

INTERNATIONAL WORK

AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA DURBAN SINGS!

Durban Sings is an oral history and audio media project of the Centre for Civil Society based in the School of Development Studies of the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). The project collaborates with up to fifty young people from eight Durban townships in South East coast of South Africa.

Molefi Mafereka Ndlovu from the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), and Dr. Claudia Wegener, the supporter of the project from the UK, report on a recent initiative.

'In November 2009 the "Durban Sings" oral history and audio media project, based at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), called artists, musicians, designers, photographers, scholars, film makers, writers and cultural activists across the globe, to lend their ears and media skills to the existing material collected under Durban sings and to do some "remixing".

'The contributions that we have received will form the core of "creative donations" that are meant to be the basis for an ongoing exchange within and between the emerging community media networks in global South and the North. All the responses that reached us in time will be in line to be included on our DVD multi-media publication which we call: "Remixing African Oral History for a Global audience" due to be released in November 2010.

'The project also has a switchboard blog (<http://durbansings.wordpress.com/project-update/>) which serves as a shared and public archive for the participating Durban community groups, with a particular aim of developing and producing a publication of the project activities and findings in form of a "Media Activist Handbook" and an accompanying interactive multi-media DVD.



The flyer for the Durban Sings call for contributions.

'Looking ahead, in February 2011 the project aims to involve the Johannesburg Art Gallery and thereafter prepare for a hand-over of the project tools and resources back to participant groups in Durban.'

- For more information of the project visit the switchboard blog: <http://durbansings.wordpress.com/project-update/>

ASIA

HONG KONG OUR HOME, OUR HISTORY – AN UPDATE

Our Home, Our History – The Hong Kong Heritage Project (HKHP) is a non-profit undertaking initiated in May 2007 by Sir Michael Kadoorie. HKHP is the archive of the Kadoorie Family and collects oral history interviews about Hong Kong's history. Amelia Allsop provides an update on a recent development.

'We have a new collection of interviews from a particular Hong Kong district: Sham Shui Po, which is one of the few neighbourhoods to retain its pre-War character and a place which is liable to change in the coming years. We identified old trades synonymous with the area which were likely to be swept away with the onset of gentrification and sought to interview these

bone setters, cooked food stalls, wholesale garment sellers to preserve their stories. Thirty interviews have so far been collected on film. HKHP has also collaborated with nine local schools by sharing experiences and resources to ensure students are well equipped to record their relatives' and neighbours' memories of the district. The process enables students to learn about the heritage of their rapidly changing local community. The interviews will be kept as part of the HKHP collection so as to be reached by a wider audience.

'We hold the largest oral history repository in Hong Kong (with over 360 filmed interviews collected so far) and our collection is continually growing – you can discover more by visiting www.hongkongheritage.org, or contacting Amelia Allsop at amelia@clp.com.hk'

INDIA

SURVIVAL OF THE HEART: PRESERVING THE TIBETAN CULTURE

The Tibet Oral History Project documents the extraordinary lives of exiled Tibetan elders – the last generation to live in a free, unoccupied Tibet – and preserves memories of their homeland for future generations. Founder, Marcella Adamski, PhD, a clinical psychologist working in San Francisco, explains:

'When I met His Holiness the Dalai Lama I asked what could be done to help the people of Tibet. He requested that the elders who fled Tibet following the Chinese invasion be interviewed before they pass away and their stories are lost forever. To fulfil this request, I founded the Tibet Oral History Project, which has already videotaped 120 elders' eyewitness accounts of Tibet's recent history.

'When the Dalai Lama was forced to flee Tibet in 1959, an estimated 80,000 Tibetans followed their spiri-



Interviewee Tenpa
Chonphel, age 73.

tual leader into exile in India where most now live. The project's interviews document the refugees' early peaceful life in Tibet and the devastating impact of the Chinese invasion and occupation on their families, livelihood, social structure and religious practices.

'The refugees we interview come from diverse backgrounds – nomads, farmers, housewives, traders, monks, healers and community leaders. Under Chinese occupation, many of them became political prisoners, forced labourers, and even resistance fighters. Now at the ages of eighty or

ninety, these refugees are the last generation who can describe the rich and ancient traditions of Tibet as an independent country.

