Moving Memories: Oral Histories in a Global World

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

OHA

Journal No. 40, 2018

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Editor's notes

It is with regret that this will be my last edition of the Oral History Australia Journal. After eight years, it is time for someone else to learn the ropes and take over the task. While the word 'task' might sound as if the job is onerous, but I have thoroughly enjoyed reading about the work of fellow oral historians from around the country and around the globe, making suggestions, seeing the articles develop and then bringing them into print. Something a bit like oral history recording, the relationship I have developed with contributors has been intimate and rewarding.

Of course, I have not undertaken this work alone. I have been supported by a thoughtful and collegiate Editorial Board, led for the most part by former Chair, Dr Ariella van Luyn, who handled the post assiduously, and now by Dr Francesco Ricatti. Whilst the composition of the Board has changed over the years, I would like to acknowledge the great support received from Beth Robertson, who has been a member of the Editorial Board for many years and has given so much to oral history generally over many decades, Associate Professor Janis Wilton, Bill Bunbury and Francis Good, all of whom have handled the work very professionally.

I also thank Reviews Editors, Dr Maryanne Jebb, Dr Jayne Persian and the current Reviews Editor, Dr Gemmia Burden. Their work in soliciting book reviews has alleviated my load considerably.

While we await the appointment of a new editor, I contemplate how change is a good thing. With fresh eyes come new ideas and new approaches. I look forward eagerly to see what these might be. In the meantime, I would encourage you to submit your articles, either for peer-review or as a project report, so that the new Editor has plenty to work with. You will notice from the Call for Papers in this issue that the 2019 Journal will be a special edition on Oral History and the Emotions. However, this does not mean that we will not consider papers on other themes, which can be published in a second section. The Journal has been online since 2017, which means that we are able to extend submission dates, so you have plenty of time to think and write!

I hope that enthusiasm for oral history and our wonderful Journal continues to flourish into the future.

Sue Anderson

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Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place: making digital stories with youth in Bundaberg

Sasha Mackay

Abstract

This article describes a digital storytelling project involving Indigenous high school students in regional Queensland. 'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place' was delivered by Bundaberg-based arts company Creative Regions and comprised a series of life storytelling and digital media skills-development workshops, concluding with a public screening of young people's personal narratives. This article outlines the project's practices, the challenges experienced, and the outcomes for the project's participants, facilitators, and partnering organisations. The project is an example of some of the challenges and limitations of digital storytelling in institutional contexts such as schools, yet also demonstrates the continued value of the form as a means of fostering feelings of self-worth and occasioning self-representations from underrepresented groups. This article provides many points of interest for community arts organisations and practitioners working in the fields of digital storytelling and life narrative.

Project overview

'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place' was a six-week digital storytelling program that encouraged Indigenous high school students to share personal stories about their lives and cultures. The project was developed through a partnership between community service provider UnitingCare Community (UCC) and Creative Regions, an arts production company based in Bundaberg. Specifically, the project was intended to complement UCC's Guwanu Community and School Engagement (CaSE) program which targeted Indigenous senior school students in the Bundaberg region.

Amongst the many objectives of UCC's CaSE program were the aims to foster stronger partnerships between schools and community, and to work closely with schools as well as the broader community to increase school attendance. Creative Regions consulted with Indigenous organisations in the Bundaberg region, four senior schools across the

region, employed two facilitators from Indigenous Corporation Stepping Black, and worked closely with UCC to develop a digital storytelling program that could meet a number of aims. Specifically, the program sought:

- to provide Indigenous students with an accessible, worthwhile, and enjoyable form of school-based participation, and thus align with the objectives of CaSE;
- to support the students to feel positive about their lives and stories;
- to teach them to use storytelling techniques and digital media to represent their own lives, stories and aspirations in their own voices;
- and to empower the students to feel their stories were valued by their families, teachers, peers and the broader Bundaberg community.

Creative Regions and Stepping Black facilitated a series of digital storytelling workshops inside schools and during school hours for six weeks. The

'What's your story?' Students brainstorming with facilitator Jenni Chew from Stepping Black. Photograph by author.

Scripting. Photograph by facilitator Jenni Chew.

workshop participants were Indigenous students aged between 13 and 17 who were involved in other aspects of UCC's CaSE program and were invited to participate in the digital storytelling program by their teachers and CaSE workers.

When the project began in April it had 19 student participants from across the four schools. Numbers decreased over the six weeks, though, and 12 participants saw the project through to its end. The challenges of maintaining students' involvement in the project and possible reasons for their disengagement are discussed later in this article.

Workshops were two hours in length and guided students through the processes of brainstorming, scripting and recording voiceovers, selecting and editing photographs, and using simple filmmaking software such as iMovie and Windows MovieMaker to assemble the voiceovers and photographs. A mini film festival concluded the project in June, and ten students' digital stories were screened to an audience of their families, teachers, project stakeholders, and members of the local Indigenous communities. The students' stories can be viewed here: https://vimeo.com/album/4015571

Project delivery: challenges and potentials

Digital storytelling represents a distinct methodology around life storytelling and media production. It is a workshop-based practice in which people create autobiographical narratives that are about two-three minutes in length, and made from a voiceover and still images – usually photographs the storyteller has brought from home.[1] Importantly, digital storytelling is not about training people in professional media production and digital stories are not expected to exhibit technological or design

expertise;[2] rather, the personal story, told in the storyteller's own voice, is regarded as central to the power and potential of the digital story.[3]

Much has been written about the value of digital storytelling as a means of amplifying the voices and experiences of minority groups and people whose lives have traditionally been represented by others.[4] As a workshop-based process that guided people to create and publish their own self-representational narratives and 'give voice' to their own hopes and aspirations, 'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place' reflected traditional philosophies and processes that have underpinned digital storytelling projects. Likewise, the project encompassed a number of the challenges of digital storytelling, including the struggle to foster meaningful participation in institutional contexts such as schools; the ways in which the objectives of stakeholders and facilitators influence the types of stories shared; and tensions around quality storytelling.

Working in schools

All the digital storytelling workshops were facilitated during school hours in the participating schools in order to align with the CaSE program's objectives around school attendance and engagement. Workshop facilitators from Creative Regions and Stepping Black also thought school-based workshops would be convenient for teachers, parents and students as no one would have to travel to workshops, and this could result in a higher rate of workshop attendance. However, the school context for workshops created two specific challenges for the facilitators and the student participants: facilitators were heavily dependent on school facilities and specific school personnel, and so experienced difficulties when those people were absent; and for the students, the school environment and the compulsory nature of the digital storytelling workshops did not seem conducive to the project's aims to empower participants.

Creative Regions and Stepping Black had a specific contact person at each school who booked the rooms for workshops, excused students from their normal classes, and gave facilitators access to computers, scanners and printers. When the key contact at one school was transferred and not replaced, there was no designated teacher to bring the students to the digital storytelling workshops, book rooms, or assist with equipment. While other teachers at the school were supportive and tried to assist, they were unfamiliar with the project and its participants and could therefore only offer minimal assistance.

Photography 101 with Luke Barrowcliffe from Stepping Black. Photograph by facilitator Jenni Chew.

While staffing changes were not the only school-based challenge affecting students' participation, the loss of one key contact appeared to impact significantly on the number of students attending workshops in that school. The first digital storytelling workshop facilitated in the school had seven participants, but numbers dwindled as soon as there was no teacher ensuring the students' attendance. By the end of the project, only one of the school's students had participated consistently enough to complete a digital story for screening at the mini film festival.

Leaving normal classes to attend the digital storytelling workshops every week was problematic for some of the students, mostly because it estranged them from their peers. Although the majority of students were dedicated workshop participants who appeared to enjoy working with Creative Regions and Stepping Black, and became deeply invested in the storytelling and digital media processes, several students were reluctant participants. For those students, the project seemed to contribute to social problems because it distanced them from their friends. On one occasion, a student described being unwilling to leave her classes and friends to attend the workshops. On another occasion, a teacher suggested peer pressure was an issue for a participant whose friends had specifically asked her not to go to the workshops.

The influences of friends and the social pressures that affected young people's participation begins to suggest that the school environment was unconducive to the project's aims to empower the students and inspire their positive self-representation. School can seem a place of limitations, rules and strictures and be ultimately disempowering for some students. Many of the young people who were involved in this project had poor experiences of school and did not feel they were good students. Their negative feelings towards school may have meant they struggled to feel positive about the digital storytelling workshops, which could have seemed like just another school activity that was required of them. Since students' participation was heavily encouraged – if not enforced – by teachers and other adults, it seems unlikely participants could have experienced the workshop environment as a supportive, empowering space in which they could freely author and express their own self-representations.

Describing digital storytelling workshops facilitated in a community technology centre called Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth (DUSTY) in West Oakland, Hull and Katz[5] emphasise the importance of social context and a supportive environment for fostering participation and enabling people to feel positively towards their lives and stories. One participant at DUSTY, thirteen year-old Dara, was a shy and discontented school student who never did any work in the classroom.[6] At DUSTY, however, Dara developed self-confidence and became a hard-working participant, eager to learn and to assist others. For Dara, a supportive social space

outside of school was central to her developing a positive sense of self and the feelings of autonomy necessary for authoring meaningful stories about her life. While Hull and Katz do not wish to imply that adolescents cannot develop or represent positive senses of self within traditional schooling, they surmise that 'alternative spaces for learning' can sometimes effectively support adolescents' interests in learning and enable them to develop feelings of self-worth.[7]

One of the aims of 'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place' was to provide an enjoyable form of school-based participation; however, the challenges the school environment posed for students as well as facilitators suggests that workshops run outside of school would have been more effective for supporting disengaged students to willingly learn narrative and technological skills. Outside of school workshops may have felt like 'freer' or less restrictive environments for creativity, alleviated some of the social concerns the students had, and would perhaps have resulted in a form of participation that was more meaningful for participants.

Facilitating self-representation: whose story is it?

'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place' sought to fulfil the objectives of a number of organisations and individuals, including the aims of UCC and the CaSE program, the partnering schools and teachers, and the personal hopes and intentions of Creative Regions and facilitators from Stepping Black. These multiple objectives underpinned the project and shaped participants' storytelling in explicit ways. For example, it was important to the project that students created stories that had a tone of optimism or that represented the positive aspects of their lives. Hence, workshop facilitators and the assisting teachers guided students to create personal stories that focussed on their positive experiences and aspirations, steering them away from negative thoughts and memories.

Encouraging students to create and share specific kinds of stories and to represent themselves in certain ways were not necessarily problematic aspects of the project. As numerous researchers and practitioners attest, digital storytelling projects are not neutral environments in which personal narratives and self-representations simply occur; rather, stories are produced at the intersection of multiple and sometimes conflicting intentions, including those of facilitators, participants and organisations.[8] It is therefore natural that particular projects will solicit and produce specific kinds of

Photo selection. Photograph by author.

digital stories. Nonetheless, negotiating multiple intentions and trying to ensure participants' stories meet numerous objectives can produce challenges for facilitators, as well as participants.

One such challenge arose when a teacher edited his student's script in an attempt to ensure 'it didn't give the wrong impression'. The storyteller had written 'my family and I trust each other because we can keep each other's secrets'. The teacher removed the sentence, concerned it suggested the student was sly and his family had something to hide. This was an ethical concern for some facilitators. While 'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place' hoped to provide students with an opportunity to represent their own lives – seemingly on their own terms – the project's aims and the intentions of those involved shaped the kinds of stories that were shared.

In addition to ensuring the young people produced stories about positive experiences, workshop facilitators also felt pressured to ensure their completed stories met a certain level of quality. There was always a temptation for facilitators to edit the stories to make them look and sound more professional. The digital stories would be screened at the local entertainment centre to an audience of project stakeholders, teachers, parents and friends, and possibly members of the broader public. As such, the students' digital narratives had to be 'good stories'.

Tensions around quality appear common in digital storytelling projects, particularly those facilitated by media professionals.[9] Ensuring stories follow a narrative arc, have a turning point and closure are amongst the expectations that tend to define a 'good' digital story.[10] In 'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place', good visual and sound quality were also

Students receiving participation awards at the mini film festival. Photograph by Paul Beutel Photography.

important as the stories were to be shown in a theatre. Once again, though, editing students' stories raised ethical questions. While adjusting story content and audio and visual quality may have made the students' stories more appealing to audiences, it may also have impacted the extent to which the storytellers felt their stories were authentic depictions of their lives, and products of their own creation.

The project's successes

'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place' encompassed numerous challenges, and yet it also achieved some very positive outcomes for the participants, facilitators and project stakeholders. The project's successes can be categorised under the following broad themes: educational and learning outcomes; and increased self-confidence and self-esteem.

Digital storytelling is a straightforward form of narrative and media production and in this project it provided the students with an opportunity to develop their storytelling skills and learn simple filmmaking techniques. Many of the students involved in this project had not experimented with a range of digital media and were mostly unfamiliar with software such as iMovie. Since digital storytelling does not require prior knowledge of filmmaking software, or for students to have advanced writing or storytelling skills, it provided an accessible medium for teaching digital and narrative techniques.

The project's contribution to students' learning and skills-development were evidenced in the feedback facilitators received from parents and teachers. For example, a parent emailed Creative Regions to thank all project facilitators for the digital storytelling workshops and mentioned that her son had made two more digital stories at home in his own time. One of these stories was about himself, and another was about his grandmother. That the student felt confident enough with the technologies (digital photos, audio recording software and Windows MovieMaker) to use them outside of the workshop environment, and also felt his personal stories were valuable enough to record, suggested that the project had achieved two of its core objectives: to teach participants the narrative and technical skills that would enable them to represent their lives and express their voices to others; and to support young people to feel their stories were important and worth telling.

Research in health and social sciences demonstrates that life narratives are processes of meaning-making for storytellers, enabling them to work out how to be in the world and what to do.[11] Further, narrating one's experiences 'means that events and lives are affirmed as being worth telling and thus worth living'.[12] The possibility that the processes of digital storytelling had contributed to participants' developing self-confidence and pride towards their lives and their abilities as storytellers seemed especially clear for five students whose demeanour during workshops improved over the weeks.

