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8th International Symposium of the Finnish Oral History Network FOHN

**AFTER:**  
**Time, Place, and (Dis)Connections in Oral History and Life**  
**Storying**

# ABSTRACTS

1–2 December 2022  
Helsinki, Finland

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**FOHN**  
FINNISH ORAL HISTORY NETWORK



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



**RED:** [SKS, Great Hall \(Hallituskatu 1\)](#)  
**PURPLE:** [University of Helsinki, Main Building \(Unioninkatu 34\)](#)



QR code: [FOHN Symposium 2022 website](#)

## Thursday 1 December

**KEYNOTE 9.30 -10.30**

**SKS, Great Hall**

**Chair:** Ulla Savolainen

**Andrew Irving (University of Manchester)**

*“Between Thought and Expression: Lies a Lifetime”*



*Images taken from the storyboard from the animated documentary “See Me”  
(Andrew Irving, Priit Tender, Sarah Ezekiel)*

*“Between thought and expression”* sang The Velvet Underground’s Lou Reed on *Some Kinda Love* *“lies a lifetime”*. On the one hand it is a lyric that evokes the *strange distance* between the often inchoate and amorphous origins of a thought, image or memory as it takes shape, and on the other hand, the moment of public articulation and expression when it enters into the world, sometimes irreversibly so, and takes on a different social, historical and ontological character. Of course, there is no objective, independent access to another person’s consciousness or experience, and as such we must ask what is at stake when the boundary between thought and expression is traversed? or when something unsaid becomes said and becomes part of a public rather than personal narrative?

The capacity for a complex inner lifeworld encompassing ongoing streams of inner dialogue, reverie and imagination, as well as non-linguistic or image based forms of thought, is an essential component of social life and many everyday practices. From personal daydreams and fantasies to ongoing social and existential concerns, the streets, shops and cafés that surround us contain

everything that life has to offer, from the most trivial to the most tragic of stories, but much of it remains unspoken and unheard.

The stories we communicate with ourselves on an ongoing basis about our lives, hopes and anxieties has long been a subject of modernist literature and artistic practice—but is largely a *terra incognita* for anthropology and many other disciplines—which risk only telling half the story of human life. The question of how to research and represent the transient, stream-like and ever-changing character of people’s interior expressions as they emerge in the moment is a methodological and practical problem rather than a conceptual one. Drawing on a series of experimental and ethnographic encounters this presentation will consider what kinds of lives are being lived between thought and expression.

*Andrew Irving is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Manchester. His research areas include sensory perception, time, illness, death, urban anthropology and experimental methods, film and multi-media. Recent books include “The Art of Life and Death: Radical Aesthetics and Ethnographic Practice: (2017: Chicago); Anthropology and Futures: Researching Emerging and Uncertain Worlds (2017: Bloomsbury). Beyond Text? Critical Practices and Sensory Anthropology, (2016: M.U.P); Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Cosmopolitanisms, Rationalities and Discontents, (2014: Berghahn). Recent film, television and multi-media works include: See, Make, Sign (Exhibition; 2019, Children’s Museum of the Arts, New York). Wandering Scholars: Or How to Get in Touch with Strangers (Live film and sound installation: Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde, Vienna, 2016). The Man Who Almost Killed Himself (BBC Arts, Odeon Cinemas, Edinburgh Festival 2015). And the New York Stories Project (2013), which is currently hosted on more than thirty websites including Scientific American, National Public Radio and the Wenner Gren. Current research project: <http://deafamsa.net/>. [andrew.Irving@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.Irving@manchester.ac.uk)*

## **PARALLEL SESSIONS 11.00–12.30**

### **University of Helsinki, Main Building**

#### **1. Gender and Feminism in Oral History Research (Room: U3039)**

**Chair:** Riikka Taavetti

**Minna Uusivirta (University of Turku):**

***Bodies after sport – How to address bodily experiences and memories of female cyclists after their careers***

Doing sports is a bodily experience that can leave the athlete with traces of many kinds. I study the experiences of the first women cyclists that participated in road race in the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 by interviewing the participants.

As athletes these women prepared for the race by training for hundreds of hours and thousands of kilometers riding outside, navigating different routes and feeling pain during hard efforts or climbing mountains in all types of weather. They are familiar with the effects of adrenaline and endorphin rushing through the body, cramping muscles, and the aches of finishing a race after crashing. After their careers their bodies have been left with marks from extensive training and racing and many external factors such as their relationship with a coach can have impacted the perception the women have of their bodies afterwards.

In my paper I will discuss the challenges and possible approaches of interviewing these women and attending to these feelings that are an inseparable part of sports both during and after a race.

*Minna Uusivirta is a doctoral researcher in Folkloristics at the University of Turku. [muusiv@utu.fi](mailto:muusiv@utu.fi)*

**Sarah Nickel (University of Alberta):**

***Managing Reciprocal Responsibilities: Indigenous Community-Engaged Research across Time and Space***

My current project examines the multiple ways that Indigenous women in three western Canadian provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, engaged in social and political activities between the 1960s and 1980s. I am interested in both formal and informal political involvement as women developed their own political organizations, but also initiated ad hoc community groups to respond to a particular event or issue. For instance, I explore women's formal legal advocacy to change sexist provisions of the Indian Act, as well as their roles setting up halfway houses for Indigenous women leaving prison and women's shelters for those escaping gender-based violence.

As an Indigenous historian from the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc Nation, and someone grounded in Indigenous community-engaged oral history methodologies, I have been confronted with the ethical and methodological concerns of how to conduct responsible research across a vast number and variety of "communities." Indigenous community-engaged research talks about best practices in developing relationships, and building reciprocity and responsibility into the research design, process, product, and knowledge dissemination, but how does one manage these demanding obligations when "communities" might consist of individuals from many Indigenous nations who united under a common cause to respond to crisis? Further, how does one maintain ethical obligations to engagement and reciprocity with numerous and shifting organizations, individuals, and geo-political communities? In this paper I will share my experiences developing research protocols as an Indigenous researcher researching inside and outside my home community, and reflect on some of the challenges I've faced.

