

INTERNATIONAL WORK

ASIA

CHINA

A century of change

Over the years, much has been documented by historians, sociologists, economists and others regarding China's complex, rich and turbulent history. Yet, arguably an enduring legacy of Maoist hegemony mean that eyewitness accounts seldom feature among mainstream accounts of this country's captivating history. Dr Angela Maye-Banbury, an urban sociologist and oral historian at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), led the 'Fainted Ink and Golden Brushes' oral history study which seeks to bridge this gap:

'With support from SHU's international office, Angela mentored a team of four social science researchers at China Agricultural University (CAU) on the use of oral history. In further developing the methodology, colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing (Professor Lin and Professor Wang) peer-reviewed the methodology.

'During the first phase of the study conducted between 2012-2014, twelve detailed oral histories were completed with people aged between sixty-six and eighty-five (six men and six women) who lived in Beijing. These interviews were conducted by Zhang Meizhu,



A changing neighbourhood in Shanghai (2009). Photo: Dr Angela Maye-Banbury.

Sheng Yan and Sun Jintao at CAU. During the second phase in 2016-2017, a further eight oral history interviews were conducted by Xi Zhang, a former SHU planning student.

'The oral history interviews enabled people whose voices have been airbrushed out of mainstream accounts of China's rich and at times controversial history to relay, on their own terms, the impact of far reaching social, economic, political and cultural change. Interviewees were invited to reconstruct their various house moves from childhood to the present day.

'The interviewees spoke in detail of how they negotiated family and community life during critical junctures of Chinese history. These events included the transition from the National Government (1928-1976), life under Japanese occupation in the *hutong* (alleyways) whilst living in multigenerational *siheyuan* (courtyard) housing and the realities of the Communist 1949 watershed. Interviewees also spoke of the impact of the disastrous Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) when the implementation of Mao's vision of economic modernisation led to

one of the worst famines in history resulting in reportedly the loss of 45 million lives. Those interviewed also spoke of the chaos of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971) when their homes were seized by the government and family relationships ruptured as husbands, wives and children were dispatched often hundreds of miles from home to undertake manual labour in support of the Communist mission.

‘Transcription of the audio recordings into Mandarin and English has taken around four years and included “backwards translation” from the Mandarin back to English for additional rigour. Grace Wong, architect and photographer, transcribed and translated the first ten oral history interviews. Xi Zhang translated the remaining interviews. There is now a collection of twenty translated oral histories which provide rich and unique insights into how people have navigated radical government reforms imposed over several decades. In particular, the research has provided fresh perspectives on how and why people’s attachment to place has changed following the implementation of policies intended to change the social, cultural and political landscape’.

The transcripts are currently being analysed to identify themes to support various journal papers. To date, the research has been presented at several conferences and one paper on the study has been published: Angela Maye-Banbury, ‘Repertoires of resistance: how agency fuelled rhetoric, resistance and rebellion during Mao’s housing revolution’, *Journal of Resistance Studies*, vol 1, no 2, pp 51-84.

● Further information: Dr Angela Maye-Banbury, email a.maye-banbury@shu.ac.uk

KUWAIT **The Oral History and Documentation Project**

The Oral History and Documentation Project (OHDP) was launched in 2016 by Dr Farah

Al-Nakib, former director of the Center for Gulf Studies at the American University of Kuwait (AUK). It is the first comprehensive programme to actively conduct oral histories in Kuwait on a wide range of topics and themes in order to preserve the voices, memories and experiences of Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis. The importance and urgency of this project lies in the dearth of information and resources available on Kuwait’s history since the pre-oil era. Reem Al-Ali, OHDP manager, introduces the project:

‘In October 2015 the project hosted training in oral history led by Rib Davis, a renowned oral historian and trainer from the UK Oral History Society. Faculty, staff and volunteers received intensive training in oral history in order to serve as interviewers for the OHDP. A second oral history training was conducted in December 2016 covering the ethics and legalities of conducting oral histories and how to develop oral narratives into books, websites, exhibitions and theatre.