Five students from one school had been very unsettled, uncommunicative and difficult to engage during the first two workshops. Writing and script-development was very difficult for some students, and facilitators assisted by scribing while the students told stories about themselves verbally. Despite these challenges, the students became very dedicated to their stories as the weeks passed. Each student was passionate about getting his or her story 'right' and they spent a lot of time perfecting their voiceover scripts and selecting the images most appropriate to the narratives. While earlier workshops had been noisy and disrupted, later workshops were very quiet as the students worked individually and silently to finish their stories for the film festival.

The mini film festival was held on a weeknight and the students were encouraged to attend with their families. Not all of the project participants attended and, interestingly, it was the students who had originally been the most difficult to engage who came along with their parents, siblings and teachers. They were proud to see their stories on the big screen and to receive their certificates of participation. Their class teacher reported that they had been excited about the event at school that day, had shown their stories to their friends at school, and that overall the project had been a 'thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile experience' for them.

The mini film festival was effective in that it encouraged the students to feel their stories were valued by their families, teachers and in their communities, and it also clearly aligned with the CaSE program's aims to connect schools with communities. Although the process of delivering digital storytelling workshops had often been challenging, the mini film festival was a very positive experience for facilitators, participants, and was warmly received by the project's stakeholders. One hundred and fourteen people attended the event – a mixture of the students and their families, teachers and school staff, stakeholders from UCC, as well as a large contingent of the general public. The students' digital stories were screened alongside three short, professionally produced documentaries depicting the experiences of an Indigenous elder and two adults who live in the Bundaberg region. As such, the evening offered a multi-generational, multi-perspective insight into the lives and stories of local people.

Survey, email feedback, and oral and written testimonials indicated that the audience found the event deeply meaningful, and an honest, authentic representation of Indigenous experiences. For example, as an audience member wrote on a survey at the event, 'thank you. It was very touching and candid'. Another commented that their favourite part of the event was 'the honesty and passion delivered by the presenters'. A project stakeholder from UCC valued that the event brought a community together to celebrate the lives and stories of Indigenous people. For Creative Regions and Stepping Black, the warm, community atmosphere and sense of goodwill at the mini film festival, in addition to the students' pride, meant that the project concluded on a positive note.

Conclusions:

The challenges and successful outcomes outlined in this article represent some valuable learning opportunities for Creative Regions, and for other organisations or practitioners who facilitate digital storytelling projects. For minority groups such as Indigenous youth, digital stories continue to be useful tools for personal expression and for amplifying individual voices and experiences within communities. Further, events such as the mini film festival that concluded this project have the potential to broaden public understanding of other people's lives, including their particular interests and aspirations.

The often-challenging processes of 'Indigenous Stories, Stories of Place' suggest a number of key areas for facilitators to be mindful of when delivering digital storytelling projects such as this. Firstly, the context for workshops is fundamental. Workshop environments in which participants feel comfortable are important for fostering meaningful participation, self-confidence, and for enabling the digital storytelling process to be empowering. Secondly, facilitators and stakeholders need to be mindful of the ways their objectives inevitably shape and frame participants' storytelling. This means being realistic about the extent to which participants can exercise control over their storytelling, and hence the project's capacity to facilitate 'authentic' self-representation. Thirdly, ensuring quality story content should never come at the expense of disregarding or dishonouring a participant's own intentions for their digital stories, especially in projects that seek to build self-esteem or empower.

(Endnotes)

1   Jean Burgess, 'Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2006, p. 207.

2   Joe Lambert, 'Where It All Started: The Center for Digital Storytelling in California', in John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (eds), *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the*

World, Wiley Blackwell, West Sussex, 2009, p. 87.

3   Jean Burgess, 'Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol 20, no. 2, 2006, p. 207; Anna Poletti, 'Coaxing an intimate public: Life narrative in digital storytelling', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2011, p. 74.

4   There is a wide body of literature on digital storytelling's potential for groups of people who have traditionally had limited opportunities for self-representation and self-expression. Notable examples include John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (eds), *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World*, Wiley Blackwell, West Sussex, 2009; Jo Tacchi, 'Open content creation: the issues of voice and the challenges of listening', *New Media & Society*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2012, pp. 652-668; Glynda Hull and Mira-Lisa Katz, 'Crafting an Agentive Self: Case Studies of Digital Storytelling', *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 43-81; Donna Hancox, 'The Process of Remembering with the Forgotten Australians: Digital Storytelling and Marginalised Groups', *Human Technology*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2012, pp. 65-76.

5   Glynda Hull and Mira-Lisa Katz, 'Crafting an Agentive Self: Case Studies of Digital Storytelling', *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2006, pp. 43-81.

6   *Ibid*, pp. 61-62.

7   *Ibid*, p. 61.

8   Lara Worcester, 'Reframing Digital Storytelling as Co-creative', *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 43, no. 5, p. 91, 2012; Lisa Dush, 'The ethical complexities of sponsored digital storytelling', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, no. 6, pp. 627-628, 2013; Nancy Thumim, *Self-Representation and Digital Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2012, p. 54; Sasha Mackay, 'Storytelling and New Media Technologies: investigating the potential of the ABC's Heywire for regional youth', *QUT Doctoral Thesis*, 2015, p. 157.

9   See, for example Nancy Thumim, '"Everyone has a story to tell" - Mediation and self-representation in two UK institutions', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2009, p. 630; Sasha Mackay and Elizabeth Heck, 'Capturing the authentic voice: challenges and opportunities for voice in two ABC storytelling projects', *LinQ*, vol. 40, 2013, pp. 87-89; Sasha Mackay, 'Storytelling and New Media Technologies: investigating the potential of the ABC's Heywire for regional youth', *QUT Doctoral Thesis*, 2015, pp. 108-109.

10   Anna Poletti, 'Coaxing an intimate public: Life narrative in digital storytelling', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2011, p. 78.

11   Lyn Harter, Phyllis Japp and Christina Beck (eds), *Narratives, Health and Healing: Communication Theory, Research, and Practice*, Routledge, New York, 2008, p. 10.

12   Arthur Frank, 'Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002, p. 111.

Community Development and Community Memory – Remembering Racism?

Margaret Ridley

Abstract

Many community development projects have used oral history to shape a collective memory and to reflect identity. Community memories may be influenced by a collective reticence to speak of social disharmony or division. The persistent myth of egalitarianism in Australia allows little acknowledgement of the presence and consequences of racism. This may account in some degree for its absence from oral histories. This article considers how this absence may buttress Western cultural hegemony and how oral historians may be inadvertently advancing a discourse of tolerance particularly in community development projects.

Introduction

I gave a paper at last year's national conference titled 'Community Development and Community Memory'. The paper described a community development project which showcased the residents of Logan. Logan is a Queensland city just south of Brisbane. It is one of Australia's most multicultural communities with a reputation for poverty and crime. The Queensland Music Festival (QMF) produced and directed *Under this Sky* in Logan in 2015. It was designed to provide a counternarrative of the city through a celebration of its residents' talents. While I did not attend the event, Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) made a documentary about the production. It used first person narratives. I felt a sense of unease when I watched the documentary, prompted by my understanding of racism. I know quite a bit about racism as I work in Equity Services at the Queensland University of Technology and part of my role is to deliver cultural competence training to the university's staff. It seemed to me that members of Australia's dominant cultural group came to Logan to show the locals how to get along. While not overt, this is subtle racism. The implication is that Western cultural practices are preferable. Also, racism was never mentioned. I may appear to be offering a provocative assessment discounting the benefits of a joyous and celebratory event. However, I am going to risk being described as a kill-joy so that I can prompt discussions about the implications of an Australian

cultural reticence to speak about racism. I want to demonstrate how this cultural reticence supports the power and privilege of Western epistemologies and how this has implications for the use of oral histories in community development.

Reticence

One of the sessions at the recent International Oral History Association Conference in Finland was titled, 'Silence in Memory, Silenced Memories'. Accounts were given of collective silences. Reticence is used to describe what is 'unsaid' by interviewees. Alistair Thomson describes how particular public groups can be repressive 'in the construction of meaning and identity'.[1] These public groups may influence what goes unsaid, perhaps creating social taboos. Lenore Layman has described four categories of reticence in oral history interviews.[2] Two of these are pertinent to this article – 'that which is painful or disturbing to discuss and that which did not fit with public, commemorative memory.'[3] In Australia, there is a collective reluctance or reticence to speak about racism.[4] Back in 1991, Janis Wilton[5] considered how Chinese Australians were unwilling or reluctant to talk about discrimination. Wilton identifies a range of possible reasons for this reticence which align with Layman's categorisation. She notes:

> The unspoken pressure here is to refrain from making comments which could reflect negatively on the town, neighbours or clients because they are their town, neighbours and clients'.[6]

Jacqueline Nelson uses the term 'place defending' and describes its consequences for anti-racist community development.[7] If racism is absent from the questions asked or the answers given, then it appears that racism does not exist or is not as influential in the life outcomes for those who experience it.

Racism

Racism is more than just words or actions. It also includes the invisible barriers, big and small, that can

prevent people from doing as well in life as others simply because of their cultural background.[8]

The Challenging Racism Project 2015 – 2016[9] conducted by the University of Western Sydney found that 17% of the six thousand Australian respondents had experienced racism in the last twelve months. Dr Amanuel Elias from the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation found the economic cost to Australia of racial discrimination during the decade from 2001 – 2011 was $44.9 billion.[10] Racism has been part of Australia's history since it was colonised by the British.[11] The White Australia Policy, instigated as one of the first two enactments following Federation in the form of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (which sought to exclude all non-Europeans), was its most overt demonstration. This policy was in practice for three quarters of the 20th century.

Today, racial vilification is illegal and direct racism is decried in public discourse.[12] A pervasive Australian cultural defensiveness discourages questions and shapes answers about racism[13]. Illustrative was Senator Ian Macdonald's recent observation in a Senate Committee meeting:

> I might live in a bubble perhaps, but I find it very difficult to find any but very rare cases of racism in Australia.[14]

Senator Macdonald's comment ignores the subtle acts of racism that people from non-dominant cultures experience every day. Racism studies use the term 'micro-aggression' to describe these perennial, oblique putdowns[15]. It might be describing Australia's history as young or commending someone whose ethnic background is Chinese about their command of English. Microaggression works to position non-dominant cultures as the other and this has a significant impact upon life chances. Andrew Leigh's research about applying for jobs when one's name is not Anglo-Saxon is revealing[16]. What is the significance of this explanation of racism for oral historians? We may be perpetrators, albeit without intention.

Discourse analysis assists in understanding why accounts of racism may rarely appear in Australian oral histories. Jacqueline Nelson describes an Australian 'discourse of tolerance[17] in which racism is not mentioned, and harmony is emphasised. The avoidance of acknowledging racism occurs at a political and an individual level. 'Place defending' works to have public programs framed around the advancement of social cohesion rather than as initiatives to combat racism.[18] As a result, we have such events as Harmony Day, celebrated on 21st March with the motto 'Everyone Belongs'. Individual narratives reflect the influence of the discourse of tolerance. This discourse frames memory and identity by providing a language that excludes the acknowledgement of racism or its consequences. As Janis Wilton observed,

her interviewees described racism as something in the past, that things had improved, and the community was better assimilated.[19] So, the consequence is that community development that uses oral history may inadvertently discount the impact of racism because people who come from non-dominant ethnic groups are reticent to articulate their experiences of discrimination. Interviews may support or reflect a discourse of tolerance because both interviewers and interviewees are averse from discussing disharmony. It serves the power dynamic between dominant and non-dominant groups to emphasise social cohesion and to downplay racism.

Community Development

Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives.[20] Oral histories have been an important part of many community development projects.[21] They are particularly useful in articulating identity. Oral histories can challenge single narrative accounts of the past.

However, Wendy Madsen, Sarah McNicol and Cathy O'Mullan warn of the difficulty in producing a community's collective memory 'when one group tries to co-opt the narrative in some way, either omitting or over-emphasising the stories of specific groups'.[22] Standpoint theory suggests that representatives of the dominant culture will co-opt the narrative to advance their truths. Those who hold power and privilege secure their position by arguing that their truth is objective and neutral.[23] Indeed, these narratives may conform to familiar tropes such as the resilient settler or the hard-working immigrant. Racism is denied, discounted or omitted. Indeed, Madsen, McNicol and O'Mullan say of their oral history projects in the Wide Bay-Burnett region of South East Queensland that the communities had not 'experienced significant physical, cultural or social trauma in their pasts'.[24] A cursory search of the internet will show that the Wide Bay-Burnett region was a site of frontier violence and dispossession. Many of the Indigenous people of the area were removed to the Cherbourg Mission where they suffered deprivation and abuse. This dispossession and violence will have had inter-generational repercussions that continue to have resonance. To omit this history from the narratives included in these community development projects is to dismiss its significance. It a history that does not sit easily with stories of a harmonious community who banded together in times of adversity. It is a history at odds with a community identity of tolerance and inclusion. It is a history that challenges the existing

City of Logan. Photograph by Caitlin Clifford.

social order reliant upon a sovereignty that was never ceded.

Madsen, McNicol and O'Mullan are advocates for community oral history projects to build social cohesion.[25] It seems straightforward, that a celebratory community development activity will soothe past wrongs and pave the way for harmony. However, Madsen, McNicol and O'Mullan acknowledge that 'the relationship between researcher and community members needs to be negotiated along intellectual, cultural and purpose lines'.[26] I would argue that what needs to be acknowledged and negotiated is the dynamics between dominant and non-dominant cultures. As explained above, interviewees may be reticent to speak of racism and this suits the discourse of tolerance that buttresses the hegemony of Western cultural practices. Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson has written much about the implications of having Indigenous culture interpreted through the lens of Western epistemologies.[27] Being a white, middleclass woman, my explanation of these epistemological differences is entirely inadequate. However, I can point to collectivism rather than individualism. Many Indigenous groups regard history as a community asset to be revealed through complex cultural practices. Further, Neipa Mahuika says that Maori storytelling is an act of resistance to colonisation. He describes how 'indigenous communities have been turning to oral history as a means of decolonizing and repopulating popular nation making narratives that employ democracy as a myth of collective equality: one nation, one people'.[28] Community development projects often culminate in a performance or an edited volume of interviews or an exhibition. What needs to be asked is whether these epistemologies are imposed and whether they respect non-dominant ontologies.