*Sarah Nickel is an associate professor of History at the University of Alberta. Her work focuses on twentieth century Indigenous political activism in Canada using archival and oral history practices. [smickel1@ualberta.ca](mailto:smickel1@ualberta.ca)*

**Lotta Kähkönen (Tampere University):**

***Affective Relations and Vulnerability in Interviews with Trans\* Artists***

In this paper, I develop methodological approach to an interview data as part of a study on trans cultural production. The interviews have been conducted with trans\* artists (trans\* = transgender, non-binary and other gender non-conforming people) in Finland. In my analysis, I will utilize the concept of vulnerability as an affective relation. I focus on moments of vulnerability that include embodied experiences, affects and emotions, and interpret how these moments work as resource for new ways of orientating and acting in social conditions that involve discriminating structures. My approach draws from feminist theorization of vulnerability as post-liberal ethical and political vision that emphasizes recognition and care, offering an understanding of the dependency of individuals on others (Kittay 1999; Butler 2004, Gilson 2014). In particular, I will utilize an account of vulnerability as affective relation (Rozmarin 2021) that aims to explain how vulnerability may operate as activating affective resource that enhance agency and offer paths of creative transformation. I argue that by using narrative approach that pays attention to affective moments of vulnerability assists not only in expressing the non-verbal but also in explicating the significance of the data for trans\* and queer community in the present and the future.

*Dr. Lotta Kähkönen currently works as senior researcher in Gender Studies at Tampere University. Their research focuses on links between art and activism by trans artists and communities. [lottamari.kahkonen@tuni.fi](mailto:lottamari.kahkonen@tuni.fi)*

## **2. Borderlands under stress: (Dis)connections in Oral History Interview: Thinking of Time, Language, and Intersubjectivity (Room: U4071)**

“Borderlands under stress” is a concept introduced by Blake (2000) at the turn of the millennium. With this concept, he refers to the many disputes and tensions that take place on a significant part of the world's borders.

In this panel, we explore the current situation in the borderlands between Russia and Finland and Russia and Estonia stressed by the pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine and analyze the impact of these seminal events on the structures of place, identity, and memory in these territories. All papers are based on extensive fieldworks conducted by us, separately and together, in the Russian-Finnish and Russian-Estonian borderlands in different years, including the summer and autumn 2022.

**Chair:** Helena Jerman

**Virpi Kaisto (University of Antwerp):**

*Everyday life and sense of place in a “borderland under stress”: Visual and ethnographic study of the Finnish-Russian borderland*

I use the concept “borderlands under stress” as a metaphor for the Finnish-Russian borderland in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the political turmoil caused by the war in Ukraine. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, new international border crossing points were opened between Finland and Russia and the number of crossings increased significantly turning the boundary into an important asset for the economies of the border cities and regions. Social interaction across the border developed and the two sides became increasingly connected with each other. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions were introduced on cross-border traffic, and the number of crossings dropped dramatically. Although most of the restrictions were lifted in the summer of 2022, everyday life in the borderland did not return to the situation before the pandemic. The war in Ukraine changed Finland's security environment, the most notable manifestation of which was Finland's application for NATO membership. In the borderland, people's perceptions of the neighboring country and its people began to change, and political meanings began to be attached to the previously mundane cross-border mobilities and interaction.

This paper presents a study exploring everyday life and sense of place in the Finnish-Russian borderland in the summer and autumn of 2022. The study applies an ethnographic approach. Methods of data collection include photography, participant observation and in-depth interviews, and research material is also collected from local newspapers and social media. This presentation focuses on the in-depth interviews, which are conducted with people who have been actively involved in cross-border business or cooperation for several years during their lifetime and who live in one of the studied border cities (Imatra and Lappeenranta in Finland, and Svetogorsk and Vyborg in Russia). The aim is to shed light on how the everyday life of these people and their subjective and emotional attachment to place—their sense of place—has evolved over time and changed especially during the past two “stressful” years.

*Virpi Kaisto is a Researcher at University of Antwerp, Belgium. As a human geographer, she has been studying the Finnish-Russian borderland for several years focusing on everyday life and people's lived experiences.*  
[virpi.kaisto@gmail.com](mailto:virpi.kaisto@gmail.com)

**Elena Nikiforova (Centre for Independent Social Research):**

***Borderlands as a time-space continuity: Diachronic neighboring in the Russian-Finnish borderlands, Kivennapa case***

My paper aims to contribute to the discussion on time, place, postmemory, and identity in the former Finnish Karelia, focusing on the case of former Kivennapa/now Pervomaiskoe, in Vyborg district, Leningrad region. Based on a series of observations and in-depth biographic interviews about place attachment and identity from both sides of the border, I reconstruct and analyze the nets of crossborder ties between the current residents of Pervomaiskoe and the descendants of former residents of Kivennapa parish. Emerged over the question of Finnish material heritage and its maintenance on these lands, these connections developed into emotionally involved and very personal crossborder relationships over place and memory that I call ‘a diachronic neighbourship’. These personal relationships, I argue, work towards producing this borderland and its sense of place as a time-space continuity above all state disruptions. In this paper, I want to reconstruct this neighbourship in retrospect, from the heyday of cross-border cooperation in the 1990s-early 2000s marked by intensive neighboring at all planes to the present mode of interrupted neighboring caused by the pandemic and by the situation of war in Ukraine. I also want to reflect upon the role of us, researchers, in the production of this neighbourship, as we have been intermediaries, triggers, and narrators of these relationships.

