

# INTERNATIONAL WORK

## AFRICA

### SOUTH AFRICA South Africa's Hidden War

Emily Bridger, Associate Professor in History at the University of Exeter, and Kefuoe Makena, Research Associate at the University of Exeter and postgraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand, report on their use of oral histories on the United Kingdom Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellowship project 'South Africa's Hidden War: Histories of Sexual Violence from Apartheid to the Present' (2020-2024).

'A recent South African newspaper article argued that the country "has one of the highest rape statistics in the world"

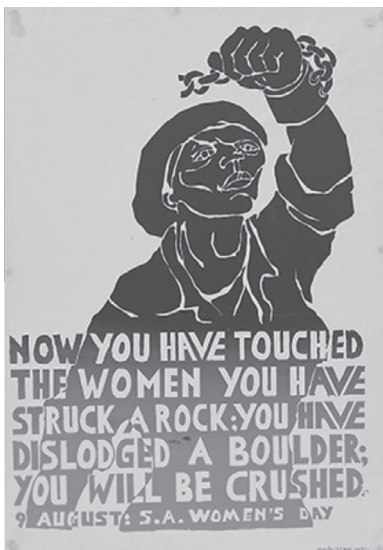
(<https://mg.co.za/opinion/2022-08-09-rape-is-endemic-in-south-africa-why-the-anc-government-keeps-missing-the-mark/>). Yet much of the research into this problem ignores or glosses over the longer histories of sexual violence. Our project explores how sexual violence was conceptualised, experienced and responded to over the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. It aims to develop the first extensive history of sexual violence in twentieth-century South Africa and reframe current discussions of the problem with a greater

understanding of these histories and greater emphasis on women's own voices and narratives.

'Oral histories are essential to this project, both to combat the archival gaps and silences in written records and to explore how women narrate and remember sexual violence in the past, and what position such violence occupies within their wider life histories. Since 2019, we have conducted over seventy oral history interviews with women from different generations and communities and with many of the country's early anti-rape activists.

'A core group of interviewees thus far has been members of the Khulumani Support Group, an organisation that supports victims of apartheid-era violence. These

**Artwork by Judy Seidman, a board member of the Khulumani Support Group, presented on the Hidden War project website. Copyright: Creative Commons licence.**



interviewees all live on the East Rand, an area outside Johannesburg which experienced a violent period of civil war from 1990 to 1994 before South Africa's first democratic elections. Kefuoe's involvement in these interviews has been integral. She grew up on the East Rand, and is thus able to conduct interviews in the multiple languages spoken there and build a strong rapport with interviewees. Yet this has also brought challenges. Interviewees speak about the multiple forms of violence they've experienced or witnessed in the same neighbourhoods and streets as Kefuoe grew up in, making the past inseparable from the present. To help with the challenging nature of these interviews, the project team have received special training and support from Devon Rape Crisis in the UK and the Ububele Educational and Psychotherapy Trust in South Africa.

'These interviews have demonstrated the multiple forms of gender-based violence that many South African women have experienced over their lives. They also highlight the complex aftermaths of such violence not just for individual women themselves but also their wider families. Beyond the empirical information they provide, these interviews provide important insights into how sexual violence is remembered, by whom and why. Drawing on oral history methodology, we examine what is sayable and unsayable about rape in the apartheid past, how women's memories conform to or challenge dominant historical narratives and how what women disclose in interviews shifts according to their present circumstances and needs.

'Moving forward, we aim to expand our network of interviewees by partnering with other non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations in the country.'

● Further information: website <https://hiddenwar.exeter.ac.uk/>

## ASIA

### BANGLADESH Intergenerational research on environmental change

Researchers from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and two universities in the UK (Newcastle and Northumbria) have worked together since November 2021 to design and deliver research to understand the lived experiences of environmental change for older and younger women and men living in two villages of the Bangladesh Sundarbans. Abdul Mobin Ibna Hafiz, a research assistant at BUET, introduces the work.