Under this Sky

Under this Sky showcased the stories of members of the community of Logan. According to the 2016 Census, Logan has a population of 303,386 residents.[29] Twenty-six percent of these residents were born overseas and there are people from 217 different ethnic backgrounds. Media reports about Logan often focus upon crime and social disharmony. Under this Sky used 700 performers to tell a counternarrative. A stage was created at a local football club using the field as audience space. Participants were selected or auditioned by the Queensland Music Festival. David Burton, the show's director, gave the following description:

> The show boasts all original music, written by and for the community, featuring a cast of more than 700 and exploring a day in the life of this pulsing city. Musical genres mesh as gigantic puppets meet fire-twirlers, dancers face-off, solo guitarists play to night starts, whilst the full-throttle sound of hotted-up lawnmowers makes way for the thunderous rhythm of massed drummers.[30]

It sounds like a fantastic spectacular and the SBS documentary shows that it was. It showcased a community where its respect, resilience and inclusion could be witnessed by itself and others through a demonstration of its combined talents. Diversity was celebrated and framed as a community strength. Stories

were told by members of the community through song, poetry and soliloquy. They were stories of hope and courage. What was absent from these stories and from the production was any reference to racism or its consequences. What was notable in the documentary was the unchallenged position of the QMF as the authority on performance. My critique of *Under this Sky* is that it was an act of 'othering'. The language and format of the production positioned the performers as outsiders who needed the assistance of the QMF to show the world that their community is talented, proud and could get along. The show was framed as if the solution to the social problems of Logan could be solved by a demonstration of good behaviour and tolerance.

Under this Sky was curated through the eyes of outsiders with the privileged standpoint as authorities of cultural production. Performers were auditioned according to understandings of merit drawn from the QMF's expertise. Several star performers were selected to shine in the production. Stories of hope, resilience and redemption were framed in the epistemology of Western theatre. It would have been better for the production team to facilitate a community-led performance which was accepted rather than stage-managed. Logan had a vibrant cultural life before the QMF came to town. The language used to describe the performers was 'ordinary people' rather than fellow practitioners. Also, individualism is a Western precept. Perhaps the show may have been structured around collectivism where participation was based upon community assigned roles. It felt like the cultural practices of the community did not live up the QMF's standards. *Advance Australia Fair* was translated and performed in Yugambeh language. I am trying to imagine the standpoint of the local Aboriginal people. The national anthem of the colonisers is probably representative of their dispossession. From this perspective, the new version of the anthem is a pretence at tolerance and harmony masking the ongoing consequences of dispossession. One of the local Indigenous elders told her story but read from a script written by the show's director. Filtering her oral history sends a message that her ontology needs to be surrendered to be palatable to Western ideas of what will be entertaining theatre.

So, *Under this Sky*, without intention, added to a collective silence about racism. It perpetrated 'othering' by its application of Western epistemologies. The QMF's use of Western theatre precepts excluded the ontological practices of the community and denied them the opportunity to use these practices as an act of resistance. Oral historians need to consider their standpoint and the standpoint of their interviewees when using interviews for community development. They need to consider whether those interviews are being used to support familiar national myths such as egalitarianism and tolerance. They need to recognise how language is used to frame marginalised groups as 'the other' towards the maintenance the dominant culture's power. What may seem to be the promotion of community identity may be masking structural inequality and racism.

Conclusion

If racism is absent from oral histories, it is as if it did not exist. This observation has caused me to wonder about whether racism has ever featured in the stories told by Australians. I would like to do some research listening to oral history collections to chart whether anyone talks about experiencing racism and how it has affected their lives. It may be that these collections confirm what has been done more broadly in discourse analysis where racism is seen to be discounted or dismissed via a discourse of tolerance. If this proves to be the case, then it will have implications for oral historians who are from Australia's dominant Western culture. Acknowledging the risk of reticence about racism may be a starting point. The implications of this reticence in oral histories used in community development is significant. It would be counter to oral history's declared intention of giving a voice to the marginalised if interviews were used to reinforce the hegemony of the dominant via community development activities. *Under this Sky* showed me that care should be taken when outsiders drive community development. Consideration needs to be given about whose lens is being applied to represent a community's identity and whether that lens supports systemic inequality. The dilemma is that most communities will not want a 'black armband' version of their history. I am not sure that I have an easy answer, but a starting point may be a move away from representations of identity that support an Australian egalitarian myth.

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Access to oral histories in New South Wales public libraries

Ellen Forsyth

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight opportunities for public libraries collecting oral history. It will investigate the importance of effective cataloging and of adding holdings to the National Library of Australia's Trove database to enable wider dissemination. Having local oral history recordings in public libraries, as well as searchable through Trove and being able to be listened to anywhere demonstrates the value of digital technology in a global world.

Local studies collections in New South Wales public libraries

In late 2013 and early 2014 the State Library of New South Wales' Public Library Services and Library Services Divisions conducted an audit, via survey, of New South Wales public library local studies collections. The audit was completed by 116 of the then 152 councils in NSW.[1]

The public library collections of local studies material across the state has a combined total of at least 2.9 million items and over 21,329 metres. Fifty percent of this material has no record on Trove[2] and it cannot be found without searching specific library catalogues or websites. Less than 16% of local studies collections are fully searchable on Trove. This affects their wider availability, making it hard for people to connect information from different libraries together, or even to find material at their local library. Over 40% of the local councils surveyed had no digitisation program, and there is very limited digital original content being collected. The results of the audit indicate a need for increased digital collecting in public libraries. This is particularly important because of the amount of digital content being created each day in every community as people document their lives and their communities.

Audio and video content in local studies collections in New South Wales public libraries

Sound recordings and videos are collected by many New South Wales public libraries, however some of these collections are small. The number of analogue sound recordings in New South Wales public libraries is almost the same as the number of digital recordings. Many of the analogue recordings still need to be digitised for preservation and access.

The audit showed that there are low levels of collection of sound and video files in any format, as table 1 shows.

Obtaining oral histories for public libraries

There are several ways oral histories can be added to a library collection including creation by staff or volunteers, contracting for the recording/s or donation. For material which is recorded by staff, volunteers or obtained by contract recording it is possible to have clear guidelines for the format of the recording and accompanying documentation such as that provided by Oral History NSW.[4]

For material which is donated it is important to consider what information is available with the recordings. Is there documentation providing consent? Is there information about who did the recording, when it was done and what subjects are covered? What format are the recordings; are they digital or tape; if tape how will the digitisation be funded? What data is available to use for cataloguing? Are they transcribed, or do they have logs? A library may consider a risk management approach, of making the material available, with a takedown statement, so that if there are problems, the material can become available locally only, rather than online. It is preferable that the material is as widely available as soon as possible, and with changes to copyright it is important to not be too conservative or risk adverse effects to the subject/interviewer.

For donations of oral history material, it is preferable that sufficient metadata is available to adequately identify the recordings. It is also best that there are documented permissions accompanying the recordings as well as logs and/or transcripts. The acceptance of donations of oral history material is at the discretion of each public library in accordance with their individual collections' strategies, and with consideration of risk management.

Table 1 Data from NSW local studies audit[3]

Type of recording	Number of respondents	Number of item
Analogue sound recordings	80.22% or 73 libraries responded	37 libraries hold a total of **3335** items in this category
Digital sound recordings	82.42% or 75 libraries responded	33 libraries provided exact counts and held a total of **3312** items in this category 3 libraries provided estimates of about **35** items in this category
Moving images (film and/or video) – digital and analogue	82.42% or 75 libraries responded	49 libraries provided exact counts and held a total of **5402** items in this category 5 libraries provided estimates of about **570** items in this category

Rights

The Australian Government's Open Access and Licensing Framework (AusGOAL) briefly operated during 2016/2017 to provide advice to government agencies. They provided support and guidance to government and related sectors to facilitate open access to publicly funded information, which was very helpful. AUSgoal provided free legal advice including on areas such as copyright. In NSW we obtained a consent form for oral history collecting, written by a barrister. The form is for public libraries, however other organisations are welcome to use it as well.[5]

This form was requested as it is helpful for public libraries to collect material using creative commons licensing as this provides greater flexibility for the use of recordings. It also means that decades-long copyright does not need to be managed as the copyright owners licence the work for high levels of access straight away.

Collecting recent content

At recent NSW[6] and Queensland public library local studies meetings there have been discussions about the importance of collecting contemporary material. Often local studies collections contain mainly older material with little new content, and little content about current or recent events. Collecting contemporary material including oral histories can help better reflect the diversity of the current community, and make sure a wide range of stories are included. This requires that recordings of, and information about newer residents, younger residents, and culturally and linguistically diverse people are included. Often it is only the stories of older people which make their way into public libraries collections. These stories are important, but so are the stories of younger people. Imagine a series of recordings done every year looking at what it is like to be, for example, 20 and living in Moree, Bondi or Eden? Consider a local council version of the Australian Generations project.[7] Over time this builds up a really interesting picture of a wider cross section of the community as well as creating valuable research data.

Standards and guidelines

The State Library of NSW is updating *Digital practice guidelines for public libraries*.[8] This builds on work done by Swinburne Library Information Service and Practico in 2005 developing *Digital practice: guidelines for digitising images in NSW public libraries* and has been regularly updated since that time by State Library of NSW staff, working with staff from public libraries. This is being updated to strengthen sections on digital collecting and digital preservation. It is published as a website and brings together standards and guidelines to assist NSW public library staff.

Training

The audit showed the need for public libraries to have assistance with collecting digital content. It was decided to provide training for NSW public library staff

in recording oral histories. In 2016, 70 NSW public library staff were trained. The training took place at Grafton, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong, and the State Library of NSW in Sydney. By conducting the training in regional NSW as well as in Sydney, it made it possible for people from a wider range of libraries to be able to participate as it reduced the travel time for participants.

Before participating in the oral history training each participant agreed to:

- Plan and do three recordings

- Photograph people being interviewed, and if possible, include this information in the oral history record

- Catalogue/have the recordings catalogued, with the record on Trove

- Have the recordings available online

These requirements were so that there would be progress made on oral history collections in the libraries who participated as it is easy to come along to a training day and be motivated about what is possible. It is much harder to go back to the work place and implement what has been learned. The three recordings were due to be completed within twelve months of completing the training. This was always going to require things to go very smoothly for this to be possible. The time frame has been extended by an additional twelve months.

With seventy participants, there are potentially 210 recordings. With people changing jobs, and other challenges, however, the numbers are likely to be lower. So far over 20 recordings have been completed; some are online, not all are catalogued, and only a very small number are on Trove.[9] Libraries who had more than one person participate in the training are generally planning their interviews together. This is providing a catalyst to discuss local studies collecting more broadly.

How can oral history recordings be made available?

Staff from Wollongong Library participated in the training and they are making information available via the library catalogue and the Illawarra stories website.[10] Shiralee Franks from Tamworth describes in a separate paper how the Central Northern Library is making available their recordings of people who worked or lived on Goonoo Goonoo Station. For others the recordings can only be listened to in the library.[11] Ideally the access is online as that enables wider enjoyment and use of these resources. This is why work was done to enable creative commons licensing rather than relying on copyright.

How can public library staff share their skills?

With a number of people new to oral history across the state, the most important element has been local support. People being able to talk with the colleagues they work with has been vital. There has been some wider discussion about oral history, but as much of the problem solving has been local (for example how to use a particular recording device, how to transfer files, or add the recording to the catalogue), local support has been critical.

I set up and oral history email list of the participants of the training, but this has been used very little. I have run two video conferences to connect people who participated in the training and who may have had some questions. It has been more effective contacting library staff individually and as a group either by email, or by people asking questions face-to-face when I visit their library.

As well as this focus, there is a state-wide local studies working group which has two meetings a year, and oral histories are part of their discussions. This group has an email list where questions can be asked.

What to look for over the next year in NSW public libraries?

There will be many more oral history recordings available as more people complete their three recordings and have them catalogued. Not all these recordings will be online as each library is making different decisions about access. More oral history material held in the libraries will be digitised. I also hope that there will be greater diversity in the people interviewed, with a greater focus on people of all ages and backgrounds. It would be interesting to see bilingual oral history recording taking place, as that would be much more appropriate for people whose first language is not English. Hopefully more oral history, both digitised and digital, will be discoverable on Trove.

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Passaparola: The Politics of Resistance in Rural Italy During World War II

Judith Pabian

Abstract

Between 1935 -1945 Italy's Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini embroiled his country in a series of unsuccessful military campaigns and took Italy into the Second World War on the Axis side in June 1940. He was deposed by his own Fascist Grand Council on 25th July 1943 and the king appointed Marshal Badoglio as Prime Minister. Italy formally remained at war with the Allies for a further six and a half weeks during which German forces in Italy swelled by several Divisions. On the 8th September 1943 Badoglio proclaimed armistice with the Allies before he, along with the King and government, fled Rome for the South behind Allied lines and on 10th September 1943 Germany formally occupied north and central Italy. This article uses examples from a recent oral history project on wartime experiences in the Val d'Orcia, in the Tuscan province of Siena. These reveal the importance of the culture of *passaparola* – literally, passing the word along – among a largely peasant population where the landlords' power of literacy was integral to peasant exploitation. The article is also a platform to demonstrate and discuss the methodological issues posed by intergenerational oral histories complicated by translation. The Val d'Orcia was occupied until the 29th June 1944.

Introduction

On a warm spring day in April 2016 I met Signora Benedetta Origo at the Francesco Tozzi Secondary School in the rural Tuscan town of Chianciano Terme, where she was giving a talk to final year students on the German occupation of the area during the Second World War. The meeting was a prelude to interviewing her that afternoon at La Foce, her family's estate in the Val d'Orcia. I had read the wartime diary of her mother Iris Origo, Marchesa di Val d'Orcia and been fascinated by its frequent reference to the seemingly ubiquitous presence in the area of armed and other forms of resistance. First published in 1946 in English – and in many other languages since then – it continues to draw international attention to this still comparatively remote rural corner of Tuscany.[1]

Drawing on conceptual frameworks and ideas developed by Alessandro Portelli and by scholars of informal life politics and resistance in Asia,[2] this paper aims to illustrate how a recent intergenerational oral history project in rural Tuscany perpetuates a once class-based tradition of storytelling by turning on its head a form of patron-client exploitation that was integral to it. But who is the 'speaker' in such histories, what is the role of the historian and how do we make sense of unclear narratives and chronologies to locate events in linear time when to do so is crucial to understanding the tensions and trauma of the historical actors? How do they add to local memories and representations of events under an oppressive regime?

