

# INTERNATIONAL WORK



## AFRICA

Students from Gifford High School in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Photo: Heeten Bhagat.

### **ZIMBABWE** **Conversations Across Generations**

Dr Rory Pilosof and Heeten Bhagat introduce 'Conversations Across Generations', an intergenerational oral history project in Zimbabwe.

'History, citizenship and belonging are all highly contested in Zimbabwe. Religious, political and ethnic tensions have resulted in diverse and complicated historical narratives being simplified or overlooked in favour of patriotic and nationalist narratives. As a result, there is a clear imperative to recognise and document the cultural and ethnic diversity of Zimbabwe. One of the key challenges that "Conversations Across Generations" aims to address is the fact that many Zimbabwean youth are not being exposed to

the traditions and cultural practices of the past. Many are unaware of the richness of their cultural heritage and this project is designed to reconnect the youth with their past.

"Conversations Across Generations" seeks to encourage communication practices between young people (high school and university students) and elders by getting the students at chosen schools to conduct interviews with senior citizens that explore memories of traditions and cultural practices from their youth. By facilitating inter-generational dialogue the aim is to help young Zimbabweans learn about their past and culture. In addition recording these exchanges goes towards building an archive that gives insight into cultural practices and pasts from a wide range of people and cul-

tures in Zimbabwe.

'The first phase of the project has had some very positive feedback from the schools and communities involved. The students were encouraged by the enthusiasm of elders in their chosen communities and the children found the interviews a fantastic learning experience, both from the stories that they heard and the technical skills learnt. Both the schools and communities involved have asked for the project to continue.

'Initial seed funding for this project was raised by the Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust, through the Dialogue Facilitation Fund granted by the UNDP. The project is currently seeking further funding from UNESCO and other private funders. The project is also partnering with the National Archives of

Zimbabwe, which will co-house the material collected and assist with the role out of the larger project. Africa University, in Mutare, has also agreed to establish a Culture and Oral Traditions Unit to ensure proper cataloguing and archiving of the collections.

‘With adequate funding the project seeks to connect with schools and communities across the country and ensure that ethnic and regional diversity is represented in the venture. Currently there are three schools and one university participating and we would like to see this increased to ten schools and five universities over the next twelve to eighteen months.’

- For further information on the project, please contact Heeten Bhagat, email [souxiip@gmail.com](mailto:souxiip@gmail.com) or Rory Pilosof, email [PilosofR@ufs.ac.za](mailto:PilosofR@ufs.ac.za)

## ASIA

### INDIA

#### Re-mapping Manipur 1939-1945

Dr Wahengbam Jyotirmoy Singh, assistant professor from the College of Teacher Education in Manipur, reports on a project to record the memories of men and women in Manipur who witnessed the Second World War. The project is funded by University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, India and aims to document the impact of the war on Manipur and to understand the socio-economic and cultural history of Manipur during the period.

‘The Second World War reached India with the Japanese bombing of Imphal, the capital of Manipur on 10 May 1942. This changed the life of the inhabitants of Imphal as well as those living in remote areas of Manipur. During this war period many Allied soldiers arrived in different parts of Imphal including British, American, Africa, Nepali, Gurkha, Pathan and Punjabi.

‘Almost 100 Manipuri men and women who witnessed the Second World War have been interviewed so far, with each interview lasting between one and two hours. All interviews have been video recorded. The interviewees include people from all walks of life and include members of the royal family. This project is important because, despite the many works written about this period, the accounts of ordinary

people who witnessed the history of Manipur have been given little consideration.

‘Interviews include memories of the sight of the Japanese plane (the first plane seen by many), the bombing of Imphal, leaving their homes for a safer place, scarcity of food, living on government rations, and the good relations between soldiers and the local population. Almost all interviewees mention their fond memories with the soldiers. For example, some interviewees recall soldiers visiting their houses, bringing biscuits and sweets, and becoming emotional about their own children whilst spending time with local families.



Interviewee Maharajkumari Mangisana, sister-in-law of the late Bodhachandra, the last king of Manipur, with S Devakanta, local guide. Photo: Dr Wahengbam Jyotirmoy Singh.

‘We plan to interview more people alive in Manipur during the Second World War, and if further funding becomes available we wish to create a documentary film from the recorded interviews.’

- For further information about the project, please contact Dr Wahengbam Jyotirmoy Singh directly, email [wjyotirmoy@yahoo.co.in](mailto:wjyotirmoy@yahoo.co.in)

## EUROPE

### THE NETHERLANDS

#### Refugee Oral History Project

Saskia Moerbeek, director of Stichting Bevordering Maatschappelijke Participatie (Foundation for the Promotion of Social Participation) introduces a multi-city community-based refugee oral history project, ‘Ongekend Bijzonder’ (‘Specially Unknown’). The

project started in October 2013 and will run until October 2016.

