

# INTERNATIONAL WORK

## AFRICA ■ EGYPT OCCUPY HISTORY

Randa Kaldas, Associate Director of the Economic and Business History Research Centre at the American University in Cairo (AUC) reports on the oral history component of the *University on the Square* project.

‘On 25 January 2011 thousands of Egyptians marched on the streets of all major cities chanting “*eesh, horreya*”, “*adala egtema’eya*” (bread, freedom, social justice) leading to the toppling of the then president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, on 11 February 2011. The movement afforded the opportunity for researchers to occupy a “front seat to history” and it wasn’t long before several projects were conceived that aimed to document the January 25 revolution. In an email to the American University in Cairo community on 7 February 2011, the President of the university Lisa Anderson announced “...a university-wide project to collect testimonies, photographs, audio recordings, artifacts, memorabilia and other documentary evidence of the events of the last several weeks across Egypt”.

‘Our project, *University on the Square: Documenting Egypt’s 21st Century Revolution* seeks to preserve the history of the momentous events of early 2011 in Egypt through the eyes of the AUC community. The participation and contribution of various members of AUC community to the revolution could mark the institutional history of AUC for years to come.

‘With respect to the oral history component of the project, by February



Citizens demanding change in Tahrir Sqaure, February 2011. Photo: Ahmed Abdel Latif.

2012, the total number of interviewees in the university wide project had reached 137. Interviewees are by and large affiliated to AUC, yet are still representative of the different constituencies within Egypt: the youth, political activists, the intellectuals, and the working class.

‘The Economic and Business History Research Center (EBHRC) staff have to date, recorded interviews with 43 individuals. Of these interviews, six are with AUC faculty (three of whom were members of the committee of the wise’), and 18 are with AUC staff; the majority of whom are security guards of the AUC down-

**1.** A group of prominent Egyptian independent figures formed this committee in February 2011 and joined the national dialogue with Suleiman and opposition parties, in an effort to promote a solution to the country’s crisis.

town campus which overlooks Tahrir Square. These are eyewitnesses that were bound to Tahrir Square by virtue of their work commitment rather than by choice. The collection also includes a doctor at the Tahrir clinic, set up to serve the injured during the period January 25-February 11 and a barber in one of the buildings around the square.

‘The majority of EBHRC interviews were conducted during the months of February, March, April, and May 2011. However, the University on the Square project is still ongoing and new voices continue to contribute to the project. The value of The University on the Square project is yet to unfold. To find out more visit the project website: [www.aucegypt.edu/OnTheSquare](http://www.aucegypt.edu/OnTheSquare) or email us at [onthesquare@aucegypt.edu](mailto:onthesquare@aucegypt.edu)’



**ASIA**  
**■ INDIA**  
**FOUNDING OF THE ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF INDIA (OHAI)**

In the Spring 2012 edition of the journal we reported on the first national oral history conference in India held in July 2011 in Bengaluru. Here, Dr Indira Chowdhury from the Centre for Public History, Bengaluru, reports on the follow-up to that conference, the establishment of the Oral History Association of India:

‘The seeds for the newly formed Oral History Association of India (OHAI) were sown at the first national level Oral History Conference held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru on 19 July 2011.

‘On the 2nd of June 2012, a group of academics, historians and practitioners from different fields, all with a deep commitment to oral history, met in Bengaluru at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology to discuss and determine the framework for the new Association.

‘The meeting began with a *Pecha Kucha* (Japanese term meaning ‘chit chat’) session on ‘Challenges of Oral History in India’ coordinated by Indira Chowdhury. Suroopa Mukherjee presented on the ethics of oral history with trauma victims, Meena Menon explored ‘Oral history and documentation of political events’, Rama Lakshmi elaborated on ‘Oral history and museums’, Vrunda Pathare discussed the ‘Challenges of corporate

*The Pecha Kucha session during the meeting to establish the OHAI. Photo: Indira Chowdhury.*

oral histories’ and K Lalitha spoke on ‘Memory into History’. The constitution, membership details, activities, vision and objectives of the Association were discussed and defined thereafter.

‘The OHAI will be headquartered in Bengaluru. The present Committee has Dr Pramod Srivastava (University of Lucknow) as President, Dr Indira Chowdhury as Secretary, and film maker, Deepa Dhanraj as Treasurer. The Association is currently awaiting registration.

