Interviewed by Malak Labib on 20 April 2008 in Cairo, Egypt. Economic and Business History Research Center, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.
 - 10 Mohamed Taymour, Interviewed by AbdelAziz EzzelArab, Mostafa Hefny and Wael Ismail on 26 June 2005 in Cairo, Egypt. Economic and Business History Research Center, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.
 - 11 Sedki, *op.cit.*
 - 12 Gazarin, *op.cit.*
 - 13 Abdel Wahab, *op.cit.*
 - 14 Amin, *op.cit.*
 - 15 Saad Hagra, *Muhākamat barnāmaj al-khaskhasat alā mā'idat mustadīrah bi-al-Jāmi'ah al-Amrīkiyah, al- ālam al-yawm al-usbū'ī*, 18 May 2009.
 - 16 This roundtable hosted a mix of former ministers, public officials, entrepreneurs, academia and the press. For more information about attendees of the roundtable, please visit: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/research/ebhrc/news/Forum/Pages/Sixth2009.aspx> .
 - 17 Hussein Sabbour, Interviewed by AbdelAziz EzzelArab et al on 6 occasions from 13 April 2010 to 13 July 2010 in Cairo, Egypt. Economic and Business History Research Center, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.
 - 18 Hagra, *op.cit.*
 - 19 AbdelAziz EzzelArab, 'And As You Listen: The Oral Narrative of Muhammad Abdel Wahab, Minister of Industry of Egypt, 1984–93,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41 (2009), 1–3. p. 1, Retrieved on October 9, 2014 from: http://journals.cambridge.org/download.php?file=%2FMES%2FME S41_01%2FS0020743808090016a.pdf&code=e86a5dfdaf1afe08e051a6bcc1b17fc3.
 - 20 AbdelAziz EzzelArab, 'The State and the Market in Egypt, 1981-1993: A Reading in the Narratives of EBHRC,' Theory and Practice in the Humanities and Social Sciences Workshop Series, The American University in Cairo, December 2014.
 - 21 For more information about EBHRC founding team, please visit <http://www.aucegypt.edu/research/ebhrc/about/Pages/FoundingTeam.aspx> .
 - 22 H. Sayed, 'EBHRC Situated: An Essay on the Sakes of Research in Social Science,' *The Chronicles*, summer 2013, p. 8
 - 23 Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History*, Altamira Press, pp. 9-10.
 - 24 Sayed, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

Description of the Oral History Programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe

Sindiso Bhebhe

Abstract

This report will aim to describe the development of the Oral History Programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe since the colonial period to present. It will look at the strengths and weaknesses of the programme especially in issues of inclusivity and exclusivity. The report will try to answer such questions as whether the programme is national in its outlook or elitist in its approach, which is just serving the interests of a few dominant ethnic groups. It will explain how those from the marginalised groups of society are treated. It will also look at the methodologies used to collect oral testimonies and how these fare in the long term preservation and archiving of these recorded testimonies. The article is based predominantly on the views of interviewees who commented on the programme during interview. The environment encountered by archivists and the welcome given to them in different communities they visited during oral history exercises will be discussed, especially their implications on the success of the Oral History Programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. The literature on oral history especially relevant to National Archives of Zimbabwe will be reviewed, analysed and discussed.

Introduction

The Oral History Programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe can be traced back to 1968. At that time it mainly targeted Europeans who had been in the public service or who were prominent in the colonist community. The colonial regime by then did not view Africans as having had a history worthy of being recorded.¹ However later in the 1970s a few Africans began to be interviewed. These were prominent Africans, including chiefs, politicians and acclaimed philanthropists such as Jairos Jiri. It can be argued that the Oral History Programme at that stage was still elitist as it excluded Africans from ethnic groups who were deemed to be 'not prominent' or of poor, 'uneducated' background. Such an approach to oral history meant that the National Archives of Zimbabwe was a voice

for the prominent: the conquerors, the vanquishers, the elites, the educated; whereas the voices of the grassroots' people: the defeated, the minorities, and the women were side-lined and forgotten.

It has only been recently that this elitist approach to oral history is being abandoned for the more inclusive approach. The minority groups are now being targeted such as the Kalanga, the San, the Shangane, the Tonga, the Venda, the Xhosa, the Nambya, the Sotho, and the Nyanja. However it has not been an easy journey. The challenges of collecting these oral testimonies, such as language difficulties, have come into play. The fact that the National Archives of Zimbabwe has no speakers of these minority languages means that 'dominant languages' such as Shona and Ndebele are used to interview these minority groups.

The Oral History Programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe

The Oral History Programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe is meant to fill the gaps in the archival collection of the institution. It can be argued that the '*raison d'être* of the programme therefore is the bringing about of a balance in the collections of the National Archives, *pari passu* ensuring that the silent majority does not perpetually remain in communicado.'² The Oral History Programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe has moved away from excluding some voices of society to including almost every section of the nation.

This archivist has been involved in the oral history programmes that target the minority groups in the Matabeleland region. In one of many of these oral history programmes, on the 9th to 16th of March 2012, the archivist was part of the team that travelled to the Bulilima and Mangwe Districts in Plumtree in an endeavour to collect oral testimonies of the Kalanga people. The rationale of the programme was to document this ethnic minority group so that it becomes part of the national historical and cultural narrative discourse of the nation of Zimbabwe as a whole.

The archivist has also been involved in other oral history programmes that target the minority groups. The one that readily comes to mind is that of the San community which is an indigenous ethnic group which used to be nomadic and is mainly found in rural Tsholotsho and Plumtree in the western areas of Zimbabwe. Not only were these groups targeted but the other so called 'minority' groups are being put in the oral history radar of National Archives of Zimbabwe. In order to collect and document the history of the San, this archivist worked in partnership with the Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust (TSDT) which is a community formed and based organisation which champions the resuscitation of Tjwao language and culture. Its objectives are to revitalise Tjwao (San language), restore their cultural pride. This group is mainly made up of the San themselves. So it's a community project whereby the community itself is telling its story without much interference from third parties such as archivists and historians. Through this partnership the archivist was able to collect oral history videos documenting their history, culture, language and socio-political issues and these have since been donated to National Archives of Zimbabwe and are now archived.

Networking with other archivists cum oral historians in the region, mainly in Southern Africa has been one of the practise mainly done every year. This archivist has been attending the Oral History Association of South Africa' (OHASA) annual conferences since 2012. In these conferences the archivist has written and presented academic articles. In preparing one of that academic article entitled: *'The role of archives in the documentation of oral traditions, a case of the San people in Tsholotsho and Plumtree'* one of the retired long serving oral historian/archivist who once worked at the National Archives of Zimbabwe was interviewed and had a lot to say about how the oral history programme was initiated at National Archives of Zimbabwe as the following paragraph will show.

Initially, as mentioned earlier, the Programme catered for the prominent white community, and was then known as the English Oral History Programme. The oral historian interviewed said at that time those interviewed were those who played significant roles in various areas of national or local life – farming, politics, the military, commerce and industry, aviation, and local government. Other interviewees were suggested by members of staff or the public. The problem with this, as an oral historian narrated, was that lay people, in recommending potential interviewees, often thought that because someone was in their 80s or 90s, their age would make them a valuable and essential interviewee.

One of the few oral historians interviewed said some of the memorable experiences during this period was the freedom to interview both young and old, the non-political as well as the politically motivated. It was a particularly interesting exercise in objectivity trying

to capture opposing perspectives: for example left and right-wingers; people whose work had strengthened the white regime, and people who had tried to undermine it. One advantage in this respect was that the English-Language Programme was not racially specific, so I was able to speak to anyone who was willing to be interviewed in English, including black and coloured Zimbabweans.

Later in the 1970s prominent black people were incorporated into the programme and then it was mainly Shona-oriented. Matabeleland, which is home to almost all minority languages in Zimbabwe, was not part of the programme until the 1980s.

During the early years of the English Oral History Programme from 1968 to the late-1970s a structured questionnaire was used to collect oral testimonies. For example those oral interviews catalogued as ORAL/216 are questionnaires completed by Pioneers and Early Settlers in 1969, and ORAL/217 are questionnaires completed by Early Settlers in 1972. Those respondents who were seen to have more interesting information were then interviewed. In the 1980s this method was no longer used.

There are three ways of approaching oral history, namely: the journalistic, the academic and the archival. The journalistic approach tends to edit its oral collections sometimes to even fit to contemporary political correctness and to entertain the audience.³ Munjeri argues that 'it is difficult to know at what point this editing process crosses the line of historical credibility into journalistic licence.'⁴ Despite these weaknesses the societal influences of journalists cannot be underestimated. These are people who sometimes interview people and collect notable oral testimonies. Therefore this observation has seen the National Archives of Zimbabwe working with journalists and the National News Broadcaster, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. Munjeri⁵ notes that:

The National Archives of Zimbabwe has cooperated with willing journalists, and has secured a number of tapes and transcripts which, subject to the donors' conditions, are kept for permanent preservation in the institution. A case in point is the taped interviews of Benjamin Burombo, Masotsha Ndhlovu and soon to be made available, those of Josiah Tongogara.

Academics also collect oral testimonies but mainly for self-interests. The National Archives has managed to work with some academics, particularly those from overseas, in order to secure some of the interviews carried out on local topics. Munjeri⁶ said that:

London, York and Leiden Universities, for example, have been particularly helpful in this respect. The tapes are deposited with National Archives of Zimbabwe and remain 'embargoed'

until the donor has published his work or until such time as he feels they are no longer useful for his purposes. Alternatively copies of the tape recordings are made and preserved.

The oral history approach at National Archives of Zimbabwe is different from the academic and journalistic approaches as it is obviously archival in nature. Lohead⁷ argues that it is the ‘... responsibility of the archivist to ensure that the historical record is as complete as possible for other persons to research.’ Lohead⁸ further argues that ‘... the best possible assessment of gaps to be filled in the historical record must surely come from those who are most familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of existing archival holdings.’ However it should be noted that not all are in agreement with the notion that archivists should be the ones who conduct oral history. Grele⁹ states that ‘... librarians and archivists have embraced oral history and this has reinforced the suspicions of most historians who, with the best intentions in the world, cannot conceive of librarians and archivists as significant initiators of serious scholarship.’ Despite some of these negatives, the National Archives of Zimbabwe has used and continues to use oral history as a tool to fill in the perceived gaps in the historical narrative of the nation of Zimbabwe.

Following the attainment of independence in 1980 the Oral History Programme tried to become national. It moved from its elitist approach to accommodate those from the grassroots levels. Murambiwa et al¹⁰ describe this process in the following words:

Its main objective was to recollect the British colonial occupation and remembrance for those who served the then Rhodesia in various ways. In essence, the African stories were largely neglected unless it had incidental or circumstantial relevance to the colonial occupation of the country.

However this was to change soon after independence when the Oral History Programme was eventually expanded to cover the whole society and diverse ethnic communities of Zimbabwe. With the celebratory mood of independence cutting across almost all spectrums of society the National Archives of Zimbabwe began recording testimonies of the revolutionary liberation struggle. However most of the recorded testimonies were those of the victors, namely cadres of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and its military wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), whilst those who lost in the 1980 elections (which culminated in the first black government), for example the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and its military wing Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary army (ZIPRA), were side-lined. This was worsened by the civil strife in Matabeleland between the years of 1983 to 1987 which came to

be known as Gukurahundi, which mainly affected those people who supported ZAPU. Writing about this period Kaarsholm¹¹ argues that it ‘was therefore difficult to carry out research in Matabeleland – to gain access to archives and documentation, to get around and interview people, and for them to be brave enough to speak out.’

Murambiwa¹² describes the Zimbabwe Archive as a memory of racial and ethnic conflicts which tended to be violent. In addition to this Murambiwa states that:

It is the archive of divergent versions shaped by colluding interests of archivists and historians. As part of the creation of the ‘Zimbabwean archive’ certain social sections actively seek to protect their desired memories through collecting documents, objects and stories that buttress their viewpoints. In a parallel process, the same social sections seek to erase unwanted memories of losers, atrocities and repression. This they do through destruction of evidence, access control and distortion of history.

Pickover¹³ echoes the same sentiments when he observes that:

In this globalised world, knowledge and information, and archives, are seen as strategic resources and tools. The manner in which information is used and who controls it is therefore pivotal. And as a result the Soul of the Archive, because it mirrors historical constructs of the past, (albeit only fragments) is often a sought-after commodity. As such, archives are also about propaganda, rights, desires, lies, ownership, trust, nationalism, freedoms, concealments, acquisitiveness and surveillance.

It is from this theoretical background that one can understand the battle over collective social memory between ZANU and ZAPU. The ZAPU archives, important historical materials and other papers of ZPRA were seized by the government and have not since come to light.¹⁴ SAHA¹⁵ has this to say about the exclusion of ZAPU’s historical narrative from the national memory:

The Zimbabwean government has since 1980, been dominated by ZANU, a political party formed as a break-away from ZAPU in 1963. Within this context, the story of ZAPU’s role in the liberation struggle has been eclipsed, deliberately underestimated by official Zimbabwean sources, and largely not understood by many sympathisers.

It is from this status quo that the National Archives of Zimbabwe, National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) and the History department of University of Zimbabwe joined together in trying

to collect 'true' and 'endangered' oral records of the Zimbabwe war liberation struggle. The programme was known as the 'Capturing of the Fading National Memory'. The project targeted even those of rank and file status. Much was collected nationwide; however problems were encountered in Matabeleland, which experienced the brunt of the civil strife that took place soon after independence as a result of violence by the government against the defenceless population, mainly of Ndebele origin. The result of those traumatic events led interviewees in this part of the country not to be forthcoming in providing their oral testimonies as they viewed the Government and its workers, in this case oral historians, with suspicion.

The failure of the 'Capturing of the Fading National Memory' programme in regions where 'atrocities' were committed by the black government against certain black ethnic communities is interesting because it raises the problem of the implications of what interviewees should remember and what they should forget. Why should they remember the war of liberation (a war fought between the whites and blacks) and forget the civil strife that took place soon after independence in which blacks were killing each other? The lessons learnt from the 'Capturing of the Fading National Memory' is summarised by Klopfer¹⁶ when he states that '... the question of who is to be interviewed is not only a question of choosing among heroes or villains, but also one of knowing who cannot speak, and perhaps finding other methods to record experiences.' The remedy offered by Klopfer¹⁷ for having to deal with this problem of the silence of the traumatised is to offer therapeutic support whilst at the same time gathering their stories. However Field¹⁸ argues that 'oral history will neither heal nor cure, but it offers subtle support to interviewees' efforts to recompense their sense of self and to regenerate agency.'

However hope is not lost in trying to document the history of ZAPU. This archivist is now involved in collecting their oral testimonies. Maybe their cooperation now can be viewed in the assumption that time is the great healer of their traumatic war experiences. So this archivist has been able to work with some Trusts that represent them and were formed by them such as the ZIPRA Trust and the Mafela Trust. Some of their collected war oral testimonies are now archived at the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

Therefore in future the National Archives of Zimbabwe needs to take into consideration the traumatic experiences of its interviewees and it needs to ask the following questions seriously: Who decides what documents in the Archives need to be complemented? Who decides on who should be interviewed? Who decides on the gaps that should be filled? Is this process of top to bottom decision making done by archivists the only effective way of collecting oral histories? And if the targeted community is to be involved in the

initial stages of oral history planning, to what extent and which modus operandus should be used?

The glaring gap in the oral war archive at the National Archives of Zimbabwe is the absence of minorities. Besides the popular oral archive of triumphalism of ZAPU and ZANU cadres there is also what Mazarire¹⁹ terms the 'silent oral archive' which occurs as a result of this archive of triumphalism. This is the archive of those Africans who worked for the Rhodesian Army. It is also the oral war archive of women who participated in the war of liberation, which is not visible.

