



Remembering Contentious Lives 12-14 September 2022

Location: Sweelinckzaal, Drift 21, Utrecht

Monday, 12 September

- 14.00 – 14.15 Welcome and Opening Remarks from Ann Rigney
- 14.15 – 15.45 **Keynote (1)** (Chair: Ann Rigney)
Margaretta Jolly (University of Sussex)
“Narrating Feminist Lives in the Backlash”
- 15.45 – 16.00 Break
- 16.00 – 17.30 **Circulating Contentious Narratives** (Chair: Daniele Salerno)
Rosanne Kennedy (The Australian National University)
“The Contentious Lives of Guantanamo Diary: from Moving Testimony to Cultural Memory”
Sophia Brown (Free University of Berlin)
“Mediating Palestinian Dissent for an Anglophone Readership: Raja Shehadeh’s Life Writing”
- 17.30 – 21.00 Drinks outside Sweelinckzaal and dinner for panelists in Academy Building (Domeplein 29), Westerdijkkamer
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Tuesday, 13 September

- 10.00 – 11.00 **Testimonies of Displacement: Online Panel** (Chair: Clara Vlessing)
Gillian Whitlock & Phoebe King (University of Queensland)
“Archiving and Activism: Protest Cycles in a Pacific Imaginary”
- 11.00 – 11.15 Break
- 11.15 – 13.15 **Resisting Institutional Memory** (Chair: Duygu Erbil)
Máté Zombory (ELTE Budapest) & Zoltán Kékesi (ZfA Berlin): Online
“Antifascist Life Writing: A Postwar Paradigm of Memory Activism”
Peyman Amiri, (University of Amsterdam)
“Prison Memoir; Resisting Narratives”
Idriss Jebari (Trinity College Dublin)
“Recollecting Dreams of Revolution During an Actual One: The Tunisian
Perspectivistes between the Radical Sixties and 2011”
- 13.15 – 14.15 Lunch, served outside the Sweelinckzaal
- 14.15 – 15.45 **Keynote (2)** (Chair: Ann Rigney)
Anna Poletti (Utrecht University)
“*Can The Monster Speak?* Ventriloquism and Voice in Trans Activist Life
Writing”
- 15.45 – 16.00 Break
- 16.00 – 18.00 **Co-producing Auto/biographical Voices** (Chair: Tashina Blom)
Alison Atkinson-Phillips (Newcastle University)
“The Oral History Interview as a Site for Activist Reflection”
Jaber Baker (EHESS Paris)
“Political Prisoners’ Biographies and the Life of Prison Memory”
Diana Painca (Université Libre de Bruxelles)
“Acting Out the Past: Activism and Performance in Oral History Interviews
on Communism”
- 18.00 – 21.00 Dinner for panelists at Sarban, Afghan Restaurant (Oudegracht aan de Werf 161)
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Wednesday, 14 September

- 9.00 – 11.00 **Transgressing Archives: Collecting and Collective Texts** (Chair: Daniele Salerno)
Verena Baier (University of Regensburg)
 “Archiving Hope: Remembering Activism in Collaborative Life Writings of
 the 1980s US- Nicaragua Peace and Solidarity Movement”
Katrina M. Powell (Virginia Tech)
 “Poetics of Displacement: Narrating a Life as Collective Resistance”
Dagmar Brunow (Linnaeus University): Online
 “Transmediating Hope: Remembering Activist Legacies in the Archive”
- 11.00 – 11.15 Break
- 11.15 – 13.15 **Establishing Addressees** (Chair: Ann Rigney)
Judith Naeff (Leiden University)
 “Memoir as Reckoning: Arwa Salih’s *The Stillborn*”
Vasiliki Belia (Maastricht University)
 “Redrawing the Lesbian: The Relationship between Lesbian and Queer
 Feminism in Kate Charlesworth’s *Sensible Footwear: A Girl’s Guide*”
Duygu Erbil & Clara Vlessing (Utrecht University)
 “*[The Contentious Subject] Speaks*: The Speaker as a Model of Radical
 Subjectivity”
- 13.15 – 13.25 Closing Remarks from Ann Rigney
- 13.30 Lunch at Bakkerswinkel (Wittevrouwenstraat 2) for panelists
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Keynote (1)

Narrating Feminist Lives in the Backlash

Margaretta Jolly, University of Sussex

Social movements rise and fall in cycles and we are seeing their reinvention as tools of a post-democratic right. Activist lives are shaped within these shifting contexts, where patterns of leadership, belonging and labour are tested by new identity politics. Building on new social movement theory, I will consider contention as a relative term which can disrupt consensus within as well as outside a movement, and across patriarchal as well as feminist allegiance. In these contexts, I will explore the challenges of narrating feminist lives for different audiences and ages. My examples include the tv mini-series *Mrs America* which dramatised Phyllis Schlafly's campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s, the BBC's *Banned! The Mary Whitehouse Story*, *Misbehaviour*, a comedy-drama on the 1970 Miss World protest in London and the children's book – plus spinoffs – *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls*. Principally I will discuss *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project*, which I directed with the British Library and subsequently interpreted in web-resources, schools' workshops, exhibitions and a book, to raise questions of curation, institutionalisation, genre, media and use for remembering a formative feminist generation's lives – and deaths – in times of backlash.

Margaretta Jolly is Professor of Cultural Studies in the School of Media, Arts and Humanities, University of Sussex and directs the University's Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research. Her work has focused on auto/biography, letter writing and oral history, particularly in relation to women's movements. She is the editor of *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (Routledge, 2001) and the author of *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism* (Columbia, 2008). She directed *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project*, partnered with The British Library, 2010-2014 and is currently Principal Investigator for *The Business of Women's Words: Purpose and Profit in Feminist Publishing*, also partnered with The British Library.

