

“First of All, Let’s Go Learn Something”: Traditional Approaches and Modern Practices of Oral History in Italy*

“Ante todo, vamos aprender algo”: enfoques tradicionales y
prácticas modernas de la historia oral en Italia

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* The expression suggests the posture assumed by the collectors of memory voices. Is borrowed, not literally but grasping its deep meaning, from an intervention by Alessandro Portelli during the 1st School of Oral History and Public History in the metropolitan landscape of Rome in Tor Marancia, on 18 June 2022. The article is the result of a sharing of studies and reflections by the two authors, but specifically Patrick Urru wrote the first three paragraphs and Giulia Zitelli Conti the following one.

Resumen

This article presents a “story of Oral history” in Italy, from the beginning to today, dwelling in particular on the 70-90s and on the directions of the new millennium. Oral interviews are stories “from below”, where the authorship is shared between the interviewed people and an empathic interviewer.

Explored for decades in the Anglo-Saxon context, only recently the discipline obtained its own autonomy and academic dignity in Italy, overcoming a long-lasting scepticism about its “reliability”. In the 1980s, archival institutions began to take an interest in oral history, because it became then clear that “domestic” conservation could not give any guarantees of preservation and accessibility to these unique sources.

The bibliographic selection offered by this essay well illuminates how this approach can be employed to study in an innovative way the most various historical phenomena: the Resistance, the story of the unions, the lesbian movement, migrations, tragic events such as earthquakes, and much more.

Palabras clave

Oral history, Italy, sound archives, interviews, oral sources, public history.

Abstract

Este artículo presenta una “historia de la historia oral” en Italia, desde el comienzo hasta hoy, deteniéndose en particular en los años 70-90 y en las direcciones del nuevo milenio. Las entrevistas orales son relatos “desde abajo”, donde la autoría se comparte entre los entrevistados y un entrevistador empático.

Explorada durante décadas en el contexto anglosajón, solo recientemente la disciplina obtuvo su propia autonomía y dignidad académica en Italia, superando un escepticismo de larga data sobre su “confiabilidad”. En la década de 1980, las instituciones de archivo comenzaron a interesarse por la historia oral, porque entonces quedó claro que la conservación “doméstica” no podía dar ninguna garantía de preservación y accesibilidad a estas fuentes únicas.

La selección bibliográfica que ofrece este ensayo ilustra bien cómo se puede emplear este enfoque para estudiar de manera innovadora los más variados fenómenos históricos: la Resistencia, la historia de los sindicatos, el movimiento lésbico, las migraciones, hechos trágicos como los terremotos, y mucho más.

Keywords

Historia oral, Italia, archivos de sonido, entrevistas, fuentes orales, historia pública.

Introduction

More than forty years have passed since the publication of the research done by Alessandro Portelli, one of the most important oral historians of our time¹. His article (1979) can be considered a real manifesto of this methodology in Italy², and is on the one hand a deep analysis “of the diversity of oral history”, and on the other a reply to the critics raised by some Italian scholars. There is however also a story before and after this new methodology of historical research – rather than a new discipline.

Without any claim of completeness, this article retraces the most significant stages of oral history in Italy, starting from the beginning of this movement. It presents the most relevant schools of thought of the 1970s and 1980s – the latter period can be considered the heyday of Italian oral history. The research related to the collection of oral sources deals with very different themes: from the Resistance to the story of the companies, passing through the story of factory workers and the 1968. Furthermore, starting from the early 1980s, Italian oral history meets the archival administration, and this becomes a moment of discussion on the preservation and classification of oral sources that will continue throughout the 1990s.

A new phase of Italian oral history opens with the foundation of the Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale (AISO) in the early 2000s. Within this movement, scholars discuss the need to equip with the “best practices” to protect their research and the people they interview, becoming a reference point for young researchers who approach this methodology for the first time. This essay focuses on the historiographical trends emerging in the last ten years among scholars who employ oral sources, with specific attention to the younger generations. History of women, urban studies, environmental history, studies on the movements of 2000s are just some of the topics on which recent publications are

1. Alessandro Portelli’s publications are many, and translated into multiple languages. Among the most significant for oral history, see *The death of Luigi Trastulli, and other stories: form and meaning in oral history*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), *The order has been carried out: history, memory, and meaning of a Nazi massacre in Rome*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), *They say in Harlan County: an oral history*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), *Storie orali: racconto, immaginazione, dialogo*. (Rome: Donzelli, 2017), *La città dell’acciaio: due secoli di storia operaia*. (Rome: Donzelli, 2017).

2. Alessandro Portelli, “Sulla diversità della storia orale”, *Primo Maggio*, 13, (1979): 54-60. <https://www.autistici.org/operaismo/PrimoMaggio/La%20rivista/Primo%20Maggio%20%2313.pdf>. This essay has been translated and published in several books and magazines in different languages.

focused on. The bibliographic update does not only concern historiographical themes but also posture, languages, and tools.

In particular, this essay studies the enhancement offered by the approaches of public history, a methodology of Anglo-Saxon origin adopted in Italy for about ten years – and under constant discussions by scholars. Light will be shed in particular on the biographical links of the two disciplines, both adopting a “view from below” and being used on careful listening. The transdisciplinary approach and the aspiration to co-authorship are other elements which can bring both groups of scholars together. The digital switchover opened new and wide-ranging ways to face sound sources – and not only, because it also allows the use of new (or not so well known and conventional) languages: video-documentaries, podcasts, online exhibitions, interactive museums, video games, and city tours supported by historical narratives. The present essay shows, by way of example, a couple of projects, arising from a combination of the two approaches which creatively employ oral archives.

Ghosts, mystics, things that move and speak by themselves

“A spectre is haunting the halls of Academia: the spectre of ‘oral history’³: these words open the article by Alessandro Portelli mentioned above. His essay played an important role for many Italian scholars, because it acknowledged what they were doing with their research. Giovanni Contini, for example, started interviewing Italian factory workers to understand how they were affected by the technological revolution in the 1950s. After reading Portelli, Contini discovered he was doing “oral history” without knowing it⁴. The Italian “*storia orale*” comes from the English “oral history”⁵, which has been systematically explored in the United States since 1948 – year of the foundation of Columbia University’s Oral History Research Office (OHRO) by Allan Nevins⁶. The term ‘oral history’ generically defines the historical research methodology which collects

memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed

3. Alessandro Portelli, “On the peculiarities of oral history”, *History Workshop Journal*, 12, (1981): 96-107. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/12.1.96>.

4. Luciane Sgarbi S. Grazziotin, Giovanni Contini, “Oral history research in Italy: An interview with Giovanni Contini”, *História Unisinos*, 22, no. 2, (2018): 326-330. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4013/htu.2018.222.16>.

5. The bibliography on oral history is wide. For a selection of the most significant titles, see *Useful readings on oral history*, International Oral History Association, <https://www.ioha.org/resources/useful-readings/>.

6. Allan Nevins (1890-1971) was an American journalist and historian, and is considered “the Father of Modern Oral History”. See Willa K. Baum, “Oral History in the United States”, *Oral History*, 1, n. 3, (1972), 15-29. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40178434>. For a broader reflection on American oral history and beyond, see: Nēpia, Mahuika, *Rethinking oral history and tradition: an indigenous perspective*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Daniel R. Kerr, “Allan Nevins Is Not My Grandfather: The Roots of Radical Oral History Practice in the United States”, *Oral History Review*, 43, no. 2, (2016): 367-391. <https://doi-org.umiss.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ohr/ohw074>.

in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization or other form of public presentation⁷.

The methodology considered in the present essay, therefore, focuses on biographical sources obtained during oral history interviews – and not on ‘ego-documents’ such as letters, diaries, and written autobiographies⁸.

Portelli’s article appeared for the first time in 1979 in the journal *Primo Maggio: Saggi e documenti per una storia di classe*⁹. In the following years this essay had an international distribution, therefore it is important to briefly highlight some aspects of it, in order to understand the author’s point of view on the use of oral sources. First of all, the article focuses on the orality of these sources, contrary to the customs of American oral history which, at least initially, believed in the centrality of the transcriptions of the interviews, and eliminated or rewrote the original records. Promoting orality also means focusing on the form of language, the narrative styles, and the meaning of the story. The reliability and partiality of oral sources must be put under discussion, as with every kind of source. Oral sources, however, have a different kind of reliability: even those “unreliable” from a factual point of view are to be taken into consideration, because they give the opportunity to investigate the historical reasons behind certain interpretations and mistakes. Oral sources are partial in the sense that they are contemporary not so much on the event, but on the research on it. Everything that the source says depends both on what the interviewer manages to bring out during an interview, and on what the interviewee decides to say. The oral historian therefore becomes an active part of the story, and shares narrative authority with the interviewed person¹⁰.

There was scepticism among Italian academics about this “new” methodology of research because, according to some of them, it produces sources with scarce reliability, based just on subjective memories. This suspect was widespread among Italian scholars: even Beniamino Placido, mentor of Alessandro Portelli, did not entirely trust oral sources¹¹. Commenting (for the newspaper *La Repubblica*) a television series dedicated to the story of a small town in southern Italy, Placido described Italian oral history, and the “breathless gasping of the mystics of animation and participation” – referring to those who focus on the “representations ‘from below’” and to “the artificial packaging of

7. *Oral History: Defined*, <https://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>.

8. See Mary, Fulbrook and Ulinka, Rublack, “In Relation: The ‘Social Self’ and Ego-Documents”, *German History*, 28, n° 3, (2010): 263-272. One of the most important Italian public archives collecting diaries, letters, and autobiographical memoirs is the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale of Pieve Santo Stefano (Arezzo): see Camillo, Brezzi and Patrizia, Gabrielli, *La forza delle memorie: l’archivio dei diari di Pieve Santo Stefano*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2022).

9. For a story of the journal see Cesare, Bermani, *La rivista Primo maggio (1973-1989)*. (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2010).

10. Michael, Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

11. Alessandro Portelli, “Beniamino Placido, mio maestro”, *Alessandro Portelli*, 11 January 2010, <http://alessandroportelli.blogspot.com/2010/01/beniamino-placido-mio-maestro.html>.

