

## **HSTY3902 PROPOSAL: GUMINE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

In 1994, Raphael Samuel theorised that history is not merely something a professional historian creates, but ‘a social form of knowledge... the work of a thousand different hands.’<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps most true of oral history, a methodology which is profoundly social, engaging in a dialogue between the past and the present, through narrative and action.<sup>2</sup> In continuing an oral history project started by the organisation HOPE Worldwide, a faith based charity, and the PNG community of Gumine in the Chimbu Province, I hope to construct an online archive for preservation and access of the existing primary source material. This endeavour will be informed through a reflexive exploration of what Frisch terms a ‘post-documentary sensibility,’ examining innovative approaches to drawing meaning from sources and negotiating historical authority in this new digital age, in order to create a less linear, more ‘shareable space’ within public historical archives.<sup>3</sup>

‘Always remember, Kaleku, the things I have taught you about the ways of the old people from the time before. Old and new ways must mix together,’ asserts Kuman in the Poignant’s 1972 anthropological children’s book, *Kaleku*.<sup>4</sup> Documenting the Gumine big-man’s family, the re-discovery of this book sparked an oral history project led by HOPE Worldwide and funded by the Myer Foundation. Observing the remarkable social change that has transpired in Gumine and the wider Chimbu Province as they interact with newcomers, the researchers conducted interviews with elders relating their memories of ‘cultural practices, historical events, and personal impressions.’<sup>5</sup> The project aimed not only to preserve records of this past to prevent its disappearance, but also to enable the community to engage with this process, particularly by working with students of Gumine High School. Unfortunately funding for the second stage was not renewed, and thus this incredible material has been left untouched for a decade.

After learning of this project from my father,<sup>6</sup> I have contacted Joan Timothy, country director of the PNG HOPE program and wife of Martin Timothy, one of the original researchers. With her encouragement after discussing possibilities

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel, R., “Unofficial Knowledge,” in *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (1994), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton, P. and Shopes, L., *Oral History and Public Memories*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008, p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Frisch, in Adair, B., Filene, B. and L. Koloski, eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, 2011, p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> Poignant, A., and Poignant, R., *Kaleku*, Great Britain: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Myer Application Summary document, supplied.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Ogle, one of the managers of the original project when he worked as the Australian director for HOPE Worldwide.

for reviving their work, I have reached out to Kumani Kuman, a present big-man in Gumine who oversaw the project and assisted in interviewing, and his daughter Stella Kuman, a friend of mine who now lives in Sydney and will help me translate the original interviews from Golin dialect into English.<sup>7</sup> We hope to publish this material in some form to make it accessible to the community, not only for its emotional and academic significance but also as a valuable history and language teaching resource in Gumine. Stella has also helped with getting me in touch with the original translator, Dixon Dai, who works with Gumine Station and may have ideas on how best to proceed to benefit the community.<sup>8</sup>

The main questions that emerged for me when considering this project were ethical and methodological. A historian is not just a passive academic writer, but also an active collector, curator, and creator.<sup>9</sup> I was concerned with whether I would really be 'doing' history: more than simply whether my individual work would be enough for the grade, but whether historical authority lies with me as the archivist, and whether it *should* lie with me, as an outsider. The weight of this question intensifies due to the challenging nature of oral history, as a 'turning and returning of myth, history, and memoir.'<sup>10</sup> As an act of interpretation in itself, historical memory is more than just what is remembered, but *why* it is remembered and how it is experienced in the present.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes seen as problematic material in need of critical scrutiny to be of historical worth, one cannot ignore authority when mediating social memory for greater historicity. Likewise, archivists are not without influence: what material and how it is selected and presented is inherently an authoritarian endeavour.

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<sup>7</sup> My main contact with the organisation is thus Joan Timothy (email [jtimothy@hopewwpng.org.pg](mailto:jtimothy@hopewwpng.org.pg)), who is encouraging and keen for the project although she seems busy in our communication and basically has given me free rein, with advice on who to chat to for project progression. As such, my work has been guided more by communication with community members like Stella and Kumani as well as the original project aims and researchers, like my father and Dixon Dai.