‘The project aims to collect and create a permanent record of individual refugees’ life histories from across the Netherlands. These life stories will be accessible to the general public and will offer a new primary source for further research.

‘Refugees are an integral part of the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht and have contributed to the economic, social and cultural fabric of their cities.

Yet the lives of the city’s refugees and the history of refugee communities remain undocumented and marginalised. Public perception of refugees is largely shaped by dominant media and political interests which often represent refugees in a negative light. The intention of the project is to initiate the process of changing these representations and perceptions.

‘200 individual life histories of (former) refugees will be collected with special attention to explore and document their contributions to the development of the city they live in. The interviews will be conducted in either the Dutch language or the interviewee’s mother tongue. Participating refugee communities include: Iranian, Iraqi, former Yugoslavian, Eritrean, Chilean, Afghan, Somalian, Congolese, Ethiopian and Vietnamese.

‘There also will be sixteen sub-projects in which refugees from participating communities are invited to work with professional artists to create an artistic presentation of a common theme in their stories.

‘Finally in each city there will be a presentation to the public using either theatre, opera, art exhibitions or storytelling, based on the collected material. These presentations will be made in collaboration with the city museums, archives and other public institutions. At the end of the project the life stories will be made accessible through a website, a publication for the general public and a final international symposium.

‘In each city the main partners (museums, archives and refugee communities) are represented in a local steering group. On a national level a committee of experts from different disciplines will explore the many questions related to the project.

‘To collect the stories according to oral history standards and to organise



Training fieldworkers for the Refugee Oral History Project, Netherlands.  
Photo: Saskia Moerbeek.

the group projects, twenty fieldworkers from the ten participating communities are following a professional training programme of six months. Every interview will be recorded in a combination of audio and video formats and will be transcribed and/or translated. To ensure the streaming and accessibility of the material we will work together with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

'The first part of the project is funded by SNS Reaal Fonds, the European Commission (migration funds) and the city of Amsterdam. Further funding is currently being sought for the second part of the project.'

- For further information about the project, please visit the project website at [www.ongekendbijzonder.nl](http://www.ongekendbijzonder.nl)

## LATIN AMERICA

### ARGENTINA

#### **Sugar Workers of Tucumán: Working Class Culture and the Marxist Left (1966- 1975)**

Tucumán's sugar workers were one of the main groups of social support for the political-military organisation the Revolutionary Worker's Party and the People's Revolutionary Army (PRT-ERP) during the period 1966-1975. Alejandra Pisani, a doctoral student at Universidad de Buenos Aires, has been a member of the Research Group on

Genocide in Tucumán (GIGET) since 2008. She introduces her research which focuses on the culture of the sugar workers in Tucumán, Argentina, between 1960 and 1980.

'The central hypothesis of this research is that cultural traditions have played a key role in forging a relationship between sugar workers and the guerrillas of the PRT-ERP. Research is currently under final development and expected to be completed by 2015.

'So far, sugar workers and grass-roots activists of the time have been interviewed as well as people who came into contact with them. Interviews were carried out by the GIGET and since 2013 have been available to authorised researchers in Tucumán and

in the Oral History Archive of the University of Buenos Aires.

'One of the main research challenges was working with people belonging to a social group specifically targeted by the army's repression (called "Operation Independence") in 1974 and 1975, and by the 1976-1983 military dictatorship in Argentina. The persistence of the effects of terror in the population created challenges in building a relationship of trust in which respect for the interviewees' times and patterns of sociability of the local culture has played a key role. Establishing trust was vital to access the meanings and values of workers in the past.

'One of the main findings of the research has been the identification of a rebellious working tradition grounded on class experience and transmitted orally from generation to generation.'

- For further information about the project, please contact Alejandra Pisani, email [alepisani@hotmail.com](mailto:alepisani@hotmail.com)

## CARIBBEAN

### ST LUCIA

#### **Celebrating St Lucia's Cultural Community**

Marian Nelson and Allen Sherman report on the 'St Lucia Oral History Project' initiated in 2007, which aims to record and communicate the personal histories of St Lucia's artists and other cultural contributors.