'oral history', which assumes that things move and speak by themselves"¹². He criticises the involvement of the unknown protagonists of the story, the unofficial part, what comes from below. This kind of research reduces the distances between producer and user of history. Oral history puts at its centre the encounter between two subjectivities: that of the interviewers and the interviewees. It questions the production of sources for historical research and the methodological ideal of documentary objectivity: there are no neutral comments on the events, just as the historian's intervention actively attributes to the document a value of testimony which is not neutral either¹³. The source always originates from an encounter between two or more people, from an exchange of interests and cultural values. Luisa Passerini, a pioneer of Italian oral history, argues that oral history is revolutionary not only because it gives power to the masses, but because it emphasises the role of the historian in the production of sources¹⁴. Passerini prefers to focus on the theoretical foundation of history, rather than on its ethical-political mission. In the latter case, the historian's political attitude and ideas run the risk of compromising the scientific value of his work¹⁵.

A similar concern for political influence is feared by the historian Guido Quazza, mentor of Passerini, professor at the University of Turin and director of *Rivista di storia contemporanea*. In this journal, Quazza compares two different ways of employing oral sources in research. Analysing an essay by Portelli, Quazza praises the careful analysis of the reconstruction of the testimony, but describes this approach more as anthropological than historical. The historians Anna Bravo and Lucetta Scaraffia, on the contrary, use testimonial sources more rapidly, but are very concerned with the conceptual needs behind them¹⁶. There is a close relationship between anthropology and oral history, as testified by the "Convegno internazionale di antropologia e storia: Fonti orali" held in Bologna in 1976¹⁷. This international conference will only later be recognized as a founding moment of the International Oral History Association (IOHA)¹⁸.

As already explained, the publication of Portelli's essay in 1979 is a turning point for oral history in Italy. Cesare Bermani was one of the first Italian scholars to deal with the study and collection of oral sources, with the conviction that the use of oral testimo-

12. Beniamino Placido, "Laggiù, la vita è sogno", *la Repubblica*, 3 October 1978.

13. Jacques Le Goff, "Documento/Monumento", *Encyclopedia: volume 5*. (Turin: Einaudi, 1978).

14. Luisa Passerini, "Conoscenza storica e storia orale. Sull'utilità e il danno delle fonti orali per la storia", *Storia orale. Vita quotidiana e cultura materiale delle classi subalterne*. (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), VII-XL.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Guido Quazza, "Ricerche di storia orale", *Rivista di storia contemporanea*, 1, (1979): 18-20.

17. Bernardo Bernardi; Carlo Poni; Alessandro Triulzi, *Fonti orali: antropologia e storia*. (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1978). An abridged version is in Bernardo Bernardi, Carlo Poni, Alessandro Triulzi, "Oral History: fra antropologia e storia", *Quaderni storici*, 35, (1977).

18. Mercedes Vilanova Ribas, "Las fuentes orales entre Bolonia (1976) y México (2008)", *Historia, antropología y fuentes orales*, 36, (2006): 49-50. For the story of the foundation of the International Oral History Association (IOHA), see Agnès, Arp; Annette, Leo; Franka, Maubach, *Giving a voice to the oppressed: the International Oral History Association, between political movements and academic networks*. (Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

nies in historical research dates back to the 1930s¹⁹. Bermani explains the great variety of topics that can be addressed with the methodology of oral history, and briefly studies the scholars who employed this methodology. They include individual researchers on the margins of academic life (the so-called “storici scalzi”), historical institutes of the Resistance, the world of schools, small institutes carrying on research on local history, and many others. The *Istituto Ernesto De Martino per la conoscenza critica e la presenza alternativa del mondo popolare e proletario*, founded in 1966 by the will of Gianni Bosio and Alberto Mario Cirese, represents a reference point for the research on popular history and social and political songs. This institute focused from the start on the preservation, description, and enhancing of the records collected on the field. It is currently one of the most important sound archives in Italy, and it preserves songs, popular representations, and testimonies on the most important historical moments of the labour movement and beyond. Agreeing with Portelli’s view, the Istituto Ernesto De Martino believes in the promotion of oral sources, and its series of *Sound Archives* immediately aims at presenting oral reality as precisely as the reality mediated by writing²⁰. This accuracy ensures the preservation of records and also allows to broadcast popular music, a great variety of dialects, and the memory of contemporaneity. The disc they publish contain songs, but also interviews – as in the case of the recordings made by Alessandro Portelli in the Roman suburbs²¹, or the story of the struggles and demonstrations of the Crouzet workers in Milan collected by Franco Coggiola²². The experiences of the Istituto Ernesto de Martino are a fascinating example of preservation, description, and promotion of oral sources²³. Even if the institute was interested mainly in popular music and tradition, it ultimately contributed to the foundation of oral history in Italy.

Reviewing and archiving oral sources

Starting from the early 1980s, the research involving the collection and use of oral sources exploded. It is difficult to keep track of all the projects carried out in this decade, so this article will focus just on a few experiences, without any claim to be exhaustive. During the first national oral history conference (Turin 1981), a dossier presented the first attempt to collect the names of researchers and institutions that were using and/or preserving oral sources²⁴. The only institution was the “Centro etnografico ferrarese. Museo comunale del risorgimento e della resistenza”; all the other actors were

19. Cesare Bermani, “Fonti orali e ricerca storica in Italia”, *Introduzione alla storia orale: volume I. Storia, conservazione delle fonti e problemi di metodo*. (Rome: Odradek, 1999): 1-126.

20. Cesare, Bermani, *L’intellettuale rovesciato*. (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998).

21. Alessandro, Portelli, *Roma, la borgata e la lotta per la casa*. (Milan: Edizioni del Gallo, 1972).

22. Franco Coggiola, *Milano lotta operaia alla Crouzet*. (Milan: Edizioni del Gallo, 1972).

23. On the importance of Gianni Bosio’s analysis and the activity of the Istituto Ernesto De Martino for Italian Oral History, see Alessandro Portelli, *L’Elogio del magnetofono: alle origini della storia orale, Il de Martino*, 1, (1992): 29-36.

24. *Le fonti orali: dossier n. 1, gennaio 1981*. (Turin: Istituto piemontese di scienze economiche e sociali Antonio Gramsci: 1981); *Le fonti orali: dossier n. 2, marzo 1981*. (Turin: Istituto piemontese di scienze economiche e sociali Antonio Gramsci: 1981).

single scholars or small research groups. This dossier is an interesting source, because it names the researchers employing oral sources and updates on the research in progress or completed at that time of the conference. The absence of institutions aimed at the preservation of oral sources shows how, in the Italian context, research with oral sources was – and to a large extent still is – primarily an individual matter. The survey in the dossier was limited geographically to northern Italy, with the exception of Puglia and Sardinia. The topics addressed by the participants included women's history, the Resistance, the world of workers, folklore, and urban history.

Another source summarising the development of oral history in Italy during the 1980s is the journal *Fonti orali. Studi e ricerche. Bollettino nazionale d'informazione* (published from 1981 to 1987)²⁵, which aims to create communication and connection between scholars, but also leaves space to debate and reflection on oral history research. The project of this journal addresses a variety of topics, and promotes the comparison between the historical and social sciences with other disciplines such as literature, linguistic-dialectology and anthropology. The journal wants to update on the development of oral history on an international level, and focuses on the archiving of oral sources – this way showing great awareness for the precarious preservation of recorded media and the great dispersion of the collections created by individual researchers.

On the subject of archiving, for the first time oral historians and state preservation institutions tried to converge together through the agreement stipulated in 1983 between the Società per la Storia Orale²⁶ and the Discoteca di Stato²⁷. The agreement involved both the production of the interviews and their conservation, protection, and use in the form of recordings and transcriptions²⁸. The Società per la Storia Orale was established in Rome the previous year, with the aim of collecting through interviews (also in the context of specific research projects) the oral testimonies of those who have been protagonists, spectators, or just participants in the political, social, and cultural events taking place in Italy during the twentieth century²⁹. For the first time, Italian oral historians showed interest in setting up a tape library, guaranteeing the preser-

25. The digital version of the journal is available on the website of the Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale (AISO): <https://www.aisoitalia.org/fonti-orali-studi-e-ricerche/>.

26. The association was established in Rome in 1982, and its bodies are the Assemblea generale and the Consiglio direttivo. The admission of the members is deliberated through a secret ballot by the Consiglio Direttivo. During the members' meeting of May 29, 1995, the Consiglio Direttivo for the three-year period 1995-1997 was elected, and consisted of: Francesco Malgeri, president; Gabriele De Rosa, treasurer; Maria Grazia Melchionni, general secretary; Renato Grispo, Giuliana Limiti, Aurelio Rigoli, and Enrico Serra as advisors. Since 1996, the Società per la Storia Orale has published a newsletter to update members of the activities and events concerning oral history, in Italy and in other parts of the world. The author wish to thank Maria Grazia Melchionni for sharing the two issues of the newsletter (1996-1997) and the 1996 members list.

27. The Discoteca di Stato changed its name in 2007 and became Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori e Audiovisivi (ICBSA). The ICBSA is responsible for documenting, promoting and preserving the national sound and audiovisual heritage, <http://www.icbsa.it/index.php?it/8/istituto>.

28. For the full text of the agreement, see "Convenzione di collaborazione tra la Discoteca di Stato e la Società per la storia orale", Paola, Carucci; Giovanni, Contini, "Le fonti orali", *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato*, 1-2, (1988): 184-186.

29. Art. 3 of the Statute of the Società per la Storia Orale.

vation of the collected material and, if needed, to invest in public archives the funds received for their activities. The concern for the preservation of the material can be connected also to the scientific background of one of the leading members of the association, Maria Grazia Melchionni³⁰. The scholar came into contact with oral history in the United States, where the discussion of the preservation of oral sources has of the utmost importance for many years. The Società per la Storia Orale is rooted in academia, and this avoids the common scepticism on oral history (as mentioned above), according to Melchionni caused by the militant oral movement of the 1970s³¹.