*Elena Nikiforova is an independent social researcher affiliated with the Centre for Independent Social Research, St.Petersburg, Russia - Helsinki, Finland. [elenikifor@gmail.com](mailto:elenikifor@gmail.com)*

**Maruta Pranka (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Latvia University):**

***Intergenerational transmission of memories of exiles – contradictions and acceptance***

The presentation focuses on inter-generational transmission of memory as factor influencing aspects of ethnic identity, the role of memories to adapt in the space of two ethnic identities. The experience of memory transitions between generations in exile and identity formation of the second generation of exiles from Latvia to Sweden at the end of the II WW will be discussed. Video interviews with Latvian-Swedish respondents, born at the end of 40-ies and beginning of fifties the last century were conducted. In difference from their parents who went to exile because of the occupation and war the second generation was born out of their fatherland. Their connection with Latvia was shaping through their parents’ stories and memories. What role has parents’ experiences for the children’s historical consciousness? The second generation, have not experience of these events, but lived in connection with it. In what way do they relate to, manage and negotiate their parents’ history in interaction with their own story of growing up as children of exiled? How we understand, use and reproduce history is an important issue, not only for the science of history, but also for society at large. The paper based on interviews of the project “From past to present: migration and integration through the life story network”, financed by Nordplus conducted by the researchers of Institute for Philosophy and Sociology, Latvia University.

*PhD in sociology, leading researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Latvia. Main research interests: life stories, biographical approach in researching social processes. [pranka@latnet.lv](mailto:pranka@latnet.lv)*

**PARALLEL SESSIONS 14.00–16.00**  
**University of Helsinki, Main Building**

**3. Oral History, Silences and Absence (Room: U4071)**

**Chair:** Anne Heimo

**Kirsti Salmi-Niklander (University of Helsinki) & Lotta Leiwo (University of Helsinki):**  
***Silenced, fragmented and reconstructed family histories of T-Bone Slim***

Matti Valentini-poika Huhta (1882–1942), better known under his pseudonym “T-Bone Slim”, was one of the most seminal figures in the US Labor movement. However, he stayed out of the limelight and his identity remained as a mystery to most of his readers – and even to his family.

Our presentation is based on the ongoing research project that focuses on T-Bone Slim’s transnational networks. His parents and their siblings emigrated from Kälviä, Central Ostrobothnia to Ashtabula, Ohio in the 1870s and the 1880s. T-Bone Slim’s living relatives and descendants have only quite recently discovered their silenced family history and their Finnish ancestry. Musician John Westmoreland, T-Bone Slim’s grandnephew is an artist member in the project. In May 2022 we visited family history sceneries in Kälviä with Westmoreland. As a contrast to the “silent” landscapes and silenced family histories, we heard many living folk narratives and oral histories told by a local guide.

In this paper, we discuss the methodological and ethical aspects of exploring silenced family histories, which are a puzzle of fragmented archival materials, oral histories, and fieldwork in family history sceneries. One of the challenges is the language: T-Bone Slim wrote his poems and columns in English, but archival materials and oral histories related with his family history, childhood and youth are mostly in Finnish. All our materials have silences and non-verbal features, which can be accessed through comparative analysis.

*Kirsti Salmi-Niklander is University Lecturer and Docent in Folklore Studies at Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki. Her research interests include oral history and working-class cultures. [kirsti.salmi-niklander@helsinki.fi](mailto:kirsti.salmi-niklander@helsinki.fi)*

*Lotta Leiwo is a Master’s student at the University of Helsinki majoring in Folkloristics and the research assistant in Kone Foundation funded research project ‘T-Bone Slim and the transnational poetics of the migrant left in North America’. [lotta.leiwo@helsinki.fi](mailto:lotta.leiwo@helsinki.fi)*

**G Koffink (Oregon State University):**

***What’ll I Do? What’ll I do? What’ll I do?: Nursing the Grief of an ‘Always-After’ in Trans-Archives***

Of destruction and restoration, this paper addresses the role of imagination as a method of intimacy in the queer archival space. In a community fraught with the grief of our brothers, uncles and fathers, Heather Love asks the trans- and crippled archivist to “depend” on the distance created by the present mourning of those we cannot meet. Hence, using the frame of trans- poetic analysis and practice, the author forces recognition of what is missing and what can be constructed of the pieces left to sum. Defining poetics as an art and act of “imitation,” “representation” and “confrontation” the author reforms how the trans-crip archivist interacts with their subject. In this instance, the author analyzes seven chronological interviews between Lou Sullivan (a gay trans-masculine activist) and Ira B. Pauly (psychiatrist) to confront xur bodily and emotional responses as a fulcrum for creation. Essentially, the author exposes xurself to the

silence found in trans-masculine histories and uses it as a framework for future knowledge production. As a young trans- elder and archivist in crisis, I, the author, have spent the better part of my scholarship grappling with the purposeful silences of my history. Hence, I posit the productive value of loss not as generative, but as poetically restorative.

*G Koffink (xe/xem/xyr) is an M.A. student of Oregon State University's Gender Studies program. Xyr care work centers trans-, crip and neurodivergent kinship beyond and within the bodies of archive and apprehendability. [reagan.paul2020@gmail.com](mailto:reagan.paul2020@gmail.com)*

**Adriana Kapała (Centre of Community Archives):**

***The Community archives in Poland – new power of oral history?***

There are nearly 600 community archives in Poland. Community archives are the social phenomenon in Poland. They are created from the bottom and assume participation of community (local, but not only). Most of them are created by foundations and associations, but also by private persons or informal groups. Community archives collect oral history - this is not done by researchers, but by local activists (most often non-archivists). Oral history in this kind of archives supposes social participation. Community archives focus on participation, integration and fulfill the original postulate of oral history – giving a voice to ordinary people. It can be the history of the village, the stories of women working in the Gdańsk Shipyard or the biographies of Polish jazz artists. In that way, they manage to reconstruct the history of ordinary citizens and engage the community in its activities. Institution which I will represent is Center of Community Archives. Center was established by a Polish NGO KARTA Center Foundation and by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in February 2020 to support the community archives and popularize their achievements.

*I am a historian, archivist, and social activist. I coordinate workshops and education at the Center of Community Archives. Previously, I was employed at the KARTA Center Foundation. [adriana.kapala@gmail.com](mailto:adriana.kapala@gmail.com)*

**4. (Dis)connections in Oral History Interview: Thinking of Time, Language, and Intersubjectivity (Room: U3039)**

In oral history research, interview as a methodological choice has largely defined the field: in interviews oral historians together with their research participants construct knowledge of how the past is understood from the present perspective. While there are a number of comprehensive books about different interview techniques and reflections of the decisions that researchers have made in their work, in the end each study - and interview - is unique. Therefore, the need to think and rethink how the interview methodology and the diversity of encounters in interviews affects our work is ongoing.