'The scenic beauty of St Lucia attracts thousands of tourists every day, however the rich cultural life of the island is much less celebrated. The idea for the St Lucia Oral History Project



Sugar workers on strike at the Santa Ana Sugar Mill in Tucumán, 1964. Photo: *Compañero* newspaper.



was sparked by a three-week visit to St. Lucia in 2004, when the St Lucian poet John Robert Lee introduced us to the artist Dunstan St Omer. In 1972 St Omer painted the first black Holy Family in the Caribbean as a magnificent church mural, yet this historic site is rarely visited by tourists. Similarly, few visitors know that Nobel laureate (for literature) Derek Walcott is St Lucian with much of his poetry filled with imagery from St Lucia.

To date, we have interviewed sixty St Lucian artists, writers, musicians, historians and other cultural figures aged twenty-five to eighty-five. We are helped by students from the University of Vermont who receive college credit for their work on the project. This summer (2014) we will be teaching a course in Caribbean Studies and Literature at the college, with an emphasis on St Lucia.

'The 400 hours of interviews are currently being transcribed, and we are starting to weave together a narrative history of the island told in the voices of the interviewees. St Lucia became independent in 1979; our oral history moves



**Top:** The Holy Family mural by Dunstan St Omer. **Photo:** Marion Nelson and Allen Sherman. **Above:** Sir Dunstan St Omer and Derek Walcott (Nobel laureate), November 2008. **Photo:** Marion Nelson.

from colonial times through independence and beyond; our interviewees tell the story. We are also working to create a multi-media presentation on the impacts of globalisation on St Lucia's cultural identity and heritage.

'We believe all the history and stories recorded through the interviews belongs to the people of St Lucia. All

interview recordings (audio and video) and transcripts will be given to St Lucia's Folk Research Centre where they will be freely available to everyone to access.'

● For further information about the project, please visit the project website at [www.stluciaoralhistory.org](http://www.stluciaoralhistory.org)

**OCEANIA****PAPUA NEW GUINEA****The Kokoda Pilot Study: Papua New Guinea in the Second World War**

In November 2013, Ovoru Indiki, thought to be among the last of the famous 'fuzzy wuzzy angels'<sup>1</sup> who supported Australian soldiers fighting along the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1942, died, reportedly aged 105. Ben Moide, slightly younger but with an illustrious record in the Papuan Infantry Battalion – the 'green shadows' who 'moved silently in the jungle, inflicting casualties' on the Japanese<sup>2</sup> – passed away in January this year.

Their passing underlines the urgency of the task, first outlined during a visit to PNG by Australia's then prime minister Julia Gillard in May 2013, to 'document an oral history of Papua New Guineans' experiences during World War II'<sup>3</sup>. One year later, the pilot stage of the project – focusing on a small number of locations in the vicinity of the Kokoda Trail – has commenced. Dr Jonathan Ritchie of Australia's Deakin University introduces this project:

'The pilot study is overseen by an advisory panel led by the director of PNG's National Museum and Art Gallery, the Cambridge-educated Papua New Guinean anthropologist Dr Andrew Moutu. Dr John Waiko, PNG's

premier historian and the author of PNG's definitive historical textbook, is providing historical expertise and cultural advice. Other Papua New Guineans are taking lead roles in researching and recording this critical period in PNG's history as local historians, interviewers, and translators.

'The pilot study is funded through the Kokoda Initiative, a partnership between the governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia to sustainably manage the Owen Stanley Ranges, Brown River Catchment and Kokoda Track Region.

'So far, the study has highlighted the war's pervasive and profound influence on Papua New Guinean communities, from the Japanese invasion of New Guinea in early 1942 until, and after, their surrender in August 1945. Men and women, old and young – all were affected. Most interviews have been with the sons and daughters of the carriers, fighters, cooks, medical orderlies and domestic helpers, but a small number of people who participated in the war effort survive. Two interviewees – Claude Gegera and The Revd Gibson Gisi, both eighty-nine years old and living at Deboin Village in PNG's Northern Province – stand out for their near-photographic memories.

'The strong message is that this has largely been an untold story, despite the apparently desultory attention given to the men and women who served Aus-

tralia as "fuzzy wuzzy angels". The Kokoda pilot study is welcomed enthusiastically by many Papua New Guineans who see in it a long-overdue recognition of the vital role played by their mothers and fathers in the defeat of Japanese forces between 1942 and 1945.

'The pilot study will yield many lessons for how best to extend the oral history exercise documenting PNG's perceptions of the Second World War across Papua New Guinea leading up to the seventy-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of fighting in 2017.'