A Local School's Oral History Project

Final year students at the Francesco Tozzi Secondary School participate in a locally designed component of the Tozzi School's curriculum on Fascism, Nazism and the history of the Italian Resistance during the Second World War. It is an oral history exercise that traverses three and sometimes four generations; since they are asked to talk to their grandparents, great grandparents or other older family members about their experiences of the war. The resulting essays thus produce intergenerational interpretations of past events and their significance in people's everyday lives. The essays are read by Signora Origo, who awards a prize – an economy copy of her mother's book supplied by the school – to the authors of those she judges are the ten best. While she is no longer heiress to the La Foce estate, which now belongs to the Comune of Montepulciano, Origo retains her mother's love of historical literature and literary pursuits. This element of the school's curriculum appealed to my broader interest in the contested memories of rural Tuscans about the German occupation of the Val d'Orcia in 1943-44, and their impact on contemporary local commemorative practice. I had no idea of the treasure this unplanned visit would yield beyond the interview I was so keen to secure.

At the conclusion of that interview Signora Origo said I might find some of the students' essays interesting and suggested I scan some of them. At her invitation, I returned to La Foce the following week with Dr Francesca Cenni from the Piero Calamandrei Archive – my host institution in nearby Montepulciano. We joined the students, their teachers and family members for a tour of the famous gardens, designed by Gerald Pinsent, before driving a little further down the road for the prize giving. It took place in a cavernous cellar at Castelluccio, once part of the Origo estate. There followed a casual feast of simple, beautifully presented local foods and a chance to observe the easy socialising of students with each other. As Dr Cenni and I were preparing to leave, Signora Origo handed me a brown carrier bag containing all the final year essays, bound in a sturdy plastic folder with her notes of the merits of the ten prize-winning essays. Later, one of the teachers, Marie-Angela dell' Erba sent me her digital copies of the essays written by the previous year's students. This unrestrained sharing of stories, far from posing ethical issues, is a tradition in an area with a long and rich culture of storytelling that is integral to the design of this aspect of their curriculum– they call it *passaparola*.

Culture of Passaparola

I heard the word frequently in my interviews with local inhabitants of the area in describing how they gathered and distributed intelligence and negotiated everyday life during the German occupation. *Passaparola* was a means of sharing grievance, for example in relation to one's conditions or other people among one's social equals. Alternatively, it may be the sharing of knowledge of an advantageous nature. The pre-eminence of the spoken word is an obvious corollary of a spoken rather than written culture. Literacy rates in Tuscany lagged far behind neighbouring regions (especially those in the north)[3] as a consequence both of social and economic conditions. *Passaparola* may be the paradoxical consequence of an institutional silencing that underpinned the inherent exploitation and oppression of peasants in the centuries-old Tuscan practice of sharecropping (*mezzadria*). In 1921, sixteen percent of all Tuscan families and over a quarter of its total population were mezzadria, who, with an average of seven members per household, constituted the region's largest families.[4]

Richard Andrews has written about the imposition of silencing under this system of uncompromising hierarchical patron-client relations and sharp social and economic distinctions. He illustrates the power of the authority in the *padrone* to give voice, to command the spoken and written word. Literacy acts as a source of privilege and power, '… of the *padrone's* power against which there was no appeal'. All contractual arrangements were written down in 'an educated language to which the peasants themselves had no access'. Peasant discontent could only be expressed verbally and within the family or to trusted allies, as could information that is intended only for restricted audiences. Seen in this way, *passaparola* constituted in itself, an act of subterfuge, of resistance.

Hierarchies of authority extended to gender so that within the household women were silenced by men and younger women by older women.[5] Including women in *passaparola* broke another social boundary that signalled a necessary feature of both of everyday and armed resistance. I believe that it was both an act of equalising and of trust. In this continuing spirit of *passaparola* I was entrusted with the students' stories, signifying recognition that I was engaging as a serious and trustworthy researcher with them and their history. In the last fifty years this tradition of *passaparola* has found further expression in the annual *autodrammi* of the world famous *Teatro Povero* of Monticchiello. It emerged a decade after the legislated abolition of sharecropping and is a publicly performed way of conveying the social and political challenges and changes of everyday life.

The digital age has created a new dimension in *passaparola*; privacy protocols forbade the School giving me the students' contact details. I was advised instead to make contact with them through their Facebook pages and through social media I have made direct contact with some and indirect contact with others through their posts.

This paper looks at how two of the young Italian authors who took part in the essay competition at the Francesco Tozzi Secondary School wrote differently about the same series of wartime events that took place between late 1943 to mid-1944. Theirs is a story of conflict and trauma – of capture, escape, homecoming and resistance, related to each author in 2015 by different protagonists from this remote area. It is an area where households include grandparents and great-grandparents, thereby providing a theatre for perpetuating the culture of *passaparola*. How do their stories contribute to contemporary oral history practice? What issues do they raise for historians? In what sense are they the same story? What ethics do we bring to our treatment of them?

The Authors

The authors were 16-year old students at the time and in this paper, I attribute them the pseudonyms Carlo and Marco. They were asked to talk to older family members or neighbours about their wartime experiences and relate those stories in one- to two-page essays. If none of their relatives were alive during the war, they

were to interview the oldest relative in possession of the story. Carlo is from an Albanian migrant family and had to look to an elderly neighbour to find a suitable informant for his oral history project. He seems to be an outgoing young man with something of a rebellious streak who is active on social media where he appears to be sociable and unrestrained. Marco's family is local, and he readily found an informant in his grandfather, Alberto, who sadly passed away earlier this year. I cannot give his family name here, but in Italian it translates as an expression of defiance. Marco is a quiet, serious and studious young man who achieved excellent results. He was one of five graduates from his school to win a highly competitive scholarship that was awarded to only thirty students in the province of Siena that year. He has a low profile on social media, with which he doesn't seem to engage much. Like all their peers, the boys attend senior schools from which they are expected to graduate in mid-2018.

The Stories – similarities in structure but different in other respects

The first thing that struck me about these two accounts was their structural similarity; they begin with the writer-informant relationship and go on to describe their protagonists' capture and imprisonment by the Germans, their escape from prison and their homecoming and in both cases, their joining the partisans. The second thing that struck me was, that within this shared structural framework, the way the authors recounted events is very different stylistically and in terms of emotional morality and engagement. In the following narratives we can see that the action scenes of the story differ markedly in each case.

Carlo begins by introducing the informant/protagonist as his neighbour, Iseo Casagrande who, Carlo tells me, was still alive earlier this year and would have been in his late eighties or early nineties when Carlo interviewed him. Marco introduces his informant as his paternal grandfather Alberto, who is recounting events told to him by his father Fulvio, that is by Marco's great-grandfather who is the protagonist of his account.

Both authors describe their protagonists travelling to Florence to report for service in the Italian army. There, a short time later – when the Germans arrive – they are taken prisoner.

> **Marco:** My great grandfather Fulvio, during the Second World War was called up to Florence between the end of August and the beginning of September 1943. On 8th September, which was the day of the armistice with the Allies, the Italian sentries at Florence were replaced by German sentries. The Italians were immediately declared prisoners without fighting.

This is a carefully drafted piece of work that begins with clear, accurate, chronological detail. This economic narrative has a quiet, measured tension in which the story is presented as a rather dry, matter of fact series of events. He doesn't elaborate on these and there is a sense of him engaging intellectually rather than emotionally with the story. In this it contrasts sharply with more protracted description of the same episode in the Iseo/Carlo narrative:

> **Carlo:** Signor Iseo told me that initially he went from Sant'Albino to Chiusi, where he took the train to go to the barracks of the 19th Artillery at Florence. The next day, he was sent to guard the powder magazine where the munitions were kept. In every corner there were two soldiers equipped with hand grenades. At some point a vehicle arrived that crashed into the gate. So, these soldiers began to pull out their hand grenades. However, by the light emitted from the grenades they saw that the intruders were Italian carabinieri. The carabinieri should have had stopped to see what was happening, but they were afraid and thought the soldiers were Germans so they kept throwing bombs at them.[6] Some days later, the Germans arrived and took them into a dusty room because they wanted to deport them to Germany.

The chronology is unclear, and the narrative is quite fractured, action-oriented, participant/author-engaged. There is a sense of adventure and engagement with the characters, together with bravado and a tinge of disdain for the opponent that is not uncommon both in oral and written memories of the time, be they first hand or handed on.

These same stylistic characteristics turn up in the boys' escape narratives. In describing the context and manner of their protagonist's escape from prison (unharmed – that is, without being shot), we can see the different emotional moralities emerging from these stories:

> **Carlo/Iseo:** But the Italian soldiers managed to escape in the most casual way: the Germans had found some geese and wine, got drunk and left. Their officer said to them: 'Everyone should make his own way, because we run the risk of being taken to Germany for the third time.' Iseo left the place but still with the fear there might be Germans around.

> **Marco/Alberto/Fulvio:** In prison Fulvio spoke with a German sentry who knew Italian. Both agreed that they were tired of fighting. The German soldier had left his family in Germany and wanted

to go home so Fulvio asked if he could set them free. The sentry asked Fulvio if they had respectable (civilian) clothes to disguise themselves. Then Fulvio asked his comrades who was keen to escape with him. They all seemed to be agreement except for one, because he thought they would be shot! That night, the [German] sentry made [it possible for] them to escape but first he warned them, 'If you don't run you won't be shot!' So, for the first three hundred metres they didn't run, but then turning a corner, they fled at high speed because everyone wanted to get home.

This time Carlo has conveyed in a very short narrative an emotional morality that is full of trickery, adventure, individuality, triumphalism and, again mockery of the enemy, while clearly signalling the fear and tension of his undeniably dangerous escapade. In my field interviews and at events that commemorate the German occupation and resistance to it, I found that these were familiar devices in the *passaparole* of local *contadini* and their immediate descendants. It seemed to me that these devices were at one with a deeply injured pride and hence, indignation associated with the occupation. Not only had their land been physically taken by hostile forces, so were the products of their labour. Indignation at the invasion of their land, the intrusion upon their lives and the theft of their valuables - often food – especially grain and, as we see in Carlo's story, animals. Local people are still angered by what they consider the ultimate in disrespectful treatment of peasants by some German officials, '… they had no respect! They robbed us – of food, of animals, valuables'.[7]

Marco's narrative contrasts sharply with this in several ways. Firstly, in a departure from the rest of Marco's essay, the escape story is more protracted. While Fulvio is assigned a collaborative approach to confronting danger; camaraderie is evident both in the subjective use of the inclusive third person plural in reference to the escapees and in the empathic reference to their German sentry. Moreover, the clear impression that the Italian prisoners, at Fulvio's instigation, discussed and executed the escape as a group and stayed together in flight is at odds with Carlo's description: 'Iseo left the place…' urged by the Italian Officer that '… each should make his own way …' to avoid the risk of being deported to Germany. Carlo's work speaks to a fear that is evinced in other testimonies I gathered in Tuscany. It was risk that weighed heavily on the *contadini* and their families since it was all too evident at the time that deportees to forced labour camps in Germany survived only if they were among the lucky few who managed to escape.

The authors then describe their protagonists making the journey home safely. In both cases the story of the homecoming culminates in their protagonists joining the partisans. Again, the content and style of the two stories differ markedly. Marco concludes his essay with extraordinary brevity – a simple, dry contraction of time and events that, nevertheless contains a level of accurate, historical detail that helps us situate events, context and the rationale behind the action.

> **Marco:** They moved only at night, because they feared German troops, and by day they hid themselves in barns. Arrived at Chianciano, after a little while, they joined the partisans of Pietraporciana[8] as non-combatants [because] (l)ife in Chianciano use to be extremely difficult because if someone wasn't a fascist, the Italian Fascists reported them to the Germans who then shot them.

The ever-present likelihood of being shot, tells us that for men in Fulvio's position – now a fugitive from being conscripted into the Salò rump army – life was fragile.[9] Worse still is the collusion of one's own countrymen – Italian Fascists – in the murder of local inhabitants. There is no overt emotion of anger expressed in this narrative; just fear, tension and sadness. Marco concludes the story of his great-grandfather with the observation:

> **Marco:** With the passage of the Front and the arrival of the Anglo-Americans, at Chianciano there were three to four days of hell, then the whole place was liberated. Life returned to normal. [My emphasis].

Iseo comes from the little hamlet of Sant'Albino about three kilometres from Chianciano and half way between Chianciano and Montepulciano. His journey home is recounted in a single short sentence:

> **Carlo:** One night, [Iseo] arrived at Montepulciano and from there he made his way to Sant'Albino where he later became a partisan.

In fact, it can be safely said that the events described in these essays take place within a very short timeframe – beginning with the protagonists' reporting for military service in Florence in late August-early September, quickly followed by their capture in mid-September 1943. While it is not clear whether the protagonists were imprisoned in Florence, which is about 130 kilometres from Chianciano, or Siena, 80 kilometres away, the journey, travelling only by night across country would have taken anywhere from four or five days to a couple of weeks. We are not told how much time the Italian soldiers spent as captives, but their descriptions of this journey home make no reference to a winter that was experienced as extraordinarily harsh and bitter[10][11], we can estimate with some certainty that they escaped and reached home before the winter of 1943-44 set in. There is no reference to their group being split up or assigned to work groups and as we know, they were not held prisoner for long enough to be consigned to

Germany as forced labour. From the sparse evidence it is possible to deduce that the sequence of events took place within a period of one to two months.

Chronologies, facts and the role of the historian

In Carlo's account so far, the episodic structure relies on no dates, no conventional chronology. However, he has added to his story a final paragraph – a bundle of fragmented, disconnected references in which the events don't really find any coherent form, nor is the chronology able to withstand scrutiny against known historical facts. The events are peppered with factual and chronological errors that might have any one of several causes; unfamiliarity with local and national Italian histories, lack of concern with linear time, confusion in the telling.

However, it is the responsibility of the oral historian to be informed as to backgrounds; the political, social and economic contexts – to know or verify where and when things took place. In this case what happened, when and where has sometimes been revealed over years of painstaking research by scholars and local historians. The historian's job is to be open to and respect their informant's testimony – to scrutinise it as would a friendly scientist, with genuine curiosity. Reading the disparate fragments of testimony that Carlo added to his more structured account in conjunction with known, verifiable chronologies and historical events, they make their own unique contribution to history and fill gaps in the more structured narrative. It is worth reproducing the additional text in full in order to appreciate what we can gain from it.