In this panel researchers working in the fields of ethnology, history and museology discuss their experiences of doing oral history interviews. With diverse case studies, the researchers contemplate on the meaning of temporal distance from the events remembered, the time of the interviews as well as the differences in interviewing experts, politicians, or activists. On a more practical level, the presentations address the role of language in interviews, the differences between a group interview and one-on-one interview, the impact of the relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee, and the role of historical documents in an interview.

As the presentations demonstrate, in oral history interviews even the seemingly most practical choices have methodological importance. By focusing on interviews, this panel aims to show that with contemplating methodology, we can both deepen our understanding of the particularities of the case studies at hand and offer contributions to the wider field of oral history.



**Chair:** Reetta Humalajoki

**Terje Anepaio (Estonian National Museum) & Kirsti Jõesalu (University of Tartu) & Jana Reidla (University of Tartu):**

*Distant and familiar: Researching colleagues in the Baltic history museums*

We will discuss the benefits and risks of being in-between: it is when the researcher has a position as a current or former member of the group under study. Our field of study is the mnemonic pluralism in the museums which is carried out through the research project MNEMUS (<https://mnemus.ut.ee/project>). In this project we are researching role of museums in fostering democratic pluralism in contemporary Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania where – since the post-communist turn – mnemonic diversity has been constantly on the agenda.

The presentation is based on group fieldwork in Lithuania (Sept 2021), Latvia (Aug 2022) and Estonia (ongoing), where we are conducting interviews both with museum management and exhibitions' staff and with curators and collection keepers. Some members of the research team are current or former museum professionals interviewing current/former colleagues (Anepaio and Reidla), as others have experience in curating and research (Jõesalu, Kõresaar). One of the key issues of our presentation arises from our relatively close relationship to the profession of the interviewees (curators, museum researchers etc.). On the other hand, as the museum curators are trained as researchers, being the object of research may seem to be an unexpected position for them.

The questions we are dealing with in our presentation: belonging, reflection, cultural and professional context being so familiar, and at the same time distant (differences in tasks, job titles etc, differences in cultural and institutional contexts in Baltic countries). The second aspect we want to deal with is the question of language. In Latvia and Lithuania our language has been either Russian or English, which is non-native language for all participants.

To conclude, we discuss methodological risks of the prior knowledge and “almost” belonging to the same group with interviewees and how the use of foreign language may affect the interview process and maybe even results.

*Terje Anepaio (MPhil) is a curator at the Estonian National Museum (ENM) since 2001. As an oral historian and museum anthropologist she works with different mnemonic communities such as repressed people (NGO Memento). [terje.anepaio@erm.ee](mailto:terje.anepaio@erm.ee)*

*Kirsti Jõesalu is a research fellow at the Department of Ethnology. She investigates the roles, responsibilities and practices of history museums in creating pluralist and reflexive spaces for memory work. [kirsti.joesalu@ut.ee](mailto:kirsti.joesalu@ut.ee)*

*Jana Reidla (PhD) is a Researcher of Ethnology at the Institute of Cultural Research, University of Tartu. She has a background in museum studies with a focus on museum collection, management and curatorship. [jana.reidla@ut.ee](mailto:jana.reidla@ut.ee)*

**Bradley Reynolds (University of Helsinki):**

*Flipping the Script: How Mnemonic Narratives Respond to Archival Narratives*

In this presentation I will talk about interview methods developed for oral histories I conducted with retired Finnish and American diplomats. In developing my oral history method, I questioned why the term oral history is often used rather than ‘expert interview’ in international history, despite the method being closer to that of an expert interview. I argue that an actual engagement with oral history methods (rather than just using the name as a buzzword) offers researchers in international history new epistemological opportunities, so as to ask different questions from interview data.

I present my experience in planning and executing oral history interviews in international history. In the first half of interviews I collected the narrative interviewees wanted to tell. In the second half I presented archival documents and challenged these narratives to see how their story changed. Questions of power, memory, and identities emerged.

The topic of finlandization also offered a unique research frame. By comparing how memories and narratives changed in the research design with Finns vs American interviewees, certain emotional and cultural meanings of specific framings were also questioned.

*Bradley Reynolds is a doctoral researcher in political history at the University of Helsinki and an associated researcher with the Academy of Finland project, The Baltic Sea Region and the Post-Cold War Hysteresis. [bradley.reynolds@helsinki.fi](mailto:bradley.reynolds@helsinki.fi)*

### **Hannah Kaarina Yoken (University of Jyväskylä)**

#### ***The Interviewer's Perspective: Conflict, Difficult Emotions & Oral History***

In this presentation I will summarise the findings and analyses presented in a recent book chapter, written by Heidi Kurvinen and myself, which is to be published in Finnish in 2022 as part of a new edited volume on oral history in Finland (Ulla Savolainen & Riikka Taavetti, eds., Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura).

I will focus on presenting examples gathered from Heidi's and my experiences, as well as the existing literature, that showcase the ways in which conflict and accompanying difficult emotions are a (somewhat inevitable) part of the oral history interviews process. The focus of the presentation is specifically on the perspective of the interviewer, not the interviewee.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the presentation adds to existing and emerging discussions surrounding oral history interviewing, emotions, authenticity and intersubjectivity. In terms of the doing of oral history, this presentation begins to offer interviewers tools re: how to face, acknowledge and process moments of conflict and the subsequent difficult emotions that might crop up before, during or after the oral history interview.

*Dr Hannah Kaarina Yoken is an Academy of Finland postdoctoral researcher at the University of Jyväskylä. She holds a PhD in Gender History from the University of Glasgow, Scotland [hannah.k.yoken@jyu.fi](mailto:hannah.k.yoken@jyu.fi)*

### **Rebeka Põldsam (University of Tartu) & Riikka Taavetti (University of Turku):**

#### ***Visibility and Sensitive Connections in Oral History***

In this presentation, we reflect on the oral history interviews we have conducted for our study on Estonian and Finnish lesbian networks in the early 1990s. We focus on three issues: negotiating with questions of anonymity; the meaning of language; and (re)constructing lesbian networks. The language of the network in the early 1990s was mainly Finnish, which was the first language of the Finnish participants and some Estonians understood it on communication level. Reflecting this, we have conducted our interviews in Estonian and Finnish, and experimented with participating in group interviews conducted in language other than our own. In addition, we reflect on the questions of translating between the languages of the interview and English, the language of our writing.