Keynote (2)

Can the Monster Speak? Ventriloquism and Voice in Trans Activist Life Writing

Anna Poletti, Utrecht University

Paul B. Preciado is one of Europe's most prominent trans activists. For two decades, he has experimented with writing as a way of connecting the everyday practices of living as a trans person to a vision of a social and political reality that is not dependent on the logic of sexual difference. Preciado's writing is characterized by a utopian investment in, and argument for, the transformative power that emerges when the energies of intellect and intimacy are combined. In his activism, he calls for the power of the mind and the body to be harnessed to directly change social and political life for the better (eg: Countersexual Manifesto). From his cult classic *Testo Junkie* to his most recent text, *Can The Monster Speak?*, Preciado uses the first person perspective to weave the language of critical theory with stories of his lived experience. Intertextuality is central to Preciado's voice, his vocabulary drawn from the work of key figures of critical theory (such as Foucault and Butler) and from his interpersonal relationships with lovers and friends such as the writer Virginie Despentes. In this stylistic relationality, Preciado's project is situated firmly within the tradition of trans activist life writing, which Sandy Stone argues "implies writing oneself into the selfsame discourses by which one is written—burrowing in and virally disrupting the smoothness and closure on which power depends" (92).

In his most recent attempt to find a voice to speak against the pathologization of trans people (*Can The Monster Speak?*) Preciado turns to Kafka's "A Report to An Academy", explicitly evoking and ventriloquising the humanized ape narrator of Kafka's short story. In this presentation, I will examine some examples of Preciado's use of Kafka's voice to consider the following questions: What might his use of Kafka tell us about the aesthetic, affective and rhetorical contours of writing lives that are—in their very living—contentious? Is ventriloquism an aesthetic strategy uniquely appropriate to activist life writing? What impact might ventriloquism have on the political, social and personal power of life writing as a discourse that claims to speak a truth about lived experience?

Anna Poletti is an associate professor of English at Utrecht University, and co-editor of the *New Directions in Life Narrative* monograph series for Bloomsbury. Anna's research focus is contemporary life writing, with particular interests in youth cultures, ephemera (both digital and analogue) and the role of mediation and materiality in autobiography. Their most recent publications are *Graphic Medicine* (co-edited with Erin La Cour, University of Hawai'i Press, 2022), *Stories of the Self: Life Writing after the Book* (New York University Press, 2020), and a forthcoming article in the *Minnesota Review* on zines and the creative humanities.

Circulating Contentious Narratives

The Contentious Lives of Guantanamo Diary: from Moving Testimony to Cultural Memory

Rosanne Kennedy

Caught up in the United States' self-declared "war on terror", Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a Mauritanian national, was detained at Guantanamo Bay for fifteen years without charge. Positioned as a "tainted witness" (Gilmore, 2017), Slahi wrote a diary, initially for his lawyers but ultimately to appeal for justice in the jurisdiction of the public sphere. After ten years and many obstacles, a heavily redacted version of *Guantanamo Diary* was published – today one of the most widely translated, circulated, reviewed and studied memoirs to emerge from Guantanamo. Tracing the contentious lives of *Guantanamo Diary* through writing, publication, circulation and reception provides valuable insights, I argue, into the struggle over "truth-telling" and efforts to control how in the American war on terror will be remembered for posterity. To that end, I bring three critical lenses – life writing, human rights and cultural memory studies – to my analysis of *Guantanamo Diary* to assess its significance in and as memory activism (Gutman, 2017). Firstly, I consider the competing voices in the text (2015 ed) – first-person narration, third-person footnotes and the omniscient voice of the redactions – to argue that *Guantanamo Diary* is a hybrid genre. Secondly, through the lens of "moving testimony" (Kennedy 2014), I track the transnational travels of *Guantanamo Diary* on multiple platforms, including human rights, oral history and literary reviews, and its seeding of the #freeSlahi campaign. Thirdly, I consider the afterlives of *Guantanamo Diary* in cultural memory, distinguishing between Slahi as a "reconciled victim" (Meister 2011) who advocates forgiveness, and Slahi as the "true and complete witness" of the "global war on terror" (Mishra, 2015), and consider what is at stake in these different subject positions. It is not Slahi's life that is contentious; rather, it is the life of the detention camp at Guantanamo, and all that it reveals about the politics, (il)legalities and jurisdictional arbitrage of the American war on terror.

Rosanne Kennedy is Associate Professor of Literature and Gender, Sexuality and Culture at the Australian National University. Her research interests include cultural memory studies; testimony and trauma; law, literature and human rights; feminist theory and cultural studies; and environmental humanities. She has published widely in journals such as *Memory Studies*, *Signs*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Studies in the Novel*, *Biography*, *Australian Feminist Studies* and many others. She is currently working on two books: one explores new forms of testimony and witnessing emerging from Australia's detention camps for asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru. The other, with the working title *Moving Testimony: art, activism, and human rights*, develops an affective and performative approach to testimony and its transnational circulation.

Mediating Palestinian Dissent for an Anglophone Readership: Raja Shehadeh's Life Writing

Sophia Brown

This paper examines the work of Raja Shehadeh, best known for *Palestinian Walks* (2007), which won the Orwell Prize for Political Writing. A prolific author, human rights lawyer and commentator for mainstream media outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, especially around moments of political crisis for Palestinians, Shehadeh has become the most prominent Palestinian writer in the Anglophone world, especially since the death of Edward Said. His work demonstrates a commitment to articulating Palestinian experience and, in particular, life as a colonised subject denied the freedoms that statehood bestows, alongside cultivating a mode of writing accessible to Anglophone readers regardless of their knowledge of Israel/Palestine. The paper focuses on *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (1982), which has received little critical attention and was published decades before Shehadeh became well known, and *Where the Line is Drawn* (2017), a much later text that reflects back on the earlier work and some of its key themes.