> Signor **Iseo** continues his story: We were helped a lot by the women who gave us information. They told us where the Germans were, and we would move ourselves from one place to another because if the Germans found us, we would have been killed. We did ad hoc, impromptu actions, because if a German was killed, ten Italian civilians had to die. At night we slept little as we always had to be ready.

This acknowledged indebtedness to the involvement of women in the local resistance, however, bears the verisimilitude of frequent and broadly encountered reference to such involvement. Clothing, food, communications – the inhabitants of the Val d'Orcia were renowned for helping fugitives of one kind or another.[12]

> A friend of mine was a kind of spy. He went home to get clean linen; in that moment, the Germans came and they hung him under the tower of Pulcinella near the church of Sant'Agostino.

Today a plaque above the street lamp protruding from the wall of the Palazzo del Corto on the corner of Borgo Buio and via Graciano in Montepulciano, marks the place where the twenty year-old partisan Giuseppe Marino, a native of Catania in Sicily, was hung at 4pm on 23 June 1944 after being captured by the Germans on 21 June and subjected to two days of torture. His body was left to dangle there for three summer days until the Bishop of Montepulciano, Emilio Giorgi, used his authority for its removal.

A striking aspect of this additional narrative in Carlo's story is his treatment of the Battle of Monticchiello. This most publicly celebrated event in the 11-month occupation of the valley took place on the 6th April 1944 and forms the centrepiece of contemporary commemorative practice in the area. Eighty partisans assisted by local inhabitants of Monticchiello and other male and female partisans from the area fought 240 Fascist militia and some troops from the Salò army (Repubblichini). Forty Fascists and two partisans were killed. The partisans were strategically located in several positions on the surrounding hillsides or farms.[13] Carlo reports Iseo as saying:

> I saw the Battle of Monticchiello against the Germans. Because the village is high up, they saw the Germans [sic] arrive, but they overcame them because they could strike without being seen. Besides, Monticchiello has very fortified walls and the partisan forces were, above all, equipped with machine guns.

This description rehearses a commonly encountered shorthand description in the course of which several common mythologies appear about this major event in local resistance history. First, it gives the impression that all the partisans are inside the village, raining shots down on the hapless enemy below the village's fortified walls. Second, that the battle was fought between the partisans and the Germans. Third, that it was the partisans alone who fought the enemy, omitting mention of the active participation of the women of Monticchiello as well as some who had arrived as part of a group of partisans from Pienza – another nearby hilltown[14].

The last paragraph in Carlo's bundle of fragments is deceptively unclear in terms of Iseo's history of capture. But it clears up the earlier question of how much time he and his compatriots spent as prisoners and when they escaped.

> **Iseo:** The commander of the fascists pretended to be a partisan, but he was a spy and so the caribinieri captured us and took us to prison at Montepulciano, where we were helped because when the Germans came and asked if there were any partisans, they were told 'no'. Then, they took us to Siena,

where I spent a year in jail. I was fortunate to remain incarcerated until the end of the war. I left the prison when the army destroyed itself, 12th September 1943 [15]. I returned home very happy; it was prison that saved me. Afterwards I was made a partisan but only for a little while because the [German] army was gone.

The paragraph conflates two episodes of imprisonment in Iseo's wartime history. In chronological order his leaving the prison on the 12th September (1943), two days after the formal Occupation of Italy by German forces and the 'collapse' of the Italian army. This clarifies the timing of the escape with his compatriots described earlier. It confirms that the soldiers' journey home occurred in autumn that year and answers the earlier question of how much time he and his compatriots had spent as prisoners and when they escaped – two days. His imprisonment as a partisan at Montepulciano is clearly a later episode – after he had joined the partisans and after the Battle of Monticchiello. As Siena was liberated in July 1944, it remains unclear why Iseo was in prison there to the end of the war in Italy which was April 1945.

Discussion/Questions evoked by the different treatments of this story

This apparent disregard for dates, for linear time, in storytelling is a common feature of the forty or so of these essays that I have read. Does this signify the continuing place of the spoken word, of storytelling in local culture?

The oral historian Alessandro Portelli considers that the significance of the protagonists' experiences of a past event emerges from the disparities between individual stories and between oral accounts and known facts. I am thinking especially of Portelli's groundbreaking treatment of the massacre by German SS of 335 local inhabitants and political prisoners at the Fosse Ardeatine on the outskirts of Rome on 24th March 1944.[16]

Marco's story has been passed down through four generations of his family. His account has none of the bravado evident in Carlo's. Instead we find a sombre, reflective, reserved tone and tension in Marco's story – as there is in many of the stories I have read. Marco omits any mention of the famous Battle of Monticchiello, despite the fact that his great grandfather Fulvio joined the partisans of Pietraporciana. One of the farmhouses on the Origo estate, located high up in thickly-wooded hills behind their villa, Pietraporciana served as the headquarters of Walter Ottaviani, the chief strategist of the Battle of Monticchiello and a partisan

commander. In recent years science has offered evidence for epigenetic inheritance of stress hormones associated with trauma – that is, intergenerational imprinting of trauma. So far there is strong evidence for genetic trauma transfer to the generation following the traumatic experience.[17] Perhaps this is a factor in the differences between these two stories. On the other hand, is Carlo's story despite its loose chronologies and confusions, an accurate reflection of the meandering style and possible vagueness of his protagonist's advanced years?

These stories share structural similarities. Each contains somewhat similar meta-chronologies but very different emotional moralities. Some chronologies and claims of fact don't hold up, others I have yet to corroborate. In these respects they are no different to their counterparts. How do we as historians treat them?

There is inherent tension between public commemorations of resistance – in which collective memory reinterprets the past so as to preserve a particular group identity – and the historical events they seek to portray. The Battle of Monticchiello in rural Tuscany is an example of how new approaches in oral history are interrogating accepted versions of the past to reveal local histories with previously unrecognised regional and national implications.

These two stories tell us about the same series of events from very different perspectives and emotional engagements and moralities. They demonstrate two principal modes of storytelling that I encountered in personal conversations and formal interviews with local residents when discussing this period in rural Tuscan history.

Carlo's writing conveys a bravado that is exemplified in the mocking of German soldiers as antagonists. It is unconcerned with fixing dates or formal contextual factors. It is full of movement, conveying a sense of adventure, risk and trickery. Does this reflect the way Iseo recalls the events or Carlo's interpretation of them, or both? Is there an empathic relation between these neighbours that made Iseo an obvious informant? Carlo's engagement with the story is evident in his enthusiasm for the telling. So much so that he cannot countenance leaving any part of it untold, regardless of the structural coherence or continuity of the narrative. Marco's rendition on the other hand is much more concerned with fixing dates, places and formal contexts. Its sober tone conveys the seriousness and trauma of the situation in which the soldiers found themselves; the constant fear of being shot. Against this there is security in the group, in comradeship and acting in collaboration – the social context of survival.

For the historian, these stories work in concert to

inform each other, enabling the historian to gain broader and richer insights into the abiding impact of Nazi occupation on rural dwellers.

Methodological Issues

No historian would risk prejudicing the valuable insights into cultural and historical events and actors that lie within the oral witness testimony by falling prey to hasty judgments. When comparing several informants' evidence against each other and the known facts about particular events or sets of events, it is well to bear in mind that it is within these layered disparities that we may find the significance of the historical event for the actors who have been touched by it.

Intergenerational evidence of the kind that is the focus of this article adds layers of complexity to the direct informant/historian dimension – the double or triple filtering effect of time and subsequent experience referred to by Portelli[18]. In one case the word has been passed on by a very elderly male protagonist speaking as an historical actor over seventy years after the events he is describing to a 16-year old boy. In the other case we have a story that has traversed four generations, having been passed by its protagonist to his son who now relates it to his own teenage grandson. By the time the stories get to me they have already passed through two and three informants as well as seven decades. I add another layer of interpretation drawn from my conceptual and theoretical frameworks, which in turn have been modified by the corpus of archival, oral and cultural evidence I have gathered. Finally, I translate the essays from Italian into English. In Italy there is a saying – *tradurre è tradire*; to translate is to betray. It is a signal warning for the historian.

Conclusions

These two stories serve as a window into how witness accounts are told and interpreted thanks to collaboration between educators, Iris Origo's daughter and the La Foce estate. This collaboration is nurturing the next generation of storytellers in a region with a long and rich culture of oral history. In this case it allows us a unique insight into the tensions, traumas and imperatives of everyday life and survival under a repressive regime that presented a constant threat to one's existence.

Passaparola in the school setting replicates in a surprising way the older patron setting, but here the patron is an enabling force for story telling instead of the silencing power that was countered by *passaparola*. While orality in older usages of *passaparola* in the Val d'Orcia was a modus of resistance, today it is a formally accepted bona fide method of history learning. Writing,

once the preserve of the local elites, is now taught to all students passing through the local education system. The involvement of Benedetta Origo, and the location of the celebrations on the La Foce estate once owned in its entirety by her parents, rather than emphasising social distance signals a social cohesion and a sense of shared history, community and identity. The two intergenerational accounts discussed in this article illuminate the way in which this transformed and rejuvenated oral-written form of *passaparola* is contributing to contemporary history-making.

Endnotes

1   Iris Origo, War in the Val d'Orcia: An Italian war diary 1943-44, London, Allison & Busby, 2008. (First published in London by Jonathan Cape, 1947.)

2   See especially: Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'Heroes, Collaborators and Survivors: Korean Kamikaze Pilots and the Ghosts of Colonialism in Korea and Japan', in T. Morris-Suzuki, M. Low, L. Petrov and T. Tsu, *East Asia Beyond the History Wars: Confronting the Ghosts of War*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013, pp. 164-190; Benedict. J. Tria Kerkvliet, 'Everyday Politics in Peasant Societies (and Ours)', in *Journal of Peasant Studies,* vol. 36, no. 1, May 2009, pp. 227-243; and Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.

3   Risulti sommari del Censimento della popolazione, eseguito il 1 Dicembre, 1921, vii Toscana, Ministero dell' Economia Nazionale, Roma, Società Anonima G. Scotti, 1925, p. 13. See also Hamish Macdonald, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism*, Cheltenham, UK, Stanley Thornes, 1999, p. 13.

4   Risulti sommari del Censimento della popolazione, p9.

5   Richard Andrews, 'Finding a Voice: the Community Dramas of Monticchiello', in *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 7 no. 25, February 1991, pp. 78-82, Published online 15 January 2009.

6   Although the narrator does not give a date for this event, it must have taken place after September 1943 since the Germans are counted as enemies.

7   For example, Sonia Mazzini interviewed by author in April 2016, Fanni Santoni interviewed by author in September 2016, digital recording held by author.

8   Pietraporciana is a farmhouse located high in what is still a remote part of the hills above the Origo estate. It housed the area's partisan commander, Walter Ottaviani. Pietraporciana was one of at least two of the Origo farmhouses that were used as partisan shelters in that part of the estate.

9   'Boys were enrolled from the age of 19. In some cases, a lot younger kids were taken away to fight'. Quotation from Isolina Leonardi, an employee of the Fascist tax collector in wartime Chianciano, interviewed by the author in April 2016, digital recording held by the author.

10 'The weather conditions during the winter of 1943-1944 were particularly harsh…', in *Chemins de Memoire, The Italian Campaign*, http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/italian-campaign-3rd-september-1943-2nd-may-1945.

11 '…some of the worst winter weather on record, and leaving an aftermath of bitterness…the violence of the winter weather...' John Grehan and Martin Mace, *The War in Italy 1943-1944:*

Despatches from the Front, Pen and Sword Military, Barnsley, UK, Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 2014, p. 136.

12   Denis Mack Smith, 'Preface', in Iris Origo, War in the Val d'Orcia: An Italian war diary 1943-44, London, Allison & Busby, 2008.

13   Rosalia Manno Tolu, *Le Bande Simar Dal Settembre 1943 Al Giugno 1944: Aspetti Della Lotta Partigiana Nell'Italia Centrale*. s.n, dissertation, University of Siena, 1970, pp. 68-110. Also quoted extensively in Luciano Casella, *The European War of Liberation: Tuscany and the Gothic Line*, Firenze, La Nova Europa, 1983, pp. 112-116. (Translated by Jean M. Ellis D'Alessandro).

14   Fabio Pelligrini, 'Una via di Monticchiello per ricordare Irma Richter Angheben e quel lontano 6 aprile 1944', blog posted 7 April 2016, http://fabiopienza.blogspot.com.au/2016/04/una-via-di-monticchie

15   Note that this followed the flight of the King and government from Rome on 9th September – a day after Badoglio's public announcement of an armistice with the Allies – and the occupation of Rome by German forces on 10th September 1943. In the Val d'Orcia the Occupation lasted to the end of June 1944, Siena was liberated on 3rd July 1944 and Florence on 11th August 1944. As he claims to have seen the Battle of Monticchiello he could not have spent a year in prison in Siena. He is not cited in the list of those involved in the Battle of Monticchiello: Roberto Pagliai, *L'ultimo Partigiano: Storie di Resistenza e resa in Val di Chiana e in Val d'Orcia*, alienoeditrice, Italy, 2013. pp. 185-190.

16   Portelli, 1999 *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

17   See, for example, Natan P F Kellerman, 'Epigenetic Transmission of Holocaust Trauma: Can nightmares be inherited?', in *The Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2013, pp. 33-39.

18   Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?', in *The Oral History Reader*, third edition, eds Rob Perks and Alistair Thomson, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016, pp. 46-47.

An Oral History Progress Report

26 Years using Oral history to explore Place and Belonging: A collaborative reflection on a three-year funded Oral History project in Bankstown, NSW

Zainab Kadhim and Tim Carroll

Stories of Strength is an intergenerational Oral History project which runs off the back of a long line of Oral History projects produced over the last twenty-six years by the Bankstown Youth Development Service Inc. (BYDS) under the leadership of Director, Tim Carroll. All interviews have been conducted with locals from the Bankstown area exploring place, people and their particular story. These stories explore their lives in Australia and in any one of the hundreds of countries that our participants hail from. Many of our participants are from refugee backgrounds and have spent time living in other lands before becoming 'settled' here in Australia. *Stories of Strength* seeks to demonstrate the strength and resilience of our community for the purpose of enhancing social cohesion. In a volatile time when specific narratives are propagated, often for political purposes, to instil uncertainty, fear and divide people, sharing individuals' stories of overcoming adversity serves to facilitate understanding, empathy and cultivate a culture of connection and support.