‘Currently, the OHDP is focused on recording the life histories of those born before the 1960s. These interviews explore the memories of individuals who experienced the drastic shift in Kuwaiti society with the advent of oil, as well as their experiences of major events such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the Gulf War in 1991. Not only does the OHDP target prominent Kuwaiti figures, such as politicians, celebrities, artists and historians, it also recognises the importance of capturing the experiences and stories of marginalised groups such as women, religious minorities (for example, Christians), migrants and the *bidoun* (stateless). Some of the project’s current challenges include the unavailability of interviewees to do full-length interviews (of six hours or more) and finding bilingual interviewers capable of conducting interviews in both Arabic and English.

‘The AUK Library is currently housing the OHDP and the project’s interviews will be accessible to researchers through the library soon’.

● Further information: Reem Al-Ali, email ralali@auk.edu.kw

EUROPE

CZECH REPUBLIC **Oral history – contemporary history, masters course (English and Czech)**

Jana Wohlmuth Markupová, head of the Department of Oral History – Contemporary History, introduces the two-year masters study programme at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. The programme aims to educate students in contemporary history as well as in the methodology of oral history.

‘In 2000, Professor Mirek Vaněk (president of the IOHA, 2010-2012) founded the Czech Oral History Centre at the Institute of Contemporary History, the first oral history institution in the Czech Republic. In 2007, he formed the Czech Oral History Association as a way to connect Czech oral historians with one another, and to provide a forum for the Czech oral history community to connect internationally with oral historians.

‘In 2008, Mirek went on to establish a Czech masters course in oral history. Over the years it became clear that this masters course had the potential to attract foreign students and so the department now offers two oral history masters, one in Czech and one in English. Now in its third year, it is clear that the English masters programme is a success and we hope to see our English-speaking community of oral history students grow in the coming years.

‘This success reflects a growing interest in oral history within the Czech Republic; many of our masters graduates continue to work with oral history and we are now seeing younger students

applying for our annual Czech Oral History Association awards with their school oral history projects’.

● Further details: masters course, website www.oralhistory.fhs.cuni.cz; the Czech Oral History Centre, www.coh.usd.cas.cz; Czech Oral History Association, www.coha.cz/zkusebni-stranka/

KOSOVO **Oral history and reconciliation**

Erëmirë Krasniqi, executive director of the Kosovo Oral History Initiative (KOHI), introduces the organisation and a recent research project which has culminated in an exhibition and online archive:

‘The KOHI is a collective of researchers of different generations, nationalities and competences, whose mission is to record life stories that intersect with the broader history of Kosovo and world events. The initiative was born in the summer of 2012 from a collaboration between the Kosova Women’s Network (Pristina) and the New School for Public Engagement in New York, when a few women researchers and activists from Pristina and New York came together and discussed how to go beyond the narratives of victimisation and to recover the life experiences of individuals. The KOHI locates its research practice within the field of

digital humanities, cultural heritage and memory studies. In 2015, the KOHI became an independent organisation, and began to develop broader research themes.

‘Recently the KOHI concluded a two-year research project with an exhibition titled “Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Campaign 1990-1991”. The research involved recording an extensive number of oral history interviews with leading protagonists, former political prisoners, clergy, family members who forgave blood feuds, and also writers and scholars who have been involved in the process of mediation of the reconciliations. The archival collection of interviews accommodates different and sometimes inconsistent interpretations of the campaign that were given at the time and later.

‘The “Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Campaign” (*Fushata e Pajtimit te Gjaqeve*) was a call for reconciliation and unity among Albanians of Kosovo. The campaign started on 2 February 1990, after the death of thirty-three students protesting in the streets of Kosovo in defence of autonomy. The event of the killings was represented by the Serbian media as killings between Albanians in pursuit of revenge.

‘Having researched this topic for quite some time, KOHI not only archived the interviews in the

online living archive to make them accessible to researchers worldwide, but also turned its attention towards exhibition-making. This came out of the necessity to create a physical space for these stories, since these narratives have until now had little visibility. KOHI’s lead researcher Erëmirë Krasniqi has expanded her research practice in the field of curation and worked on crafting a visual language for this story. The curatorial concept of the exhibition used storytelling as its organising principle and drew from oral history interviews conducted by KOHI. Krasniqi designed a narrative environment where the exhibition setting not only served to display the research, but also became a site of exploration in itself. The exhibition was open in April and May 2018 at the Gallery of Arts in Peja, Kosovo’.

