

Field Notes

With Albert Lichtblau

Q: What were the challenges of your projects?

The most challenging aspects were interviews with traumatized persons. At an early stage of my oral history experience, I was asked by a colleague to interview somebody. I did not know that this man was a concentration camp survivor during National Socialism. It was the first time that he spoke about his experiences and it seemed that he got lost in his memories of torture and fear.

In this situation, I reacted spontaneously, did not encourage him to give more details, gave him enough time to tell what he had to tell, and tried to keep an emotional distance from the interviewee. After he finished, I stayed with him and intuitively directed his attention to his present life. I myself was overwhelmed and had nobody to talk to aside from my colleague. This was a tough experience, which one should avoid. Later I consulted therapists who are more experienced with situations like this and they confirmed that my intuition led me to the right direction.

Q: Were there any memorable experiences that you had while working with oral history that stand out in your memory?

I interviewed a couple that saw themselves as very dissimilar. The husband presented himself as being depressed, intellectual and his wife as being funny, cheerful and able to stabilize her husband. For an interview on film, I spoke with both. After an easy-going beginning, I learned about another side to the wife. She reported a violent attack against concentration camp inmates at the end of World War II and became very emotional during the interview. This was an important moment, as I was sure that I found a key to understanding the deep-seated relationship of the couple and their isolated lifestyle.

Albert Lichtblau is Professor in the Department of History at the University of Salzburg. He works in the fields of Jewish Studies, genocide, migration studies and oral history. His masterclass at the IOHA 2016 conference is titled 'Audio- Visual History'



Spotlight

The Shinde Anjaneyulu family of Puppeteers

The Shinde Anjaneyulu family from Dharmavaram in Andhra Pradesh, India with the Antara Collective, Bangalore, will present a shadow puppet performance for the opening ceremony of the International Oral History Association (IOHA) conference in Bangalore.

The performance is presented by Mr. Shinde Hanumanth Rao, winner of the Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar and is lead by his father Mr. Shinde Anjaneyalu and their family troupe from Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh. The program is curated by the Antara Artists Collective, Bangalore.

The Tolubommalata, a style of puppetry performance from Andhra is a vibrant performance tradition that straddles the boundaries of folk and classical as well as urban and rural. These performances are believed to have a sacred role in the communities where they are practiced. They narrate tales from the epics - The Ramayana and Mahabharata. Much of the dialogue is improvised, drawing from stories that have been heard and sometimes read. These narratives have layered themselves into the memories of Tolubommalata performers over generations of telling and retelling, adapting with each show to suit the time and place of the performance.



The show opens with a narrative about the puppet and the puppeteer that is not from the traditional repertoire, but is an improvised telling of the everyday activity of performance. Puppets are brought to life not just through the movement of their jointed limbs and bright, translucent colors, but also through the voice that the puppeteer throws out into the world. It is this voice, which draws on memory, embodied in the puppet, that shapes a relationship between the performer, the object and the spectator.

The show ends with an excerpt from the "Sundara

Kanda" of the Ramayana where Hanuman, the monkey-god, servitor and devotee of Rama, traverses long miles across the ocean to reach Sita. She sits under a tree, stoic and strong, withstanding all advances of her abductor Ravana. Hanuman returns to Rama with news of Sita's well-being. Rama, overwhelmed with the news, embraces Hanuman and calls him his fourth brother (since he already has three others). This episode was always performed in the villages in times of distress, to bring peace.

Visit www.antaracollective.in for more details.

The daily Listener

Newsletter / IOHA Bangalore 2016

Monday, 27 June 2016



Opening Plenary / plenario de apertura: "The persistence of memories and the radicalization of action: oral history in transformation in Bangladesh" / "La Persistencia de la Memoria y la Radicalización de la Acción: La Historia Oral en transformación en Bangladesh" **Speaker / Ponente:** Meghna Guhathakurta (Bangladesh)

@IOHA #heardatIOHA

Bienvenido lectores! Welcome to the primer boletín / first issue of the IOHA 2016 Conference Newsletter. This student curated newsletter, a first for IOHA, aims to capture the spirit and essence of all five days (27th June - 1st July, 2016) of the conference through its various sections: *Ear to the Ground*, *On Record*, *Rewind*, *Field Notes* and *Spotlight*.

In una serie de novedades / a series of firsts, the conference, in addition to being hosted in Asia for the first time, includes film screenings and exhibitions grounded in oral histories, illustrating the potential of oral history to reach diverse audiences through a variety of mediums. The conference will provide Spanish translations onscreen for the first time at the opening plenary. In a country where oral traditions permeate daily life, we celebrate the arrival of IOHA to India. The editorial team consisting of Nikhila, Pavithra, Shagun, Keerthi, Vaishnavi, Tapasya and Arpita wishes to continue in this vein and expect future firsts for this conference and for the field of oral history. Vamanos!