The year of the agreement between the Società per la storia orale and the Disoteca di Stato marks the decision of the Archival Administration to get in touch with the researchers collecting oral sources as well. The idea, developed in 1983, was to create a questionnaire to monitor the status of oral history research in Italy. The survey’s results confirmed two peculiar aspects of the Italian situation: a plurality of disciplines – and therefore of researchers – creating oral sources, but a scarce interest in their conservation and description³². The administration of the State Archives launched the survey only in 1987, targeting the Italian and foreign “oral historians” who participated in the fifth international conference of Oral History held in Barcelona in 1985. As for the Italians, looking only at the participants of this international conference does not make sense and is unrepresentative, especially being at the time available Luisa Passerini’s dossier of the first Italian conference on oral sources in 1981 which, as mentioned, is a first census of the scholars of the field. The census promoted by the Archival Administration was accompanied by others: one of them, aimed at understanding which cultural institutes preserved sound archives, was coordinated by the Italian Archival Department, another one conducted a census of the sound archives of the Institutes of the History of the Italian Resistance³³. These surveys shed some light on what is preserved in Italy, and most of

30. Among the publications of Maria Grazia Melchionni on oral history, see “Il fascino discreto della storia orale”, *Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa*, 24, (1983): 175-197; “Decisione politica e trasmissione burocratica viste attraverso il prisma di un certo numero di interviste”, *L’intervista strumento di documentazione: giornalismo-antropologia-storia orale. Atti del convegno, Roma 5-7 maggio 1986*, (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1987), 165-171; “Alla scoperta della storia orale, 1967-1987”, Paola, Carucci; Giovanni, Contini, “Le fonti orali”, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-193; “Le fonti orali negli archivi pubblici: una questione di sinergia fra storici ed archivisti”, *Etnostoria*, 1-2, (1992): 61-77; *Istor: colui che racconta in veste di testimone. Manualletto per praticare la storia orale*. (Rome: Kappa, 1994); Luisa, Bonolis; Maria Grazia, Melchionni, *Fisici italiani del tempo presente: storie di vita e di pensiero*. (Venice: Marsilio, 2003); Maria Grazia, Melchionni; Roberto, Ducci, *La genèse des traités de Rome: entretiens inédits avec 18 acteurs et témoins de la négociation*. (Paris: Economica, 2007). Further information on the activity of Maria Grazia Melchionni and the Società per la storia orale emerged during an interview carried out on 11 October 2021 in Rome. The record is kept in the Italian provincial library “Claudia Augusta” in Bolzano. For the transcript see Patrick Urru, “Storia orale delle élite. Intervista a Maria Grazia Melchionni”, *Interviste sull’intervista*, February 4, 2022, <https://www.aisoitalia.org/storia-orale-elite-intervista-melchionni/>.

31. Maria Grazia Melchionni, *Istor...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

32. Paola, Carucci; Giovanni, Contini, *Le fonti orali...*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

33. Ludovica de Courten, Antonella Mulè, “Questionario diretto agli «storici orali»”, pp. 66-81; Antonella Mulè, “Un primo sondaggio delle Sovrintendenze archivistiche sugli archivi sonori”, pp. 82-86; Franco Castelli, “Gli archivi sonori degli Istituti storici della Resistenza. Primi risultati di un’inchiesta”, pp. 87-129, Paola, Carucci; Giovanni, Contini, *Oral orali...*, *op. cit.*; Franco Castelli, “Fonti orali e istituti storici della

all help defining and classifying these new sources, developing a common language, and reflecting on how to catalogue the preserved material.

A decade by the book

Between the end of the 1980s and the 1990s, the debate around oral history in Italy seemed to be decreasing in intensity. The end of the journal *Fonti orali* in 1987 and the failed attempt of important Italian oralists (including Alessandro Portelli, Cesare Bermani, and Roberto Leydi) to found a “Società italiana per l’uso critico delle fonti orali nelle scienze storico-sociali”³⁴ can be seen as signs of a progressive fading of the “from below” approach that characterised the movement since the 1960s. New lines of research emerged, such as using oral sources to write business history. It is worth mentioning a national seminar dedicated to these issues, organised in 1993 after internal discussion between the editorial staff of the journal *Archives and companies* (directed from 1991 to 1999 by Duccio Bigazzi, a well-known industry historian)³⁵.

In the early Nineties the Società di Storia Orale continued its activities, organised a conference dedicated to the practice of interviewing³⁶, and proposed a meeting with the title “La storia orale come fonte nella storiografia contemporanea: validità scientifica e limiti”, in collaboration with the Istituto Luigi Sturzo and the Centro Internazionale di Etnostoria di Palermo³⁷. Unfortunately, the agreement between the Società per la Storia Orale and the Discoteca di Stato did not give the desired results. The collaboration did not go on systematically as was expected, after the deposit of interviews to relevant witness-

resistenza. Un’indagine sugli archivi sonori”, *Gli archivi e la memoria del presente*. (Rome: Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1992), pp. 268-280; Giulia, Barrera; Alfredo, Martini; Antonella, Mulè, *Fonti orali: censimento degli istituti di conservazione*. (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1993).

Several censuses have recently been promoted, for example Alessandro, Andreini; Pietro, Clemente, *I custodi delle voci. Archivi orali in Toscana: primo censimento*. (Florence: Centro stampa Regione Toscana, 2007). During the conference *Fonti orali in Italia: archivi e ri-generazioni* (October 2019), a paper by Elisa Castellano and Stefano Bartolini (*Archivi e biblioteche sindacali e fonti orali: un censimento in corso e il convegno di Matera*, <https://www.reteparri.it/archivi/fonti-orali-italia-archivi-ri-generazioni-4850/>) presented the census of archives and libraries of the unions preserving oral sources.

During the seminar *Il Vademecum per le fonti orali: una bussola per operatori, ricercatori, istituzioni* (October 2021), Antonella Mulè and Elisa Salvalaggio showed the updated censuses of the audio and audio visual archives of the Archival Administration and the network of the Institutes of the History of the Italian Resistance and the Contemporary Society in Italy. For an account of this seminar, see Chiara Celata, Elisa Salvalaggio, “Al MiC la presentazione ufficiale del ‘Vademecum per il trattamento delle fonti orali’”, *Il mondo degli archivi*, 17 December 2021, <http://www.ilmondodegliarchivi.org/columns/in-italy/916-al-mic-the-official-presentation-of-the-vademecum-for-the-treatment-of-oral-sources>.

34. The discussion on an Italian association of oral historians is in *Fonti orali. Studi e ricerche. Bollettino nazionale d’informazione*, 4, (1987), <https://www.aisoitalia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/1987-4-nuova-serie.pdf>.

35. Renato, Covino, *Fonti orali e storia d’impresa. Atti del seminario nazionale, Arezzo 15 ottobre 1993*. (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2000). See also the recent research on Duccio Bigazzi’s archive by Sara, Zanisi, *Il Portello: voci dalla fabbrica. Le interviste di Duccio Bigazzi in Alfa Romeo*. (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2017).

36. *L’intervista strumento di documentazione...*, op. cit.

37. The proceedings of the conference were published in the journal *Etnostoria*, 1-2, (1992).

es of the birth of the Republic and of the process of integration to Europe³⁸. The causes can be found first of all in the lack of personnel and funds of the Discoteca di Stato, and then in the substantial lack of interest in the initiative by the Central State Archive³⁹. In the early Nineties, The Istituto Luigi Sturzo opened an “oral section” in its archive, and launched a project to collect interviews curated by the Società per la Storia Orale. This collaboration led to the publication of an “instruction manual” for young researchers working in both institutions, in order to ensure the quality and homogeneity of their work⁴⁰. This handbook provided information on all the phases of an oral history project, from the equipment for recording to the presentation of oral sources. It also gave drafts for biographical interviews, models for the letter requesting consent to the interview, but also examples of indexing and cataloguing sound documents and their transcriptions. It is therefore a practical handbook, which follows the structure and terminology of the guidelines issued by the US Oral History Association, confirming the link between the Società per la Storia Orale and the American “school”. This book did not have the great diffusion which on the contrary had *Verba manent: L’uso delle fonti orali per la storia contemporanea*, published by Giovanni Contini and Alfredo Martini in 1993. *Verba manent* is a very different, more complete volume that studies the role of oral sources in historical research, frames a research methodology within the international context, and also deals (even if very briefly) with practical issues related to oral sources.

Another little-known experience took place around the publishing project *La Spola*. The editorial board included Giovanni Mimmo Boninelli, Paola Carucci, Giovanni Contini, Brunello Mantelli, and Alfredo Martini as the coordinator. Their aim was to create a newsletter on oral sources to reanimate the debate in Italy – with particular attention to archival preservation and the promotion of oral sources for scientific and research purposes⁴¹. It is no coincidence that the first issue of the newsletter featured an interview with Paola Carucci, a well-known archivist, who briefly illustrated the approach of the Italian Archival Administration to the topic of oral sources. Carucci recalled the XI International Congress of Archives held in Paris in 1988 and dedicated to the preservation of oral archives⁴². Furthermore, Carucci noted how the European archival administrations were late in paying attention to the new sources for contemporary historical research. Different cultural traditions led to different results: in the case of Italy, for instance, there

38. The projects curated by Maria Grazia Melchionni are *La primavera d’Europa. I negoziati dei trattati di Roma in diciotto testimonianze* and *L’origine della Repubblica*.

39. Maria Grazia Melchionni, *Le fonti orali negli archivi pubblici...*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

40. Maria Grazia Melchionni, *Istor...*, *op. cit.* p. 12.

41. The author wishes to thank Alfredo Martini for making available the questionnaire, the number 0 and the first issue of the *La Spola newsletter* (the latter published as a supplement to the journal *I Giorni Cantati*, nr. 14, June 1990).

