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The Oral History Project of Looking for the Veterans Who Took Part in World War—A provincial library’s action of defending historical memory.

Zhao Hui
(China):

Abstract: In this paper, the author researches the library oral history work, through the analysis the case of searching for the World War II Veterans. Based on having got the experience that do oral history in China Hunan library, the author summed up the library oral history interviews mode.

Keywords Oral history; Library; Anti Japanese veterans
The oral history project of searching for the veterans who participated in the World War II (Anti-Japanese War) started in 2008 by Hunan Library in China. The entire work has lasted for several years, which covered thousands of miles among 14 cities and states of Hunan province in China. During the procedure, members of the group from Hunan Library had interviewed 113 living survivors who came from multiple corps and troops. The target interviewees were mostly originated in lower-middle-class Officers and soldiers who owned diverse education backgrounds and ability. As the first-hand participants and witnesses of the Anti-Japanese War, those veterans experienced the most influential events and battles in the war, such as Chiang Kai-shek’s conscription rally, Scorched Earth, Wenxi Fire, Indo-Burma Expedition, Xuzhou battle, three battles for Changsha, Changde Campaign, Hengyang Battle, Xiangxi Battle, the Battle of Hunan&Hubei, Surrender of Japan and so on. In recent years the team members went out to have interviews up to more than one hundred times.

WORK FLOW OF SEARCHING FOR VETERANS WHO PARTICIPATED IN ANTI-JAPANESE WAR
Through the persistent efforts over years, Oral history team of Hunan Library has basically formed a relatively complete work flow.

I Preliminary Preparation
1. Collecting the list of planned veterans. Collecting the list of war veterans participated was quite a difficult task. The key reason is lacking of a volume of historical material or nearly didn’t exist; what’s more, government agencies didn’t have a list for reference. In the bad case of scenarios, Hunan library can only collect the relevant materials from kinds of means. The first approach was from government United Front Work Department, Civil Affairs Bureau, and the second one was through the internets, such as Caring veterans home, Hunan veterans home, the third one is from the person in Whampoa Alumni Association in Hunan province, forthly, consulting library resources, the fifth channel is through private visits or social collection.

2. Collecting historical background of veteran, and understand the battle and fighting environment of veterans experienced.

3. Arranging the interview schedule according to the administrative regions in Hunan province.

4. Convening a seminar before the interview to discuss and prepare outline and other precautions.

5. Definite responsibilities for each member of the interview panel.

6. Preparing the interview equipment, camera equipment and interviews vehicles.

II Interview Procedure
Based on the essential attributes of library, in the process of oral history interviews for searching for the Anti-Japanese War veterans, the oral history group adopted both neutrality and intermediary models to develop an interview. Neutrality means that regarding the interviewer as a neutral and objective person who continuously searching for hidden memories of others. Intermediary refers to those that during the process of interview the respondent’s subjectivity was inevitable, because the problem raised by the interviewer actually contains a description of the respondents for interpretation. Also, because oral history is not only limited to record the oral history of those events, but also explore and discover those things didn’t speak out, which was combined with the social environment and the background of historical events recorded at that time. Thus, the process of interview searching for the veterans based on principles of neutrality without any point of view or any guidance, just followed the respondents’ ideas and narration, only aimed to restore and save the veterans’ real intention. Due to the advanced age of respondents or memory error, some fractional, even significant discrepancies with the fact narration should be repeatedly checked or confirmed on the spot. Try to collect the accurate and complete materials in one interview.
In the process of interview for the oral history group of Hunan Library, they had formed the following working steps:

Firstly, gather the planned interviewee’s basic information which contains name, previous name, birth, education background, enrolling time, model of enrolling, troop’s designation, previous position title and present address.

Secondly, explore the specific details, such as the most impressive person, affairs and objects in Anti-Japanese War that the veterans experienced and witnessed.

Thirdly, confirm the relevant address, name, affair and time from the veterans. With the reference to the outline, the group excavates further information about veterans.

Forthly, the interviewees were authorized to signature and write down some words they wanted to say.

Fifthly, the respondents signed their names on the flag named searching for Anti-Japanese veteran.

Sixthly, oral history group took photos with veterans.

III Three Mediums requirements

Video equipment
Technical requirement: Stable image; distinct focal point; specific theme, reasonable composition and clear voice.

Video camera-position requirements: Major video camera is responsible for recording the entire procedure of respondents. Floating video camera is placed beside the respondents or other perspective of oral history environment. Floating video camera records various scences which contains respondents’ current living environment, road scenes of interviewing, interviewing tidbits, signature for respondents and so on. Moreover, floating machina also shoots people, including interviewers interacting with the respondents or respondents with family members, etc. Try to search and gather meaningful shots and scenes as much as possible during the interviewing process.

Photos requirement: Photos should involve in full-face picture of respondents, oral respondents in multi-angle, interviewing scene, interaction between interviews and respondents, respondents’ old photos, respondents’ identity photo, respondents memoirs photo, or other information, and the group photo of respondents with interview members.

Sound recording requirements: Record the entire procedure voice of live scene of the interview; in particular, to record clear oral voice of respondents, that’s another way of saving oral history materials for insurance.

IV Later Period Working

1. Filing oral history information. According to the interview time and name number of the interviewee to file and classify documents individually. Every document contains the audio recording, video documents, photo documents, resume of the respondents and other relevant historical documents.

2. Three basic preservation of the collection. First, All oral histories raw datum are uploaded to the computer server in Hunan library to archive; second, use hard drive to backup archive of all the raw datum; third, recordable compact discs are used for the preservation of oral histories initial datum, such as CD-R and DVD discs.

3. Editing of Oral History
**Video edit:** oral history documents’ editing can be divided into two kinds, rough editing and meticulous editing. Rough editing refers to raw information gathered in original format and marked with titles and endings, which often preserved in database or library’s website. Meticulous editing is according to oral history material’s logic and relevant historical requirements to put the original data into a relatively complete video data in the light of the formed scripts.

**Text edit:** convert audio files into text data. The reason for voice recordings transforming into text data is to facilitate the public users, but also easily compile a book to use cooperatively. Nevertheless, the original tape record must also be carefully preserved; it is more stereoscopic and vivid for deeper research.

Oral datum’s collation and publication. Collation and publication of information is one of the purposes of oral history work. Therefore, to collate the audio, video, photos and information as the first step, then formed into text data after verification and supplementation. Furthermore, let librarians who were advantage in writing to embellish, compile and publish those materials, lastly, give the materials to the publishing department to form a formal literature version. That’s the significance of library’s oral history for readers lending and studying.

**Sharing the experience**

1. Results
   The outcomes of the project can be seen as follows:
   - 13,200 minutes’ audio recording;
   - 13,200 minutes’ video recording;
   - More than 3300 pieces of photos relating to the veterans;
   - 87 sorted pieces of oral collections.
   Their continuous and diligent work resulted in a book—*The Veterans’ Oral Collection about Their Experiences During the WWII*, which was published by Hunan People’s Publishing House in May, 2013. The book, which has 600,000 characters, consists of two volumes.

2. There are 13 media to report the project.

3. The difficulties encountered for oral history team searching for the veterans who participated in World War II.
   - Firstly, difficult to collect the veteran list
   - Secondly, long and arduous trip to their residence
   - Thirdly, confusion caused by their dialects which was difficult to understand. That makes some communication barriers to interview.
   - Fourthly, due to the advanced age, they may have passed away during the decades.
   - Fifthly, their amnesia caused by age or poor communication, they even can’t speak a word.

**The solution**

Patience
Care for
Love

**Significance and Thinking**

From the perspective of studying history, oral history of searching for veterans opened a new mode for studying history of Anti-Japanese War. The target interviewees were mostly from the lower-middle-class. A prominent feature of the project, was to give Jack-a-Lent the right of speech. Through the bottom of the officers’ oral description, some historical materials of Anti-Japanese War have been enriched, which has changed the elite historical way of thinking, by doing so, it provided a new historical thinking way for reference. Oral history of the veterans who participated in WWII enriched and revealed historical facts which had ignored even concealed in the past.
Gathering oral history information has become a novel pattern for constructing library collection. Library, especially public library endowed with the responsibility of conservation and inheritance who should develop featured resources actively. Oral history information rolled word, sound, video and picture into one, which is a kind of convergence media information resource. This kind material will hopefully become the highlight among libraries competition in future. Thus, library members should have long-term vision or insight to perceive and predict its prospect, as well as to put them into practice. Librarians construct a new featured library resources based on local collection of oral history. Thus, conservation and inheritance culture and history of Hunan is the responsibilities of Hunan Library, also the needs of enrich library’s collection.

From the perspective of sociology, the significance of performing oral history for the Anti-Japanese veterans was not only collecting the historical materials of Anti-Japanese War, but also can show loving care and warm for the veterans. The majority of the anti-Japanese veterans are desolate and helpless. At the same time, this project aims to appeal the society and country to give them more material and spiritual support and concerns. In addition, the process of interview and formation of the datum for oral history are also a social construction process of memory formation.

During the collection of oral history materials for library, the following aspects should not be ignored:

Library oral history work should be targeted to save and preserve the precious historical collection, as well as to exploring and excavating precious historical materials. There are three types of precious historical materials: disappeared, is disappearing, and will disappear. Due to the the narrator of oral history is human whose life expectancy is limited. Based on this prerequisite, library oral history work should be priority to rescue the disappearing historical materials then followed collecting the will-disappear precious historical materials.

Library oral history work should be properly preserved and strengthened in later sorting. Firstly, collected oral history materials should be properly preserved, including oral history of audio, video, pictures, people being interviewed and other relevant information; secondly, professional arrangement should be emphasized just like other literature, on the basis of complying and maintaining the original content of oral history to sort out the oral history datum by resource type in later times.

Library oral history work should establish a resource system. The collection for library oral history data should adhere to specific and subject-oriented principle; in addition, the work should integrate with the actual situation of library, cultural characteristics of the region or the entire social development, moreover, closely embrace the theme of the library collections, and definite objectives theme to carry out oral history collection step by step. Last but by no means the least, library should strengthen research on standardization and standardized construction of oral history data, and establish unanimous norms and standards to form the continuous oral history materials into a database, as well as build a library of oral history resource database system with local characteristics.

Library oral history work should establish a scientific evaluation system. After sufficient practice, to ensure conducting oral history work smoothly for library, a scientific evaluation system must be established.
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Talking and Not Talking about Violence: Challenges in Interviewing Survivors of Atrocity as Whole People.

Anna Sheftel
(Canada):

Abstract: Loosely structured life history interviewing is increasingly the oral history method of choice when interviewing survivors of mass violence; ideally, it gives the interviewee space to explore and express their memories and the connections between them, while emphasizing the context of one’s experience of violence within a larger life lived. There is, however, an inherent tension in setting out to interview someone simultaneously about their life, as they understand it, while being specifically interested in their experience of violence. The latter immediately categorizes, directs, and betrays a particular understanding of the former; namely, that a person’s life can be interpreted through the lens of one particular set of experiences within it.

This paper examines two oral history projects that I conducted with survivors of atrocity—one with survivors of World War II and the Bosnian war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the other with Holocaust survivors in Montreal—to explore the limits of framing lives within the context of violence, and to ask how they might be overcome methodologically, ethically and philosophically. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, interviewees resisted the tendency of researchers to define their lives, and their home, by violence. That my project was defined in this way created an obstacle that needed to be overcome in terms of trust and mutual understanding before the interview even began. In Montreal, interviewees who had spent decades remembering interpreting their Holocaust experiences would inevitably bring interviews back to this topic, while interactions outside the interview space suggested that there was more being left unexplored. My co-interviewer and I worried that they were interpreting their lives in this particular direction to please us, and we became concerned with how our unspoken expectations were shaping our interviews. How can we understand someone’s experience and memory of violence without defining them, and the interview space, by it? Is a life history project that is interested in memories of atrocity necessarily restrictive and directive, no matter how open it aims to be? As oral historians are increasingly concerned with how they understand, interpret, and represent the people to whom we listen, this question of framing and implicit directing is a crucial one to address and understand.
One of the most often-cited characteristics that makes oral history a unique historical method is that it entails co-creation of primary sources. Where traditional history is based upon the careful investigation of documents that pre-existed the researcher’s project, oral history is a generative process. This is both heralded as one of the greatest strengths of the craft—allowing us to “fill in the gaps” historically by listening to and recording people who have otherwise been left out of the historical record—and one of the reasons it so often comes under fire. Where is the historian’s prized objectivity if they are so involved in the documents they are studying? How can we learn anything “true” from sources that are so conditional? Indeed, in recent years, the turn to a more self-reflexive practice has meant that oral historians, especially those with feminist backgrounds, are paying greater attention to what their roles as co-creators mean for the interview, the resulting research, the craft of oral history, and the wider discipline of history as well. Scholars have reflected on the various biases and baggage we bring into the room, the temporal nature of the interview itself, power dynamics and research relationships and the hard work of sharing authority. The results of such collective soul-searching have included a trend towards a more humanistic, flexible and democratic kind of interviewing, in which strict questionnaires are abandoned for interviewee-led collaborative conversations. Oral historians have been seeking to open up the interview space as much as possible.

My own work on narratives of atrocity, which to date has mostly revolved around two projects—one in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and one with Holocaust survivors in Montreal—has adopted such an approach under the umbrella of “life history” interviewing. Sensitive to the particular issues surrounding listening to the narrators of survivors of atrocity, a life history approach allows the listener to contextualize a person’s experience of violence within a larger life, and to explore issues of memory, identity, and connections between experiences. Where genocide and related human rights violations are about stripping persons of their humanity, life history interviewing seeks to understand that experience within a context that prioritizes just that: this is a person, not only a survivor. This approach stands in contrast to testimony projects which focus almost exclusively on the violence and its most direct effects. Life history interviewing views a person’s childhood, family, work, memory and reflections as relevant and important to discuss as their experiences of violence. We can better understand what it means to be a Holocaust survivor, for example, by understanding how that has played out over the course of a person’s entire life. The kind of life story interviewing that I have been practicing since my first interviews in Bosnia has been largely chronological—beginning with family history and place of origin—but never tied to that structure.
My role as an interviewer has been to guide and to probe, helping interviewees recount their lives in ways that make sense to them. This can mean jumping between moments in a life, repeating stories, and lengthy digressions. This is often done through multiple sessions, allowing both interviewer and interviewee time to rest and reflect. The general idea is that it’s all important. Everything helps us understand the person whose life we are exploring. Elsewhere, I and others have referred to this method as “humanistic” life history interviewing, for the value that it places on the research relationship and interviewees as whole and complex people who are more than a mere collection of stories.