● For more information, please visit [www.deakin.edu.au/news/2014/21052014PNGKokoda.php](http://www.deakin.edu.au/news/2014/21052014PNGKokoda.php)

**1.** A term that gained prominence in the 1943 poem by the Australian sapper, Bert Beros.

**2.** Australian Government, Department of Veterans' Affairs, 'The Kokoda Track'. Accessed online at <http://kokoda.commemoration.gov.au/four-peoples-at-war/new-guineans-at-kokoda.php>, 4 June 2014.

**3.** Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Prime Minister concludes visit to Papua New Guinea'. Accessed online at <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/browse.php?did=19339>, 4 June 2014.

**International Work** is edited by Siobhan Warrington who welcomes all contributions by email to [siobhan@oraltestimony.org](mailto:siobhan@oraltestimony.org)

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# ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY STATEMENT ON THE BOSTON COLLEGE BELFAST PROJECT, MAY 2014

The legal action taken by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to seize oral histories held by Boston College serves as a warning not only to oral historians, but to all those engaged in collecting historical data about criminal activity or allegations of criminal offences. The case raises legal, ethical and moral issues for researchers and archivists.

We do not believe that there is a lack of legal clarity regarding the status of oral history confidentiality and recording agreements. The law is quite clear. The Oral History Society has consistently advised that we can continue to offer assurances to our interviewees about the closure and confidentiality of their interviews, or parts of their interviews, within archives and other places of deposit, *except* where they have revealed criminal acts.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, whilst publicly-funded archives and other bodies holding archive materials are legally obliged to respond to requests under the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts, this does *not* mean that they have to provide access to closed and/or restricted and confidential interviews.

Nonetheless disclosure of confidential information to meet a legal requirement can be mandatory, and beyond the reasonable control of an archive. Such legal obligations may include (but are not limited to) court orders; or mandatory obligations of disclosure arising from statutory legislation. Oral historians and archivists should be clear about these limitations when working with interviewees. Where illegal activities are divulged and recorded as part of an oral history interview, it is

not possible to guarantee that such data, if closed or restricted, will not be accessed in the case of a court order compelling the release of such material.

The Oral History Society has continued to invest effort in keeping our ethical and legal guidelines up to date (see [www.ohs.org.uk/ethics.php](http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics.php)), and remains convinced that oral historians must work to meet legal and ethical standards that protect the people we interview.

We also believe, however, that oral history can make an important contribution to our understanding of the past. Current sensitivities, whether personal or political, may change, as the situation relating to the Boston College Belfast Project shows. Priorities and policies may also change. In this case, state actions, such as the PSNI subpoenas, are potentially harmful to research which is based in the elicitation of the memories of participants in conflict and struggle. This is particularly so when that research is into areas that have not been spoken about publicly and where reprisal is a real fear amongst divided protagonists and victims. But it might also have the effect of discouraging individuals from speaking openly and honestly in a wide variety of contexts.

An overlooked and more reassuring aspect of the US court judgment was that only material specific to a named crime need be disclosed, thus partly dispelling fears that the police can go on 'fishing trips' in archives.<sup>2</sup>

PSNI made use of the subpoenas in the stated belief that the oral history materials might form the basis for criminal investigations leading to pros-

ecutions. When archives are drawn into legal processes by the state or its agents historians are placed in a difficult position and this is particularly the case for oral historians who depend on participants having confidence in our practices. The state itself is of course not always neutral in its use of archived material. We also would note the continuing use of embargoes by civil servants and politicians in other circumstances that have served to avoid legal redress.

The Boston case highlights a key challenge for researchers operating in post-conflict situations in which peace settlements have inadequately addressed past crimes. There can be a lack of clarity for oral historians working in particular contexts. For example, in post-conflict situations in which a peace process has failed to address past culpability, by means of either amnesty or 'special' statute of limitations. Silencing the voices of the past, while undertaking partial and selective legal actions, does not bode well for the future. History, left unaddressed, to paraphrase James Joyce, may well result in a nightmare from which we will struggle to awake.

## ■ The Trustees of the Oral History Society

1. See 'What should I do if the police want access to interviews in my collection?' in Frequently Asked Questions, *Is your oral history legal and ethical?: practical steps*, [www.ohs.org.uk/ethics.php](http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics.php), accessed online 13 May 2014.
2. In the Boston College Belfast Project case the initial judgment to release all the materials (as subpoenaed up to 2011) was overturned, and only relevant material specific to a named crime was required to be turned over. Sensationalist and inaccurate media reports failed to note Judge Young's judgment which basically was that there was a 'paucity of information' in respect to the crime and that Boston College need only provide parts of two interviews from two interviewees. Judge Young also stated that the court was mindful of the requirements of academic freedom.