

## From the Editors

In our call for papers for this year's edition of *Studies in Oral History*, we noted that humans are profoundly emplaced beings. Humans become attached to places – be they homes, cities or natural environments – and when we are separated from them, we become homesick. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan referred to this love of place or sense of place as 'topophilia', and it can also be connected to cultural belonging or family identity. Hence our place memories can be deeply felt and intensely personal. We noted that place memories retain a special resonance in the mind over time, associated as they are with sensory experiences, emotional associations and social inflections, and referred to the positive interactions between the fields of oral history and environmental history. While oral history offers attention to the ways humans remember and narrate their relationships to environments, environmental history insists upon close attention to the more-than-human world, and the relationships between nature and culture, people and place. As environmental catastrophes with anthropogenic causes become more common in the twenty-first century, understanding human inter-relationships with specific places and the environment is arguably more critical – and more urgent – than ever before.

Our call for papers was well received, and we are delighted to include in our 2021 edition articles and reports engaging with the themes of Oral History, Place and the Environment authored by scholars from as far afield as Bhutan, Mexico, the UK, the USA and Vanuatu. While all are firmly based in oral history, many articles are also interdisciplinary, considering oral history and fiction; oral history and education; and oral history and anthropology/ethnography. Overall, the authors are a

mixture of emerging and established oral historians. They come from academia, cultural institutions and private consulting. All offer fascinating and thought-provoking engagements with the special issue themes.

Making skilled use of oral histories collected for the National Library of Australia's ACT bushfire oral history project (2004–05), Scott McKinnon provides valuable insights into the complex and lengthy afterlife of disasters, and shows that recovery is essentially a process of transformation rather than restoration. Memories of place are particularly powerful in the aftermath of a disaster – and such memories play an important role in the process of recovery. McKinnon powerfully shows the deep connections people have with their environments – a connection that is often not verbalised or appreciated until threatened or disrupted. He skilfully demonstrates the value of oral history evidence as a means for understanding how individuals come to terms with dramatic events such as the loss of known and loved natural and built environments.

Considering a different form of environmental loss and challenges, Marilena Crosato, a community social theatre and performance practitioner, and Maya Haviland, a cultural anthropologist and community development practitioner, analyse an innovative storytelling and performance project they initiated in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Pam which hit Vanuatu in 2015. Crosato and Haviland vividly bring to life the processes through which they engaged with 13 Port Vila market women. They describe how the women melded their individual stories into a script which captured their shared experiences of resilience and violence in a post-disaster context. The women come from many different islands, and in demonstrating the significance of place to their identity, the authors show how the women typically connect with three different places – namely their home island, their town settlement and Vanuatu itself. As Crosato and Haviland state, 'Place was both character and setting, used to invoke deeper empathetic understandings of the lived experiences of women and their agency'. Through workshopping and performing their collective experiences, the project was successful in ameliorating some of the despair and challenges these market women faced in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Pam.

Carolyn Collins and Paul Sendziuk analyse a different kind of place attachment in their article on General Motors-Holden's Woodville Factory in South Australia. Analysing oral history interviews with former workers at the automobile manufacturing plant, Collins and Sendziuk reveal the deep engagements with place and community experienced by these workers. Working for Holden was the basis of individual and collective identities that often spanned decades. These connections were made material in the factory site, so much so that the closure of the site was painful for many former employees.

From workplaces to domestic spaces, historian Rachel Goldlust draws on interviews conducted with post-1970s 'back-to-the-landers' women – namely women who turned away from conventional conservation practices and adopted simple, low-carbon lifestyles – to examine women's changing relationships to home and the environment. Expanding perceptions of environmental activism, Goldlust examines how domestic activism can facilitate a connection to home and property, and how this demonstrates a unique form of protest. This specific form of place attachment reveals how women's connections to their homes can indeed be a means of empowerment and social engagement.

If oral history can illuminate historical activism, it can also enhance contemporary education. Bhutanese scholars Dorji S, Alexander Sivitskis, Sonam Gyeltshen and Ngawang Dem analyse the achievements of an oral history project that was introduced for tertiary education students at the Samtse College of Education at the Royal University of Bhutan. How refreshing – and inspiring – to learn that the oral history project aligned with the Bhutanese Ministry of Education's Educating for Gross National Happiness program, which aims to prepare students 'to develop values, ethics, skills and practices to build harmonious wellbeing of all in the early twenty-first century'. The authors draw on responses received from a student survey to argue that, through conducting place-based oral history interviews in local communities, students developed their sense of place, increased feelings of attachment to place and their local community, and facilitated the development of empathy for people and place. This article provides a much-needed empirical study to test the long-standing contention of the educational value of oral history.

