

Manuscript version: Author's Accepted Manuscript

The version presented in WRAP is the author's accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or Version of Record.

Persistent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/89282>

How to cite:

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk.

Dealing with Sensitive Topics in Communist Societies: Oral History Research in and on Cuba

by Stéphanie Panichelli-Batalla and Olga Saavedra

Abstract: This themed issue on oral history research in Cuba focuses on how researchers and participants deal with sensitive topics during the interview process. The issue highlights that any topic can be a sensitive topic when interviewing participants who have lived and still live under a communist society. It will offer various reflexive perspectives on the interview process, focusing in particular how both researcher and participant address such topics, and on how these approaches are later analysed and interpreted by the researcher.

Key words: Cuban oral history, sensitive topics, communist societies, insider/outsider dichotomy

This special issue is dedicated to oral history research in communist societies and in particular in Cuba. It focuses on the way sensitive topics are approached by participants and interviewers, as well as on the interpretation of such approaches by researchers. Each article addresses these issues by focusing on different areas of Cuban society. Cuba is of particular interest. Previous oral history projects conducted on the island enabled us to reflect on Passerini's¹ comment on the limited representation of oral history research in communist countries. However she was writing in 1992 and while a great deal of oral history research has appeared since then, it appeared after the fall of the Soviet Union. Countries were no longer communist and researchers were working to understand the communist past. It is only

in China and Cuba that oral history research is taking place during the communist present.

Articles in this special issue cover a wide range of themes including memory, trauma, and reconciliation in relation to family, exile, gender, sexuality and collective identity. Each presents the results of an oral history project conducted either in Cuba or with Cubans outside Cuba, by Cuban and non-Cuban researchers.

As is well known, oral history narratives are influenced by the relationship of trust established between researcher and participant,² and it is also widely accepted that the researcher's own experiences and cultural habitus will affect the way in which narratives are told and interpreted.³ Most handbooks on oral history and monographs involving oral history projects acknowledge that doing oral history will involve dealing with emotionally-charged, highly sensitive topics, and give recommendations on how to approach them ethically.⁴ This special issue will build on the existing literature on emotions in oral history.⁵ Any topic can be a sensitive topic, depending on the person who is telling the story, the context in which the story took place and the time and place in which the story is told. The questions that interest us are: how are such topics dealt with during the interview by the researcher as well as by the interviewee? What is the impact of different approaches taken by the interviewer and the interviewee on the interview process itself? How does the dynamic construction of this relationship affect the analysis of the data at a later stage?

Each of the articles in this special issue allows for an exploration of these issues. Together, they illuminate the ways oral historians and interviewees approach,

interpret and analyse sensitive issues affecting the lives of ordinary people in communist societies in the context of a country, Cuba, which is the last western country where an authentic socialist system remains. They highlight words used by interviewees when narrating certain topics relating to personal history, political history, work history and family history which are common in the discourse of ordinary Cuban people. They also analyse ways in which interviewers interpret their narratives based on their cultural habitus; the influence of the interviewer's ideological position on the oral history process; and the advantages and disadvantages of oral historians' status as outsiders or insiders.

Historical Background: The Cuban Revolution

On 1 January 1959, Fidel Castro and his men entered Havana, triumphantly announcing the start of a new era in Cuba. The Cuban government does not use the term 'revolution' to refer to the date of its victory against the dictatorship of General Fulgencio Batista but rather to the process that started then and is still going on in the present day. The Cuban Revolution is well known for its admirable social successes as healthcare and education for all. Yet the installation of a socialist societal model also impacted on the lives of Cuban people in ways not necessarily known to non-specialists. While many aspects of Cuban society improved, at the same time others suffered due to the ideological intolerance of a socialist system.

Fidel Castro's ideal of an egalitarian society was made official in 1961 when he declared that his Revolution was socialist, and decided to strengthen ties with the Soviet Union, in so doing becoming the United States' closest socialist threat, fewer

than ninety miles away from its coast. This led to tense relations, which took military action that same year with the unsuccessful invasion attempt by the United States at the Bay of Pigs. Tension became even greater during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. This acute crisis was diffused when the Soviet Union agreed to remove its missiles from Cuba if the United States promised never to try to invade Cuba again.