While some of the interviewees are activists and academics and their names appear in historical documents and publications, many women who were active participants in the community have disappeared to the past. Hence, while some of the can women remain anonymous, then making some other interviewees anonymous in our study would be difficult and unwanted as they wish to be remembered for their activism. That said, as we study a lesbian network, being part of it reveals information about the sexual orientation of the participants that should, according to

research ethics guidelines, be considered as sensitive information. This in contrast with the lived realities of these women, adding to the complex negotiation between right to privacy and right to be remembered as a historical subject is present in all oral history studies.

*Rebeka Põldsam (she/her) is a junior researcher and doctoral student in Ethnology at University of Tartu, studying discourses on non-normative sex-gender identities in Estonia in past hundred years. [rebeka.poldsam@ut.ee](mailto:rebeka.poldsam@ut.ee)*

*Riikka Taavetti, PhD, works as a University Lecturer in gender studies at the University of Turku. Her research addresses history of sexuality, queer history, politics of memory, and oral history [riikka.taavetti@utu.fi](mailto:riikka.taavetti@utu.fi)*

## **KEYNOTE LECTURE 16.30–17.30**

### **SKS, Great Hall**

#### **Stacey Zembrzycki (Dawson College)**

##### ***Chasing Cancer in Canada's Nickel Capital***

When Stacey Zembrzycki began, in 2014, to conduct interviews that explored the connections between mining, environmental harm, and health among Sudburians who had long resided in Canada's nickel capital, she did not realize just how much cancer would come to dominate these conversations. Both within and beyond these exchanges, she engaged in a process of historical epidemiology that sought to isolate patterns and routes of exposure that would help her understand the stories being shared with her. This paper, which draws on sixty-five interviews, argues that the visible and invisible links between land and industry as well as pollutants and disease must be untangled if we are going to understand embodied narratives and offer tangible ways forward for those who continue to be exposed to the historical legacies of toxins. Chasing cancer is long-haul work that requires deep listening in the interview space, a deep understanding of place, and a deep commitment to build and sustain relationships so that bodies can be given the time and space needed to tell their own stories.

*Stacey Zembrzycki teaches in the History and Classics Department at Dawson College in Montreal, Canada. An award-winning oral and public historian of ethnic, immigrant, and refugee experience, she is the author of *According to Baba: A Collaborative Oral History of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community* (UBC Press, 2014) and its accompanying website: [www.sudburyukrainians.ca](http://www.sudburyukrainians.ca), and is co-editor of *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2018). She also directed the multi-media project *Refugee Boulevard: Making Montreal Home After the Holocaust* ([www.refugeeboulevard.ca](http://www.refugeeboulevard.ca)). Her current project, *Mining Immigrant Bodies*, uses oral history to explore the connections between mining, health, and the environment and their impact on postwar immigrant communities in Sudbury, Canada. [stacey.zembrzycki@gmail.com](mailto:stacey.zembrzycki@gmail.com)*

## **Friday 2 December**

### **KEYNOTE LECTURE 9.30–10.30**

**SKS, Great Hall**

**Essi Jouhki (University of Jyväskylä)**

#### ***Pinpricks to the past: Reading autobiographical memories of childhood***

Revisiting one's childhood is not always an easy task. At first, recounting childhood through memories can seem effortless, but travelling between the worlds of adulthood and childhood has its difficulties. Much like all memories, our conceptions of what it was to be a child are inevitably perceived through the intricate filters of temporal layers and, as Owain Jones has aptly put, through 'adulthood' itself. Consequently, the extent to which we can recapture past childhoods through memories has been an ongoing question within the fields of childhood and memory studies for decades.

Inspired by the scholarly works of Owain Jones and Kate Douglas and drawing from concepts such as the otherness of childhood, this presentation explores the possibilities and constraints of reliving childhood experiences through memories. It pays special attention to how the liminality of childhood has been approached in both written autobiographies and oral history interviews. Reading such sources involves paying attention both to the temporality of memories and the multivocality of autobiographical narration. For instance, it is not about recapturing childhood as such, but about recognising the reflexivity, different layers and autobiographical voices in the process of reminiscence.

*Essi Jouhki is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. She obtained her PhD from the University of Oulu in 2020. Her PhD thesis on the memories of youth activism in Finland was applauded for advancing oral history methodology within the field of historical studies in Finland. Her research interests include oral history, the history of emotions, and sensory memories, among others. She has been especially intrigued by the nuanced ways of remembering childhood and youth. Her current project focuses on history of public playgrounds, and especially on the ways which playgrounds are remembered as significant children's places. [essi.k.jouhki@ju.fi](mailto:essi.k.jouhki@ju.fi)*

### **ROUNDTABLE 11.00–12.00**

**SKS, Great Hall**

#### **Co-Creating the 'Archive' of Minority Community Life**

Sponsored by the Migration Institute of Finland

**Moderator:** Samira Saramo (Migration Institute of Finland)

**Speakers:** Wisam Elfadl (Wasla Collective / Helsinki City Museum), Robert Nilsson Mohammadi (Malmö University), Eija Stark (Finnish Literature Society), Marja Tiilikainen (Migration Institute of Finland), Helga West, Biennaš-Jon Jovvna Piera Helga (University of Helsinki)