'In April 2010, a team of Americans and Tibetans travelled to Doeguling Tibetan Settlement in the small town of Mundgod, India. Videotaped interviews were conducted by myself and Rebecca Novick, writer and radio program producer, with the help of translators. Funding from the International Campaign for Tibet Rowell Fund, Firedoll Foundation and Isdell Foundation, enabled us to add another fifty-three oral histories to our collection.

'Our biggest difficulty is the urgency with which we need to record these oral histories. Time is running out to capture these eye-witness accounts of eighty and ninety year-old Tibetans, one elderly monk passed away the night before we were scheduled to interview him. If we can acquire funding, we hope to return to India later next year to conduct interviews in Dharamsala, location of the Tibetan government-in-exile.

'Two short films featuring oral history excerpts and sixty-seven complete interview transcripts are available on the project's website. The collection will be given to Tibetan archives and international research libraries. Radio Free Asia's Tibetan Service is broadcasting interview excerpts worldwide on the weekly 'Life in Exile' radio show.

'The elders interviewed are extremely grateful to be given the opportunity to share their stories. As eighty two-year old Sonam Gogyal declared, "I have been waiting my whole life to tell what happened in Tibet."

● For more information visit
www.tibetoralhistory.org or
contact info@tibetoralhistory.org

EUROPE IRELAND A STORY TO TELL

The National Institute for Intellectual Disabilities in Trinity College, Dublin, has developed a platform for older people with intellectual disabilities to have a voice and record their life-stories, to speak out about what life has been like for them over the past sixty years. Currently nine stories are archived in text and video format. The project is supported and funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and Marie Curie Actions, and has been running since 2008. Zoe G Hughes, the coordinator of the project, reports:

'Initially four researchers were involved in working with twenty-two older people to document their life-stories, and to create a digital archive of these stories. Whilst some storytellers opted not to share their story publicly, the aim of the archive is to give a secure space to anyone with a disability, and the people who support

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The first story- Sarah's story

Work

I work in a nursing home, for two days a week. I set the tables for them and I go up then I talk to them, and if they're sick I get help for them and I play bingo with them. Well I like working with the old people. Old people, I like talking to them, I think they're very interesting, you know? And some of them are very lonely and they like you to talk to them. Some of them does be very lonely.

"I love up here now, I love here. Meeting them all. It's very lively. It's nice to see them all together talking and you know?"

School



I was there just for a while, that's all I'll commit ta. And I didn't work till I was twelve years old. I wasn't able to go, when I was only maybe a week or fortnight I go to the national, then I get bad, you know? And they said I'm not able, I was just able to write me name. I got no learning or nothing, I couldn't. Never got taught, never got taught. They just, they learned me name and that you know. You do a bit of learning, not much really. Just sums and that, you know?

Sarah.

Screen shot of Sarah's story: the stories are available at: www.tcd.ie/niid/life-stories

them, to share their story with the world.

'The stories tell of lives lived in institutions with no personal choice. They are stories of survival; of overcoming adversity; of making friends and creating lives which have not been recognised as equal to those of their non-disabled peers. The storytellers often surprise us with their comments: "Staff are telling me to talk to them, but how can I talk when I don't know what to say?" The most interesting elements of this project are examples of the depth of contemplation and reflection that people with intellectual disabilities are capable of. The key challenge of the archive is to ensure that their voices and reflections do not get lost in the mists of time and cyberspace.

'Other groups of people are beginning to tell their stories to add to the archive, including family members. Having a rich tapestry of voices and stories can only add to our knowledge and challenge our assumptions of what "disabled" people are capable of.'

Zoe Hughes is currently undertaking an evaluation of the use of lifeworthy work with people with disabilities in Ireland, from the viewpoints of the storytellers themselves, their staff supporters, and policy makers.

- For more information on the project please visit the website: www.tcd.ie/niid/life-stories/ or contact Zoe G Hughes on: zhughes@tcd.ie

**LATIN AMERICA
BRAZIL
TWO UNIVERSITY RESEARCH
PROJECTS USING ORAL
HISTORY**

Marcos Montysuma and Robson Laverdi report on two very different current research projects using oral history.