'Natural cultural heritage and livelihoods are significantly impacted in delta regions by several challenges, particularly climate change but also development works that originate in the early colonial period, which have worked to alter the natural rhythms of active deltas. Coastal communities of the Bangladesh Sundarbans delta region experience increasingly frequent cyclones but also have to cope with recurring breaching of their river embankments causing regular floods and saline water intrusion.

'A research team comprising early career researchers, NGO workers and university students

from a range of disciplines worked together in multiple online sessions to learn new research methods and design the research together. A positive learning environment helped everyone to get a good grasp of the activities and the philosophy of the research. From the very beginning, there were plenty of practical activities, individual and group work, and reflection sessions which established confidence, communication and co-operation.

'The research aimed to listen to and learn from a diverse group of younger and older people in delta regions to understand:

- their experiences of environmental changes from the past to the present times and how these changes have affected their lives, livelihoods, environment and cultures
- how people have responded to environmental change and how they co-operate with each other in times of need and disasters
- how knowledge of the environment is shared among older and younger people
- people's hopes, concerns and ideas for the future.

'Over three visits to the selected communities lasting from three to five days, the research team, together with over sixty research participants and two researchers from the communities, generated



Researcher Abdul Munim recording an oral history interview with a fisherman, Horinkhola village, May 2022. Photo: Abdul Mobin Ibna Hafiz.



The research team during their second visit to Horinkhola and Ghatakhali. From left to right: Rubiya Sultana, Shampa Sarkar, Mondira Bardhan, Md Rustom Ali Sheikh, Sarmin Aktar, Abdul Mobin Ibna Hafiz, Abu Syed, Abdul Munim. Photo: Living Deltas Hub.

forty-three oral history interviews and a series of group-based activities involving visual methods (mapping and photography).

‘The research enabled us (the researchers) to learn on a more personal level from the participants about their lives in the delta region. Listening to first-hand accounts provided a clearer understanding of the multiple impacts of environmental changes. The learnings of this research work include but are not limited to:

- how the local environment has changed over a time span of thirty to forty years
- the extent of the loss of land, fields, homes and graveyards
- the loss of various species of plants and trees in the community
- how the changes have affected people’s lives and livelihoods, including the extinction of traditional occupations
- people’s various survival tactics and coping mechanisms during cyclones
- the role that NGOs and other organisations play in people’s lives.

‘We are now working together to design effective ways of sharing the data with the local communities but also with

national and international audiences. The research methods and insights from the research experience have been presented in several conferences, and academic journal articles are underway.’

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## EUROPE

### **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA** **Srebrenica Genocide Memorial oral history project**

Hasan Hasanović, author of *Surviving Srebrenica* and co-author of *Voices from Srebrenica: Survivor Narratives of the Bosnian Genocide*, is also head of the Oral History Project at the Srebrenica Memorial Center (SMC). He introduces the Centre’s oral history work and its latest overarching project titled ‘The Lives Behind the Fields of Death’.

‘Up to this point, the SMC has completed 400 oral histories. Initially, the first half were completed in co-operation with the Sarajevo War Childhood Museum and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIRN BiH). As the

SMC began to develop its own methodology, the second half were completed independently. The interviewees of both genders were either children or adults when they survived the Srebrenica genocide and other war crimes in eastern Bosnia. Additionally, a collaboration was established with the Shoah Foundation resulting in twenty oral histories from the Memorial being integrated into Shoah’s Visual History Archive, meaning that they are indexed, preserved and available globally. In 2021 the Memorial curated the first video exhibition of oral history interviews, consisting of twenty themes gleaned from seventy interviews. This exhibit is available to all Memorial visitors and has also travelled outside the country. The number of SMC staff devoted to the Oral History Project is growing. We have hired two new colleagues, and seasoned colleagues are conducting interviews as well as training second-generation survivors to become interviewers.