By examining these two works, written more than thirty years apart, the paper considers the narration of Palestinian resistance over time and, in particular, how this resistance has been mediated for its non-Palestinian audience. The exponential growth in Shehadeh's readership since the early 1980s, alongside a political climate that gives rise to ongoing hostility to Palestinian calls for liberation, makes this question of mediation crucial. This is explored via an examination of paratextual material in order to scrutinise the reception of the work and how Shehadeh's publishers choose to mediate it, as well as by reflecting on how Shehadeh mediates his own life writing. Central to both texts, especially the latter, is Shehadeh's friendship with a Canadian Jew, who becomes an Israeli citizen. The paper examines the narration of this complex and longstanding friendship, one that is often destabilised by opposing political beliefs and expectations. In so doing, it reflects on the tensions between personal and shared memories of violence. Finally, it also critiques the depoliticization of Shehadeh's work that emerges when it is primarily presented as an account of friendship that endures across political divides. Consequently, what room is left for the central issue of Palestinian oppression and the activism that has always resisted it?

Sophia Brown is currently an Alexander von Humboldt postdoctoral fellow, based at the Freie Universität Berlin and affiliated with the ERC-funded project, PaIREAD: Country of Words, which traces the story of Palestinian literary production across different countries and continents. Her PhD, a study of exilic Palestinian life writing in English, was awarded in 2017 by the University of Kent, UK. In 2018, she was a visiting research fellow at the Kenyon Institute, East Jerusalem. She has published journal articles on Egyptian women's blogs, the narration of life under occupation in East Jerusalem and the life writing of Ahdaf Soueif, and is currently preparing her first monograph, based on her PhD thesis. Her latest publication, 'Snapshots of Solidarity: Anthologizing Palestinian Life Writing', was published in 2021 in *Post-Millennial Palestine: Memory, Narration, Resistance* (Liverpool University Press).

Testimonies of Displacement

Archiving and Activism: Protest Cycles in a Pacific Imaginary

Gillian Whitlock & Phoebe King

In her account of "the death of asylum" in the twenty-first century the geographer Alison Mountz presents a global genealogy of nine key events that accelerated the securitization and detention of asylum seekers. One of these is the Tampa Incident, which triggered "the Pacific Solution" in 2001, and another is the more aggressive program of offshoring, interception and excision introduced in 2013: "Operation Sovereign Borders". This genealogy is global, however these policies that assert Australian sovereignty introduced a thriving, privatised industry of island detention to the Pacific, and an aggressive policing of borders through the excision of islands, forced tow-backs at sea, and repatriation of asylum seekers to homelands where they remain at risk.

However, as Mountz suggests, the death of asylum is resisted by the life of activism, and our paper draws on the concept of "refugee imaginaries", that foregrounds the role of the arts and humanities in imagining, historicising, and protesting against these punitive experiences of forced migration and statelessness. It focusses on how refugees imagine the world, and how the world imagines them. More specifically, we turn to the concept of a Pacific Imaginary, and to protest movements that contest the punitive policies introduced under the auspices of the Pacific Solution (2001–7) and Operation Sovereign Borders (since 2012).

Our archival case studies document two distinctive "protest cycles" that draw on very different technologies. The first focuses on letters exchanged between asylum seekers in detention on Nauru and Australian citizens in the aftermath of the Tampa incident in 2001, that draw on epistolary technologies associated with early modernity in life writing. The second takes an archival approach to the digital space of Behrouz Boochani's personal Facebook profile after his imprisonment in Australia's offshore detention centre in 2013. Studying this intimate, digital archive allows us to map the birth of Boochani as a powerful voice from the Pacific camp:

tracing the evolution of his voice through these fragmentary autobiographical acts. This reveals a trove of texts that, individually, experiment with form and address to leverage the affordances of the Facebook post to bear witness to the trauma of Operation Sovereign Borders and call to a witnessing public. Published as individual posts to this publicly accessible Facebook page, these texts become collaborative spaces of interaction between Boochani and his network that facilitate personal and collective acts of memory and resistance. Cumulatively, this forms a fragmentary, ephemeral, and contingent record of both this protest cycle's beginning and Boochani's development as an authorial persona.

Together these case studies document powerful coalitions between asylum seekers and Australian citizens, and the technologies that create contentious life narratives and affirm the life of activism.

Phoebe King has completed her Master of Philosophy in literary studies at the University of Queensland, studying the reception of Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*. Her current areas of interest are life writing, refugee narratives, and Australian literature.

Gillian Whitlock is an Emeritus Professor in the School of Communication and Arts at the University of Queensland. Her most recent publications are *Life Writing in the Anthropocene*, co-edited with Jessica White (Routledge 2021), and "How Should I Read This" in a Forum on Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*, *Biography* 43, 4 (2020), pp. 705-723.

Resisting Institutional Memory

Antifascist Life Writing: A Postwar Paradigm of Memory Activism

Zoltán Kékesi & Máté Zombory

In the course of the nineteen fifties, hundreds of thousands took to the streets of European cities in both East and West to protest the rearmament of West Germany. Our paper examines the antifascist activism that manifested, among other things, in the "largest mass movement of the decade" (Katharina Stengel). In particular, it looks at the life writing of two political prisoners of Auschwitz whose careers represent contrasting trajectories in the Cold War era. While Oszkár Betlen (1909–1969) remained a hardliner of the Hungarian Communist Party, Hermann Langbein (1912–1995) left the Austrian Communist Party in the aftermath of the 1956 uprising. Nonetheless, their efforts to remember responded to some of the same pressing issues of their time: reparations; re-militarization and NATO-membership of the Federal Republic; amnesty and re-integration, and, finally, the ongoing preparations for the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt am Main. Our paper studies their memoirs in the context of the two life writers' overall political activity.