<sup>8</sup> Modern school resources are in short supply in the rural highlands. In July 2015 three rural primary schools in Gumine Province, about 6-8 hours walk from Gumine Station (established by the kiap police patrol) became the first in Simbu Province and possibly in PNG to teach computer classes after being donated computers by the Kama Scholars Foundation. While Internet may still be a hurdle to cross, this archive could be an excellent teaching resource for primary and secondary students as it relates to their own community. Kama, B. '8 hour walk: Gumine's rural schools first with computer lessons', *PNG Attitude* (online), 06/07/15.

<sup>9</sup> Perks, R. and Thomson, A., *The Oral History Reader* (Second Edition), New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 337.

<sup>10</sup> Momaday, N. S., *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969.

<sup>11</sup> Blouin Jr., F., and Rosenberg, W., *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. ix.

As I study social work concurrently, I am also concerned with how this work gives back to the community rather than merely taking their history for future academic use. While I have great interest in working with the actual history recorded in this project in the future, I am hesitant to do so without first understanding more about the community, its needs, and how best to engage with the sources. In researching oral history and archiving, I was inspired by Frisch's notion of a 'post-documentary sensibility.'<sup>12</sup> Although written texts and documentaries are expedient presentation forms, they are very structured narratives that do not provide much room for engagement or allow for shared authority, multiplicity of narratives and interaction with the material. The digital age presents great new opportunities for all people to engage with oral history in new ways, without sacrificing its valuable sensory nature. Inspired by various online archives like StoryCorps<sup>13</sup> and the SBS history capsules,<sup>14</sup> I hope to create a website, compiling the footage, photographs, transcripts and historical synthesis of the primary and secondary sources on particular themes, preserving these interviews in a way that is easily navigable and engaging for schoolchildren and the public while retaining academic value. I intend to explore these framing concerns through a written rationale in my final body of work, as my findings will both inform the creation of an archive, as well as being important to examine and understand for my own future research.

In practical terms, the actual project will comprise a website that indexes the videos (or clips of these, due to their length and concerns about internet speed and downloading) with English transcriptions, as I believe the individual narratives are important to retain. Given the number of themes running through the interviews, I hope to also compile three to five (dependent on time limits) historical commentary pages that compile quotations from these elders with secondary sources. Themes to choose from include first contact, tribal fight, ceremonies, interpersonal relationships, agricultural practices and salt making, migration/origins, World War II, and women's and men's roles. The website will be constructed using WordPress with some guidance from my younger brother in establishing the site and creating search functions. As well as a list of further useful resources, such as the Patrol Reports microfiche collections or the ex-kiap forum, I hope to also include an interactive element to make the archive more engaging for younger users in particular, but this has yet to be decided with the help of my community advisors.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Frisch, 'Oral History and the Digital Revolution: Towards a post-documentary sensibility', chapter 6 in Perks, R. and Thomson, A., *The Oral History Reader* (Second Edition), New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 102 – 114.

<sup>13</sup> StoryCorps website, accessible: <https://storycorps.org/about/>

<sup>14</sup> *Stories from a Meeting Place* website, SBS, accessible: [www.sbs.com.au/theblock/](http://www.sbs.com.au/theblock/) and *Cronulla Riots: The Day That Shocked The Nation* website, SBS, accessible: <http://www.sbs.com.au/cronullariots/>

*Claire Ogle, 1059 words (SORRY! It's late because I didn't know what to cut out - there were a lot of questions to respond to!)*

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

For ease of annotation, my current list of sources will be broken up into sections to indicate how I am engaging with these texts as they complement each other.

### **Primary sources**

Jacob, P., Timothy, M., Dai, D., Kuman, K., Ogle, G. (2005) *Oral and Cultural History Preservation Program in Gumine, PNG: video interviews, first transcripts, preliminary reports and documents*, HOPE Worldwide PNG: unpublished.

This primary source material comprises most of the original footage, transcripts and documents from the 2005 project. I received access to this through Graham Ogle and Joan Timothy and it will make up the base of the archive after it has been sorted and fully transcribed. This material includes interviews and footage of Aiwa Ya, Kora Marme, Sine Bosbe, Dauna Kerepe, Poi Otto Kuman, Petrus Sine, Simau Wera, Mathias Muru, Sera Temne, Tona Sipa, Donga Mau, Peter Kuman, Aiwa Muru, Andrew Baulin, Sipa Kale, Rosa Wera, Joseph Kulkia, Alua Bia Mian, and David Aiwa. Consent forms were used but I have yet to gain access to these – need to find out whether they have been digitised or are in physical files. Likewise, the file numbering hints that some of the recordings may be missing, so these also will need to be followed up.