From the earliest days, Fidel Castro understood the importance of culture in the promotion of his Revolution. He founded the *Casa de las Américas* in 1959, which became one of the highest regarded cultural institutions in Latin America, and is well known for its literary prize, the *Premio Literario Casa de las Américas*. In addition to culture, and especially after the US embargo was set up in 1960, the revolutionary government also understood the need to find other ways of establishing diplomatic international relations with other countries. One of them became the well-known international solidarity programme, which involves the export of Cuban healthcare professionals, among others, to countries in need, as part of a broader policy of overseas engagement. The first long-term mission of Cuban doctors offering medical support to another country took place in Algeria in 1963, and since then, Cuban healthcare professionals have worked in more than a hundred countries all over the world.

As already mentioned, education for all was also one of the priorities of the Revolutionary government. 1961 was the year of the literacy campaign, which spread all over the country. On 22 December of that same year, the National Literacy Campaign was considered accomplished and Cuba was declared a 'Territory Free of Illiteracy'. However, while this popular educational epic was taking place,

revolutionary effervescence started to fade, in particular for intellectuals and for homosexuals. Although both groups had actively participated in Castro's Revolution, their identities did not fit within revolutionary ideals. In 1961, Fidel Castro made clear in his speech 'Words to Intellectuals' that intellectuals were, in his view, very important for the revolutionary process, but only as long as they supported the ideas and the actions of the revolutionary government, in his words: 'Within the Revolution, everything goes, against the Revolution, nothing'.⁶ In 1965, Cuba became a communist country and that same year, Ernesto Che Guevara published his celebrated essay: 'Socialism and man in Cuba',⁷ in which he introduced the concept of the 'new man', reinforcing the points Castro had made in his 1961 speech. This new revolutionary man was supposed to be productive, useful, and support the revolutionary process unconditionally. No space was permitted for religion, homosexuality or for critical artistic or intellectual work. That same year Cuba created UMAP (*Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción* / Military Units to Aid Production). These were highly controversial labour camps for enemies of the Revolution, including, among others, homosexuals. These camps were closed in 1967 because of external and internal pressure. Inside Cuba, Vilma Espín, Raúl Castro's wife and at that time president of the FMC (*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*/Cuban Women's Federation), took on the role of defending the rights of the homosexuals. When she died in 2007 she passed the legacy of her leadership on to her daughter, Mariela Castro, who had been leading the sexual revolution in Cuba since the early nineteen nineties and had transformed Cuba into one of the most advanced countries in the world with regard to sexual rights.

The 1960s were also marked by another dark historic development in Cuban history, the Padilla Affair. In 1968, Heberto Padilla, a Cuban poet, was arrested and imprisoned for writing poems with counterrevolutionary content. He was released only after publically criticising himself and others. This led to an international reaction, mainly by intellectuals such as Mario Vargas Llosa, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Susan Sontag who wrote to Fidel Castro, asking him to intervene, but to no avail. The Padilla Affair confirmed that there was no freedom of expression in Cuba except within the parameters tolerated by the Revolution.

There were other events of particular importance for this special issue, which also occurred in the 1970s. One of the main products of Cuba's economy is sugar, and in 1970 the government decided to set the challenge to break all sugar production records. The year became known for the 'Ten Million Ton Sugar Harvest'.⁸ Although the record was not broken, the campaign had a significant impact on Cuban society at that time. Sugar had been and remained part of the daily lives of many Cuban families for decades and it was only in the early 2000s that the decision to modernise the economy led to the closure of many sugar mills. These structural economic changes occurred during the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and the consequent loss of its trade relationships with Cuba, a period referred to by Castro as the 'Special Period in Times of Peace'.

In 1975, the new 'Family Code' was approved. This new law reinforced the socialist idea of an egalitarian society in which both men and women were expected equally to support the Revolution. Women were encouraged to work outside the home and men were expected to participate in household chores. In order to facilitate this

transformation of the traditional Cuban family, the Revolutionary government offered to set up services to help women work outside of the house, such as childcare programmes. Although remarkable in theory for a Latin American country, women ended up in many cases taking on a job outside the home but still being the only person to take care of the household chores.