In response to the question "What can studying life stories tell us about the relationship between memory and activism?," we reintegrate pre- and post-1945 political biographies of antifascists and use postwar testimonies to understand continuities in their activism. We focus on biographical embodiments of "contentious lives" that became emblematic for the postwar public and shaped collective identities across the Iron Curtain. We expound antifascism as a transnational phenomenon and argue that, historically, it constitutes a preeminent paradigm in (and well beyond) Europe for understanding the "memory-activism nexus." Drawing on a new wave of antifascism studies and our previous paper, "Antifascist Memory Reconsidered," we offer a fresh look at postwar antifascism and demonstrate how antifascists forged a link between activism and memory so fundamentally different from today's Holocaust remembrance.

Our paper proposes a reconsideration of antifascist memory and argues that it has unexplored potentials for our present. For antifascists, life writing was but one avenue of postwar activism. Since for the postwar public fascism represented a threat in present time, "lived experiences of dissent" had an urgency and political significance that need to be explored and explained historically.

Zoltán Kékesi is a cultural historian. Currently, he is an Alexander von Humboldt senior research fellow at the Center for Research on Antisemitism, TU, Berlin. Previously, he worked as a research fellow at the Center for Jewish History in NYC, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, the Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research in Jerusalem, the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe in Leipzig, and the Institute for Advanced Study at CEU in Budapest. He is the author of two books in English, *Agents of Liberation: Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Art and Documentary Film* (2015) and *Memory in Hungarian Fascism: A Transcultural History* (forthcoming).

Máté Zombory is a sociologist. He is Associate Professor at Eötvös Loránd University and senior research fellow at the Centre for Social Sciences in Budapest. His field of interest is the historical sociology of transnational and cultural memory. He is author of *Traumatársadalom. Az emlékezetpolitika történeti-szociológiai kritikája [Trauma Society. A Historical-Sociological Critique of the Politics of Memory]* (2019) and *Maps of Remembrance. Space, Belonging and Politics of Memory in Eastern Europe* (2012). His current research, supported by the Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah, Paris, deals with the Cold War history of Holocaust documentation with particular attention to the activities of Hungarian journalist and author Jenő Lévai.

Prison Memoir; Resisting Narratives

Peyman Amiri

This paper, by analysing prison memoirs of Iranian political prisoners of 1980s, attempts to explore various epistemic and functional aspects of prison memoirs. These narratives are first-hand testimonies of those who have witnessed the unbearable, and thus, of a two-folded nature in the first instance: historical and legal. By narrating the forcefully silenced stories of incarcerated lives, they constitute an alternative, insightful archive to keep the history of the oppressed from falling into oblivion. Not only do they chronicle the 'truth' of each narrator's own venture, but also, in combination, they provide a ground to comprehending the general conditions and courses of events of the time. On the other hand, these evidences materialised by memory can be considered the most important, if not the only, sources for documentation of systematic violations of basic human rights. Furthermore, by means of reporting the untold, they function as a healing medium in a psychoanalytic sense. In fact, in some horrendous situations it has been the idea of bearing witness and giving testimony that has helped many to survive.

Meanwhile, prison memoirs are narratives of an extraordinary type of everyday life – the one under perpetual observation and total control, which describe innovative everyday tactics of enduring and resisting the severe conditions of imprisonment and reclaim the oppressed past from the universal history. However, they are not just monuments of a historical resistance; they are discursive practices that confront the dominant discourse's will to maintain control over the meaning of past, and therefore the understanding of present, by putting forward counter-discourses. Hence, these narratives turn to be formidable political instruments that, in the line of their authors' subjectivation, resist the institutional memory produced and propagated by the oppressive state.

Peyman Amiri is a PhD researcher at ASCA, his project focuses on the everyday life of the political prisoners in Iran during 1980s and aims to explore the everyday forms of resistance in conditions of incarceration by analysing narratives of political prisoners, primarily through the genre of prison memoir. Furthermore, by linking the concept of resistance to the practice of everyday life of the political prisoners, this study seeks to probe into the meanings and manifestations of resistance associated to it in the political discourse of the period in question. Additionally, he teaches at PPLE College (UVA) and AUC.

Recollecting Dreams of Revolution During an Actual One: The Tunisian Perspectivistes between the Radical Sixties and 2011

Idriss Jebari

When the Tunisian people went to the streets demanding the “fall of the regime” in 2011, a group of older former leftists benefitted from the sudden reopening of the public sphere to publish memoirs from their youthful activism in the sixties and seventies. They intended to overcome authoritarian-imposed amnesia over their years in the opposition but also to inform the younger generations of how they too had fought for their ideals to build a socialist society and push back against Habib Bourguiba’s paternalist state. Already in 2008, the first kernels of remembrance had begun to emerge following the passing of an important leader (Nourredine Ben Kheider), but soon devolved into what the weekly-magazine *Jeune Afrique* labelled a “war of memoirs/memories”, and especially long-held resentment and recriminations inherited from the late sixties and further entrenched during their prison stays.

By contrast, this paper focuses on the post-2011 movement of recollection and memoirs, which drew on the particular revolutionary moment as an impetus for the release of memoirs and remembrance. This moment appears to have freed up ordinary militants of the Perspectives leftist movement to write up their individual journeys toward militancy at the university as radical students and within the Perspectives structures. They underlined their strength of their ideals and their social origins – factors of singularity – rather than the experience of prison and the forms of their opposition – factors of homogeneity within the movement. Hence, 2011 had an important impact on the diversification and singularization of the memories of the Tunisian leftists as a delayed revolutionary emancipation against the imposition of a single memory on the group, which often evades scrutiny in contrast to government-amnesia.