The omission of women in institutions of memory is not peculiar to Zimbabwe only. Schwartz and Cook²⁰ state that 'Gerda Lerder has convincingly traced, from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, the systemic exclusion of women from society's memory tools and institutions, including archives.' French feminist Julia Kristeva as quoted by Malpas²¹ describes the importance of transforming modern approaches to history so as to take account of the politics of gender. She says histories must aim to produce narratives capable of recognizing the presence of women in the past. She claims this could lead to a multiplicity of histories that explore the ways in which differences within and between sexes have been controlled, denied or suppressed by patriarchal societies. It is interesting that this is beginning to change as the National Archives of Zimbabwe has started to specifically target the silenced, and in this case women, as seen in the interviewing of those women who participated in the liberation struggle.

Oral archive of minority ethnic groups

Zimbabwe is made up of different ethnic groups with the following languages: Shona, Ndebele, Kalanga, Nyanja/Chewa, Shangani, Tonga, Barwe, Sotho, Venda, Chikunda, Xhosa, Sena, Hwesa, Nambya and Tshwawo of the Khoisan community. In the former Constitution of Zimbabwe which was replaced by the new Constitution in 2013, Shona, Ndebele and English were recognised as the national languages. Of these three, English was also recognised as the official language. However the new Constitution under section 6 (1) reads, 'The following languages, namely Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisian, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa, are the officially recognised languages of Zimbabwe.' Under section 6 (4), the supreme law stipulates that the State must promote and advance the use of all languages used in Zimbabwe, while creating conditions for their development.

This is the language environment in which National Archives of Zimbabwe operates. After noting that the

oral archive of Zimbabwe has a gap when it comes to minority groups, the institution then started collecting their oral traditions. All this is done in the spirit of national cohesion so that everyone will feel they belong to a Zimbabwe where pluralism or diversity of Zimbabweans is celebrated.

This pluralistic approach to the language situation in Zimbabwe has seen the National Archives of Zimbabwe so far collecting the oral traditions of the Shangani, Kalanga, Venda, Sotho and Xhosa. However it has not been an easy road as the following section will show.

Raw experiences of the National Archives of Zimbabwe's archivists in the field

When conducting oral interviews in Chiredzi, an area which is dominated by the Shangani people, the issue of which language to use for interviews became an obstacle. There was not even one archivist who could speak the Shangani language. The community was not happy with that. They demanded to know why in the whole of Zimbabwe there were no Shangani people recruited into the Oral History Programme so that these interviews could be conducted in Shangani. The issue then turned political as they viewed our approach as discriminatory and purposefully intended that way.

In another case, Sivu,²² the interviewee of Venda origin before answering the questions gave a lecture by asking the interviewers the point of their inquiries – and why now? He continued to ask why it had taken so long for the National Archives to come to him as it was now eight years since independence. He further asked, shouldn't the first object of historical research be concerned with the civil strife that took place between 1982 and 1987? These sentiments from the minority groups are but the tip of an iceberg of the simmering anger over the traumatic experiences of the struggle for liberation, especially those after independence. Therefore this begs an archival approach which tries to soften their sentiments and remove those suspicions that they have towards the Government, when collecting their oral traditions. This can possibly be addressed by adopting Thompson's approach in which community information centres are opened in their localities which are owned by them and used by them to collect their own oral history.²³

When the National Archives of Zimbabwe visited the Kalanga area in Plumtree in 2012 in which this archivist was part of the team some challenges were experienced. Plumtree is divided into two sections; one area is known as Mangwe and is occupied by the Ndebele people, the other area is called Bulilima and

it is mostly occupied by the Kalanga people. One of the Oral History team members was of Kalanga origin and comes from the area by birth. It was therefore easier for us to win their cooperation and deal with gatekeepers. Unfortunately this member was not able to speak Kalanga. One could see the disappointment from the faces of elders when they noted that one of theirs because of assimilation could not speak the mother language.

It therefore becomes apparent that it will be a grave mistake for the National Archives of Zimbabwe to venture into these areas and try to collect oral histories in the language of the Ndebele 'oppressors.' At this juncture in order to understand these sentiments expressed by the Kalanga it is necessary to quote from May cited by Maja:²⁴

[L]anguage loss is not only, perhaps not even primarily, a linguistic issue – it has much more to do with power, prejudice, (unequal) competition and, and in many cases, overt discrimination and subordination. ... Language death seldom occurs in many communities of wealth and privilege, but rather to the dispossessed and disempowered.

Through the oral history interviews conducted with the Kalanga people the issue of the language and demotion of their chiefs during the colonial times were prevalent themes. In the interview with Siti,²⁵ she said they want their children to learn their Kalanga language from grade one to form four without being forced to use the Ndebele language. When Guma,²⁶ was interviewed he asked the interviewer if, as he claims, he wants to preserve their culture, then how can he do that by conducting the interviews regarding Kalanga customs in Ndebele language.

Drawbacks in the Oral History Programme

Transcribing has always been a challenge at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. Clearing the backlog of those recordings that need to be transcribed has proven difficult. Mainly this is because there are few oral historians at the National Archives. However, recently the institution has decided to suspend transcription as it usually does not give the whole picture of the interview. For example, non-verbal communication cannot be captured by transcribing.

The Oral History Programme has been affected again by the issue of funding. The institution has found it difficult to solely sponsor its Oral History Programme. It has to rely on partnerships in order to make progress. Murambiwa²⁷ complained that 'the National Archives of Zimbabwe does not have the resources, goodwill or intention to be the sole custodian of the 'Zimbabwe

Archive.’ Maybe at this juncture we can consider some of the reservations which have been expressed by some scholars who think that archival institutions should not engage in oral history collection in the first place. Dryden cited by Swain²⁸ argues that:

Active involvement of archivists in oral history is a dangerous departure from the traditional role of archivist. Archivists can identify ‘gaps’ in their collection, but they do not have the expertise, the funding, or the time needed to conduct extensive research or anticipate questions of future researchers.

Nevertheless despite these reservations it is now generally agreed with postmodernism reasoning that archival institutions cannot be mere acquirers of material but need to create records which will fill the gap in the national record hence their presence on the oral history programmes. Archivists are now becoming aware that they have to go out into society and give voice to those who are silenced. Such reasoning is well put by Cook²⁹ who:

... advocated for macro appraisal of government records which is a method that searches for multiple narratives and hotspots of contested discourse between citizen and state, rather than just accepting the official policy line but it deliberately seeks to give voice to the marginalized, to the ‘Other,’ to losers as well as winners, to the disadvantaged and underprivileged as well as the powerful and articulate.

The same sentiments are echoed by Harris³⁰ who states: ‘In my view, the defining idea, the leitmotif, of transformation discourse is that archivists, far from being the impartial custodians SAS liked to portray, are active documenters of society and shapers of social memory.’

The shortfalls that result from interviewing interviewees in a foreign language have been a serious drawback. The composition of staff at the National Archives of Zimbabwe is biased towards the so called ‘majority’ ethnic groups and minority groups are not visible in their numbers. This challenge can however be addressed by adopting Thompson’s³¹ approach, which advocates for the community to collect its own oral testimonies. Thompson³² suggests that ‘through oral history the community can, and should, be given the confidence to write its own history.’ Thompson continues:

There have been telling criticisms of a relationship with informers in which a middle-class professional determines who is to be interviewed and what is to be discussed and then disappears with a tape of somebody’s life which they never hear about again – and if

they did, might be indignant at the unintended meanings imposed on their words.

Thompson seems to argue that a community approach is recommended for oral history. This approach has not been fully adopted by the National Archives of Zimbabwe, but it may be the best way to address the issue of language. The minority groups can tell their stories in a community environment, possibly under the supervision of the archival institution.

Conclusion

The National Archives of Zimbabwe is doing its best to collect the oral testimonies of different ethnic groups. Initially when the Oral History Unit was established in 1968 the target was very old white settlers who came to Zimbabwe as children or young adults in the 1890s/early 1900s. The priority was to get their memories before they died. Later the approach changed when prominent black people were also interviewed. Then after independence the Programme expanded its reach to all classes of society. In other words it became inclusive. Minority groups’ oral testimonies were also then collected and archived. However the journey has not been smooth as issues like funding, language, politics of ignoring the ‘other’ and the challenge of using ‘proper’ oral history methodologies continued to hinder the Programme. All these challenges have meant that whilst some gains have been achieved, it has proved difficult to develop an archive that represents the whole nation. The ghost of the ‘archive of the elite’ that prevailed during the colonial period appears to be difficult to exorcise as it is still present, albeit in different skin colour; only the actors have changed. The National Archives of Zimbabwe should continue trying to transform the institution as suggested by Harris³³ who argues that ‘public archives, in short, should be transformed from the domain of the elite into a community resource.’

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Using the past to strengthen the present: intersections between oral history and community resilience

Wendy Madsen

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Abstract

Community resilience has gained increased political and research attention over the past decade. However, it is a concept that has yet to gain the full attention of community oral history practitioners and historians. This paper outlines a community oral history project focused on exploring community resilience within a small regional Queensland town after it was impacted by two flood events in 2011. It draws out a strong social narrative of townsfolk being resilient in the face of adversity from the origins of the town. Synergies are explored between oral history and community resilience which suggest community oral history projects can play a role in supporting community resilience.

Introduction

The relationship between oral history and community is a complex and interdependent one. In 1990, Michael Frisch¹ suggested oral history provides a powerful tool for historians to enter the public discourse. Since that time there has been considerable discussion on how historians may do that, reflecting on the issues of, and interconnectivity between, myth, narrative, memory, collective identity, ideology and consciousness.² Inherent in these discussions are issues relevant to the communities themselves as well as where historians fit into the processes. An emerging social concept that has yet to be fully explored in this space, but which clearly has relevance, is that of community resilience. Indeed, Karen Till³ argues the study of community resilience would be enhanced through a greater consideration of the sort of place-based and memory work that has occupied oral historians for some time. In this paper I explore an oral history project that evolved out of a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) project into community resilience. In particular, I examine how community oral history can contribute to community resilience through: 1) increasing capacity, collective problem solving and action by community members; and 2) uncovering stories of the past that are used to support and strengthen a social narrative

of how the community can respond to change and adversity. Consistent with the idea of shared authority as understood by oral historians, this project provides further illustration how oral histories can help to more explicitly uncover a social narrative and to open up a space for exploration of that narrative within the community involved.

Background to project

In order to understand how this oral history project came about, I need to explain the broader research project. In 2011, a colleague and I commenced working on a research project related to community resilience in the Central Queensland town of Theodore after the town had experienced significant flooding. The first phase of the project used Photovoice to build rapport with the community and to draw out an understanding of community resilience from the perspective of the community. A second phase involved the development and delivery of a survey. The third phase was to be directed by the community members, who decided they wanted to focus on an oral history. They did not know at that time I had a background in history research. Thus, my role in this third phase of the project was to provide support for a community oral history in the form of workshops, guidance and writing.

Not surprising given the focus on community resilience in the first two phases, the community members involved in this phase wanted to explore how the people of Theodore had responded to adversity in the past and how the town had built a reputation for being resilient. The burgeoning literature related to community resilience identifies community resilience as a process and capacity to respond to, and learn from, adversity.⁴ Community resilience is increasingly understood within a complex adaptive systems approach that emphasises diversity, openness to new ideas and people, reserves of resources, feedback loops, modularity, leadership, social networks and trust.⁵ Inherent in this conceptualisation of community resilience is that of potential pathways communities may take as a result of adverse events. They can absorb the shock, undergo some internal adaptation

or transition to a new state that may or may not be desirable.⁶ As will be illustrated throughout this paper, social narratives and memories constitute an important element in determining which of these pathways are followed. The oral history phase reported here not only explores community resilience as part of a social narrative within the community, but also suggests the community oral history process itself can actively contribute to community resilience as it opened the space for increasing collective problem solving and action, and contributed to members learning new skills and thus building capacity within the community.

Method

While a number of community members played various roles in the development and implementation of the oral history project, three members of the Dawson Folk Museum were the key drivers and were intimately involved in all stages of the planning, data collection, analysis and writing up. The first workshop, held in May 2013 was used to discuss the ethics and practices of oral history interviewing, identify potential interviewees, discuss the types of questions to be asked within interviews, practice undertaking interviews and assign roles and responsibilities across the project. This workshop was largely based on the recommendations found in Lesley Jenkins' guide to community oral history projects.⁷ Ten members of the community attended this full day workshop. Over the next three months, four community members undertook 19 interviews (13 women, 6 men). A small group transcribed these interviews in preparation for the second full day workshop held in August. Three community members attended this workshop which focused on drawing out main ideas from the transcripts and in constructing a plan for a book. Due to the time constraints associated with the funding for this project, I developed a first draft of the book based on these ideas. This draft was then worked on by three members of the group to come up with a final version. The book was printed by a local business and launched at the Theodore show in May 2014.

The testimonies were wide ranging in remembering events of the past in response to questions that explored early memories and experiences of Theodore, relationships, community events and associations, leaders, community involvement and perceptions of community resilience. While most of those interviewed were elderly and had had a long association with Theodore, there was an attempt to solicit a wide range of perspectives from an Aboriginal elder, people who had immigrated from the Philippines and North America and a long time visitor. The extracts drawn from the testimonies for this paper were purposeful but only after the testimonies had been read in their entirety multiple times and a sense of the whole – of individual testimonies and collectively – had been gained.

Community resilience as revealed in oral testimonies

It is possible to find examples of all components of community resilience within the oral testimonies. However, I will focus here on three main concepts identified as important to community resilience in the literature: diversity and openness; social networks; and collaborative leadership and civic engagement. These concepts clearly contribute to a social narrative of community resilience within Theodore, a narrative that is quite openly recognised by the community.

Embracing diversity and openness to new ideas and people

Theodore was established in the 1920s as part of an irrigation scheme devised by the Queensland Government. This scheme included an Experimental Farm that trialled a number of agricultural products. The scheme also aimed to attract young experienced farmers and their families willing to take the sort of risks inherent in such a venture,⁸ including undertaking some of their own experimentation.

And the Experimental Farm, Dad said they used to grow all sorts of things there. They had nut trees, they had ALL sorts of stuff, experimenting.⁹

Dad ... spent quite a bit of time inventing a cotton stripper which he made out of the frame of an old header, lots of scrap, this and that and the other thing, with a great deal of assistance from a very skilled welder called Bernie Porter ... He also got help from Ron Bock (Senior) who was also a very skilled metal worker as well as a local carter of grains and other freight ... Dad and his friends were scientific thinkers about farming so they'd trial agricultural plots. They experimented with farming methods and machinery, they tried to work out better ways to do things... They were forward thinking people, willing to have a go at this or that.¹⁰

The willingness to try new ideas extended to a willingness to be quite inclusive of people from different social and cultural backgrounds. For example, Waanyi, an Aboriginal woman who came to Theodore as a child in the 1960s, remembered:

We weren't really like Catholics but, you know like Father Hayes, he was there more or less to help us to be adopted into the township itself and to meet other people ... Theodore's a place where you can live in harmony and not be harassed by people.¹¹

Others also considered Theodore to be a place that welcomed people.

But I think when you look at Theodore as a group of people who work together, irregardless [sic] of your background, you find quite a melting pot of people who are interested in things.¹²

When new people arrive I think they are welcomed into the community fairly well without being made to feel like they're intruders. It's because of the friendly nature of the people who are here. I think that comes about because of isolation.¹³

This disposition to welcome people into the community related to a history of isolation may be a factor in Theodore's willingness to embrace diversity. However, necessity may not always be the only motivating force to be open to new ideas and people. It is likely those who originally came to Theodore brought with them innovative ideas, a readiness to try something new and to be open to the ideas of others.

Social networks

Although there were big plans for the irrigation scheme in the 1920s, with town planning for Theodore to accommodate up to 50,000 people,¹⁴ the township remained a small rural community. As a consequence, people in the region came to know and rely on each other, both in times of plenty as well as adversities.

Everybody supports everybody when there's a problem. They always have here and they still do I think. I'd be shocked if they didn't ... It has filtered down through the generations; it's come right through.¹⁵

Many of the people in the community lived on properties some distance from the town and until the roads and transport options improved in the 1960s and 1970s, the opportunities to meet up with each other relied on regular visits to town for shopping or social events.