**PARALLEL SESSIONS 13.30–15.30**  
**University of Helsinki, Main Building**

**5. Places, Spaces and (Dis)Placements in Oral History ([Room: U3031](#))**

**Chair:** Liisa Lalu

**Maija Krūmiņa (University of Latvia):**

***Retrospective Narratives of the Exile Latvians: Stories of the Displacement***

In the result of the Second World War, Latvia not only lost its statehood, but also several hundred thousand of its inhabitants, part of whom fled to the West fearing the return of Soviet rule. At the end of the war, most part of these people did not consider it possible to return to Latvia, but found refuge in the different host countries instead. There they defined themselves as an exile community with a common goal and shared memories. After Latvia regained its independence, Latvian National Oral history archive started to collect exile Latvian's life-stories. As the displacement marks a turning point (biographical disruption) in the lives of the exiles, they tend to recall this period in great detail in their life-stories. However, during the prolonged exile period, these stories have been shaped according to individual's course of life, as well as a wider social and cultural context. Within this framework, the proposed paper will analyse the impact of the collective memory of the Latvian exile community on the stories of displacement of the individual exiles told more than fifty years after the events. The paper is prepared within the Project "Strengthening of the capacity of doctoral studies at the University of Latvia within the framework of the new doctoral model", identification No. 8.2.2.0/20/I/006.

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**Nkrumah Bankong-Obi (TheNEWS Magazine, Lagos Nigeria):**

***"Lost Origins and Tearful Narrations" The Story Of How The Beebo People Were Displaced From Their Natural Habitat***

An activist once said that no one desires to leave the home unless the home is a mouth of a shark." Indeed every human being is tied to a home. It is the first of the agents of socialisation and primordial point of instruction. And when the home, implying settlement, farmlands, accessible amenities within the community - is threatened, the consequences to individual development and growth could be compromised. For the people of Beebo in Boki Local Government Area of Nigeria, their ancestral home has been taken away from them, which indeed worse than a sharks' cavities. Displaced in the 1940s to give room for the establishment of a game reserve, the forest dwellers have suffered neglect and lack of freedom to possess their natural habitat as a result of official restriction of the Nigerian government which changed the status of the reserve to a National Park in 1990.

As one listens to the aged gatekeepers and griots talk about how they missed their forest, how they have been cut off from nature, it crystallizes that oral history and its tools are required to keep memory alive. In storytelling, we depend on witnesses, muse-makers and elders to recount what life was like; and depend on them as we create patterns for this generation to figure how much disconnect has been brought about by a lofty policy of creating a National Park but in a manner that displaces the original inhabitants from their heritage.

*Okwangwo Division: A Forced Divorce Created by The Cross River National Park*, my forthcoming book on the displacement of several communities in the deep South of Nigeria, is woven on accounts of oral history which has served as a valve for collecting, storing and finding paths to keep alive a peoples association with their deep past and the terror of lost identity. Using the interview, recording, transcription and review components, the book aims to ‘storify’ the agony of this what used to be a part of their heritage and source of livelihood and collective empowerment.

*Journalist and poet, Bankong-Obi is a culture researcher and climate change advocate based in Abuja. He has published extensively on the Nigerian Civil War, human rights and gender disparities in his country.*  
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**Ricardo Velasco Trujillo (University of Minnesota Twin Cities):**  
***Envisioning a Community Digital Oral History Project with Displaced Rural Black Communities in Colombia’s Marginalized North Pacific Coast Region***

In 2014, I produced the testimonial documentary “After the Crossfire: Memories of Violence and Displacement” in collaboration with a group of victims of human rights violations who witnessed the emergence and escalation of war in Colombia’s marginalized north Pacific coast region during the decade of the 1990’s. Two years later, I traveled to the village of Jaqué, Panama, to continue documenting testimonies and to share the documentary with a group of refugees who were displaced as a result of the events narrated in the film – events that dramatically disrupted the life of the region’s rural black communities.

This paper discusses a vision for a digital oral history project that started to take form after the experience of community engagement that resulted from this visit. I focus on the central ethical and technical issues at the core of the project to materialize this vision. The project is founded on principles of reciprocity and redistribution, and a co-custodial model for the research data. I draw on the preliminary findings of ongoing research seeking to understand the documentation and archiving needs of grassroots cultural organizations among displaced communities of the region working on autonomous reparation and reconciliation initiatives within the context of the Colombia’s current post-conflict transition. Many of these organizations currently rely on the support and expertise of state entities. I argue that new digital tools can be used to address structures of dependency and subordination and equip organizations with autonomy to tell and document their own histories and experiences in the aftermath of violence. I will present technical solutions I have found to adapt to the needs of communities living in marginalized areas of the country.

*Ricardo Velasco (Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Minnesota) is a social documentarian and cultural studies scholar who studies cultural practices in post-conflict Colombia.* [www.culturalecologies.com](http://www.culturalecologies.com).  
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**Ginta Elksne (University of Latvia), Iliana Veinberga (Riga Porcelain Museum) & Dzintra Romanovska (Riga Porcelain Museum):**

***“I am grateful to fate that I had the opportunity to work in this factory!”: employees’ memories of Riga Porcelain Factory***

After the restoration of independence in the 1990s, the Latvian industry had to adapt to a globalised world, when many countries were already in the de-industrialisation phase. Companies and entire industries that had previously played a significant role in the region’s economic and social space downsized or partially or completely disappeared, leaving evidence of their existence in both physical artefacts and in the fates and personal stories of many people. In recent years, researchers and the general public in Latvia have increasingly turned to the study of the industrial

heritage of the Soviet period, including by recording eyewitness accounts of the history of various industrial sectors.

The aim of our presentation is to analyze the possible contribution of oral history to the work of museums and the recording of memories of industrial workers, based on both theoretical insights and oral history interviews with former employees of Riga Porcelain Factory, formerly a prominent factory in Latvia. The interviews have been conducted over several years in collaboration with the Riga Porcelain Museum. Preserving the memories of former factory employees provides an opportunity to expand knowledge about the daily life of industrial workers, and to reveal their experiences, reflections, and observations. Oral history interviews with former factory employees provide evidence not only of the history of the industry but also of the complex and controversial experience of the Soviet era. It both describes one once important industry in Latvia and adds to the information about the fate of Latvian people in different periods of history. Witnesses to the activities of various formerly important industries are becoming fewer and fewer, and with them, the human evidence of the industry's heritage, as well as specific skills, knowledge, and experience, is disappearing.