To date approximately 60 young people between the ages of 14-17 have been trained in the art of interviewing. Our workshops are held within a school context and are specifically designed to utilise specific curriculum outcomes from Drama, History, Society and Culture to ensure that they enhance student's outcomes rather than just add an extra layer of 'work' by well-meaning outsiders. We have discovered that if the project can fit into an assessment task, then our chances of being gifted with a high-quality interview literally soar. We have been very fortunate to have developed fantastic relationships with many schools and individual teachers over many years and find ourselves welcomed into a school in the knowledge that the students, the teachers and the school body generally will receive skills and other benefits over the duration of the project's life – and often after.

These transferrable skills are developed through a series of workshops with professional radio-programmers. Workshops begin by covering the morals and ethics of interviewing, interviewing techniques and eventually how to create engaging audio stories using editing software such as Audacity. Discussions around belonging, place and identity are an integral part of the workshops as we seek to communally 'unpack' how social cohesion and harmony can further be recognised and strengthened.

The students practice their skills by interviewing one another using Zoom recorders and 'smart phones' - working through a series of questions about childhood memories, dreams and what strength and freedom mean to an individual. Through this process, the students learn more about their peers and themselves as they begin to explore stories that lie beneath the surface of their everyday interactions with one another - leading to new understandings and friendships for many of the students. They are also taken through their responsibilities as interviewers to uphold integrity and always act respectfully in regard to their interviewee's thoughts. They learn how to gain appropriate consent and how to check in with their interviewees if it is necessary to do so during the interview process, particularly when interviewees become emotional or share stories that make the students feel uncomfortable. This aspect of our project is of the utmost importance, given the nature of many students' backgrounds, coming as refugees and/or migrants from war torn countries.

All participants, teachers and observers to our workshops have been moved and sometimes 'shaken' by the way that participants have opened up to each other during the workshops. Even after twenty-five plus years of doing this kind of work I am constantly struck by the power of this simple interaction between people and the way that such an interview can bring a truly 'light bulb moment' to manifest between individuals and groups, developing or enhancing a sense of real empathy and new bonds between individuals and entire classes.

The student's brief is to locate and interview someone with a story of strength. What they find is that almost everyone has a story to share about some form of adversity they have had to overcome to be where they are today. Participants have interviewed their teachers, neighbours, parents, siblings and other members of their community. This provides both the students and interviewees a space to reflect – sometimes perfunctorily, sometimes deeply – on their lives, as interviewees are

heard, recorded and edited, leaving the students and interviewees truly inspired and sometimes transformed.

Through the sharing of intergenerational and cross-cultural stories pertaining to strength and overcoming hardship, students are able to gain deep understanding, inspiration and strong connection to their community which enhances their sense of place. The stories collected through the project are shared widely on the Mapping Frictions website http://mappingfrictions.com/westsydstories/index.html and on FBi Radio's *All The Best* to give voice to alternative narratives and the lived experiences of individuals within the Bankstown and wider community. We have also chosen to provide formatted transcripts of raw interviews and edited audio stories.

The *Stories of Strength Oral History* project lends itself to providing profound insights into people's lived experience and everyday lives that would otherwise remain hidden. Our student interviewers gain insights into the complexities of people's lived experience and how this interacts with personal bias or public knowledge. They learn that story-telling is a form of communication that connects us to our common humanity wherever we are born, have lived and whatever language we spoke or speak, whatever religion or sect we belong to. They understand how story-telling can be used to preserve culture, language and personal history and use it as a vehicle to share knowledge in a form that has been done traditionally for thousands of years.

XX IOHA Conference – June 2018 – 'Memory and Narration' – Jyväskylä , Finland

Cate Pattison

This year the International Oral History Association held their twentieth biennial conference, celebrating forty years of sharing oral history methodology, projects and passion. Hosts this year were the Finnish Oral History Network and the University of Jyväskylä, drawing over 300 delegates to Finland, a uniquely beautiful and progressive nation. With around 250 international presenters from 52 countries, participants chose from 48 parallel sessions spread over four days. I certainly battled with FOMO constantly, as there were so many wonderful themes and topics. Below is a mere slither of some of the highlights, for me.

Fifteen Australian participants attended the conference, which opened with a keynote address from Adjunct Professor Paula Hamilton from the University of Technology Sydney/Macquarie University. Paula's rich presentation built on her work in memory studies and shared recent research into the experiences of people employed as domestic servants in Australia in the 20th century; their experiences of sexual violence, trauma and shame. Her research has also explored the largely untold and fascinating history of infanticide in this context, with women variously identified as innocent victims and perpetrators. Hers is a complex historical ethical analysis.

In a session on Indigenous forms of oral history, the applicability of these methods for research within First Australian communities was shared by Lorina Barker and Sadie Heckenburg. Sadie explained how the act of Yindymarra, to 'respect, be gentle, polite, honour, and do slowly', transfers so well to oral history practice, ensuring interviewees are granted a culturally safe space and quoted on their own terms.

As those with first-hand World War experiences are getting thinner on the ground, the battles fought in Vietnam are now also becoming pressing for researchers to prioritise. Rose Campbell from Denver shared interviews she had done with college educated women who served in Vietnam with the Red Cross, sent to provide wholesome company, but were more often untrained trauma counsellors. Wrong (now) in so many ways, the cohort became known as 'donut dollies', due to the round shape of their eyes - in contrast to those

of local women. Closer to home, Australian Carolyn Collins' fascinating presentation, 'On the Picket line with Mum', spoke of family memory and the anti-war movement in Australia between 1965-74, in particular the 'Save our Sons' campaign movement, when middle class feminism was galvanising. One interviewee in the study told how she threw her shoe at Harold Holt in an anti-war demonstration at Perth Airport in 1966; the shoe now a proud family heirloom.

Delivering another keynote, Shelley Trower from London has conducted extensive ethnographic research on the practice of reading, and many might relate to her findings that people often remember a book's cover, and the time, place and emotional state they were in when they read it, over and above its literary content. Both men and women in her studies also confessed to using reading as an escape from their families, be it with a shielding broadsheet or a gripping novel. A healthy number of papers focussed on methodology, including one from Martha Norkunus from Tennessee,

A post-sauna dip in the lake. Photo by the author.

who has taught on the practice of listening, and shared some of her training exercises for oral historians including blindfolding interviewers to force focus on the spoken word. Sharon Utakis from the Bronx Community College has done work using more than one interviewer, and could provide some interesting points about the impact of an interviewer's gender and perceived cultural distance, on interviewees.

My own subject area of cultural geography, deindustrialisation and gentrification was also well serviced, with studies from New York, Munich, Macau and Brazil providing sharp and varied contrast of this now global experience, and valuable insight for my work on Mosman Park in Perth.

Once the programme was over for the day there was plenty to keep us busy into the long light evenings. On day two, many of us enjoyed a private tour of the Alvar Aalto museum, a fascinating insight into the work of this prolific modernist Finnish architect and designer. The penultimate day included the AGM of the IOHA, with office bearers appointed for the proceeding two years. Sue Anderson from Adelaide was confidently voted in as the new President, taking the reins from American, Mark Cave. It is wonderful to have one of our own leading this international body and I know that Sue will relish this prestigious opportunity. We were then able to celebrate at the main conference social event which took us cruising over Nordic lakes to a midsummer evening of Finnish food, music and culture. The more intrepid of us enjoyed a sauna followed by an invigorating lake swim, in 10pm broad daylight. As I was reminded by our Finnish hosts, what's shared in the sauna stays in the sauna!

In 2020 the IOHA conference will be held in Singapore.

Reviews and book notes

Review

Elizabeth Campisi, *Escape to Miami: An Oral History of the Cuban Rafter Crisis,* **New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 232 pages. ISBN (hbk) 9780199946877.**

At a time when the world is witnessing an apparently endless wave of mass migration across the Mediterranean of people fleeing war and economic devastation in the Middle East and Africa, Elizabeth Campisi's book on the 1994 Cuban *balseros* (rafters) crisis is certainly a timely publication. Her account of the appalling and inhumane conditions under which Cuban and Haitian refugees were detained at the U.S. naval base of Guantánamo will also resonate with those aware of the Australian government's current policy of detaining would-be asylum seekers (including women and children) in off-shore camps in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Furthermore, the question of immigration remains a key—and as yet unresolved—aspect of U.S.-Cuba relations since the Obama administration declared the strategy pursued against Cuba by ten of his predecessors in the White House a failure, and restored diplomatic relations with Havana.

As a civilian employee working for the U.S. Justice Department's Community Relations Service at Guantanamo, Campisi became what she calls a 'vulnerable observer'. One of her main motivations in documenting the experiences of the rafters in the camps, she explains, was 'to highlight the human cost of the tensions between the U.S. and Cuba, and, more specifically of using the base as an extraterritorial immigration center'. This was in addition to the huge monetary burden of the operation borne by U.S. taxpayers, estimated to be $1 million a day over 17 months.

She begins with a brief overview of the two earlier waves of mass migration from Cuba since 1959 that occurred in 1965 and 1980, which she contends were largely the result of successive U.S. administrations' policy of encouraging illegal emigration, especially by boat. The 'dramatic images of sunburned escapees from communism had a higher propaganda value', she suggests, 'and were therefore more likely to appeal to the American public than the less forlorn plane hijackers and visa recipients'.

The experience of the 1980 Mariel boatlift—when Fidel Castro called President Jimmy Carter's bluff and allowed 125,000 Cubans to be transported by sea to the United States by relatives and friends arriving in boats from Florida—determined how Washington would react to future migration crises as U.S. immigration authorities were forced to respond to the United States being a country of first asylum for refugees for the first time. Approximately 1,000 *Marielitos* were eventually repatriated to Cuba after being deemed 'excludables', many of them convicted criminals, after long drawn-out negotiations between Washington and Havana. Although the U.S. government agreed to issue a minimum of 20,000 visas a year to Cubans wishing to emigrate, in reality only about 10 per cent of that number were granted over the next decade or so. This created an enormous build-up of frustration among would-be émigrés and set the scene for the next migration crisis.

In the wake of the devastating economic crisis that Cuba suffered in the early 1990s after the collapse of its main trading partner, the socialist bloc, U.S. policymakers took steps to further tighten the economic blockade against Cuba in the expectation that the demise of the revolution was imminent. So unsurprisingly, in July and August of 1994 thousands of Cubans took to small (often homemade) craft hoping to reach Florida, expecting to find the usual welcome mat laid out to Cubans 'escaping' revolutionary Cuba and to be fast-tracked to permanent residency under the 1966 *Cuban Adjustment Act*. As during the 1980 Mariel episode, Fidel Castro pronounced that any Cuban wishing to leave could do so. Blaming the Cuban government for the uncontrolled mass emigration, on 19 August 1994 President Bill Clinton suddenly decided that Cuban rafters would not be automatically admitted to the United States and instead would be taken to the U.S. base at Guantánamo to join 21,000 Haitians already languishing there. The Haitians had fled their country a few months earlier due to the political violence and economic catastrophe that followed a coup against

elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide. Campisi draws attention to the drastically different policies adopted for the Cubans and the Haitians, the latter deemed to be 'economic migrants' (in contrast to the Cubans' status as 'political refugees') and whose plight became somewhat infamous for the denial of due process.

President Castro responded to Clinton's actions by stating that his government refused to 'continue to act as border guards for the United States'. A new migration accord was subsequently reached with the Cuban government, signed on 9 September 1994, in which it was agreed that any Cuban 'migrant' rescued at sea would not be admitted to the United States but taken to a 'safe haven' and would have to apply for a U.S. visa in Cuba. This protocol was dubbed the 'wet foot/dry foot' policy, marking a partial end to the preferential treatment of Cuban émigrés since migration became a political weapon the U.S. wielded against the revolutionary government. While this largely staunched the mass illegal departures across the Florida Straits from Cuba, a stand-off began between the detainees in Guantánamo and the U.S. government that lasted several months until Attorney-General Janet Reno announced the rafters' applications would be processed and most admitted into the United States.

The most significant factor contributing to the trauma the Cubans experienced in Guantánamo, in Campisi's view, was the indefinite nature of their detention in the 'legal abyss' they lived in for several months and in some cases over a year. Moreover, Campisi observed their treatment by the U.S. military personnel varied greatly, only improving in July 1995 when Rear Admiral Michael Haskins took over as base commander. She also notes it took some time for appropriate programs to be instituted for the children in the camp—many of them unaccompanied—many exhibiting signs of disturbance such as bedwetting, regressive behavior and anxiety. A later study conducted by the University of Miami showed that children were particularly vulnerable to developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder due to their experiences in the camp and the perilous sea voyage on flimsy craft undertaken in the attempt to reach the United States.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Escape to Miami* is the author's observations of how the behavior of the detainees reflected the social mores and political culture of revolutionary Cuba. Campisi was convinced the 'emotional resilience' evident among the rafters was 'related to their culture and upbringing under the Cuban Revolution'. For example, she noted their 'remarkable facility for organizing themselves', which she attributed to the fact that the majority of Cubans had participated in mass organizations of one kind or another, such as the Committees to Defend the Revolution, and also the experience of attending the schools in the countryside that encouraged independence, resourcefulness and working in groups for a common cause.

Campisi was further struck by the remarkable self-confidence the Cubans displayed in creative pursuits in the camp, such as painting, drawing, poetry and sculpture, whether or not they had had previous artistic training or experience. One respondent told her: 'Cubans are like that—Cubans are creative people'. The detainees showed incredible resourcefulness and inventiveness, able to make do with whatever was on hand. This was clearly the result of decades of shortages and hardship in Cuba. She also comments on their informal social systems and "*doble moral*" with which the Cubans had learned to circumnavigate bureaucratic obstacles.

After the Cuban government's 2013 decision to lift the requirement for its citizens to obtain exit permits to travel abroad, tens of thousands of Cubans began to seek access to the United States via Mexico and Central America. When President Barack Obama suddenly announced the end of the 'dry foot' policy on 12 January 2017, thousands of Cubans were stranded in Mexico and other countries. *The New York Times* commented: 'Cuban identity, and pride, is in no small part forged by its relationship with the United States, both in the tiny country's defiance of its bigger neighbor and then in the unique privileges afforded to those who fled and made it to America. To be suddenly placed on an equal footing with the millions of others around the world hoping to do the same was an especially hard fall.' Nevertheless, once legally on U.S. soil, the special status for Cubans guaranteed under the *Cuban Adjustment Act* still applies, allowing Cuban immigrants to work, receive benefits and, after one year, apply for permanent residency.