*Chimbu (Simbu) Province Patrol Reports 1954-1974*, (microfiche collection), University of California San Diego: The Library Online. Accessible: <http://libraries.ucsd.edu/collections/about/collections-of-distinction/melanesian-studies/papua-new-guinea-patrol-reports/chimbu-simbu-province-patrol-reports.html>

The UC San Diego has published a guide to the microfiche of government patrol reports in the Chimbu region, and researchers can purchase copies of microfiche through the National Archives of Papua New Guinea. I may not purchase these for this project, but the online records show when the first patrols began in Chimbu Province (1954-1965), and in Gumine (1962 – 1973) and Kundiawa (1940 – 1974) as stations were first established. This is useful information for creating a historical record, and if this project were to be taken further, accessing the many actual reports would be incredibly interesting.

Kama, B. '8 hour walk: Gumine's rural schools first with computer lessons', *PNG Attitude* (online), 06/07/15. Accessible: [http://asopa.typepad.com/asopa\\_people/2015/07/8-hour-walk-gumines-rural-schools-first-with-computer-lessons.html](http://asopa.typepad.com/asopa_people/2015/07/8-hour-walk-gumines-rural-schools-first-with-computer-lessons.html)

*You and the Native* – originally published February 1943 for Allied Geographical Section, the Southwest Pacific area; republished in Brown, P., *The Chimbu: A Study of Change in the New Guinea Highlands*, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company Inc., 1972.

## **Gumine & the Chimbu peoples of Papua New Guinea**

These sources mostly comprise scholarship on the Chimbu (also known as Simbu) Province in Papua New Guinea. Anthropologist Paula Brown is one of the most prolific scholars on the Chimbu peoples and her work provides excellent and balanced research into the Chimbu societies and how it has changed with Western influence through the natives' memories, performances, and conceptions. Likewise, Axel and Roslyn Poignant lived in Gumine for a time in 1969, and their children's book *Kaleku*, an anthropological narrative accompanied by incredible colour photographs, relates the story of a family spanning the changes in traditional life during the period just after the white patrols began, brought to Gumine by Kuman Dai.

These works are supplemented by sources from another perspective: Gammage's monograph on the Hagen-Sepik Patrol which made first contact with many Highlands peoples, mapping and establishing outposts and a goldfield from March 1939 to June 1939. Gammage has interviewed a number of the Highlanders who saw the first patrol, publishing these invaluable sources alongside his own mapping of the original campsites along the patrol route and examination of both private diaries and official reports. Similarly, Clune relates his own experience in 1940's New Guinea in his account of the gold rush. While these works may not be explicitly related to the Gumine people, they provide a point of comparison and greater understanding of the interactions between the native people of Papua New Guinea and the newcomers.

Nelson's *Taim Bilong Masta* is of particular interest as it is based on the ABC Radio series in 1980/1981, produced by Tim Bowden. This series saw many Australians talk about their experiences in Papua New Guinea, creating an archive of oral history that has now been presented thematically through text. This work inspires thought through its structure and presentation, as well as providing great primary source material through the oral history captured.

All stemming from the earlier time period, these sources are either written during or later examine traditional Chimbu society in the earliest period of documentation and how it has changed through the decades since contact. As the oral history recorded in the 2005 project particularly focuses on a demographic of interviewees from the same period, this is a deliberate choice. I intend to research further for more recent sources to provide greater depth, however the articles listed on Google Scholar that I have found so far are more specific studies of agricultural practices or studies of particular social aspects and influences, rather than Chimbu history as a whole. This means that the oral history recorded by HOPE Worldwide is even more important, as the informants are already of great age, some having already passed away. This primary source material is invaluable as it is the last generation that remembers the first contact period and this early period of social change.

Brown, P., *The Chimbu: A Study of Change in the New Guinea Highlands*,  
Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company Inc., 1972.

Brown, P., *Beyond a Mountain Valley: The Simbu of Papua New Guinea*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995.

Brookfield, H.C. and P. Brown, *Struggle for Land: Agriculture and Group Territories Among the Chimbu of the New Guinea Highlands*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press (in association with The Australian National University), 1963.