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## **6. Oral History via the Lens of Trauma and Prejudices (Room: U3040)**

**Chair:** Outi Fingerroos

**Debasmita Mahajan (Techno India University):**

***The human psyche under acute agony: A comprehensive study on the shadow lines***

This paper will be an attempt to accentuate the novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) written by Amitav Ghosh, by exploring the utterly unfortunate historical incidents of World War II and episodes of Partition of India (focussing on the division of Bengal into East Pakistan and West Bengal) the aftermath of which led to riots in Dhaka in 1964. The narrator of this text is an unnamed man who travels to London, Calcutta and Dhaka with the elderly members of his family. The narrator listens to various stories from his uncle Tridib and tries to abide by the principles of his grandmother, whom he addresses as 'Thamma'. This paper shall try to focus on how the novel oscillates back and forth, with the series of gruesome events witnessed by one generation to another and evolvement of the bonding between Thamma, Tridib and the narrator as well as the cordiality with their other relatives and family friends. This paper will examine how the Partition induced trauma faced by Thamma, who originally belong to Dhaka, was compelled to migrate to Calcutta due to major unavoidable circumstances. This entire incident of forceful migration will be analysed by reading facts from *Trauma and the Triumph* (2003) by Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta. This aged lady reminisces about her ancestral home and paternal uncle, with whom she yearns to revive her bond. Moreover, this paper will be an attempt to highlight, how these three individuals and their personal experiences of trauma, horrifying memories during tumultuous political situations, ultimately shape up their individual personalities, by examining the concept of "Soft Violence" coined by Jayanti Basu in her text *Reconstructing the Bengal Partition: The Psyche Under a different Violence* (2013). The Other side of

Silence (2017) by Urvashi Butalia, is another secondary text, which will be taken into consideration, to analyse each character's embedded silence and their individual way of coping with the aftermath of Partition.

**KEYWORDS:** Partition, Memory, Trauma, border, displacement, silence.

*Debasmita Mahajan Scholar of the Department of English. Academic Achievements: Publications: 1. Mahajan, Debasmita. *Simmering Silence and Beneath: An Anthology of Gender Issues in India.* [debomahajan@gmail.com](mailto:debomahajan@gmail.com)*

**Riku Kauhanen (University of Turku):**

***“Here they were hiding” – A case study of oral history, memories, and locality of Finnish military desertions during the Continuation War 1941–1944***

During Finnish Continuation War (1941–1944) thousands of Finnish men deserted from army's ranks for different reasons such as traumas, sympathy towards Soviet Union, collapse of front lines or general reluctance. After the war treatment of these people and their motivation and memories has varied, reflecting attitudes towards Finnish historical consciousness.

When these people were hiding, they used wilderness, dugouts, secret rooms in houses and other such places as cover and to stay hidden. Nowadays many of these places have disappeared or little is left of them – most can only be located by using oral history, and the informant must be around to show the exact place. At the same time these places transform into places of memory, with colourful history, or rather histories.

Though the areas are little and communities telling the stories can be small, even in these situations oral history is very varied. Many times, informants themselves know, that different narratives conflict with each other, and build new meanings and interpretations from this. Afterwardness is the key element in understanding the discussion and processing of memories. How can a researcher approach different levels of time simultaneously?

This case study highlights the problems of oral history which is tied to physical sites. Though the memories are similar, their interpretations and conclusions are varying, competing, and commenting on each other. This also leads to informants themselves discussing and highlighting ethical questions, such as feelings and situation of living relatives of the deserters.

*Riku Kauhanen University of Turku, Department of Archaeology [rrikukauhanen@gmail.com](mailto:rrikukauhanen@gmail.com)*

**Meeri Siukonen (Finnish Literature Society):**

***Online participation and distance interviewing in the Memories of the Stalinist repression -Project***

Memories of the Stalinist repression -project (2021–2022) by Finnish Literature Society (SKS) records the history of the victims of the political repression in the Soviet Union and their descendants' experiences of the persecution which is a little known part of national history in present day Finland. The project started in January 2021, in the midst of the ongoing pandemic and restrictions for meetings, which limited the possibilities for traditional oral history interviewing face-to-face. While face-to-face contacts became possible later on during the project, so far approximately one third of the total of 80 interviews, conducted within the project, have taken place at a distance online.

Drawing from this experience, this paper analyzes the opportunities and limitations of online participation in oral history projects from a methodological perspective. On the one hand online participation has posed challenges for conducting oral history interviews and required



developing novel methods that will be discussed. Especially the challenges and limitations concerning elderly interviewees and the sensitive, to some participants even traumatic topic will be addressed. However, it will also be shown that rather unexpectedly online participation also opened opportunities for widening the scope of interviewees beyond national borders. It is argued that this has turned out to be very fruitful within the context of recording oral accounts and collecting materials on transnational histories such as the Stalinist repressions.

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**Zahra Hamedei (Darab University, Fars, Iran):**

***An Experience in Applying the Technique of Oral History in Studying Tribal Schools***

The current research is derived from studies conducted on tribal schools in the south of Iran, and the writer has appeared as the interviewer of oral history. Goal: Expressing the problems in the interviews carried out in this project. The research method is Descriptive-Analytical, Describing the problems and analyzing the causes of these challenges. Research Results: The writer faced various challenges during the interviews with tribal schools. Most experiences resulting from these interviews have been around ethnicity and tribal prejudices discussions that affected the interviews. The interviewees' tribal prejudices, who were mostly teachers and schools founders, challenged the existing facts. What seriously challenged the oral history of tribal schools of south of Iran, was dispersion of the nomads, difficult access to the interviewees, and tribal prejudices.

Approaches and suggestions to overcome the challenges: Comparing the interviewees words with each other on one side, and comparing them with the historical events in the considered field of study on the other side, has been an effective help to remove this gap.

Keywords: Oral History, Tribal Schools, South of Iran, Contemporary History \*The Associate Professor of History Department, Darab University, Fars, Iran.