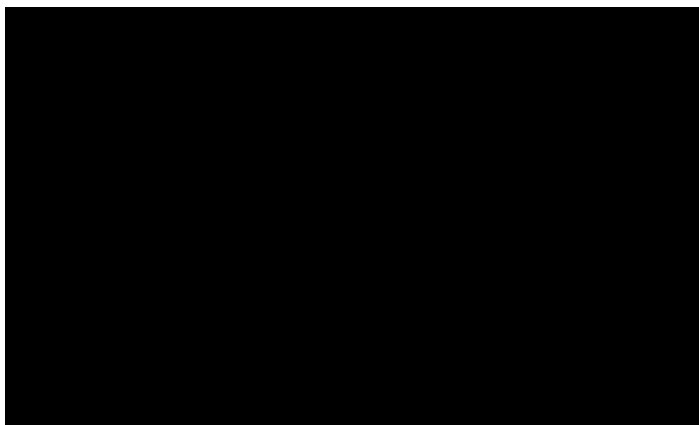
● Further information: Erëmirë Krasniqi, email oralhistorykosovo@gmail.com, website www.oralhistorykosovo.org

LATIN AMERICA

ARGENTINA **Oral history in secondary schools**

Laura Benadiba, historian and president of *Otras Memorias – Asociación Civil para Difusión y la Enseñanza de la Historia Oral* (Other Memories – A Civil Association for the Diffusion and Training in Oral History) reports on her work with oral history and schools in Argentina.

‘Oral history as a methodology can provide us with a path towards truly interdisciplinary work, particularly in schools. Oral history provides an opportunity for teachers and students to work together in a space which takes account of the context they both live in and to engage in their own research. It places students within the same historical process that is shared with them, increasing their engagement in and energy for the subject. The other benefits of oral history work within schools include:



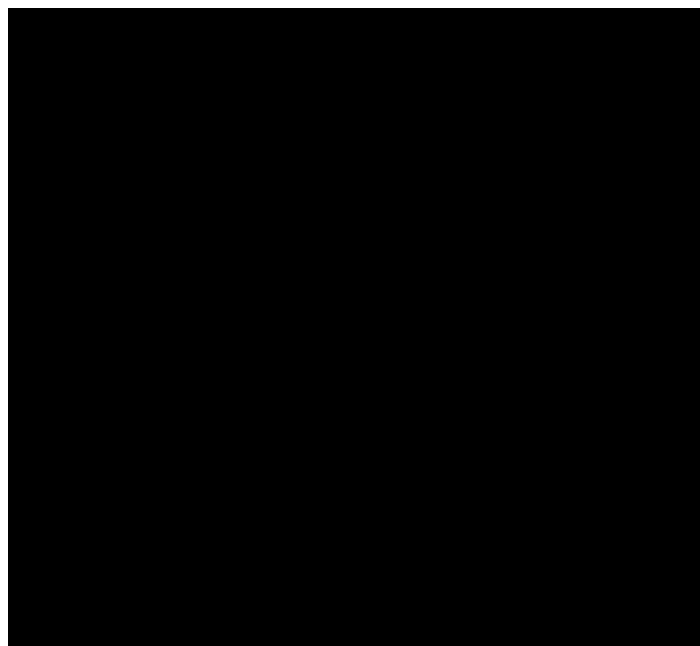
Opening of the ‘Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Campaign 1990-1991’ exhibition at the Gallery of Arts in Peja, Kosovo. Photo: Adrian Bytyqi.

- students achieve a greater identification with the past, understanding themselves as an essential part of it and, at the same time, participating in the construction of their own historical documents;

- they approach history in a non-academic way, by means of contact with the social environment in which they are living, allowing them to feel much more involved with the period they are investigating; and

- the planning and recording of interviews and their subsequent analysis develops students' research skills.

