

Field Notes

With Robert Perks

Q: Could you give us some guidance notes that would be useful to a beginner in the field of oral history?

- Think carefully about your project's historical rationale and objectives, read around the subject and check if any interviews or other personal data already exists.
- Seek specialist training in oral history interviewing and best practice from professional bodies. Read the key methodological writings about oral history techniques and analysis.
- Ensure you have a solid ethical and legal framework in place for your project, including information sheets and recording agreements for your interviews.
- Use the best quality recording equipment to obtain .wav files at international standards (a minimum of 44.2kHz/16bit) and ensure proper data back up is in place.
- Prepare for each interview and draft question structures, but be ready to be flexible. Above all: listen, listen, listen.
- Document each recording with metadata and content information. Seek a professional place of deposit for the long-term preservation of (and access to) your recordings.
- Talk to other oral historians; share your worries and challenges, attend oral history events and conferences.

Q: Were there any memorable experiences you had while conducting interviews that stand out in your memory?

One of my first interviews in the 1980s taught me the most important lesson that every interviewer needs to learn: the need to be flexible, unshockable and to think on your feet. I went to interview a textile worker in her eighties, but when I arrived, I discovered that not only had she been a textile worker (and in fact had led a strike!) but she'd gone on to train as a midwife, becoming a follower of birth control pioneer Marie Stopes. I had done no preparation at all about inter-war midwifery, birth control and the horrors of backstreet abortion. I had to quickly abandon my prepared questions and formulate some new ones to encourage my interviewee to share her amazing life. It turned into an astonishing interview, entirely different from the one I'd set out to record that day.

Dr. Robert Perks leads the oral history team at the British Library. Some of his publications include 'The Oral History Reader', 'Oral History, Health and Welfare' and 'Ukraine's Forbidden History'. At IOHA 2016, Dr. Perks is chairing the first Public Panel titled "What happens when oral history goes public?: oral history archives online".



Spotlight

The 1992 Memory Archive
Anjali Monteiro, K.P. Jayasankar and Faiz Ullah



On 6th December, 1992, Hindu fundamentalists demolished the centuries old Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, claiming that it was the birthplace of Ram. The violence that ensued in many parts of India also reached Mumbai (then Bombay), where over 900 people lost their lives between December 1992 and January 1993. From the spatial segregation of communities on religious lines to the proliferation of the politics of hate, this violence profoundly changed the cosmopolitan fabric of Mumbai.

Twenty years after this incident, in 2012, the students of the School of Media and Cultural Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences began work on the 1992 Memory Archive. This was undertaken as a part of the citizens' campaign, Bombay ki Kahani, Mumbai ki Zubani, (Bombay's Story, [in] Mumbai's Voice). This project sought to remember and explore the contours of normalised prejudice, understand how survivors have struggled with the denial of justice, and problematize the question of social memory through film.

The making and screening of the films provided an opportunity for students to engage with the city, the survivors of the violence and other stakeholders in the campaign in intense and complex ways. The project compelled them to reflect on the ethics and politics of representation and deepen their relationship with the city. The television news channel NDTV 24/7 selected three of the films for their slot 'Documentary 24/7', which were telecasted at prime time in January 2013.

In order to facilitate wider dissemination of the films and create an online resource, which could resist the process of erasure on an on-going basis, the students decided to set up a website that is accessible, interactive and allows for different levels of engagement. In addition to the films, it includes a timeline and a map that enables readers to explore events during the period from December 1992 to March 1993, based on the Srikrishna Commission Report.

Visit their website at <http://mumbai riots.tiss.edu>

The daily Listener

Newsletter / IOHA Bangalore 2016

Tuesday, 28 June 2016



Panel Discussion / Mesa redonda: "What happens when oral history goes public?: oral history archives online" / "¿Qué pasa cuando la historia oral se hace pública?: Archivos de la Historia Oral en el Internet"

Speakers / Ponentes: Urvasi Butalia (India), Tamara Kennelly (USA), Anjali Monteiro & KP Jayasankar (India), Robert Perks (UK) and Venkat Srinivasan (India/USA) **Chair:** Robert Perks (UK)

@IOHA #heardatIOHA

¡Saludos, queridos lectores! Dear reader, welcome to the first day of panels and sessions. Today's edition of the newsletter features oral historian Robert Perks, IOHA Vice-President David Beorlegui Zarranz, and filmmakers Anjali Monteiro, K.P. Jayashankar and Faiz Ullah and touches upon some of the themes that will be highlighted in the day's parallel sessions and the public talk this evening. In this newsletter, you will find pieces curated by our students that touch upon oral histories of urban spaces; displacement through war; social memories of violence and segregation; and the challenges and possibilities offered by new media and technology to the practice of oral history. The editorial team at *The Daily Listener* hopes to contribute in our own small way to the engagements of oral history with this edition. Disfruta!