Ear to the ground



The volunteers at work

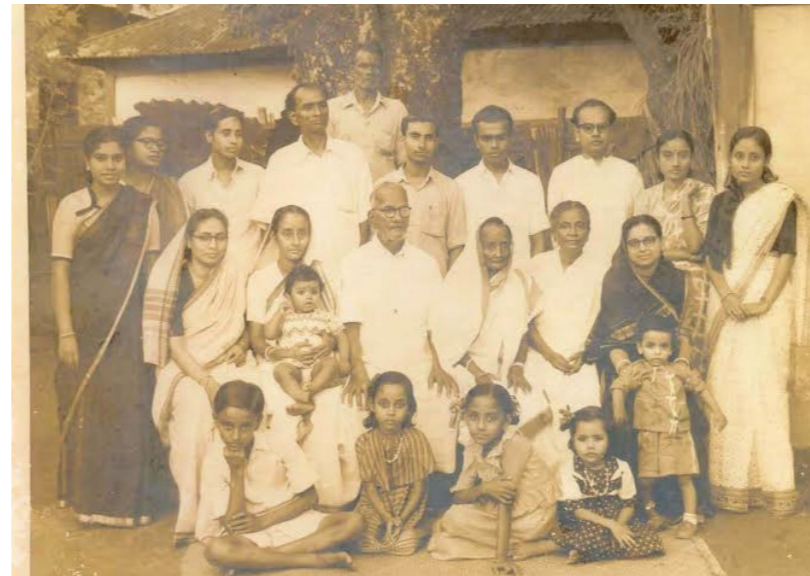


Stuart editing the print material



Derek illustrating for the newsletter

On record



A family photo of 4 generations of the Guhathakurta family. 3rd from left, 2nd row, is Meghna's great grandfather mentioned in the excerpt below. Next to him are his wife and daughter, Sumati.

The following is an excerpt from Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta's interview with her grandmother, Sumati Guhathakurta, about her childhood. This was later published in *No Woman's Land*, edited by Ritu Menon, Women's Unlimited, New Delhi: 2004

Sumati's story: Pre-partition

"I was born in 1899 to the Raychaudhuri family in my natal village of Gabtali, Sonargaon (East Bengal). My father worked in the Treasury in Mymensingh (a town 100 miles north of Dhaka), and I remember vividly the single storey house near the railway line where I grew up and incidentally where I spent a large part of my widowhood.. The single most important years were my education. I completed ten years of schooling, ignoring my father's resistance and social strictures and passed my Matriculation exam in 1917 with flying colours. This was a time when the only girls who went to school without any moral qualms were Christians, or those from the Brahmo Shomaj families. For Hindu and even more for Muslim girls, education was socially restricted to the lower grades."

"When I passed from the seventh grade to the eighth, the neighbours started gossiping. Was my father thinking of making his daughter a magistrate or what! (meyerkey ki joj magistrate banabey na ki!) When these words reached my father, he was infuriated and he told my mother not to let me go to school. My mother was generally supportive of my education, but was afraid to defy my father, so she told me to stay away from school for a few days. But the headmistress of the Bidyamayee school, where I used to study, came to visit my mother one day and urged her to reconsider the decision to withdraw me from school, because I was really doing very well. So my mother allowed me to run to school, which was next door to my house, when my father was not around. My father reluctantly accepted the situation. I remember this as an important part of my life because my educational background has shaped much of my life experiences and world-view."

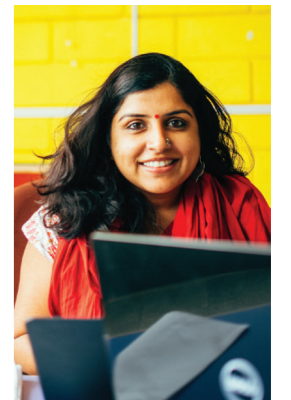
Rewind

The Conference organising team began working on the conference in early 2015. From fundraising to measuring rooms for exhibitions, this team has seen it all. In the run up to the conference, as the excitement levels rise, we decided to find out what was the mood at ground zero.



"When the idea of the conference surfaced - I welcomed it but I also wanted to run ...far away! In the end, we all ran together - and the conference ran too!"
- Indira Chowdhury

"Right now I feel I'm ticking off a hundred things on a list only to see that there are about a hundred more! If you do spot people with dark circles and boundless energy at the conference, it must be a member of the organising team!"
- Avehi Menon



"Thinking about time(s) and space(s) with an oral history conference is far more arduous and very different from thinking about time and space with oral history."
- Archit Guha

"I want to sit in on a lot of the lectures. There are such fascinating subjects, especially the public panels! On the whole, it has been really fun and we've been able to work quite amicably."
- Indira Bharadwaj