‘OHAI is committed to promoting oral history through conferences and workshops as well as setting the standards for oral history archives. It will build an active presence both locally and internationally through networks and partnerships. OHAI intends to publish a newsletter called *OHAI-Varta* (“Varta” in many Indian languages means “News”). The Association hopes to have its first Annual Conference in Lucknow, India in 2013.’

**■ JAPAN**  
**ORAL HISTORIES WITH SURVIVORS OF THE 2011 EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI**

David Slater, a cultural anthropologist and ethnographer from Sophia University, Tokyo, reports on an oral history project he and his students are conducting in the Tohoku region of Japan:

‘On 11 March 2011, the largest earthquake in recorded history hit the north coast of Japan, in a region called Tohoku. This triggered a tsunami that was often three stories tall and which peaked much higher. More than 18,000 people were killed or are still missing. A further 40,000 people were displaced, most of whom are still living in temporary housing units. The destabilisation of the nuclear reactors in the area and the government’s lack of any clear resettlement plan have left these people in limbo, unsure if they will ever return to their homes.

‘The disaster has quite possibly been the most minutely documented disaster of any in history, but one important part of the tragedy has been lost in the waves – the human voice – the immediate reflections, both personal and collective, of events and situations, in narrative form. Our group of students at Sophia University, Tokyo, are in the process of systematically collecting these voices.

‘Like many here in Japan, I spent the better part of the spring and summer of 2011 digging toxic mud and removing rubble. (See more at: <http://accjournal.com/getting-your-hands-dirty>.) When it came time to return to classes in the autumn, I struggled to find a way that my students and I could contribute. As we were volunteering, we began to interview other volunteers to collect their experiences and to get the word out that more help was needed. When the locals saw our interviewing, they began to see some utility in us beyond our strong backs.

‘We video record the interviews, and then bring them back to Tokyo to code them, and develop our next round of questions. Because we are committed to working closely with the community, we then have another round of consultations with local residents before continuing with the next round of interviews. This is a slow and costly procedure, but it ensures data that truly reflects the views of the residents and creates more community ownership.

‘Transcribing, translating and editing this raw footage will have to wait for more labour and more money. Sophia University has brought us rudimentary cameras, and until now has been supporting the students’ travel and logging expenses.

‘Our interviews cover three main areas: conditions before March 2011

(the difficulties of a depressed, rural economy that is losing many of their youngsters); the period from the earthquake until today (the upheaval of the disaster and life in temporary accommodation); and survivors' visions of the future. A selection of the videoed interviews can be viewed on the following website: [www.tohokurecovery.com/2012/04/21/rebuilding-the-area/](http://www.tohokurecovery.com/2012/04/21/rebuilding-the-area/)

'As we collect them, the interviews will be part of scholarly databases, such as this Digital Archive at Harvard (<http://www.jdarchive.org/?la=en>) but also at each village, we are working to set up Community Archives, places that will serve as a record of the disaster, but also as an important resource for the continued process of community rebuilding.'

David is currently looking for funding to support the continuation of this important project. If anyone has any ideas please do contact him at: [dhslater@gmail.com](mailto:dhslater@gmail.com)

## EUROPE

### ■ GREECE

#### INTERNATIONAL ORAL HISTORY CONFERENCE

Riki Van Boeschoten, President of the Oral History Association of Greece, reports on the international conference which took place in Volos, Greece, 25-27 May 2012:

'The conference, entitled "Bridging generations: interdisciplinarity and life stories in the 21st century" opened new pathways for the development of oral history in Greece. It attracted more than 250 visitors from Greece, Turkey, the UK, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia and Denmark and included 53 papers on a broad range of topics (oral history and museums, digital technologies, gender, violent conflicts, the present economic crisis, education, religion, migration). Please see <http://extras.ha.uth.gr/oralhistory/en/programme.asp> for the conference programme.

'The conference fully confirmed the interdisciplinary nature of oral history and life story research, with speakers and participants from the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, museology and even architecture. Among the highlights of the conference were the introductory remarks by Professor Andonis Liakos about the reasons for the belated emergence of oral history in Greece, Toby



Paul Thompson giving his key note lecture. Photo: Riki Van Boeschoten.

Butler's presentation on the use of "memoriscapes", an excellent panel on Greece and the Soviet Union in the 1940s, Joanna Bornat's paper on the use of comparative oral history, Paul Thompson's paper on the pros and cons of creating an Oral History Association, and a more reflective panel on methodology.