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## **7. Oral History of the Present (Room: U3041)**

**Chair:** Pete Pesonen

**Małgorzata Łukianow (University of Warsaw):**

***Resilience and persistence: ethical and organisational concerns of documenting the 2022 war in Ukraine***

My presentation will focus on the ethical and procedural challenges of documenting and archiving accounts of the currently ongoing war in Ukraine. The oral history project "Testimonies of War" is concerned with documenting the fate of war refugees from Ukraine using the biographical interview method. It focuses on groups and individuals (particularly vulnerable populations), so it requires special attention to the ethical solutions developed. These apply to the various stages of the project, from recruiting witnesses to the post-processing of the data, issues of reciprocity of researches involved, as well as taking care of the psychological well-being of the witnesses and interviewers.

During the development of the research tools and procedures, we consulted our solutions with various academic bodies, including ethics committees, digital data archives and professional organizations. At the same time, the dynamically changing social and political situation will always be one step ahead of the post-factum procedural solutions for ethical proceedings. Moreover, the research situation sometimes changes from week to week, and solutions proposed months earlier may need to be updated. In view of this, should ethics committees' opinions be updated? In what situations? Should ethics committees revise their decisions in case of significant changes? During the presentation, I will show case studies and solutions we developed based on several-week proceedings and research experiences.

*Małgorzata Łukianow is a sociologist and assistant professor at the University of Warsaw. Her interests are memory studies, sociology of culture and knowledge. [m.lukianow@uw.edu.pl](mailto:m.lukianow@uw.edu.pl)*

**Inés Matres (University of Helsinki):**

***“Ha! suck on that corona ‘found something to do’ Capturing adolescents’ experiences during the pandemic in Finland***

During the Spring 2020 lockdown in Finland, museums and archives initiated rapid-response collections to capture immediate experiences during this exceptional situation. Among diverse corona documentation initiatives some 75 diaries were collected, originally created as school assignments by adolescents during remote school.

Against the background of the pandemic, I have investigated the collective experience conveyed by these materials, and more broadly how they could be understood as a form of direct participation in documenting the now. I accessed these diaries after their collection had finished. A time/space disconnect could be understood in this study both as the absence of direct contact with narrators, the time since the making of the diaries, but also as the lacking documentation of their original context.

Previous research about oral history texts (or so called writing competitions) helped me navigate disconnects between the contexts in which these diaries were created, collected and my readings. The ethnographic notion of “voice” also guided my close reading and analysis recognizing signs of direct participation. Attending to how the narrators became visible in their diaries, I found that despite being called “corona diaries”, they resist being about the pandemic. Due to the daily accumulation of the school and private lives of the narrators, these materials document much more: new routines, curricular achievements and personal realisations, hobbies and emotions, new writing and media use, information habits, and distinctly teenage expressions and environments.

Their nature as assignments, particularly the fact that entire classes participated, allowed to collect a kaleidoscope of experiences and of participatory intensities giving a very life-like image of what it means to be an adolescent nowadays.

*MA European media studies, doctoral candidate in European ethnology. My thesis inquires cultural heritage practices in the context of everyday school against the background of 'digiloikka' [ines.matres@helsinki.fi](mailto:ines.matres@helsinki.fi)*

**Charlie Morgan (National Life Stories at the British Library):**

***After the crisis, the archive: Contemporary collecting and historical research***

The growth of crisis oral history and contemporary collecting has been one of the most significant developments in the last two decades of oral history. The Covid-19 Pandemic saw a 'boom' in such collecting; narrowing the distinctions between oral history, journalism and social research. But if we conceive of oral historians as engaged in projects of 'afterwardness', what

happens when that work is not 'after' but 'during'? When interviewing does not take as its premise, 'the perspective of hindsight'?

This paper will draw on examples from the British Library Sound Archive to critically examine these developments both in terms of the challenges that contemporary collecting poses for long term archival storage and maintenance, and the methodological questions it poses to notions of historical research in oral history.

In the first instance, this paper will explore these archival challenges through, amongst others, changes in data protection legislation, the use of oral histories in public inquiries and the need to work with a wide range of technological formats. How have archival workflows for preservation and access, as well as relationships with interviewees and researchers, been disrupted or altered?

At the same time this paper will ask how the turn to documentation 'as it happens' balances the desire for empirical evidence against the subjective value of oral history. Are researchers, deliberately or inadvertently, reproducing earlier critiques of oral history and the study of memory? In this context, does oral history need a renewed defence of the 'after'?

*Oral History Archivist at the British Library and current Chair of the Oral History Society's Archives and Oral History Special Interest Group. Lead author on the OHS's guidelines for remote recording during Covid-19. [charlie.morgan@bl.uk](mailto:charlie.morgan@bl.uk)*

**Dalia Ebeid (Cairo University):**

***Non-Verbal Language and Women's Oral Histories: Editorializing Feelings***

The archive of women's voices at the Women and Memory Forum (a feminist research organization) aims to uncover the untold stories of Egyptian women through oral history interviews. Women's oral histories provide alternative modes of knowledge emanating from women's life stories which often challenge official historical records and mainstream patriarchal and masculine forms of knowledge. The archive of women in the public sphere in Egypt after 2011 highlights Egyptian women's engagement during the Arab Spring and the three years which followed. This project contains life stories of triumph, defeat, optimism, and the harsh realities of engaging in a rapidly-changing political climate as women. As researchers at Women and Memory Forum, we devised an editorial policy aimed at turning the spoken interviews into written records, with the aim of preserving and archiving these life stories. The editorial process was created to render oral history interviews more accessible to researchers and the general public, to preserve the stories of the women narrators, and to create archives of alternative feminist knowledge. The methodology of the editorial process entails the transcribing of feelings and non-verbal language such as silences, tears, laughter, stuttering, and hesitation among others. I argue for the necessity of documenting feelings and the unspoken as what is unsaid and expressed only via feelings forms an integral part of oral history life stories.

*Dalia Ebeid works as an assistant professor at the English department at Cairo University. She also works at the Women and Memory Forum, a feminist research organization where she specializes in feminist oral history. [dalia.ebeid@wfmf.org.eg](mailto:dalia.ebeid@wfmf.org.eg)*