Beyond the use of the Guantánamo base for the highly questionable detention of what Campisi calls 'legally and politically inconvenient populations', such as Haitians, Cubans and more recently 'enemy combatants' in the 'war on terror', she points out that there remains the substantive issue of the continued illegal U.S. occupation of the territory against the wishes of the Cuban government. Any effort by Washington to reestablish a normal relationship with Havana, she argues, must involve 'returning the base to sovereign Cuba'.

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Review

Jayne Persian, *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians,* Sydney, New South Books, 2017. 240 pages. ISBN 9781742234854.

The radical decision to take non-British immigrants was deemed necessary for the economic development and defence purposes of the nation. Australia needed tradesmen and other labourers to fill huge gaps in heavy industry, agriculture, house building, and other public works.[1] However, the first Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, was unable to find enough willing migrants from the preferred "Nordic" countries (Sweden, Norway, and Finland). So-called displaced persons, mostly Eastern Europeans refugees fleeing from communism, therefore became a viable source of migrants. Australia started accepting displaced persons under the newly formed International Refugee Organisation (IRO) and their Settlement Scheme from 1947, after Calwell met with the IRO and was persuaded to sign an agreement. Those refugees accepted under the IRO's scheme came under humanitarian grounds, but Calwell and the Migration Officers he placed in Displaced Persons' (DPs) camps in Western Europe had a particular migrant in mind. As Egon Kunz highlights, the scheme became a race between major countries of immigration, including Australia, America and Canada, to recruit 'suitable settlers'—defined both by racial stereotypes and physical fitness.[2] At first, this was single, healthy men capable of performing manual labour, and preferably not professionals or intellectuals. In March 1948, family units were accepted in order to fill immigration quotas. By 1954, Australia had received approximately 170,000 displaced persons. Calwell's 'Beautiful Balts', as the media dubbed them, constituted the first intake of IRO refugees. Many came from the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia; the remainder were originally from Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine and Russia. Despite their collective diversity, they were dismissively and homogenously labelled 'Balts' by the Immigration Department and by the Australian press.[3] The term was later banned from official communications by the government, in preference for the term 'New Australians', which encompassed newly arrived *non-British* migrants. This was part of a wider effort to sell the mass immigration scheme to the public. Persian's *Beautiful Balts* plays on this label, hinting to the hidden histories and problems faced by the DPs' that were 'buried under an avalanche of celebratory propaganda'[4].

Opening with the story of her husband's grandparents—Cossack displaced persons, who narrowly escaped forced repatriation to the Soviet Union—Persian insists that there is no 'typical' DP story. The diverse politics, national sentiments and class backgrounds of these refugees from Soviet-occupied countries shaped their subsequent settlement experiences in Australia. However, there are some consistent strands that *Beautiful Balts* explores, including the virulent anti-communism (and attendant exilic and anti-Soviet nationalisms) of many displaced persons. Drawing on an exciting combination of ethnic community newspapers, archival sources and oral histories, Persian's account shines new light on DP community politics in Australia.

First, *Beautiful Balts* sets the international scene for the movement and then recruitment of DPs to Australia. Segregated nationalist camp communities emerged in the wake of WWII in UNRRA-funded refugee camps in Germany and Italy, which included groups like the Ukrainian-dominated Anti-Bolshevik Block of Nations. As Persian elucidates 'DP elites (usually from a high-status pre-war background) mobilised their compatriots against repatriation and modelled a community-building process that was later used in countries of settlement' [33]. Following this strand, the chapter titled 'Inside the Cold War' traces emergent diasporic identities, often by focussing on publicly prominent (and contentious) personalities, like Vladimir Lezak-Borin. Some participated in the growing Cold-War discourse of anti-communism, though Persian acknowledges that most DPs did not actively participate in political organisations, even if they did refuse repatriation to Soviet-controlled lands. Many continued to build on the nationalist cultural identities established in European DP camps—through newspapers, clubs and community centres.

The oral histories conducted with prominent and not-so-prominent members of Polish, Russian and Baltic groups across Australia offer new insights into community politics as they operated in a paranoid post-war Australia fearful of Soviet espionage. The (translated) Czech, Polish and Latvian newspapers, combined with close archival work, also builds a compelling and complex image of DP adjustment. Building on work first begun by sociologist Jean Martin in the early 1970s, Persian challenges the assumptions that displaced persons easily assimilated. She does so without dramatizing their experiences, nor does she shy away from exploring accusations that some nationalist organisations were fronts for militant, right-wing extremist groups that sheltered leaders with records of genocidal war crimes[5].

This is a field that continues to grow through the digitisation of ethnic community newspapers, and through research conducted as part of the ARC-funded project 'Post war Russian displaced persons arriving in Australia via the China route'. A lengthier study of Soviet-spies in community organisations and the activities of pro-communist and anti-communist groups should be the subject of future study—like the pro-Soviet Russian Social Club in Sydney, and the

intelligence agencies and migrant surveillance that plagued this and similar groups in Australia until the 1980s (the subject of Ebony Hutchin's PhD thesis).

Persian's unobtrusive narrative style, and her skilful integration of a wide-range of resources, makes this an enjoyable read. *Beautiful Balts* is attuned to the dissonant heritage of this diverse cohort, and constitutes a necessary intervention into the historiography of post-war migration in Australia.

Alexandra Dellios, The Australian National University

(Endnotes)

1   John Lack and Jaqueline Templeton, *Bold Experiment: A documentary history of Australian immigration since 1945*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 8.

2   Egon Kunz, *Displaced Persons: Calwell's New Australians*, Canberra, ANU Press, 1988, p. 38.

3   Bruce Pennay, *Calwell's Beautiful Balts*, Wodonga, Parklands Albury-Wodonga, 2007, pp. 1-24.

4   p. 127.

5   p. 162.

Review

Anisa Puri and Alistair Thomson, *Australian Lives: An Intimate History,* Melbourne, Monash University Publishing, 2017. 425 pages. ISBN (print) 978-1-922235-78-7.

In recent decades there has been considerable international research studying not only historical memories (through oral history), but also the meanings and uses of the past among various peoples around the world (through historical consciousness). As oral historian Alistair Thomson has explored, different generations remember different things; and they remember them differently. The idea of 'social generations' and the histories they live through and remember prompted a recent large-scale study of Australian generations, also led by Thomson.

The *Australian Generations Oral History Project* was a collaboration between historians at Monash and La Trobe Universities, the National Library of Australia and ABC Radio National. Researchers worked with three hundred participants, and generated diverse outcomes, including a radio documentary produced by the ABC, research articles, 1221 hours of audio recordings at the NLA, and the book, *Australian Lives*. It is a model of interdisciplinary and multi-institutional history-making that, we can hope, has created a historical archive that will in turn be used for generations to come.

In *Australian Lives* historian Anisa Puri joins Thomson in compiling a collection of participants' life stories and their sense of themselves *in* history. They draw on the interviews of fifty participants—a sample small enough 'so readers can get to know each narrator', as the authors write, and large enough 'so the interviews represent a range of Australian lives and histories'[1]. And that balance definitely feels about right; we *do* get to know these Australians and the lives they led. Those lives feel familiar, as well as representative of worlds and experiences unlike our own (whoever that 'our' might be as readers.)

What's more, the thoughtful editing by Puri and Thomson allows each of these voices to be present throughout the book. In a way, the participants are co-authors, their own lives providing authorial voices that develop throughout the book. Puri and Thomson gently contextualise at the beginning of each chapter, but then it's time for the *Australian Generations* to speak.

The nine chapters cover the topics 'Ancestry', 'Childhood', 'Faith', 'Youth', 'Migrants', 'Midlife', 'Activism', 'Later Life' and 'Telling My Story', and it is a testament to the curating authors that their selection does really give a sense of changing lives, values and experiences over time, as well as the diversity of people's values and experiences *in time*.

For example, we can read the experiences of Aboriginal participant, Lisa Jackson, as she recollects her family's fear of welfare officers' surveillance when she was a girl: 'We had this built-in fear of Welfare, "Oh Welfare's coming to get you" and we didn't understand what that meant. I didn't understand "Welfare". Then my cousins were, "oh, oh, they're coming" and I'm like "What's coming, who's coming?" "Welfare." So you know after a while when you hear the word "Welfare" then you go, "Oh yeah, okay."'[2] But we also get a sense of a strong Aboriginal identity when Jackson describes her mother's explanation for attending Aboriginal community meetings and events. 'This is what we do', she explained[3].

We step back in time to remember the acute divisions of sectarianism in Australian for much of the twentieth century. Ruth Apps remembered her childhood in Wagga in the 1930s: 'When we walked home from the convent after school we had to pass the public school and the nuns always exhorted us, "Don't walk on that side of the road, there are Protestants over there". You did not walk on the same side of the road as the Protestants. You just simply didn't do it'[4]. Yet the lives of other participants also reveal a simultaneous religious tolerance among many families, which were inter-faith or non-denominational.

And we are given extraordinary accounts of how the women's movement radically changed the lives of women in families, how access to birth control and shifting attitudes to work, along with increasing

consciousness of domestic violence altered family life in Australia. Participants recount an emerging feeling of women's freedom. But within that are also the experiences of those, like Lynne Sanders-Braithwaite, for whom family life post feminism's second-wave could still be painful and desperate: 'I had these two beautiful children that I adored but it was caravan parks and farm houses and evictions, lots of violence within the home, lots of fear. A constant feeling of failing at everything I'd ever believed in or wanted'[5].

While each of these topics (Aboriginal history; religion; women) have significant historiographies in their own right, reading these ordinary people's thoughts does offer a powerful glimpse into history as intimate experience (at least as much as any national or global thread). They bring to the page a form of Australian history articulated through lives born and lost, queer sensibilities, and gender, as well as emotions of shame, grief, pride and fear.

In this way, the book sits firmly in the genre of oral social history, which uncovers experiences of the everyday. Along with the social oral histories of Wendy Lowenstein, for example, *Australian Lives* tells a different sort of history. As John Arnold has provocatively suggested in *Rethinking History*, 'There is little more seductive in social history than the promise of access to the "voices" of those normally absent from the historical record.' It's not just a seduction, though, as Christina Twomey has argued. These local and intimate stories do important historical work: 'Overseas scholars who include Australia in their itinerary of the transnational are out there, but they are few and far between. They are even less interested in writing the history of, say, a woman from Queensland, who never left the country, and spent her life working in pubs and shops. But we should be.'

If you're after critical engagement with the Australian Generations participants, you won't find it in this text. This is not an analytical book that interrogates its participants or mediates their lives through the scholarly lens of memory studies. It doesn't seek to dissect pliable memories, explore inconsistencies or look for silences and omissions.

Australian Lives never pretends to be anything other than a collection of participants' lived experiences. And while the researcher in me would have liked an appendix with some more information about the larger project, including some of the questions and maybe participant statistics, there's also something refreshing about just having the text there, as is. (And researchers can also read the authors' journal articles for more detail about the project's method and data.)

What's more, there is an argument that academic intervention can undermine and silence in its urge

to analyse and critically engage. As such, I think *Australian Lives* hints at the radical potential of vernacular narratives that include intimate discourses around gender, race, sexuality, culture and family life. As Maria Nugent has argued in relation to Aboriginal history-making, 'Aboriginal family history is always more than just family history.' Those stories, passed down through Aboriginal families over kitchen tables and on verandas during much of the twentieth century provided a powerful counter-narrative to the academic and official histories from which they were occluded. Consequently, books like *Australian Lives* are an important attempt to document that sort of history making. And if recognising the 'fragmented and unreliable status of archival sources' is a critical step in recognising the limits of the history discipline, as Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley insist, then this sort of quotidian discourse—presented without scholarly intervention—is absolutely essential.

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(Endnotes)

1   p. xi.

2   p. 48.

3   pp. 67-68.

4   p. 98.

5   p. 278.

Review

Svetlana Alexievich, translated by Bela Shayevich, *Second-hand Time, the Last of the Soviets: An Oral History,* London, Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016 [2013]. 520 pages. ISBN (pbk) 978-1-925355-56-7.

Svetlana Alexievich's distinctive oral history-based works reveal the human-scale consequences of the wars and other catastrophes of Soviet and post-Soviet times. Previously, Alexievich has documented women's experiences of the Second World War, the Soviet war in Afghanistan, and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. In *Second-hand Time, the Last of the Soviets*, Alexievich takes a phenomenon as vast and complex as the collapse of the USSR and examines it through the personal stories of its former citizen-believers and the first post-Soviet generation. Through dozens of voices, Alexievich presents an intimate investigation of the end of a regime that dramatically shaped the lives—and so often the deaths—of its people. In pursuit of a portrait of the fast-vanishing '*homo Sovieticus*', Alexievich presents testimony from individuals undergoing the radical social and political changes and conflicts that followed Perestroika. *Second-hand Time* reveals the experiences and reflections of former political prisoners and their descendants, veterans,

writers, bureaucrats, labourers, teachers and students, refugees from the ethnic wars, and others. From this diverse assemblage of voices, Alexievich composes a kind of requiem for the conflicted, complicit, Soviet soul and the world that birthed it.

Alexievich's accomplishment as a writer and documentarian lies in her ability to closely examine extraordinary events through the experiences and impressions of ordinary people caught up in them. She builds her texts from what she calls 'a chorus of individual voices and a collage of everyday details' gathered over years of research and kitchen-table conversations with the people whose stories appear in her work.[1]

 In 2015 she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for 'her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time'. Alexievich's ability to make literature from oral history comes from close engagement with her sources, a keen sense of resonant detail, and her particular way of seeing and interacting with the world around her. In her words, 'A 'fragment of literature' may sparkle into sight at any moment'[2]. Alexievich researched and wrote *Second-hand Time* as a symbolic exile from the Soviet Empire and in physical exile from Belarus. The interviews date from 1991 to 2012, but her own life experience in the Gorbachev generation gives her a profound understanding of her subject, enabling her to elicit emotionally transparent testimonies from the people whose stories she uses. As Alexievich explains, 'We share a communist collective memory. We're neighbours in memory'[3].