'The conference also demonstrated the vibrancy of oral history in Greece beyond the academy: there were two interesting sessions on the use of oral history in school and university curriculums, as well as a lively session presenting the work of two local oral history groups from Athens and Crete. The conference proceedings can be viewed (mostly in Greek) at <http://vod.uth.gr>.

'On the last day of the conference, 45 founding members created the Oral History Association of Greece, adopted its constitution and elected a 7-member provisional council. While some members wished to define more strict criteria for membership and to stress the Association's academic profile, the Assembly finally followed Paul Thompson's advice to keep membership as broad as possible. The seven members that were elected on the provisional council represent universities all over Greece, which have developed activities in the field of oral history. The official establishment of the Association will take place next year, after approval of its constitution

by the Greek court. On that occasion, the Association will organise a second conference and elect its Administrative Council.

'In the days after the conference, Rob Perks and Toby Butler offered an excellent oral history training workshop to a group of 30 volunteers. In Athens we also organised a meeting of local oral history groups with Rob Perks, focusing mainly on networking and the organisation of oral history archives. Finally, on 31 May Rob Perks gave a lecture on the latest developments of oral history.

'Oral historians from abroad who wish to communicate with the new Association can send a message to our new mailing list [epi@lists.uth.gr](mailto:epi@lists.uth.gr) or to its president, Riki Van Boeschoten: [rvboe@yahoo.gr](mailto:rvboe@yahoo.gr)'

## CARIBBEAN

### ■ HAITI

#### THE HAITI MEMORY PROJECT

Claire Payton, a doctoral candidate in history at Duke University, reports on the Haiti Memory Project (HMP), an oral history project that documents stories of earthquake survivors in Port-au-Prince. Over the course of six months in 2010 Payton conducted more than 100 interviews in the Haitian capital. This summer, work will begin on the collection to process it using groundbreaking OHMS software in order to make it digitally searchable online.



Claire and her translators in Port-au-Prince.

‘Like everyone following the earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010, I was moved by the devastation. As a student of Haitian history I was acutely aware that those few seconds had utterly transformed the country’s future. Knowing from my experience studying Haiti’s past that the people most directly impacted by poverty and destruction rarely leave traces in traditional archives, I decided to move to Port-au-Prince as an independent researcher and conduct interviews with poor and displaced Haitians about the disaster and its aftermath.

‘I tried to move beyond the structural question of Haiti in “crisis” in order to address how everyday men and women give meaning to the earthquake and its aftermath. The participants, many of whom live in Haiti’s displaced persons camps, range from young adults to elders in their 60s. With the help of translators, I conducted most interviews in Haitian Creole, but some are also in French or English. Given the context of a predominately oral culture, oral history is a medium that permits us to document and preserve the valuable insights and perspectives of ordinary people. I didn’t have experience with

oral history before going to Haiti, but it was clear that it was an imperative method of research.

‘In order to realise the goal of full digital access to the HMP collection, I began collaborating with the Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky in the spring of 2011. Dr. Douglas Boyd, the director of the Nunn Center, is developing the OHMS software tool that connects a textual search, in either a transcript or an index, to the corresponding moment in the online audio or video interview. The HMP will become the first multilingual collection processed and presented online using the OHMS system.’

To learn more about the Haiti Memory Project, visit the website at [www.haitimemoryproject.org](http://www.haitimemoryproject.org) or follow the project on Twitter at @Haiti Memory.

**LATIN AMERICA**  
**■ BRAZIL**  
**LABORATORY OF ORAL HISTORY AND IMAGE (LABHOI-UFF)**

This year the Laboratory of Oral History and Image (LABHOI), a division of the History Department of

Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil will celebrate 30 years of work. Ana Mauad and Hebe Mattos from LABHOI report on what’s planned for this anniversary and provide an overview of the LABHOI’s current activities:

‘Since its creation in 1982, the Laboratory of Oral History and Image (LABHOI), has been developing projects on the history of memory of different Brazilian communities based on both oral and visual sources, and the relationship between them.

‘The main purpose of LABHOI’s projects, despite its academic origin, is to engage communities in the production of their own history through visual and oral records. One of the results of this work is the organisation of a digital database, accessible for a large public, which covers three fields of interest: Memory, Africa and Slavery; Memory, Art and Media; and Memory, City and Communities.