Dr Emir Suljagić, director of SMC, describes the key successes of this work: ‘The UN Tribunals determined that genocide occurred, so now it’s time for the Memorial to preserve the narratives of survivors in order to educate the world and fight denial. Genocide is a crime against all humanity, so these stories belong to the world.’

‘The biggest challenges are finding survivors willing to participate. There are many reasons that people do not wish to share their stories, including trauma, nightmares, illnesses, fear of the camera and public speaking, thinking it will not make any difference or being afraid of legal persecution by the authorities of Republika Srpska and Serbia. Additionally, thousands of survivors who need to be interviewed live abroad. We will continue to record oral histories, and each will be subtitled in English. We want to make the oral histories available for research globally, hence the Memorial is





Filming survivor Mirsada Malagić, 26 January 2021, Sarajevo. Photo: SMC.



Oral history video exhibition, Srebrenica Memorial Center, Potočari, 30 September 2021. Photo: SMC.

continually collaborating with its international partners.

‘The new multifaceted “The Lives Behind the Fields of Death” project is in conjunction with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network in Bosnia and Herzegovina and will be completed in the next sixteen months. It is a complex undertaking which will involve the filming of 100 additional testimonies, producing a documentary focussing on women’s experiences of the genocide, establishing an Oral History Summer School for twenty young people from Bosnia, hiring ten interns to work for three months on oral histories, and formalising access to psychological

support for all of those involved in oral histories. This new project is funded by the Matra programme of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

● Further information: website <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en>

## LATIN AMERICA

### ARGENTINA Memory and history with older adults

Laura Benadiba, teacher and oral historian, introduces her oral history work with older adults in Buenos Aires carried out by civil society organisation Otras Memorias (Other Memories), which works to disseminate and teach oral history.

‘In 2016 we started working with older adults in collaborative spaces to use oral history as a catalyst to bring together memory and history. One of the initial objectives was to use the evocation of memories by the older adults participating in these collaborative spaces, with the aim for them to build their autobiographies and recognise themselves as people with a vital trajectory, valued by all. This work has continued, and during 2021 and 2022 we have been working with older adults in a retirement centre in Buenos Aires.

‘Working in groups, participants confront their biographical trajectories and delve into the uniqueness of each one as well as the collective traits they share. This collaborative approach serves to enhance the memories and participation of the members of the group. Before starting the oral history work, participants are encouraged to identify and bring with them a memory object that relates to their own life history. These can be physical items but also photographs or particular songs or poems. Bringing these objects to others in the group allows the generation of collective knowledge from objects, according to the experiential memory of each of the participants. Participants bring photographs, music, old newspaper articles, household objects, and school notebooks etcetera with the aim of preserving their identity by reactivating their personal memory that is also collective.

‘We then go on to engage older adults in oral history as both interviewers and interviewees, recognising that the process of being interviewed but also being the interviewer serves to stimulate cognitive function and executive function, evoking memories and enhancing language and communication.

‘The oral history interviews carried out by the older adults will form a public archive which will not only be useful for the



Oral history activities taking place in the centre for retirees of the neighbourhoods of Villa Crespo and Caballito, Buenos Aires, 2022. Photos: Laura Benadiba.

participants themselves to preserve their personal legacy but also for use in future research and in further workshop activities with older adults in retirement centres or neurological institutions. Some of the filmed interviews have already been uploaded onto Otras Memorias' YouTube channel.

'To conclude, we have found that using oral history with older adults has the following advantages and benefits for older people themselves. Oral history can support older adults to make connections between their present and past lives; encourage and develop reflective reading and writing through listening and analysis of the interview; and enable a climate of interaction and promotion of social and communication skills such as participation, listening and respect for the ideas and interests of others,



as well as the presentation of their own opinions orally to the group.'