This paper interrogates life writing through the perspective of inter-generational transmission between cycles of protests, the relationship between individuals and the collective, and how the literary format interact with other spaces of memory. After contextualizing the emergence of the Perspectives memory in the run-off and in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 revolution, I discuss three memoirs that complicate the terms of this memory: *Mohamed Cherif Ferjani’s Prison et Liberté* (2014), Azzedine al-Hazki’s *natharat ummi [my mother’s glasses]* (2018), and *Bnat essiassa* (2020), a collectively edited volume addressing women’s experience within the movement. Finally, this paper discusses how the memory of these Perspectives after 2011 has been received and assimilated by younger generations of Tunisian activists through chronicles in the website *nachaz* discussing these releases or in conversations held on the margins held to celebrate the legacy of Perspectives after 2011.

Idriss Jebari is Al Maktoum Assistant Professor in Middle East Studies at Trinity College Dublin. He is a historian of Arab thought and his research focuses on North African cultural and social history after the region’s political independences from France, on collective memory in the Arab world, and its role for reconciliation processes and transitional justice. After completing his doctorate on the history of the production of critical thought in Morocco and Tunisia at the University of Oxford, he held a postdoctoral research fellowship at the American University of Beirut (Lebanon), and a teaching fellowship in Middle East and North African history at Bowdoin College in Maine (USA).

Co-producing Auto/biographical Voices

The Oral History Interview as a Site for Activist Reflection

Alison Atkinson-Phillips

Oral history as a method for understanding the past is often misunderstood as being primarily about documentation. However, the rich emphasis on intersubjectivity in the oral history interview means that the remembered past is always in dialogue with the present in which the interview takes place. Oral history has experienced resurgence as a method in recent years. It seems lately that every heritage project must have an oral history element. And whereas only a few years ago, Frisch (2016) bewailed oral history’s ‘deep dark secret’ that no-one much listened to it, digital innovations mean that much longer interviews are now available online and curated as part of digital exhibitions. While this does not necessarily mean people are spending hours

listening to full interviews, it does mean a shift away from highly edited clips, allowing the intersubjectivity of the interview to become more visible. This paper draws on insights from the ongoing Mutual Aid Oral History Project, to answer questions about the role of intergenerational storytelling and the cross-fertilisation of activism. The Mutual Aid Oral History Project involved interviews with English mutual aid responders during the summer of 2020 and the winter/spring of 2021. This means that interviews were conducted in the immediate context not only of the Covid-19 pandemic but of the #BLM protests (summer 2020) and of Brexit. By using a life story approach to explore the past, present and future of the interviewee's activism, participants were given space to reflect on their own place within a longer history, making connections that were often as surprising to them as to the interviewer. The oral histories also created opportunities to 'reach back' through multiple generations to understand the deeper influences of today's actions. Not all those involved in actions for social change claim an activist identity, and this creates a challenge for researchers seeking to understand the legacies of protest movements, which often linger below the surface.

Alison Atkinson-Phillips is a social and cultural historian whose work intersects the fields of public history, oral history and cultural memory studies. Her work has aimed to understand the formative experiences that lead individuals to take on an activist role in a range of contexts, and the ways individual actions intersect with local and national policy. Alison is author of *Survivor Memorials: Remembering Trauma and Loss in Contemporary Australia*, which documents the work of memory activists in bringing acknowledgement of difficult experiences into the public sphere and physically into public spaces. She is a member of the Newcastle University (UK) Oral History Unit & Collective.

Acting Out the Past: Activism and Performance in Oral History Interviews on Communism

Diana Painca

Transcribed oral history interviews on Romanian communism represent a performative re-enactment of the past, being a form of political and social activism. In this sense, oral history represents a "venture into the public realm" (Arendt 1968:73) where speaking becomes a form of action enabling interviewees to counter the prevailing historical discourse and bring about political and social change. Therefore, their marginalized subjectivities move from margin to centre stage in performance (Bell 2003:315; in Heddon 2006:6) expressing lived experiences of dissent and anti-communist resistance.

Using insights from autobiography studies (Powell 2021), Oral History (Portelli 2003), and political theory (Arendt 1968, Caivano/Murphy 2017), we seek to discern the textual strategies employed in the historical interviews given by former partisans of the anti-communist armed resistance in the Carpathians (Memorial of pain: darkness and light Hossu-Longin, 2013). To this purpose, we start from the postulate of courageous action regarded as a "willingness to act in public" and expose one's self while being-with-others (Arendt 1998:36). Such an argument resonates with the idea of the autobiographical speaker as a performative subject who interacts with an audience (Smith 2014:17). This tenet is corroborated by Oral History research which regards performance as an integral part of the historical interview. "Insistent on doing through saying" (Pollock 2005: 2), its performative features foreground the construction of the interviewee's self as an actor-agent and as a survivor calling readers to action (Miller et al. 2003:11; Heddon 2006:5, Powell 2021: 5).

Against this background, our analysis highlights a wide range of textual and narrative strategies employed by interviewees. First, speakers address their public directly ("Let me tell you a story!"). Second, direct speech is used as a token of immediacy. Third, visual and kinaesthetic imagery reminds one of the correlation between language, movement/gestures and thought. A story is thus recreated not only linguistically and cognitively but also somatically, the interview turning into an embodied performance of the self. Similarly, the use of theatricality (crying, long pauses, insertion of poems/songs in the narrative, rhetorical questions) amplifies believability and engages the audience's attention, granting an enlightening power to the narrated event while proving its real existence.