Just as oral history can enhance education, it can also work in partnership with fiction to capture the ways in which humans form connections to place – and how such bonds are increasingly threatened in an era of climate crisis. Scott Hicks writes of a town in the US Appalachian Mountains, where repeated flooding became so devastating that the decision was made to move the entire town to higher ground. But while the physical infrastructure of Grundy could be relocated, the place attachment of town residents could not be so easily uprooted. Hicks explores the ways in which residents' place memories were captured through oral history interviews, comparing them to fictionalised accounts of place evocation. He concludes that the relocation of Grundy 'raises questions of the sufficiency of relocation or recreation to quell the solastalgia – or distress caused by environmental change – that is set to increase as our planet continues to suffer the effects of anthropogenic climate change'.

The peer-reviewed articles section closes with a lyrical piece filled with vivid photographs by Lilian Pearce, who reflects on the relationships between oral history interviews and photography in illuminating environmental histories. Pearce describes her experience of interviewing a farming family in regional New South Wales, and the ways in which their personal family photographic collection spoke as evocatively of changing practices of land conservation and management as did their words. Pearce's article will be of enormous value to other oral historians considering how they might incorporate the analysis of visual images in their interviewing practices and subsequent interpretations.

In this year's reports section, filmmaker Malcolm McKinnon writes poetically of his long relationship with Arabana Elder Reg Dodd and Dodd's home, the pastoral station Finnis Springs. McKinnon describes his and Dodd's differing perceptions of Finnis Springs, and Reg's intimate, embodied knowledge of place that comes from a lifetime of being on place and close observation. McKinnon shows how, for Aboriginal people who have grown up on and lived their lives on Country, Country is an active agent, central to any narrative, and how history – both ancient and recent – is embedded and tangibly present in Country.

Ligia Arguilez reports on her doctoral research at the University of Texas, in which she demonstrates how the common desert shrub known in English as the creosote bush can act as a site of memory, highlighting the long history of movement and cultural hybridity of the *fronterizo* or ‘borderlands people’ who inhabit both sides of the US–Mexico border.

From the Newcastle University Oral History Unit and Collective in the UK, Siobhan Warrington explains her involvement in the Living Deltas Hub (2019–2024), which is a collaboration with colleagues in delta regions of Vietnam, India and Bangladesh. Coordinated by Newcastle University, the project involves over 100 researchers working with participatory oral history methodologies to chart environmental change and work towards more sustainable futures.

Bianka Balanzategui’s report on the Window in Time oral history project takes the reader to Ingham in North Queensland. This project captured the experiences of older migrants, most of whom came to Australia from Italy and Sicily and all of whom worked in the sugarcane industry. Balanzategui reflects on the value of collecting these oral histories, and storage and access problems that arise from changes in recording technology and regional communities lack of a suitable official repository for such recordings.

Noting that one of the most pressing concerns of our time is global warming and climate change, Anni Turnbull and Johanna Kijas reflect on the creation and use of oral interviews with environmental activists in the galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM) sector. Pointing out that oral histories can be used to engage audiences on an emotional level, they refer to interviews regarding activism against a coal seam gas project commissioned by the State Library of New South Wales.

Finally, the reviews section offers a series of illuminating analyses of a diverse range of new outputs utilising oral history. These include a book on LGBTI service in the Australian military; a podcast on the death of an Aboriginal man in police custody; an exhibition on the 2011 floods in South East Queensland; an edited collection on oral history, education and justice; and a book on memories and ostracisation of a Christian minority in Nagasaki, Japan.

We continue to be grateful for the support of Oral History Australia's national committee and thank them for financing both a copy editor (Katie Connolly) and designer (Karen Wallis). We officially welcome our Editorial Chair, Alex Delliios, and thank Alex for her work this year, and our Reviews Editor, Gemmia Burden, for her efficiency and professionalism.

We hope you, the readers, enjoy this edition of the journal and we welcome your feedback and engagement.

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