Marcos Fábio Freire Montysuma from the History Department at the Centre for Philosophy and Human Sciences at the Federal University of Santa Catarina provides an overview of an on-going investigation into populations affected by the building of dams to serve hydro electric power plants in the Madeira River Complex.

'We sought to observe the construction of knowledge of men and women who live near the river, fishermen, extractors, and indigenous tribes people, in terms of their interactions in the peculiar ecosystem of the Amazon. These habitants of Rondônia's rainforests will be flooded by the construction of the dams in the Madeira River Complex and the research explores the environmental and social impacts.

Our analysis is done from dialogues in interviews constructed

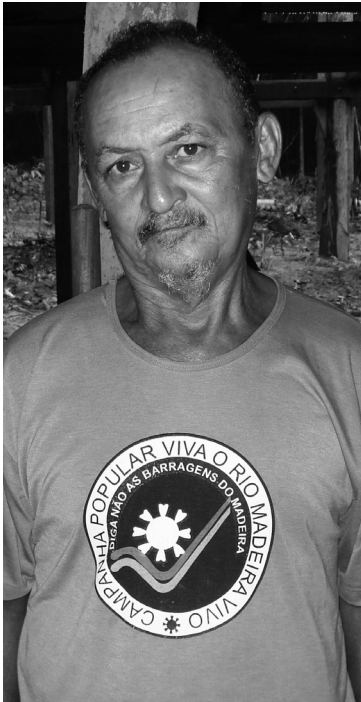
through the methodology of oral history, carried out with the local populations of the Madeira River Basin. In their testimonies we followed memories, experiences and ways of life, related to their habitat. We sought to apprehend the ways in which they constitute their knowledge and share skills of their local environment and its resources.

The research completed to date is due to be presented at up and coming events. And we hope to continue the field research to follow up on the next steps of the construction and to surpass the twenty-seven interviews already conducted. We are concerned that these initial interviews may have been affected by some people's fear of suffering possible retaliation from the companies responsible for the construction, and also by the scarce protection resources which we have at the moment. We believe this research is important for the present discussion of socio-environmental issues that constitute contemporary Brazil. For more information contact Marcos Montysuma at mmontysuma@gmail.com

Robson Laverdi from the History department of the West Paraná State University (UNIOESTE) is using oral history in a study of the lives of young gays in the Brazilian countryside. He reports, 'This research aims to place in history the urban lives and other social practices of young male homosexuals in small country towns, specifically those situated in the western part of the state of Paraná, nearby the triple border region between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Among the towns studied in this research are Assis Chateaubriand, Marechal Cândido Rondon e Toledo, with populations estimated between 30,000 and 90,000 people.

'The research pays attention to situations and dynamics which permeate a complex network of young gay lives. For example, the difficulty of gay anonymity and the inexistence of social spaces for this group in small towns.

'We adopted the methodology of oral history, to give voice to a previously voiceless social experience. Among the interviewees are youths from 18 to 28 years old, who are



An interviewee wearing a "Say No to Madeira Dams" campaign tshirt.

openly gay or not, who survive in these realities despite media promises of another life in larger urban centres.

Several book chapters have already been published based on the first stage of this research and there are plans to conduct more interviews with activists from the gay movement.'

- For more information please contact Robson Laverdi at robson_laverdi@hotmail.com

NORTH AMERICA HAWAII

The Centre for Oral History (COH) at the University of Hawaii is undertaking a project entitled 'Captive on the US Mainland: Oral Histories of Hawaii-born Nisei' (literally, second generation, used in North America and Australia to specify the children born to Japanese people in the new country). The project is funded by the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program, administered by the National Park Service. The Director of the COH, Dr Warren S Nishimoto, reports:

'The COH is seeking to interview individuals who, as young Japanese

Americans during the Second World War, were removed from their places of study, training, or employment on the West Coast and incarcerated in various assembly centres and relocation camps.

'The idea for the oral history project emerged after the Centre learned of the story of Sidney Kosasa, the founder of a large sundry store chain in Hawaii. Kosasa was born in Hawaii and attended local schools before enrolling at the University of California at Berkeley where he earned a degree in pharmacy. In 1942, Executive Order 9066 forced Kosasa and other West Coast Japanese Americans to be held in an assembly centre in California, and later at Tule Lake Relocation Centre. After his release from Tule Lake in 1943, Kosasa eventually returned to Hawaii and, in 1949, formed a family corporation and opened a pharmacy of his own.