Second-hand Time follows the technique of her previous books, a method of gathering and presenting stories that allows her to 'be simultaneously a writer, reporter, sociologist, psychologist and preacher'. Her multifaceted role is evident in the quality of the narratives she elicits from her interlocutors as well as in her skill in editing and arranging the voices she gathers to poignant effect. In addition to these oral monologues and excerpts, she constructs her collage with quotations from a variety of records and news reports. Many of the segments contain references to literature or lines from poems or Soviet songs—another aspect of collective memory Alexievich taps in her composition. In transposing oral expression to the page, she notes the silences, pauses, tears and laughter that accompanied the original narration. Her occasional editorial remarks and asides give the reader a sense of the relational dynamic between Alexievich and her narrators. However, in the extended monologue passages, Alexievich is out of sight for pages at a time, letting the reader take her place as listener as her narrators have their often-spellbinding say.

To offer interpretive order to the book as a whole, Alexievich begins *Second-hand Time* with a 'Chronology', which lists key public events from Stalin's death in 1953 forward, as well as her own introduction, 'Remarks from an Accomplice', the title of which plays on her role as recorder/reporter, as much as it does her admission of her Soviet identity. Here she introduces the purpose and nature of the book, gives the reader some of her own history, and describes her quest: 'In writing, I'm piecing together the history of "domestic» "interior» socialism as it existed in a person's soul. I've always been drawn to this miniature expanse: one person, the individual. It's where everything really happens'[4]. Later in her remarks she describes her approach to cultivating the stories that constitute her work:

> The Soviet civilization… I'm rushing to make impressions of its traces, its familiar faces. I don't ask people about socialism. I want to know about love, jealousy, childhood, old age. Music, dances, hairdos, the myriad and sundry details of a vanished way of life. It's the only way to chase the catastrophe into the contours of the ordinary and try to tell a story. Make some small discovery. It never ceases to amaze me how interesting everyday life really is. There are an endless number of human truths. History is concerned solely with the facts; emotions are outside of its realm of interest. In fact it's considered improper to admit feelings into history. But I look at the world as a writer and not a historian[5].

What Alexievich achieves in the composition of *Second-hand Time* is both history and literature—a universe of memory and emotion curated and presented with a clear-eyed attempt to 'honestly hear out all the participants of the socialist drama…'[6]. The main body of *Second-hand Time* is organised into two major sections. 'The Consolation of Apocalypse' (1991-2001) looks at the life stories of ten people during the transition to freedom in light of the past. 'The Charms of Emptiness' contains ten stories of people's experiences of what came in the decade following—the rise of gangster capitalism, love in the time of ethnic conflicts, losses from the war in Chechnya, terrorism in Moscow, and protests against fraudulent elections in Belarus, among others. Each story is titled with an emblematic phrase or idea drawn from the words of its protagonist. 'On the Beauty of Dictatorship and the Mystery of Butterflies Crushed Against the Pavement' is followed by 'On Brothers and Sisters, Victims and Executioners… and the Electorate'. Arranged and titled in this manner, each story becomes an essay of its own, each one contributing a layer of meaning and another view point in the construction of the multi-dimensional whole. In addition to these significant themes, multiple occurrences of small details bring the narratives into dialogue with each other, two examples being the half-dozen different bouquets of flowers

mentioned across the text, and the existence of at least as many references to and opinions of salami as Stalin.

The most significant theme common to most of the stories collected in *Second-hand Time* is suicide. While noting their contrast to the average Soviet life, Alexievich explores these individuals' rejection of the present and their reach for the unknown as a kind of metaphor for the end of the empire itself. For those unable to speak for themselves in the text, the words of family, friends and bystanders create a portrait of the absent on a personal scale. On a larger scale, the entire collection of testimonies summons the ghost of the Soviet Union and the myriad ways it continues to haunt the people whose lives are entwined with its history. As one narrator puts it: 'Our entire tragedy lies in the fact that our victims and executioners are the same people'[7].

The text itself presents one explicit criticism of Alexievich's work, and it is directed more at her definition of history than at her work itself. A former Kremlin official interpreting the August 1991 suicide of Marshal Sergey Akhromeyev—who killed himself after the failure of the attempted anti-Gorbachev coup—offers his opinion to Alexievich in the course of their conversation: 'I've read your books… You shouldn't put so much stock in what people say, in human truth… History records the lives of ideas. People don't write it, time does. Human truth is just a nail that everybody hangs their hats on'[8]. Despite this objection, like so many of Alexievich's narrators, he allows his desire to be heard and understood to take precedence over his hesitations. Through her intervention, he and dozens of others share their human truth with anyone who is interested in knowing, what was it like?

Through her documentary-collage *oevre* Alexievich goes to unprecedented lengths to deliver an unflinching and artfully crafted portrait of her people. In *Second-hand Time* Alexievich has mined her vanished yet still-present homeland for stories with emotional complexity and detail that rival Dostoevsky's for drama and depth of inquiry into the human condition. I would recommend *Second-hand Time* as a highly compelling read to anyone interested in Soviet and Post-Soviet history, and/or the overlap of oral history and literature. Bela Shayevich's English translation offers fluent access to Alexievich's work and the voices of her collaborators, along with informative footnotes to explain names and events referenced in the text that might be obscure to non-specialist readers.

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(Endnotes)

1 Svetlana Alexievich, Nobel Prize acceptance speech 2015, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2015/alexievich-bio.html.

2 p. 557.

3 p. 25.

4 p. 24.

5 pp. 28-29.

6 p. 23.

7 p. 396.

8 p. 190.

2018 Author Biographies

Ellen Forsyth is a Consultant, Public Library Services at the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. Her work involves providing advice to public libraries and in coordinating state wide working groups for local studies, readers' advisory and reference and information services. Ellen is interested in how public libraries manage collecting current materials for local studies and has experience with collaborative projects.

Judith Pabian is a doctoral candidate in history at the The Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific. Following an honours degree in history from the ANU in 1984, she spent several years in the UK where she took part in social movements during the Thatcher regime and conducted research for the Oxfordshire Local Education Authority. She spent a decade or so designing and implementing multi-faceted programs in the art of applying for research funding, notably ARC grants, working mainly with scholars in the humanities. Her current work draws on conceptual frameworks and approaches to the study of history developed by scholars of Asia, in order to analyse everyday responses to oppressive regimes. She has been researching the everyday politics of resistance in rural Italy for three years. Essential support for the project was provided by the Piero Calamandrei Archive in Montepulciano, its president, Silvia Calamandrei and archivist Francesca Cenni.

Sasha Mackay is an Associate Producer Creative Regions, a Bundaberg-based arts production company that designs and delivers arts-based responses to social issues and concerns. Sasha was awarded her PhD in 2015 from the Queensland University of Technology. Her thesis *Storytelling and new media technologies: investigating the potential of the ABC's Heywire for regional youth* examined life narrative as a form of participation in public service media, and the profound challenges and exciting opportunities that arise when institutions such as the ABC invite audiences to be content-creators and storytellers. Sasha has a passion for capturing the stories of people who live in rural and regional Australia, and she currently coordinates Creative Regions' writing and storytelling projects.

Margaret Ridley is the immediate past president of Oral History Queensland. She has degrees in Arts and Law and a masters in Cultural Heritage. Also, she has a post-graduate diploma of Library Science. She has worked at QUT for most of her professional life. She started as a lecturer with the Faculty of Law and is now working in Equity Services. Her current role has involved a significant amount of teaching, writing and research about racism. She is interested in doing some further research about an observed cultural reticence to talk about racism and its implication for oral history.

ORAL HISTORY AUSTRALIA INC

FINANCIAL REPORTS

FOR THE YEARS ENDED

30 JUNE 2018 AND 30 JUNE 2016

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ORAL HISTORY AUSTRALIA INC

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ORAL HISTORY AUSTRALIA INC

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2018 AND 2017

	Notes	2018 $	2017 $
INCOME			
Capitation Fee	4	8,985	8,265
Standing Orders		65	1,110
Royalties and Copyright Council	5	1,082	867
Conference		-	6,855
Journal		-	185
Interest Income		124	100
		10,256	17,382
EXPENSES			
Direct Cost			
Standing Orders Distribution	6	-	900
Journal Printing and Postage	7	550	5,597
Annual Conference		7,256	2,000
		(7,806	(8,497
Operational Expense			
Bookkeeping Fee		330	330
Website		709	606
Scholarship		-	1,500
Meeting Expense		553	446
Legal Cost		-	71
Sundry		95	-
		(1,687	(2,953
Total Expenses		(9,493	(11,450
Net Surplus / Deficit for the year		763	5,932

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

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ORAL HISTORY AUSTRALIA INC

BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 30 OF JUNE 2018 AND 2017

	Notes	2018 $	2017 $
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and Cash Equivalents	2	33,321	32,931
Sundry Debtors		233	233
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		33,554	33,164
TOTAL ASSETS		33,554	33,164
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade Creditors	3	100	473
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		100	473
NET ASSETS		**33,454**	**32,691**
EQUITY			
Retain Earnings		32,691	26,759
Net Profit / (Loss		763	5,932
TOTAL EQUITY		**33,454**	**32,691**

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

NOTES FOR THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2018 AND 2017

	2018 $	2017 $

NOTE 1: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

The Financial Report is prepared on an accruals basis and is based on historic costs and does not take into account changing money values or current valuations of non-current assets.

NOTE 2: CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

CBA Cheque Account	17,089	16,811
CBA Term Deposit	16,232	16,120
	33,321	**32,931**

NOTE 3: TRADE CREDITORS

Standing Orders Distribution - June 2017	100	450
Website - Reimburse to Sandra	-	23
	100	**473**

NOTE 4: CAPITATION FEES

OHA New South Wales	3,615	2,895
OHA Queensland	1,200	1,155
OHA Tasmania	500	465
OHA South Australia and NT	840	690
OHA Victoria	1,000	1,875
OHA Western Australia	1,830	1,185
	8,985	**8,265**

NOTE 5: ROYALTIES AND COPYRIGHT COUNCIL

Royalties	1,082	867
	1,082	**867**

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

NOTE 6: STANDING ORDERS DISTRIBUTION	2018 $	2017 $
OHA New South Wales	-	525
OHA Queensland	-	-
OHA Tasmania	-	100
OHA South Australia	-	175
OHA Victoria	-	100
OHA Western Australia	-	-
	-	**900**

The total distribution for the Year Ended on 30 June 2017 includes the distribution of $450 corresponding to Financial Year 2016.

NOTE 7: JOURNAL PRINTING AND POSTAGE

Journal Printing	550	3,201
Journal Postage	-	2,396
	550	**5,597**

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

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Call for Papers

Contributions are invited from Australia and overseas for publication in

Oral History Australia Journal No. 41, 2019

Special Issue: Oral History and the Emotions

*Please note that papers and articles on other topics will also be considered.

Contributions are invited in the following three categories:

A Papers on the theme, 'Oral History and the Emotions .' Themes might include:

- Intersubjectivities
- Dealing with distress
- Dealing with catharsis
- Emotions associated with sensory memories
- How to interpret emotions
- The historical significance of emotions
- Culturally expressed emotions
- Emotions contextualised in time and place
- Interviewer emotions.

Papers in Category A may be submitted to the Oral History Australia Editorial Board for peer-review. However, please note:

- Papers for peer-review must demonstrate 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 31 March 2019, they may not be processed in time for publication in the 2019 issue of the Journal. Furthermore, regardless of when offers are forwarded to the Board, no guarantee of publication can be given, due to availability and time constraints of reviewers.

- Before being submitted for peer-review, papers will first be assessed for suitability by the Editorial Board. Authors will be advised of the recommendations made by the Chair of the Board.

Deadline for Category A submissions for peer-review: 31 March 2019 Forward to:

Dr Francesco Ricatti, Chair, Oral History Australia Editorial Board, email: Francesco.Ricatti@monash.edu.

B   Articles/project reports 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 Category B submissions: 31 May 2019

Forward to: Dr Sue Anderson, Editor, Oral History Australia Journal, email: Sue.Anderson@unisa.edu.au.

C   Reviews of books and other publications from Australia or elsewhere that are of interest to the oral history community: may include reviews of static or internet available exhibitions, or any projects presented for a public audience (*limit 1,500 words*).

Deadline for Category C submissions: 1 April 2019

Forward to: Dr Gemmia Burden, Reviews Editor, Oral History Australia Journal, email: g.burden@uq.edu.au.

Accompanying Materials

Photographs, drawings and other illustrations are particularly welcome, and may be offered for any of the above categories of contribution. Please obtain written permission from image owners and make every endeavour to ascertain the name of the photographer.

Membership information

Oral History Australia

(formerly the Oral History Association of Australia)

The Oral History Association of Australia was established in 1978. In 2013 the name was changed to Oral History Australia. Each State is a member association of the national body. 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.

State 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 Oral History Australia Journal. Members receive a copy of the annual Oral History Australia Journal and newsletters and publications from their individual State associations. Among other publications, Oral History Australia, South Australia/ Northern Territory has published the *Oral History Handbook* by Beth M Robertson, which is available for purchase by 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 to State member associations should be directed to the following addresses:

ACT
Incorporated into the New South Wales association.

New South Wales
President: Dr Shirleene Robinson,
Oral History New South Wales
PO Box 261
Pennant Hills NSW 1715
Email: president@ohansw.org.au
Phone: 02 8094 1239
Website: www.oralhistorynsw.org.au

Northern Territory
Incorporated into the South Australian association.

Queensland
President: Elizabeth Gondwe
PO Box 12213 George Street
Brisbane Qld 4003
Email: info@ohq.org.au

Website: www.ohq.org.au

South Australia
President: Dr Annmarie Reid
PO Box 3113,
Unley SA 5061
Email: presidentohasant@gmail.com
Website: www.oralhistoryaustraliasant.org.au

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

Victoria
President: Dr Francesco Ricatti
C/o RHSV, 239 A'Beckett Street,
Melbourne Vic 3000

Email: contact.oralhistoryvictoria@gmail.com
Website: www.oralhistoryvictoria.org.au

Western Australia
President: Kyra Edwards
PO Box 1065
Nedlands WA 6909
Email: ohaawa@gmail.com
Website: www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/oha-wa.html