Clune, F., *Somewhere in New Guinea*, Sydney: Halstead Press Pty Limited, 1951.

Gammage, B., *The Sky Travellers: Journeys in New Guinea 1938 – 1939*, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1998 .

Malcolm, L.A., *Growth and Development in New Guinea – A Study of the Bundi People of the Madang District*, Institute of Human Biology Papua New Guinea, Monograph Series No. 1, Chipping Norton: Surrey Beatty and Sons, 1970.

Nelson, H., *Taim Bilong Masta: The Australian Involvement with Papua New Guinea*, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1982.

Podolefsky, A., *Simbu Law: Conflict Management in the New Guinea Highlands*, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1992.

Poignant, A., and Poignant, R., *Kaleku*, Great Britain: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1972.

## **Oral History and Archiving**

The sources I have collected so far on oral history and archiving provide great insights into research ethics and methodology. Originally just searching for more understanding of archiving methods for oral history, my interest was piqued by Frisch's discussion of a 'post-documentary sensibility', insofar as the digital age is creating new possibilities for enhancing the use of audio-visual documentation – at the heart of all oral history – in its analytical use. Rather than focusing on transcripts as the product of oral history, innovative digitised archives are emerging which not only link transcript texts with researcher's search terms, but also to specific time points in video and audio material, with the ability to clip and create new historical narratives from engaging directly with the original material.<sup>15</sup> Spielberg and USC Shoah Foundation's *Visual History Archive* is a great example of an archive that has various search functions and text formats, as well as encouraging students to use the archived footage in creating short films for the annual USC Institute competition which are then published alongside the original oral history. Frisch notes the importance of 'active discovery' rather than trying just to teach lessons or evoke the past, and digitised

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Frisch, 'Oral History and the Digital Revolution: Towards a post-documentary sensibility', chapter 6 in Perks, R. and Thomson, A., *The Oral History Reader* (Second Edition), New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 106.

archives that provide some interactive avenue or provoke thought are a valuable new resource in public history.<sup>16</sup>

As Hamilton and Shopes observe, oral history is too often not 'taken out of the house and past the front door', as we often put less thought into the theories and methodology of presenting and using oral history as opposed to actually organising and doing oral history.<sup>17</sup> Blouin and Rosenberg's examination of authority in history and in archives provides great depth into interpretative authority and how we present the past, relating the historic divide between authoritative history and authoritative archiving, as well as examining the role of an archivist as an activist in producing historical knowledge. Furthermore, Blouin and Rosenberg comment on social memory and archiving – a topic integral to oral and public history and the question of shared authority. Relating the contested nature of history and memory, they provide important analysis into the struggle between private interests and problematic narration of the past as 'forgetting' and 'remembering' are both selective processes. Likewise, the interests of an archivist are not beyond question. As a researcher/archivist who does not speak the language of the original oral histories, I am concerned about the values I bring to the table – such as the integral component of English translations, though this has been a central thread in the project prior to my involvement. Perhaps this is our outsider authority coming to bear upon the text; but then again, perhaps it adds great value in opening access to all peoples, even those from other Chimbu provinces who may not speak the same dialect but share a common tongue through schools teaching English. In my further research I hope to examine how other researchers have overcome this issue of language.

More practically, there are several sources I have found, such as Barber and Peniston-Bird's *History Beyond the Text*, and Perk and Thomson's *Oral History Reader* that relate how historians are engaging with oral history in a variety of ways and areas. Zusman's *Story Bridges* is a text to assist students in conducting intergenerational oral history, which may be useful if I make a webpage that encourages students to create something within their own community. This reading is supplemented by contemporary online sources that provide valuable examples of how these archives are created in reality. Given time and skill restraints, my aspirations for this project are not set as high as the standards set by SBS's *Cronulla Riots* or *Stories From The Meeting Place* websites, but resources such as these provide an excellent example of how interactive, interdisciplinary material can be used to create more engaging history in the digital age. We should not merely study the past, but enhance our understanding by studying how people use it to interpret their lives and their world. Through oral history and interactive methods, this process can be studied as we engage with it, to come to more valuable understandings of how our past affects our present.

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<sup>16</sup> Frisch, M., *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 190.

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton, P. and Shopes, L., *Oral History and Public Memories*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008, p. vii.

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