Diana Painca obtained her doctorate in “Languages, Letters and Translation” (Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2020). Her pioneering research connected Translation Studies with Oral History on communism. Some of her publications include ‘Rise like a Phoenix’: Communist Mythology and Rock music (*The Annals of Bucharest University*, 2018), Abstract of PhD thesis (*New Voices in Translation Studies*, 23, 2020), Re-enacting the past: the translation of performativity in oral history interviews (*FITISPos International Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2021), Giving the past a voice: oral history in translation (Peter Lang, 2021). She was one of the editors of the volumes *Poétiques, Mythes et Croyances* (EME Éditions 2019) and *Royauté(s): entre historicité et imaginaire* (EME Éditions, 2021). Diana Painca presented her work at conferences in Belgium, Portugal, Spain, France, Romania and the United Kingdom. She was also an active member of the Oportunidance Language Platform (connecting researchers/professors from the Free University of Brussels, Universidade de Lisboa, Barcelona Drassanes, University of Bucharest).

Political Prisoners’ Biographies and the Life of Prison Memory

Jaber Baker

In Syrian literature, the autobiographies and prison narratives of former detainees – which include interviews, memoirs, and literary texts – have long been seen as one of the only conduits to documenting and understanding the secretive history and practices that took place and continue to take place inside Syrian prisons. The proposed presentation builds on this literary backdrop to explore how the autobiographies of individual authors can be read as contributing to the as-yet unwritten autobiography of the prison as an institution. This institution – a massive archipelago of physical buildings, political practices, and lived experiences (e.g., the sight of security services’ vehicles and weapons in daily life) – occupies one of the most prominent places in Syrian’s social-political life. Indeed, the proposed presentation emerges from a broader research project that argues for an understanding of prison as a living being. The circulation of narratives, rumours, and images of prison in Syria find their visual equivalent in the streets, just as oral and written statements about imprisonment find their living reflections in people of flesh and blood. The presentation will develop its argument through readings of three texts from the Syrian corpus: Mufid Najm’s *Ajniha fi Zinzana* (*Wings in a Cell*, 2015); Mustafa Khalifa’s *al-Qawqa’a* (*The Shell*, 2008), and the unpublished manuscript “Khalifa Aswar Tadmur” (Behind the Walls of Tadmur Prison). My aim will be to show how these autobiographical expressions of individuals who entered prisons also contribute to the weaving of an autobiography of Syrian prisons as vital and influential establishments, and most particularly an autobiography of the notorious death camp, Tadmur.

Jaber Baker is a novelist, researcher, former political prisoner and human rights activist, Master's student at the EHESS – Paris, and the senior researcher responsible for the Syrian file at the Center for Media and Cultural Freedom –Samir Kasir Eyes (Skeyes). Has produced several political novels in Arabic, including *601 The Divine Trials* (2017), and *Bab al-Faradis* (2020). Baker is also one of the authors of *Syrian Gulag: Assad’s Prisons, 1970-2020* (2022), the first-ever comprehensive study of Syrian political prisons.

Transgressing Archives: Collecting and Collective Texts

Archiving Hope: Remembering Activism in Collaborative Life Writings of the 1980s US- Nicaragua Peace and Solidarity Movement

Verena Baier

My PhD project investigates memories of US Americans participating in the Nicaragua conflicts of the 1980s when the Reagan government's opposition of Sandinista Nicaragua and the support of the Nicaraguan counterrevolution ignited direct action in different camps of US society. Thus, it not only looks at the life writings of US activists within the leftist peace and solidarity movement, but also at non-state actors on the political right, such as mercenaries, supporting the Nicaraguan Contras. I explore how their respective life writings play a role within and are constituted by social movements of the US left and the paramilitary subcultures in the context of the emerging New Right – movements I do not think can be narrated as domestic tales only.

For the transnational peace and solidarity movement in particular, the decade following the Nicaraguan Revolution – that is the 1980s – were the “hot phase” of what was perceived as the Nicaragua crisis during the Cold War. However, the production of Nicaragua related life writings did not just cede in the year 1990; up until the late 2010s that is when – as John Beverley called it – “the testimonio moment ha[d] passed” (*The Real Thing*, 1995, p. 281), life writings on the topic continued to be published.

This suggests an approach to the life writings of the US-Nicaragua solidarity movement that not only focusses on the immediate act of witnessing a crisis to call for change in the here and now, but also acknowledges another purpose as well as different temporalities of witnessing that are directed toward the not-yet of possible future change, but also take into account the longing for and thus the storying of past activist lives.

As the construction of collective identities plays a pivotal role in remembering activism, I propose a paper that focuses on the collective dimensions of life writings by US American activists of the 1980s Nicaragua peace and solidarity movement. Thus, I will investigate collaborative life writings that is narratives that are a product of more than one person (cf. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2010, p. 240). Within the peace and solidarity movement, such collective texts are frequent and realized in forms such as “We”-narratives, collaborative autoethnographic narratives, collective collage narratives, or institutional autobiographies, which all stress the importance of collectivity as well as its inherent power through and in their texts. This not only allows me to explore collective strategies and show how life writing is a deeply collective affair embedded in societal meaning making processes, but also highlights the function of narratives as a social practice as well as its role within the memory production of social movements and activism.

Verena Baier is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the University of Regensburg, Germany, where she also manages a humanities graduate research group, and is supported by a full PhD scholarship of the Stiftung der Deutschen Wirtschaft (sdw). Previously, she studied English, Spanish and American Studies at Augustana College, IL, the University of Seville, Spain, and the University of Regensburg, Germany. Her research interests include life writing studies, memory studies, Latin American history and culture, transnational American Studies, and social movements, – fields of interests that brought her to UC Berkeley twice; as a visiting PhD scholar affiliated with the Institute of European Studies (IES) during winter and spring term 2019/20, and the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) in spring 2022.