Although many supported the revolutionary process and appreciated its commitment to improving housing, health and the education system, others disapproved of the ideological direction the Revolution had taken. In 1980, more than 125,000 Cubans left Cuba through the Mariel boatlift, a six-month period during which Fidel Castro opened the doors of the Cuban island to whoever wanted to leave. Small watercraft travelled on a regular basis from Key West in Florida to Cuba to pick up Cuban citizens wanting to leave for the United States. Ten years later, after Cuba lost its number one economic ally, the Soviet Union, people found themselves struggling to live in the straitened economic conditions of the Special Period. This led to another mass exodus in 1994, a little after Castro announced that he would remove the Cuban coast guards. This exodus is called the 'Cuban Rafter Crisis' in reference to those who risked – and still risk – their lives crossing the Straits of Florida on precarious rafts. Those who left during the Rafter Crisis were trying to take advantage of the Cuban Adjustment Act and the Dry Foot Wet Foot policy which gave Cuban citizens permanent residency in the United States one year after having reached United States territory, even if illegally.⁹ On 19 August 1994, the Clinton Administration ordered the interception of Cuban rafters at sea and their transfer to the Guantanamo Bay Navel Base, while the US government decided what to do with them. In the end, all were given US residency.

In 2008, Raul Castro took over the Cuban presidency from his older brother Fidel. Since then, many reforms have taken place. The most striking one, the re-establishment of diplomatic relationships between Cuba and the United States in December 2014, led to President Obama visiting the island in March 2016, becoming the first American president to visit Cuba in almost a century.

Cuban *Testimonio*

Oral history research in Cuba is directly linked to the literary genre *testimonio*, which occupied a particular place in the cultural component of the Cuban revolutionary process, as well as in the construction of the history of the Cuban Revolution. We have therefore decided to include a brief reference to the Cuban literary *testimonio* before contextualising oral history in Cuba.

In Latin America, the literary genre *testimonio*, also referred to in English as the documentary novel, finds its origins in the *cronistas* (chroniclers) of the conquest of the New World. Texts such as Christopher Columbus's diary (1492-3) or *Las cartas de relación* by Hernán Cortés (1520s) are considered as the predecessors of the *testimonio*. However, it might be more appropriate to locate the origin of the Latin American *testimonio* in the writings of Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1568) and Bartolomé de las Casas (1542) as, although also *cronistas*, their texts show concern to question the official history and to offer a voice to the voiceless and marginal people of the Spanish conquest.¹⁰

Contemporary *testimonio* acquired a stronger relevance in Latin America during the

second half of the twentieth century, becoming a literary genre as such in the 1960s. Novels as *Juan Pérez Jolote – Biografía de un tzotzil* by the Mexican Ricardo Pozas or *Operación Masacre* by the Argentinian Rodolfo Walsh become an inspiration for young authors such as the Cuban Miguel Barnet or the Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú. *Testimonios* are now not only a way to give a voice to the marginal voices of historical events, but also a means to support political and social struggles against injustices.¹¹

Cuba, like many other Latin American countries, offered interesting and valuable examples of this literary genre, but in different ways. Abdeslam Azougarh¹² divides the Cuban *testimonio* into two thematic groups: the first refers to the historical events from the start of the twentieth century until the triumph of the Cuban Revolution; the second focuses on the many aspects of the Cuban revolutionary process. In the introduction to his book, *Pasajes de la Guerra Revolucionaria*, Che Guevara stresses the importance of giving a voice to those who were witnesses of the revolutionary victory: ‘Many survivors of this action and each of them is invited to leave a record of their memories in order to include them and better complete the history’¹³ The original idea, reflecting the concept of an egalitarian society, was that every voice counted when reconstructing the history of the revolutionary process. Unfortunately, as the years went by, *testimonio* in Cuba started to distance itself from Latin American *testimonio*, becoming a propaganda tool of the Cuban Revolution, as Cuban poet and writer, Victor Casaus explains:

