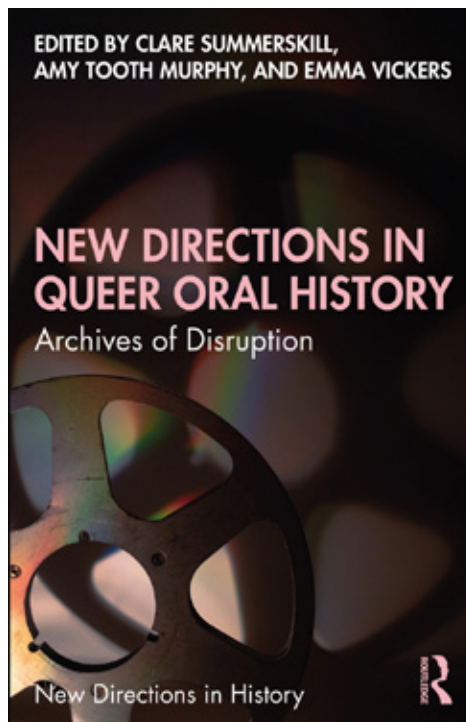


Reviews



***New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption*, edited by Clare Summerskill, Amy Tooth Murphy and Emma Vickers**

Routledge, London, 2022. 244 pages, \$75.99
(paperback). ISBN 9780367551131.

REVIEWED BY DR JACQUELYN BAKER,
Deakin University

New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption is a far-reaching collection edited by oral historians: Clare Summerskill, Amy Tooth Murphy and Emma Vickers. The editors are all well-placed in their fields of research as well as in their communities. Most notably, Summerskill is an independent academic researcher as well as a stand-up comedian, writer, performer and a self-described ‘insider playwright’ – a term she uses in her chapter about interviewing older lesbians for a verbatim play (p. 185). Tooth Murphy is a lecturer in oral history at the University

of London and Vickers lectures in history at the Liverpool John Moores University. Tooth Murphy and Vickers are both members of the Oral History Society LGBTQ Special Interest Group which, in part, aims to share knowledge and increase engagement with LGBTQIA+ communities. It is this intersection of academic expertise, non-academic experience and community engagement that contributes to a well-rounded and comprehensive scope. The book contains 19 contributions that reflect on the practice and analysis of oral history interviews conducted with LGBTQIA+ people and queer communities.

The chapters are short and direct, which makes for a quick read. Most contributors adopt a relaxed and conversational tone, which contributes to a sense that the chapters are both speaking to each other and that the contributors are speaking directly to the reader. This well-reflects the book's origins, as *New Directions in Queer Oral History* began as a 'lively conversation around a crowded table in central London' (p. 1). Indeed, the overall tone of the book feels welcoming, and the chapters are inviting. The book is organised in four sections. Part 1 reflects on the narration of LGBTQIA+ histories; Part 2 navigates discourse, composure and intersubjectivity; Part 3 considers embodiment and affect; and Part 4 contemplates identity, shared authorship and creative practice. The way that the book has been organised makes the reading experience feel like a conversation amongst friends.

While Summerskill, Tooth Murphy and Vickers sought to produce a book that shines a light on the work conducted outside of the United States, they do acknowledge the significant contributions made by American oral historians and they pay homage to the feminist historians who, in part, paved the way for the establishment of queer oral history. Despite the criticism that it 'leans toward UK studies and lives' (p. xxiii), this reviewer found it to be reasonably balanced with eight contributions focused on the UK; four chapters from Australian oral historians; four contributions related to the Canadian context; three chapters focused on the United States; and one contribution related to Northern Ireland. A bias toward queer communities and research conducted in the UK should come as no surprise considering that is where all three editors are based. However, this scope does reveal a partiality toward queer oral history conducted in the Anglosphere. In addition, most contributions