Well, Saturday mornings used to be full of country people ... But every Saturday morning they all used to dress up and come in. And it was a big event really; to chat and see people up the street ... I think it's mostly because we were isolated. I mean it was the community up the street too, in the sense of just meeting people up the street. We had a lot of street stalls in those days; we nearly had one every week.¹⁶

There would have been regular dances. I can remember the hall just packed out with, you know, the Show Ball, Pony Club Ball, New Year's Eve Balls, just be packed out.¹⁷

Another avenue of keeping in touch with each other was provided by the local post office which offered services other than delivering mail and later, acting as the telephone exchange.

The post office was the centre of everything; nobody had telephones very much and so if you wanted any news you went to the post office.¹⁸

Sometimes particular members of the community also played a role in keeping people informed about the whereabouts and doings of others.

There was a certain amount of community grapevine. Mrs Letchford was really good at it. Being bed bound, she spent a lot of the time on the telephone. And she was able to keep in contact with people and kept people informed about each other a bit.¹⁹

While some may have found such social arrangements a little intrusive at times, it appears most appreciated the support provided by these social networks.

Having lived here now for 30-odd years, my friends are here. I don't really have that many close friends in Brisbane now, maybe two, but I've got maybe a dozen or more really close friends where our children have grown up; we've all had the chicken pox together, we've all had the dramas of teen drinking or whatever. We've had the boarding school blues together and I think those relationships that you build with people are very hard to leave as well ... I think it's having that strong sense of community is a lot of why we stay here.²⁰

Whenever you work your work is important, whether teaching or behind the counter at IGA. They all do their best for their community because they all live here. People care and like to know what is happening to you, but it is not a sticky beaky wanting to know. It is caring; you might need to help someone and so you can offer if you know they need help. The floods showed how much people cared.²¹

Indeed, it is likely that the social relationships that have been built over time across the community allowed the people of Theodore to pull together during times of adversity.

Collaborative leadership and civic engagement

An important mechanism for building positive social networks within Theodore has been a long history of civic engagement. While specific charismatic leaders can be identified throughout the last 90 years, it is apparent the success of the community's social life has rested on many shoulders.

There's families who were connected into doing things, whether it's because their fathers were sort of leaders. There were some good people in those days that did stand up.²²

There are people who are very civic-minded and others who are happy to pitch in an hour or two, or a day, or whatever here and there, but there's always the same people who are saying, 'Yeah, righto, this will be good for the town; let's get in and get it done.'²³

I feel when the town does need someone to come in and take a leadership role, there is always a natural leader who gets in and moves things along smoothly ... And that's the sign of a good leader I suppose, that they don't do it for the recognition; they just do it purely and simply to get things going. And they achieve, they're often quiet achievers. Even if they do take on a fairly high profile, it's not normally them who make the fuss about what they've done.²⁴

Theodore residents volunteered for a wide range of groups that provided in one way or another for the township.

And I joined the CWA and the Anglican Ladies Guild, and I was on the Show [committee], I generally did the ring books for years. I helped with the Ambulance Guild that they had at that time, or the Hospital Guild I think it was more. We had great committees in those days.²⁵

And it was very connected, and Rotary, Lions and Apex were very busy and lots happening. And sadly those early days, those early memories that, I think I treasure, those activities have really tapered off, and I'm not sure why ... I've put a lot into this community, right from nursing mothers, play group, preschool; I was never on the P&C for the school, but I was a teacher at the school off and on since 1981, so I feel that I think I've given a lot of myself at the community level. ANZAC day, the Show, Arts Council, Rotary, so I think being involved in the community where people see that you are prepared to give to the community, and you know I think you reap what you sow.²⁶

Both Marion and Anne lamented on the slackening of voluntary activity in recent years, yet Anne was also able to point to a number of instances when the town was spurred to pull together and act collectively for the sake of the town.

We've supported the community, but likewise the community has supported us. There's been a few times when various people ... bureaucrats have wanted to shut our hospital, and you know

people in Theodore are very passionate about their hospital, their health services, and I think they are willing to fight for what they see are their rights to have equal access to services ... I think it [the flood] was a great learning experience for a lot of people, but I think it is important that local people take the leadership of their community and I think in part, getting back to resilience, we are practised; we've had to do it for years and years over different things, whether it be the airport lighting, the retirement village, all sorts of – there's a few other examples – saving the hospital on about three occasions! And I think this town already knew how to work together, it was nothing particularly new for this town, maybe under a flood situation it was new, but working together is working together.²⁷

The ability of people in Theodore being able to pull together is a recurring theme in the conversations one has in this town and it was quite apparent in the oral histories collected as part of this project. While this paper has focused on a select number of components of community resilience – on a history of people embracing diversity, building social networks and civic engagement – it provides an opportunity to explore how community oral history projects can contribute to community resilience more broadly.

Contributing to resilience through community oral history projects

There are two ways community oral history projects can potentially contribute to community resilience: 1) through increasing community capacity and collective problem solving and action; and 2) through the narratives themselves. While the narratives are an important part of community resilience (and are dealt with separately below), oral history projects can contribute to community resilience by enhancing the adaptive capacity of the community through increasing the skills and knowledge of those involved and by opening up additional avenues of working together. The process of designing, interviewing and bringing together stories of each other requires people to collectively problem solve and to negotiate meaning.²⁸ Interviewing enhances communication skills as interviewers learn to truly listen to one another and to engage fully with the perspectives of others. While few community members will develop the refined interviewing techniques of an experienced oral historian, as outlined by Mary Quinlan,²⁹ learning to interview as part of an oral history project can enhance the communication skills of community members, skills they can transfer to other situations such as committee

meetings. People may also interview those they do not normally mix with, thus opening up avenues to extend their social networks, a key factor in developing social capital and hence community resilience.³⁰ The process of writing a book based on these testimonies can be challenging for community members to work through as they negotiate whose stories are drawn out and how. This is a 'shared authority' that is more complex than that experienced by single oral historians as it involves multiple interviewers and interviewees all of whom live in the community that is being represented.³¹ Such a situation presents an opportunity for collective problem solving and negotiated meaning that few professional historians would envy. However, it is one that can strengthen the bonds between community members and hence contribute to community resilience.

Revealing resilience pathways through social narratives and social memory

In his overview of the way oral histories have been used in the past, Ron Grele³² outlines the use of narrative as a way of individuals and communities ordering and making sense of their experiences; one that 'unites the individual to the collective practically, cognitively, and aesthetically, and therefore encompasses a social relationship and identity.' The stories of the past that were elicited as part of this oral history project demonstrated various components of community resilience, specifically diversity and openness, social networks, and civic engagement and leadership. The testimonies revealed stories community members tell each other around how they have overcome adversities in the past, how they have worked together in various capacities, and how they are 'practiced' at being resilient. These stories do not just exist as part of an oral history project. They are part of the living memory that continues to influence the present. Thus, these stories contribute to a social narrative around community resilience and to a social memory that emphasised innovation, relationships and community spirit, reflecting the components of community resilience explored here.

The relationship between community resilience and oral history is not one that has been explored much in the literature, although there are clearly some synergies that warrant further attention. Community resilience has been touched upon by some historians, but the concept of community resilience has rarely been analysed beyond common usage.³³ Karen Till³⁴ argues that community resilience researchers have not sufficiently examined the historical context of place in their consideration of resilience, even as greater attention has been paid to locating community resilience in a social-ecological framework; although more now

recognise the role of social memory and social narrative as part of understanding social capital, particularly in disaster studies.³⁵ Indeed, the practice and theoretical work associated with oral history has much to offer community resilience researchers, particular work that has been undertaken in collective memory studies and public oral history.³⁶ Oral history has a long tradition in empowerment and working for social change within communities, particularly those whose voices have been silenced.³⁷ Such work has been contributing to building resilience in those communities by breaking down social and cultural barriers, providing avenues for stronger social networks to become established and through opening up spaces for different perspectives to be embraced.³⁸ Thus, consideration of community resilience within oral history work may be beneficial to both areas of study.

Within the community resilience literature, 'social memory' describes the repository of social learning that resides in social narratives handed down through generations and various media such as books and films, as well as institutional memory as captured in archival stores, policies and regulations of institutions that have been instigated through reflection and public inquiries after previous experiences such as natural disasters.³⁹ Social memory is therefore influenced by broader cultural discourses but is closely tied to the local traditions within each community, the historical stakeholder networks within any given community, and the way these two factors interact in order for the community to learn from their experiences.⁴⁰ These are referred to as the 'know-what', 'know-how' and 'know-why' expertise that resides within communities,⁴¹ expertise that is often covertly developed over time but which becomes overt during times of adversity. This has often been the focus of traditional oral historians as they have sought to capture the narratives within communities and to make meaning of social relationships and identities, of understanding the discourse developed when individual memories become collective and when memory serves as a mechanism of social cohesion.⁴²

It is in this way that Geoff Wilson⁴³ suggests social memory contributes to determining the resilience pathway taken by any one community. Social narratives can weave stories of solidarity and collective efficacy or of individual vulnerability.⁴⁴ Institutional memory, as contained in building regulations and other policies, will determine whether or not a natural weather event becomes a disaster, as illustrated by Craig Colten and Alexandra Giancarlo who described how New Orleans' local authorities consistently overruled regulations put in place after previous disasters throughout the twentieth century; a case of social memory failure.⁴⁵ It is in the cumulatively and repeated mechanisms and social networks built over time within a community that allows its members to 'pull together' in a time of crisis, or not.⁴⁶

The oral history project outlined in this paper demonstrated a strong narrative of resilience drawn from stories in the past of people overcoming adversity through working together, a narrative that continues to be reinforced through people experiencing success as they continue to work together to achieve outcomes for their community. That is, social narratives that emphasise resilience contribute to a social memory of resilience that is drawn on by communities to support resilience during times of adversity. To a large extent it is a process of self-fulfilling prophesy; resilience in the past begets current resilience. The power of understanding this relationship between social narrative and social memory lies not so much in those communities that have ‘strong’ community resilience, but in understanding how social narratives and social memory can continue to reinforce vulnerability, institutional amnesia, and stories of resistance to working together. It is in revealing these social narratives and social memories and in opening up a space for contemporary communities to examine these stories that oral history can play such an important role in helping communities acknowledge and reconcile their past. In doing so, they are in a better position to intentionally change their social narratives.⁴⁷

Conclusion

There are a number of limitations that are also strengths apparent in the project reported in this paper. Methodologically, community oral histories involve multiple interviewers who are enthusiastic amateurs, meaning the testimonies will vary considerably in quality and focus. However, while this may be seen as a weakness from oral history perspectives, the process of community members learning to listen to each other as they tell stories of their past and of working through the issues of whose stories to draw out in a collective narrative of the town is one that enhances communication skills and knowledge, social networking as well as collaborative problem solving. Community development and health promotion practitioners would be interested in these results alone as evidence of increased community resilience.

However, I have argued the benefits of a community oral history run deeper than these processes. The stories themselves reveal social narratives and memories that reflect the level of community resilience in the past that continues to influence community resilience of the present. There is a risk that community oral histories will tend towards the celebratory and that difficulties and stories of shame and oppression will not be examined, that the social narratives and memories represented will be sanitised. Such an approach would not be useful for increasing community resilience because they would

not reveal those aspects within the community that need attention to increase adaptive capacity, be they local government regulations or addressing issues around social capital. Inclusion of an oral historian in such projects can help community members consider who they interview and what questions are asked as a way of taking a more critical and inclusive approach. In this way, the stories can provide insights into how the community has functioned in the past, what social narratives have been reinforced that continue to influence the way community members see themselves, and their place within that community. Community oral histories can thus offer opportunities for community members to take a good honest look at their past as a way of understanding their present, and how they relate and work together for the good of the community. It is this insight into the past that allows community oral history projects to contribute to community resilience.

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Taking the leap: including video in audio oral histories

Judy Hughes

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Abstract

Advances in technology offer both challenges and opportunities for today's oral historians. The USC Shoah Foundation's work in the United States is an example of how the potential of multimedia and oral history is being explored to the fullest extent. For many oral historians, however, the next frontier is not cutting-edge multimedia, but simply incorporating the moving image into their existing audio recording practices. Video is not a new technology, but up until recent years it has largely been the preserve of the better funded, better resourced and more technically capable in the field. With the rapid rate of change in multimedia and online technologies and the increased accessibility of video equipment and software many audio-only oral historians must be considering, or reconsidering, the use of video in their work. This paper examines some of the issues involved in making such a consideration through a review of the available literature and a case study. It also proposes a way forward incorporating a hybrid video/audio approach.

Introduction

A boy walks into the small theatre and sits down in the front row. On the stage before him is a man in his 80s. He has white, thinning hair and is wearing a vest over a white shirt. The boy looks at his kind face and asks



Simulated video of Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter speaking to students.¹

the first question: 'How old were you when the war ended?' The man looks to the faces of the boy and his classmates and begins his story. For a moment, they forget he isn't real.

The above fictional scenario describes an encounter between a school group and a three-dimensional digital representation of a Holocaust survivor.² The hologram is life-size and realistic. It answers questions with the aid of voice recognition software and a computer that finds the most appropriate response from a database of pre-recorded interview excerpts with a real Holocaust survivor. Far from being the stuff of science fiction this scenario is taken from a simulation produced as a result of work currently underway by the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation, a visual history archive in the United States housing nearly 53,000 audio-visual testimonies.³ Using the latest in digital moviemaking technology, the Foundation's New Dimensions in Testimony (NDT) project is seeking to develop fully interactive displays of digitised Holocaust survivors.⁴ With the backing of its founder, Hollywood director Steven Spielberg, it is no surprise that the Foundation is at the cutting edge of digital technology as it explores new ways to engage the public with history. Exciting as this project is, for many oral historians the technology being explored in the NDT project is so far from their everyday reality that it might as well be science fiction. I raise this example, not to suggest a new technological benchmark for oral historians, but as a means of illustrating the current scope of oral history in a multimedia environment and the rapid pace of change. Just as the introduction of the tape recorder revolutionised oral history practice last century, advances in technology in the 21st century, particularly in multimedia and information technology, are posing a myriad of challenges and opportunities for oral historians. Some are already heavily involved in the new technologies, while a significant number continue to use a primarily audio-only approach. In this paper I intend to focus on the latter group and the challenges and opportunities involved in taking the next step along the multimedia path - adding video to the audio recording. Although not a new technology, video has up until recent years been the preserve of the best funded, best resourced and most technologically

capable in the oral history field. It is my contention that the vastly expanding range of multimedia opportunities and the greater accessibility of video recording equipment and editing software mean it is increasingly likely that oral historians currently working in audio-only are considering, or reconsidering, the use of video recording. In this paper I look at some of the issues that need to be taken into account in such a consideration and pose some suggestions for those taking the leap to video technology.

Oral historians considering video face a number of questions. How much additional value does the inclusion of video generate compared to an audio-only technique? What are the additional costs and logistical considerations? Is the performance of the interviewee likely to be affected and if so, in what way? What are the accessibility issues? Do any new ethical issues arise with the greatly expanded realm of potential uses, including commercial uses? In this paper I will briefly review the literature concerning the use of video in oral history and explore some of the related issues through a case study. My case study is a video oral history interview I conducted for a class project in the Recording Oral History unit at Monash University in 2014. Through this example I aim to put the video oral history debate into a practical context looking at the advantages and disadvantages, the insights and the missed opportunities. I intend to group the issues in three broad categories—pre-interview planning, the interview and post-interview.

Firstly, I need to declare my initial bias towards video. With a background in journalism and multimedia communications it seemed obvious to me that the video oral history interview should be embraced as the preferred form of oral history. My initial thoughts were these: since both video- and audio-oral history require high quality audio isn't it simply a matter of adding a video file to the audio file? Why not add video with the potential for a wide range of multimedia end-uses and opportunities for analysis based on visual cues such as facial expressions and body language? Isn't it simply a matter of the oral historian skilling up to meet the reality of the new digital age? These are some of the issues I will explore in this paper.

It is necessary to also be clear on what I mean by video oral history. Lynn Abrams describes oral history as both a *process* of conducting and recording interviews with people about their past and an *output* of that process—the narrative account of past events.⁵ This definition I believe fits well with the notion of audio-visual oral history I am exploring in this paper. Adding video to an oral history interview varies both the recording process and the resulting historical record, compared to audio-only, but it is still oral history. It is not a matter of choosing audio or video recording, but rather considering whether to use audio recording only or to use video recording *in addition* to audio recording. As

I will discuss later in this paper, the incorporation of the moving image in an oral history recording provides a number of advantages both in understanding and interpreting the narrative provided by the interviewee as well as making the recording useful in a range of multimedia contexts. The audio and video elements of the interview form the oral history record. Once the record is edited and combined with other multimedia elements it arguably becomes something else: a production, presentation, exhibition, documentary or digital story.

Comparing audio-based and audio-visual oral history techniques

The argument for including video in oral history is primarily, but not exclusively, one of post-interview usage. Adding a visual element to an interviewee's story opens up a world of both current and potential multimedia educational and commercial opportunities ranging from online archives and social media campaigns to documentaries, museum exhibitions, e-books and multimedia packages. Those advocating consideration of video in oral history, such as Steve Humphries and Peter B. Kaufman, point to the capacity to engage an audience through the medium's 'emotional power' and to assist in interpretation and understanding through 'seeing' the storyteller tell their story.⁶ For Kaufman it is a simple matter of recognising that the world has changed and a new video age is upon us. He argues that video is increasing as a proportion of global consumer Internet traffic and that most people are already accessing digital information through screen-based devices—built for video.⁷

Putting to one side the argument that modern-day audiences are increasingly looking for visual content in both education and entertainment, what benefits are there for the historian in including video in an oral history interview? In a paper published in 1991 when consumer Internet usage was in its infancy⁸ and recording in video was largely the preserve of professionals and amateur enthusiasts,⁹ Dan Sipe argued that oral historians ignored video at their peril. Recording an oral history interview with video did not just assist in the interpretation process, but provided a 'new level of evidence.' Moving images not only recorded the facial expressions and body language of the interviewee, but also provided additional information on the interview setting, the relationship with the interviewer and the process of remembering and narrating memories.¹⁰ For Sipe, video yields 'richer detail' and is the best medium for fully documenting the nature of memory generation as experienced in the process of an interviewer and interviewee.¹¹

One can watch the external signs of the processes of memory and see what the interviewer encourages, probes or challenges the memory of the narrator—stances often communicated non-verbally.¹²

A decade later, Donald Ritchie highlighted another advantage for historians, arguing that video was a significantly better medium than audio-only for recording group interviews. Transcription of multiple voices could be very difficult, but ‘video provides a much more precise means of distinguishing speakers.’¹³ More recently educators have pointed to the potential of using video oral history to motivate and inspire a new generation of tech-savvy students. Jill Goodman Gould and Gail Gradowski of Santa Clara University in the United States have used video oral testimony in teaching undergraduates about the Holocaust. They argue that their experience has convinced them that video oral testimony is ‘uniquely appealing to twenty-first-century students’ who are known to be visual and experiential learners.¹⁴ Gould and Gradowski found that the use of video engaged both the intellect and emotions of the students, motivating them to put more effort into their work.¹⁵

While scholars may agree on some of the advantages of using video in oral history they also acknowledge that compared to audio-only oral history, video

requires additional skills, more equipment, greater cost and potentially more people to deliver the oral history package. As Doug Boyd observes, it is also substantially more difficult to curate video oral history, compared to audio-only oral history, with significantly larger file sizes in file formats that are often proprietary in nature and therefore at greater risk of obsolescence.¹⁶ A video oral history archive therefore requires substantially more digital storage capacity due not only to the file sizes but also the necessity to record in multiple formats so as to best safeguard against obsolescence. This means a greater degree of planning at the outset of any audio-visual oral history project, compared to audio-only. Such planning must encompass storage costs as well as preferred recording and output settings based on the highest possible quality within budget.¹⁷

For many oral historians cost and practicality have dictated the use of audio-only techniques. It can, however, also be argued that the audio-only oral history methodology provides for deeper listening. Without the dominant sense of vision, the listener pays greater attention to the tone and expression in the voice, the silences and the omissions. In outlining a number of the aural clues in oral testimony Alistair Thomson proposes that the oral historian must learn the skills of listening to aural testimony, seeking meanings in the sounds, the texture and pace of the spoken voice and the silences that punctuate it.¹⁸



*View from Alcatraz prison museum across San Francisco Bay.*²⁰

The inherent effort required in this task suggests that removing the distraction of the visuals may well assist the deep listening required in the analysis of oral history. Similarly, Siobhan McHugh describes the affective potential of oral history on radio arguing that ‘sound and voice, combined with the intimacy of the listening process,’ engenders an emotional response in the listener and assists in the process of understanding, judging and retaining content.¹⁹ It can be argued, however, that the real question is one of deciding where the best clues lie and examining all avenues. In some interviews it may be the voice, in others the body language—or a combination of both. Certainly in some cultures body language, and particularly hand gestures, form an integral part of the message being delivered by the speaker.

I am not suggesting that video is the only medium that can provide a visual element to oral history audio interviews. Audio can be combined with ambient sounds, archival audio, photographs, maps, artwork and text documents to create a truly multimedia experience. Consider the example of the Alcatraz Cellhouse Audio Tour at the former Federal Penitentiary on Alcatraz Island, San Francisco. This audio walking tour, offered to every visitor as part of their admission to the prison museum, combines oral history interview excerpts by former Alcatraz prisoners and guards with ambient sounds such as cell doors closing, ship horns blowing, birds and background chatter.

So there was never a day you didn't see what the hell you were losing or what you were missing. It was all there for you to see, clear as day. There's everything I want in my life and it's there. It's a mile or a mile and a half away and I can't get to it.²¹

If these words were uttered as part of a video presentation showing just the head and shoulders of the former inmate speaking it is likely that the viewer would gain an additional insight into that person through his facial expressions, perhaps the sadness might show in his eyes or a slight slump of his shoulders. In this example, however, the setting is particularly important. It is arguable that the sound of the inmate's voice in the ear of a visitor looking from the prison museum across the bay to the Golden Gate Bridge may be more effective and affective than the video experience in putting that visitor in the inmate's shoes.

Issues to consider in using video

It is clear from the above discussion that audio holds a legitimate place in the multimedia landscape of oral history and it is not always necessary to include video imagery to create an evocative educational

experience. Incorporating video with high quality audio enables more post-use options, but there are issues to consider. One of these is the effect on the performance of the interviewee and potentially also the interviewer. As Lynn Abrams observes, oral history testimony is distinct from ordinary speaking in that it is performative in nature — a narrator telling a story in a particular context with a particular audience in mind.²² Further, Abrams argues that the performance aspect of oral history ‘involving the combination of voice and gesture’ provides vital clues for the researcher on how to interpret the story being told.²³ There are a number of implications arising from this argument. Firstly, it follows that an audio-only interview is by its nature an incomplete record of the oral history interview, lacking the visual aspect of the performance. Secondly, the differing contexts of an audio-only interview compared to a video interview suggest that the two methodologies may well provide different outcomes. The interviewee may feel intimidated by the additional equipment (including the camera and possibly also lighting) and the pressure of a focus on how they look as well as how they speak. This may cause them to be more nervous and more cautious with their answers or alternatively, in some cases, over-dramatise by playing to the camera. Similarly, the interviewer may be distracted in their performance as a result of having to monitor the additional equipment and perhaps also out of concern for the interviewee, a person they will be eager to put at ease and with whom they want to forge an empathetic relationship. Donald Ritchie, however, argues that good processes can minimise some of the negative potential of video. He advises oral historians to carefully explain the equipment to the interviewee, ensure they are comfortable and know where to look in relation to the camera.²⁴ He also argues that television and home videos have become so prevalent in modern society that interviewees are far less likely to be put off by cameras than may be expected. Since Ritchie was writing in 2003 one could argue that this is even more the case today with the popularity of You Tube, Instagram and other visual-based social media.

One issue that seems to have received scant attention in the current debate is the question of accessibility. Although much is being written about the potential for improving access to oral history archives through posting interviews online and using new technologies to search the content in those interviews, there is little discussion about the need to meet international web accessibility standards. Under the Web Accessibility National Transition Strategy published in 2010 all Australian government websites (federal, state and territory) committed to a program to achieve compliance with the Web Accessibility Guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium over a four-year period.²⁵ In terms of multimedia, this means that alternatives need to be provided for pre-recorded audio and video files so that they are accessible to those

with disabilities as well as those for whom English is not their first language. Such alternatives include captioning, transcripts, audio commentary and signed interpretations as well as text alternatives for images. Since most oral history projects would either be government-funded or community-based and all would be eager to maximise public engagement, accessibility is an important issue. Including video in an oral history can assist a person with some hearing loss as they can see the person speaking as well as hear them or read the associated transcript or captions. For those with a visual impairment, a video interview would potentially need to be accompanied by some audio commentary, in addition to the interview audio, to describe the visual setting and any photographs or objects shown during the interview. In a paper on making oral histories accessible to persons with varying degrees of hearing loss, Brad Rakerd makes a number of suggestions including ensuring high quality audio, providing effective listening spaces and signed interpretations as well as supplemental information for context. He also recommends that a video 'headshot' of all those in the interview be captured and made available to those who would benefit from seeing the visible facial cues.²⁶ While these are all very useful suggestions, Rakerd does not mention the one technique that is commonly used to assist the hearing impaired—that of captioning on video. In terms of the debate over including video in oral history interviews the question of accessibility adds a further level of complexity. The inclusion of video assists in making audio more accessible, but it also requires further effort in that captioning (and possibly also full transcript) will most likely be required under accessibility guidelines. As well, website design needs to ensure that video files and controls for playing multimedia can be accessed by those with a range of disabilities, not just those with visual or audio disabilities.²⁷

Another issue to consider in looking at video recording is the question of commercial use and interviewee rights. If the incorporation of video in oral history provides more opportunities for multimedia post-interview use, it also provides more opportunities for making money from the oral history record. The rapid nature of technological change means it is difficult to anticipate potential post-interview uses of the oral history record, so modern-day historians are advised to consider flexible permissions, which better protect the rights of their interviewees. In reflecting on the 'promises and perils' of oral history on the Web, Sherna Berger Gluck floats the prospect of 'permission temporality', providing a means of continuing negotiation with interviewees post-interview to cater for potential, unforeseen use of their interviews.²⁸ Jack Dougherty and Candace Simpson suggest using Creative Commons copyright licensing to ensure that interviewees retain their rights whilst

allowing for the dissemination of their interviews for educational purposes.²⁹

Case study

Having considered the broad debate about including video in oral history, it is useful at this point to consider these issues again at a micro level through a case study. In this task I take a slightly different approach to Joanna Hay, a filmmaker and video producer who considered the video question in an article in 2012.³⁰ Hay deals with many of the practical difficulties in recording video interviews but does not canvas audio as an alternative. Her focus is on overcoming the practical difficulties of video. While I have some experience in video filming and editing it is more in the realm of the enthusiastic amateur and therefore more akin to the oral historian weighing up the benefits of moving from audio-only to an audio-visual format against the extra cost and effort required.³¹ My aim in discussing this case study is to highlight how I came to the decisions I did in using video, what worked well and what opportunities I missed.

My interview was with 92-year-old Mrs Heather Low, a lifetime resident of the Melbourne suburb of Ivanhoe. There were two purposes behind the interview, both of which influenced the decision to opt for video and audio over an audio-only approach. Firstly I needed to do an oral history interview as part of my studies. Since most students were conducting interviews in audio only and I already had a preference for video interviews, I decided video — combined with a high quality audio recording — offered the opportunity to explore different ground as well as to gain experience while in a supportive class environment. Secondly, the selection of Mrs Low as the interviewee was in part motivated by her involvement in the Ivanhoe Reading Circle, an incredibly enduring book club established in 1920.³² A mutual friend introduced me to Mrs Low and we discussed how an oral history interview could be useful when the Reading Circle celebrated its centenary in 2020. A video interview simply offered more end-use options including the potential for inclusion on the Reading Circle's website, or in a video documentary or an e-book. I did not seriously consider an audio-only interview, wanting to keep my end-use options open, but I did choose to use a separate audio recorder in preference to relying on the camera's in-built microphone. This was to ensure quality audio recording, allow a comparison of audio-only against video as well as round out a multi-format package for archiving. Combining the audio and video tracks was not difficult with the video-editing software I used, although the set-up did necessitate monitoring two pieces of recording equipment. Using a camera with a high-quality on-board microphone may have been simpler, but was not an option in this case.

Planning, costs and logistics

The next task was planning the logistics of the interview. For a one-off oral history interview I wanted to keep costs low and elected to do all the technical work myself with my existing equipment and natural lighting.³³ With the relative affordability of high definition digital video cameras that are light and easy to use, an oral historian can successfully film and interview without assistance, but it is more difficult and risky than using a separate videographer. I opted for a natural setting—in Mrs Low’s home—in part to help put my interviewee at ease, but also because a studio with controlled conditions was not an option. Lighting and a quiet location were the key factors, but difficult to achieve together—a compromise had to be made. The best location for light was in the dining room but this was also close to the kitchen and a quick sound-check showed the refrigerator noise to be quite audible. Since I couldn’t get to the back of the refrigerator to turn it off, I increased the temperature setting so that it switched itself off.³⁴ I then set up the camera on a tripod on one side of the dining table with the audio recorder in the centre of the table. I sat on the side of the table with the camera (on a tripod) with Mrs Low opposite facing the glass windows and door. Unfortunately this set-up made it difficult for me to monitor the video camera during the interview. Reviewing the footage later I found problems with reflection off Mrs Low’s glasses and a door ajar behind her, which was visually distracting. In hindsight I should have brought along a friend or fellow student to monitor the camera or spent more time on set-up.

Putting the interviewee at ease

Prior to the interview Mrs Low expressed concern about her ability as an interviewee saying she believed she was ‘past her prime’ and could not remember the same detail that she could a few years ago. Conscious of this concern I worried that video might put added pressure on her. In order to put her at ease I invited our mutual friend to come to the interview and talk to her while I set up the equipment. I also read the transcript of a previous interview she had done with the local historical society as well as published histories of the Ivanhoe Reading Circle. Reviewing the interview later I realised that I was perhaps more nervous than the interviewee and had failed to give her the time and space she needed to remember, jumping in with a new question at each pause. In the weeks following the interview I went back to Mrs Low and asked about her impressions of the interview experience. She was clear that neither the camera nor the audio equipment had concerned her. As a former kindergarten teacher and active member of the Ivanhoe Girls’ Old Grammarians’

Association she said she was comfortable with public speaking and microphones. What had made her somewhat uncomfortable was her concern about her ability to answer the questions. She believed she had a tendency to be verbose and that she should have been able to answer questions more succinctly. Mrs Low’s comments show that it is easy to assume that we know what is best for the interviewee. The art of listening is important before the interview commences as well as during the interview. Video was not the problem for Mrs Low in this instance, but it may well have been a distraction for me as the interviewer.

The visual element

In describing the potential of video, Dan Sipe argues that filming an interview can actually simplify the work of the interviewer by allowing the oral historian to ‘concentrate on the interview and study the footage later.’³⁵ This no doubt would have been the case at the time of Sipe’s writing as such interviews would have required a dedicated camera operator. Nonetheless, the comment is still relevant for the sole videographer/oral historian today. Irrespective of the quality of the filming, video footage allows a further level of analysis post-interview.

In order to explore the value derived from video footage I met with Mrs Low after the interview, showed her a transcript of a five-minute extract and played that extract for her with audio-only and with video. Her reactions to the three formats were revealing. While reading the transcript Mrs Low’s attention was drawn to the language she had used and her view that it was ‘too wordy’. In response to the audio she commented that she had never liked her voice but was ‘used to it’ now. Viewing the video, however, triggered a significant memory. Mrs Low remarked that while it was true her father had been a key influence in her love of reading she should have mentioned that her mother had also been a big influence—as a storyteller. She said her father had been a formal reader, recommending books for her to read, but her mother had told her many original stories. Mrs Low said she felt she had not been fair to her mother by not including her in her interview comments about reading. This example demonstrates the powerful effect (and affect) visual stimulation can have on memory. It made me realize that I had missed opportunities by not using props such as photographs, books and objects in my interview with Mrs Low.

In terms of visual cues such as facial expressions and body language, it is not the purpose of this paper to provide a full analysis of my interview. Rather I will make some general observations about the value of such cues. It was my experience that including the visual element allowed me to better understand what Mrs Low was saying and to appreciate the points in

the interview where she had difficulty remembering or where the remembering resulted in emotions of frustration, concern or pleasure. Mrs Low was generally fairly contained in her body language but she did tend to put her hands to her face at times—particularly early in the interview before she was relaxed and later, perhaps when she was becoming tired. In general Mrs Low was more relaxed in her body language when remembering was easier for her. I was also able to observe how she used her hands to make a point or to provide further clarification such as when she demonstrated progressive dancing with a circular sweep of her hands.



Still images from the oral history interview with Mrs Heather Low.³⁶

Post-interview

Post-interview production is significantly more complex with video than audio with tasks including combining the video and audio, minor editing (including colour correction and some clipping), exporting to several formats as well as preparing transcript, summaries and possibly also captioning. I used the program Final Cut Pro X for the video editing and inserting a visible timecode, but simpler programs such as iMovie would have also done the job. To transcribe I used a program called InqScribe which enables the play rate to be varied and hyperlinked timecodes to be inserted so that it is possible to go to a particular point on the interview by clicking on the timecode in the transcript. This program is particularly useful in that the transcript can also be used for a captioned version of the video.

If I had conducted an interview in audio-only I would have had to prepare one or two multimedia files—the original WAV files and a compressed file such as an MP3. With video I chose to produce four video files—two versions of the video (one with a timecode and one without) each in high quality and a compressed MP4 format—and two audio files (.WAV and MP3). In addition I prepared a media information text file with technical data for the video files.³⁸ The size of video files can create difficulties in preparing media to pass on to interviewees and related archives. In this case the one-hour-twenty-minute interview resulted in a 10 GB video file (1.45 GB compressed) and 2.84 GB of .WAV audio files.³⁹ A single layer DVD takes only 4.7



Screenshot of InqScribe interface.³⁷

GB of data and the versions I was preparing totalled about 30 GB. This left me with the option of producing a DVD for viewing but putting all the files on a higher-capacity USB memory stick. When working with elderly interviewees it needs to be considered what media they will have available to them for playback. In considering the needs of archives, the inclusion of video files can mean substantially more cost in storage and back-up.⁴⁰

Reflections

Despite my preference for video, the experience of this interview made me acutely aware of some of the difficulties in conducting an audio-visual interview. As a result, I decided to conduct audio-only interviews for my Masters research project, although I provided for the possibility of additional video interviews in the permissions documentation. The reason for this was that I was interviewing experienced journalists about their career and I needed to be fully focused on my role as interviewer. In hindsight, I would have conducted the interview with Mrs Low slightly differently. As an inexperienced videographer I believe I should have brought along a support person to monitor the video footage. This did not necessarily need to be a trained videographer but could have been a fellow student or friend. I should have also spent more time on set-up—perhaps taking some test footage at an earlier meeting to discuss the interview process. While any video footage can assist in interpretation of an interview, end-use options require the best possible video recording. Ideally, lighting should have been provided, or at the least internal lighting that provides a consistency compared to the vagaries of natural light. I did use a checklist for the interview and wore earphones to monitor the sound quality but this checklist also could have been refined for optimal recording.

For those considering the leap to video recording be comforted that there are many online resources available to assist you in the task. A brief search of the Internet and in particular, You Tube videos, will find

all the tutorials you need in terms of recording audio, video and providing suitable lighting. Costs are coming down and the increasing video quality of smartphones is providing additional options.

Conclusion

If video holds such potential for oral history, why is it that audio oral history is still a frequently used technique? As mentioned earlier, practicality and cost are the key factors, but Donald Ritchie suggests that another reason is an element of 'technophobia' among oral historians.⁴¹ If this is true, the phenomenon may well soon dissipate as a generation comfortable with social media moves into the oral history field. In order to meet the new range of ethical dilemmas arising, education of young oral historians needs to highlight the rights and interests of oral history interviewees. A potential approach lies in the example demonstrated by Gould and Gradowski. The pair show that the study of video oral history can be a means of sparking critical thinking and encouraging a more skeptical approach to Internet sources. It is a short step further to incorporate ethical training in such educational pursuits.

In this paper I have sought to demonstrate the importance of evaluating the range of oral history recording techniques with project purposes and potential post-interview uses. Boyd is amongst those who advocate a 'hybrid audio-video' approach. Under this model most interviews are conducted in audio first and then a selection made of those suitable for a further video interview. This reduces cost and labour for the project. Savings can then be used to pay for professional filming allowing the interviewer to focus on the interview and the relationship with the interviewee. Another option is to record 'B-roll' footage and still photographs of the interviewee with favourite objects or in a location that is meaningful to the interview. These files can then be combined with the audio interview (and other archival recordings or illustrations/animation) in a later, multimedia production.

In conclusion, the video/audio question is very much a case of 'watch this space.' Two decades ago video interviews were only possible with the aid of a professional videographer. Today 12-year-olds are shooting video on their mobile phones and posting it to the Internet. Boyd's hybrid approach may well be overtaken by the multimedia-savvy new breed of oral historians, who would no more consider doing an interview without video than a traditional oral historian today would consider conducting an interview with pen and paper. In the meantime I believe oral historians do need to 'skill up' in order to ensure they have access to the best approach for their projects. This may be audio-only, video and audio or a combination of audio-only and selected video interviews. The challenge is

well expressed by Tara McPherson in an article for the USC Shoah Foundation's magazine *PastForward*:

Working with the tools of the digital era is exciting, but the digital is for us a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. Our larger goal is to deploy the digital in ways that let us bring history and memory more palpably to life.⁴²

(Endnotes)

- 1 Screenshot of simulated video produced by the USC Shoah Foundation showing a three-dimensional image of Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter speaking to a class of students. Accessed on You Tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKiC0RsI8nc>. Accessed 27 September 2015.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Number of testimonies as cited by the USC Shoah Foundation at <https://sfi.usc.edu/vha>. Site accessed 27 September 2015.
- 4 The NDT project is a joint endeavour of the USC Shoah Foundation, the USC Institute for Creative Technologies and Conscience Display. Further information at <https://sfi.usc.edu/news/2014/07/5882-audiences-interact-pinchas-gutter-early-new-dimensions-testimony-pilot>.
- 5 Lynn Abrams, 'Introduction: Turning practice into theory', in *Oral History Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2010, p. 2.
- 6 Steve Humphries, 'Oral History on Television: A Retrospective' in *Oral History*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Autumn 2008), p. 101 and Peter B. Kaufman, 'Oral History in the Video Age', in *Oral History Review* (2013) 40 (1), p. 2.
- 7 Kaufman, *op.cit.*, p. 2.
- 8 According to the World Bank the number of Internet users in Australia in 1991 was 1.1 per 100 people. Data retrieved on 10 June 2014 from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2/countries?page=4>.
- 9 Donald A. Ritchie, 'Introduction: The Evolution of Oral History' in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, p. 10.
- 10 Dan Sipe, 'Oral History and Moving Images' in *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, 2nd edn, 2006, pp. 408-410.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Donald Ritchie, 'Videotaping Oral History', in *Doing Oral History—A Practical Guide*, Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 2003, p. 135.
- 14 Jill Goodman Gould and Gail Gradowski, 'Using Online Video Oral Histories to Engage Students in Authentic Research', in *The Oral History Review* 2014, Vol 41, pp. 343, 349.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p.343.
- 16 Douglas Boyd, 'Audio or video for recording oral history: questions, decisions', in D. Boyd, S. Cohen, B. Rakerd & D. Rehberger (Eds.), *Oral history in the digital age*, Institute of Library and Museum Services. Retrieved from <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/audio-or-video-for-recording-oral-history/> on 8 June 2014.

- 17 As file sizes depend on recording and output settings it is difficult to make a generic comparison of audio and video file sizes, other than to say that video files are substantially larger. The case study in this paper provides a sample comparison.
- 18 Alistair Thomson, 'Life Stories and Historical Analysis' in *Research Methods for History*, Edinburgh University Press, 2011, p. 113.
- 19 Siobhan McHugh, 'The affective power of sound: Oral history on radio' in the *Oral History Review* 2012, Vol. 39, No. 2, p.195.
- 20 Photograph taken by the author in 2012, Alcatraz Island, USA.
- 21 Alcatraz Cellhouse Tour (in HD), accessed from YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsVw5Belqao> on 11 June 2014.
- 22 Abrams, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-132.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 24 Ritchie, *op.cit.*, p. 137.
- 25 Details of the strategy are available at <http://www.finance.gov.au/policy-guides-procurement/web-accessibility-national-transition-strategy/wcag-introduction>. Accessed on 1 March 2015.
- 26 Brad Rakerd, 'On making oral histories more accessible to persons with hearing loss' in *The Oral History Review* 2013, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 67-74.
- 27 In her PhD thesis 'Website Accessibility in Australia and the National Transition Strategy: Outcomes and Findings,' Vivienne Westwood identifies the inaccessibility of video controls as a common problem for users with disabilities, p. 236.
- 28 Sherna Berger Gluck, 'Reflecting on the Quantum Leap: Promises and Perils of Oral History on the Web,' in *The Oral History Review*, 2014, Vol. 41, No. 2, p. 250.
- 29 Jack Dougherty and Candace Simpson, 'Who Owns Oral History? A Creative Commons Solution,' Oral History and the Digital Age website, accessed on 1 June 2015 from <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/a-creative-commons-solution>.
- 30 Joanna Hay, 'Using video in oral history — learning from one woman's experiences,' in *Oral History in the Digital Age*, edited by Doug Boyd, Brad Rakerd and Dean Rehberger, Washington, D.C. Institute of Museum and Library Services 2012. Retrieved from <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/using-video-in-oral-history/> on 10 June 2014.
- 31 At this time I had undertaken a number of multimedia projects where I conducted both the filming and editing, but only one of these was a life history interview using video. Previously I had conducted video oral history interviews as the interviewer — with the support of a videographer and video editor.
- 32 Further information about the Ivanhoe Reading Circle can be found at <http://www.ivanhoereadingcircle.org.au>.
- 33 I used a Canon HF10 HD video camera and a Zoom H2N audio recorder (using a four channel internal microphone configuration to record interviewer and interviewee, rather than external microphones).
- 34 Switching off the refrigerator did not cause any disruption to the interview, but did cause some difficulties later in the interview when the refrigerator switched itself back on.
- 35 Sipe, *op.cit.*, p. 410.
- 36 Images extracted from the oral history interview with Mrs Heather Low, taken by the author.
- 37 Screenshot of the InqScribe interface.
- 38 Using the program MediaInfo.
- 39 Since audio was recorded separately.
- 40 The file sizes quoted here are examples only for illustrative purposes. Different settings for recording and different video codecs for outputting can significantly vary file sizes.
- 41 Ritchie, *op.cit.*, p. 135.
- 42 Tara McPherson, 'Scholarship in a Digital World', *PastForward* Summer 2012, p. 16.

Reviews and book notes

Review

Douglas A. Boyd and Mary. A Larson (eds), *Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access, and Engagement*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 256 pages. ISBN 9781137322029.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, oral historians are grappling with the technical, ethical and epistemological implications of the digital revolution. This United States anthology, the first to tackle these issues in book form, is illuminating and frustrating. Frustrating because although US oral historians have certainly been at the forefront of digital innovation, the book focuses entirely on US examples and the authors rarely look beyond the US literature. While researching the forthcoming third edition of the international *Oral History Reader* I was annoyed by North American authors proclaiming the innovation of their work or lamenting a gap in the field, when I'd just read work from other parts of the world that had already done that innovation or filled that gap.

Another frustration lies in the inevitable tension between the book format and a digital oral history world that showcases sound and image as well as text. The editors have done their best to manage this tension, with QR codes within the printed book that a reader might use to upload web-based images (for an e-reader that facility is integrated and therefore more likely to be used; for a paperback reader the QR codes are annoying – I'd rather see the images in the book). The book's valuable website - <http://www.digitaloralhistory.net/> - includes all the images, as well as interviews conducted with the chapter authors who talk about their work as digital pioneers, and a Facebook site you can join to discuss the book. There is also a section for reviews, which at the time of writing only includes the back cover puffs but which might include reviews like this to spark debate.

In the book's first section, 'Orality/Aurality', four essays by notable US digital oral history innovators discuss how their pioneering projects devised ways to capture and promote the oral qualities of their recordings and challenge the dominance of the

transcript as the first, and often last, port of call for researchers. Folklorist William Schneider introduces the legendary Project Jukebox at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. In the late 1980s, Schneider and his colleagues created a computerised delivery system for interviews which showcased and indexed segments of interview recordings online. Among the lessons Schneider learnt were that early adaptors are imperilled by technical obsolescence, that online interviews are best understood if accompanying material explains the cultural contexts of the recordings (especially but not only for native American interviews), and that digital platforms pose new challenges for involving informants in decisions about the storage and use of their stories. The Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive developed in the 1990s by feminist oral historian Sherna Berger Gluck at California State University, Long Beach, also enabled researchers to search collections thematically and then listen to relevant interview segments. Like Schneider, Gluck highlights the challenge of technological future-proofing and the necessity for substantial, on-going institutional support. Oral historians who want their interviews to be searched and used as technologies change will need to partner with large and stable institutions (in Australia, state and national libraries and archives) that have the skills and resources to future-proof digital and online access to interviews.

Charles Hardy III explains how he and Alessandro Portelli created their extraordinary essay in sound, "I can almost see the lights of home": A field trip to Harlan County, Kentucky', which featured in the online *Journal for Multimedia History* in 1999 but became hard to access when the journal foundered after just three issues. As a radio producer who has 'authored in sound' for many years Hardy argues not just for the value of aural history productions that illuminate the meanings of sound and voice, but also for 'relearning of old ways of listening' (67) that have been diminished through the dominance of text and image.

The path-breaking projects developed by Schneider, Gluck and Hardy all curated online access to oral history through custom-made software that was not future-proof and could not readily be repurposed for

other projects and archives. Archivist Doug Boyd's chapter explains how new open source software platforms (such as the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer Boyd created in Kentucky, or a similar platform created by the oral history team at the National Library of Australia, which we used for the Australian Generations project) enable digital audio or video interview files to be placed online and linked to transcripts or timed summaries so that an online browser can search for a word or phrase and then click to listen or watch each of the found extracts in one or many interviews. Boyd is no naïve digital evangelist. Though he relished the digital recovery of analogue recordings used in Henry Glassie's iconic oral history of the Irish village of Balleenone, he ruefully admits that the hiss on the old cassette tapes which he digitally removed was in fact the ambient sound of Irish villagers' fireplaces. Boyd notes that old-fashioned transcripts still have their interpretative uses (text can be browsed, sound can only be used in real time) and ponders the as-yet unrealised potential of voice recognition software. As Boyd and others argue in this book, the really revolutionary changes in oral history are being forged by new digital approaches to organising, accessing, using and preserving oral history recordings. These changes are breaking down divisions between interviewers and archivists and transforming our capacity to interpret oral history collections.

Boyd's chapter links neatly to a fine essay by Elinor Maze about metadata. It's hard to make metadata exciting, but in the online world good metadata is essential if you want an interview to be found and used. One day we will be able to search interviews via sound or visual cues, but for the foreseeable future both audio and visual forms of oral history require text-based finding guides so that users can search and then play material from within an interview or across interview collections. Maze explores key questions: what types of metadata ('what is it?' and 'what is it about?') are necessary and useful for oral history interviews? Should there be standard archival metadata templates for interviews that facilitate digital harvesting across collections? Who creates the metadata (given finding guides are never value-neutral) and how might crowd-sourced social-tagging be both useful and problematic?

The second part of this book showcases uses of digital oral history. The essays by Marjorie McLellan (on oral history in schools and colleges) and Gerald Zahavi (founder of the *Journal for Multimedia History*) perhaps focus too much on their personal journeys and American institutions and not enough on the wider, universal issues posed by their work. Tom Ikeda introduces the remarkable web-based Densho project, which features interviews and other materials about Japanese-American incarceration during World

War II. Densho advocates for historical recognition and compensation and promotes contemporary lessons about the consequences of racism.

Mary Larson examines the ethical issues that become more acute as more interviews become more accessible online; indeed she argues that online oral history is now so commonplace that creators and users are less careful about the consequences. In response to a similar concern, Gluck suggests that interviewers should reconsider the questions they ask and the topics they probe, given that answers will likely end up online to be found by anyone, anywhere, for ever. Larson concludes that perhaps we should not be uploading interviews containing sensitive material but rather placing extracts and guides from such interviews online and requiring users to visit an archive to research the unedited interviews.

Two concluding essays focus on the future of oral history and digital humanities. Dean Rehberger notes the similarities between oral history and digital humanities (both exploit technology and encourage collaboration, both traverse disciplines and professions, the academy and community, both assert social and political aims for research), and perhaps this book will help strengthen links between the two fields and movements (at the 2015 international Digital Humanities conference in Sydney I was struck by the scarcity of oral historians).

Perhaps the most provocative questions in this book are posed by Stephen Sloan, who ponders the role and value of oral history in a world of digital data overload and interminable presentations of self through social media and 'lifelogging.' The wealth of big data, and increasingly sophisticated capacities to search and interpret big data, is favouring an evangelical resurgence of quantitative research across many disciplines. But big data tends to show connections and corollaries rather than explaining how and why. Oral history offers different but vital research opportunities. Qualitative research using long form interviews (which we might term 'small data,' or perhaps 'life data') can explore context and depth, nuance and difference, event and subjectivity. Oral history research requires reflection and explanation; it is 'the deterrent to overgeneralisation' (184). Sloan concludes, as I would, that 'Oral history is not merely experience recorded (as in lifelogging) or experience presented (as in social media), but it is experience *examined* - not merely documented and shared, but investigated with purpose, with the oral historians as an active agent in the process. We are at our best when we seek to reveal "why" and "how", which, despite their wonders, most digital sources of information fall short in providing' (185).

Alistair Thomson, Monash University,
alistair.thomson@monash.edu.au

Review

Mark Dapin, *The Nashos' War: Australia's National Servicemen and Vietnam*, Australia, Penguin, 2014. 480 pages. ISBN 0670077054

Mark Dapin's *Nashos' War* is based on interviews with over 150 Australian National Servicemen. Neither Dapin nor the publishers claim that this book is based in the oral history genre, however, the large number of interviews suggests the book may well be of interest to oral historians.

What Dapin writes is a more personal narrative, and sometimes, a different view of national service in the Vietnam War. He covers thirty-three different aspects of the war. Dapin's national service interviewees give the reader their view of the war. At times it coincides with the public memory/view of the war, while in other parts the book challenges Dapin's beliefs about this era of Australian military history.

The book is based on interviews, wartime diaries and letters. It should be noted that soldiers deploying to the war zone were given instructions not to keep diaries as they would be sources of intelligence if captured by the enemy. As Gary Mackay points out, in *Fragments of Vietnam*, there were many who ignored this direction.¹

It would have been helpful to the reader if the author had explored the violation of this order. It would have given an insight into the nashos' independent line of thought. From these personal sources, Dapin provides some new and interesting insights on national service in the Vietnam War.

The National Servicemen of *The Nashos' War* are no different to the disenfranchised and marginalised people that oral historians have often worked with. Various authors have pointed out that these people often have different views, remembrances and reconstructions of the events to what has been accepted as either official history or the public memory.² What Dapin hears with clarity, is the voice which the unheard use when given a chance to comment on the history and events in which they participated. According to a number of oral historians, oral history is multi- or poly-vocal information where different voices are heard and not those of the dominant cultural political and/or economic elite.³ Here Dapin has opened up to us with an oral historian's insight into how different narratives bring voices into history which are often absent from the official histories.

Dapin makes the observation that if the reader wishes to explore the official view of the war, then the 'official histories' are the appropriate forum to use. However, this will be the history according to the Generals and the Government.⁴ He does not explore why there is a difference between the official version and the participants' description. Valerie Yow defines

oral history as 'the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form with purposes beyond the record.'⁵ Herein lies the difference between Dapin simply recording the Nashos' views, and what could have been an oral history analysis of these participants' war.

The book starts out promisingly as the author explores Errol Noack's story. Noack was the first national serviceman killed in the war and Dapin gives an insight into his call up and journey to Vietnam. He starts with a description of the conscript's and his family's reaction to the result of the national service lottery, and then his training in preparation for deployment to Vietnam. His mates described the events of the fateful day he was killed, after only twelve days in Vietnam. One of the conscripts agreed with the Army's initial explanation of what had occurred that evening. It would have been interesting if the variation between this veteran and his peers was explored and analysed in more depth, to address the difference in the versions of that event.

While Dapin accessed Labour and National Service files, newspaper reports and other material, he fails to inform the reader of other sources that could have been accessed to show that his conclusion of a cover-up was correct. If Dapin had examined the official documents such as the commander's diary, the army files, personal records (particularly operational casualty reports) and other army documents, then he would have had an abundance of documentary data supporting the narratives he had obtained from his national service informants. Dapin would have found information that indicated that either the army was not honest with Parliament, or that Parliament misled the Australian public. This leads to the question of what may have occurred in our political and defence scenes if the truth had been told at this point.

He also fails to locate other participants in these events who were, and are still, prepared to tell anyone interested that Noack was a 'home goal.' At the time, the Army claimed Noack had been killed by enemy guerrillas, but the official history concluded it 'seems more probable' he was a victim of friendly fire.⁶ Dapin quickly dismisses the army cover up with a brief comment that it took years for the real truth to emerge.⁷

Dapin claims to sort fact from the myth using these 150 former national servicemen's narratives to deconstruct the folklore of national service in Vietnam. Dapin quite correctly identifies that there are an abundance of Australian Vietnam war myths. He explores these in several chapters entitled, 'The Myths and Meaning of National Service,' 'The Myth of the Sixties,' 'The Myth of the Moratorium,' and 'The Myth of the Volunteer.' In each case he finds some information that he accepts, and some that debunks the myths, and then moves on. Partly what he describes is misinformation, misrepresentation and straight out lies rather myth. It

would have produced more clarity if he had first clearly defined the myths, and then explored the reasons why they were created.

One example is 'The Myth of the Volunteer.' Dapin challenges the myth that every conscript in Vietnam was a volunteer. Dapin makes the observation that most of the National Servicemen thought they were volunteers for Vietnam. This is in spite of the fact they had been conscripted under the National Service Act. Conscripts are generally not considered as volunteers. Further check of the Defence Act Section 50C would suggest that the Army had the right to deploy any member of the Army overseas, no matter what their preference. Dapin cites Malcolm Fraser's answer to Parliament, indicating that the Army was not to give national servicemen a choice on their deployment to Vietnam.⁸

While debunking this myth, Dapin fails to elicit from his informants why many Vietnam veterans considered that they were volunteers. He does not provide the reader with any information as to why these men claimed they were volunteers. While he cites those who claimed that there were parades where a choice to go to Vietnam was given, and others who were sure there was no choice, he does not analyse what they perceive were either a form or parade to indicate a reluctance to serve in Vietnam. It would be very interesting to know why the idea of being a volunteer should be so important to these national servicemen, and Dapin fails to explore this issue. As Portelli tells us, even a false statement can give us an insight into history and the realities of an era.⁹

In his foreword, Dapin states that he did not interview all the interviewees. He accepted the word of an interviewee about the veracity of another veterans' story of his national service time. For oral historians this is a strategy fraught with danger, which may result in obtaining one community view, instead of many individual variations of the same history. The interesting part of this admission is that one non-interviewee was happy with his portrayal in the book.¹⁰ This is another area which should have been explored, national servicemen training and fighting together knew much about each other.

Dapin does give us a starting point for further research. As an oral historian, I found many questions sitting among the information that Dapin provides from his interviewees.

There is much to like about the book, as it provides some new information about national servicemen's life on the battlefield. Perhaps Dapin attempts to cover too much ground in trying to cover the whole war. The book may have been stronger if he had concentrated on just those areas where myths have appeared. However, he provides information which will help those oral

historians who are interviewing war veterans, as well as showing us that war veterans do not necessarily reflect the official version of history.

(Endnotes)

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- 3 Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 24 -5. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 12, 16. Valerie Yow, 'Do I Like Them too Much?', in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 64-6.
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- 5 Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral Histories: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3rd Edn, Bowman Littlefield Lanham 2015, p. 3.
- 6 Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan, The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950-1966*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1993, pp. 247-48.
- 7 Dapin, op.cit., p. 35 .
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- 9 Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different,' in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, p. 36.
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Ben Morris, University of Wollongong, Ben.Morris@uow.edu.au

Review

***Chinese Whispers*, immersive installation-based performance directed by Rani Pramesti, Bluestone Church Art Space, Footscray, Melbourne Fringe Festival 23-28 September 2014.**

How does racial violence happen?

Rani Pramesti wanted visitors to ponder this question in her immersive installation-based performance *Chinese Whispers*, informed by Chinese Indonesian memories of the May 1998 anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia. The installation was also a personal exploration of Pramesti's personal identity and feelings about the riots, which triggered her family's migration from Indonesia to Australia when she was twelve years old. *Chinese Whispers* was created while Pramesti participated in the Emerging Cultural Leaders program

at Footscray Community Arts Centre in 2013, where she was mentored by the Vietnamese Australian playwright Chi Vu. Visitors to the installation moved through a physical maze wearing a pair of headphones, through which we listened to excerpts of Pramesti's personal narration and her interviews with Chinese Indonesians in Australia as they recounted their own memories of the riots.

The use of oral history in what was originally envisioned as a typical theatre performance was accidental but it enabled Pramesti to construct an immersive installation that combined features of a physical exhibition space, including objects and a theatre piece, with one live performer. Pramesti originally intended to create a work based on the migration stories of Chinese Indonesians in Melbourne and involve the participants as actors in the final work, but there was a problem. The participants led busy lives and could not attend regular performance workshops, so Pramesti interviewed them about their migration stories. The result was 14 hours' worth of interviews but no actors, so the installation piece was born. With Ria Soemardjo, an Indonesian Australian musician who composed and recorded the soundscape, Pramesti identified themes from the stories that participants had provided. However, she came across an ethical problem: 'Whose stories do I have the right to tell?' She resolved this by focussing on what made the most impact on her. These were the participants' memories of the May 1998 riots and she wove their memories into her own 'Hero's Journey' narrative.

Triggered by economic problems and high levels of unemployment, these riots consisted of mass violence, burnings, lootings, rape and killings mainly targeted at ethnic Chinese Indonesian businesses and homes across several Indonesian cities including Jakarta where Pramesti's family lived. In at least three cities, more than 100 women were raped and more than 1000 people died in shopping mall fires in Jakarta and Solo between 12 and 15 May. The riots also contributed to the fall of President Suharto's regime and his resignation on 21 May. Not all interviewees experienced the riots first hand and for most interviewees the riots were not a trigger for their migration to Australia as the riots were for Pramesti's family. This enabled Pramesti to explore the riots from different perspectives and come to the central question at the beginning of this review.

Visitors wandered in pairs with headphones through the narrow passageways of the maze made with translucent white fabric, moving to the next room through aural cues. In the maze we encountered objects to touch and explore such as origami newspaper accounts of the riots while we listened to Pramesti's narrative and her interviewees' memories. Vines of green paper leaves and lanterns entwined with the soft glow of Christmas lights enveloped us, 'holding' us, in Pramesti's words, in order to guide us through the traumatic memories.

Natalie, one of Pramesti's interviewees later explained why remembering the riots was important to her.

We don't want to open that room. It was there, the experience and sort of impact. We don't want to go there anymore. It's unpleasant but how do you heal or how do you make sure this does not happen again if you don't learn from it. That's why it's healing.

The first room began with Pramesti's childhood in Indonesia and visitors were invited to spin a zoetrope, an early form of animation, which showed a child running. According to Pramesti.

When the riots happened I was only 12 years old and up until 1998 I thought of myself as just another Indonesian person but after the riots happened, and even as the riots were happening, I came to realise that people perceived of me as 'Chinese.'

The feeling created was that of an idyllic childhood which was destroyed as visitors walked along the corridor lined with paintings of the riots leading to a room exploring intergenerational hate. The anti-Chinese violence that occurred in May 1998 was not an isolated occurrence in Indonesia's history, according to Pramesti's narrative and the books we flip through on the bookshelf. In the next room, we heard Tara, one of Pramesti's interviewees, categorising groups of Indonesians as *Cina* or Chinese and *Pribumi* or 'people from the earth' — the latter term being used as a racial slur. The message was that racism goes both ways. Around the next corner, we were confronted with a set of drawers and we were encouraged to open them. They contained weapons — an iron bar and two rocks that fitted perfectly into the palm of an adult's hand. While listening to graphic accounts of what individual interviewees witnessed during the riots, we picked up the weapons, forcing us to contemplate the reasons for hate. Holding one of the rocks, I learnt how it might feel if I threw it at someone I hated and also what it might feel like to be hit by one. We were soon urged into the next space where an animation of the riots surrounded us. Are we perpetrators? Are we bystanders? Or are we victims? And what does it mean to be each of them?

Pramesti's narrative then led us into the next room where we sat down in front of a Catholic altar. The soundscape was calm and soothing. Visitors were encouraged to reflect on what we had experienced and to leave a message with a few words of what we had learnt. These messages were later attached to the outside walls of the space. The final room acted as a debriefing space with actress Fanny Hanusin inviting visitors to try a vast array of Indonesian snacks and drinks and to chat about our thoughts, experiences and feelings.

Through the intimate construction of the maze and her careful narration, we saw the influence of Pramesti's

training in social work, as well as theatre, as she sought to gently and thoughtfully guide us through the difficult and traumatic memories. The installation was deeply moving and reflective as it engaged our senses and emotions through its design and the combination of lighting, sound, spoken personal narratives and physical objects. The installation was difficult, however, if a visitor had mobility problems because of the small, intimate spaces or a hearing impairment because the experience relied so heavily on listening. It was also a didactic experience in that we were prompted to think about and respond to the May 1998 riots and Pramesti's central question at the end of the journey. By then we learnt that, in poet Mark Gonzales's words, 'You cannot heal what you will not face.'

**Karen Schamberger, Deakin University,
kschambe@deakin.edu.au**

Review

**Mark Cave and Stephen M. Sloan, (editors),
*Listening on the Edge. Oral History of the Aftermath
of Crisis*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014.
294 pages. ISBN (hbk) 978-0-19-985931-3.**

This is a splendid production that utilises an obvious, though powerful, formula. The authors invited thirteen oral historians to present an excerpt from their own or others' work in a situation of recent state crisis, catastrophe or trauma. Interviewers have a page or two to introduce themselves and the occasion for interview/s. Then follow, in each chapter, up to a dozen pages of transcription, followed by a commentary on the interview. The sites of trauma include Srebrenica, Hazara refugees in Australia, the massacre at Virginia Tech, the Cuban rafters, Rwandan Rescapés, Hurricane Katrina, the drug war in Ciudad Juárez, poisoned workers in China, Rwanda again, US Army chaplains in Afghanistan, and the World Trade Centre.

Every contributor has thought deeply about the interview and has much to discuss. Each raises lots of issues or questions, of which I pull out just a few randomly. Selma Leydesdorf notes about her Srebrenica interview with Hanifa:

Whenever I present the translated interview to MA students, their reaction is always the same. 'It is chaotic; there is no plot, no timeline, and no information. This woman is obviously too traumatized to give a good interview.'

But, Leydesdorf warns them that only a perfunctory reading will bring up such a blunt dismissal. Interviewing Reza in Australia, Denise Phillips cautions that he may have consciously or unconsciously slanted his narrative, desperately bidding for any form of influence with the Department of Immigration. Phillips

warns interviewers to beware of raising expectations that we have little power to fulfil. Elizabeth Campisi remarks that Cuban refugees arriving in Miami in the 'nineties felt great pressure to conform to a narrative that presented life in Cuba as invalid and negative.' Interviewers pass the message to each other - 'You have to get to them before they learn what to say.' The closing of options in the refugees' reflection and memories, she concludes, squandered opportunities for the rafters 'to heal themselves of the trauma of leaving.'

The Tutsi Kiroli, interviewed by Taylor Krauss, far from being grateful for having survived, thinks himself as a walking fatality: he ceased living when his children were killed by Hutu and his lineage was therefore eliminated. Eric Rodrigo Meringer derives the lesson, from his interviews with Juárez residents Raul, Rosa and Jonathon, that media emphasis on drug cartels v antinarcotics forces, wrongly subsumes all violent crime in that city as part of the drug war. Working with soldiers in Afghanistan, the army chaplain Christina, interviewed by David W. Peters, used to be offended by soldiers swearing. Not any more: 'They protected me. They carried my bags.' Another chaplain, Timothy, found himself in the crosshairs of an enemy: 'The bottom line was, that at the end of the day, I told everybody that I wished one of them would kill him... It sure shocked a bunch of them.' Mary Marshall Clark comments on interviews with Zohra, a Muslim New Yorker after the attack on the World Trade Centre, that she first wanted to tell the stories of her ancestors whom she invoked to help her make meaning out of her own experiences of September 11.

Timothy reflects that his chaplaincy work is not exactly that of the oral historian. The chaplain is more interested in healing than in determining the accuracy of the story. The primary task is to help the soldier make meaning out what has happened. Do we oral historians unconsciously do that too? I wonder. When is the narrative of catastrophe complete? asks Clark. Oral history is a parable 'that often fits for those doing oral history in time of emergency and after, particularly in deeply politicized moments when state actors define the meaning of events unilaterally, and collective memory is constructed to eclipse narratives that challenge historic norms of suffering and valor.' The psychoanalyst Ghislaine Boulanger notes that 'psychoanalysts have been encouraged to take a more comprehensive view of our patients, to understand that they are embedded within a culture and acted upon by history.' These are deep questions, and indeed, the book throws up issues like this on every page.

It's something of a pity that five of the chapters, nearly half the book, relate to the United States. Refugees making their way to Italy, inmates of Indonesian holding centres, Vietnamese boat people, Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa, the Forgotten Australians and oral histories conducted in South

America after state violence, such as Chile, would have been obvious themes. It's well to remember, too, that collective catastrophes are not caused only by state intervention (or lack of state intervention in the case of prisoners in New Orleans jails, during Hurricane Katrina). Natural disasters like landslides, tsunami and earthquakes need to be researched too, not just to find out what happened, but to continue to enlarge the central theme of this book: that is, what is the deeper significance of a catastrophic event to each individual, distinct from both the collective and the official narratives. How do memories change in months and years after the event? Will every person look for, or find a deeper significance in the disaster? Should those who do not, be encouraged to by the interviewer? Should historians themselves look for meaning in catastrophic events?

So many of the issues we all face as interviewers are here discussed, not necessarily with the right answers, or any answers. A selected bibliography completes a terrific book which oral historians will find hard to put down.

**Peter Read, Australian National University,
peter.read@sydney.edu.au**

Review

Abbie Reese, *Dedicated to God: An Oral History of Cloistered Nuns*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014. xvii + 247 pages. ISBN 978 0 19 994793 5.

Dedicated to God is one part of a much larger ethnographic project by multidisciplinary visual artist Abbie Reese who over a period of six years filmed and interviewed 12 of the then remaining 20 members of the Poor Clare Colletine order living in the Corpus Christi Monastery at Rockford, Illinois. Inspired by media reports of an increase in interest in the cloistered life, her research was focused on discovering what compels a woman today to seek the obscurity which an enclosed order offered. For the nuns, however, participation in the project had a dual purpose: the hope that such publicity might induce young women to join, and the belief that to spread the message in this way was consistent with their mission as hidden witnesses.

Reese was aware from the outset of the contradiction implicit in her project of asking women who had made a deliberate choice to be anonymous to talk about their lives. In an environment in which oral communication, outside of the daily recreation hour, is kept to a minimum and the voice used primarily for worship, the oral history interview was an alien form. Yet, given the opportunity to maintain their anonymity through the use of self-chosen pseudonyms, the nuns embraced the project using the opportunity to persuade Reese that the enclosure she saw as creating a 'cultural time

capsule' was for them a source of freedom, with the grille functioning to keep the distractions of the world from them, rather than separating them from the world. This was but one of the many lessons she had to learn in order to acculturate to the monastic environment to which she had been given privileged entry.

Richly illustrated with the still photography that forms another part of the project, *Dedicated to God* has three sections, each of which contains thematic chapters followed by individual oral history narratives. The first examines the notion of the call, the pathways by which the women came to embrace the cloistered life, the second the nature of the life itself, and the third the threats which it is currently facing. In exploring these themes the chapters work more effectively than the narratives, most of which, by virtue of the self erasure that is inherent to the rule, focus primarily on the life before, carefully constructed in order to show the logic of the decision to enter the monastery and the joy that has derived from the decision. While, in the thematic chapters, Reese draws vivid images of the nuns as individuals, in their own narratives that individuality is largely confined to their early lives, with any remaining traces more likely to be presented as errors that they need to correct than as personality traits to be valued.

In its separation from the world the monastery offers a profoundly conservative way of life. Although obedience, like the decision to enter, is understood as a free choice, there are rituals and routines governing every aspect of life, none of which are open to challenge. The process of assimilating to this life requires a complete relearning but while the women interviewed here may hint at the difficulties they faced, none regret their decision. While for Reese the chasm between the religious and the secular life is best described as a 'continental drift' for her subjects, the monastery serves as a 'cultural oasis' in which they can devote their lives to God without any of the distractions of the world outside. They see themselves as the 'comforters and caretakers of the world' offering prayers on behalf of the many people outside the monastery who use the telephone prayer service to request their intercessions.

Reese is refreshingly candid about the impact of the project on her own life and of her growing admiration for the women amongst whom she was working. She reflects on the broad spectrum of opinions that her interviews disclosed in relation to the meanings and practices of nuns' calling, a diversity which they have no space or opportunity to discuss amongst themselves. However, she is less open about the areas of religious life that her interviewees chose not to mention. Doubts and internal disagreements are hinted at but never expanded upon. Although there is an acknowledgment that most of those who make preliminary enquiries about the life never enter, there is no discussion about any nuns who may have entered and subsequently left. And, there is a complete silence about sexuality and

sexual desire, either before or after the taking of vows.

Nevertheless, the picture which Reese constructs will be intriguing enough to attract readers to the other aspects of the project, an online exhibition, a planned film and, of most interest to oral historians, a CD of the interviews from which the text has been distilled. In presenting the research findings in a written form, *Dedicated to God* is both an extreme example of oral history's claim to give voice to the voiceless and an outstanding illustration of its potential to contribute to multidisciplinary artistic practice.

**Shurlee Swain, Australian Catholic University,
shurlee.swain@acu.edu.au**

Spotlights from XVIII International Congress on Oral History ‘Power and Democracy: The Many Voices of Oral History,’ July 9 - 12, 2014, Barcelona

Randa Kaldas

[Editor’s note: A report on the Barcelona conference by Anne Johnson was provided in the 2014 OHA Journal. Readers may also be interested in this perspective. Randa Kaldas is Associate Director of the Economic and Business History Research Center of The American University, Cairo]

The Eighteenth International Congress on Oral History was held in Barcelona from July 9 - 12, 2014. Over the course of three days, 5 plenary sessions, 7 roundtables, 90 concurrent sessions were held on the theme ‘Power and Democracy: The Many Voices of Oral History.’ The congress was bilingual in English and Spanish with simultaneous translation provided only for plenary sessions.

The conference hosted more than 250 presenters from around the world with over 300 participants. It was a great privilege that I was selected to present in one of the five plenary sessions in the panel on ‘Challenging Government: The voice of the People’ and my presentation title was ‘The Perception of Tahrir Square during the First Eighteen Days of the Egyptian Revolution, an Oral History Approach.’ This report highlights some of the presentations I attended.

Mercedes Vilanove gave the opening speech on ‘Beginning and end of a dream, the republican Barcelona between 1931 and 1939.’ She talked about her experience interviewing workers about the social revolution of Spain. She shared how in her research she was aiming for interviews with the least powerful people, the ‘excluded,’ which goes beyond the ‘illiterate.’ She demonstrated the role that oral history can play, as to her, oral history was the tool that explained the spontaneity of the masses and their conviction that the revolution is their only means for social change. It defined the new social order of the Catalonians, ‘the invisible majority.’

The panel ‘When Subjects Talk, Who is Listening? Uncertain Outcomes in Oral History’ included pioneers in oral history. Cliff Kuhn chaired this session and read Michael Frisch’s reflections on the papers presented. In Ellen Griffith Spears’s presentation titled ‘The Owl Man: Editorial Authority Revisited,’ she examined the fate of the oral history interviews that are left behind

from a publication and the potential richness in such narratives as life stories. Indeed, she conducted oral narratives for the purpose of producing a book on industrial pollution and environmental justice activism in a U.S. town. Exploring one narrative that was not included in the book shows that it was a rich narrative that tells the life story of an African American minister and how his involvement in the civil rights movement transformed his life. The author’s editorial decision to exclude this narrative constitutes a risk of burying potential information forever. Spears concluded that the fate of excluded narratives should go beyond being archived and should be interpreted as well.

Catherine Fosl presented on the uncertainties of the outcome of the oral narratives conducted with Amy Thornton, a white South African woman, who spent her earlier life as an activist in the anti-apartheid movement. For one, it was unclear whether a publication based on a life story of another activist in the plethora of similar publications would be useful. Another uncertainty was related to the effect of memory and the perspective that Thornton had when interviewed in her late seventies/early eighties compared to the version of her story in her younger years that she wrote in her personal papers that she had destroyed for security reasons.

Finally, Alessandro Portelli talked about the stories he skipped: war tales and hospital tales. Oral history is often referred to as the art of listening. However, we all listen with varying degrees of intensity. In one of Portelli’s oral history projects to document the history of the labour movement from 1949 to 1953 in Terni, an industrial town in Italy, most narrators repeated stories about their families and their lives in the town. As a result, he had to revisit the project and ended with a book on the history of the town from 1831 to 1985. Some parts of the interviews were skipped as they seemed irrelevant to the book and were excluded on the basis of being too common, private, and/or of neither a political nor local nature. Years later, Portelli returned to these records exploring the parts that were left out and attempted to find connections between them. He realized that two types of stories were skipped: men’s stories about their military service, and women’s stories about caring for men in hospitals. On looking closer, the

analogy between these two types surfaced; both were two versions of suffering and confrontation with death. Men went through this feeling during the war while women faced it in hospitals. Portelli emphasized that there is more to oral history than the art of listening. Indeed, the dialogue that emerges from the relationship between interviewers and narrators, memory that is a function of the time lapse between the events and the interview, and finally the relationship between the oral source and historian's writing as interpretation of that orality are all vital in working with narratives. To Portelli, oral history should not end with the interview or even a publication, and the narrative should not be seen as just a repository of information, but rather an ongoing process of construction and reconstruction of meanings of events.

One of the sessions in the conference worth noting is the panel on 'Promoting Oral History Research from Archives.' Juliana Nykolaisyn shared the proactive approach that The Oklahoma Oral History Research Program (OOHRP) has been increasingly adopting to generate more interest and excitement for its collection by using multiple points of access to its collection including social media, radio, exhibits, QR Codes and developing community partnerships. Another important project presented in this session is The Women and Memory Forum's project on 'Documentation as Resistance: Egyptian Women's Oral History Archive.' Three members in this project, Hoda elSadda, Maissan Hassan, and Diana Abd El-Fattah gave an overview of the project and shed some light on several problematic issues in the conceptual, implementation, and management phases of the project. This project aims at documenting women's roles – as leaders, activists, and participants – in the January 25 revolution. There is a dominant narrative that this project attempts to challenge by putting together fragments of stories based on an initial assumption that these protests started a new era for women. Some of the theoretical concerns of the project relate to the objectivity of the collection, the selected stories, and the target audience of such a collection. On the other hand, several challenges face the management component of this project such as the discrepancy between the spoken Arabic in the interviews and the written Arabic in the transcripts. Also, narrators' approval throughout the various stages of the project from the recording phase ending with the transcription phase is another challenge. Finally, given the nature of some of these interviews, there has not yet been a consensus on access policy of these records.

For me, the highlight of this conference was being selected to present in a plenary session amidst international scholars in the field. If I am to choose the second best thing, the most informative session of this conference was the two-part panel on 'What Happens When Oral History Goes Public?' chaired by Rob Perks, Curator of Oral History, The British Library. Part one

'What Happens When Oral History Goes Public? Ethics and Online Oral History' had 4 presentations. Rob Perks, chair of both sessions, started off the first session by giving a quick overview of the change in the guardianship role of archives and interviewers given his experience as curator of the British Library. With the recent shift in history making through the web, in the last two years, there has been a lot of debate around ethical issues that emerged with the usage of online oral history that has led to an increase in the number of users of these sources. For example, approximately 40,000 users access British library material per month, with curators, interviewees and interviewers having no knowledge of who these people are or the purpose for which the interviews are being accessed. In addition, the British library is moving a step further and working towards allowing people to upload their own material on the web.

In the first presentation in this panel, Mary Larson emphasized the shift in the idea of curation from a gatekeeping model to a new paradigm that curators have the following responsibilities, namely ensuring: paperwork is in order, proper communication with narrators and their community with respect to the changes in the definition of what is 'public', a proper understanding of 'informed consent', and the proper contextualization of online information. Larson explained how in the eagerness in placing material online that is facilitated with the new technological ease of online access, ethical issues become less of a concern. Larson concluded that not all oral narratives need to be publically available and there has to be room for sensitive interviews to remain private. Next, Elise Chenier explored the difference between obtaining consent to archive the interviews vis-à-vis what happens when material is actually archived online. She shared her experience with lesbian oral testimony and how in spite of the fact that she did have consent to archive online from all narrators, one narrator changed her mind and demanded that the material be taken down from the net.

In the third presentation, Veronique Ginouves and Myriam Fellous-Sigrist discussed the dilemma they face with respect to the issue of interview anonymity in the oral narrative collection of the Mediterranean Social Science Centre. Anonymity became more of a concern with the increasing trend of 'open access' in the last few decades. In the absence of clear legal and ethical guidelines for sharing these records online, it is increasingly difficult for interviewees to maintain anonymity. Anonymity needs to be dealt with not as a principle, but rather in terms of the evolving process it goes through (file number, code, catalogue entry, name, picture, voice, etc.), the context, and the available technology (to create a polyphony of the anonymous interviews) that pave the way to the visibility of the collection.

Lastly, Leslie McCartney shared her experience as oral history curator of Project Jukebox, the digital branch of the oral history program of the University of Alaska that provides access to audio and video recordings, transcripts, maps, etc. She explained how the ethical considerations of placing old material records online are much more than the legal considerations, and highlight the importance of knowing the context of these records by linking the audio to a summary or transcript.

Part two of the panel ‘What Happens When Oral History Goes Public?’ tackled the theme of ‘Oral History Online: Technology and History-Making.’ In this panel, Doug Lambert examined the importance of making the access of online oral history recordings meaningful and accordingly really ‘accessible’ using passage-level indexing rather than the traditional keywords/tags/metadata linking to the whole interview. Sylvarie AitAmour discussed how technology is transforming oral history by placing hundreds and thousands of audio records online. Indexing is the real gateway to accessing the oral narrative as in practice nobody can listen to hundreds of hours of recordings. In Anne Heimo’s presentation, she discussed the consequences of ‘ordinary’ people sharing their experiences and interpretations themselves, thus becoming active producers of their own history, a role that until recently was exclusive to history professionals. Doug Boyd also emphasized that not everything has to be waiting on shelves to be transcribed. One way of looking at the transcript is its possible use as an index/metadata of the audio itself.

The discussion gave room to some useful interpretations and suggestions from presenters. One example is how giving a proper context to interviews may be a way to avoid ‘improper use’ of the material. Another useful suggestion was that access to the material be given after a request.

The plethora of presentations at this conference was most enriching and was a good learning experience that can be most beneficial in regard to practical, administrative, ethical and methodological issues that one faces almost daily working in the field of oral history. Experiences and different perspectives that academics and practitioners offer in tackling different challenges attest to the uniqueness of each oral narrative project and demonstrate that when it comes to oral narratives, there should not be a prescriptive answer to solving problematic issues.

The Hazel de Berg Award for Excellence in Oral History 2015 awarded to

Jill Cassidy



Jill Cassidy has made an outstanding contribution to the cause of oral history in Australia for almost 30 years, undertaken both in a professional and voluntary capacity.

Working at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) in Launceston, Jill conducted oral histories which formed the basis of exhibitions to commemorate Australia's Bicentenary in 1988. She later authored a number of publications including *Launceston Talks: Oral Histories of the Launceston Community*. As a result of the project's success in documenting the history of northern Tasmania, Jill was appointed as the Museum's first Oral Historian. She went on to initiate, manage and conduct further oral histories, exhibitions, publications and ran engaging and successful public programs. Jill firmly established the Museum's collection and her commitment to recording and preserving interviews ensured the collection continued to grow and that oral history became an integral part of QVMAG exhibitions. Jill's contribution here was exceptional. She was also a member of the Editorial Committee for *The Companion to Tasmanian History*.

In 1991, soon after being appointed as Oral Historian at QVMAG, Jill initiated the formation of the Tasmanian

Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia, now Oral History Tasmania. She has been either branch President or Secretary since its inception, and has edited the newsletter *Real to Reel* for most of that time. Jill has tirelessly contributed to the promotion of oral history practice in Tasmania. She has conducted annual oral history workshops in Hobart and Launceston, along with others around the state when requested. She has given talks about oral history to many groups from historical associations to school groups and has contributed a number of oral history papers to conferences and seminars. Jill ran a local oral history symposium for Deviot – the community where she lives. She has also played a central role in the national association, as President and as the Convener of two very successful national conferences. She has been a member of the national executive since 1991.

Jill has played a central and critical role in Tasmanian oral history. She continues to be the heart of Oral History Tasmania and has generously mentored many Tasmanian Oral Historians.

Sue Anderson
National President
Oral History Australia

Notes on Contributors

Sindiso Bhebhe

Sindiso Bhebhe is a Principal Archivist at the National Archives of Zimbabwe, under the auspices of the Ministry of Home Affairs. He holds a Master's degree in Library and Information Science and is a former high school language teacher. Sindiso is deeply involved in the Oral History Programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. He has written, presented and published academic articles in local and international forums. He is also a researcher with the InterPARES Trust, a multi-national, interdisciplinary research project exploring issues concerning digital records and data entrusted to the Internet.

Sharee Cordes

Sharee Cordes is an oral history consultant with her business, 'The Story Collector,' in Brisbane and is also the oral history co-ordinator for the Wynnum Manly Historical Society. She is currently studying for her Master of Museum Studies where she is researching the benefits of using oral histories and digital stories in museums.

Margaret Dawson

Margaret Dawson is President of the Busselton Oral History Group (Inc), a member of the Busselton Historical Society and a committee member of the Busselton Settlement Art Project. After graduating from Claremont Teacher's College in 1960, teaching, raising a family and involvement in many community organisations, Margaret began recording oral histories in 1985 with people from all walks of life including early settlers, individuals involved with the Busselton Jetty, Group Settlement, fishing, timber and wine industries and a funded series with immigrants. She also recorded the soundtrack for three Busselton Historical Society historic film displays. Margaret has an avid interest in family history and has put together many articles for her family and made numerous presentations to groups on behalf of the Busselton Oral History Group.

Brenda Gifford

Brenda Gifford is an Aboriginal woman from the NSW South Coast and a member of the Yuin nation. She is

passionate about her work with the National Film and Sound Archives First Voices Program and Aboriginal music, helping capture Aboriginal musicians' stories and putting them on the record at the NFSA. She believes music gives voice to our concerns, frustrations, hopes and aspirations, and can be part of the healing process for Aboriginal people. Brenda has 20 years' extensive experience as a musician. She wrote the sleeve notes for the reissue of The Loner album by Uncle Vic Simms on the Sandman record label. Brenda enjoys working with an all-Indigenous team on the The First Voices Program which celebrates and showcases the stories of Australia's First Peoples and captures the multitude of layers of stories through the voices of First Peoples musicians, filmmakers, actors, broadcasters and cultural knowledge holders. Through these stories we celebrate the unique place Indigenous cultural expression plays within Australia's audio-visual history.

Judy Hughes

Judy Hughes is a journalist and communications professional currently undertaking a Master of Arts at Monash University exploring the work practices of Melbourne journalists from the late 1970s to the present day. Judy's work for *The Australian* newspaper and Australian Associated Press in the 1980s and 1990s featured specialist reporting on State and Federal Parliament and industrial relations. In 1999 she established the media and communications role at the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (now the Fair Work Commission) and over the following 13 years managed a broad range of communication and educational activities for the Tribunal. This work included audio-visual oral history interviews as well as developing several online and physical educational exhibitions. In 2015 Judy worked with the Young Christian Workers Archive to produce a short You Tube video combining audio oral history extracts with illustrations and animation, which was commended in Oral History Victoria's inaugural Community Innovation Award.

Randa Kaldas

Randa Kaldas is Associate director at the Economic and Business History Research Center (EBHRC) at the

American University in Cairo (AUC). Her studies for a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and a Master of Arts in Economics (International Development) sparked her interest in oral history and she now holds training sessions on oral history to students of a 'Business and Politics' course that draws on the Center's narratives of people who played a pivotal role in Egypt's public policy and enterprise since the 1950s. Randa led the EBHRC team in contributing more than 70 hours of narrative to the University's 'University on the Square: Documenting Egypt's 21st Century Revolution' project on the 2011 revolution. Randa has presented at several international conferences, including in a plenary session of the International Oral History Conference in Barcelona in 2014. She is a past editor of EBHRC's periodic publication, *the Chronicles*.

Dr Wendy Madsen

Wendy Madsen has been researching the history of health for almost 20 years. Initially focussed on the history of nursing, she has more recently shifted her interest to historical and contemporary community-based health promotion, including community resilience.

Cate Pattison

Cate Pattison studied communication and cultural studies at Murdoch University, Western Australia before embarking for London where she worked in public broadcasting media research for ten years. Upon returning to Perth she developed her love of social research and began a career in community history, publishing commissioned work in education, resources and mental health. She also works as a freelance oral historian for the Grove Library, and as a part-time researcher in the Business School at the University of Western Australia.

Dr Bob Reece

Bob Reece is Professor Emeritus in History at Murdoch University, Western Australia, where he taught from 1978 until 2012 apart from three years as Keith Cameron Professor of Australian History at University College, Dublin. His first publications were in Aboriginal History, notably *Aborigines and Colonists* (1974) and 'Inventing Aborigines' (1987). His time in Ireland resulted in the publication of three edited collections of Irish convict biographies (1989, 1991, 1993) and *The Origins of Irish Convict Transportation to New South Wales* (2001). The Irish interest was also pursued in 'The Irish and the Aborigines' (2000) and a biography of Daisy Bates (2007) for the National Library, where he held a Harold White Fellowship in 2005. More recently, he has published articles on the history of the Benedictine Aboriginal mission at New Norcia, and *The Invincibles: New Norcia's Aboriginal Cricketers 1879-1906* (2014). He has also published extensively on

the history of Sarawak (Borneo) on which he wrote his doctoral dissertation (1977), his books on the subject being *The Name of Brooke* (1982), *Datu Bandar* (1991), *Masa Jepun* (1998), and *The White Rajahs* (2004).

Margaret Ridley

Margaret has a Bachelor of Arts, LLB (Hons), two Graduate Diplomas and a Masters of Cultural Heritage, from which her interest in oral history arose. Margaret has worked as a legal academic, law librarian and as an equity officer at the Queensland University of Technology. Currently, she is a co-facilitator in cultural competence training at the University. Her recent publications have addressed equal opportunity in legal practice. Her commitment to social justice has been reinforced by being a member of the community of St Mary's in Exile and her board membership of Micah Projects Inc. Margaret is President of Oral History Queensland.

David Sweet

David holds a degree in Mass Communication and a Masters of Communication and is a lecturer and tutor at the University of South Australia in the final stages of his PhD on oral history and family photographs. On leaving high school he spent three and a half years at the Police Academy, Fort Largs, and then served as a Police Constable in South Australia. In the late 1960s he joined the Royal Papuan New Guinea Constabulary, returning to Adelaide in 1972. A change of career saw David as a member of the Metropolitan Fire Service for thirteen years, where he established the Service's first media liaison and public relations function. With another career move in 1985, David spent the next twenty-five years working in corporate communication in public transport and energy, both in Adelaide and Perth. David is currently National Secretary of Oral History Australia.

Elena (Lena) Volkova

Elena is a graduate of the Moscow State University and employee of the Russian State Literary Museum, where she interviewed writers, poets, artists and other significant figures of Russian cultural life. She then embarked on her own projects recording life stories with survivors of the GULAGs and WWII veterans. She continued this theme with a weekly program at the *Echo of Moscow* radio station and in founding the *Echo of Moscow* Radio Archive. In Australia she has interviewed for the Australian War Memorial, curated the exhibition *Australians caring for refugees*, acted as Research Assistant for *The Difficult Return* project and as an interviewer for the *Australian Generations* project. A former President of OHA Queensland, she is currently studying Transmedia Storytelling at the Queensland University of Technology.

ORAL HISTORY AUSTRALIA INC

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2015

	Notes	2015 \$	2014 \$
INCOME			
Capitation Fee	4	8,070	8,505
Standing Orders		1,907	1,405
Royalties and Copyright Council	5	408	1,956
Journal		40	50
Interest Income		484	39
		10,909	11,955
EXPENSES			
Direct Cost			
Standing Orders Distribution	6	(3,700)	-
Journal Printing and Postage	7	(7,332)	(5,988)
Royalties and Copyright		-	(842)
		(11,032)	(6,830)
Operational Expense			
Bookkeeping Fee		(125)	-
Website		(871)	(879)
Meeting Expense		(392)	(721)
Insurance		(1,357)	-
Legal Cost		(86)	(2,500)
Sundry		(142)	(8,748)
		(2,973)	(12,848)
Total Expenses		(14,005)	(19,678)
Net Surplus / (Deficit) for the year		(3,096)	(7,723)

* Amount is presented as reported on Financial Year 2013-14.

BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 30 of June 2015

	Notes	2015 \$	2014 \$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and Cash Equivalents	2	30,370	30,687
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		30,370	30,687
TOTAL ASSETS		30,370	30,687
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade Creditors	3	2,779	-
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		2,779	-
NET ASSTES		27,591	30,687
EQUITY			
Retain Earnings		30,687	38,410
Net Profit / (Loss)		(3,096)	(7,723)
TOTAL EQUITY		27,591	30,687

Membership information

Oral History Australia

(formerly the Oral History Association of Australia)



The Oral History Association of Australia was established in 1978 and was renamed Oral History Australia in 2013. The objectives of the Association are to:

- Promote the practice and methods of oral history
- Educate in the use of oral history methods
- Encourage discussion of all problems in oral history
- Foster the preservation of oral history records in Australia
- Share information about oral history projects.

Branch seminars and workshops are held regularly throughout the year, while a national conference is held every two years. Many of the papers from conferences appear in the OHA Journal. Members receive a copy of the annual Oral History Australia Journal and newsletters and publications from their individual branches. Among other publications, the South Australian Branch of Oral History Australia has published the Oral History Handbook by Beth M Robertson, which is available to members at a discounted rate.

The Oral History Australia website can be found at: www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au. National enquiries can be made to the Secretary at secretary@oralhistoryaustralia.org.au. Enquiries should be directed to State member associations at the following addresses:

ACT

Incorporated into the New South Wales association.

New South Wales

President: Professor Paula Hamilton
Oral History Association of Australia NSW Inc.
PO Box 261
Pennant Hills NSW 1715
Email: secretary@ohaansw.org.au
Phone: 02 8094 1239
Website: www.ohaansw.org.au

Northern Territory

Incorporated into the South Australian Branch

Queensland

President: Margaret Ridley
PO Box 12213 George Street
Brisbane Qld 4003
Email: president@ohaaqld.org.au
Website: www.ohq.org.au

South Australia

President: June Edwards
PO Box 3113,
Unley SA 5061
Email: ejune32@yahoo.com
Website: www.oralhistoryaustraliasant.org.au

Tasmania

President: Jill Cassidy
c/- Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery,
PO Box 403,
Launceston Tas 7250
Mobile: 0418 178 098
Email: mandjcassidy@gmail.com

Victoria

President: Professor Alistair Thomson
School of Philosophical, Historical and International
Studies
Monash University
Clayton Vic 3800
Email: Alistair.Thomson@monash.edu
Website: www.oralhistoryvictoria.org.au

Western Australia

President: Doug Ayre
PO Box 1065,
Nedlands WA 6909
Email: ohaawa@gmail.com
Website: www.ohaa-wa.com.au

CALL FOR PAPERS

Contributions are invited from Australia and overseas for publication in the OHA
Journal No. 38, 2016

Fast Forward: Oral History in a Time of Change

Contributions are invited in the following three categories:

A Papers on the themes of the OHA's Biennial National Conference, 9-12 September 2015, at the State Library of Western Australia in Perth. (*limit 5,500 words*). Precise themes are yet to be decided, but will focus on the broad theme of rapid change as we are currently experiencing in the field.

Peer Review

If requested by authors, papers in Category A may be submitted to the OHA Editorial Board for peer review.

However, note these important points:

- Papers for peer review must show a high standard of scholarship, and reflect a sound appreciation of current and historical issues on the topics discussed.
- Papers for peer review may be submitted at any time; however, if not received by the Editorial Board by the deadline for submissions of 28 February 2016, they may not be processed in time for publication in the 2016 issue of the *Journal*. Furthermore, regardless of when offers are forwarded to the Committee, the review process may not necessarily be completed in time for publication in the next available *Journal* due to time constraints of reviewers.
- Before being submitted for peer review, papers will first be assessed for suitability by the OHA Editorial Board (which comprises the Chair, the Journal Editor and two other panellists). Authors will be advised by the Chair of the outcome.

Deadline for submissions for peer review: 28 February 2016. Forward to:

Dr Ariella Van Luyn, Chair, OHA Editorial Board, Email: ariella.vanluyn@jcu.edu.au, mobile: 0401925228.

B Articles/Project reports: articles describing specific projects or conference reports, the information gained through them, and principal outcomes or practice issues identified in the process (*limit: 4,000 words*).

Deadline for submissions: 1 April 2016. Forward to: Dr Sue Anderson, General Editor, OHA *Journal*, Email: Sue.Anderson@unisa.edu.au.

C Reviews of books and other publications in Australia or elsewhere that are of interest to the

oral history community (*limit: 1,500 words*). This may include reviews of static or internet available exhibitions, or any projects presented for a public audience.

Deadline for submissions: 1 April 2016. Forward to: Dr Jayne Persian, Reviews Editor, OHA *Journal*, Email: Jayne.Persian@sydney.edu.au.

Accompanying Materials

Photographs, drawings and other illustrations are particularly welcome, and may be offered

for any of the above categories of contribution.