While the work of loosening the structure of oral history interviews in favour of collaborative conversations should ideally be able to generate narratives together that do justice to the interviewee’s experience without overly constraining it, there has not been enough discussion, yet, about how the intrinsic structure of the oral history interview always constrains what we are and are not able to do together. No matter how loose, how flexible and how sensitive one’s approach, an interview is a particular space that plays into certain social anxieties and puts values on people’s experiences in subtle ways. On the former point, for example, Alan Wong described undergoing an interview himself as part of his oral history training, and the ways in which it made him self-conscious of the performativity of the experience. He wondered how he looked, if he was interesting enough, or if he was saying anything that would be helpful to the researcher, who was a professor he knew well. He also pointed out that despite oral historians’ aims to make interviews as conversational as possible, the unidirectional nature of the process—one person asks another person about their life with little reciprocity—can never be felt as natural as we hope it to feel. On the question of the values we impose on people’s lives, for example, by seeking to interview a group of people whose common thread is their survival of a particular historical atrocity, and thus de facto defining them in this way, we can subtlety and unknowingly undermine our larger goal of understanding their lives from a holistic perspective.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the structures and assumptions inherent to interviewing complicate the process and present challenges for the noble goal of understanding the whole lives of the people with whom we work. I do so by looking at how some oral history literature treats issues of framing and structure, as well as by reflecting on my own interviewing experiences in Bosnia-Herzegovina and with Holocaust survivors in Montreal. There is an inherent tension in setting out to interview someone simultaneously about their life, as they understand it, while being specifically interested in their experience of violence. The latter immediately categorizes, directs, and betrays a particular understanding of the former; namely, that a person’s life can be interpreted through the lens of one particular set of experiences within it. I argue that oral historians need to be aware of the subtle, yet directive ways that our projects, no matter how humanistic or democratic, create expectations and direct the stories we hear. More than anything, such a reality requires humility in the face of the tremendous challenge of trying to understand another human being. In the introduction to his work on Holocaust survival and testimony, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben wrote, “One of the lessons of Auschwitz is that it is infinitely harder to grasp the mind of an ordinary person than to understand the mind of a Spinoza or Dante.” Indeed, while such a belief is what drives many of us to spend so much time interviewing people, oral historians need to think about what exactly they are able to understand about a person through the act of interviewing—no matter how loose or how structured the interview is—and what they cannot. If we cannot understand a whole person, then the question remains: what can we? By exploring how we structure our interview projects and how we unwittingly define and categorize our interviewees, I hope this paper serves as an instructive example of the problem of studying people’s lives.

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8 Alan Wong, "Conversations for the Real World: Shared Authority, Self-Reflexivity, and Process in the Oral History Interview".
9 Please note that as this paper discusses moments with interviewees that largely happened outside of the formal interview, I do not name them.
In her reflections on an oral history project that she conducted with teachers, Naomi Norquay argues that forgetting is not only a feature of how people construct and organize their memories, but also something that emerges out of the structure of the interview process itself. She points out that, “Research participants tell their stories within the specific context of the interview and within the boundaries of their relationship to that context. Stories, therefore, are necessarily partial and incomplete.”11 As most oral historians will acknowledge that what they hear within interviews is contextual, the salient question becomes what partiality is a problem, and what is not. As Alexander Freund says, in his recent work on silence, “We go into interviews knowing we will not get the complete story. Yet, throughout our interviews, we hope and attempt to get, if not the whole story, at least a fully self-contained story.”12 He argues that the oral historian’s discomfort around this contradiction is a problem that we need to honestly address. The turn toward life history and humanistic interviewing has a clear ethos of believing that if we work hard enough, and listen well enough, we will get a story that is more just as well as more complete.

In her recent work on framing—a term which she employs from scholarship in communications and translation studies—Catherine Baker describes an oral history project which interviewed interpreters who had worked during the Bosnian War. Looking at how language choices and experiences of working across languages allowed her to hear stories of the Bosnian war from a very different perspective, Baker calls attention to the necessity of examining how framing both before and during an interview affects its progress. Conducting an oral history project about translation meant she could talk about the Bosnian War without making any assumptions about how people related to it. She says:

The participants whose accounts feature in this chapter...were not necessarily participating in interviews “about” mass violence. What these interviews turned out to be “about” was determined by the frames within which interviewer and interviewee both sought to speak and listen. Reflecting on processes of framing within these interviews shows how acts of questioning produce—or sometimes impede—meaning, investigating a frame that so often becomes relevant within the study of mass violence: the frame of ethnic conflict and identity.13

Because it was nominally on a different topic, Baker was able to interview people about the war without forcing themselves to identify as survivors, to profess membership to a particular ethnic group, or to understand what happened in Bosnia as a war or genocide or through any such particular and politically loaded lens. This led her to reflect on the importance of framing, whether implicit or explicit, in directing interviews and the questions and answers that occur within them. She concludes by saying:

...There is much to be gained from a practice of representing mass violence that does not reduce those who have experienced it to a simple identity of “survivor,” as feminist critiques of “survivor” labelling after sexual violence would suggest. Yet, this practice must also preserve space for narrators to draw meaning, if they wish, from the idea of having survived and from actions they have been able to take because of who, in collective terms, they are.14

This challenge gets to the heart of the project of interviewing survivors of any kind of violence, not to mention members of communities in general; how do you probe someone’s experiences without unfairly defining them? When does defining a person or framing their experience open up avenues for exploration, and when does it shut them down?

Henry Greenspan, in his work with Holocaust survivors, is similarly critical of the often unspoken ways in which interviews and other testimony contexts structure and constrain how Holocaust survivors are seen.

14 Ibid.
For example, he points out that, “being invited to speak ‘as a survivor’ inevitably foregrounds the Holocaust as cause and the rest that one has to tell as effect.”\textsuperscript{15} Several Holocaust scholars have critiqued the triumphalist nature of the survivor narratives are culturally celebrated in North America, and the exclusionary and silencing nature of such a model.\textsuperscript{16} Greenspan takes the point about how we transpose certain narrative structures on the lives of survivors further by raising this issue of cause and effect. Even if you discuss a whole survivor’s life, and even if you avoid playing into popular stereotypes of what that life looked like and meant, the unstated assumption when interviewing a survivor of violence is nevertheless that their major moments, joys and pains can all be interpreted through the lens of their experience of atrocity. Greenspan cites his interviews with Victor, who at different moments in their time together, attributed such decisions as a career in factory work and marrying a non-Jew, initially to his Holocaust experience, and then to rather unrelated issues, such as a preference for factory work that predated the war. He then cites Agi, someone with whom he worked for decades, as musing, “can I really attribute this to that one year, April 1944 to April 1945?”\textsuperscript{17} Greenspan’s response is to urge us to be open to the complexity of survivors’ lives, such that moments and events can have multiple meanings, some related to their experience of violence, others related more generally to their experience of being human. Such quandaries are part of his advocacy for life history interviewing, particularly a model which is based in long-term research relationships, multiple interviews, and creating space for reflection, questioning and interpretation within the interview. This is the only way that we can avoid reducing survivors entirely to their Holocaust experiences.

In an article that details their difficult encounters with a particular interviewee, Tracey K’Meyer and A. Glenn Crothers talk about balancing sensitivity to the interviewee and their agenda with their obligations as historians to preserve history.\textsuperscript{18} Their interviewee had requested to be interviewed as she wanted to document her contributions as a nurse on the Pacific front during World War II. When they sat down with her, K’Meyer and Crothers discovered another incredible story; as a light-skinned African-American born and raised in Kentucky, the interviewee had spent much of her life crossing racial divides due to her ability to pass as either black or white. While K’Meyer and Crothers identified her experiences as unique and important, the interviewee was uncooperative in recounting them; she did not want to talk about race. For the authors, this issue was one of working with what they deemed a “reluctant narrator” toward the higher goal of preserving an important part of Kentucky’s racial history; they describe the impasse as being about diverging opinions about what in this woman’s life was historically interesting. Remembering that we are discussing the historical relevance of an actual person’s life, it is important to note that an impasse over the interview’s topic is effectively a disagreement over who the interviewee was. She clearly did not want her life to be defined by her racial negotiations, whether or not they were more historically interesting than her service with the Red Cross. How can you have a meaningful research relationship when you cannot actually agree on who the person whose life you are trying to understand is? Through multiple conversations within and outside the interview space attempting to reconcile what the goal of the interview project was, the interviewers did eventually succeed in convincing her that speaking about race was valuable, but they ended by wondering if she only came around to tell them what they wanted to hear. This seems like an obvious conclusion, but it again leaves us with the question: after such a battle over the definition of a person’s life, what, then, can we say we have learned about them?

If oral history interviewing involves the co-creation of a primary source, then it also involves the co-definition of a human life. Not all negotiations over that definition happen as explicitly, and with as much conflict, as K’Meyer and Crothers’ experience. This, however, is the purpose of having a conversation about the frames, structures and definitions that we unwittingly impose on our interviewees and on our interview projects. Being involved in co-creation means we are doing more than recording, asking

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\item[17] Henry Greenspan, On Listening to Holocaust Survivors, 231.
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questions, and trying not to hurt. It means that we are de facto part of the process of interpreting what a person’s life means, what value it has, and what historians might want to take from it. This is not a problem in and of itself, but it is something that we need to be able to probe. Below, I turn to experiences from my own practice to explore how the issues I have discussed here have manifested themselves in my work.

ON NOT BEING ENOUGH OF A SURVIVOR

The oral history interviews that I conducted in Bosnia-Herzegovina over 2005-2006 formed the basis of my doctoral dissertation, which examined how people in a Northwestern region of the country constructed narratives of wartime violence in the context of the uses and abuses of history and memory at varying levels. I interviewed a wide cross section of the population around the city of Bihać and its surrounding towns and villages about their memories, as well as the memories of their families and communities, from World War II until the present. I was interested not just in how they saw their own experiences, but also how they saw the commemoration, remembrance and historicization of the war and violence of twentieth century Bosnia-Herzegovina. As such, my interviews covered a wide range of topics, and alternated between the recounting of memories and moments of reflection and interpretation. These were necessarily life history interviews, because the very purpose of the project was to see how memories of violence played out in the long term.

Numerous interview projects have been conducted within Bosnia-Herzegovina, but only a few have been academic projects run by oral historians rather than testimony-gathering for NGOs, international organizations or journalists. As a result, when I arrived, many people’s understandings of what an interview entailed seemed to be a short recitation of the worst moments of violence that one had experienced. Finding willing interviewees was a tricky endeavour, and I detail the multiple and salient reasons for this elsewhere. One reason that is relevant to this discussion, though, is that I learned, through conversations with friends who both did and did not agree to be interviewed by me, that many saw themselves as unsuitable candidates simply because their stories were not horrific enough. This was particularly true as many in the region that I was located in had not experienced the kind of genocidal violence that was so emblematic of the Bosnian War. They were sure that their stories of life under siege would not hold any value to me, and did not believe me when I insisted otherwise. This speaks, as I mention above, to the question of how individual narratives interact with the dominant narratives that they find propagated culturally, especially through other interview projects. Just as Holocaust scholars have critiqued how the hegemonization of a certain kind of Holocaust narrative can be silencing, here, the sense that I was looking for a dramatic and gory story of genocidal violence made people assume that they could never fit.

Further to this was the idea that certain kinds of stories made for better, or more interesting, interviews than others. Many of my eventual interviewees in Bosnia had spent much of the war under siege, as Bihać was besieged for almost the entire war, from June 1992 – August 1995. As interviewees told me themselves, while their memories of living under siege were those of anticipation and fear, and while they certainly haunted them, the main characteristic of the horrors of life under siege is that it was boring. These are stories about waiting. It is not obvious how to tell them. Just as Alan Wong, in his reflection on being interviewed, worried about being interesting enough, so the people with whom I worked in Bosnia-Herzegovina seemed to harbour similar anxieties. Were there stories enough to interest me as an interviewer? By framing my project as being about memories of war, I unwittingly communicated a set of expectations of what I anticipated interviewees would tell me, and this created a distance that was difficult to work through. These expectations were not necessarily my own; they came from previous experiences,

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popular culture, and every other way that people interacted with definitions of the Bosnian war and what it meant to be a survivor of it. My project could not escape any of that, and as an interviewer, I could also not escape immediately giving interviewees the impression that I was looking for good stories, no matter how subjective such a concept would be to define.

While in Bosnia-Herzegovina, much of this tension played out outside of the interview space. During my interviews with Holocaust survivors, this has been an important tension within interviews. Together with Stacey Zembrzycki, as well as a team of interviewers based out of the Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations project at Concordia University, since 2008 I worked with a group of Holocaust survivors in Montreal who frequently give public testimony. The idea was to try and understand how people take their most horrific memories and make them so public, speaking at community events and in classrooms. How do you turn suffering into pedagogy? Interestingly, conscious of the importance of letting people define and name themselves, and not wanting to be exclusionary, the project specifically chose to use the word Montrealers in its title rather than survivors or any similar descriptive. What united the people who were interviewed for this project—coming from the Rwandan, Cambodian, Jewish, Haitian and other immigrant communities in the city—was that they were people who had come to Montreal either directly or indirectly from situations of violence. Yet, despite this noble attempt to be as inclusive as possible, it is worth noting that this title still implies that the principle topic of these life stories is a particular kind of violence. This is unavoidable; just as my doctoral project was, at the end of the day, about war, this project was, at the end of the day, about war, genocide and other human rights violations. No matter how inclusive, all oral history projects are nominally about something, and seek to answer certain questions. Still, this, from the start, gave a certain frame to the life stories that were to be included; much like Greenspan’s discussion of cause and effect, the way both these projects were framed assumed that the focal point of the life would be genocide and atrocity, with the rest of the life relating back to that.