‘LABHOI has become an important source for theoretical and methodological debates about the uses of visual representations of the past, and its members have published books and articles in this field. Recently LABHOI turned to the production of experi-



A photograph by Milton Guran, an interviewee in LABHOI's project: *History and memory of photographic practice*.

mental videos based on the idea of videographic writing of history, a modality of historical text that can perfectly mix sounds and images of recollections.

'In 2012, we launched the DVD box *Present Pasts* with four documentaries built upon our audiovisual archive *Memories of Slavery*. This audiovisual collection has been developed since 1994 and is composed of more than 300 hours of interviews with the descendants of slaves of the old plantation coffee areas of Rio de Janeiro ([www.labhoi.uff.br/passados-presentes](http://www.labhoi.uff.br/passados-presentes)).

'Other recent projects include:

- *Sounds and Images of Recollections: Narratives and Registers of Afro-Brazilian Identities and otherness from XIX to XXI century*, sponsored by the Brazilian Research Council (CNPq), in which an international network of researchers are working on issues about the memory of the slavery.
- *History and memory of photographic practice in contemporary Brazil* which is organising a database of interviews with different professionals who have worked before, during and after the Brazilian Dictatorship, in order to understand the political role played by

photography in producing historical meaning about the present.

'To celebrate LABHOI's 30 years we will be hosting an international seminar that will bring important academic and non-academic interlocutors together to discuss and define the future of knowledge of our three fields of interest (see above) based upon a shared authority and the uses of oral and visual sources for the history of memory.'

Members of LABHOI include: Ana Mauad, Hebe Mattos, Mariza Soares, Paulo Knauss, Milton Guran. To find out more about their work please visit: [www.labhoi.uff.br](http://www.labhoi.uff.br)

#### **OCEANIA** **■ AUSTRALIA** **THE AUSTRALIAN** **GENERATIONS PROJECT**

The Australian Generations Oral History Project is an Australian Research Council Linkage project funded for four years (2011 – 2014). Led by Monash University, partner organisations are La Trobe University, the National Library of Australia and ABC Radio National. Kate James, from Monash University introduces the project:

'Generational difference is one of the major issues of our time. The project's chief investigator Professor Alistair Thomson explains, "Dramatic social, technological and environmental changes in the past century mean that Australians born in the 1920s may have distinctive experiences and expectations, for example of family, faith or place, by comparison with Australians born in the 1950s or the 1980s. We aim to explore the formation and significance of Australian generations."

'Australian Generations is pioneering new ways of creating, interpreting and presenting oral history. Life history interviews with 300 people in Australia born between 1920 and 1989 are creating a digital archive of 1500 hours of recordings, hosted by the National Library of Australia. Professor Thomson believes "future researchers will benefit from online access to an immensely rich national oral history collection." The project will also produce two books and one of Australia's most ambitious radio history series.

'Since mid 2011 we have publicised the project across radio, national and local newspapers, online and social media platforms, and at grass

roots level. 500 people have submitted an expression of interest to participate; we have accepted 208 interviewees; and we have completed 70 interviews, 45 with online timed summaries.

‘The online timed summary service is one of the more innovative features of the project. As Professor Thomson explains, “When the interviews are uploaded into the National Library of Australia’s digital archive, they are accompanied by a corresponding online timed summary which means people will be able to search for keywords and phrases before listening to the entire interview.”

‘We have faced a few methodological challenges, not entirely unknown at the beginning of the project. These include reaching the “quiet” Australians and underrepresented groups such as young men, post war migrants and Australians who’ve not undertaken higher education. We’ve found that using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has really helped us connect with these groups albeit in different ways. Facebook is primarily utilised as a marketing tool, but it also helps us create a space where people can interact with the project enough that they ultimately register their interest in



One of the Australia Generations Project participants: Inala Cooper of Victoria.

participating. Twitter enables us to communicate the project in real time to targeted domestic groups and enhance our visibility to the international oral history community.

‘Our aim is to select all 300 interviewees by December 2012 and complete all interviews with timed summaries by December 2013. The research team will work at co-authoring a book during 2014 and the radio series is due to broadcast during 2015.’

● Find Australian Generations at [www.facebook.com/australiangenerations](http://www.facebook.com/australiangenerations) and on Twitter @aust\_gen. For more information contact [kate.e.james@monash.edu](mailto:kate.e.james@monash.edu) or visit [www.arts.monash.edu/australiangenerations](http://www.arts.monash.edu/australiangenerations)

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