Poetics of Displacement: Narrating a Life as Collective Resistance

Katrina M. Powell

When records are compiled in refugee intake lines, demographic information is collected to inform humanitarian statistical data and international court testimonials to determine war crimes. These enumerations, however, are also used to manage and regulate bodies. Life narratives, those that resist the narratives of displacement contained in ledger books, challenge and expand enumerations, letting us into the interior of these ledger line items, each revealing hypertextual narratives behind those numbers. Images of power convey certain kinds of narratives about the displaced: despair, victimhood, demand for proof of citizenry, a masculinized sense of the trajectory of the displaced, and a method of cataloguing with a long colonialist history. Colonialist enumeration systems serve to manage resources but also to control people, highlighting them as resources to be managed. A poetics of displacement, however, recognizes that the single refugee ledger entry, an institutional representation of displacement, could not possibly document all aspects of identity—the ledger is incomplete. Performative autobiographical narratives resist identity stasis by creating

“alternative ledgers...fragments and hidden narratives not often included in historical archives,” counterparts to seas of white tents in a refugee camp, uniformed military moving civilian bodies, typed letters on government letterhead, and eviction notices. In this presentation, I outline a poetics of displacement, focusing on the interior, fragmented, and nonlinear methodologies that challenges us to consider what counts as an archive and who decides what’s contained in it. Ledgers of memories suggest that there are ethical considerations to creating archival spaces, resisting documentation for scrutiny and purposes of control, and can mean the difference between asserting an identity and succumbing to labels for purposes of categorization and order. As such, narrating a life is an outlaw act, a resistance to containment, and an embodied narrative creating a transgressive archive challenging colonialist enumerations.

Katrina M. Powell is Professor of English and founding Director of the Center for Refugee, Migrant, and Displacement Studies at Virginia Tech. She is the author of several books, including *The Anguish of Displacement: The Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park* (University of Virginia Press, 2007), *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement* (Routledge, 2015), and *Performing Autobiography: Narrating a Life as Activism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). She teaches courses in Feminist Autobiography, Rhetorics of Social Justice, and Feminist Research Methodologies. Her most recent project is a series of oral histories funded by Voice of Witness, titled, *Resettled: Beginning (Again) in Appalachia*, to be published by Haymarket Books in 2023.

Transmediating Hope: Remembering Activist Legacies in the Archive

Dagmar Brunow

Offering an intermedial perspective on memory studies, this paper contributes to the theorization of the (re)mediation (Erl/Rigney 2009) or transmediation (Elleström 2020, Bruhn/Schirmmacher 2021) of audiovisual memory. The paper follows Ann Rigney’s move from trauma to joy and hope when exploring the “memory-activism nexus” (Rigney 2018).

In the wake of the new turn in archival studies, which understands “archives as incubators of social change and injustice” (Prelinger 2021), this talk looks at transmediations of activist memories in and through the archive(s). Mobilizing a transmedial approach (Elleström 2020), I look at archival practices as epistemologies, bringing together insights from film archival studies (Fossati 2021, Prelinger 2021), critical archival studies (Carbajal/Caswell 2021) and critical Digital Humanities (Thylstrup et al 2021). How can an intermedial perspective help us to address the media specific affordances of audiovisual archives today? Drawing on the on the notion of the archive as the producer, rather than as a source of knowledge, this paper will present recent findings from my research project “The Lost Heritage: Improving Collaborations between Digital Film Archives” (2021-2024).

Dagmar Brunow is associate professor of film studies at Linnaeus University (LNU), Sweden, and part of the steering group for LNU’s Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS). Her research centres on archives and audiovisual heritage, cultural memory, documentary filmmaking as well as feminist and queer experimental filmmaking and video practice. Her research projects “The Lost Heritage: Improving Collaborations between Digital Film Archives” (2021-2024) and “The Cultural Heritage of Moving Images” (2016-2018) have been financed by the Swedish Research Council. Dagmar is the author of *Remediating Transcultural Memory: Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention* (de Gruyter, 2015, paperback 2021), the editor of *Stuart Hall. Aktivism, Pop & Politik* (Ventil Verlag, 2015), and co-editor of *Queer Cinema* (Ventil Verlag, 2018, with S. Dickel). Dagmar is a member of the editorial board of *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema* (2017), and the leader of the workgroup “Cultural Memory and Media” at NECS – Network of European Cinema Studies.

Establishing Addressees

Memoir as Reckoning: Arwa Salih's *The Stillborn*

Judith Naeff

This paper analyzes the different speech acts involved in Arwa Salih's *The Stillborn*: notebooks of a woman from the student-movement generation in Egypt, which combines life writing to socioeconomic critique, and personal letters to historical analysis. The book is grounded in the author's experience as a leader of the Egyptian student movement of the early 1970s, a narrative ridden with bitterness about her aborted dream of liberation. But unlike most life writing, the author refuses to present the reader with a narrative arc of a life as a worthy tale or lesson. Instead, the book forms a reckoning with dismal failure and a biting critique of the deficiencies of the author's comrades. It was published in 1997 and a few months later, the author committed suicide.

Drawing on speech act theory, the paper deals with the texts collected in *The Stillborn* as performative utterances: from a j'accuse, to a testimony, and from private letters to paratextual introductions. To analyze these disparate texts as speech acts means to take seriously the book's various implicit and explicit addressees and the ways in which it interpellates an Egyptian audience, and continues to do so, in new ways, since the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary experiences of 2011-2013. The paper proceeds with an analysis of literary and extra-literary references to Salih and her book in the 1990s and in the 2010s as situated responses to *The Stillborn*'s interpellation.