42. The proceedings of the conference are published in the International Council on Archives, *Proceedings of the 11. International Congress on Archives: Paris, 22-26 August 1988*. (München: Saur, 1989). UNESCO showed a great interest in oral history as well, and in 1986 it published a study dedicated to archives, oral history, and oral traditions. See William W., Moss; Peter C., Mazikana, *Archives, oral history and oral tradition: a RAMP study*, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000068747.locale=en>. The *Records and Archives Management Programs* (RAMP) are designed to promote methods, norms, and standards to manage the documentation.

had always been a great commitment to the preservation and cataloguing of the ancient written documentation. Carucci believed it necessary for archival Department and state archives to implement a small cultural revolution – a delicate operation that needs time and constant awareness. Carucci finally underlined the importance of dialogue between oral historians and archivists, to focus on common problems and to exchange relevant experiences, in order to develop a better definition of the criteria for the identification and preservation of sources. The latter issue is essential, not only for a critical analysis of any research, but also to allow a new generation of scholars to use the sources that previous researchers have established and/or collected during their lives⁴³.

Finally, in the 1990s Italian oral history obtained important recognition from the academic world, in particular from the national association of contemporary historians, the SISSCO- Società italiana per lo studio della storia contemporanea. In 1998, this association awarded its annual prize for the best Italian contemporary history book to two works based on oral sources: *La memoria divisa* published by Giovanni Contini, and *Anatomia di un massacro. Controversia sopra una strage tedesca* by Paolo Pezzino (both published in 1997)⁴⁴.

A new phase for oral history opened in the early 2000s. The organisation of the XIIIth International Oral History Conference, held in Rome in 2004⁴⁵, represents thanks to the contribution of Alessandro Portelli an important step in the constitution of the Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale (AISO) in 2006.

A Welcoming House: the “Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale” (AISO)

The foundation of the AISO is of the utmost importance for the scholarly community interested in the use of oral sources⁴⁶. Its promoters aimed at welcoming the collectors of memories, putting into dialogue the many different experiences of research and use of oral sources. Established in 2006, the association is based at the Casa della Memoria e della Storia in Rome, in Trastevere, at the Circolo Gianni Bosio. The AISO is directed by a council and a president, elected by the members every two years. Its presidents have been Gabriella Gribaudo (2006-2013), Giovanni Contini (2013-2017), Alessandro Casellato (2017-2021) and Antonio Canovi (from 2021).

One of the main aims of the association is to stimulate scientific discussion on the methodologies and practices of oral history. Among the many meetings, promoted and co-organized with other cultural institutes, let us remember the seminars *La memoria delle catastrofi* (Naples 2010) and *Famiglie e rappresentazioni* (Rome 2012); the study day *Le fonti orali e la storia* (Florence 2013); the conferences *L'era del testimone?* (Naples 2018) and *Fonti*

43. Alfredo Martini, Paola Carucci, “Quattro domande a Paola Carucci”, *La Spola*, 0, pp. 2-4 (unpublished number).

44. Bruno, Bonomo, *Voci della memoria. L'uso delle fonti orali nella ricerca storica*. (Rome: Carocci, 2013).

45. *Memory and Globalization*, XIIIth International Oral History Conference, Rome, Italy, 23-26 June 2004.

46. For more details on the activities of the association, see <https://www.aisoitalia.org>, whose editors are largely early career researchers. The current coordinators are the doctoral students Chiara Paris and Enrico Ruffino.

orali: archivi e ri-generazioni (Turin 2019); the online seminar *Fare storia orale a distanza (e in emergenza)* (2020); the online conference *Scrivere quasi la stessa cosa. La trascrizione come atto interpretativo nella pratica della storia orale* (2021) and the seminar *Raccontare storie, raccontare la storia* (Rome 2021). Finally, in 2022 the conference *Imparare dagli errori. Difficoltà, complicazioni, ripensamenti nella storia orale* and the seminar *Sharing memories. Esperienze di archiviazione e diffusione di fonti orali* took place respectively in Treviso-Venice and Naples.

Also thanks to a significant growth of the members (currently about 170), AISO has increasingly structured its areas of intervention, especially focusing on training and education, planning activities in schools, and organising the so-called Schools of Oral History – today at the core of the AISO –. Many teaching experiences are offered: some as a first approach to the methodology of oral history, others as specialisation courses. In both cases, they generally last between two and four days and are open to anyone: students, graduate students, PhDs, researchers, teachers, cultural operators, journalists, librarians, archivists and also to enthusiasts. Some AISO schools are dedicated to a specific historiographical theme, as in the case of *Il manicomio e la città: voci attraverso i muri* (held in Feltre in 2022), others are more practical, such as the *Memorie immaginate* school on audio-visual techniques (Padua 2016), while others are closely linked to the landscape where they originate from, like the school in Montefiorino (which reached its fifth edition).

Another recent trend of the AISO is the concern and growing attention for the conservation and promotion of oral sources. In other countries, especially in the Anglo-Saxon areas, oral history literally originated in archives, and the projects collecting the testimonies were strongly related to the construction or expansion of sound archives. The contrary happened in Italy, where for a long time – and sometime still today – “domestic” forms of preservation prevailed: in the drawers, desks, or hard drives of individual researchers. The interview is the sound recording of a unique meeting between people: the interviewer builds a relationship of trust with his witness who, in turn, chooses to donate to that specific person his memories as an act of generosity. It is clear that the researcher can be somewhat jealous or at least protective of the oral sources he collected. The oral historian’s hesitations are even more understandable if one thinks about the unsafe conditions of the places where these recordings are supposed to be preserved – often not because of negligence, but because there are not enough resources to properly take care of them –⁴⁷.

This praxis collides however with the mortality of both the researcher and the witness, an event that sooner or later takes place, and that worsens the risk of dispersing all these data. Whether the interviews are privately kept or stored in archives, another problem is the difficulty of adapting the recording medium to the technological development – with the risk of deterioration. There is thus a strong need to archive, and to do it well. It is also a question of ethics: the historian should make verifiable every source he uses, in a simple and public way.

47. Luisa Passerini wrote about the challenge for oral historians to archive oral sources in the Piedmont region, see for example, Luisa, Passerini, “L’archiviazione delle fonti orali tra pubblico e privato: amarezze e residue speranze da un’esperienza piemontese”, Paola, Carucci; Giovanni, Contini, *Le fonti orali...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-173.

These considerations led the Coordinamento per le fonti orali, a network of cultural institutes, archives and scientific associations, to draft, with the coordination of Silvia Calamai (Associazione Italiana di Scienze della Voce-AISV, Università degli studi di Siena, CLARIN IT), Alessandro Casellato (AISO, University Ca' Foscari Venezia) and Maria Francesca Stamuli (Sovrintendenza archivistica e bibliografica of Tuscany), to draft the document *Vademecum per il trattamento delle fonti orali*, presented in Rome in October 2021⁴⁸. The text “contains useful information for those who work with oral sources as researchers, archivists, librarians, or experts of documents. It originates from the acknowledgment that many of the oral archives produced in the past now require urgent safeguarding to prevent their irreversible deterioration. It aims to inform and attract the interest of researchers on the importance of a correct way to produce, preserve, and archive their own oral sources – as a prerequisite for preserving and promoting them, making them available to both the subjects who participated in the research and to other scholars in the future. It offers some basic information and references to archivists, librarians and, more generally, conservators of oral archives to better conduct their own work”⁴⁹.

Among the points addressed, we can find the delicate issue of informed consent (adapted to the GDPR)⁵⁰, the equipment and cataloguing of oral sources, the digitization and long-term preservation, and the sale and acquisition of oral archives. The *Vademecum* also provides multiple models for a proper treatment of recordings (from releases to catalogue cards), and a useful list of centres for digitising and storing sound documents in Italy.

Recent historiographical trends

Looking back over the activities of AISO as outlined above, it is possible to describe some of the recent trends of oral history in Italy, of which this association is one of the many and different components. This paragraph proposes a bibliographic review, organised by research themes and limited to a selection of publications from the last decade⁵¹. This will not be exhaustive, but will focus on the most recent publications, with the aim to define oral history today, and to investigate the different ways of approaching the oral collections and interviews.

48. The Coordinamento, recently become Tavolo permanente per le fonti orali, is now led by Chiara Celata (Associazione Italiana di Scienze della Voce-AISV, Università degli studi di Urbino), Silvia Filippin (Direzione Generale Archivi-DGA), Elena Musumeci (Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione-ICCD), Giulia Piperno (Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori e Audiovisivi-ICBSA), Elisa Salvalaggio (Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri, Università degli studi di Torino), and Patrick Urru (Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale-AISO, Università degli studi di Trento). The new Coordinamento recently organised a conference dedicated to a follow-up of the *Vademecum*: “Un anno di Vademecum per il trattamento delle fonti orali: risultati, criticità, orizzonti di sviluppo”, Rome, 27 October 2022.

49. Coordinamento per le fonti orali, *Vademecum per il trattamento delle fonti orali*. (Rome, 2021): p. 5. Available at this link: <https://www.aisoitalia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Vademecum-per-il-trattamento-delle-fonti-orali.pdf>.

50. Ivi, pp. 33-34.

51. This article considers the years 2013-2022, ideally continuing what Bruno Bonomo presented in the fourth chapter of *Voci della memoria*, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-150, a great introduction to methodological questions.