'*Otras Memorias* organised its first national congress of oral history for secondary school students in 2016. The event was held in the city of Pergamino and saw the participation of 500 students from different schools mentored by *Otras Memorias*. In 2017, the second two-day congress was held in the city of Zárate, with the participation of 800 students from all over the country, as well as from Mexico and Colombia. At this second conference, students presented the oral history projects they had been working on. Students from one school in Argentina describe the process of this work: "The interview process was very rewarding [...] we stopped, we paid attention, we asked questions, we were excited [...] our grandparents were transformed and gained a new dimension. They



are no longer just our grandparents, we could understand their pain, their sacrifice, their eternal longing and their deep love of the land that allowed them to imagine a different future was possible."

'*Otras Memorias* is currently planning its third National and International Congress of Oral History for secondary school students: 'When the Young Seize the Past' is to be held in October 2019 in the city of Carmen de Areco, province of Buenos Aires'.

● Further details: email contacto@otrasmemorias.com.ar

BRAZIL **Marginal Archives:** **narratives on leprosy in** **Santa Teresa Colony**

The *Colonia Santa Teresa* hospital opened in 1940 in Santa Catarina, a state located in the south of Brazil; it was designed as an asylum institution for the obligatory confinement of people affected by leprosy (a leprosarium). Until the 1980s there were thirty-three such institutions spread throughout Brazil, after which they were transformed into general hospitals or asylums.

Viviane Trindade Borges and Daniela Pistorello introduce the 'Marginal Archives' project focused on memories relating to the history of the Santa Teresa Colony. Viviane is a professor in the Department of History at the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC) and Daniela Pistorello is a collaborating researcher at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). Daniela contributed to the research during her postdoctoral degree at UDESC during 2015-2017, with a grant from the Co-ordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), Brazil.

"This project sought to create a space for debate regarding the memories relating to the history of leprosy, with Santa Teresa and its residents as the guiding thread. There are currently fifteen residents remaining in the hospital and former residents now living in the surrounding neighbourhoods were also invited to participate. The method named "conversation wheels" was used; a participatory method drawing on the disciplines of social psychology, psychoanalysis and education that enables individuals to reflect on their daily lives and their relationships with the world.

2ND ORAL HISTORY CONGRESS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

Youth takes over the past.

Laura Benadiba coordinates.
Organizes *Otras Memorias*.

Working horizontally to achieve education for EVERYONE.

A new activity in the world in which students present their own investigations made with oral sources.

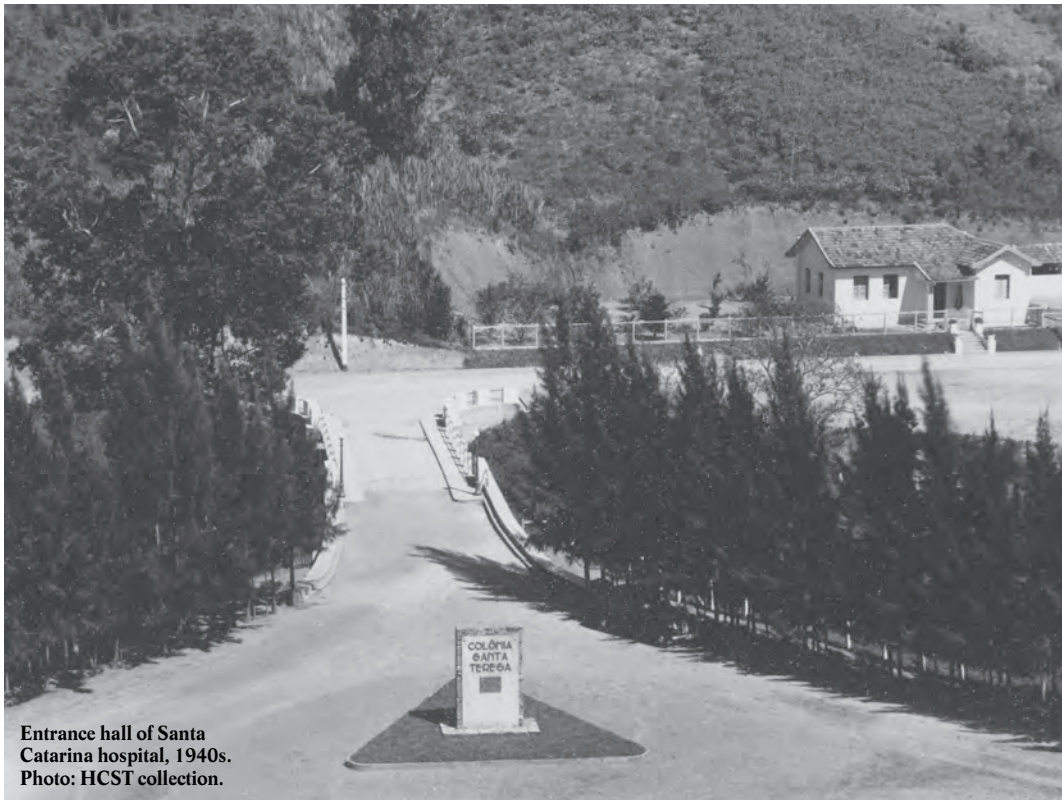
Summaries sending deadline
August 28th, 2017.
Participation certificates will be handed.