In Cuba, we went first from the experimental and enriching years, in which testimonial texts helped to reveal some of the historical and cultural realities

that were ‘ignored’ or relegated during the dictatorial period, to years in which, once the genre had been institutionalized, new proposals were integrated as mere propaganda mechanisms in the service of the new official cultural agencies. In other Latin American countries, however, there was an urge for testimonies to denounce the situation of political oppression.¹⁴

There was no space in Cuban cultural spheres for *testimonios* that denounced situations of oppression within Cuban revolutionary society itself. Novels such as *Against All Hope* by Armando Valladares¹⁵ or *Farewell to the Sea* by Reinaldo Arenas¹⁶ were censored, had to be published outside Cuba and have never been considered as part of the Cuban literary canon. Although the purpose of oral history can in some ways be seen as very similar to that of this literary genre, its practice in revolutionary society is slightly different, as will be discussed in the following section.

Cuban Oral History Research

The common view is that oral history projects in communist societies offer a limited view of history, as participants fear repression and offer a self-censored discourse in their life narratives.¹⁷ Cuba might at first seem to fit the image of countries such as North Korea, the former USSR and East Germany, where oral history projects were hindered by people’s fear of talking. However recent projects such as ‘Memories of the Cuban Revolution’, directed by Elizabeth Dore¹⁸, Luis J Botifoll digital collection¹⁹ and the projects from which this special issue derives have demonstrated that the situation of oral history research on the island and with Cuban exiles is slightly different.

In 1968, Fidel Castro invited the renowned American anthropologist Oscar Lewis²⁰ to interview Cuban citizens about their lives under the Revolution. Surprisingly for some, people did not seem afraid to talk and some of the conclusions drawn from the collection of narratives did not reflect those expected by the Cuban leader. This led to the project being cut short eighteen months later and Lewis accused of being a CIA agent. Since then, only a few projects documenting the Revolution through the use of oral history have received official approval, this includes the “Peasants of the Twenty First Century” project on the Cuban sugar industry²¹, the “Voices” project²², as well as the ‘Memories of the Cuban Revolution’²³ project which started in 2004. In the case of the latest, the content of the narratives meant again that the project ran into difficulties, although it was resumed and is still on-going.

In her article based on the interviews from the ‘Memories of the Cuban Revolution’ project, Cubans' life stories: the pains and pleasures of living in a communist society’ Dore concludes that she disagrees with Passerini’s statement about the flattening effect in some oral history research about communist countries²⁴, which can derive from ‘what narrators say and do not say, and/or (...) from how oral historians hear and interpret, or are deaf to, what people tell them’.²⁵ We would add that it can also derive from the reader’s own position in relation to history and in this specific case to the Cuban revolution. When these stories come to light, they are often interpreted and framed within the left-right binary lens, leaving little margin for a more dynamic analysis.

Dore adds that ‘Cuba is the only communist country where people have been willing to speak with a certain openness to interviewers’.²⁶ However the historical contexts that span the period in which this major oral history project was authorised and took place (2004 onwards), coincided with important changes and transformation in the Cuban economic and social spheres. Dore suggests that ‘the state's diminished capacity to satisfy the population's basic needs contributed to Cubans' outspokenness, which increased over the life-time of the project’. This indicates that the extent of their openness was contingent on the economic and political timeframe in which the testimonies were collected as a participant in the ‘Memories of the Cuban Revolution’ project pointed out:

The punch line of jokes making the rounds was that now you could say pretty much anything at all in your own home because the Interior Ministry simply could not afford the electricity, not to mention the recording devices, they used before.²⁷

As consequence of these social and economic transformations there is now a large and rapidly growing oral history literature in and about Cuba, and some of the articles in this special issue are placed within this framework.²⁸ There is also a recent appearance of web-based oral history projects.²⁹ As mentioned by Anne Heimo, the growth of new technology such as the internet means that people have found new ways of ‘sharing their memories, which do not necessary include involvement with oral historian’.³⁰ In contemporary Cuba, the limited but growing expansion of the internet, is also having an impact not only on the way people are sharing their memories, but it also helping them to remember by allowing them to choose their own version of the past.