Beyond the already-stated reasons for adopting a life history approach, we conducted these kinds of interviews with Holocaust survivors because many of them had already recorded their stories of the violence they had lived through, sometimes multiple times, and we were interested in hearing more. In particular, our research has looked at the survivors’ migration and early years in Canada, as well as the educational and testimony work that many took up in the past twenty years. These two themes are only now emerging as being of interest to researchers, and while many of our survivors had been interviewed multiple times, most had never talked about these parts of their lives to an interviewer before. And just as in Bosnia, we encountered a similar tension when it came to talking about the entire lives of our Holocaust survivors, no matter how interview-savvy many were. We were still fundamentally talking to these people because they were survivors, and it was difficult to explain how the rest of their lives were of interest. Due to the period of time we were interviewing in, the majority of our interviewees were child survivors, which not only meant that they were young during the Holocaust, but also that few had had the concentration camp experience that is typically associated with the Holocaust. Many were hidden children, such that like Bosnians under siege, their memories involved much terrified waiting. In interviews, some told us about the generational hierarchy that had existed when the older generation had still been alive; the children were not seen as the “real” survivors. But more than that, many of our survivors also expressed anxiety that their experience was not typical enough.

21 Monica Patterson talks about the ways in which the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission created a paradigm for good stories, i.e. stories which were acceptable to tell, which conveyed emotions that were productive for the TRC project, etc. See: Monica Eileen Patterson, “The Ethical Murk of Using Testimony in Oral Historical Research in South Africa,” in Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice, eds. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 201-18.

22 See the project’s website, http://www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca, for more information on its purpose, structure and work.


24 Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, “We started over again, we were young”: Postwar Social Worlds of Child Holocaust Survivors in Montreal,” Urban History Review 39, 1 (October 2010): 20-30.
The most memorable encounter that highlights this point is also detailed in a piece that Zembrzycki and I published in the *Oral History Review.* Seeking to take advantage of the life story context, and to convince interviewees that we wanted to talk to them about more than the Holocaust, we experimented with beginning interviews in different chronological places. Our team had had some success beginning with the survivor’s arrival to Canada, for example, and then moving forwards and backwards as the interview progressed. During one particular interview, though, this strategy did not work; we began by asking about the interviewee’s arrival in Canada, and they immediately asked us to turn off the camera. Stunned, we did, and the interviewee proceeded to explain that they did not think they could give us what we wanted. They had come to Canada twenty or so years after the war, and not in its immediate aftermath, like typical survivors. The interviewee had not integrated into the Montreal Jewish community upon their arrival, and had been only peripherally engaged with it since. The interviewee was not from Eastern Europe, and did not fit the stereotype of what most expect when they meet a Holocaust survivor in Montreal.

Even though we tried, as explicitly as possible, to make it clear that we were not interested in recording the *typical* Holocaust survivor testimony, going so far as to change the order in which we discussed the interviewee’s life, their anxiety over giving us what we needed to hear still obstructed the process. It worked out in the end; we started over, with their Holocaust story, as that was familiar ground to tread. Once we had spent more time together, it became easier to discuss the rest. However, the fact remains that for a group of people such as Holocaust survivors who have had their experiences so widely represented, it is very difficult to conduct an interview without certain assumptions and values about what constitutes a good and worthy Holocaust story being in the room with you. We had been naïve to think that a more open and flexible method would allow us to avoid such tensions completely. The only thing that helped us move past them was time.

Both in Bosnia and in Montreal, then, implicit frames and the assumptions that they generate have impeded communication both within and outside the interview, largely because people felt that they were not survivors *enough.* Some of this was unavoidable, as the interview space is not a vacuum, and we were each bringing our own perceptions about what it means to recount a life touched by atrocity into the room. I could not help that, for example, in both contexts my interviewees had prior experience that told them that a survival through hiding was less valued than survival in a concentration camp. However, some of the framing also came from me and my collaborators; we were still assuming that the violence was the focal point in people’s lives, which carries with it a set of assumptions about the severity and nature of what that violence was. No matter how loose our interviews were, they were still fundamentally about being a survivor of war and genocide.

**ON BEING MORE THAN A SURVIVOR**

Some struggles in the interview space centre around anxieties about not giving the interviewer enough; others are about the opposite. How much can we actually learn about a person in an interview? This tension is a sort of dialectic which touches on the same overall question that inspired this chapter; the difficulty of knowing. In the same way that having lived under siege made a person feel that they did not sufficiently fit, the other issue was also that of not wanting to be defined by that siege. Just as Greenspan worries about how we attribute every decision a survivor makes to the cause of the Holocaust, so did the Bosnians with whom I worked resist the notion that the war needed to be understood as the defining feature in their lives. I presented my Bosnian project as a life history project, but it was nevertheless still a project about wars. And so however I tried to convince people that I was interested in their lives, in their reflections and in their opinions, they were certain that I wanted to hear about war, and given the context of how western writers and researchers have already written about the region, that meant to them that I wanted to hear about a particular kind of war, as discussed above. This is precisely my point; that no matter how broad, how open and how collaborative the model of interviewing I was trying to achieve, the

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25 Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, “Only Human.”
frame was still one that people were profoundly skeptical of. This was especially the case as the story of the Bosnian War had been so dramatized and manipulated already.

The problem with this frame was not just that people felt they did not fit. It was also that many objected. There is a real tension in discussions of what happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina between those who focus on ethnic tension and brutal violence as underscoring the region’s history, and those who see the region, particularly during its Yugoslav years, as having modeled interethnic cooperation, thus making the violence of 1990s an exceptional moment of shame and betrayal. This is a political and ideological difference. I did not want to play into the ideology of the former, but fundamentally, conducting an oral history project about war could not avoid falling into such a trap entirely. People did not want to be defined by war. People are more than the wars they survive. How can you communicate that you understand this when you are building research relationships around a project that is about those wars? Some of my Bosnian interviewees insisted on making points about their lives beyond violence during our interviews. Others just seemed uncomfortable. The conversations I would casually have with friends during social outings about everything they loved about where they were from, and about funny family memories and their school years with friends, rarely came up in interviews.

Due to the luxury of conducting an oral history project within the city in which I live, Zembrzycki and I have been able to spend a lot more time with the Holocaust survivors whom we have interviewed for the project at Concordia University. Beyond our multiple interview sessions, we have gone to hear them speak at various events, organized collaborative workshops within the community as another mode of inquiry, and more simply, we have shared lunches and tea with them on numerous occasions just to catch up. We have been privileged to build bonds with some survivors that go beyond interviewing relationships; these are truly people whom we value and enjoy spending time with. After one particular tea date at a survivor’s house, however, we noted that even our casual conversation always referred back to the Holocaust. On this particular afternoon, our interviewee had invited several others over just to have some cake and chat, as we had not seen each other in a while. The mood was light-hearted and casual, and yet conversation never departed too far from their identities as survivors. During our interviews, many of our survivors have explicitly told us that this is not a topic they deem necessary to discuss on a daily basis, particular when among other survivors as they already know what the other has been through. And so we knew that these discussions were for us.

The Holocaust survivors with whom we work have all led full, rich lives. All are grandparents, most had illustrious careers, and many still have busy and stimulating lives in their seventies and eighties. We know that there is more to their lives than the Holocaust, but even in our most informal interactions with them, we have had trouble accessing those worlds. When a survivor with whom we had worked quite closely suddenly passed away, Zembrzycki attended the funeral and was stunned at the number of people who were there, all of whom knew him through different networks. The focus of the funeral was his status as a family man, and as a loving husband, father and grandfather. She left with the feeling that this had been what his life had been about, to his community. And yet it was only peripheral in our interviews; as he had been married to a survivor, marriage was a frequent topic of conversation, but otherwise family was not. This was not for lack of trying, but rather due to the difficulty, on both ends, of working past the implicit structures that we had placed on the interview process. Clearly, one’s role as a patriarch in one’s family is not a separate experience from having survived the Holocaust; some interviewees described their drive to have families as having come directly out of an obligation that accompanied their survival.26 But it is also much more than that. And that part is what was so difficult for us to access. Here was a person who we had spent many hours with, with whom we had felt a connection, and whose interviews were among the most profound we both felt we had done in our careers to date. And after his funeral, we realized that we had barely really known him at all.

26 Sheftel and Zembrzycki, “We Started Over Again, We Were Young.”
CONCLUSION

My father is a Holocaust survivor. He was very young during the war, and while he has never recounted his story fully to me, he has always been open about the extent to which those early experiences have impacted him and continue to keep him awake at night. After the war, he and his father remained in Poland until they moved to Israel in the early 1950s. This means that he was still in Poland during his bar mitzvah year, when he turned thirteen years old. A few years ago, he mentioned that due to the state’s crackdown on organized religion in those later years, he had never had a formal bar mitzvah. And so now, in his seventies, he wanted to have one. He had never had the chance to read from the Torah, which is the focal point of this rite of passage, and this was something he wanted to finally do. My father imagined an inauspicious event. He did not want his own ceremony, but rather to be bar mitzvah-ed as part of his synagogue’s regular Saturday morning services. He would sponsor a lunch afterwards to celebrate, and invite only his immediate family. This was for him. My father is not particularly observant, but he wanted to do this as a way of connecting to one of the principal rites of passage in our community.

To date, my father has not yet had his bar mitzvah. When I asked him, after months of discussing it, why he had not pursued the possibility, he told me that his very well-meaning rabbi, with the best of intentions, had become too excited at the prospect of a Holocaust survivor, now in his seventies, having the bar mitzvah he had never had. My father was only seven years old when the war ended in Poland. To him, his lack of bar mitzvah had little to do with the Holocaust, and neither did his motivation to do it now. While I could see the obviously appealing headline that his bar mitzvah would garner for the synagogue’s newsletter and in the local Jewish newspaper, I could also see why this felt so wrong for my father. And while I knew that if I were his interviewer, I myself would be compelled to draw connections between his desire for a bar mitzvah and his survival, I also knew that I believed him. Not only was this not why he wanted to do it, but he is also someone who had always avoided being singled out as a survivor within the local Jewish community. He has never spoken openly about it in public, and I have watched his discomfort when others have. This is not how he wants to be known to people.

My father does not deny the impact the Holocaust has had on his life and on how he views the world, but he is also much more than that. His relationship to Judaism is more complex than that too. And he has resisted, for as long as I have been paying attention, letting himself and his actions be defined only as those of a Holocaust survivor. The Holocaust has always loomed large in our family, but it has never been a monocausal explanation for an entire life. How could it be? Greenspan describes one of his interviewees, Reuben, as struggling with the desire to represent the “whole life”, which for him included the Holocaust, but did not focus singularly on the Holocaust. We must ask ourselves how we can have conversations like that within research projects that are about the Holocaust, or World War II, or the Bosnian War.

In his critique of memory studies as an emerging field, Alon Confino similarly argues for complexity, and says:

> ...historical actors participate in various processes at the same time...they simultaneously represent, receive, and contest memory. To accept that none of these processes has primacy and yet to understand the meaning of memory, we need to understand all of them as intertwined—memory as a whole that is bigger than the sum of its parts.

Interviewees are bigger than the sum of their parts. Survivors of atrocity negotiate the difficulty of recounting their experiences due to feeling equally that they are survivors enough, and that they are much more than that. Oral historians know that we shape the process of the interview, and that the act of co-creation means constraint and compromise. We know that our own understandings of what we are going to listen to will interact with interviewees’ understanding of who they are, what they want to tell, and how and why. We also know that we can never get the complete story; that our interviews will never let us fully

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27 Greenspan, On Listening to Holocaust Survivors, 232.
into another person’s life. The question then remains: if we are not getting everything, then what are we
getting? And how do our decisions, both explicit but especially implicit, about what our projects are about
and who they include, shape which part of a person’s life we hear? The paradox of life history interviewing
is that it is interested in the whole person, while simultaneously acknowledging that this is an impossible
goal. The onus is therefore on the life history interviewer to be critical and aware of what we expect, what
we are given, and what we will never ask for.
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Sanita Berzina-Reinsone
(Latvia):

Resumen: Cuando el Ejército Rojo ocupó los Países Bálticos en 1944, mucha gente se vio obligada a refugiarse en las zonas boscosas. Los bosques lejanos ofrecían escondite para evitar las detenciones y demás peligros que traían las autoridades del poder soviético. Como respuesta a la ocupación soviética, durante la Guerra Fría se fundaron muchas organizaciones de guerrilleros nacionales. Los bosques tranquilos de los Países Bálticos se convertían en lugar de resistencia y de refugio para muchas decenas de miles de personas, entre ellas muchas mujeres.

Mi investigación está basada en las entrevistas sobre las historias de la vida de doce mujeres. Las entrevistas, llevadas a cabo durante los últimos años, muestran la guerra secreta desde el punto de vista de las mujeres que después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial se trasladaron al bosque y juntaron a los grupos activos de guerrilleros o llevaban una vida tranquila e ilegal. Sus voces fueron silenciadas durante la época soviética, incluso por sus parientes cercanos, que tenían miedo a ser denunciados. Algunas de ellas no se atrevieron a revelar sus experiencias a estos parientes cercanos hasta algunas décadas después, cuando los países Bálticos fueron de nuevo independientes en 1991.

En los años de la posguerra, cuando aparentemente en la Unión Soviética reinaba la paz, trasladarse a vivir en el bosque significaba no solamente cambiar el peligroso mundo humano por el no tan incierto mundo de naturaleza, sino también cambiar totalmente la vida social y destruir permanentemente las relaciones con el poder estatal. Al adentrarse en el bosque, las ciudadanas ordinarias adquirían un nuevo estatus social. Ellas se convierten en opositoras al estado; en enemigas fuera de la ley que hay que erradicar; en bandidas. A pesar de que el bosque no garantizaba la seguridad total, esta era la única zona donde sentirse protegidas. Pero en la realidad ya no existía el camino de regreso al mundo humano civilizado: cruzar la frontera del bosque significaba perder la vida o la libertad.

En mi presentación, además de revelar las vidas de las mujeres letonas en términos emocionales y prácticos, acentuaré la imagen del checa como representante de los órganos represores soviéticos, y voy a argumentar que, en las historias que estas mujeres comparten, el contacto directo e indirecto con los checas, que persiguen y ponen en peligro a estas mujeres del bosque, contrasta fuertemente con el mundo natural: los agresores despiadados y perseveradores duros que viven fuera del bosque contra el refugio y ayuda que el bosque proporciona.

Abstract: When the Red Army occupied the Baltic States in 1944, many people were forced to flee into the woodlands. Remote forests provided shelter to evade arrest and other dangers posed by the occupying Soviet authorities. As a response to Soviet occupation, various national partisan organisations were established throughout the Baltic States during the Cold War. The once peaceful forests of the occupied Baltic lands were transformed into sites of both resistance and shelter for tens of thousands of people, among them many women.
My study is based on twelve personal accounts, recorded in life story interviews, which describe the hidden war through the eyes of the Latvian women who joined active partisan groups or lived quiet but officially illegal personal lives in the forest. Their voices were silenced during the Soviet period, even from close relatives because they feared being denounced.