Judith Naeff is university lecturer Cultures of the Middle East at Leiden University and co-chief editor of the magazine *ZemZem*. She received an NWO Veni grant for her research project Remembering Dissent and Disillusion in the Arab World.

Redrawing the Lesbian: The Relationship between Lesbian and Queer Feminism in Kate Charlesworth's *Sensible Footwear: A Girl's Guide*

Vasiliki Belia

The past decade has seen an explosion of graphic narratives that remember the feminist past, making it accessible and attractive to a wide contemporary readership. The paper studies one such graphic narrative: Kate Charlesworth's *Sensible Footwear: A Girl's Guide* (2019), part graphic memoir of Charlesworth's life as a lesbian in the UK and part graphic documentary on British LGBTQ activism from the 1950s to the present. The work places Charlesworth and, more generally, the figure of the lesbian at the center of LGBTQ activism and at the meeting points of the LGBTQ and the feminist movements: lesbian and queer feminism. Dominant narratives about the feminist past describe the relationship between lesbian feminism and queer feminism as one of linear progress, where essentialist understandings of gender and sexuality give way to sophisticated ones. Such narratives give reductive readings of the diverse sexual, racial and class politics that characterized lesbian feminism. They are also interested narratives: they aim to mobilize their reader to assume a feminist subjectivity through disidentification with the past. *Sensible Footwear* gives a complex account of lesbian and queer feminism that goes against the grain of dominant narratives, paying attention to the similarities and continuity between the movements. The paper reads the work through the lens of feminist approaches to historiography that emphasize the role that the collective memory of feminism plays in the creation of political subjectivity. The analysis draws on narratological and aesthetic frameworks in comics studies to examine how the affordances of the medium contribute to this collective memory. It focuses, in particular, on the visual representations of the figure of the lesbian in the two main narrative strands, the memoir and the documentary. It argues that Charlesworth, weaving together personal and political history through a pastiche of drawing styles, invites her reader to occupy a feminist subjectivity that defies easy categorizations and is accountable to the past, exemplifying the historiographical potential of the graphic narrative.

Vasiliki Belia is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Gender and Diversity and the Department of Literature and Art, Maastricht University. Her research studies contemporary graphic narratives that engage with the memory of the feminist past and negotiate its meaning in the present. She has previously worked as lecturer and researcher at the Gender Studies Programme, Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University (2015-2020).

The Contentious Subject Speaks: The Speaker as a Model of Radical Subjectivity

Duygu Erbil & Clara Vlessing

Speeches and speaking have long been essential to contentious politics. Practices like soapboxing establish a speaking-model of radical political subjectivity that overcomes binary oppositions between deeds and words (Katriel 2021). The attention given to speaking as a form of contention has prompted a trend of books entitled “*The Contentious Subject Speaks*”, published especially in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, which tend to deliver public speeches in print form. Intriguingly, co-producers of these collections frame them using a discourse of autobiographicality: selected and printed speeches “tell the life story” of their subject “in their own words”. The trope of “*The Contentious Subject Speaks*” remediates past political address into the narrative of a political life to be remembered. These books circulate as “portable monuments” (Rigney 2004) to a life lived radically.

This paper looks at two apparently divergent examples of this phenomenon, Alix Kates Shulman’s *Red Emma Speaks* (1971) and Erdal Öz’s *Deniz Gezmiş Speaks* (1976). The former offers a selection of texts and speeches by the anarchist Emma Goldman (1869-1940), supplemented by Shulman’s paratextual framing. The latter provides a ventriloquised account of an interview with the Marxist-Leninist guerilla and Turkish student leader Deniz Gezmiş (1947-1972), undertaken shortly before his execution. First published in the 1970s both books have been repeatedly republished, maintaining central positions in the remembrance of Goldman and Gezmiş’ lives. Despite differences that resist comparison, both deploy a rhetoric of immediacy, authenticity and intimacy that allows the co-producers to take the positions of the secondary addressor and the primary addressee, as their subjects speak through them and speak to them concurrently. We examine the paratextual patterns that employ an auto/biographical discourse to mediate political speech into revolutionary life narratives

Duygu Erbil is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at Utrecht University. Her research analyses the cultural afterlife of Deniz Gezmiş through a cultural materialist approach and is part of the ERC-funded project *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe (ReAct)*. Her work explores the memory-activism nexus with a specific focus on relational life writing, cultural economy, and the relationship between law and memory.

Clara Vlessing is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at Utrecht University. Her research looks at the cultural afterlives of women activists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It serves as a case study within the wider project *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe (ReAct)*. Her latest publication, “Campaigns to Remember: Writing in the Afterlives of Sylvia Pankhurst” appeared in *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* in 2021.

Practical Information

Conference Location: Sweelinckzaal, Drift 21, Utrecht

- Access to Drift 21 is also through the entrance to the university library at Drift 27, 3512 BR Utrecht.

Utrecht City Pass:

If you are planning to do some sight-seeing in and around Utrecht, you could consider getting a Utrecht City Pass, offered by the Utrecht Tourist Office. This pass is linked to your credit card, and can be used for public transport, bike rentals and museum access. Please visit <https://utrechtregionpass.com/> for more information. Please note: if you are interested in this service, it is best to reserve the card before your arrival and pick it up at Utrecht CS or the Star Lodge reception desk.

WiFi Instructions:

- Eduroam is available in all university buildings.
- You can also use the free visitor WiFi. Click on 'UU-visitor' and a pop up window should appear. Select 'doorgaan'. This service is free of charge and available in all university buildings.

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