Despite this willingness to talk and the rise of oral history projects taking place in Cuba, most oral history research about Cuba is still conducted by academics from abroad, and it remains very difficult to receive authorisation to carry out projects on the island. History has shown that on the one hand, the Cuban government has encouraged people to speak, on the other, it has tried to control them, especially when --as in the case of *testimonio*-- it wasn't praising the successes of the Revolutionary society. Thus, while some of Passerini's 1992 comments – about the limitations of conducting oral history in communist countries – ring true, given the restrictions placed on these projects, Dore's work and the contributions from scholars in this special issue open a new chapter in oral history research. These Cuban voices speak from inside communist society, not from a reflective position after its downfall.

Articles in this Special Issue

Articles for this Special Issue were drawn partly from an international oral history workshop held at Aston University in Birmingham 'Oral History and Cuba. A Changing Society?' (April 2015)³¹ This workshop stood as a meeting point for international scholars from very different backgrounds. It included researchers from Cuba, some of them still living on the island, like Ana Vera Estrada and others living abroad, such as Olga Saavedra. There were collaborations from the United States, as well as from the United Kingdom, some on Cuban exile, others on social groups still residing in Cuba. The workshop offered a space where political convictions did not hinder discussion, and where scholars were able to share their research and listen to others' projects without

feeling divided, an uncommon situation for academics working on Cuba. We hope to reflect that space in this Special Issue, opening it still more for dialogue with a wider audience.

Each of the articles focuses on a different aspect of the revolutionary process, including health, family, culture, migration and agriculture. Despite the degree of openness mentioned above, each project still presented sensitive topics, especially when referring to the Cuban state and social improvements the Revolution has put in place, as well as to the impact of migration and social change on the family as an institution. As Kathleen Blee has stated, 'Historians have paid less attention to the life stories of ordinary people whose political agendas they find unsavoury, dangerous, or deliberately deceptive'.³² This could explain why so many sensitive topics still remain in the discourse of the participants involved in these projects.

In the first article Stephanie Panichelli-Batalla offers an in-depth analysis of two interviews with Cuban doctors who worked in Nicaragua at the end of the 1980s under the Sandinista government. Their narratives present a new perspective on this controversial programme which sends health care professionals all over the world to countries which lack medical personnel, or need assistance during natural disasters or epidemics, such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The programme was set up in the early years of the Revolution, and was a way to maintain and create new international relations with other countries despite the US embargo on Cuba. Since then thousands of Cuban doctors have worked, and are still working, all over the world providing healthcare and medical training to local doctors. This programme and

its international missions have been at the centre of many debates on Cuban healthcare, with some praising it for its global impact, and others criticising its negative effect on healthcare provided to the Cuban population, reducing the number of doctors available to Cuban patients. The article presents the experiences of two doctors, and focuses on the impact that working in the medical mission has had on their lives, turning them from enthusiastic medical students into ideologically disappointed professionals and finally to frustrated exiles in the US, unable to practise medicine and feeling the urge to tell their side of the story. Analysing their stories enables us to acquire a different understanding of their experiences and fills a gap in the existing history on the Cuban international solidarity programme.

The second article, by Kepa Artaraz, tackles another area of the Cuban revolutionary process: the cultural world. As mentioned earlier, Cuban intellectuals played a crucial role in the construction of revolutionary discourse and of revolutionary history. From very early on with the creation of the Casa de las Américas in 1959 and the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) in 1961, Cuba showed its interest in developing an official institutional form of collaboration between the state and intellectuals.

However, Fidel Castro's 1961 speech 'Words to Intellectuals', and later the Padilla Affair, quickly made it very clear to intellectuals that there were limitations to their actions, and that these had a clear political definition. Cuban intellectuals' freedom was subordinated to political power. Artaraz' article offers an interesting view on the collective self-construction of Cuban intellectuals, based on an oral history project with twenty-two participants. It argues the need within a context such as the Cuban revolutionary one, to appreciate the identity of the narrators, the context of the interview, as well as the time when the narrative takes place. By applying Pierre

Bourdieu's ideas on field and habitus, Artaraz addresses some of these methodological reflections, and offers a means for understanding constructed collective self-presentation.