Deciding to live in the forest after the war, when the Soviet Union enjoyed apparent peace, meant not only exchanging the dangerous human world for the less uncertain natural world, but also totally changing the nature of social life and permanently destroying relations with the state powers. By going into the forest, ordinary citizens assumed a new status. They became opponents, outlaws, targets for eradication, bandits. And even though the forest did not guarantee complete safety, it was the only possible safety zone. In any event, a path back to civilization no longer existed, for crossing the boundary line that leads out of the forest meant giving up life or freedom.

In the presentation besides revealing the lives of outlawed Latvian women in the harsh forest condition in emotional and practical terms, I will particularly turn my attention to the narrated image of chekists as representatives of the Soviet repressive organs. I will argue that in the narratives these women share, direct and indirect contact with the chekists that endanger and chase forest women is contrasted with relations with the natural world: the merciless attackers and hard-hearted persecutors who live outside the forest versus the shelter and help the forest provides.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE BALTIC NATIONAL PARTISAN WAR

The end of World War II did not bring peace to people living in the Baltics, in a sense, the war only started. When the Red Army occupied the Baltic States in 1944, many people were forced to flee into the woodlands and various national partisan organisations were established. The once peaceful forests of the occupied Baltic lands were transformed into sites of both resistance and shelter for tens of thousands of people, among them many women and families, including little kids and old people about whom one had to take care of — a burden to dynamic partisan war. The bloody struggle of the Balts lasted until the middle of the 1950s. The Baltic partisan movement was autochthonous; it had no external leadership and almost no outside support. Estimating the number of participants in the resistance is problematic because the nature of the groups, associations, and individuals constantly changed. As a result, research data varies considerably. According to accounts of the Soviet Union’s special services unit, some 82,000 partisans were living in the Baltic forests in 1947 (Strods 2006, 23).¹

Precise figures as to the number of women living in the forests do not exist in the scholarly literature. It is estimated that at almost 500 women were living in the forest in Latvia alone, though this figure is based only on the number of women who came to the attention of the cheka (Dreimane 2014). One of the most powerful motivations for opposing the occupiers proved to be memories of the terror promulgated by the Soviet Union in 1940–1941, when a large proportion of the society suffered, especially the most educated and wealthy segments. In 1944–1945, as the Red Army advanced into the Baltic, mass arrests resumed along with general conscription, to which the majority of men responded negatively. Instead of serving in the Red Army, they chose to embrace an illegal status as forest partisans. Public opinion at the time held that this second Soviet occupation would also be short-lived and that the West would soon oppose the Soviet Union and insist on freedom for the Baltic nations, as set forth in the Atlantic Charter (Kuodyte&Tracevskis 2006, 17). People headed for the forests in order to wait out this transition in relative peace and to avoid mass deportations and the daily terror instigated by local authorities.

Baltic resistance came to a bloody and tragic end. The majority of those who accepted the amnesty offered to them by the Soviet authorities² sooner or later were convicted and deported to Siberia. Those who remained in the forest were either shot or captured and then tried. Some were sentenced to death, the rest became political convicts in the camps of the Gulag. According to data from the USSR security services, 45 % of the guerrillas in Latvia were captured (4 % of them were sentenced to death, while the others were sent to the Gulag camps); 45 % accepted the offer of amnesty (but most were later deported to Siberia), and 20 % were killed (Turčinskis 2007, 91–113). A comparable situation prevailed in the other two Baltic countries. Supporters³ met a similar fate. Most were deported to Siberia⁴ but many were arrested, convicted, and sent to the forced labour camps.

Fieldwork

My study is based on twelve personal accounts, recorded in life story interviews between 2011–2013, which describe the hidden war through the eyes of the Latvian women who joined active partisan groups or lived quiet but officially illegal personal lives in the forest. Their voices were silenced during the Soviet period,

¹ The number of active participants was highest in 1945 and 1946, which was also the period when the largest number were annihilated. In addition to the active partisans, there were supporters, who were armed but lived legally in their own homes and joined the groups when absolutely necessary (Lesksys 2009, 64). For other citations see Laar 1992, 24; Miljan 2004, 21, Misiusas et al. 1983, 84, Petersen 2001, 207, Raun 2001, 174, Statiev 2010, 115, Turčinskis 2007, 112.
² Special campaigns were carried out in the Soviet Union to encourage partisans to legalize their status. That meant registering with the authorities, turning in weapons, and agreeing to live as a civilians in accord with the laws of the Soviet Union. The promise of amnesty, however, proved to be a trick of the government. Most of those who obtained legal status were later arrested and tried or sent to Siberia “as former bandits” (Strods 2012, 128–131).
³ Baltic partisans had a large number of supporters. Locals provided them with food, clothing, and in part also with weapons and ammunition salvaged and stored during the war. In their effort to disrupt partisan activity, the occupying forces turned harshly upon relatives, parents, spouses, sisters and brothers, and children, whom they arrested, imprisoned, and dealt with morally and physically, turning them, essentially, into hostages with the intent that the partisans would surrender in order to protect their loved ones. Such actions instead increased the influx of people into the forest.
⁴ Deportation to Siberia was one of the tactics of political repression. People were forcibly transported en masse to remote regions of the USSR where the able-bodied earned a subsistence wage working in collective farms (kolkhozi), gold mines, and lumber camps. Initially, the deportees were told they were sentenced to life, but in 1957, when the USSR began a review the deportation cases, many were allowed to return to their home countries (see Полян 2001).
even from close relatives because they feared being denounced. The interviewees have been born from 1919 to 1944; after the WWII one of them was little kid, two were teen girls, others — young women in their twenties. Most of the women interviewed had spent a few months up to a few years in the forest, but three of them lived in the forest for nine years, almost the entire length of the Baltic resistance period. This length of time is all the more striking given that the average was two years (Strods 2006, 28). It must be admitted that life in the Baltic forests all year long is no simple task. The winters are extreme, with deep layers of snow and harsh temperatures, e.g., in January 1950, when some of the interviewees still lived in the forest, the average air temperature was -16˚ C, but at the beginning of January it dropped to -30˚ C.5

In the analytical part of the paper I will particularly turn my attention to the forest life of women and narrated image of a chekist — a representative of the Soviet repressive agency. I argue that in the narratives these women share, direct and indirect contact with the chekists that endanger and chase forest dwellers is contrasted with relations with the natural world: the merciless attackers and hard-hearted persecutors of the human world versus the shelter and help the natural world provides.

OUTLAWED WOMEN AND THE FOREST
Although the Baltic resistance was a men’s war, it was also the first war in which Baltic women were directly involved. The Baltic women who were forced to seek shelter in the remote forests in the decline of the WWII had been simple country women, farmers, students, etc., in other words, ordinary citizens. Their presence in the battlefield unsettled the conventional social order to which both they and society were accustomed.

For the most part, the women did not go into the forest for ideological reasons or to oppose the Soviets, but rather out of fear for their lives and a wish to avoid physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Deciding to live in the forest after the war, when the Soviet Union enjoyed apparent peace, meant not only exchanging the dangerous human world for the less uncertain natural world, but also totally changing the nature of social life and permanently destroying relations with the state powers. By going into the forest, ordinary citizens assumed a new status. They became opponents, outlaws, targets for eradication, bandits. And even though the forest did not guarantee complete safety, it was the only possible safety zone.

In the forest, women found themselves almost completely isolated from the outside world. Although they were not involved in the planning and execution of military action and, as much as possible, they were not even informed about the movements of the partisans or what actions they had taken, their very presence in the forest marked them as openly aligned against the Soviets. They had, in effect, joined the war, with all its possible consequences.

Women managed the domestic duties in the forest; they washed clothes, sewed, and mended, gathered fuel and food. Women with a medical background assumed care for the wounded and sick. On rare occasions, women took part in the intellectual work of the partisan groups, such as writing poetry and producing newsletters.6 In extraordinary circumstances — during a siege or when re-locating — women participated fully in hauling loads, standing guard, helping doctors with the wounded, and even wielding weapons when necessary.

Living in the forest for a longer time, forest women discovered previously unknown sensory abilities, ones that previously were not needed. For example, Mihālīna (born 1923) who spent nine years in the forest mentions extraordinary hearing and sight that safeguard her and her companions: “When we relocated, I always had to take the lead. I had excellent hearing and eyesight. Sometimes, when sitting by the fire in the camp, if I began to listen carefully, then everyone noticed, fell silent, and watched me. What was that? Was it chekists or a wolf? One time there were three of us. We were sleeping. I awake — I see the chekists

5 The statistics come from Latvijas Vides, ģeoloģijas un meteoroloģijas centrs (Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Center), accessed July 20, 2013.
6 The Latvian poet Bronislava Mārtuževa (1924–2012), who spent five years in a hide-out under her house, wrote patriotic poems and helped to produce the illegal partisan newspaper “Dzimtene” (Homeland).
passing nearby. I freeze. I don’t move a muscle. The other two are still asleep. I didn’t wake them to avoid making noise. The chekists go away, but you see, even in my sleep, I heard them” (15.09.2011). As Mihalīna learns to master the nuances of sounds and signs, she learns to differentiate among rustling noises and figure out what a particular movement of animals means: “If cranes cry out at night, you know immediately — chekists.”

NARRATING THE ENEMY: INDIRECT MEETING

In the life stories each forest woman, in a greater or lesser extent, address the relationship with chekists. They symbolize the occupying, hostile forces, they are attackers and destroyers of the stable and predictable life rhythm, and freedom. In terms of terminology chekist is a cheka agent, whereas Cheka is an inclusive term for the Soviet national security service and its infrastructure (NKVD, NKGB, MVD, MGB), which operated in the Baltic from 1945 until 1954 and which was responsible for the defense of the communist regime, including its organs of repression, intelligence and counterintelligence. Cheka, as the institution and chekists, its agents, along with other official terms appeared both in official documents and in ordinary speech. The term became outdated after 1954 when the KGB was created. The KGB ceased to exist after the collapse of the USSR in 1991 (Turčinskis 2007, 91f, see also Blūzma et al. 2009, 640).

In life stories forest woman share the chekists usually are depicted as uninvited guests, a brutal, loud, and destructive force whose arrival and presence is signalled by the animals and the forest itself. “They plowed through the forest like tanks,” Brunhilda (born 1926) remembers (29.12.2012). “They shot at us for five hours. Like war,” remembers Hilda (born 1928). “Terrible noise. They had dogs, megaphones” (30.01.2013). Chekists derived their strength and advantage from superior numbers and weapons; they entered the forest as a battlefield with an aim to hunt down and destroy the people. Their image sharply contrasts with the quiet forest to which forest women have been adapted themselves as they strive to blend into the landscape, to remain unseen and unheard, not to disturb or damage the forest surroundings. Camps and bunkers were situated far from inhabited areas, even in places that normally would be considered dangerous and inaccessible, they were camouflaged with branches, topped with sod, covered with dirt. The night time, blizzards and drenching rains were used for relocation. Crossing a dirt road, tracks were swept away using the branches of fir trees. Her nine years long forest period Mihalīna describes as “living among the wolves”, drawing a parallel between forest partisan lifestyle and that of wild wolves. In their life stories, other women too revealed the sense of resemblance between their and animal lifestyle (hiding and being chased), and so does Lidija (1919–2012) who spent almost a decade living in the wild forest, in her forest poetry. The fragment of her poem written on Christmas 1950:

Between the damp walls of the dugout,
Which exhale decay and mould,
We crawl like moles in caves,
And time lacerates the deepest wounds.

[Starp zemnīcas mitrajām sienām,
Kur puvums un pelējums dveš,
Kā kurmīši alā mēs lienam,
Laiks brūces kur dzīlākas pleš.]

The forest and its inhabitants were not a static backdrop, but they were regarded as co-inhabitants in the everyday life. In the stories, contact with the forest creatures is humanized, creating the impression that the people and the animals are equals who amicably share the territory. The animals approach out of curiosity, they come to meet and to visit, they warn, soothe, bid good-bye, and delight. For the women, such trust between the animals and the humans created a spiritual harmony and a sense of belonging to the forest, feelings that narratively culminate in the portrayal of the forest as protector of the persecuted, outlawed forest women. Teenager Regīna and her sister, brother, and two other boys had found shelter in a nearby forest. Startled by a sudden chekist attack, they instinctively began to run. The chekists chased after them and shot at them. Even though they knew the forest very well, in their alarm, they got lost and
cannot find where they had hoped to escape. Getting lost saved them, however, because the woods have been surrounded by the chekists. "It was really fate," Regina (born 1931) concludes (15.06.2012).

Remembering that she alone survived an attack in which more than 500 cheka soldiers attacked a group of twelve partisans, among them four women, Hilda says: "It was a miracle." The fighting had taken place in a sparsely wooded area, where there was really nowhere to hide, and Hilda, scared by the terrific noise of grenades, gunfire, and barking dogs and seeing that her companions, who only moments ago had been alive, were now dead, froze in terror. She did not hide or run until the noise ended; soon afterward, she was arrested. She affirms the miraculous nature of her deliverance by recounting the chekists's own astonishment: "The interrogators themselves, those Russians in Riga, were amazed. Very amazed. They talked among themselves in Russian, saying 'So how did she escape? There was nowhere to hide.'"

Mihalina also looked upon surviving unharmed in the forest for so many years as a miracle. "I encountered the chekists about six times, eye to eye. They shot at me, but I survived. They didn’t hit me. In 1950, they riddled my scarf with bullets, and my coat, too. The sleeves were shot to pieces. Others were shot at and killed, but I survived. How can that be?" she rhetorically asks.

NARRATING THE ENEMY: FACE TO FACE

The imagined or indirectly met chekists narratively embody the destructive, brutal, and merciless power the women fear. Chekists, met in the forest, lack individual identity — they are generalized and turned into an enemy composite without redeeming human features. In the narratives, the image of the chekists changes when face to face contacts are illustrated. It is not based on the opposition: human world (that chekists represent) versus natural world (where forest people belong) anymore, personal and individual qualities of both sides are brought forward instead.