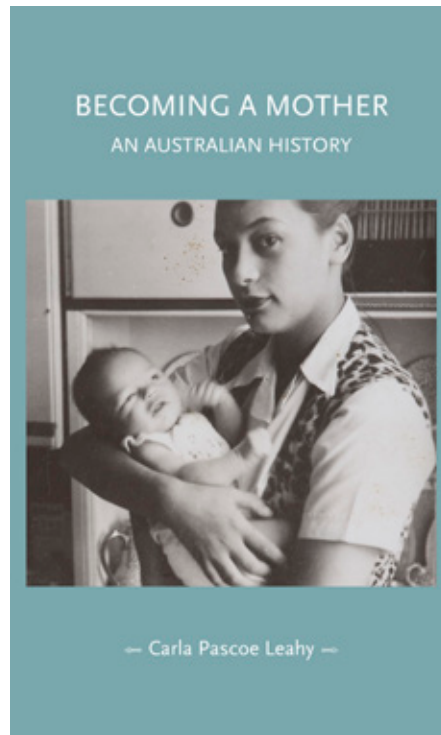
focus on white queer communities – and do so uncritically. Only three chapters out of the total 19 contributions discuss, or had worked with, non-white participants and communities: Jacob Evoy's contribution about Jewish children of Holocaust survivors; Dan Royles's chapter about Black AIDS activists in the United States; and Jane Traies's contribution about lesbian and bisexual Ugandan women seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. Traies's chapter is the final contribution in the book and, if read in order, her conclusion about new challenges of race and power that she encountered is one of the last takeaways read by the reader before closing the book. While this felt like a deliberate choice, it does not negate the sense that non-white communities and voices, as well as communities beyond the Anglosphere, were largely absent from this collection.

The emphasis on bisexual women felt intentional given the bisexual erasure and biphobia that continues to permeate queer communities and heterosexual societies alike. I agree with Nan Alamilla Boyd's observation that *New Directions in Queer Oral History* does contain a strong emphasis on lesbians, bisexual women and fem-identified queer people (p. xxiii). As an oral historian who researches lesbian feminist groups and communities in Melbourne, this bias was favourable to me. Lauren Jae Gutterman's chapter on lesbian oral histories and bisexual visibility; Sophie Robinson's chapter about documenting lesbian feminists in Australia; Summerskill's reflection on interviewing older lesbians for playwriting; El Chenier's contribution on oral history interviews as lesbian liberation; and Traies's aforementioned chapter were read with particular interest and gusto. Summerskill, Tooth Murphy and Vickers wrote that all chapters reflect a desire to make a meaningful contribution to the methodology and that all contributors express an 'activist imperative' and are driven by the political and liberating potential of queer oral history (p. 1). For those writing about bisexual women and fem-identifying queer people, it is clear that their intention is to address bisexual erasure and to explore the complexities of finding and writing bisexual histories. Writing this review on International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) makes this intention feel particularly salient. However, despite the way these contributions bring to the fore experiences and testimonies of bisexual women and fem-identifying

people, researchers interested in bisexual men, as well as bisexual masc-identified queer people, may find this book wanting.

New Directions in Queer Oral History is well situated in its body of literature, and it thoughtfully builds on the work that has come before it – namely, Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez's *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, which was published in 2012. This book does not end with a concluding chapter, which feels like a deliberate choice that well-reflects the title of this collection. Rather than trying to find neat conclusions or endings, most of the contributions conclude by encouraging readers to reflect on their practice, to consider other questions and to contemplate new problems. In addition, the editors meditate on the limitations of the label 'new' that is often ascribed to queer oral history – even though queer oral history has been practised in the academy for 40 years.

New Directions in Queer Oral History will be useful to those new to the methodology and will be enjoyed by experienced oral historians. Furthermore, it makes a valuable teaching tool for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. While I wish that this book had been published at the beginning of my own PhD candidature, I will carry the insights, reflections and calls to action with me and into my next oral history project.



Becoming a Mother: An Australian History,
Carla Pascoe Leahy

Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2023.
296 pages, \$195. ISBN 9781526161208.

REVIEWED BY EMMA DALTON,
Adjunct Research Fellow, La Trobe University

In *Becoming a Mother: An Australian History*, Carla Pascoe Leahy uses the stories of her interviewees to provide narratives of women's personal experiences of pregnancy, birth and early motherhood following the birth of their first child. Pascoe Leahy is a lecturer in Family History at the University of Tasmania. Her book, *Becoming a Mother*, was funded by the Australian Research Council. *Becoming a Mother* makes an important contribution to the fields of Australian oral history, international oral history, Australian motherhood studies, and international motherhood studies. By providing access to the specificities of women's lived experiences, Pascoe Leahy avoids

stereotyping her participants. Whilst the mothers Pascoe Leahy spoke to gave birth to their first child in different periods (post-war, second wave and millennial), their experiences vary for many reasons, and not just the birth dates of their children. Pascoe Leahy refers to her interviewees as narrators, and situates herself with her narrators, providing her own stories first.