19th Thursday
and 20th Friday
October
García, Provincia
de Buenos Aires.

Hashtags:
#HistoriaOral
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Segundo Congreso
de Historia Oral
para estudiantes de
Escuelas Secundarias



Entrance hall of Santa Catarina hospital, 1940s.
Photo: HCST collection.

“The conversation wheels were moments of listening and speaking. The purpose was to hear from the former patients about their experiences in the hospital: How do today’s ex-residents perceive the hospital space? What is significant to them? What narratives are constructed about the disease and its hospitalisation from their experiences?”

“The first conversation wheel was held in March 2016, with the presence of patients and ex-patients and their families, hospital employees, members of the local community and undergraduate history students at UDESC. During this initial session, life trajectories inside the hospital were identified, along with important characters and stories. These provided the themes for the next conversation wheel: daily life and sociability.

“The second and third wheels, which took place in April and May of 2017, were again filled with personal narratives, sharing

experiences of weddings, football, theatrical plays and work. They helped to bridge the gap between the university and the institution and between researchers and patients and former patients.

“Originally, the hospital itself was keen to create a permanent memorial within the hospital based on the recorded memories. However, there were rumours of the possible closure of the hospital and so instead we organised an exhibition within the University entitled “Place of Living, Place of Care: narratives on leprosy in Santa Catarina”. One of the objectives of the exhibition was to make it possible to think about the disease and its treatment historically, to demystify it and to reduce prejudice towards it and its patients. Ultimately the project and the resulting exhibition aim to contribute to the reduction of the immaterial wall separating the residents of the hospital from the rest of society.

“This work is also linked to the

project “Present Time and Institutions of Social Isolation in Santa Catarina: looking at marginal histories (1930-2011)”, which has received support from CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development)’.

● Further information: Viviane Borges, email vivianetborges@gmail.com and Daniela Pistorello, email danipistorello@hotmail.com

NORTH AMERICA

ALASKA Kotzebue Communities of Memory Project Jukebox

‘Project Jukebox’ is the digital branch of the oral history programme at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. ‘Project Jukebox’ recordings integrate oral history recordings with associated photographs, maps and text. Leslie McCartney, curator of oral history at the university, introduces the latest website, the ‘Kotzebue

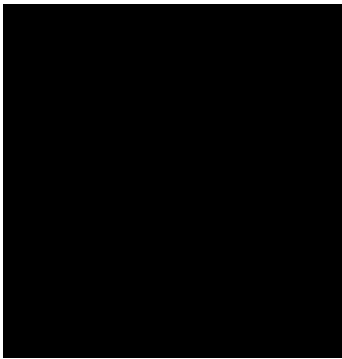
Communities of Memory Project Jukebox’:

‘The Alaska Communities of Memory Project was a state-wide effort from 1994-1996, funded by the Alaska Humanities Forum (www.akhf.org). Unlike the other participating communities in Alaska who gathered to reflect on what made their community special, Kotzebue wanted to focus on how world conflicts had affected their community. Rachel Craig, one of the community planners from Kotzebue, said that her people needed to share these experiences, so that future generations would understand the impact of these conflicts on the men who had served in the military as well as the women in the community who were left behind.