Oral history and the territory have always been closely intertwined⁵². Italian oral history was produced in urban districts and neighbourhoods, and local micro-histories are very important in this context. Research investigated the territory as an inhabited landscape, allowing “to recreate the experiences that different people have of the cities, to explore in which ways they relate to places and people, to access their perception of urban realities and the meaning the latter assumes in their eyes”⁵³. The most common way of intertwining oral history and urban studies is to use interviews together with other types of sources: documents from municipal archives, papers from police headquarters and prefectures, maps, statistics and censuses, urban plans, newspapers, audio-visuals, photographs, songs and literature. This is how Laura Longo studied Piazza Mercato in Naples⁵⁴. Longo conducted 43 semi-structured interviews, considering them as the “founding architecture” of her work. They were recorded between 2014 and 2016, dialoguing with traders, residents, foreign migrants, local associations, and social actors like the school principal or the parish priest. These narratives from below write the history of that part of the city, focusing for example on the difficult years of the war, the golden season of commerce, the 1980s earthquake, the trade crisis, and the coexistence between different cultures which populate alleys and open spaces, from churches to mosques. As Alessandro Portelli masterfully showed, it is not only what is told that is significant, but also the unspoken, the silences, the omissions, and even the memory failures⁵⁵. In the case of Piazza Mercato, the interviewed people do not respond to the explicit questions on the presence of organised crime in a “Gomorra style”⁵⁶, but with a vocabulary of abandonment and insecurity: “the authority of the Camorra in these territories is not just a consequence of an excessive use of brutal force, but also and above all of the fact that it constitutes a resource to emerge from the long and painful wait of what the future holds”⁵⁷. To put it in the words of an interviewee: “The problem is that this is an abandoned territory, a territory where there is no concept of polis, there is no vocation for this territory. And then, since there is no vocation for a territory, that is, if you don’t know what to do, everyone gets by, gets by as

52. See for instance: Franco, Alasia, Danilo, Montaldi, *Milano Corea. Inchiesta sugli immigrati*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960); Giorgina, Levi, *Il Lingotto. Storia di un quartiere operaio* (Turin, 1922-1973). (Turin: Gruppo editoriale piemontese, 1974); Daniele, Jalla, Stefano, Musso, *Territorio, fabbrica e cultura operaia a Torino* (1900-1940). (Turin: L’arciera, 1981); Lidia, Piccioni, *San Lorenzo. Un quartiere romano durante il fascismo*. (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984); Alessandro, Portelli, *Biografia di una città. Storia e racconto: Terni 1830-1985*. (Turin: Einaudi, 1985); Antonio, Canovi, Marco, Mietto, Maria Grazia, Ruggerini, *Nascita di una città. Il territorio di Santa Croce: la storia, la memoria, le “Reggiane”*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli 1990); Alessandro, Casellato, *Una “piccola Russia”. Un quartiere popolare di Treviso tra fine Ottocento e secondo dopoguerra*. (Verona: Cierre, 1998); Gabriella, Gribaudo, *Donne, uomini, famiglie. Napoli nel Novecento*. (Naples: L’Ancora, 1999); Laura, Cerasi, *Perdonare Marghera. La città del lavoro nella memoria post-industriale*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007).

53. Bruno, Bonomo, *Voci della memoria*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

54. Maria Laura, Longo, *Piazza Mercato a Napoli. Memorie e racconti di un paesaggio urbano 1940- 2016*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2020).

55. See Alessandro Portelli, *Storie orali...*, *op. cit.*

56. We are alluding to Roberto Saviano’s investigative novel, *Gomorra*. (Milan: Mondadori, 2006) and on the very successful homonymous series (Italy: Cattleya, Fandango, Sky, 2014), both dealing with the Neapolitan Camorra.

57. Maria Laura, Longo, *Piazza Mercato in Napoli*, *cit.*, p. 92.

he or she can: with fake music records, a bit of drugs, a bit of prostitution, a bit of everything that can be lawful or illegal⁵⁸.

Nina Quarenghi adopted a similar approach with her interviews in the Roman neighbourhood of Monteverde between 1909 and 1945⁵⁹. Her research is part of an editorial project edited by Lidia Piccioni, *Un laboratorio di storia urbana: le molte identità di Roma nel Novecento*, which since 2006 published ten volumes dedicated to as many city areas⁶⁰. Monteverde is a wealthy neighbourhood, whose urbanisation was developed by the mayor Ernesto Nathan (1907-1913). It is multifaceted part of the city, where seventeenth-century villas of the Janiculum coexist with low-income skyscrapers in via di Donna Olimpia, where the novel *Ragazzi di vita* by Pier Paolo Pasolini is set⁶¹. Quarenghi's research crosses the Fascist period and the war, employing a wide range of sources: maps of the area, parish books (useful for reconstructing the demographic picture of the neighbourhood), documents preserved in the archives of the local elementary school, maps of the local Case del Fascio (preserved in the Central State Archive), newspaper articles, and memoir books. With a skilful knitting, the author combines this rich documentation with the voices collected in the neighbourhood: "the voice of the people interviewed intertwines with written and iconographic documents, this way verifying all the information collected or simply colouring them with life"⁶². At the end of the volume, Quarenghi describes how she felt meeting the interviewees, in pages halfway between a research diary and small fictional frescoes. Example of her encounters are as follows:

Mario. He is ninety-six years old, already on the landing when I get out of the elevator; he bows when we shake hands and smiles 'I wonder how many times we have already met in the neighbourhood'; he is a distinguished gentleman, in a grey suit with a tie and a tricolour circle in the buttonhole. He welcomes me into his home, which is a typical grandparent's house, with furniture of the 1960s [...]. We both sit almost on the edge of two small armchairs, and as soon as I mention the past the story begins; memories emerge from his small, opaque but laughing eyes. His eyes are short-sighted on the present, but very acute on the past, and he squeezes them a little every time I question him, to focus on a new image to share with me. He pours his memories one after the other and fills empty spaces, colours the grey pages, creates elevations

58. *Ivi*, p. 93. Interview by Maria Laura Longo with Carmine N. (1954), Naples, 16.06.2015.

59. Nina, Quarenghi, *Un salotto popolare a Roma. Monteverde (1909-1945)*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2014).

60. Monica, Sinatra, *La Garbatella a Roma. 1920-1940*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2006); Stefania, Ficacci, *Tor Pignattara. Fascismo e resistenza di un quartiere romano*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007); Ulrike, Viccaro, *Storia di Borgata Gordiani. Dal fascismo agli anni del boom*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007); Emiliana, Camarda, *Pietralata. Da campagna a isola di periferia*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007); Bruno, Bonomo, *Il quartiere delle Valli. Costruire Roma nel secondo dopoguerra*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007); Eva, Masini, *Piazza Bologna. Alle origini di un quartiere "borghese"*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2009); Alice, Sotgia, *Ina Casa Tuscolano. Biografia di un quartiere romano* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2010); Irene, Ranaldi, *Testaccio. Da quartiere operaio a Village della capitale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2012); Giulia, Zitelli Conti, *Magliana Nuova. Un cantiere politico nella periferia romana (1967-1985)*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2019).

61. Pier Paolo, Pasolini, *Ragazzi di vita*. (Milan: Garzanti, 1955).

62. Nina, Quarenghi, *Un salotto popolare a Roma*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

and depressions in the flattened ideas of the books, opens breaches from which life emerges hot and I drink it all⁶³.

As often happens in any field of research, what moves the scholar’s work is diverted or enriched by the encounter with the sources. Between 2014 and 2016 Stefano Portelli⁶⁴ collected about eighty interviews with the citizens of the Idroscalo of Ostia, on the Roman coast, and of the nearby neighbourhood Nuova Ostia where, in the early 1970s, the inhabitants of the *borghetti* (hamlets)⁶⁵ of Eastern Rome had been transferred. Portelli’s goal was “to connect the development of the coast with the exodus from the city, to show how much displacement – that is, forced transfers or ‘deportations’, to use the significant term used locally – weighed on the formation of Rome”⁶⁶. Portelli found among these Romans “of seven generations” many stories of migration: about thirty people came from other provinces of the Lazio region, central and southern Italy, Romania, Peru, and Chile. Tales of migrant life were thus added to the stories of urban displacement. This type of subjective sources also allows to deconstruct – or at least complicate – consolidated narratives. In this case, for instance, the widespread idea of an urban marginality interpreted just in terms of suffering collides with the stories that the inhabitants make of the Idroscalo: “a village”, the “lost country of migration, with the benefits of the city”, where a community spirit resists and leads to a “greedy love” for that place and the claim of the “right to stay”⁶⁷, in opposition to recent eviction attempts.

Clara Zanardi studied other shores in *La bonifica umana. Venezia dall’esodo al turismo*.⁶⁸ The book analyzes the centrifugal tendency of the inhabitants of the lagoon and the roots of this phenomenon of depopulation over the years. An important role in triggering this process was played by the housing models offered by the economic miracle, combined with concerns about the unhealthiness of the apartments. There was a progressive increase in rents, also as a consequence of the renovation of the buildings and their transformation conversion for third sector activities. Finally, the explosion of tourism has shrunk the residential real estate market in favour of temporary and more profitable housing models. This research makes extensive use of oral sources collected by Zanardi with about fifty Venetians who remained in the “city of water”. Among the themes that strongly emerge from these voices, it prevails a feeling of discomfort, animosity, but also disorientation caused by the tourist invasion. “Venice is not Disneyland”, as the social networks say. There is also a strong regret for the disappeared Venice, consisting of simple taverns, the “authentic” carnival attended by residents, but also a destination for tourism of different quality. The general picture is complicated by the fact that all this criticism

63. Ivi, p. 183.

64. Stefano, Portelli, *Migrazioni nelle migrazioni: percorsi verso l’Idroscalo di Ostia*, in Michele, Colucci and Stefano, Gallo (edited by), *Le strade per Roma. Rapporto 2021 sulle migrazioni interne in Italia*, pp. 137-160. (Bologna: il Mulino, 2021).

65. “Borghetti” are groups of informal, self-built houses, which take the shape of barracks. After the Second World War, the hamlets dotted the capital, often rising near the “legal” hamlets built during Fascism.

66. Stefano, Portelli, *Migrazioni nelle migrazioni*, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141.

67. Ivi, respectively pp. 148, 151, 153, 157.

68. Clara, Zanardi, *La bonifica umana. Venezia dall’esodo al turismo*. (Milan: Unicopli, 2020).

against mass tourism is apparently contradicted by the economic participation in the income it generates declared by some witnesses:

I do not worry because I bought a bed & breakfast that already was a b&b, I mean, I did not buy a house throwing out a Venetian... I am a Venetian, and thanks to this apartment I can live in Venice myself, because I can pay the rent, the bills. [...] This is my job, I've been renting rooms for thirty years, what do you want from me? Do we lecture on jobs? What, you work in tourism and thus destroy Venice? Sorry, but do we go to the tobacconists and tell them: you are a killer because you sell cigarettes that kill? Let's go to the doctors: do you make money with people's pain? Can we really lecture on this?⁶⁹.