In the narratives, life in the forest ends suddenly and violently — with an attack, a battle, or siege, during which forest people are killed, wounded, or captured. When describing their last days in the forest, the arrests and the direct contact with the chekists, the women more often than before dwell on their personal appearance and the paradoxical incommensurability between them and the authorities — the delicate, long-haired, exhausted, unarmed woman versus the throngs of armed soldiers, full of anger, ready to destroy or rule over the "bandits." Hilda describes herself sarcastically: "A lone dreadful bandit — a young girl with long dark hair." Similarly Leontine (1922) recounts: "I was like a young child, with long, tangled hair, skinny. In nine years [spent in the forest], my hair had grown down to my hips" (06.07.2012). Anna (1923) looked much the same: "I had a braid down to my waist" (01.11.2013). Offensive, abusive, as well as sadistic behaviour brought against forest women by chekists upon the arrest or in jail emphasizes the disproportionality and the power hierarchy between them, narratively it is often expressed in gender terms: as dominance of men over women.

Face to face communication with the chekists allows to distinguish individual personalities among them. Stories about time spent under the chekist control reveal differentiation between the good chekist and the evil chekist. The good chekist is the one who makes some favour to the jailed woman, usually these are small human gestures that have been kept in women’s active memory as they contrast to overall violence and ignorance they experienced during the interrogation and in jail. E.g., Hilda tells that after her arrest she was relocated from her hometown’s militia office to Central prison of Riga. "One of them was soft-hearted," she reminds, "I had a beautiful, long hair. He gave me a little hair brush to brush my hair. He even didn’t take the brush back! He saw that I was a young girl, just over eighteen." The good chekists "do not notice" apparent, though slight, violation of rules, do not verbally or physically humiliate, give a glass of water, or simply express compassion toward the jail. The evil chekist, instead, narratively embodies all demonic traits that were assigned to them telling about indirect communication — he is brutal and merciless, he rarely misses the chance to humiliate the jailed women. "Vinokurov, the chekist from my hometown, ... grabbed me by my ear and flung me against the wall. My head hit the wall. For two days, that’s how he questioned me — pulling me by the ears and hair," Mihalina briefly recounts. To affirm the evil chekists’ cruelty forest women recounts other chekists’ astonishment and hushing up their violence by
others, usually officers of higher rank. “They beat me so severely while their chief, a hefty man, came and ordered them in Russian to stop beating me,” Hilda recounts her capture.

To conclude, a chekist or chekists, lacking in individuality or having it, play a crucial role and is one of the central images that interweave life stories of Latvian women who were forced to flee to the forest to avoid arrest and later persecution by Soviet authorities after WWII. Some of the women haven’t had any encounter with the chekists before entering the forest or living in it, still all of them had experienced a constant fear of them and had lived in dreadful expectations of meeting them. Until today Latvian forest women remember the emotions of direct and indirect communication, verbal and physical contacts with the chekists after the WWII, and the narrated image of the chekist symbolize the sense of fear, despair and destruction the forest women lived in the decades after the war.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Battlefield Memory and the ANZAC Memory.

Ben Morris  
(Australia):

Resumen:  
La tradición ANZAC es una expresión socio-cultural de la historia nacional australiano.  
Elites militares, políticas y sociales se han apropiado de esta tradición para construir una  
mitología nacionalista/militarista de gran comodidad para ellos y para sus propósitos.  
Esta tradición se basa en la visión del mundo de la fuerza australiana de defensa, los  
Retornados y Servicios League (RSL), la Federación de Veteranos de Vietnam y otras  
organizaciones similares, y la política del nacionalismo australiano.

La mitología ANZAC es una crónica permanente que los veteranos que regresan del campo  
de batalla a menudo se abrazaron porque les dio una base de poder continuar en el retorno  
a la vida civil, una razón por su servicio y un sentido de significado. Varios historiadores  
australianos han hecho una observación de que algunos autores australianos han  
intentado colocar el despliegue Vietnam australiano dentro del mito nacional.

Estos autores han influido en el recuerdo de la guerra que resulta en algunos veteranos de  
fundición como voluntarios en la gran tradición de Anzac, es decir, como ciudadanos  
soldados voluntarios para servir a su país en tierras lejanas de la motivación patriótica.  
 Esto refleja el hecho de que la leyenda de Anzac y la tradición excavadora sigue siendo un  
objetivo popular para un veterano para ver su servicio militar.

A menudo, el recuerdo de la memoria del campo de batalla puede ser influida por lo que es  
aceptable en el marco de la ANZAC leyenda. Mientras que los veteranos reiteran  
recuerdos que no se ajustaban a este mito parece haber un deseo subyacente de mantener  
esta tradición

Abstract:  
The ANZAC tradition is a socio-cultural expression of the Australian national story.  
Military, political and social elites have appropriated this tradition to build a  
nationalistic/militaristic mythology of great convenience to themselves and their purposes.  
This tradition is based on the world view of the Australian defence force, the Returned and  
Services League (RSL), the Vietnam Veterans Federation and similar organisations, and the  
politics of Australian nationalism.

The ANZAC mythology is an ongoing chronicle that veterans often embraced when  
returning from the battlefield because it gave them a continuing power base on return to  
civilian life, a reason for their service and a sense of meaning. A number of Australian  
historians have made an observation that some Australian authors have attempted to place  
the Australian Vietnam deployment within the national myth.

These authors have influenced the remembrance of the war resulting in some veterans  
casting themselves as volunteers in the grand tradition of Anzac, that is, as citizen soldiers  
volunteering to serve their country in distant lands out of patriotic motivation. This reflects  
the fact that the Anzac legend and the digger tradition remains a popular lens for a veteran  
to view his or her military service.

Often the recalling of battlefield memory can be influenced by what is acceptable within the  
frame of the ANZAC Legend. While veterans reiterate memories that did not accord with  
this myth there seems to be an underlying desire to uphold this tradition.
MYTHS AND LEGENDS
Most nations weave myths and legends around their warriors. Central to Australian military history is the ANZAC legend or ‘myth’ (Dennis, Grey et al. 2008 37-42, Ross c1985 11,14). ANZAC is derived from the words Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (Dennis, Grey et al. 2008 32, Grey 2008 92) and was first used when Australia and New Zealand troops were sent to support Great Britain in World War I 1914-1918. This legend describes fearless young people defending their country in faraway lands against evil adversaries and then returning home to live out their lives unscathed by their battlefield experiences (Tyquin 2006 2).

Many events and experiences that do not fit these legends are ignored or sanitised in the official military histories. Viewed through a national mythological lens (Thomson 1994 151, Tyquin 2006 2) they fail to meet the pre-conceived standard. Veterans’ memories can challenge these myths (Tyquin 2006 2). Those who were there and experienced the combat have recollections that differ from what has become the ‘official history’. This lack of fit can result in some veterans ‘compensation being delayed or refused as their stories do not fit with the official histories.

The Vietnam War provides a compelling example of the power of myth in Australian popular culture, and of the triumph of popular cultural images – many of them American (Grey and Doyle 1992 xii-xiii) – over the memory of actual events. If truth is the first casualty of war, then remembering can veil accurate understanding of past events. The Vietnam War and the use of conscripts on active duty overseas was the most divisive commitment in a generation. It polarised sections of the Australian community in a manner not seen since World War I and the conscription debates of 1916–17 (Thomson 1994 47, 138, Caulfield 2007 101, 114-18).

THE SOURCE
I interviewed a group of soldiers from the Second Battalion Royal Australian Regiment who were on operational service from May 1967 to May 1968. My work exposes the official records to the voice of the soldiers and examines the difference between the soldiers’ stories and the official version whether conscientiously or not has been crafted by politicians and senior military officers to promote the ANZAC Legend. Australian military history relies on Commanders’ Diaries (AWM 2014), but the histories that emerge from those diaries often neglect the rank and file soldier as a primary source of information. My research, based on oral histories, brings material into the debate which adds extra detail to the official version of events, in some places conflicting with the soldiers’ narratives. The skeleton of the official records is not in dispute, but some of the detail is either wrongly reported, or left off the record. The official histories use a process of selection, simplification and generalisation to portray a complex situation to fit their view. The Commander’s Diary is like a ship’s log providing basic information that the veterans’ narratives enhance(AWM 2014).

THE ANZAC LEGEND
Much of the Australian literature on the Vietnam War follows the Australian military history template which was created during the First World War by the official war correspondent Charles Edward Woodrow Bean (Kent 1985 378-390, Thomson 1994 54-55, 233, 236-37). Paul Thompson in The Voice of History (Thompson 1988 1), claims that all history depends ultimately upon its social purpose. The purpose of Australian Military history is to promote the ANZAC story. After each war, the military hierarchy and the veterans have added to the legend, and Rintoul argues that many of the books written about the Vietnam War follow Bean’s model (Rintoul 1987 13, 182, Thomson 1994 53-54, 78).

Bean’s image is of a brave bronze patriotic bushman who marched off to war, fought courageously, (whether the war was won or lost), and returned home to a hero’s welcome. Caulfield claims that the Vietnam veterans he interviewed expected to follow the Bean’s template (Caulfield 2007 117, 119,133). Bean’s ANZAC lived happily ever afterwards and just got on with his life; he lives on in the minds of the politicians, senior officers, military historians and the public. In reality, many Vietnam Veterans were
unable to follow the Bean model. In Inventing ANZAC, Graham Seal places the Vietnam Veteran within the ANZAC tradition; Alistair Thomson makes a similar comment in ANZAC Memories (Thomson 1994 252). The overall view of the Vietnam Veteran as part of the ANZAC legend pervades most books about Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War.

**ANZAC AND THE VIETNAM WAR**


Historians such as Gammage, White, Thomson, Seal, Fewster, Lake, Reynolds, Stockings, Crotty and Larsson, (Gammage 1975, White 1981, Thomson 1994, Seal 2004, Fewster 2007, Lake, Reynolds et al. 2010, Stockings 2010, Crotty and Larsson c2010) have probed the ANZAC tradition to reveal how important the image of the ANZAC has been in shaping a national identity. As Thomson put it:

*The Australian soldier of the legend was enterprising and independent, loyal to his mates and to his country, bold in battle, but cheerfully undisciplined out of the line and contemptuous of military etiquette and the British officer class. The Australian army suited his egalitarian nature: relations between officers and other ranks were friendly and respectful, and any man with ability could gain promotion. According to the legend these qualities, fostered in the Australian bush, discovered and immortalised in war, typified Australians and Australian society, a frontier land of equal opportunity in which enterprising people could make good. This was the nation that 'came of age' at Gallipoli.*

(Thomson 1994 24-25)

According to Mandle (Mandle 1978 3-23), the ANZAC has come down in the popular imagination as ‘tough and inventive, loyal to ... mates beyond the call of duty, a bit undisciplined (but only in non-essentials), chivalrous, gallant, sardonic’. For Stockings (Stockings 2010 86-112), ANZAC represented, ‘a distinct collection of values, both real and imagined. It was centred on success, not defeat. If someone failed at Gallipoli, it was not the Australians – therefore it must have been the incompetent, aristocratic British generals they were forced to serve under’ (Stockings 2010 87). In the case of the Vietnam War, the allegedly arrogant and culturally insensitive American Generals (McNeill and Ekins 2003 158) with no experience of jungle warfare are the cause of failure rather than the ‘incompetent, aristocratic British’.

**BUILDING A LEGEND**

Jane Ross writes that a ‘myth is a legend that is built up as an ideal-type’(Ross c1985 12-13), created out of what the mythmakers believe to be the most important part of the legend (Merriam-Webster 2014). Participants often want to tell their story in a way that positions their own experience within this ANZAC tradition. Australian soldiers returning from the battlefield often embraced the ANZAC legend because it offered membership of an exclusive club upon their return to civilian life, providing a reason for their service and a sense of meaning (Thomson 1994 121).

Seal describes ‘myth’ as a belief-structure, which is understood and embedded in a society and its culture (Seal 2004 3-8). Australians have an image of their soldiers that emphasises their military proficiency and their contempt for pompous officers and rigid discipline. This myth can be ‘true’, or appearing to be so, and ‘false’, in the sense that it hides, disguises or distorts, ignores or trivialises aspects of the nation’s experience. Both Ross and Seal in their explanation and use of the word ‘myth’ provide a workable explanation of the ANZAC Legend.

Seal sees the ANZAC legend as a mixture of two traditions: the Digger tradition and the ANZAC tradition. Seal argues that ANZAC legend is an ongoing interaction between these two traditions. They can exist in agreement, in conflict and, within different settings, and in an uneasy relationship. In Vietnam, Australian
soldiers were mostly referred to as ‘diggers’, which is the ANZAC reference adopted from the Victorian gold rush days for the serving soldiers. While ‘ANZAC’ was the correct, approved and endorsed term, the word ‘digger’ suggested the mischievous, unconventional, non-establishment ordinary soldiers who did the dirty work of war.

Australian military history privileges the ANZAC and digger legends. The brave ANZAC and the larrikin digger moulded on the battlefield into model soldiers who did not, for example, accidentally shoot civilians. This legend tends not to dwell on the unpleasant side of war – for example: stories of cowardice, the accidental killing of civilians, and the sad decline of many veterans after their return home. Military legends function to provide meaning, direction and order, and to cover up the unpleasant bits of warfare. Information that does not fit with these legends is often left out of the official history. The unit histories of the Australian military experience in Vietnam are mostly written within the digger and ANZAC traditions.

PROTECTING THE MYTH
Alistair Thomson, in ANZAC Memories Living with the Legend and Michael Tyquin, in Madness in the Military, both look at the battle over the ANZAC legend after the First World War. Both authors write about Charles Bean and others airbrushing the diggers’ image, and are concerned that those parts of the history that do not fit the publicly acceptable image are ignored or hidden. In Thomson’s major Australian work, ANZAC Memories, Living with the Legend he provides an insight into the memories of the original ANZACs. Although focused on World War I, this work gives a serious academic and valuable guide to veterans’ oral histories. In his study he relates how one veteran, Percy Bird, had a set speech that followed the dictates of the ANZAC Legend and situated his story within what he saw as the parameters of the Legend. It was hard for Thomson to get inside the façade that Bird had built. Michael Tyquin states that the senior officers and the historians saw mental illness as a weakness that threatened the image of the tough bronzed ANZAC that Bean, the editor of First World War Official History, and his acolytes, had tried hard to create. Tyquin’s book tells a harrowing tale, one of many that the legend hides.