‘It was envisioned that these recorded sessions would be viewed by the communities and in schools to teach the younger people about their history. But as it is with so many well-intended oral history projects, the video tapes that were used to record these sessions during the mid-1990s were placed in a drawer and there they stayed until 2015.

‘Between 2015 and 2016, a grant from the Alaska Humanities Forum enabled Leslie McCartney to meet with Kotzebue community members to review the recordings and select portions to be placed online. As many of the narrators had passed away, community members were instrumental in contacting family and ensuring gift and release agreements were signed and consent obtained to place the selected material online. This process took a year longer than expected and the Alaska Humanities Forum extended the grant period to ensure this crucial step could be undertaken properly.

‘One of the selected recordings included the kick-off event: a twenty-minute reading of the names of those who had served in Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam conflict or in the Alaska Territorial Guard. Those who had served came from the Alaska Iñupiaq communities of



Kotzebue is a city in the Northwest Arctic Borough, Alaska. Photo: OH-2015-25-01_PT.1 – UAF Oral History Collections.

Kiana, Noorvik, Kotzebue, Kivalina, Candle, Deering, Haycock, Selawik, Noatak and Shungnak.

‘Within the recorded memories, many men spoke of the horrors of armed conflict and how this affected them. Women, such as Daisy Walton, spoke of the extra work women had to do when the men left. Women took on subsistence hunting themselves, hauled water, emptied honey buckets, and kept the fires and lanterns going (these were times when communities did not have electricity or running water). During the recording sessions several of the men, like Chester Ballot, were forthright with their stories of substance abuse and suicidal thoughts after they returned home. On coming home from Vietnam, he said:

I came home, went back to see my family, I showed them I was alive. Still had most of my mental capacity. Went back to work. And then something happened. I drank some more, maybe to forget. But no one asked me, ‘What was it like over there?’ My mom didn’t ask me, my friends didn’t ask me, so I didn’t tell ‘em.

‘On 11 November 2017, McCartney returned to Kotzebue to attend the Veterans Day celebration and to present the completed online project to some 100 community members. It was recognised that the online project provides an important legacy, not just for the grandchildren of the

narrators, but for a wider global public, in terms of understanding the social impacts of war on individuals and communities. Multiple copies of all the recordings have been given to the community to be aired on the local radio and television station and to be used in schools and at future community events’.

● Further information: Leslie McCartney, email lmccartney@alaska.edu; ‘Project Jukebox’, website <http://jukebox.uaf.edu>

UNITED STATES **The Coney Island History Project**

The Coney Island History Project, founded in 2004 in Brooklyn, New York, is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to increase awareness of Coney Island’s legendary and colourful past and to encourage appreciation of the neighbourhood of today. Charles Denson (executive director) and Tricia Vita (administrative director) share the background of its development:

‘The Coney Island History Project was founded by Astroland Park owner Carol Hill Albert. Before her career in the amusement business, Carol Albert worked with photographer Bruce Davidson to produce an acclaimed book of oral histories titled *Subsistence U.S.A.* Her interest in oral history led to the founding of the Coney Island History Project with Charles Denson, author of *Coney Island: Lost and Found* (New York Society Library’s 2002 New York Book of the Year Award) as executive director and oral historian.

‘Our oral history project began with a portable recording booth on the boardwalk. The colourful booth-on-wheels, dubbed the “Memory Booth”, was equipped with an air-conditioned recording studio illuminated by a skylight. Wooden panels opened from the booth to display our mission statement and historic photographs. The project proved



Project founders Carol Hill Albert and Charles Denson in the Coney Island Memory Booth, 2005. Photo: Coney Island History Project.

to be so popular that we expanded to a permanent location with an exhibition centre, which is free to all during the summer season and is located at Deno's Wonder Wheel Amusement Park.

'More than 300 audio interviews are available for listening at our online archive, including both short anecdotal stories and in-depth conversations with people who live, work or grew up in Coney Island. Interviewees include residents, business owners, tourists, artists, writers and others from all walks of life. We've recorded the oral histories of many departed Coney luminaries whose stories would have been lost forever. The oldest interviewee was a 102-year-old strongman, and the youngest was a five-year-old visiting with her grandmother.

'The Coney Island History Project is funded by the New York

City Department of Cultural Affairs, grants, private donors, memberships and contributions. In 2015, with funding from the New York City Council's Cultural Immigrant Initiative, we began recording interviews with immigrants and foreign-born New Yorkers in English as well as in Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. One of our biggest challenges has been to find funding for bilingual Chinese and Russian interviews, which are more expensive to produce due to the cost of transcription and translation. The interviewees whom we work with have undergraduate or graduate degrees in oral history, journalism or radio and are able to conduct interviews in English and one other language.

'Our oral history interviews also provide information for our weekly fee-based walking tours

and special free tours. In honour of Immigrant Heritage Week, we offered an Immigrant Heritage Walking Tour of Coney Island, conducted in English and Mandarin and based on some of the oral history interviews in our archive.

'The project has expanded its mission to include environmental advocacy, local history work in schools, photography exhibitions, historic preservation and community outreach. A new initiative for 2018 is the organisation of tours with elders who grew up in Coney Island and who are celebrating milestone birthdays (for example eighty or ninety years). The tours will be organised following an oral history interview with the individual and will be timed to take place around a family reunion'.

● For more information and to listen to the oral histories: Coney Island History Project, website www.coneyislandhistory.org and www.coneyislandhistory.org/oral-history-archive

OCEANIA

AUSTRALIA Behind the Wire

Behind the Wire is a volunteer-run oral history project about Australian immigration detention. It comprises a book, podcast and museum exhibition, and has won several national and international awards, including Australia's top journalism award for a radio or audio feature. Project co-ordinators and editors Michael Green and André Dao introduce the project:

'For over twenty-five years, Australia has had a policy of detaining people who arrive on its shores seeking asylum. For half of that time, it has gone even further, sending people who come by boat to offshore detention centres on remote islands in the Pacific Ocean. It is a subject of constant public controversy, but the detention centres are off-limits for journalists. We sought to work with people who have been, or still



Above: Video stories from *Behind the Wire* projected on to National Gallery of Victoria façade. **Photo:** Michael Green. **Right:** The exhibition ‘They Cannot Take the Sky’ was made up of video, audio and photographs. **Photo:** Stewie Donn.

are, held in immigration detention, to gather their testimony about their experiences.

‘We published a book, *They Cannot Take the Sky*, which is a collection of literary, first-person narratives and interwoven fragments from thirty-six people. Together with Melbourne’s Immigration Museum, we co-ordinated a committee of people who had experienced detention to curate an exhibition based on the book, also called *They Cannot Take the Sky*. It is made up of over two hours of first-person video and audio vignettes, as well as a series of photographic portraits. The work is now touring – in one iteration in early 2018, it was projected onto the 100-metre facade of the National Gallery of Victoria.

‘We also made a podcast, *The Messenger*, about Sudanese refugee Abdul Aziz Muhamat and



his life inside one of Australia’s offshore detention centres, Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. The series is based on several thousand voice messages between Aziz and journalist Michael Green, gathered over the course of two years.

‘It has been a considerable challenge to negotiate and minimise potential risks to narrators, and to establish a process that put narrators in control of their own story. Not to mention co-ordinating a large team of volunteer transcribers, interpreters, photographers and

film-makers, among others, as well as establishing relationships with institutions such as museums, galleries and publishers. Behind the Wire is a not-for-profit organisation, and we are currently developing a second project’.

● Further information: website, www.behindthewire.org.au

International Work is edited by Siobhan Warrington who welcomes all contributions by email to siobhan@oraltestimony.org