Unlike other books mentioned above, Zanardi decides not to report the names and surnames of the interviewees, which are identified by their initials only, and she provides a few personal and biographical information on them. This way the documents inevitably lose some subjectivity, but it is a not uncommon choice made perhaps to protect the privacy of one's sources.

Another different approach can be found in *Napoli a piena voce. Autoritratti metropolitani* by Luca Rossomando, a research project originating from the magazine *Napoli Monitor*. The book describes the Neapolitan capital through the stories of those who live there, taking into consideration a sample of people who reside in the hinterland. The stories of "poor and rich, unskilled workers and artists, traders and workers, outlaws and policemen" are presented one after another, as "live" autobiographies. The interviewer is there, but he almost disappears: sometimes his questions and excerpts from the field diary are recalled, but sometimes his presence is not revealed at all, even if we obviously know that it is necessary for the recording. This collection of biographies is related to Rossomando's militant approach, clearly announced in the introduction:

The Neapolitan metropolis is populated by such a variety of people, and each of them contains such multiple and stratified experiences, that it does not make any sense (and it is not even honest) to draw generalisations from such an intertwining. This does not mean giving up the investigation, but quite the opposite. On the one hand, this book is a sort of inventory, a very brief catalogue of metropolitan multiplicity, an essay about the voices, places, and experiences that it contains and nourishes. On the other hand, it is an implicit invitation to anyone who has the skills and aptitude for further research, to expand it in other possible directions. Unfortunately, every person has a theory on this city, but very few people have an extensive and thorough practice of this theory⁷⁰.

69. Ivi, pp. 176-177. Interview with LN,.

70. Luca, Rossomando, *Napoli a piena voce. Autoritratti metropolitani*. (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2012), XI-XII.

Maria Immacolata Maciotti, a recently deceased sociologist, made an extensive use of interviews for her work⁷¹. According to her, researchers who record a voice take it out of its context, but at the same time they seminate their own harvest for future generations of scholars and enthusiasts⁷². Those who approach the research topics for which those interviews were collected could easily come across the oral sources previously collected and communicated. It often happens that this sowing generates very deep relationships and that the places where an interview took place “adopt” the interviewer: as it happens for instance for the intense bond between Alessandro Portelli and Terni, the Umbrian city of steel⁷³.

In Portelli’s work on Terni the central topic was work, as it happens in Sara Zanisi’s *Il Portello. Voci dalla fabbrica. Le interviste di Duccio Bigazzi in Alfa Romeo*⁷⁴. This book is the critical edition of interviews to the workers of the Milanese car manufacturer recorded by Bigazzi in the first half of the 1980s⁷⁵. Zanisi’s work originates from her meeting with the Associazione Duccio Bigazzi, which wanted to enhance its recently digitised audio cassettes archive, together with the paper fund preserved at the Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. “In taking charge of the edition of this book” Zanisi writes in the introduction “I was aware of the double responsibility in publishing ‘the interviews of others’, so I started from two questions: what potential and what restriction do these interviews have? How is it possible today to recreate and maintain the bond between interviewer and interviewee, when none of them is alive anymore? Which links exist between the sound fund and the paper archive, and how can we trace it?”⁷⁶ Publicising the lives of others always implies a delicate act of responsibility, in this case complicated by working on material produced by another researcher. Zanisi chose to publish a selection of transcribed sources alongside short biographies of all the witnesses met by Bigazzi, together with a text explaining the essence of the research. The testimonies are organised in two chapters, both dealing with life stories: one excludes the voice of the researcher, the other one proposes a series of questions and answers. In both cases, Zanisi shortened, assembled and edited the material for easier reading. All the sources are presented chronologically, in the same order of registration planned by Bigazzi, this way complying to his own research agenda. Zanisi significantly decided to involve an external editor, in order to have “a professional look, a sartorial touch on the cut and sew practice that is the publication of such a volume on oral sources”⁷⁷. Finally, in this delicate operation Zanisi could take advantage

71. Among which: Maria Immacolata, Maciotti (edited by.), *Biografia, storia e società. L’uso delle storie di vita nelle scienze sociali*. (Naples: Liguori, 1985); Id. (edited by), *Oralità e vissuto. L’uso delle storie di vita nelle scienze sociali*. (Naples: Liguori, 1986); Id., *La disgregazione di una comunità urbana. Il caso di Valle Aurelia a Roma*. (Rome: Siales, 1988).

72. Id., “Memoria, società e territori”, *Magma*, 10, n. 2 (2012), http://www.analisiqualitativa.com/magma/1002/articolo_02.htm

73. Alessandro, Portelli, *Biografia di una città*, *op. cit.*; Alessandro Portelli, *Acciai speciali. Terni, la ThyssenKrupp, la globalizzazione*. (Rome: Donzelli, 2008); Alessandro Portelli, *La città dell’acciaio...*, *op. cit.*

74. Sara, Zanisi, *Il Portello...*, *op. cit.*

75. Duccio, Bigazzi, *Il Portello. Operai tecnici e imprenditori all’Alfa Romeo 1906-1926*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1988)

76. Sara, Zanisi, *Il Portello...*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

77. *Ivi*, p. 55.

of recordings kept in an accessible archive, which allowed her to process the material comfortably, because her readers will be able to consult the original documents as well.

Another Italian history in the automotive industry, this time overseas, was analysed by Camillo Robertini who studied the FIAT factory in El Palomar (on the outskirts of Buenos Aires), between 1964 and 1980⁷⁸. The collection of interviews here fulfils a function we did not highlight yet: it makes up for documentary failures. Since it was difficult to access the company archives, former factory workers started collecting testimonies to study the company also from their point of view. To study the labor community in the years of the dictatorship, Robertini favors the figure of the common worker “almost always ignored by the history of work”. Commonly an interview is made possible by the mediation of a third person who introduces interviewee and interviewer, but in the creation of an interviewees address book, even web interactions can become a useful tool. In this specific case, for example, the identification of witnesses, about fifty met between 2014 and 2019, took place thanks to campaigns on social networks with the support of the FIAT Historical Center.

The contexts analysed so far have a long oral history tradition, but in the “age of contestation”⁷⁹ memories played a fundamental role as well⁸⁰. The political season starting in 1968 is a fertile ground for the oral approach, thanks to the “direct participation of a large number of ordinary people in the ‘big history’ and the breaking of boundaries between the public and private spheres”⁸¹. Feminism in particular broke the barrier between these two dimensions, screaming loudly that “personal is political”. Several interesting works have recently been published on the history of women, also employing interviews. Among them, Paola Stelliferi’s research on feminism in Rome in the 1970s stands out⁸². Stelliferi’s research is divided into three parts: at the beginning, a prologue recreates “the disruptive explosion of the feminist question within the new left in the mid-1970s”⁸³. The first part analyses the organisations of the central areas of the city, the first separatist experiences, and the transformation of the movement from an elitist to a mass political phenomenon (1975-1977). The second part studies the neighbourhood organisations, focusing on the heterogeneous experiences of four locations with the help of written documentation as well. The interviews collected by the author were particularly important for this last section both because of the lack of other sources, and because “the methodology of oral history is particularly fruitful in studying what has made subjectivity, self-representation, and the narration of personal experiences the main instrument of individual and collective liberation”⁸⁴. The importance of self-awareness, relationships with peers, and the experience of independent clinics

78. Camillo, Robertini, *Quando la Fiat parlava argentino. Una fabbrica italiana e i suoi operai nella Buenos Aires dei militari (1964-1980)*. (Florence: Le monnier, 2019).

79. Expression borrowed from Paul, Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi*. (Turin: Einaudi, 1989).

80. For example: Luisa, Passerini, *Autoritratto di gruppo*. (Florence: Giunti, 1988 and 2008).

81. Bruno, Bonomo, *Voci della memoria, op. cit.*, p. 134.

82. Paola, Stelliferi, *Il femminismo a Roma negli anni Settanta. Percorsi, esperienze e memorie dei collettivi di quartiere*. (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2015).

83. Ivi, p. 3.

84. Ivi, p. 4.

emerge from the over thirty interviews, collected between 2011 and 2012. Methodologically speaking, there is a certain dissonance between the self-representation of the self and the transcription of the interviews. Many witnesses did not recognize themselves in the words attributed to them by Stelliferi. “Some interviewed women [...] told me they felt a certain discomfort in rereading themselves, that they did not recognize the transcribed words as their own (especially in the case of slang or informal expressions), and that they felt disappointment and dissatisfaction with the ‘result’ of their own narration; as if they perceived their words of today insufficient, inadequate and unable to fully restore their experience”⁸⁵. This happens frequently in the case of feminism, and generally of the movements of the 1970s. The situation is complicated by the fact that the processes do not recreate just individual memories, but a whole season dominated by a collective subject as never before. How to recreate an experience of the self, and of the self with others? This effort affects the witness and, consequently, the researcher.

When subjectivity is so central, oral history becomes even more important, as it happened with Elena Biagini’s research on the lesbian movement in Italy between the 1970s and 1980s⁸⁶. The author immediately declares her belonging to it: “the mechanism repressing lesbianism often included silence: social stigma for women was less visible than for men, also due to the different access to the public space typical of the male and female gender. [...] For lesbians, being visible is even more crucial to break the silence”⁸⁷. In research based on oral sources, the intertwining empathy between the interviewer and the interviewed is crucial. In this regard, Biagini critically analyses her own role: “I was part of the object of my research, because I am part of the movement I am describing, and this made it possible in the way it was conducted. I gained trust on the basis of shared political ideas”⁸⁸. There is a generation gap between Biagini and the witnesses, which marks a functional asymmetry and generates a certain proximity in the difference. This can offer the best scenario to conduct interviews, as it places the researcher at the same time inside and outside the object of study. Biagini left to the interviewed people the choice of being quoted with name and surname, name, initials, or through pseudonyms. When women were not interviewed but mentioned by others, their names were reported in full only if they were public figures or if they were present in other publications. When dealing with such delicate issues, carefulness and attention are of the utmost importance.