Pascoe Leahy uses her own stories and the stories of her narrators to consider maternal emotions and maternal experiences in relation to pregnancy, birth and early motherhood. She frames these emotions and experiences with discussions about the historical context surrounding the time of her narrators' first child's birth. She also introduces policies and practices; statistics relating to medical interventions; comments from medical practitioners; and references to texts about pregnancy, birth and parenting young children.

The book *Becoming a Mother* engages with different conceptions of time (p. 26). Each chapter delivers a different message, but follows a similar pattern. Chapter 1 charts the development of 'maternal studies' (p. 12), a discipline also referred to as 'motherhood studies'.¹ Here, Pascoe Leahy explains how she constructed her sample of interviewees (p. 20) and explains that her methodology is 'framed by a commitment to understanding mothering through the words and worlds of mothers themselves' (p. 19). Chapter 2 highlights the complexities of pregnancy and the ways in which perspectives of pregnancy and pregnant women have changed across three periods, the post-war period, the second wave and the millennial period. Chapter 3 considers how discourses surrounding childbirth have changed over the 75-year period considered in this book. It also looks at the opportunities the women have had to make choices about their births. Childbirth is represented as an important experience in a woman's life, and as having potentially significant ramifications for new mothers. Chapter 4 considers early motherhood, including infant feeding, and the ways in

1 Andrea O'Reilly (ed.), *Twenty-first Century Motherhood: Experience, Identity, Policy, Agency* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Samira Kawash, 'New Directions in Motherhood Studies', *Signs* 36, no. 4 (2011): 969–1003; Vanessa Reimer and Sarah Sahagian (eds), *The Mother-Blame Game* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2015).

which new mothers bond with their children. The possibility of maternal difficulties is touched upon in this chapter. Chapter 5 considers where new mothers might find support, and how this has changed across the periods considered. Chapter 6 examines the work that mothers engage in. Interestingly, whilst post-war mothers did sometimes engage in paid work, they often did not acknowledge the work they did as work. They seemed to want to make it clear that their husbands were good providers. Hence, they downplayed their own efforts to bring income to their families. Whilst post-war mothers wanted to be viewed as putting their role as mothers first, millennial mothers felt they were judged when they did not engage in paid work outside of the home. Chapter 7 delves deeper into the possibility that mothers may not find the transition to becoming a mother an easy one.

Pascoe Leahy presents instant bonding and a rush of maternal love for the child as the standard experience of new mothers, describing this as her own experience, and the experience of most of her narrators. Perinatal depression and difficulties in adapting to early motherhood are considered, but not given much attention until the final chapter. This deeper consideration of perinatal depression and maternal difficulties near the book's end seems to frame these experiences as being outside the common experience of new mothers, although Pascoe Leahy does provide statistical evidence which demonstrates that this is not the case (p. 227). Interweaving her discussion of perinatal depression and maternal difficulties throughout her chapters may have served to provide recognition of the commonality of these experiences.

Pascoe Leahy represents a variety of mothers in her study. Pascoe Leahy provides the year and place of birth of her interviewees, as well as the year and location in which they gave birth to their first child. Further, she provides details relating to the cultural and religious identity of her interviewees. For example, 'Adriana was born in 1924 and grew up in a Presbyterian, Anglo–Australian family in Queensland' (p. 254). In contrast, 'Miroslava was born in 1946 to Orthodox, Macedonian–Australian parents' (p. 257). Unfortunately, the stories of only three Indigenous mothers are considered in *Becoming a Mother* (60 mothers were interviewed). Regardless of the rationale, more Indigenous voices were needed.