● Further information: email [lbenadiba@gmail.com](mailto:lbenadiba@gmail.com), website [www.otrasmemorias.com.ar/](http://www.otrasmemorias.com.ar/), YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/@LauraBenadiba/featured](http://www.youtube.com/@LauraBenadiba/featured)

## NORTH AMERICA

### CANADA Oral History Summer Institute

*'The diversity of the participants was one of the best parts of the course. I loved the mix of younger traditional students and community people'.* Community participant

*'I really enjoyed learning from, and connecting with, other Indigenous learners. It was amazing to hear about worldviews from other territories and nations'.* Community participant

The Centre for Oral History and Tradition (COHT) at the University of Lethbridge in

southern Alberta is a Canadian research hub which supports oral history research through training, collaboration, research grants and the hosting of speaker series. Co-director Dr Jodie Asselin introduces COHT's Oral History Summer Institute (OHSI).

'This coming summer, COHT will host its third annual Oral History Summer Institute. The OHSI provides hands-on experience with oral history project design, recording and transcribing technologies, and interview techniques while learning with a wide variety of practising oral historians. COHT is proud of the programme's unique design, which features weekly live and engaging conversations between diverse practising oral historians. The conversation format between moderators (often faculty or students) and the speaker builds off an intent for openness, engagement and inclusivity for all participants and evolves each year to build off past experiences.

'COHT is a research hub that facilitates research and collaboration across communities. Currently co-directed by anthropologist Dr Jodie Asselin and sports historian Dr Carly Adams, our organising executive committee gathers a hybrid range of community and academic scholars, including students across disciplines. We recognise that oral history can itself be a revolutionary act, especially for those







At the start of the pandemic, interviewee Fernando Rodriguez (centre), a retired Air Force veteran, moved from El Paso to Austin, Texas, to stay with his son, Gil Rodriguez, and his son's wife, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez. Mr Rodriguez is seen here with his grandsons, Ramón (left) and Agustín (right), sporting masks made by a relative. Photo: Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, © Voces Oral History Center.

expanding to several other collections since. I had longed to collaborate with other universities and the pandemic finally made those partnerships possible. My small team spent several weeks putting all our processes online: creating an online survey to replace the paper pre-interview form, conducting oral history interviews via Zoom and designing online consent processes. In the end, we attracted fourteen other institutions. They agreed to follow our protocols: they would own their own interviews, but they would allow us to minimally edit those interviews and put them on our YouTube channel. We trained the interviewers and created a workflow for them and for their students.

'Some of our professors used the Voces of a Pandemic for their classes. For example, Noreen Rivera, associate professor at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, a predominantly Latino area in South Texas, coaxed over 100 interviews out of her students.

'The interviewers have been professors, graduate and

undergraduate students. Faculty and grad students have presented their findings at various academic conferences and written research papers. We held regular research workshops to help our writers shape their work. One of them, Leo Valdes, produced an excellent journal article, "In the shadow of the health-care city: historicizing trans Latinx immigrant experiences during the coronavirus pandemic", which has received the Antonia Castañeda prize for best article/book chapter from the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies. To date, the *US Latina & Latino Oral History Journal*, an annual peer-reviewed journal sponsored by Voces, has published three articles from Voces of a Pandemic, with another two in press and two more that might turn into publications down the line.

'Perhaps the biggest challenge has been staying on top of the interviews and related materials as they are deposited. For instance, in spring 2022, we received over seventy-five interviews within four weeks. As funds permitted, we

have hired graduate students to process the mountain of paperwork. In 2021 we held a crowd-funding campaign to pay undergraduate interns to help edit auto-generated transcripts and to put some on our website, on the Oral History Metadata Synchroniser (OHMS) platform.

'We are planning a conference in April 2023, showcasing the interviews and the research that has derived from them. Voces has created an excellent model for future collaborations with other institutions, and in the future we may apply it to other topics as they relate to the Latino populations in the US.'

