

COUNTER-ARCHIVES: RETHINKING ORAL HISTORY FROM BELOW

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE GREEK ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION (GOHA)

PLACE: SALONICA, GREECE

VENUES: Aristotle University of Salonica, Museum of Byzantine Civilization

ORGANIZING INSTITUTIONS: GOHA, ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF SALONICA, UNIVERSITY OF MACEDONIA, HISTORICAL ARCHIVE OF GREEK REFUGEES, MUSEUM OF BYZANTINE CIVILIZATION

SPONSOR: ERT 3

DATES: **3-5 June 2016**

CALL FOR PAPERS

"History from Below" has been the hallmark of oral history since the 1970s. Giving voice to subjects and social groups forgotten by official archives was perceived as an efficient tool to democratize history and to create a counter-archive able to challenge the master narratives of dominant memory. This democratization effort did not focus on the narratives alone, but also on new ways of working with local communities, on empowering the powerless and on improving the accessibility of the counter-archives thus created. Through the 1980s and 1990s oral historians, taking into account early criticisms on the dangers of romantic nostalgia and naïve populism (Passerini 1979) in representing the powerless, have become more sophisticated in their analyses, by focusing on the co-construction of meanings in the interview and the role of subjectivity. This move has greatly improved our understandings of memory. On the other hand, the field of biographical research has over the last twenty years focused on the narrativity of biographies as social constructions and on the complex processes of "doing biography". This work has produced an interesting theoretical and methodological framework for the empirical study of biographical self-presentations and their archival traces (CV's, on-line videotaped life-stories, social media, personal blogs, etc.)

Obviously, oral history cannot be reduced to a bottom-up perspective alone, neither do all oral histories constitute a "counter-archive". The narrative construction of lives is influenced both by personal experience and by public discourse. The notion of "counter-archive" has been recently explored in the context of documentary film (Amad, 2010) and the everyday feelings of trauma and sexuality (Cvetkovich, 2003), as a way of creating new archives that foster new public and political cultures, including cultures of public memory. Grassroots archives are emerging everywhere. What these archives have in common with the "counter-archive" of oral history is the construction and preservation of narratives of lived experiences independently of the grand narratives produced by state power. As the notion of "counter-archive" raises important questions about authority, documentation and publicity, it offers useful insights on the scope, the forms and the expressive means of historical research and the writing of history.

Forty years since "history from below", we now live in a very different world, dominated on the one hand by increasing social inequality and exclusion and on the other by the proliferation of memories in the public sphere, mainly through easily accessible digital media and in the arts. While both "history from below" and the "counter-archive" may seem even more relevant than in the 1970s, the same may be said of the early criticisms of "naïve populism". In this context, the **Third International Conference of GOHA** invites participants to rethink critically these two notions, focusing in particular on the following questions:

- Do we still need “history from below”? If so, what are the promises and challenges of this approach in the present context?
- How would we define today the notion of “below”? Who are the new subjects, the new topics we need to include? How do these subjects construct their biographies in their narrated lives?
- What is the nature of the new “counter-archives” in the 21st century? Which are the main methodological and ethical questions raised in the creation and dissemination of these archives?
- How can we engage our audiences more actively, promote critical awareness of the world we live in and, ultimately, contribute to social change?

Against this background we invite proposals on the following sub-themes:

- Life stories and mobility (refugees, migrants)
- Oral history and the arts (film, theatre, literature, music, fine arts, photography)
- Work and unemployment
- Oral history and the use of urban space (buildings, monuments, musea, sound-walks)
- Oral history, biographical research and new subjectivities (e.g. homeless, new social movements, LGTB, disabled)
- Testimonies of the present. Which memories should be preserved for the future?

All proposals for oral history-based contributions, including papers, panels, presentations, and displays should include the author(s) name, affiliation and email address and be submitted by **27 March 2016** to rvboe@yahoo.gr and tasoula@otenet.gr.

Max. 250 words

Organizing Committee:

Riki Van Boeschoten (Chair of GOHA, University of Thessaly)
 Tasoula Vervenioti (Historian, coordinator Oral History Groups Athens)
 Yorgos Tsiolis (GOHA, University of Crete)
 Yorgos Angelopoulos (Aristotle University of Salonica)
 Vasilis Dalkavoukis (University of Thrace)
 Eleni Ioannidou (Historical Archive of Refugee Hellenism, Salonica)
 Eleni Kallimopoulou (University of Macedonia, Salonica)
 Maria Kavala (Aristotle University of Salonica)
 Pavlos Pantazis (Aristotle University of Salonica)
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 Syrago Tsiara (Museum of Contemporary Art, Salonica)