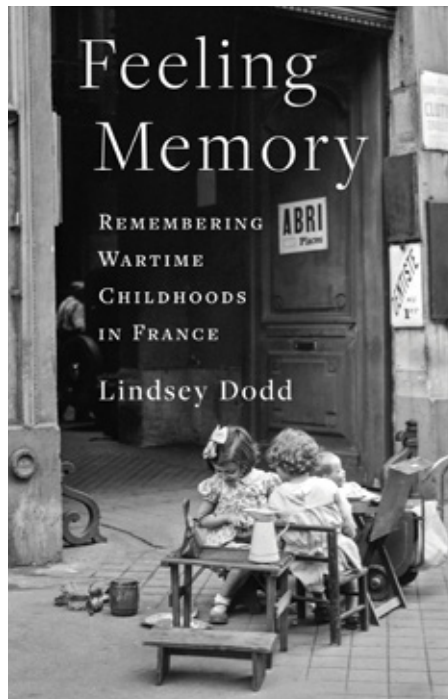
Pascoe Leahy's text represents 75 years of women's experiences of pregnancy, birth and early motherhood, and acknowledges key scholarship from the fields of oral history, gender studies and motherhood studies. However, she gives Adrienne Rich only two sentences (p. 15), and she mentions only one of Andrea O'Reilly's publications (p. 17).² Rich and her text *Of Women Born* have been influential upon the development of motherhood studies.³ O'Reilly, is a Canadian professor and prolific writer, who is noted to have 'coined' the term motherhood studies.⁴ Unfortunately, whilst she is cited in the footnotes of the chapter in which she is mentioned, she is not included in *Becoming a Mother's* bibliography (this is alarming because her work is so important to the discipline of motherhood studies). Whilst Pascoe Leahy's book *Becoming a Mother* is a book about Australian mothers, its engagement with the discipline of motherhood studies calls for a deeper acknowledgement of the work of our feminist mothers.

Nevertheless, Pascoe Leahy's *Becoming a Mother* is a gift to readers. Within its pages she invites mothers to share their stories. *Becoming a Mother* is unique, because motherhood studies is still a field that many scholars have not heard of. Pascoe Leahy uses her expert knowledge of the field of oral history, bringing feminism, gender studies and motherhood studies to it, to bring forth the stories of mothers whose voices might not otherwise be heard. These stories will be valued into the future, and, hopefully, Pascoe Leahy's framing of them will inspire more oral historians to engage with motherhood studies.

2 Andrea O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2016).

3 Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1977).

4 Fiona Joy Green, 'Motherhood studies', *Encyclopedia of Motherhood* (2010). Available at <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412979276>. Accessed 23 July 2023.



Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Experiences in France, Lindsey Dodd

Columbia University Press, New York, 2023. 400 pages,
US\$35.00 (paperback). ISBN 9780231209199.

REVIEWED BY PROFESSOR PAULA HAMILTON,
UTS Sydney

Feeling Memory seems an odd title for a book. It knocks the reader off kilter. But one very soon comes to see how important is this way of beginning the journey with Lindsey Dodd's work. Unashamedly academic in approach, it is not for the faint-hearted oral historian and those who just want to enjoy the pleasures of interviewing. Yet it is a complete *tour de force* of theoretical synthesis and imaginative insights that would suit those looking for more in-depth interpretation and studies of meaning.

Initially, this book is about the distinctive perspective of French children's memories from World War Two and their emotional responses to the years of disruption, parental absence, constant movement and violence. It illuminates these memories, largely thought to be inaccessible and limited for the remembering adult. But the book is so much more than this. It is groundbreaking because Dodd has combined not only the literature on oral histories with that on memory studies; but also incorporated recent work on histories of emotion and the sensory as well. Few have achieved this despite scholars in the latter two separate fields of study attempting to do so.¹ Dodd explores the epistemology of history and hermeneutics of memory along the way, laying their methodologies and limitations bare for those who work with oral histories. (Interestingly for example, Dodd is quite critical of memory studies' top-down approaches and lack of attention to the everyday.)

There is considerable explanatory material about the nature of the project which involved 120 people; 52 interviews were recorded by Dodd herself and the remaining data was taken from interviews already existing in French archives all over the country. Not all geographical areas were equally covered, and the author quite rightly eschewed representativeness as a criterion for selection. Interviews were all recorded in French and translated by Dodd herself (My only quibble – what does translation do in this context? What is lost or gained by it) and there are important discussions about drawing on interviews already recorded in archives and their different purposes. Central to the general analysis is Dodd's discussions about both interviewer and listener and their emotions as part of the practice, that is both the *oral* and the *aural* aspects of oral histories.

A chronological timeline is provided at the beginning of the book which starts with the Nazi invasion of France, and runs through events of the twentieth century which influenced the shifts in French public memory, though I did wonder if this was at the publisher's insistence since Dodd herself emphasised the project was driven by

1 See the small volume as part of the Cambridge Elements series: Rob Boddice and Mark Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

memories not history. It was nevertheless useful for those of us who were unfamiliar with the details of the French past and its afterlives.

The structure is unusual. While the broader structure outline is divided into four parts – namely Memories Felt, Memories Located, Memories Told and Memories Lived – within these are ten ‘pauses’ or short pieces of more detailed explanation usually drawing on a single person’s experience. These short pieces are almost asides to the main study but they allow more in-depth study of a particular incident or experience. They add to the richness of the material presented without detracting at all from the narrative flow.