The third article, 'The closure of the sugar Mills, narrated by the workers' by Ana Vera Estrada, offers a detailed insight into the significance of the sugar industry and its centrality to the Cuban economy during the process of 'restructuring'. It is based on a wider research project, which involved sixty eight interviews with members of the sugar cane community in the provinces of Matanzas and Artemisa between 2004 and 2015. In 2002, driven by the fall in the price of sugar worldwide and the loss of the Russian and Eastern European markets, the Cuban government decided to close half of the remaining sugar mills in Cuba. The state solution to this situation was the scheme, 'Study as Employment', encouraging re-training to moderate the impact of unemployment on workers. This was known as the Alvaro Reynoso programme, and paid people to study. But, as reflected in Estrada's research, the programme was never fully implemented and other sources of employment did not materialise. The interviews reveal much about this process, and its major repercussions in the personal lives of workers. Estrada's article reflects on the challenge of addressing this sensitive issue, and offers a unique perspective on the Cuban historical sugar problem.

In the following article, Daliany Kersh makes use of thirty oral history interviews with Cuban women to examine how women's domestic duties increased during the crisis of the 'Special Period' from 1990 to around 2005, and discusses the strategies they devised to overcome extreme shortages. While women had been encouraged by the ideology of the Revolution, and some of its reforms deriving from

the Family Code, to enter paid employment, in practice gender equality had not extended that far in what remained a society where macho behavioural patterns dominated. Kersh notes that the 'Special period' is often identified as a 'feminised' crisis because of the extra pressures placed on women's domestic labour as a result of cuts to public services. However, through sensitive listening to women's accounts, she shows that in practice changes to gender roles in post-Soviet Cuba were in fact more nuanced. Kersh also reflects on her position as both insider and outsider, a foreigner interviewing a group of women she knew quite well about their intimate personal lives.

This collection of Cuban oral history articles is completed by Olga Saavedra, who discusses transgender identity in Cuba during the period 1960-2015. This work uses as its key source interviews collected by the author initially in 2002 and later between 2013 and 2015 in Havana and Matanzas. Saavedra bases her article on a selection of nine interviews with three Cuban families, which reflect how it felt to be a transgender person or a family member of a transgender³³ person in Cuba before and after the sexual revolution led by Mariela Castro in the 1990s. During the interviews she conducted, Saavedra encouraged interviewees to reflect on family photograph albums as they spoke, as a methodological tool for opening memory and deepening the exploration of the narrator's relationship with their past. In her analysis of these narratives, she draws on both Carrie Hamilton's and Alessandro Portelli's works on the role of emotions in political commitment and nationalism.³⁴ While offering a comparative theory on gender, sexuality and oral history within the Cuban revolution, Saavedra also sheds light on those spaces where being a transgender person has been the principal factor in the fragmentation of the Cuban family.

Finally, Elizabeth Dore offers a concluding overview in which she discusses what she calls an ‘oral history boom’ on the island due to Cuba’s precarious economic situation and recent political changes, among other factors.

Concluding remarks

This special issue offers rich insights into contemporary Cuban history, and provides links to on-going debates in the field of oral history. Each of the six articles examines stories linked to a specific aspect of Cuban society and communities, inside or outside of Cuba. The theme of revolutionary identity in relation to migration and family is a recurrent subject. Each story can be seen as a departure from a normative state: either from a dominant ideology, from a normative construct of gender or sexuality, from a desired workplace, or into an unwanted state of subjugation, from a much-loved home or even nationality. But still, as one of the articles states, there are still many closed doors that need to be opened when exploring Cuban oral history.