Don't forget to tweet at us (@IOHA2016) with the hashtag #heardatIOHA. All exhibitions will be on display from today until 30th June on the 4th floor of the Srishti N5 campus.

Ear to the ground



Heather Goodall (L)
Urvashi Butalia (R)

Participants and speakers arrive at the conference venue



Pilar D. Prats



Albert Lichtblau



Sean Field

Master Classes in session

On record



David Beorlegui Zarranz
Vicepresidente IOHA

Tal y como sucede con un gran número de investigadores de historia oral, mis primeros pasos en la disciplina estuvieron orientados por un interés académico y político. Pasado un tiempo, mi interés fue trasladándose del estudio de los movimientos sociales de los años setenta, en un contexto dictatorial y de tránsito a la democracia, al su memoria, poblada de recuerdos tan vibrantes y esperanzadores como dramáticos y terribles. El curso de la investigación desbarató la mayoría de mis premisas iniciales y encauzó mi labor en una nueva empresa, a mi juicio más interesante, el estudio de la memoria y sus profundas implicaciones con respecto a la experiencia y la subjetividad humanas. Y es que no hay quizá mejor consejo que se pueda dar a quienes ahora se adentran en la práctica historiadora que el dejarse llevar por la infinita variedad de matices que portan consigo las voces que nos relatan el pasado, capaces de reorientar la investigación al insistir en zonas en las que no habíamos reparado previamente. Muy vinculado a esta cuestión, me parece que una de las principales ventajas que ofrece la historia oral con respecto a otras formas de investigación es una permanente voluntad de asumir nuevos retos teóricos y metodológicos.

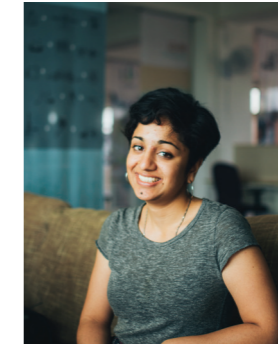
El gesto reflexivo que se introduce por parte de la memoria en relación al pasado constituye a mi juicio un elemento inapelable a la hora de efectuar un análisis histórico. En mi caso, me sentí particularmente interpelado por la sombra melancólica que proyectaba sobre el presente el recuerdo de las luchas pasadas contra la dictadura, clamando en cierto sentido por una reparación y unas utopías que no se han llegado a producir y apuntan hacia una explicación del período ignorada por la historia política clásica.

Ampliar la perspectiva histórica a la "gente corriente" y "de abajo", dota a nuestra labor de una evidente dimensión política que no puede pasar inadvertida a nuestros ojos. La memoria es, ante y todo y sobre todo, un lugar en el que se dirimen las luchas de poder, un terreno en el que se entrecruzan el pasado y el presente con vista a servir de guía o referente en nuestra acción del futuro.

We suggest you mingle around and find a bilingual participant to enrich your reading experience for this section!

Rewind

In continuation from the last edition of this newsletter, we asked a few members of the conference organising committee what their thoughts were about organising a conference in their city for the first time. Here is what they had to say.



"There were many challenges in getting the online payment portal ready for the conference. In the end, the hours of sorting through html code and chasing down colleagues more literate than I in the ways of website design paid off."

- Arpita Bajpeyi

"I was nervous about guiding the team working on the conference newsletter. These feelings were dispensed with once I got to witness Nikhila's efficiency and the immense support and guidance from Arpita. The harmonious coming together of a team is always a special event!"

- Tapasya Thapa



"The foundation of a well-organised conference is the humble excel sheet. The endless hours of checking and re-checking excel-lists pays off when the conference begins to run smoothly."

- Avani Jain

"Helping host a conference is like hosting a formal house-party, but with twenty times the number of people in attendance and no option of eating-out if you burn the curry. It is both stressful and rewarding at once."

- Nikhila Nanduri