The first section, Memories Felt, focuses on the sensory experiences of the children, a particularly rich way to explore children’s memories and the feelings evoked by both the individual senses such as sound and smell as well as the multisensorial landscape of the past. In her analysis Dodd also notes ‘stories of survival hinge on unpredictability and chance and emphasise agency rather than passivity’. This is a central insight into oral history interviewees who have survived disasters like World War Two and are recounting their stories some years later as adults.

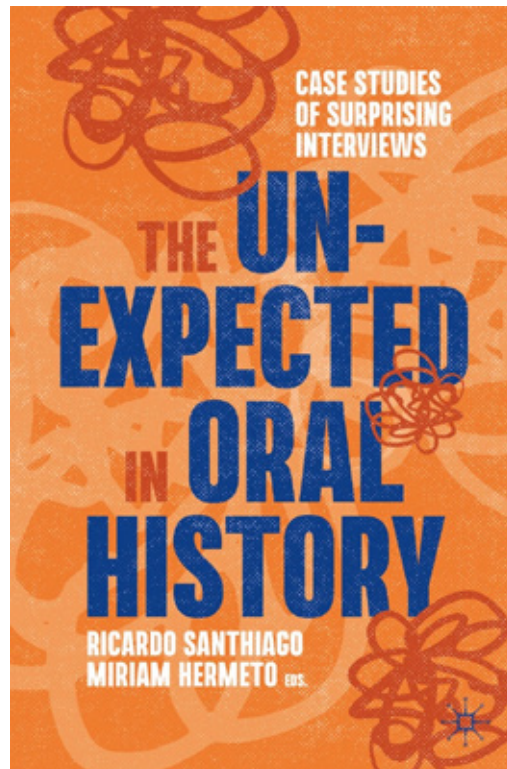
Part 2, Memories Located, examines traumatic memories, often vividly recalled, that are sited through concepts of place, space and time, where Dodd asks what role they play in the constitutions of childhood memories. In this section Dodd also asks questions about listening to these stories as a form of witnessing where ‘memories often dwell on the places of someone else’s trauma’.

Part 3, Memories Told, explores the fixed nature of memory-making through the recording process and also how the memories of wartime children match or are dissonant with the public memory of the war in France and how these have changed over time as ‘regimes of memory’ shift in response to public events.

Section 4, Memories Lived, investigates the way in which the time of the past in the stories unfolds in the present. It explicates the content of the memories of what life was like for the children more closely ‘where quotidian mundanity meets the historically significant’. As a concluding section, it incorporates all of Dodd’s previous

theoretical dynamics and underlines how, above all, the memories produced through oral histories are *felt*, shaped by emotions and affect. This book then leaves you wondering how we ever carried out oral histories and interpreted memories without the recognition of their emotional configuration involved with every aspect of the process.

As a final note, congratulations must also go to the publisher Columbia University Press and the Columbia Oral History Series. In these days of writers and readers who *should-be-grateful-that-they-can-get-any-books-published-at-all* as the usual approach, this one is clearly laid out and beautifully produced. It was a pleasure to touch, smell and read.



***The Unexpected in Oral History: Case Studies of Surprising Interviews*, edited by Ricardo Santhiago and Miriam Hermeto**

Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, 2023.
274 pages, €70. ISBN 9783031177484.

REVIEWED BY ROSA CAMPBELL

As I read *The Unexpected in Oral History: Case Studies of Surprising Interviews*, edited by Ricardo Santhiago and Miriam Hermeto, I thought often of Penny Summerfield's essay 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews'. If you are an oral historian in the English-speaking world, it is likely that you have read Summerfield's essay. In this groundbreaking

piece, Summerfield discusses ‘composure’ and ‘discomposure’ in the oral history interview. Discomposure occurs when interviewees struggle to construct a life that is ‘composed’, and to appear ‘calm and in control of themselves’, constituted as ‘the subject of their story’. If an interviewee is composed, they recount a narrative which is coherent, psychically comfortable and satisfying, free of ‘anger, self-contradiction, discomfort’.¹ Summerfield suggests that we oral historians might be astute to moments of discomposure, and usefully interpret them. In Summerfield’s case, the discomposure of her interviewees – British women who played a role as active combatants in World War Two – points to a lack of cultural representations and silence around the events those who she interviewed sought to relay. Public discourse had little to offer about the role of combatant women and so for these interviewees a narrative was hard to sustain.