Our purpose with the selection of the articles was to tell a narrative that was already there, waiting to be recorded and understood as part of the Cuban reality. These stories need to be located in relation to the interviewees’ own multi-layered existences – in relation to their own bodies, families, communities, religions – rather than only in relation to specific ideologies. We see this issue as a space for reflection and dialogue, and we hope that, for once in the usual Cuban context, there is no need to take sides in favour or against the communist government. Life stories, as James Clifford might say³⁵, are only partial versions of historical truths. It is important to take all them into consideration, giving a voice to Cubans on the island, but also to those no longer there, but who, from a distance continue to be part of the family and economic

universe of Cuba. From all of our differences, privileges and positions of marginalisation, all Cubans, wherever they are inside or outside Cuba, have had a protagonist role in Cuban oral history. As researchers, we are still learning how to listen to each of these stories and help them to be remembered and recognised.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the participants in the research projects presented in this special issue, with a special thought for Fernando Santos, one of Olga Saavedra's participants, who passed away while we were still working with the editors. We would also like to thank Elizabeth Dore for writing the conclusion, as well as Paul Thompson, María Estorino and Vicente Bloch who supported us from the start and were actively involved in the 2015 workshop. Finally, we would like to give our thanks to *Oral History* and its editors for offering this space for dialogue around oral history research in and on Cuba. It is unfortunately still uncommon to see in the same publication contributions from Cubans on the island and Cubans living in exile.

¹ Luisa Passerini, *Memory and totalitarianism*. New York : Oxford University Press, 1992.

² Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 (third edition).

³ Rebecca Clifford, "Emotions and gender in oral history: narrating Italy's 1968", *Modern Italy*, 2012, pp 209-221 Accessed online at: www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.1080/13532944.2012.665284, 24 Apr 2012

⁴ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁵ See also the themed issue of *Oral History*, 38, 2, 2010 'Emotions' and in particular Jenny Harding's paper 'Talk about care: emotions, culture and oral history', pp 33-42; Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The oral history reader* (3d edition), New York: Routledge, 2016; as well the *Voice of the past*, Paul Thompson with Joanna Bornat, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, fourth edition.

⁶ Fidel Castro. "Words to Intellectuals". Accessed online at: <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610630.html>, 13 April 2017.

⁷ Ernesto Che Guevara, “Socialism and Man in Cuba” in David Deutschmann (ed.), *The Che Reader*, New York: Ocean Press, 2005. Accessed online at:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm>, 24 April 2017.

⁸ For more information on the Ten Million Tons Sugar Harvest, see Manuel R. Moreno Friginals and Teresita Pedraza Moreno, “The Ten Million Ton Sugar Harvest”. Accessed online at:

<http://faculty.mdc.edu/tpedraza/MMF-Ten%20Million%20Ton%20Harvest.htm>, 13 April 2017.

⁹ This policy was cancelled by the Obama administration in January 2017.

¹⁰ Christopher Columbus is mainly known as the person who reached America unexpectedly in October 1492 while trying to travel to the Indies, initiating as such the whole process of colonisation of America. Hernán Cortés is known for the conquest of Mexico. Both of them kept diaries to inform the Spanish King and Queen about what was happening in the New World.

Bernal Díaz del Castillo was a conquistador who participated under Hernán Cortés in the conquest of Mexico. His text *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (Accessed on line at <https://archive.org/details/tesisnoqueprese00garcgoog>, 24 April 2017) was intended to present his version of the truth of what was happening in the New World, demystifying what authors as Columbus and Cortés had presented in their writings. Bartolomé de las Casas, on the other hand, was a Dominican friar who is also known as the defender of the human rights of the indigenous population in the New World. In his text *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (Accessed on line at <http://www.columbia.edu/~daviss/work/files/presentations/casshort/>, 24 April 2017), he denounced the oppression of native people by the European colonisers, offering through his writings a voice to the voiceless.

¹¹ Ricardo Pozas, *Juan Pérez Jolote – Biografía de un tzotzil*, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1948; Walsh, Rodolfo, *Operación Masacre*, Argentina: Ed. de la Flor, 2000; Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un Cimarrón*, La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 2001; Elisabeth Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1983.

¹² Abdeslam Azougarh, *Miguel Barnet: Rescate e invención de la memoria*, Ginebra, Slatkine, 1996, p 24.

¹³ in Abdeslam Azougarh p 22.