ORAL HISTORIES OF AUSTRALIANS IN THE VIETNAM WAR
There are literally dozens of academic, official and popular histories of Vietnam, where fact and fiction have become intermingled. As Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle state, war and myth go hand in hand [Grey and Doyle 1992 ix - xi]. Unfortunately the purveyors of myths make it difficult for historians to accept veterans’ oral histories. In their book, Vietnam, War, Myth and Memory: Comparative Perspectives on Australia’s War in Vietnam [Grey and Doyle 1992], they postulate that the history of the Vietnam War is loaded with myth, as much as previous more acceptable wars [Grey and Doyle 1992 ix-x]. Many of the existing Vietnam histories have been written under the influence of the ‘ANZAC legend” and this has skewed Australian Military history. On the American scene, Patrick Hagopian has described the falsehoods and inventions that have been found in Mark Baker’s Nam, Wallace Terry’s Bloods, and Al Santoli’s Everything We Had. [Santoli 1981, Baker 1982, Hagopian 2000 569, Terry c1984]. In the Australian literature Stuart Rintoul’s Ashes of Vietnam, and a number of other narrators, have recounted stories that defy reality [Rintoul 1987 118].

Gerard Windsor in his book All Day Long, The Noise of Battle, examines the issue of veteran’s memory and its veracity [Windsor 2011 20, 24-5]. Both Thompson and Portelli suggest that there must be internal consistency, and oral history narratives need to be tested against other sources [Thompson 1988 8, 9, 31-2, 118-36, 170-72, 273, Portelli 1997 24, 193, Portelli 2007 16, 70, Perks and Thomson 2009 36, 41]. During my research, the soldiers’ narratives were checked against the Commander’s Diary (ATF 1967, ATF 1967, Defence 1967).

Works particularly examining the Australian soldier include Gary McKay’s oral history work, Fragments of Vietnam, (McKay 1992) which was republished as Beans Bullets and Bandages (McKay 1999), and his other oral histories Delta Four (McKay 1996) and Going Back (McKay 2007), with ABC journalist Stuart Rintoul’s Ashes of Vietnam, and TV producer Michael Caulfield’s book, The Vietnam Years From the Jungle.
to the Australian Suburbs, look at the Australian Vietnam veterans’ views of war. These authors, except for Gary McKay, were not participants in the war. McKay, who had served in Vietnam as a platoon commander, saw not only the battlefield, but also experienced the casualty evacuation system, when he was wounded in the last Australian battle of the war. Rintoul and Caulfield are journalists turned authors like Baker and Wallace, whose works Nam and Bloods are reviewed by Portelli in The Battle of Valle Giulia. All these Australian writers touch on the ANZAC theme in various ways. All show some reverence to the ANZAC, although Rintoul and Caulfield brings out the anger that is generated in some veterans with the celebration of ANZAC Day (Rintoul 1987 216, 227, Caulfield 2007 264, 381, 470-71).

GOOD TALES VERSUS REAL NARRATIVES
What seem to be new about the popular mythology surrounding Vietnam (in terms of the ANZAC Legend), are the embellished tales of alleged atrocities and war crimes. One of the most common atrocity stories from the Vietnam War revolves around the throwing of Vietnamese out of helicopters. The story goes right back to the start of the war and is repeated in a number of books including Bloods (Terry c1984 27, 254) Ashes of Vietnam (Rintoul 1987 130, 168) and Portelli’s chapter ‘As Though It Was A Story’ (Portelli 1997 161-79). These narrators state that enemy soldiers were thrown out of helicopters to encourage other captured enemy soldiers to talk. Yet as Kulik in War Stories points out, helicopters were difficult places in which to conduct interrogations (Kulik 2009 138). In reality, every enemy soldier represented an excellent source of intelligence and wasting them by dropping them out of a helicopter does not make sense. This myth is told to demonstrate power and control by the Americans over the Vietnamese, or perhaps to shock the audience or both. Overall it must be kept in mind that in his introduction to Nam, Baker (Baker 1982) acknowledges that there are some generalisations and fantasy, and maybe even outright lies, among the stories he had collected. As Kulik and Burkett asked in their works, why did these authors fail to check their narrators’ accounts?

In the Australian service history, this ‘enemy thrown out of helicopters’ story can be traced back to 1965, when the First Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment was part of the American 173rd Airborne Brigade. In the obituary of Chaplain Gerry Cudamore, Alan Ramsay (Ramsay 2004) wrote about how the padre had heard this story from the soldiers and was concerned about its authenticity. Ramsay became one of Australia’s leading political reporters and he never wrote a story that suggested that Cudamore’s story had any veracity. This myth is also challenged in the AWM’s magazine Wartime by Lex McAulay (McAulay 2002). McAulay has written several books on Australia’s involvement in Vietnam.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE ANZAC LEGEND
Australian historians have explored the dark side of the ANZAC legend, although there is not the obsession with atrocities that evident in American literature and popular culture. Burstall, Ham, Caulfield and McNeil, in the official history To Long Tan, all record that two live enemy casualties were shot dead after the Battle of Long Tan; participant Sergeant Bob Buick confirms this (Buick 2000, Buick and McKay 2006) and admits to being the executioner. Medical opinion then and now, suggests that if an enemy casualty had survived the night on the battlefield, no matter how terrible their individual injuries might appear, they would have responded to medical treatment (Bain 2013). While there is no doubt that war crimes occurred, they were not a ‘normal’ part of how Australia fought the Vietnam War, and this was not developed as a theme in Australian Military History, as it (Burkett and Whiteley 1998, Kulik, 182-86) seems to have been in American Military History.

Partly as a consequence of My Lai (Edwards 1997 245-246) journalists and writers of popular histories are fascinated by alleged war crimes, atrocities and military cover-ups. In the Australian literature, the case against the Australian soldier is made by Rintoul in Ashes of Vietnam. Rintoul suggests that atrocities were very much part of the Australian Vietnam experience; about one quarter of his oral history narrators mention them. Rintoul claims that Australian soldiers routinely committed atrocities involving the killing of unarmed civilians, particularly women and children, raping of women, and failure to observe the Geneva Conventions on the handling of prisoners of war, together with what might be described as lesser crimes involving the mishandling of dead bodies. Rintoul does not make it easy to check his sources; those that
spoke of atrocities are identifiable only by their Christian name, making any form of verification impossible.

Politicians, senior officers, and the RSL often pretend that atrocities do not happen because they should not happen. Even when evidence is available, it tends to be ignored rather than examined. The custodians of the ANZAC legend were furious when a Vietnamese officer, Colonel Trung (Maddock 1991 151), wrote about alleged Australian atrocities. Caulfield and Ham (Caulfield 2007 203, Ham 2007 543) make the claim that Australian soldiers did not commit atrocities during the Vietnam War, but this statement is hard to believe in the light of their acknowledgment of the Long Tan mercy killings (Caulfield 2007 319, Ham 2007 244). Further they write about burying of Vietnamese dead where the niceties of normal Christian burial were forgotten, and they claim that small bodies were folded into even smaller graves (Caulfield 2007 202, Ham 2007 244). Caulfield writes about civilian deaths which resulted from a decision made by men who later cannot explain, or have forgotten the incident (Caulfield 2007 204). He concludes that these actions caused suffering for those veterans long after their active service was completed. Paul Ham devotes a fair amount of space to the subject of enemy atrocities, but does not mention Australian atrocities (Ham 2007 357-58, 410-11, 495, 519-20).

Maddock (Maddock 1991 158-59) attempts a balanced conclusion. Australian soldiers did expose corpses in the market places of the villages Hoa Long and Xuyen Moc. It is highly unlikely, in Maddock’s opinion that they took heads or livers, but he explains that it is easy to see how a belief about atrocities could arise. Arbitrary arrests and random killings could be logical interpretations by the Vietnamese, that the Australians saw in a quite a different light. Because vicious fighting sometimes occurred in villages, it is almost certain that some genuine non-combatants got killed, as happened in the Battle of Binh Ba. What one side regretted as unintended civilian casualties, might well be seen less charitably by the other as a slaughter of the innocent.

It almost goes without saying that an important issue from the veteran’s perspective is distinguishing between the deliberate killing of civilians or prisoners, from ‘friendly fire’, or misspoken or misunderstood orders, which obviously fall into the collateral damage category. It is clear that the American and Australian tactics of night-time ambushes and free-fire zones made it highly likely that non-combatants would end up in harm’s way. In my research, it has become obvious that my platoon was not the only group of Australian soldiers that had killed civilians. O’Brien’s history of Seventh Battalion relates two such incidents. Rintoul reports a platoon commander placing hand grenades into the vegetable baskets of dead civilians so he could classify them as enemy.

The Intersection of the Military Histories and the Oral histories

The ANZAC theme frequently arose amongst the veterans that I interviewed. They all saw themselves as ANZACs. They all want to be in the legend. Discussing the Battalion’s departure from Brisbane, one veteran remembers as follows:

.... because up until then we’d always had this drilled into us, this great ANZAC tradition, we were the keepers of the ANZAC tradition and had to uphold that great tradition (Gordon 2007).

This soldier spent considerable time talking about his relatives who had served the nation. As Portelli indicates this narrator appeared to be establishing his place in history, it is just that he took many words and some time to do it. When questioned about the ANZAC tradition he gave details of his relatives who had served.

He tells how in his training, the conscripts were reminded in both recruit and infantry corps that they were the keepers of the ANZAC tradition:
The ANZAC tradition and that is why after having more or less have it rammed down our neck, ‘You are the keepers of the ANZAC tradition,’ (Gordon 2007).

TRADITION OF AIRBRUSHING

It was not only the official and popular histories that were sanitised for the Vietnam War history. Prior to providing an oral history, one of my narrators wrote a chapter in a collection of soldiers’ stories (Parry 2011 38). In this book, my narrator only spoke about two incidents, which fit the parameters of the ANZAC Legend, and of what was acceptable to the custodians of the legend. In our interview he refused to talk about the Bamboo Pickers’ incident. It was one of those subjects that were carefully avoided. When asked by the interviewer to speak about the Bamboo Pickers’ incident, he refused, indicated that he remembered the incident but he did not wish to discuss it.

It was as simple as that: true ANZACs do not shoot civilians; therefore such incidents are not spoken about. After a break, I encouraged him to comment about the incident, and he did not describe the incident but he explained why he was not going to talk about it.

The narrator claims that the incident does not affect him, but refuses to discuss it because he believes it had affected the interviewer. He ignores the fact that the interviewer had asked the questions, and even after a discussion with the recorder turned off, he still refuses to discuss details of the incident, but is prepared to relate his reasons for failing to comment on the incident. The fact that he kept referring to me in the third person also indicates that he was affected to some extent by the subject of the ambush.

My narrators tended to concentrate on two issues. These were an incident involving a M16 mine, and a booby trapped artillery shell or claymore mine attack on the platoon (RAR 1967 Serials 1304, 1307, 1312, 1529-1531). These incidents were acceptable to the custodians of the legend. Other incidents which do not fully fit the parameters that are legend worthy tended to be passed over in the narratives. These were the subjects where I had to ask questions to get the soldiers to talk. These were particularly painful incidents.

When Paul Ham’s book Vietnam: the Australian War appeared in the bookshops, one of my platoon rang me saying that the author had got the story of the mine incident wrong (Ham 2007 338). The soldier wanted me to get the error corrected.

A check of the Official History showed the same error as the one in the book (McNeill and Ekins 2003 264). Research produced two medical documents (Blomley 1967, Miller 1967) showing that while the soldier had massive injuries to his body, the legs were still attached, and the medical authority indicated that the wounds were inflicted by a M16 mine. Here is a story which features greatly in the minds of the soldiers, yet the story in the history books is short and incorrect in a material fact. The mine incident involved an M16 mine, which may have been lifted from our own minefield. The discussion on the ethics and wisdom of the laying of this minefield is ongoing, and has been the subject of a book and many articles. It is still a big issue amongst veterans forty years later.

Everyone who was present was affected by the incident, and they all tell their part in moving the wounded man from the danger area to the helicopter landing zone. A number of the men cried at various times when talking about this particular incident. The soldier was a replacement from the reinforcement unit, and had come to the Battalion three months after it had arrived in Vietnam. He had not been involved in the work-up exercises, or the initial shake-down operations in country. He was a non-drinker, and thus did not partake in the usual activities in the soldier’s canteen. However, he was always available for the first stint on sentry duty, so the others could go and have a drink after returning from operations. As one member described him, he was a gentleman (Heath 2004), but in some ways he was the antithesis of an ANZAC digger. He didn’t drink, he didn’t swear and he was amenable to authority. He was a sharp contrast to the rest the platoon. Yet in their narratives, they show a very high level of respect for him, and each tells a different part of the process in their attending to and moving him to the medical evacuation
helicopter pick-up point. Everyone knew he wasn't going to survive the wounds that had been inflicted by the mine. The whole platoon was in shock over the extent of his injuries and his pain. Their stories vary from the man being very stoic and quiet and not really wanting to talk to anyone, to one soldier who claimed he was screaming out loud (Heath 2004, Forshey 2007, Gordon 2007, Horne 2007, Walker 2007). The soldier may have been screaming out loud in that particular narrator's mind, but for the rest, including myself, the man was extremely stoic, heroic and quiet. He behaved how every soldier would hope they would in that condition. He displayed courage like a true ANZAC.

The second incident mentioned by all who were present was the explosion of a device detonated by remote control or booby trap, and the death of two members [RAR 1967 Serial 1529 - 31, 1534, 1537, 1539 - 41, 1549, 1551. 1555]. The behaviour and the incident fitted into the legend requirements.

The official and battalion histories show some deaths as “killed in action” (KIA), whereas examination of the Commander’s Diary shows some were killed by our own fire, also inexplicably known as “Friendly Fire”. Fitted into this category was the death of Joe Fewquandie [ATF 1967 serials 560, 562, 598, 609]. The narrators didn’t talk about this incident because it reflected badly on the company. What the narrators and I did not know, was that the blame for the incident had been placed on the company commander (ATF 1967), but this information was only discovered when searching for other documents. Fewquandie’s death was covered up; no information was given to the persons hurt the most by the incident. The persons involved were not debriefed or provided with a mental health consultation. The person responsible was not disciplined [ATF 1967 5 Dec 67]. This person went on to receive an award for gallantry in the following month when he should have been dismissed from his position.