But, as someone who uses oral history methodology I have often wondered, what of the discomposure of the *interviewer*? The methodology demands a certain composure from us. As interviewers we must hold the space, ask questions, find our words, give up our expectations and release control of the interview at least enough to give our interviewee a chance to tell their story. The oral historian is not a therapist. But we must, like the analyst, ‘behave ourselves’, remember that it is not about us, refrain from inserting ourselves and get out of the way.² How do we maintain our composure when faced with something strange, eerie or shocking that breaks the surface of the interview either at the time, or when we are listening back to the tape? What, in other words, do we do with the unexpected?

As Santhiago and Hermeto who edited this volume suggest, discussion of the unexpected in oral history ‘ends up restricted to hall-way conversations, in which we confide to our colleagues the pains and delights of producing oral history’ (p. 9). But the unexpected is centred in this rich and varied edited collection and the forms that the ‘unexpected’ can take in the interview are grouped into six categories. The

1 Penny Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews’, *Cultural and Social History* 1, no. 1 (2003): 65–93.

2 Donald Winnicott quoted in Janet Malcolm, *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession* (New Jersey and London: Aronson Inc, 1980), 144.

first, the ‘unexpected as outbreak’ discusses what happens when an interviewee’s story fully shatters expectations, such as in Steven High’s essay. High recalls interviewing a woman for a local museum project, early in his career. She ‘unsettled the essential goodness of local history’ by putting her experience of sexual violence on the record (p. 36). This was unexpected in the interview at the time, and unfolds into a further unexpected event, when he listens back decades later. High reflexively determines that the questions he asked such as ‘Did you feel angry?’ were based on his own experience of childhood sexual abuse, as much as the material he was being presented with (pp. 33–34).

The second section of the book, ‘the unexpected as falsification’ discusses what to do when an interviewee obscures the truth, or lies outright, such as in Miriam Hermeto’s account, when an interviewee who did not attend an important theatrical production said he did because he felt he should have been present at ‘something that was iconic for his generation’ (p. 60). Sometimes, though, the roots of these falsifications are more structural, such as when race and racism play into memory lapses as discussed in this book in Lívia Nascimento Monteiro’s essay, or when homophobia causes an interviewee who had been in a loving relationship with another woman to deny it, as in Ricardo Santhiago’s contribution. As the editors state in the introduction, the whole volume is ‘inspired by the landmark work’ of 1995 written by Brazilian historian Janaína Amado called ‘O grande mentiroso: Tradição, veracidade e imaginação em história oral [The Great Liar: Tradition, Veracity, and Imagination in Oral History]’, which grappled with what to do when an oral history interviewee turned out to have lied (pp. 8–9). The impact of the essay is particularly felt in the second section. The historians here, like Amado, urge that we should not discard an interview that is unusual or riddled with half-truths, but ask instead what meaning we might make of the incongruities and falsifications we are faced with.

The third section considers how when unexpected events disrupt the interview it is particularly memorable to the interviewer. For example, when Luciana Heymann and Verena Alberti seek to understand the growth of private education in Brazil, they interview a founder of a private university who tells them nothing of the history they are interested in, but recounts a profound, mystical experience where Jesus

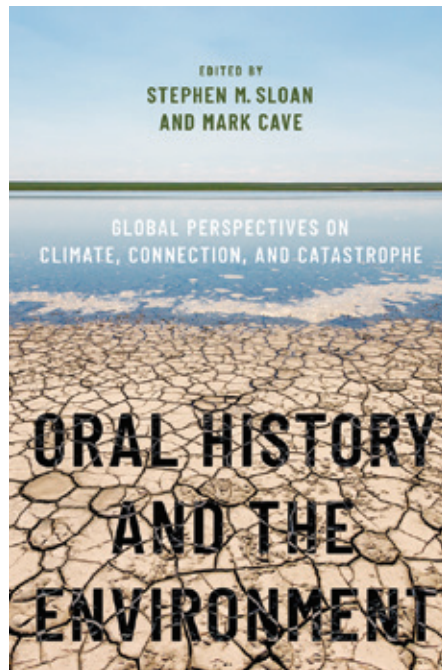
Christ rode in his car, and discusses the subsequent church he was constructing in honour of Christ. The historians conclude that while the mystical experience ‘tells us little about the creation and trajectory of [the University of West São Paulo]’ it demonstrated ‘the overlap between the spheres of politics, of religiosity, of higher education’, all of which were pervaded by the interviewee’s wish to serve the public (p. 116). While it was less useful to the researchers’ project than almost all the others, it was the most memorable.

Much of the book sees unexpected moments in the interview as contributing to oral history theory, while the fourth part considers how the unexpected may be generative to historical research. In Camillo Robertini’s essay, the author describes how he went ‘looking for heroes’ when interviewing those who worked in the Fiat Factory in Córdoba, Argentina during the years of the Videla dictatorship (1976–1981; p. 147). Robertini explains ‘My hypothesis was almost obvious: since the workers had been the victims of the Videla regime, their memoirs would surely convey their resistance to the regime (p. 148). But, instead he found workers who did not recollect engagement in anti-dictatorship activism, but who described themselves as concerned with everyday life, with their homes and marriages, with upward mobility, rather than politics. One worker described the dictatorship as a time where ‘there was stability, there was food, life went on’ (p. 152). This narration, Robertini found, ‘radically mutat[ed]’ his original research question (p. 153). Ultimately the unexpected opened the project out so that he came to explore how workers accepted and consented to the military regime.

Sections five and six concern themselves with how the unexpected does and does not disrupt the method of oral history. In part five, the essays detail the unexpected as ‘a given’, where oral history is precisely selected as a methodology because of the desired presence of the unexpected. It is a methodology that nuances the ‘straightforward story of progress’ desired by an NGO, as the contribution by Indira Chowdhury reveals (p. 182). Contributions also discuss how oral historians must often make changes to methodological design due to the needs of the interviewees, many of which cannot be anticipated. In this way, the unexpected is par for the course in oral history.

As discussed in section six, sometimes interviewers may need to break with the conventional methodology and employ unexpected techniques themselves when interviewing. These essays in the final section trace ‘deviations from accepted practice, which in other cases could be construed as a kind of mortal sin by oral historians but had to be tolerated and accepted’ in these interviews (p. 216). Sometimes interviewers required a lack of formality in order to get to their subjects, such as when Joana Barros interviews homeless people in São Paulo and must do away with the formalities and paperwork in order to capture an interview on the spot, or when Monica Rebecca Ferrari Nunes employs a methodology at cosplay conventions, inspired by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin’s concept of *flânerie*. Nunes wandered until she got ‘lost in the events, approaching young people randomly, following an abductive and intuitive approach to initiating conversations’ (p. 220) a methodology which enabled full immersion in the cosplay scene and warm, meandering, spontaneous interviews with young geeks.

The essays contained here are wonderfully varied and rich, though certainly mixed in quality. Often they employ poetics, and sometimes this works wonderfully to illuminate a point or highlight the surrealism present in the oral history interview, though less so at other times. The categorisation can on occasion seem arbitrary. Overall however, this is a useful volume which centres and explores the unexpected, and reveals that it must be grappled with by oral historians.



***Oral History and the Environment, Global Perspectives
on Climate, Connection, and Catastrophe, edited by
Stephen M. Sloan and Mark Cave***

*Oxford University Press, 2022. 320 pages, US\$37.99.
ISBN 9780190684976.*

REVIEWED BY RACHEL GOLDLUST,
La Trobe University

For years there has been a lack of considered insight and exchange between the fields of oral and environmental history. The opportunity and promise of oral history to bring local stories, and those that tell a personal yet global perspective are often underutilised in scientific and environmental studies more broadly. This book, a compendium of 12 distinct case studies presented as discrete chapters, argues for the strength and versatility of oral history as a key source for environmental history. Through their eyes, memories and intimate responses to work in nature

and/or cherished natural spaces that change over time, this book unites a global range of varied agents: activists; wilderness conservators; water managers; victims of catastrophe; tribal trustees; reindeer herders; and foresters; among others whose life experience gives them particular insight into human–environmental interaction and adaptation.

Together Stephen Sloan, an associate professor of history and director of Baylor's Institute for Oral History, and Mark Cave, a curator and oral historian from New Orleans, had previously edited *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, which no doubt inspired this pivot towards environmental considerations. In the introduction of *Oral History and the Environment*, they align both disciplines as kindred spirits due to their inherent political positioning. Both, they claim, are traditionally activist spheres and tend to have a broad interdisciplinary nature. The opening argument that both fields have long been fighting for legitimacy and the right to tell broad multinational and complex stories will be well-received by readers from either discipline.

As Australian oral historians Katie Holmes and Heather Goodall noted in their 2017 collection *Telling Environmental Histories* – humans have long told stories about the earth but our reckoning (and collective scholarship) with those stories, have tended to have been reproduced in parallel, rather than together.¹ Though there are many regional and colonial crossovers in the way we have treated, then shaped, and finally talked about the landscapes and ecosystems we find ourselves occupying, these stories have traditionally been considered too 'local' to be given the global frameworks and perspectives that this volume is looking to achieve. Therefore, the challenge *Oral History and the Environment* takes up is to assemble a variety of authors and actors, allowing the subjects to speak for themselves and detail the relationships to the environments that their lives have encountered, while simultaneously speaking to issues of climate change, globalism and environmentalism.

1 Katie Holmes and Heather Goodall, *Telling Environmental Histories: Intersections of Memory, Narrative and Environment*, Palgrave Studies in World Environmental History (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

This book highlights the need for historians of these fields to ‘push back against the textual fetish that generally characterized Western scholarship’ (p. 3). Thus, the case studies selected are each methodologically innovative, as well as texturally and geographically alluring, by complementing traditional archival sources with a range of personal, audio and other sources. Going beyond the ‘disaster or event’ foci common to environmental history scholarship, and also being mindful of the tendency towards declensionist narratives, Sloan and Cave as editors have assembled a range of case studies, depicting landscapes ‘desert to Arctic’ and touching on issues ranging from ‘drought, chemical leaks, oil spills, nuclear disaster, indigenous control of resources, natural resource management, wilderness, and protest’.

Pointing to the effective ability of oral history to address issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality, the ensuing chapters encourage practitioners of environmental history (or environmental studies more broadly) to look to explore these dimensions more fully in their work. Jan Bender Shetler’s chapter on gendered stories of resistance in Tanzania describes how famine and environmental collapse led to the disruption and reformulation of ethnic group identities, rooted in a particular landscape, and these identities are distinctive to men’s stories and retelling of history. Likewise, Caren Fox’s treatise of Maori perspectives on geothermal resources can be seen as a demonstrative example of tribal knowledge and rights being recognised and featured in contemporary industry and legal contexts. Heidi Hutner draws out the stories of Japanese feminists in their resistance to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, highlighting a growing discourse that scholars of motherhood and family have also been exploring, that radicalisation of formerly conservative women through environmental disasters is a new frontier that fosters greater participation in environmentalist causes.

Using more traditional methodologies, chapters such as Javier Arce Nazario’s first-person reflections and interviews that took place in his own village in Puerto Rico combine the data with questionnaires, and water data itself spanning several years to demonstrate that community and government knowledge of water sources can provide equal value. Similarly, Debbie Lee assembles a large quantity of archival material with a ‘live’ history collection to chronicle the human history of an American wilderness area, concluding that the local rivers found therein were more than sites of memory, but memory itself.

In reckoning with environmental histories as inherently political acts, Chapters 2 and 3 describe the spilling of 119,000 tons of crude oil off the coast of Cornwall in 1967 and then an explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Both these events, though taken discretely, can be viewed as ‘bookends’ of a contemporary epoch marked by protest and activism as the primary vehicle for expressions of care over environmental change and destruction. In considering Tero Mustonen’s appraisal of the more subtle changes observable by the Finnish Inuit across the Finnish and Canadian tundras, we can appreciate that activism has also been expressed quietly for decades, and has considered cultural as well as political forces. Likewise, Deb Anderson’s opening chapter on Australian oral histories of drought looks to amplify the dialogue between past and present, while elevating a ‘natural’ phenomenon into a political event.

Although this collection may not directly address the bigger challenges of climate change, or the business-as-usual trajectory of exponential growth and modernity, it does so obliquely by bringing a highly personal, regional and culturally and linguistically diverse collection of environmental histories together to explore change, and the environment. From an oral history standpoint, the book affirms the place of first-person experiences, ideas and observations as equal to, if not more valuable than archival sources, particularly when it comes to events, place and larger, more ephemeral contexts such as landscape and memory. There is also a valuable timeline contained in the introduction and epilogue that traces the rise of the intersection of oral and environmental histories working in tandem. All in all, this collection is a valuable tool for students of either/both subdiscipline(s), and for historians from across the globe who may be looking to feature environmental and first-person experiences in their work.