The ‘68 has been widely studied – often thanks to oral sources, as in the case of *Autoritratto di gruppo* by Luisa Passerini (1988)⁸⁹. On the fiftieth anniversary, Francesca Socrate published *Sessantotto. Due generazioni*⁹⁰, studying her sources through computational and textual linguistics approaches. Socrate, who was personally active in 1968⁹¹,

85. Ivi, p. 5.

86. Elena, Biagini, *L'emersione imprevista. Il movimento delle lesbiche in Italia negli anni '70 e '80*. (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2018).

87. Ivi, pp. 9-10.

88. Ivi, pp. 11-12.

89. Luisa, Passerini, *Autoritratto di gruppo*, cit. See also: Circolo Gianni Bosio, *Un anno durato decenni. Vite di persone comuni prima, durante e dopo il '68*. (Roma: Odradek, 2006).

90. Francesca, Socrate, *Sessantotto. Due generazioni*. (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2018).

91. See ivi, pp. XV-XVI.

uploaded about 37,000 words on this software, analysing the lexicon, the recurrence of certain words, and the use of verbal tenses. This allowed her to interpret and compare the narrative choices of the witnesses, concluding with the thesis of the existence of two generations of '68: those born between 1938 and 1945, and those born from 1946 to 1951. Socrates argues that, even if short, such a year gap marks two types of participation: "The educated and politicised older brothers, and the more naive and unwitting younger brothers"⁹². The former wrote the documents, performed prominent roles in the gatherings, introduced the "courageous heresies" of the Sixties into the movement, but also maintained a rather traditional way of doing politics. The latter sought another way, a politics that nullified the separation from the needs of individuals, that brought the private into the public, and that would place itself "outside parties and hierarchies"⁹³. Two strategies of memorial recreation correspond to these distinctions: the first generation uses the third person and the present indicative or the present past tense, a form that makes any comment "detached"; the second on the contrary favours the first person and the use of the imperfect, restoring a story imbued with emotionality, adhesion and participation.

Only recently, twenty years after its conclusion, it was possible to study the G8 in Genoa. This new historiographical trend⁹⁴ led to the publication of *I fatti di Genova. Una storia orale del G8* by Gabriele Proglione⁹⁵ and *Un ingranaggio collettivo. La costruzione di una memoria dal basso del G8 di Genova* by Ilaria Bracaglia and Eddy Olmo Denegri⁹⁶. Proglione's work contains an element not to be found in any other research mentioned so far. Because of the pandemic events, many interviews were recorded remotely. This highlights how methodologically fundamental are elements such as eye contact, physical presence, and a real meeting between interviewer and interviewed. How to do oral history, when you must keep your distance? Proglione decided to "overexpose" his own subjectivity, intersecting – at times merging – his own memory of Genoa with what his interlocutors said. Bracaglia and Denegri confirm how memory has a plural and collective character, and they put it at the core of their research, investigating a memorial "collective mechanism" understood as a political practice of interaction of individual memories. G8 is remembered in a controversial way and through painful processes initiated with the "return to normality". Narrative practices from below include the re-naming of Piazza Alimonda in Piazza Carlo Giuliani, together with an extensive production of documents of counterinformation: oral and written testimonies, images, documentary videos, and music – all of them extensively scrutinised by the two authors.

Another historiographical trend connected to collective and individual trauma is the study of environmental disasters. In this regard, two volumes were published by

92. Ivi, p. 178.

93. *Ibidem*.

94. There was a precedent, but no monographs. See "Generazioni a Genova, luglio 2001", ed. Alessandro Portelli, *Storie orali, op. cit.*, pp. 421-448.

95. Gabriele Proglione, *I fatti di Genova. Una storia orale del G8*. (Rome: Donzelli, 2021).

96. *Un ingranaggio collettivo. La costruzione di una memoria dal basso del G8 di Genova* by Ilaria Bracaglia and Eddy Olmo Denegri. (Milan: Unicopli, 2020)

Sara Zizzari⁹⁷ and Gabriele Moscaritolo⁹⁸. We will focus on the first of these studies. On April 6, 2009, an earthquake of magnitude 6.3 struck L’Aquila, resulting in 300 deaths, over 1,600 injured and 80,000 displaced. Sara Zizzari investigated this event, paying attention to the social, spatial, and cultural transformations that took place after that year, and analysing the subjective representations of the earthquake. The voices collected by Zizzari are distributed over particular times: the memory of the past is long, it occupies an extended space; it follows the interminable moment of the earthquake; then there is a short phase of first aid; finally, the state of emergency and the start of reconstruction. This is how the experience is described by the interviewed, who find it particularly difficult to remember the “interminable shock”. As Zizzari comments: “Every interviewee, even if starting the story with great clarity and confidence in maintaining a certain emotional detachment, came to a point (the narration of the earthquake itself) where there was an interruption, as a lump in the throat. Based on the person I had in front of me, I tried to understand how to manage that moment when the witness sank into the most painful memories. In some cases, I turned off the recording device, in others I asked the interviewee if he thought it appropriate. I usually remained silent, giving the interlocutors time to resume their story. Someone filled a glass of water, someone apologised with great discomfort ‘as you can see, there is still a lot of emotional involvement, sorry!’, others hid their faces with their hands.”⁹⁹ A common theme is the house: the house attacked by the earthquake – the shattered objects, the collapsing walls – and the odyssey of the tent cities and hotels, up to the landing in the new dormitory district.

This article cannot include all the many fascinating works on “model” biographies¹⁰⁰, war¹⁰¹, or colonialism¹⁰², the latter subject also approached in post-colonial and decolonized ways. There is an old publication which has been renewed: the journal *Il de Martino*¹⁰³. The homonymous institute has recently widened its scope thanks to the involvement of the following associations: Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale (AISO), Circolo Gianni Bosio di Roma, Lega di Cultura di Piadena, and Istituto di Ricerche Economiche e Sociali Toscana.

97. Sara, Zizzari, *L’Aquila oltre i sigilli. Il terremoto tra ricostruzione e memoria*. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2019).

98. Gabriele, Moscaritolo, *Memorie dal cratere, Storia sociale del terremoto in Irpinia*. (Florence: Editpress, 2020). See also Gabriella, Gribaudo, *La memoria, i traumi, la storia. La guerra e le catastrofi nel Novecento*. (Rome: Viella, 2020).

99. Sara, Zizzari, *L’Aquila oltre i sigilli...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

100. See three different works: Stefania, Pavan, *Par’nda a far l’inferno. Storia di Elena che emigrò in Australia (1958-1962)*. (Treviso: Istresco, 2021); Alfredo, Mignini, Enrico, Pontieri, *Qualcosa di meglio. Biografia partigiana di Otello Palmieri*. (Bologna: Pendragon, 2019); Alessandro, Casellato, Gilda, Zazzara, *Renzo e i suoi compagni. Una microstoria sindacale del Veneto*. (Rome: Donzelli, 2022).

101. Stefania, Catalo, Centro Antiviolenza Marie Anne Erize, *Le marocchinate*. (Sensibili alle foglie, 2015); Manlio, Calegari, *Behind the Lines. La partita impossibile*. (Acqui Terme: Impressioni grafiche, 2018); Clemente, Bicocchi, *La linea. Il racconto di una comunità*. (Florence: Editpress, 2022).

102. For example: Filippo, Colombara, *Raccontare l’impero. Una storia orale della conquista d’Etiopia (1935-1941)*. (Milan: Mimesis, 2019); Domenico, Infantolino, *Patria di parole. Autobiografia degli italiani di Libia*. (Padua: CLEUP, 2020).

103. The new course starts from n. 31/2021. The numbers are available open access: Istituto Ernesto de Martino, *Pubblicazioni scaricabili*, <https://www.iedm.it/produzioni/editoria/pubblicazioni-scaricabili/>.

Intersections Between Oral History and Public History

It is an innate disposition of oral history to be transdisciplinary, because interviews represent a cognitive tool employed by anthropologists, sociologists, and linguists as well as journalists, documentary makers, and many other professionals. These connections were recently enriched by public history, an approach of Anglo-Saxon origin which promotes a wide array of heterogeneous activities and involves historians who work outside of academia as well.

In 2016 the interest of the Giunta centrale per gli studi storici and the International Federation of Public History led to the foundation of the Associazione Italiana di Public History (AIPH). Two years later, the AIPH published its manifesto and declared: “public historians work in cultural institutions, museums, archives, libraries, the media, cultural and tourism industry, schools, cultural volunteering and social promotion, and in all areas where knowledge of the past is necessary to engage with different audiences. Public historians are also those academics who chose public history as their subject of research and teaching, or who interact with audiences outside the academic community to make history (history outside the university is sometimes called ‘third mission’, after teaching and researching)”¹⁰⁴. When public history lands in Italy, it finds fertile ground in many areas of oral history. What are the possible intersections between the two approaches? First of all, let us consider their respective “biographies”: both disciplines originated in Italy on the border of academic contexts, which frequently distrust them. Later on, however, both managed to open the door of the “ivory towers”: for oral history it took a longer time, even if even today it is proposed as a separate class in a few universities; for PH it was easier, but not without effort. They can both be represented as ghosts, in this sense. This article mentioned Portelli’s article (1979), who wrote that “a spectre is haunting the corridors of academia: oral history” – hinting at the opening words of the Communist Party manifesto. The metaphor of the ghost also appears in an essay by Serge Noiret (2011): *Public History: una disciplina fantasma?*¹⁰⁵ Both oral and public history are configured as interdisciplinary movements which lead to a polymorphic knowledge. As such, they bring together historians, anthropologists, linguists, musicologists, computer scientists, archivists, librarians, cultural operators, teachers, activists, men and women of the show business.

Antonio Canovi¹⁰⁶ remembers another link between them: both are interested in the lives of men and women, they care for places and local stories, they are ready to focus on tales of the past but at the same time they are inclined to question the present and the future. As Canovi suggests, it is a question of posture. Both look for proximity: being close to what they study, and bringing a different kind of audience close to history.

104. Walter, Tucci, “Il Manifesto della public history italiana”, *AIPH-Associazione Italiana di Public History*, 3 september 2018, <https://aiph.hypotheses.org/3193>.