'In his interviews with COH in 2001, Kosasa spoke of racism, the uncertainties that followed the Pearl Harbour attack on 7 December, 1941, his incarceration, the post-war years on the US mainland, and his return to the islands. While speaking about his incarceration, he noted the presence of other Hawaii-born students, dockworkers, and medical professionals at Tule Lake.

'The Centre for Oral History has been locating and interviewing individuals like Mr. Kosasa who were working, training, or studying on the West Coast at the time of incarceration. The interviews focus on such topics as: their childhood and youth in Hawaii; pre-war experiences on the West Coast; incarceration and release, and post-war lives.

'The goal of this interviewing project is to highlight that the Second World War confinement and its impact was not limited to the older, more established Hawaii Japanese and their families. Rather, Hawaii Nisei – striving to realise the American Dream on the West Coast also experienced confinement and its impacts.'

- For further information please contact Dr Warren S. Nishimoto: wnishimo@hawaii.edu or visit www.oralhistory.hawaii.edu and www.nisei.hawaii.edu

OCEANIA

AUSTRALIA

'GREATER EXPECTATIONS: LIVING WITH DOWN SYNDROME IN THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY'

'People with disabilities are just so much better off today because of positive attitudes. When my son was born we had no expectations for him whatsoever, and how wrong we were!'. This was the way one mother explained her life, when she was interviewed by Jan Gothard for a study on living with Down syndrome (DS). Jan Gothard's book, *Greater Expectations: living with Down syndrome in the twenty-first century* is due to be published in 2011 by Fremantle Press in Australia, with proceeds to Down Syndrome Western Australia (DSWA). The book will be illustrated with images from a photographic exhibition of people with Down syndrome, produced for DSWA and available on their website at <http://dsawa.asn.au/family-support/beyond-the-myths.html>. Jan Gothard reports:

'Over the past decade, I have interviewed people from more than fifty Western Australian families about what life is like when you live with Down syndrome. I have interviewed parents, siblings and carers, but above all, people with Down syndrome themselves, for they have a very different way of looking at the world, and of seeing themselves. One of my original concerns was exploring what it was like to have Down syndrome but I very soon discovered the obvious: that for many people with Down syndrome, it was a non-question, they experienced life simply as 'life'.

'Some family members, on the other hand, told stories which underlined the continuing discrimination which has impacted the lives of people with disabilities in Australian society. Thus one chapter focuses on the battle some families have faced in attempting to migrate to Australia with a family member with Down syndrome, with Australia's migration policies still openly discriminatory. Other chapters cover the arrival of a child with a difference; "home invasion" – service providers and early intervention; education ("learning to be disabled"); family life and opportunities; life after



'Some of my best friends have Down syndrome, and some of them don't.'
Photo: DSWA (Down Syndrome Western Australia), photographer Mona Neumann.

school; work; and independent living ("we've got to outlive him"). All are based on multiple voices supported by historical research, and together cover more than fifty years of Australian social history.

'Overall I have recorded hundreds of hours and travelled thousands of miles across the state of Western Australia in undertaking this project. I have also interviewed closer to home, as I have a daughter with Down syndrome. Some of my stories are specific to Australia: the Aboriginal mother, herself a member of the 'stolen generation' who was taken from her family as an infant, who lived all her life fearing the state would similarly take away her son because he had Down syndrome. Other themes are more universal: stories of growth, achievement, prejudice and pride.

'The voices of people with Down syndrome are particularly powerful as

they talk about their own experiences. While some are very articulate, others are less so and, reflecting on this, I have published an article on the ethical implications of 'interviewing the inarticulate' in a volume of *Studies in Western Australian History: Ethics and the Practice of History*, 2009 (see Centre for Western Australian History <http://www.cwah.uwa.edu.au>).

● Any inquiries regarding this project please email Jan Gothard j.gothard@murdoch.edu.au To contact the Down Syndrome Western Australia emaildsawa@upnaway.com

News from Abroad is edited by Siobhan Warrington who welcomes all contributions by email to siobhan.warrington@panos.org.uk

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