¹⁴ In Carmen Ochando Aymerich, *La memoria en el espejo. Aproximación a la escritura testimonial*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 1998, p 145 (our translation).

¹⁵ Armando Valladares, *Against All Hope. A memoir in Castro's Gulag*. New York: Encounter Books, 2001. (Spanish edition: Plaza & Janés, 1985)

¹⁶ Reinaldo Arenas, *Farewell to the Sea*, New York: Viking Penguin, 1986. (Spanish edition: Argos Vergara, 1982).

¹⁷ Passerini 1992.

¹⁸ See research project ‘Memories of the Cuban Revolution’, which has been recording in-depth life history interviews throughout the island since 2004. Accessed at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/cuban-oral-history/english.page>. See also Elizabeth Dore, *Cuban Lives: What Difference Did a Revolution Make?*, Verso Books (publication forthcoming).

-
- ¹⁹ The Luis J. Botifoll Oral History Project was set up by the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami. It was launched in 2008 and it collected mainly life narratives of members of the first generation of Cubans to leave the island after the triumph of the Revolution. Accessed online at <http://merrick.library.miami.edu/cubanHeritage/botifoll/>, 13 April 2017.
- ²⁰ See Maida L. Donate, “Oscar Lewis, proyecto Cuba”, accessed online at: <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/cuba/articulos/oscar-lewis-proyecto-cuba-1-264788>, 13 April 2017.
- ²¹ See Ana Vera Estrada, *Guajiros del siglo XXI*, Havana: Instituto Cubano de Investigaciones Culturales, 2012.
- ²² The “Voices” project intends to document the lives of Emeritus Professors of the University of Havana. It was initiated in 2011 and is still ongoing. Information can be found here: <http://www.uh.cu/catedras/novoa/default.html>, 26 May 2017.
- ²³ See www.southampton.ac.uk/cuban-oral-history/index.page. The research project ‘Memories of the Cuban Revolution’ has been collecting in-depth life history interviews across the island since 2004. As mentioned by the Project Director, Elizabeth Dore, by 2016, interviews were conducted to more than 125 women and men from different generations and social positions, and from diverse racial, gender, sexual and religious identities, as well as political background.
- ²⁴ Passerini 1992.
- ²⁵ Elizabeth Dore, “Cubans' life stories: the pains and pleasures of living in a communist society.” *Oral History*, 40, 1, 2012, pp 35-46.
- ²⁶ Dore 2012, p 36.
- ²⁷ Dore 2012, p 40.
- ²⁸ See Eugenia Meyer, *El futuro era nuestro. Ocho cubanas narran su historia de vida*. Mexico: UNAM-FCE, 2007; Ana Vera Estrada, *La dimensión familiar en Cuba: pasado y presente*, Havana: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2007; Ruth Behar and Humberto Mayol, *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007; Amelia Rosenberg Weinreb, *Daily Life in the Twilight of the Revolution*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012; Elizabeth Campisi, *Escape to Miami. An Oral History of the Cuban Rafters Crisis*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- ²⁹ See Carmen Doncel and Henry Eric Hernández, “Back to the “stove front”: an oral history project about Cuban housewives”, Accessed online at <https://blog.oup.com/2015/09/cuba-oral-history-project/>, 4 September 2015.
- ³⁰ Anne Heimo, “Nordic-Baltic oral history on the move”, *Oral History*, 44, 2, p 40.
- ³¹ For more information see <http://www.aston.ac.uk/lss/news/events/oral-history-and-cuba/>, 13 April 2017.
- ³² Kathleen Blee, ‘Evidence, empathy and ethics. Lessons from oral histories of the Klan’, reprinted in R. Perks and A. Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge, 1998, pp 333-344.
- ³³ See <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology> on Transgender: A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behaviour is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.

³⁴ See Carrie Hamilton, 'Moving feelings: nationalism, feminism and the emotions of politics', *Oral History*, 38, 2, 2010, pp 85-94 and Alessandro Portelli, *The order has been carried out: History memory, and meaning of a Nazi massacre in Rome*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

³⁵ James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp 1-26.