Another incident raised by the narrators completely surprised me. It concerned what I believed was an attempted suicide by one member of the platoon, on the night after we had killed four civilians. This soldier, who was a heavy drinker, was believed to have attempted suicide because of all his problems. However, the fifth narrator (“Joe” 2007), stated that this soldier was on his way to kill four other members of the platoon, when he tripped and one of the grenades went off, while the second grenade failed to detonate. The soldier carrying the grenades lost half a hand and half an arm. There was no mention of this particular incident in the 2 RAR Commander’s Diary, although it does get a mention in the Task Force Commander’s Diary (ATF 1967 Serials 3268, 3269, 3275). It seems as though the Battalion wished to ignore the incident. In spite of extensive searches, any investigation of this accident could not be found. It does not reflect well on the legend, where all were happy soldiers on the battlefield, fighting the good fight, and nothing ever went wrong. Only after one of the narrators told me the facts, was I able to ask the right questions, and a number of others (“Atticus” 2007, “Diego” 2007, “Juan” 2008, “Bart” 2009, Langham 2009) confirmed that this soldier was intent on homicide, and not suicide. If he had been successful that night, it would have doubled the number of fragging deaths (Caulfield 2007 210) within the Australian Task Force history for the 10 years of the war. This incident suggests that while the veterans did not appreciate nor like the soldier involved, their view of mateship meant that they had misled the investigating officer, or so it would appear. So until the actual investigation report can be found, this incident remains an unsolved mystery.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of my narrators transcripts suggest that the veterans quite easily talk about things in a way that increases their statue, or increases the reputation of the armed forces. Those things that are unpalatable tend to be unmentionable. Bean’s ANZAC legend lies behind much of Australian Military history, including the history of the Vietnam War. Compared to the memories of my narrators, Bean’s brave bronzed ANZAC is only two dimensional.
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Les, lugar de paso y acogida de refugiados judíos durante la II Guerra Mundial

Josep Calvet Bellera and Mireia Boya Busquet (Spain):

Resumen: Esta comunicación presenta los primeros resultados de una investigación que combina la consulta de archivos documentales con la identificación de testimonios orales y la realización de entrevistas a los mismos. El objetivo es recuperar la memoria ligada al paso de evadidos judíos por el Valle de Arán entre 1939 y 1945, especialmente en el pueblo de Les, dónde se situaba la aduana. Ambas metodologías se manifiestan complementarias y necesarias para conformar el relato histórico detallado de los hechos y entender el porqué de las acciones de los protagonistas locales en un momento en el que la memoria histórica colectiva está siendo rescatada.

Abstract: This paper presents the first results of an investigation that combines consultation documentary archives with the identification of oral testimonies and conducting interviews. The objective is to recover the memory linked to the passage of Jewish escapees by the Aran Valley between 1939 and 1945, especially in the village of Les, where the customs office was located. Both approaches are complementary and necessary to form the detailed historical story of the facts and understand the actions of local actors, at a time when the collective historical memory is being rescued.
PRESENTACIÓN: CONTEXTO HISTÓRICO Y GEOGRÁFICO.
Durante los años de la Segunda Guerra Mundial (1939-1945) miles de personas utilizaron los pasos fronterizos de los Pirineos para huir de la Europa en guerra hacia la Península Ibérica. Desde septiembre de 1939 hasta agosto de 1944 llegaron a España, ya sea clandestinamente o con la documentación en regla, alrededor de 80.000 refugiados. Todos ellos pueden ser agrupados en tres grandes grupos: por un lado, los franceses que pretendían unirse al ejército que el general De Gaulle organizaba en el norte de África y, a partir de la primavera de 1943, huir del Servicio de Trabajo Obligatorio (STO) que obligaba a los jóvenes en edad militar a trabajar para la industria de guerra alemana. Un segundo grupo lo formaban los pilotos aliados, que después de ser abatidos en el frente de batalla querían regresar a Inglaterra para reincorporarse a los combates. Finalmente, encontramos a los judíos que huían de la persecución que los nazis habían emprendido contra ellos, en muchos casos desde 1933, y del Holocausto, con la intención de establecerse en un país lejos de Europa. Para la mayoría de los judíos que no consiguieron huir su destino más probable acabó siendo los campos de exterminio. Suiza, España y Portugal fueron los únicos países “libres” donde podían desplazarse. Se trataba de familias originarias de países que habían sido ocupados por el ejército del Eje. Asimismo, muchos judíos residentes en Polonia, Holanda, Bélgica, Alemania, Austria, Luxemburgo, etc. se habían refugiado en Francia en 1939 o 1940 aunque otros lo habían hecho con anterioridad coincidiendo con la llegada al poder de Hitler y tras la promulgación de sus primeras leyes raciales.

Los pueblos fronterizos, especialmente aquellos donde se ubicaba una aduana, fueron testimonio del paso de estos evadidos que afluyan, en muchos casos después de largas e intensas jornadas caminando por itinerarios transfronterizos, generalmente mal equipados y permanentemente perseguidos. Presos del temor y el cansancio, llegaban a España cruzando la que iba a ser la penúltima frontera en su camino hacia la libertad.

La localidad de Les, objeto de la presente investigación, está situada estratégicamente en la cara norte de los Pirineos, a poco más de cinco quilómetros de la frontera, constituyendo la puerta de entrada natural al Valles de Arán desde el departamento francés de Haute-Garonne. Esta vía de acceso cuenta con un puesto fronterizo (aduana) situado en el paso internacional de Pont de Rei por lo que secularmente ha sido un lugar de entrada habilitada para vehículos y personas. Además, a través de diferentes rutas de montaña, llegan a la población caminos que atraviesan los Pirineos desde los departamentos de Haute-Garonne y Pyrénées-Atlantiques.

Esta proximidad y la configuración geográfica de la zona ha facilitado el contacto permanente de sus habitantes con Francia, los intercambios comerciales, culturales, familiares, los desplazamientos de todo tipo, y el refugio en uno u otro país en épocas de enfrentamientos bélicos, tal como sucedió durante la Primera Guerra Mundial, la Guerra Civil española y la Segunda Guerra Mundial. En este último episodio histórico, los habitantes de Les vieron como centenares de judíos que huían de la barbarie nazi llegaban a la localidad. La gran mayoría de las casas de la época les acogieron, otros vecinos les ayudaron a cruzar las montañas y refugiarse en el pueblo para partir hacia Barcelona o Madrid desde donde proseguir con su evasión.

A pesar de que tanto en Francia como en otros países se han publicado numerosos estudios globales, monografías y relatos de memorias sobre esta temática, en España las investigaciones son escasas y

1 Josep Calvet, Las montañas de la libertad, Madrid, Alianza editorial, 2010.
todavía quedan ciertos aspectos por desarrollar\textsuperscript{3}. En este contexto se enmarca el proyecto del que aquí se presentan las primeras conclusiones y que se ha articulado en base a dos objetivos, dar a conocer cuál fue el protagonismo del pueblo de Les durante este periodo y, paralelamente, reconstruir la trayectoria de los judíos que llegaron al Valle de Arán desde que abandonaron sus países de residencia incluyendo las vicisitudes que sufrieron durante su huida. Se ha pretendido rescatar la historia de estos refugiados judíos, identificarlos, conocer las circunstancias de su evasión y cómo rehicieron sus vidas. Igualmente, se ha incidido en recopilar los relatos de los protagonistas locales así como las circunstancias que motivaron sus acciones altruistas e interpretar las relaciones e intercambio de conocimientos que se produjeron entre los evadidos y la población local.

Esta comunicación se enmarca en un estudio que sigue en curso y que combina la investigación archivística con las fuentes orales con el objetivo de recuperar la memoria ligada al paso de evadidos judíos por el Valle de Arán.

\textbf{METODOLOGÍA: FUENTES DOCUMENTALES Y ORALES}

\textbf{Luces y sombras de los archivos españoles}
La investigación se ha centrado en los archivos españoles, tanto en los municipales como en los de ámbito provincial, pero también en los de los organismos y ministerios que tuvieron protagonismo en la acogida y tratamiento de estos refugiados. El resultado es poco alentador debido a un cúmulo de circunstancias que afectan a la mayoría de estudios que se pretenden acometer sobre el periodo histórico del primer franquismo.

Inexistente cualquier referencia en la documentación que se conserva del Ayuntamiento de Les, actualmente depositada en el Archiu Generau d’Aran, la siguiente instancia ofrece unos resultados desiguales. A pesar de que el Gobernador Civil de la provincia era sobre quien recaían las competencias de orden público y, en consecuencia, resolvía todo lo relacionado con el paso clandestino de fronteras, la documentación que puede consultarse en el Arxiu Històric de Lleida, donde fueron transferidos los fondos históricos del Gobierno Civil, no permite un estudio sistemático de los refugiados. Al contrario de lo que sucede en Girona, donde se conservaron los expedientes personales de los detenidos, que posteriormente han sido inventariados, clasificados y digitalizados, en Lleida tan sólo podemos consultar unos pocos legajos. Teniendo en cuenta que se detuvieron a varios miles de evadidos, cabe pensar que no se instruyeron más expedientes o, que la mayoría de los mismos nunca llegaron al archivo.

La situación todavía es más compleja cuando pretendemos acudir a instancias superiores. Los tres ministerios que tuvieron relación con el tratamiento de los refugiados que afluien a los Pirineos presentan grandes dificultades para acceder a sus respectivos fondos documentales. La documentación conservada hasta hace unos meses en el Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores ha sido transferida al Archivo General de la Administración y actualmente no está consultable debido a que ha pasado a ser catalogada como reservada. Lo mismo ocurre con los documentos generados por el Ministerio del Ejército y depositados en el Archivo General Militar de Ávila, incluidos los del Alto Estado Mayor\textsuperscript{4}, que permanecen fuera del alcance de los historiadores bajo la Ley de Secretos Oficiales promulgada en el lejano 1968. Finalmente, tampoco se puede acceder a la documentación de la antigua Dirección General de Seguridad, en la época bajo la estructura del Ministerio de la Gobernación, actualmente Ministerio del Interior.

Por todo ello, toma un mayor interés, si cabe, la aportación de las fuentes orales para entender los mecanismos de entrada en España, el funcionamiento de los cuerpos policiales que vigilaban la frontera, el papel de los vecinos del pueblo y la organización y las rutas de salida del Valle de Arán.


\textsuperscript{4} Servicio de información y espionaje del Ejército español.
La memoria oral de los protagonistas

El trabajo sobre la memoria oral de los protagonistas se centra en dos grupos, los evadidos que cruzaron de Francia a España por alguna de las rutas clandestinas que llegan a Les, y los propios habitantes del pueblo.

Para reconstruir las historias personales de los evadidos se ha partido de diferentes listados localizados en archivos. El registro de prisioneros de la cárcel de Sort, donde eran trasladados en primera instancia los detenidos en el Valle de Arán de camino a la cárcel de Lleida, ha permitido rescatar algunos nombres a pesar que no en todos los casos se ha conseguido conocer el punto fronterizo exacto donde fueron detenidos. Los expedientes de los internados en el campo de concentración de Miranda de Ebro han facilitado más nombres y detalles pues allí los detenidos eran interrogados por el lugar por donde habían cruzado los Pirineos⁵. A pesar de ello, no todos los expedientes incluyen el interrogatorio ni todos los detenidos pasaron por el campo burgalés. Finalmente, la información quizás más completa procede de los pocos expedientes conservados en los fondos del Negociado de Orden Público del Gobierno Civil de Lleida.

En muchos casos, los años transcurridos han imposibilitado la localización de los protagonistas para poder reconstruir su evasión y registrar su historia de vida. Aun así, el hecho de que en un determinado momento fueran muchas las familias judías las que decidieran emprender la huida hacia España, ha posibilitado contactar con algunos de los entonces niños de corta edad que cruzaron por este punto fronterizo. Este fue el caso de la familia Bielinsky, cuya historia se relata de manera resumida más adelante.

Las investigaciones centradas en los habitantes de Les y otros pueblos cercanos, todos ellos en el Valle de Arán, nos ofrecen detalles de la llegada de los refugiados, los lugares de acogida y el rol de algunos de los vecinos, funcionarios y militares que en esa época vivían en la zona. Cabe destacar que este tipo de informaciones difícilmente pueden obtenerse mediante la investigación documental, pues la mayoría de ellas no se registraban en los documentos escritos en esa época.

Se han realizado un total de 38 entrevistas en los pueblos de Les, Bossòst y Vielha, de las que 18 ofrecen testimonios directos del paso de judíos. Los entrevistados mayoritariamente son hombres y mujeres nacidos antes de 1933, aunque también se ha registrado algún testimonio más joven pero que ofrecía información directa de familiares y era interesante para los objetivos de la investigación. Se ha elegido esta edad por considerar que es la mínima para tener recuerdos claros de los hechos acontecidos entre 1939 y 1945.

Metodológicamente, se ha optado por entrevistas en profundidad semi-estructuradas, algunas divididas en varias sesiones, todas ellas grabadas en formato video HD. El análisis fenomenológico del contenido de las historias de vida permitirá poner de manifiesto, más allá del relato histórico de los hechos, cómo los testimonios enfocan la época histórica que les tocó vivir; también nos permite poder pasar del relato histórico clásico del “así sucedió” al que incorpora el testimonio de los protagonistas y espectadores, en el que se narra el “así recordamos como sucedió”.

Entre los testimonios locales entrevistados encontramos pasadores, policías, propietarios de casas donde se acogía a refugiados en los pueblos y en los refugios de montaña y simples espectadores de todo lo que allí sucedió durante estos años.

EL RELATO DEL PASO DE REFUGIADOS JUDÍOS

Según el profesor de la Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalén Haim Avni (1982), unos 37.500 judíos afluyen a España en el periodo comprendido entre 1939 y 1944 huyendo de la barbarie nazi. Bernd Rother (2005)⁵

⁵ Pueden consultarse en el Archivo General Militar de Guadalajara.
sitúa la cifra en 23.000⁶. Por su parte, Josep Calvet [2010], cuya investigación se encuentra en proceso de ser completada, habla de entre 15.000 y 20.000.

Durante el año 1939, los refugiados judíos que llegan a la frontera con la documentación requerida por las autoridades españolas (pasaporte, visado de salida de Francia, de tránsito por España, de entrada en el país de destino y los pasajes de barco para abandonar España) no tienen problemas para atravesar la Península Ibérica y embarcar desde puertos españoles o portugueses hacia su destino. Desde septiembre de 1939 llegaron a Les muchas de estas familias a las que se les permitió cruzar la frontera y, tras permanecer unos días en el pueblo, dirigirse a Lleida y proseguir su viaje.