● Further information: website <https://voces.lib.utexas.edu/>, YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/@vocesorahistorycenter1661](http://www.youtube.com/@vocesorahistorycenter1661)

## OCEANIA

### AOTEAROA (NEW ZEALAND) Fijian oral history: Where Indigenous knowledge intersects with science

Oral historian and Fijian language interpreter and translator Elisapeci Samanun Waqanivala introduces her oral history and radio work to document and promote Indigenous Fijian knowledge. Elisapeci is currently Chair for Viti (New Zealand) Council e Aotearoa, which works to preserve Indigenous Fijian knowledge, culture and heritage through oral history and Fijian language. She is also producer and director for Radio Viti e-Aotearoa and managing director for Grow Vuna Initiatives Limited, which researches Indigenous Knowledge in the Pacific using her home district of Vuna, Fiji, as a case model.

“Blue Pacific Ocean” has been coined to describe the heart of the planet and covers almost one-third of the Earth’s surface. As an Indigenous Fijian oral history practitioner in Aotearoa New Zealand, I find joy in peeking into oral Fijian tradition and oral histories. I have a deep sense of reverence for my ancestors’ oral heritage, culture and tradition.

‘The mode of interviews is through radio technology, streaming and oral history equipment. The radio interviews are varied and bilingual (Vosa vaka-Viti or Fijian language and English). They are based around research topics such as identity, data and ethnicity classification, migration, early Indigenous Fijian settlers to Aotearoa, health and wellbeing, plus the 2022 Fiji general elections.

‘In my thirst for Indigenous knowledge, I took a deep-dive into a methodology designed by Dr Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, titled *The Fijian Vanua Research Framework*. This blended well with the ethics and protocols of oral history interviews, and supported practitioners like myself to use and illuminate nuggets of truth about the Indigenous Fijians as part of the Blue Ocean Peoples of Oceania.

‘History books reveal our ancestors once traversed and navigated across these idyllic, vast, blue-ocean spaces in pursuit of new knowledge, trade and discovery. These pursuits earned our Indigenous ancestors from the Pacific Islands, Fiji the right to be included as guardians of this vast ocean space. The Pacific Ocean is home to remarkable biodiversity and distinctive marine ecosystems.

‘Western thought grouped the Pacific islands into three distinctive groupings: Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia. Geographically, Aotearoa New Zealand is situated within the Polynesian groups. Now Aotearoa New Zealand boasts a mixture of Peoples from within the three island groups. The Tangata



Elisapeci Samanunu Waqanivala and Laura Acraman preparing to go on air at Radio Viti e-Aotearoa. Photo: Pedro Blake © Elisapeci Samanunu Waqanivala.

Whenua Maori are the First Nations Peoples of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Indigenous Fijians, like Maori of Aotearoa and the Pacific Islands, share some common traits, such as having a deep sense of reverence for ancestral oral tradition embedded within, an essence of deep spirituality that existed well before colonisation and Christian influence.

‘The art of knowing and remembering can be gleaned through preservation of memories, artefacts or objects, oral genres, sayings, stories, histories, songs and genealogies, and this is all often handed down and revealed in oral stories or speeches. I began to discover with the Indigenous Fijian interviews that Indigenous knowledge is often hidden within oral stories handed down from generations past, a theme that resonates and transcends time in any Indigenous setting anywhere in the world. For them, the old world and, to a degree, the new, its way of life remains communal. Indigenous

Fijians, akin to Maori and Pasifika Peoples, live a communal kind of lifestyle, thriving, sharing and working together. To draw from their Indigenous ancestral wisdom is sacred, embracing their shared lives, common heritage, genealogies, terrain and history.

‘The work is voluntary on my part and this itself is a challenge. Navigating in the technological and digital space does test one’s patience. However, the information gathered and shared adds value to the body of knowledge within the Indigenous Fijian digital space, where it certainly intersects with science and use of technology. The work is ongoing.’

● Further information: website [www.viticouncilaotearoa.com/](http://www.viticouncilaotearoa.com/)

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