105. Serge, Noiret, “La Public History: una disciplina fantasma?”, *Memoria e ricerca*, 37, (2011): pp. 9-35.

106. Antonio, Canovi, “‘C’è una storia che però non esiste ancora’. Declinazioni epistemologiche tra Public History e Storia Orale”, ed. Paolo, Bertella Farnetti, Lorenzo, Bertucelli, Alfonso, Botti, *Public History. Discussione e pratiche*. (Milan: Mimesis, 2017), pp. 175-187.

They also share the ambition for co-authorship. The interview is a creative process, a dialogue provoked by the researcher’s questions which brings to light “a past narrated” by two – or more – people, who contribute in the construction of the source with their own subjectivity. Co-authorship is of the utmost importance in public history as well, because the discipline aims at the active participation of the public. Sharing authorship thus tries to make, history a “city square”¹⁰⁷, at the same time without losing its scientificity. PH invites us to make history not only *in* but also *with* the society: first of all, by listening to the questions it poses, mediating, and finding answers together. Through co-authorship, the public is not just a user, but a co-producer: this way, history becomes a field of constant mediation and negotiation on the past¹⁰⁸ but also, at the same time, a place where different voices can be heard. Both the oral and the public historian are authors and negotiators.

Chiara Ottaviano highlighted the ‘natural convergences’ between oral and public historians: “public historians must be aware of the complexity of oral sources, and should know the problems oral historians have dealt with for a long time, and the approach of oral to public history can help especially in the matter of ‘restitution’, an implicit but often very problematic goal”.¹⁰⁹ Informed consent and full preservation of documentation are interesting aspects on which oral history invites public historians to discuss, to ensure a correct and scientifically impeccable use of interviews. The second suggestion by Ottaviano concerns restitution, that is the re-sharing and creative uses of oral sources.

A final link concerns the restitution/re-sharing, that is, all the creative uses of oral sources. As Manfredi Scanagatta claimed, for the public historian the source is not only a way to know things, but it becomes central in the narrativization of the story that will be told¹¹⁰. In conclusion, this article summarises two projects both employing “toolboxes” to make a creative use of sources. Elio Catania coordinated *Sopra il vostro settembre*, a project on the lives of four Chilean exiles before, during, and after Salvador Allende. It studies the memories of Lucy Rojas, Sergio Mendez, Hector “Edoardo” Carrasco, and David Muñoz Gutierrez, each having different political views (always leftist), and coming from different areas of Chile. As the web portal shows, the goal is on the one hand “to investigate the mechanisms of construction of historical memory internal to a Latin American country after the military dictatorship, through the eyes of the interviewees, who are both protagonists of those events and historical sources”. On the other hand, the interviewees are the ones who “analyse the issue, and this opens up a possible field of research, still to be explored, regarding what it meant to resist to the regime, and what the compromise in the transition period brought to (1988-1991)”¹¹¹.

107. Paolo, Bertella Farnetti, *Public History...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-56.

108. On negotiation see Lorenzo, Bertucelli, “La Public History in Italia. Metodologie, pratiche, obiettivi”, ed. Paolo, Bertella Farnetti, *Public History...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75- 96.

109. Chiara Ottaviano, “Fonti orali e public history”, ed. Alessandro, Casellato, *Buone pratiche per la storia orale. Guida all’uso*. (Firenze: Editpress, 2021), p. 248.

110. Manfredi, Scanagatta, “Public historian. Tra ricerca e azione creativa”, Paolo Bertella Farnetti, *Public History...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-331.

111. *Sopra il vostro settembre. Il progetto*, <http://www.soprailvostrosettembre.com/il-progetto/>.

Sopra il vostro settembre was financed by a crowdfunding campaign, which made it possible to produce and put online a documentary organised by thematic chapters and a digital archive. The latter contains different kind of materials: from the poster of the show *Guerra di popolo in Cile* of the Theatrical Collective La Comune (directed in 1973 by Dario Fo) to the report – alternative to that of the Valech government commission – compiled by the Coordinadora de ex-presas y ex-presos políticos de Santiago *Nosotros, los sobrevivientes acusamos* (2004).

The second example is *Harnet Streets: contro-mappe eritree in Roma*, by the Associazione Tezeta¹¹². The project was sponsored by Lazio Region as part of the Vitamin G call funded by Generazioni Giovani. There is a first collection of stories of women and men of Eritrean origin, who arrived in Italy between the 1970s and today, interviewed during strolls in the African quarter of the capital – an area marked by colonial names. It follows a second phase of restitution to the citizens, through “trekking” in the neighbourhood, when members of the association summarise the relationship between Italy and Eritrea from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day. They employ didactic panels and games on linguistic recognition, and use audio excerpts taken by the previous interviews and organised in a different way, accessible via QR code.

The present essay focused on the growing importance of questions related to the archival preservation of oral sources. Many public and oral projects originate from archives: archives of the communities, or in any case immersed in local contexts. This is the case, for instance, of three projects born in the region Emilia-Romagna: ‘Archivio delle Voci di Fanano e Sestola’¹¹³, which catalogs and offers in open access 46 entries about the Second World War period; ‘Afor – Archivio di fonti orali del Villaggio Artigiano di Modena Ovest’¹¹⁴, which collects about 30 video interviews with the villagers, freely accessible via the Internet Archive; and the ‘Archivio di fonti orali del rione bolognese Pilastro’¹¹⁵, hosted in the ‘Luigi Spina’ Municipal Library, which preserves about twenty audio or video interviews on the history of the district through the memories of those who live there. Each of these experiences has its own peculiarities, but all of them are planned as research paths aimed at building cultural heritages together with the citizens, who are invited to contribute to the construction of archival collections.

In 2016 Thomas Cauvin argued that oral history is not public history *per se*, but almost¹¹⁶. As this essay briefly showed, the connections between the two disciplines are many, but this does not mean that oral sources are necessary to work on public history itineraries. Interviews can be employed just for scientific research, as Italian oral historians widely demonstrate; nonetheless, mutual curiosity is alive, as testified by the annual AIPH conferences.

112. The authoress contributes to this project. See, *Tezeta. Progetti e collaborazioni*, <https://tezeta.it/progetti>.

113. Available here: <https://la-linea-gotica.com/audio/>

114. See <https://ovestlab.it/afor/>

115. Which is currently being transferred to the ‘Luigi Spina’ library. On this project see: Giulia Zitelli Conti, “‘Ti do il tiro’. Storia orale e public history nel rione Pilastro”, ed. Paolo Bertella Farnetti and Cecilia Dau Novelli, *La storia liberata. Nuovi sentieri di ricerca*. (Milano: Mimesis, 2020), 63-86.

116. Thomas, Cauvin, *Public History. A Textbook of Practice*. (London: Routledge, 2016): 89-95.

Conclusion

To conclude, this essay presented the most important phases of the study of oral history in Italy, starting from the mid-1960s. Some Italian intellectuals and academics considered the oral sources collected with this methodology not very reliable for historical research. This preconception changed over the years and, as Bruno Bonomo highlights, brought to “a profound evolution in the attitude of academic historians towards oral sources, in the sense of a progressive recognition of their usefulness, a growing attention to their specificity compared to other types of sources, and a full legitimization of their use”¹¹⁷.

This paper also showed how certain experiences of Italian oral history – for instance the research of the Società per la Storia Orale or the studies related to the history of companies – invite us to reconsider the binomial ‘oral history - militant history’. In fact, the aforementioned experiences testify that considering oral history just as a research methodology to write a ‘bottom-up story’ is not enough, because it ignores the variety of topics that can be investigated with these methods, and consequently does not include all of the different subjects that can be interviewed. Our society is highly polarized and characterized by power imbalances: the methodology of oral history can help investigate them, as recent historiographical trends using it clearly showed – and this is just one of the possible paths for the future. This kind of research can be pursued in projects related to the history of institutions, such as ‘An Oral History of the European Court of Justice’ curated by the Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory¹¹⁸, or the Special Interest Group Library History recording the oral histories of IFLA’s Past Presidents, Secretaries General and Personalities on the occasion of the centenary (2027) of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)¹¹⁹.

This paper underlines the affinity between oral and public history, not only because both have in common the same approach in studying history. Both also share an ‘off track’ research path, i.e. outside the perimeters of the single disciplines, as widely demonstrated by the examples of this paper, in which the community – understood in its broadest meaning as a group of people living in the same place or sharing particular features – always plays a central role. In particular, oral history can be seen as a practice which encourages the involvement of community members through dialogue and encounter. The voices of the individuals represent the multiplicity of perspectives in dialogue with each other, this way reinforcing the process of recognition of the people as a fundamental part of this community. Such methodology, inasmuch it involves the life of men and women through time – and Marc Bloch showed this to be the essence of the historical sciences – constantly generates new reflections and practices, starting from the questions of the present.

Finally, the present paper underlined the importance of the accessibility guaranteed by a proper preservation of the interviews as a fundamental tool for enhancing the life stories of the interviewees. The role of preservation unites oral history and the archive.

117. Bruno Bonomo, “«Né in biblioteca né in archivio». Storici e fonti orali in Italia dagli anni Settanta a oggi”, ed. Francesco, Bartolini; Bruno, Bonomo; Francesca, Socrate, *Lo spazio della storia. Studi per Vittorio Vidotto* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2013), 499-514.

118. See <https://www.lhlt.mpg.de/research-project/an-oral-history-of-the-european-court-of-justice>

119. See <https://www.ifla.org/news/sig-library-history-oral-histories-project/>

Oral history is a conversation about the past that happens in the present and is future-oriented; similarly, archiving means choosing, interpreting, and keeping traces that would otherwise be erased. “The archive is not about the past, it is about the future. Witnessing is transmitting, that is, surviving. At the very least, becoming ghosts”¹²⁰.

120. Beppe Sebaste, “Christian Boltanski e la scommessa col diavolo”, *Il Blog di Beppe Sebaste*, 14.12.2009, <http://bepesebaste.blogspot.com/2009/12/christian-boltanski-e-la-scommessa-col.html>.

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