Las presiones alemanas ante lo que consideraban como una ayuda de las autoridades españolas a personas que eran objeto de su persecución, provocaron un progresivo endurecimiento de las condiciones de obtención de los visados de entrada. A partir de mediados de 1940, la firma de un acuerdo con la Francia de Vichy para retornar a Francia a los detenidos en los pasos fronterizos provoca numerosas expulsiones de judíos a territorio francés. Alguna de estas personas acabaron posteriormente en campos de concentración y exterminio. Otros tomaron la decisión de suicidarse en España para no ser entregados a las autoridades francesas, como fue el caso del filósofo alemán Walter Benjamin. Varios de los testimonios entrevistados narran también casos de suicidio en Pont de Rei, dónde los deportados saltaban desde los camiones al río Garona al comprobar que su destino era el regreso a la Francia ocupada por los nazis. Estas expulsiones, concentradas básicamente entre los años 1940 y 1942, matizan el papel de tierra de refugio para los judíos huidos de la barbarie nazi que mayoritariamente se atribuye a España.

Afortunadamente la norma no fue aplicada de manera estricta y algunos grupos fueron autorizados a transitar por España mientras otros eran expulsados a territorio francés. En muchas ocasiones se retenía a los judíos en Les mientras se consultaba al Gobernador Civil de Lleida como proceder con los mismos. En estas situaciones los refugiados permanecían en hoteles y posadas de la población, o incluso acogidos en las casas particulares, a la espera de conocer su futuro. Uno de los principales puntos de acogida era el Hotel Franco-Español, pero ante la llegada de expediciones numerosas se han contabilizado que grupos de evadidos, mayoritariamente familias, estuvieron hospedados en más de la mitad de las casas particulares del pueblo. Las familias de acogida cedían habitaciones, prestaban establos y compartían cocina y comida con los recién llegados. El intercambio cultural y de conocimientos con la población local ha quedado en la memoria individual y colectiva de los entrevistados.

La prohibición de entrada a los centenares de judíos que se agolpaban en las aduanas de los Pirineos no significa que las evasiones dejen de materializarse. La huida a la desesperada y dramática de estos judíos a consecuencia de la persecución a que eran sometidos provocó que, de forma automática, los puntos de penetración se trasladaran a las montañas, llegando a España de manera no autorizada. Desde ese momento se organizó de manera efectiva el paso clandestino de los Pirineos, empresa que no era fácil, pues se trataba de superar, en condiciones extremas, bajo la nieve, el frío, después de largas jornadas andando a pie por la montaña, puertos de montaña cercanos a los dos mil metros de altitud. Según los testimonios recogidos, los pasos más habituales en el sector norte del Valle de Arán eran los de Horqueta, Potérla y Trentanada, en Canejan y Valle de Toran, los pasos de Tres Corets y Serralonga hacia Les, Estiuèra, Arrauèra y Côth de Baretja hacia Bossòst, y Campsaure y Montjòia con llegada al valle de Artiga de Lin.

En el Valle de Arán, tal como sucedió en el resto de Pirineos, diferentes personas se involucraron en mayor o menor medida y, con mayor o menor intensidad, para facilitar ayuda directa a los evadidos judíos y que éstos pudieran llegar a España, permanecer en el país y lograr abandonarlo lo más rápidamente posible. Destaca la labor de los guías o pasadores. Las necesidades de conducir a través de los senderos de montaña a los que huían hacia España de manera clandestina hicieron que fueran imprescindibles las redes de evasión. Se organizaron redes exclusivamente para ayudar a refugiados judíos (Varian Fry o a

través del Armée Juive pero otras redes financiadas y creadas por los aliados (británicos, belgas o norteamericanos) también pasaron judíos a España. En ellas participaban españoles, residentes en el sur de Francia (exiliados) o en territorio español. En las montañas cercanas a nuestro ámbito de estudio, los guías conducían a los grupos hasta las cimas, dónde eran recogidos por guías locales que les acompañaban hasta territorio español. En este sentido, alguno de los testimonios entrevistados narra la organización de los pasos clandestinos de personas y los vinculan a las relaciones familiares entre exiliados araneses a las vecinas localidades francesas de Luchon, Melles o Aspet y miembros de la misma familia y conocidos que tras la Guerra Civil española permanecieron en el Valle de Arán. En otros casos, y fuera de estas redes organizadas, los pastores de las montañas cercanas a Les indicaban el camino o acogían en sus cabañas de alta montaña a grupos de judíos. Las relaciones entre pastores de un lado y otro de la frontera facilitaban el tránsito clandestino de personas y mercancías. En Les se han identificado un total de cuatro pasadores naturales del pueblo que ejercían este trabajo.

Paralelamente, personas anónimas dieron cobijo, alimentaron y ayudaron a refugiados judíos en casas situadas cerca de la frontera o en la ruta que les conducía hacia Barcelona, Madrid o también a la frontera con Portugal, en Galicia o Extremadura. Gente anónima cargada de valores como la ayuda y la solidaridad, dispuesta a proteger a personas en peligro. También, algunos párrocos de localidades fronterizas prestaron una desinteresada ayuda a los evadidos judíos. Los acogían en sus parroquias y les facilitaban el contacto con los consulados o con organizaciones benéficas. Médicos de pueblos fronterizos atendieron a refugiados que presentaban fracturas, congelaciones o síntomas de agotamiento a consecuencia de la dureza del recorrido. Tuvieron que vivir situaciones dramáticas y tomar decisiones vitales como decidir la amputación de miembros afectados por las congelaciones a consecuencia de los efectos del frío y la nieve. También existe constancia de la colaboración y protección ejercida por funcionarios de aduanas, ya sea para evitar las expulsiones a Francia o para ocultarlas y facilitar su desplazamiento a Barcelona. Este último caso es el narrado por los testimonios que conocían al responsable de la aduana de Les.

La mayor parte de los evadidos eran detenidos por fuerzas de la Guardia Civil o de la Policía que vigilaban todos los pasos y caminos procedentes de los Pirineos. En los registros de prisioneros de las cárcel y en el resto de documentación oficial se utiliza para nombrarlos todo tipo de adjetivos. Desde “judío”, “palestino”, “súbdito polaco de religión judía” a “extranjero hebreo” pasando por “apátrida” o el no menos significativo “sin nacionalidad o sea judío”.

Los refugiados pasaban por diversos establecimientos penitenciarios: depósitos de los pueblos fronterizos, cárceles de partido judicial y cárceles provinciales. Los varones en edad militar, comprendidos entre los 18 y los 40 años, eran transferidos al campo de concentración de Miranda de Ebro (Burgos). En virtud de la legislación internacional eran considerados prisioneros de guerra al ser súbditos de países beligerantes por lo que les correspondía ser internados en un campo de concentración bajo la tutela de las autoridades militares. Las mujeres y los niños, por su parte, aguardaban en hoteles de Barcelona o Madrid la salida de sus maridos para poder trasladarse a su destino final que acostumbraba a ser América, el norte de África o Palestina.

Los detenidos en el Valle de Arán, pasaban en un primer momento por el puesto de aduana de Les, para ser transferidos a la cárcel del partido judicial de Vielha. La situación geográfica de Les, y del Valle de Arán en general, y las duras condiciones invernales, provocaban su aislamiento del territorio español durante el invierno debido a la nieve y el cierre de los puertos de montaña. Esto hacía que los refugiados permanezcan varias semanas en la localidad a la espera de que se organizara su conducción a Lleida. Normalmente, debido a las dificultades de comunicación por carretera, estos grupos hacían una escalera en la cárcel de Sort, posponiendo así las semanas más su llegada a Lleida. Por todo ello, la presencia de detenidos se recuerda especialmente en Les y en Vielha, pero también entre miembros y colaboradores de la Guardia Civil de fronteras destacada en la zona.

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7 Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo, “Los ángeles de los Pirineos”, La Vanguardia, 4-1-2013.
A partir de mediados de 1942 se estableció en Barcelona una representación de la organización benéfica judía American Joint Distribution Committee. Dirigida por Samuel Seguerra, se encargaba de velar por la suerte de estos refugiados, intentando que fueran alojados en hoteles, que no se separasen las familias y agilizar los trámites de su emigración. Además del American Joint las embajadas y, especialmente los consulados en Barcelona de los países aliados (Gran Bretaña, Estados Unidos, Bélgica, Holanda, Polonia, etc.) se implicaron en las labores de acogida y protección a los refugiados sin distinción de origen y procedencia por lo que ayudaron a muchos judíos. Asimismo hay que mencionar la ayuda de la Cruz Roja Internacional y en menor medida de la Cruz Roja Española. En este sentido, los testimonios recuerdan grupos que fueron acogidos y financiados por la Cruz Roja polaca o que se hospedaron en hoteles bajo la tutela de la Corona Belga y Holandesa.

Las razias ordenadas por el gobierno de Vichy en el verano de 1942 provocaron la mayor avalancha de refugiados judíos de todo el periodo huyendo a la desesperada ante una situación que se convertía en límite. Entre septiembre de 1942 y enero de 1943 se concentra la llegada del contingente más importante de huidos. Abundan las familias integradas por abuelos, hijos y nietos, pero también llegaron personas solas. En 1944 y, hasta la liberación del sur de Francia en agosto de ese año, continuaban llegando evadidos, ahora niños y jóvenes que habían permanecido ocultos en la Francia ocupada y que gracias a la protección de familias francesas y a la labor de diversas organizaciones judías consiguieron atravesar los Pirineos.

EL RELATO DE FRANÇOISE BIELINSKY
Avraham Bielinsky, sastre de profesión, y su esposa Esther Gita, ambos de origen polaco, se instalan en Alemania en 1929. En 1932 nace su hijo Reinhold. A consecuencia del antisemitismo que se vive en la Alemania de los años treinta, especialmente después de la ascensión al poder de Adolf Hitler, la familia decide abandonar el país y establecerse en París, donde en 1937 nace su segunda hija, Françoise.

La llegada del ejército alemán a París en junio de 1940 provoca un nuevo sobresalto en la vida de esta familia. El gobierno de Vichy, pronto inicia la persecución de los judíos y Avraham es detenido e internado en un campo de extranjeros cerca de París. Afortunadamente puede fugarse y refugiarse junto a su familia en el sur del país. Instalados en Pau, Avraham encuentra trabajo en una fábrica textil. En octubre de 1942, ante la inminente llegada de los alemanes a la zona, se organiza la huida de la familia hacia España. Los Bielinsky abandonan Pau y se dirigen a Luchon desde donde emprendieron el tramo final de la evasión formando parte de un grupo de 6 personas que fueron conducidos por un guía.

El grupo salió de la pequeña aldea de Sode, en el municipio francés de Juzet de Luchon. Tras caminar de noche durante varias horas cruzan los Pirineos a través de la Passada de Tres Corets, llegando a Les, donde son detenidos por no tener visado de entrada en España. Los vecinos del pueblo interceden para evitar su rápida expulsión a Francia y el agente jefe de policía consulta con el Gobernador Civil como proceder con los apresados, es decir, si debe expulsarlos a Francia o aceptar su tránsito por España. Mientras se espera la resolución, los Bielinsky consiguen que alguien les selle los pasaportes y, llegan el 13 de enero de 1943, tras pasar por Barcelona y Madrid, a Vigo, desde donde parten hacia Venezuela, país que les recibe el 3 de febrero de aquel año.

No es hasta el año 2012 cuando, en el marco de esta investigación, se logra localizar a Françoise Bielinsky en Venezuela. Françoise, convertida en Paquita Sitzer tras su matrimonio, conoce entonces el punto exacto por el cual había conseguido huir de la persecución nazi junto a su familia. En agosto de 2013, coincidiendo con su 75º aniversario, retorna a Les donde se le tributa un cálido homenaje por parte de los vecinos del pueblo. Paquita agradece la contribución de Les y de sus habitantes para que decenas de familias judías consiguieran escapar del nazismo.

CONCLUSIONES: COMBINAR INVESTIGACIÓN DOCUMENTAL CON HISTORIA ORAL
Esta investigación histórica rescata la historia de los refugiados judíos que, huyendo de la barbarie nazi, cruzaron los Pirineos entre 1939 y 1945. La investigación documental y las entrevistas realizadas han permitido la identificación de algunos de los centenares que entraron por el Valle de Arán, pero también
conocer las circunstancias de su evasión, la trayectoria que siguieron o cómo rehicieron sus vidas, en el caso de que no fueran retornados a Francia. Igualmente, a través de las entrevistas y la puesta en valor de la memoria oral se ha podido conocer las circunstancias que motivaron las acciones altruistas de los vecinos, identificar a los protagonistas de las micro-historias y entender las relaciones e intercambio de conocimientos que se produjeron entre los evadidos y la población local.

Con los datos conocidos a día de hoy se puede afirmar, de manera estimativa, que centenares de evadidos judíos consiguieron su libertad atravesando los Pirineos y llegando a Les. Su evasión fue posible gracias a las acciones individuales, a contracorriente y arriesgando sus vidas, de un grupo de españoles. De estos salvadores, un pequeño grupo está identificado pero todavía quedan por descubrir muchas historias. Las dificultades encontradas en la consulta de archivos y la avanzada edad de muchos de los que vivieron en primera persona estos hechos ponen en evidencia tanto la escasa democratización de nuestros archivos y la urgencia de la compilación de nuevos testimonios orales. Fuentes orales y documentales se complementan y son imprescindibles para conocer, entender y explicar la historia íntegramente. La memoria oral ayuda a analizar documentos y abre nuevas vías de investigación que permiten alcanzar el detalle de los hechos vividos y la forma con la que estos son recordados.

Con esta comunicación, se presentan los primeros resultados de una investigación que combina los archivos con las fuentes orales para recuperar la memoria ligada al paso de evadidos judíos por el Valle de Arán. Esta combinación entre investigación documental histórica y de la memoria oral ha permitido, una vez identificados los sujetos, recopilar los relatos de los supervivientes y de los protagonistas locales que todavía pueden aportar su testimonio.

Los resultados obtenidos nos permiten explicar la historia desde otro punto de vista, dando a conocer las “otras historias”, aquellas que cuentan los propios protagonistas y que difícilmente encontramos en las fuentes documentales recopiladas en los archivos históricos. Este ejercicio es también un reconocimiento a la actuación de los protagonistas locales, que nos permite entender, aprender y transmitir la historia, contada por ellos mismos, para humanizar con nombres las cifras y las listas de todos aquellos que escapaban del nacionalsocialismo alemán durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial.