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*Synthèse croisée Faire ensemble / Doing Together*

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## ‘Cross-case synthesis’ – An introduction

- 1 The paper introducing this Special Issue on Disrupted Histories, Recovered Pasts (SULLIVAN *et al.*, this volume) clarifies that this project has researched biographical experiences that have undergone a rupture as a result of brutal political, social and/or economic changes, linked especially with war, colonization/decolonization, migration and exile. These personal biographical experiences have tended to find themselves on the margins of national and/or academic historical narratives. More specifically, our project has focused on the question of the types of experiences and knowledges either mobilized or disqualified in the writing of historical narrative and in the forms of presence of the past in the public sphere. We have been interested in how power relations shape the contexts, conditions and forms in which knowledges and experiences gain access to public spaces, become objects of study, or are transformed into counter-memories. Our case-studies are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Case-study research carried out for Disrupted Histories, Recovered Pasts, 2016-2019 (see <https://dsrupdhist.hypotheses.org/>).

Research lead	Original case-study title	Special Issue article title
Michèle Baussant, Principal Investigator (France)	“Memories and historical interpretations of the Jewish Oriental past in diasporic and Israeli contexts”	“‘Seeing the voices’: Egyptian Jews from one shore to another (Europe, Israel, United States)”

Lindsey Dodd, Co-Investigator (UK)	“Recovering childhood memories in contexts of war-time trauma in France”	“It’s not what I saw, it’s not what I thought’: challenges ‘from below’ to dominant versions of the French wartime past”
Irène Dos Santos, Co-Investigator (France)	“Recovering disrupted memories in a postcolonial context: Portuguese migrant subjectivities in Angola”	“To link Life Histories to Historical Narratives. The Place of ‘memory’ in Post-1974 Portuguese Society”
Olivette Otele, Co-Investigator (UK)	“Telling one’s story, redefining collective memory: the challenges of African refugees and migrants in 21 <sup>st</sup> century Europe”	“Moving North: disrupted histories of the Black Mediterranean”
Sian Sullivan, Principal Investigator (UK) and overall Project Coordinator	“Oral histories, sound recordings, and historical record regarding land clearances and culture/nature relationships in postcolonial and post-apartheid west Namibia”	“Maps and memory, rights and relationships: Articulations of global modernity and local dwelling in delineating land for communal-area conservancies in north-west Namibia”

- 2 Our original funding application for the Disrupted Histories, Recovered Pasts research project proposed that the case-study research shared in this Special Issue would be complemented by an open-ended process of co-production, cross-case learning, and synthesis of this case research. Our intentions were three-fold: 1) to foster systematic cross-case engagement through sharing and theorising content and experiences across our case-studies; 2) to identify commonalities and differences across our cases; and 3) to provide cross-case support for each other as we carried out our research. To do this ‘cross-case synthesis’ we met face-to-face several times during our project, identifying a shared set of concerns structuring our case research and clarifying both ‘points of articulation’ and disagreement between our cross-disciplinary research approaches and the content emerging from our cases. This process was greatly facilitated by the series of workshops held in London and Paris that from 2016 to 2018 brought together researchers supported by the broader AHRC Care for the Future and LABEX « Les passés dans le présent » collaborative research network (see <http://careforthefuture.exeter.ac.uk/2015/02/joint-funding-call-pre-announcement/>). We remain grateful for both the privilege of being part of this network, and for the comments our project received from other researchers in the network. In January 2018 we also held a broader international and cross-disciplinary research workshop that brought together 22 scholars at different career stages, all of whom are working on memory and oral history concerns in historically-disrupted contexts. Table 2 lists the rich array of panels, presentations and perspectives shared at this workshop.

Table 2. Panels and papers at the Disrupted Histories, Recovered Pasts research workshop, Bath Spa University, 26-27 January 2018 (<https://dsrupdhist.hypotheses.org/project-workshop-january-2018>).

<p>Public Keynote Lecture on <i>The Politics of Memory</i>          Marie-Claire Lavabre, Director of Research at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Paris          Discussant, Alison Hems, Heritage Management, Bath Spa University</p>
<p>Panel 1:  <i>Broken Lives, Silenced Memories: Reappropriations of the Past Among the Jews of Egypt and Islamic Countries</i>          Michèle Baussant, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Université Paris Nanterre  <i>Disrupted Histories, Re-negotiated Past: The Current Reconstruction of the Departure of the Jews of Egypt between 1948 and 1967</i>          Liat Alon, Dept. of History, Ben Gurion University          Chaired by Richard White, Media Studies, Bath Spa University</p>
<p>Panel 2:  <i>Disrupting Memory, Recovering History; Or, the Delicate Balance Between Life and Evidence</i>          Lindsey Dodd, Department of History, University of Huddersfield,  <i>Beneath the Surface of the Waterways</i>          Jodie Matthews, Department of English Literature, University of Huddersfield,  <i>Sound and (hi)story in Damara / ≠Nūkhoen pasts, from Basel to west Namibia</i>          Sian Sullivan, Research Centre for Environmental Humanities, Bath Spa University and Welhemina Suro Ganuses, Save the Rhino Trust, Namibia          Chaired by Sandra Kemp, Director of the Ruskin Library and Research Centre, University of Lancaster</p>
<p>Panel 3:  <i>Moving up North: Disrupted Histories of the Black Mediterranean</i>          Olivette Otele, History, Bath Spa University  <i>Oral Testimonies, 'Lost' Histories &amp; Re-thinking Muslim Migrant Communities in Post-war Britain: A Rural Case Study</i>          Sarah Hackett, History, Bath Spa University          Chaired by Benjamin Neimark, Lancaster Environment Centre</p>
<p>Panel 4  <i>Between Silenced Memories, Meaningless Heritage and Broken Traditions? Post-war Population Transfer From Istria, Ex-Yugoslavia</i>          Katja Hrobat Virloget, Head of Institute for Intercultural Studies, University of Primorska, Slovenia  <i>Encouraging the Emergence of Different Interpretations of Portuguese Colonisation for a Common Post-colonial Future</i>          Irène Dos Santos, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Université Paris Diderot          Chaired by Mike Hannis, Research Centre for Environmental Humanities, Bath Spa University</p>

- 3 In this final article of our Special Issue we share and reflect on this process of making our 'cross-case synthesis', drawing especially on the following blogs published on our project website: Lindsey Dodd's "Seeking points of articulation in a cross case

synthesis” (<https://dsrupdhist.hypotheses.org/458>) and “Reflections on research method and cross-case synthesis” (<https://dsrupdhist.hypotheses.org/466>), both posted in February 2018, and Michèle Baussant’s “Disrupted histories. Recovered Pasts dans un monde globalisé : penser et croiser les terrains et les sources”( <https://dsrupdhist.hypotheses.org/533> ), posted in March 2018. We set out in some detail the steps that formed our cross-case synthesis work, as these are potentially replicable for qualitative researchers embarking on new cross-disciplinary and international teamwork in other contexts. We note that whilst it is easy to propose such a cross-case synthesis in a funding proposal, in practice this is a somewhat harder undertaking. What exactly is a ‘cross-case engagement and synthesis’ in qualitative oral history research? How might we go about building one? What might it look like? What is it for? How and what kind of theorisation might arise from it? These questions become increasingly intractable when working across very different case settings and with qualitative material relating personal, and sometimes traumatic, experiences that by their nature may exceed easy classifications and comparisons. Nonetheless, we felt that we made headway in terms of engaging in a process that although needing to start from a somewhat blunt protocol for organising connections and themes across our case research, became generative, iterative and creative as we moved through the project.

- 4 Our aim in this concluding paper is thus to draw out our cumulative and theoretical reflection on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in cases of post-conflict and post-colonial societies. In what follows, we summarise our process, starting with an initial ‘sharing of what we know’, our attempts to find ‘points of (dis)articulation’ between our cases, and our identification of key themes emerging through this cross-case process. We conclude by sharing some reflections on where we think we got to in theorising this comparative and synthesising process.

## Sharing what we know

- 5 We started our cross-case synthesis work with a simple process intended to help us gain a stronger sense of how we each approach our research. This was a necessary step because prior to the original AHRC and LABEX joint UK/France research funding call that brought us together, we did know each other and had certainly not worked together. Our team emerged through Sian and Lindsey meeting at the second AHRC-LABEX PasP workshop in London in April 2015 (on ‘Delving Back Into The Past To Look Into The Present And Future’ (see <http://passes-present.eu/en/delving-back-past-look-present-and-future-franco-british-workshop-2-19375>)). Olivette was recommended to Sian by Bath Spa University’s research director, Michèle was recommended to Sian by the network leadership as a possible French partner, and Michèle brought in Irène, originally as a post-doc on the project. This organic and contingent process of arriving at our bilateral team meant that once our project was funded, we already had work to do to begin the process of communicating with each other and finding common ground in our research praxis. We needed to embark on a process that enabled us to know what we are each talking about, so that a fruitful exchange might emerge through comparison between our research praxis and case material. Further, as a group of scholars, we come not only from different disciplinary backgrounds (anthropology and history), but from different academic traditions which have evolved differently in different countries, and which draw on particular – and sometimes restricted – bodies

of scholarship. These disciplinary differences have enabled fruitful discussions regarding differences that may arise between research focusing ‘on oral history’ and ‘on memory’, in a context, particularly in French historical research, of an oppositional positioning of ‘memory’ and ‘history’. Amidst this complexity, we found – to some extent at least, and as traced below – some ways to refract these oppositions through sharing our research approaches and concerns.

- 6 We began this process in 2016 by each sharing two pieces of writing, as listed in Table 3, consisting of: 1. something we had each written which related to the Disrupted Histories project project (published or unpublished); and 2. something from inside our own disciplinary world which inspired us and which we thought would interest the others.

Table 3. Works shared in sharing what we know.

<p><i>Works by us:</i></p> <p>Baessant, M., “Broken lives, silenced memories and reappropriations of the past: The Jews from Egypt and from islamic countries”, in A. Bazin et C. Perron (ed), <i>How to address the loss? Forced migrations, lost territories and politics of history in Germany and in Europe in the XXth century</i>, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2018.</p> <p>Dodd, L. ‘Turning historian to tell your traumatic past; or, how oral history speaks both from below and from the inside out’ (paper given at History Seminar Series, University of Huddersfield, April 2017)</p> <p>Dos Santos, I., ‘Migrer du Portugal en Angola: perception de la migration et rapport au passé colonial. Quelques pistes de reflexion’, <i>Cahiers de l’URMIS</i> (2017)</p> <p>Otele, O., ‘Mourning in reluctant sites of memory: from Afrophobia to cultural productivity’, NIOD Lecture Series, September 2016, Institute for War, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam, Netherlands</p> <p>Sullivan, S., ‘What’s ontology got to do with it? On nature and knowledge in a political ecology of the “green economy”’, <i>Journal of Political Ecology</i>, 24.1 (2017)</p>
<p><i>Works by others:</i></p> <p>Bhambra, G. K., ‘What shadows? Representing Enoch Powell’, <a href="http://gkbhambra.net/">http://gkbhambra.net/</a> (28 October, 2016) (Shared by Olivette)</p> <p>Basso, K. H., Chapter 1, ‘Quoting the Ancestors’, from <i>Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache</i> (University of New Mexico Press, 1996). (shared by Sian)</p> <p>Fassin, D., ‘Une vérité sans réconciliation. Mémoire et histoire du Sida dans le post-apartheid’, <i>Sociétés &amp; Représentations</i>, 2.22 (2006) (Shared by Michèle)</p> <p>Machaqueiro, M. A., ‘Spaces of memory: the construction of colonial and post-colonial spaces in the memories of former Portuguese colonizers’, <i>CRIA-FCSH Working Paper 10</i> (2011) (Shared by Irène)</p> <p>Roper, M., ‘The unconscious work of history’, <i>Cultural and Social History</i>, 11.2 (2014) (Shared by Lindsey)</p>

- 7 Reading and discussing these works began to give us a focused basis for discussion and finding both common ground and disagreement, supporting our process for finding points of (dis)articulation across our cases and approaches.

## Points of Articulation

- 8 Our research has incorporated heterogeneous forms of mediation of the past such as oral histories, public histories, testimonies, memory, formal history and historiography and websites. In each of our case studies we have connected and crossed these sources together, so as to bring to light multivocality and historical heterogeneity. In working with the “memory truths” these sources have invoked we have sought in our case studies to consider how they connect or otherwise with “archival truths” as represented in formally archived texts and other sources. In doing so, we have considered how these truths reflect and refract each other, sometimes corresponding, sometimes diverging.
- 9 Our sources have thus been multiple, although our primary emphasis has been on oral testimony, in the form of both recordings by ourselves or archived past recordings. In working to identify “points of (dis)articulation” across our case research we thus first agreed on three focused questions regarding our oral history methodologies. We hoped that our responses to these questions might help us find points at which our case studies might share “hinges”: flexing, as it were, in different directions but articulating across the same joint. The framing questions we settled on were:
- 10 1. How might we describe our research method(s), e.g. our methods of collecting recorded interview material, and, importantly, of listening to material that we gathered or that already existed in archives? This question was foundational, given that although we all work with oral histories we were a cross-disciplinary team of anthropologists and historians that generate and use this type of research material differently;
- 11 2. In what ways might we “classify” the type(s) of oral history information we work with and/or generate in our research? (For example – childhood memories, intergenerational, on-site/in-place interviews, and so on). This question helped us to articulate differences and correspondences shaping both our interlocutors and their experiences;
- 12 3. In what ways do our oral history materials disrupt, reflect, revise, refract or recover established historical “truths” regarding the contexts of our case research?
- 13 These questions formed the basis of our interdisciplinarity across anthropology and history, which remains for us the ability to situate ourselves in terms of how we envisage, with what concepts, at what scales and according to what objectives, our objects of research and our relationships to our interlocutors and sources. Having shared texts responding to each of the questions above, in June 2017 four of us (Irène, Lindsey, Michèle and Sian), met in Paris and brainstormed across our responses, with Olivette joining us by Skype. This was a dynamic and somewhat effervescent process (involving a blackboard and several colours of chalk), that left us with a consolidated sense of the depth of genealogical and rhizomatic correspondences across our case research (FOUCAULT, 1977; DELEUZE and GUATTARI, 1988 [1980]). It created a matrix of various points of articulation across our case research, allowing us to have a better idea of themes emerging, coalescing and differentiating across our research. Before outlining some ways that these themes cut across our case research we first share the organising matrix we constructed to allow us to identify and draw out these themes.

## A method for crossing cases

- 14 Our discussions around how to cross our case study research led us to establish a loose matrix to help guide our thinking as we proceeded through our project. This matrix provided us with a way of drawing into focus specific elements of content along a number of axes so that we might also assure the comparative aspect of our research. We expressed this as a table (see Table 4), recognising that this is too schematic to fully represent several heterogeneous sets of data. In spite of this problem, we found this table acted as a useful prompt and an easily consultable tool.
- 15 The table distils a series of deceptively simple questions shaping our case study research. These questions were designed to encourage us to become very clear about a series of concerns crossing our case research and structuring our research project, namely:
- identifying the objectively disruptive or “happening history” events shaping our different case studies;
  - clarifying our emerging understanding of what exactly these events disrupted for our interlocuters and what might have thereby been lost and how;
  - and structuring a process of reflection on what we might be able to identify as being “recovered” through our research process and how.
- 16 We sought to clarify the responses to these questions for a series of interests in our case research: our interviewees and participants; ourselves as researchers; “history” / public narratives; and geographies / territories / places. This step in our synthesis process thus involved each of us working through these questions for our case research, using our matrices of observations and reflections as a basis for further face-to-face discussion (see Appendix). Although very simple in form, this matrix helped us to shed light, on the basis of our empirical material and on where both the specificities and correspondences of our cases could be identified, helping us to draw out connecting themes which we outline below.

Table 4. Starting questions for cross-case synthesis in the Disrupted Histories, Recovered Pasts research project.

For whom:	What is the disruption / when?	What is disrupted?	What is lost and how?	What is recovered and how?
For our interviewees				
For us				
For ‘history’ / public narratives				
For geographies / territories / places				

- 17 In particular, and although represented schematically above as contained or boxed in grid, what proved most valuable from this cross-case structure were the possibilities it created for making rhizomatic connections across our cases and praxis, which fed

iteratively into our analyses as we developed them in the case research papers shared in this Special Issue. O’Sullivan, following Deleuze and Guattari (1988[1980]), states that,

[t]he rhizome is anti-hierarchical and a-centred. No single organising principle predetermines the consistencies and compatibilities between the network of its elements. The rhizome precisely fosters transversal, even alogical, connections between heterogeneous events. (O’SULLIVAN, 2000, 84)

- 18 In this vein, and although a number of organising principles sit behind this project – especially the postcolonial/postconflict contexts of our research and the privileging use of oral narratives and ‘amateur histories’ as legitimate memory sources that can contribute to the making of historical discourse – what became more productive for us were the ways in which the ‘component parts’ where our cases tessellated as well as refusing connection with each other in irregular and multiple ways.
- 19 This extended cross-case conversation and comparison enriched our understanding of the pasts and presents of our case research, and our research practice and perspectives, whilst also allowing us to identify a set of productive analytical seams or axes, from which we built outwards so as to explore the shared preoccupations of our research and of our project’s aims and objectives. In summary, some of the similarities and differences we identified included:
- the disruptive historical events whose biographical consequences we were researching all led to the eviction or departure from places. They were mostly linked with specific experiences over a number of years in the mid- to second half of the twentieth century, that themselves were of course connected with prior events. The case research by Dos Santos was linked with a very specific temporal rupture – the airlift over two months of Portuguese settlers from Angola between August and November 1975 – which equally linked with prior events associated with postcolonial struggle taking place across several decades. Thus, the ruptures and disruptions we studied are polychronic, crossing temporal moments relating simultaneously to understandings of past events and their implications, across intervening time, and connected with imagined, disrupted and happening biographical presents and futures.
  - what became broken or disrupted in the biographies of our interlocutors was also similar across our divergent cases. A repeated theme was the loss of a sense of rootedness and connection with place, sometimes linked with an associated reality and of sense of displacement from ancestors through a resulting inability to retain access to graves (for example in Sullivan’s case research) and the interruption of cultural practices associated with specific places. In Otele’s case research, the fact of leaving one’s country of origin interrupted of the course of “education” of migrants and refugees, and impacted on the senses of “security” and “trust” of individuals who found it necessary to take this course of action in their lives. In the case study research by Baussant and Dos Santos the loss of status of individuals, particularly women and fathers, was a particular dimension linked with historical displacement. A further specificity in relation to loss applied to those Michael Rothberg (ROTHBERG, 2019) has termed ‘implicated subjects’, that is, those who contributed to or benefited from colonial regimes and who are today seen at best as complicit, and at worst as perpetrators. The loss of status thus is accompanied by a moral disqualification of these individuals’ entire pasts, either in the societies they arrive in or those they have left. Thus their expulsion from a territory is also an expulsion from history, as Baussant’s case in particular demonstrates.

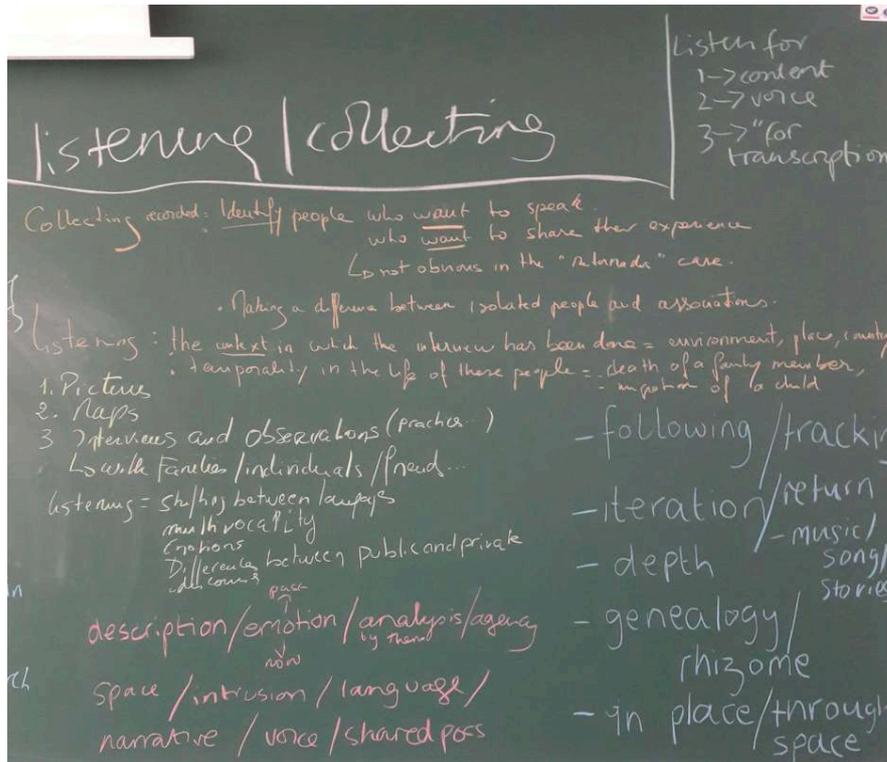
- 20 Dodd additionally speaks of the implications of how our research enquiry itself may be disruptive, causing a loss of privacy and the intimacy of memory through speaking of past experiences. Here the possibility of recognition itself may disrupt identity formations that are linked with the familiar silencing of voice and experience, bringing to the fore new identity possibilities and perceptions. An additional dimension of disruption, and as identified in the introductory article to this volume is the potential for the minoritarian histories traced through oral and “amateur” histories to refract formal historical and or public understanding of the past, as well as for orality to express differently the experiences of pasts recounted in written material. In this sense, our cases share with oral history more generally the possibility for a break with very linear narratives that exclude heterogeneity and complexity. In our case research such breaks have been related to those often recounted as the “other” to/in formal historical narrative and analyses (as in Sullivan’s case material), to certain understandings of the war of childhood and victimization (as in Dodd’s case research), and to ways of working on/with written material (as in Otele’s case research);
- 21 recovery too was multiple, relating to the relocating of places of memory and meaning occluded from recognised histories (as in the case studies by Baussant, Dos Santos and Sullivan), to relocating and working with already collected and recorded oral histories buried in relatively inaccessible archive collections (as in the case research by Dodd and Otele), as well as simply to different dimensions of recognition: for example, the recognition of individuals with occluded histories (Sullivan), the recognition of lived experiences (Dodd), and institutional, historical and legal recognition (Baussant). Recovery and recognition here is linked with new possibilities for expressing experiences that have been more or less suppressed (in both *de facto* and/or *de jure* terms), being able to voice previously unspoken emotions in relation to key actors in a person’s childhood (as in Dodd’s case research of war-time child evacuees), and in the possibility that experiences that formerly have no formal presence might be given a social context in the form of collective memories, public history sites, online forums, exhibitions, and so on. This importance of social contexts and their evolution in the recovery of memories is a key element to help us understand, as Baussant’s multi-sited case study demonstrates, why all stories and all silences are not equally weighted, and why they cannot be treated in the same way. In this way the multiplicity, multivocality and heterogeneity of the narratives we have compiled and studied might permit new, one might say decolonised, ways of understanding the construction of a narrative, as well as bringing the possibility of recovery through “emancipation” from “the past” *through* being able to express things otherwise.

## Themes

- 22 In working through this cross-case comparative process, a number of themes began to emerge and coalesce around listening and collecting, types of memory, what has been lost, disrupting, reflecting, refracting and revising, and research ethics in practice. We outline the salience of these themes below.

## Listening and collecting

ill. 1. Point of articulation 1: cross-case-analysis of types of memory, meeting of the research group 2017, Paris-Nanterre University



- 23 This theme focused on the ‘nuts and bolts’ of our research methods – the *how* part of our case research in terms of our practices of gathering narratives. Recorded oral histories are of course important for the historical detail that might thereby be conveyed, for example, around past places, people, things and events. But oral histories convey many more layers and forms of information, which we also sought to be alert to in our research. In reflecting on our praxis (as detailed in each of our case research articles in this Special Issue) we observed the significance of several key overlapping dimensions:

**Situating knowledge and experience in time and space:**

- 24 The context (environment, place, social framework, country) in which life experiences occurred often had specific influences on life trajectories, and similarly the situatedness of narratives ‘in place’ and ‘through space’ had a bearing on the shape and content of the stories that were shared. This dimension of our research precipitated an emphasis in Baussant’s case research and its restitution in the form of ‘deep mapping’: it is a collaborative work that allows us to visualize and hear memories and navigate within the complexity of trajectories, memories, archival, sounds, images, emotions. This deep mapping, co-constructed with the interviewees, involves various media and sources of information. It highlights different places inhabited by memory and forms of memory of the inhabited, all connected (CAQUARD, and CARTWRIGHT, 2014; ROSSETTO, 2015). On-site oral histories recorded in specific places of past dwelling and significance was a specific dimension of research by Sullivan and has been drawn on in submissions

to the Ancestral Land Commission appointed by the Namibian government in 2019 (SULLIVAN, *et al.* 2019; SULLIVAN and GANUSES, 2020).

### Voice and emotion:

- 25 We all emphasised the importance and range of emotional textures in the oral narratives we worked with, *listening for emotion, feeling and sentiment, both in the described-past and in the narrating-present*. Given that our research foregrounds contexts of disruption, we all variously attempted to hear without denial or projection the specific and significant contributions of emotion voiced and vocalised in our research material, whilst also listening for content regarding the experience of specific historical events and circumstances. This, for us, meant being attentive to unexpressed emotional content and affective processes (ROPER, 2014), as well as being open to possibilities for making past peoples recognisable in the present, rather than assuming that the past is ‘another country’ where people necessarily do and understand things ‘differently’. This approach deflects attention from ‘factual discourse’ towards dimensions of orality like anecdotes or songs, recognizing that these may carry emotional truths and other meanings that may otherwise remain unarticulated. Inside narratives, interviewees may make use of a range of shared storytelling tropes and motifs appropriate to their own cultural milieu. They may speak in a tragic or comic mode; they may use stock characters, such as heroes and villains; they use narrative structures around problematics and resolutions inside their anecdotes ; their stories may be coming of age stories or stories of dissent and resistance which fit into larger storytelling traditions; there may be gendered dimensions of narrative. Overall, then, we affirm that orality itself matters as a specific ‘register of information’, not only through spoken word and dialogue, but also as expressed, for example, through music, songs and ritualised storytelling which might also have spatial and place-linked dimensions (PORTELLI 1991, 1997; explored further in SULLIVAN, GANUSES, in press).

### Agency and imagination:

- 26 In listening carefully to interviewees’ own retrospective analyses of past events we sought to understand their considerations of their own agency in acting, thinking and feeling as they did in the past. Our position was very much that it is through listening to how people make sense of their own position inside and in relation to the past that these narratives might expand our knowledge about experienced pasts. We rejected interpretations of past events which assume patterns of behaviour that are solely pre-determined by social categories such as class, race, gender, age, etc. so as to foreground that historical actors, even children, have agency. Agency exists, even in instances of conformity, and this should be recognised (DODD, 2017). Listening for the attributions of past agency interviewees attribute to themselves is an important means of understanding how individuals position themselves in the world, then and now. In other cases, people remove agency from themselves, for example by assigning outcomes to God or to fate; again, questioning their meaning of this is a valuable line of enquiry (DODD, 2016).
- 27 While many individuals without a professional training in history may not have an analytical overview of the past in the way a professional historian does, they nonetheless have capacities for contributing contrariness and contradiction that may

enable the writing of 'history' to tally more closely with real-world messiness that exceeds the historian's interest in generalising, categorising and codifying the past. As such, it is not just the prerogative of the professional scholar to interpret and/or make the past. The ways that people who lived through specific times in the past understand accepted historical versions of the past in relation to their own experience can greatly illuminate and complexify these versions. We also drew here on ideas around 'shared possibilities' connecting individuals with understandings of collective past disruptive experiences (PORTELLI, 1991), noting that what ties individuals into such collectivities may also be the disruption of what they imagine(d) to be their possible futures (JEDLOWSKI, 2001), rather than the realities of their factual existence in the present. Such 'shared possibilities' are articulated in narratives not as 'what is or was' but as 'what might have been'. When a narrator identifies possible outcomes to events or actions which did not happen, but which might have done, we see inside the imagined futures belonging to a past time. Such possibilities are 'shared' because they *did* happen to others – e.g. the 'near miss' stories in bombing narratives. At the same time, external narratives and discourses regarding collective memory might be intrusive, acting in public and often national commemorative practices as a totalising 'steamroller' which might flatten in deleterious ways individuals and their experiences. Again, we wished to foreground and permit the agency of the individual(s) engaged with in our research.

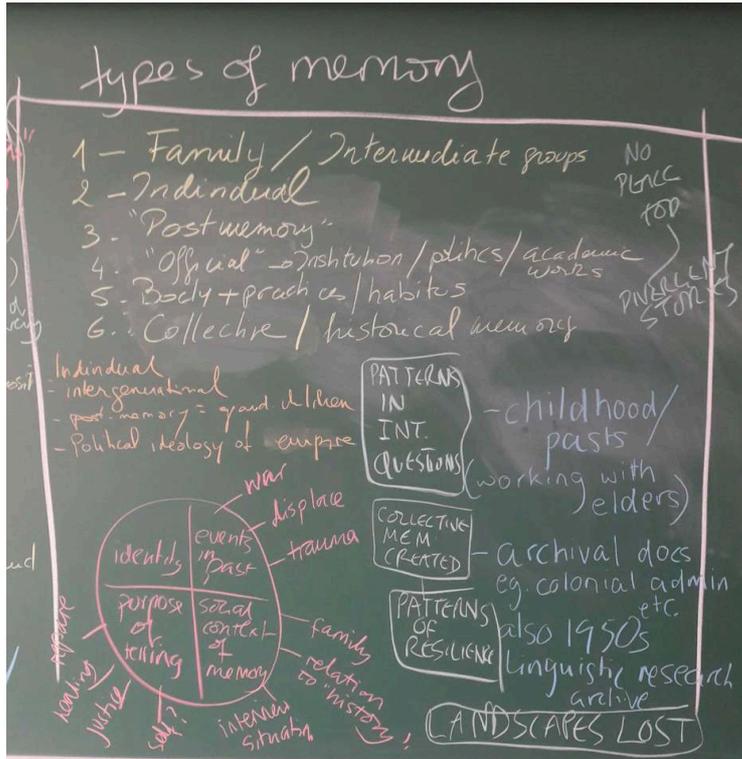
- 28 This issue connects too with the importance of differentiating between narratives linked with public remembering and privately expressed memories that may have remained distinct or isolated from public memory discourse. For oral histories that we recorded ourselves, we all also affirmed the importance of being led by our interlocutors, which meant being reflexive about ways in which we might seek to 'over-determine' narratives through asking specific questions that act to shape answers. Being led for us meant both following a narrative in the immanence of its telling, and/or physically following an interlocutor through geographical space so as to be led to previously undocumented places of memory significance, as in Sullivan's case research; see also in Dos Santos case research who does not use the term "memory" when addressing her interlocutors in order not to introduce the analytical concept of memory in the formulation that individuals make of their own past.

#### **Reticence and prompting:**

- 29 We all experienced how the recording of oral histories can be complicated by reluctance and reticence to share experiences that might be socially or politically 'risky', and the need to accept silences if these arose (LAYMAN, 2009). Here we also listen for space, silence, occlusion, omission and error in narratives of the past and try to understand why silences and misremembering might occur (PASSERINI, 1989 [1984], 2003; PORTELLI, 1997). In contrast, we also endorsed the potential for material props – often brought into an interview space by our interlocutors – to act as prompts in our interviews, providing possibilities to reflect with our interviewees on the meanings of items such as photographs as they contributed to oral history narratives. Such 'memory prompts' could be places and physical spaces themselves, the return to which stimulated recall of past events and linked webs of family, social and ancestral relationships.

## Types of memory

III. 2. Point of articulation 2: A cross-case analysis of altering, reflecting "truth" How the data collected coincide or differ from historical work, meeting of the research group 2017, Paris-Nanterre University



- 30 Much of our discussion revolved around the different 'types' of memory we work with in our case studies, as well as considering possibilities regarding what memory *does* in connection with our querying of what might be disrupted, lost and recovered in the historical and memory circumstances of our research. It is easy to slip here into a dichotomy of memory and remembering practices between the collective and the individual, expressed as well in the often-used oppositional understanding of memory as either collective or personal – *souvenir* or *mémoire*. Here we considered forms of group, shared, collective memory, such as: family memories shared across generations and the transition into what Hirsch (HIRSCH, 2012) has called 'post-memory', following the works of Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1950); official 'historical memory' held by formal institutions and archives - mobilised by the politics of memory and formal historical scholarship; and 'performative memory' and shared memorial practices, created through formalised bodies of memory work and oral histories. These collective memories can sit in tension and/or complementarity with forms of individual memory (which may also be shared), that can be generationally – and in terms of age of life - specific (for example the contrast between childhood and adult memory) as well as embodied.
- 31 In recognising that this dichotomy (of individual versus collective, public versus private, 'inside' versus 'outside') still structures memory studies – separating too easily the sociological dimension of memory (the structures of memory) from the psychological (the personal experience of remembering) – we also sought to disrupt

this polarising tendency (SMITH, 2016). Given the very disrupted contexts of our research, a tendency we tried to guard against was around any pressure to relate or create a ‘happy resolution’ of peoples’ past experiences of suffering, a situation that might particularly arise in situations where funders might desire or expect closure in the form of a happy ending (as foregrounded in Otele’s case research). Here we are invoking a tendency in patterns of collective remembering to discipline divergent stories. We are also affirming that interviewees are perfectly capable of describing in language the nature and perceived accuracy of their own memories, even when this may not be a conscious process. Grammatical structures used inside narrative expression can tell us a lot in this regard (PORTELLI, 1997; SMITH, 2006), pointing towards different memory layers introduced into a narrative by the use of ‘I’, ‘one’, ‘we’, and so on, or to the attribution of certainty signalled via the use of conditional tenses and conditional expressions. These reflect interviewees’ own understandings of the veracity of what they are conveying: compare, for example, a memory introduced by ‘it was’ to one introduced by ‘I think it was’, or indeed ‘it might have been’.

- 32 As an heuristic device, ill.3 drawn up by Lindsey Dodd illustrates the ways in which the memories and acts of memory recall gathered together in this project can be seen as connected with (at least) four interconnected factors:

### 1. Individual identity and circumstances:

- 33 This aspect foregrounds personal identity and circumstances of the individual involved, and the relative importance of those aspects in and around what is recounted in an interview. For example, if working with childhood memories as many of us have done (see especially Dodd’s article this volume), important considerations arise regarding the specificities of how childhood memory works, what is likely to be remembered, what is not, and how we identify the ‘hooks’ such as emotional or sensory content onto which memories are hung. Considering such detail permits an elaboration of how interviewees express memories of their childhoods, why these particular memories are remembered and recounted, what such memories have in common with each other, how they emerge in narrative, and how they can be used by historians. These kinds of memory emerge in connection with the specific identity of the teller and are also related to the age at which the memory was laid down (BAUSSANT, 2017).

### 2. Social context:

- 34 Memories are shared and transmitted between family members and in inter-generational and social contexts. This may mean that a story told may not necessarily be the narrator’s own memory of something experienced directly, but a family or social group memory that has been transmitted across generations and perhaps iterated and shaped in multiple further social contexts (BLOCH, 1995; ASSMAN, 2001).

### 3. Events experienced:

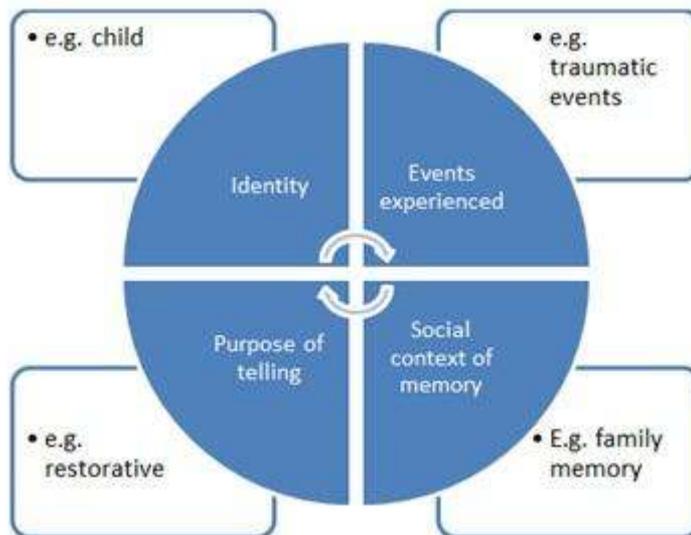
- 35 The nature of events experienced may create shared and common features of the memory process and the memory structure and texture, such as fragmentation or constriction. They evidently affect the nature of what is recounted. Children’s traumatic memories are understood as having qualities particular to them. These kinds

of memory occur as a function of what a person has lived through, and typically involve the perpetration or witnessing of violence or abuse, or experiences of loss and displacement. They exhibit commonalities of narrative and of content.

#### 4. Purpose of telling:

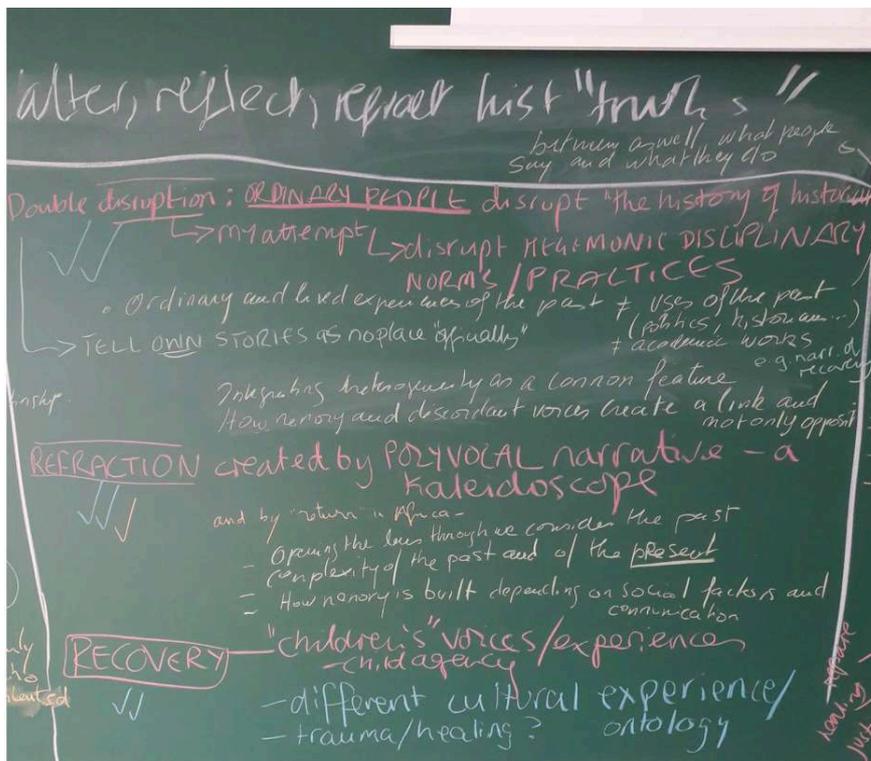
- 36 Anyone who agrees to be interviewed, or indeed who shares their memories publicly, has a motivation to do so. In a restorative mode, the motivation may be to restore one's own story to the historical record, from which it has been removed, occluded or ignored. There may also be a motivation in the collection of these interviews which derives from the interviewer, such as restoring voices to the voiceless. In both cases, restoring voices implies a challenge to or debate with another version of the past, which is being rejected. These kinds of memory occur as a function of a present-time motivation, and typically exist in situations of oppression, persecution or silencing.

ill. 3. An heuristic device for illustrating the ways in which the memories and acts of memory recall are connected with multiple interconnected factors. Source: Lindsey Dodd.



What has been lost?

### III. 4. Exploring the disruptive effects of "minority" stories, meeting of research group 2017, Paris-Nanterre University



- 37 An emphasis of our research was on articulations of loss in relation to objectively disruptive historical events, as well the ways in which one disruption may create a cascade of disruptions flowing from a singular event in the past. Articulations of loss crept constantly into memories and narratives, including through forms of silence and silencing. Again perspectives on loss are multiple, articulated by our interviewees, through our own interpretive perspectives as researchers, and in the perspectives formalised as History and of the historian. The richness of memory and its articulations flow from the generative interplay between what may have actually been lost in concrete terms, and what is imagined to have been lost (BAUSSANT, 2018; BAZIN et PERRON, 2018). Part of our attempt to create focus in our research revolved around identifying and reflecting on the kinds of loss experienced and articulated in the narratives we were able to compile concerning peoples' remembered experiences of objectively disruptive circumstances.

### Disrupting, reflecting, refracting and revising pasts

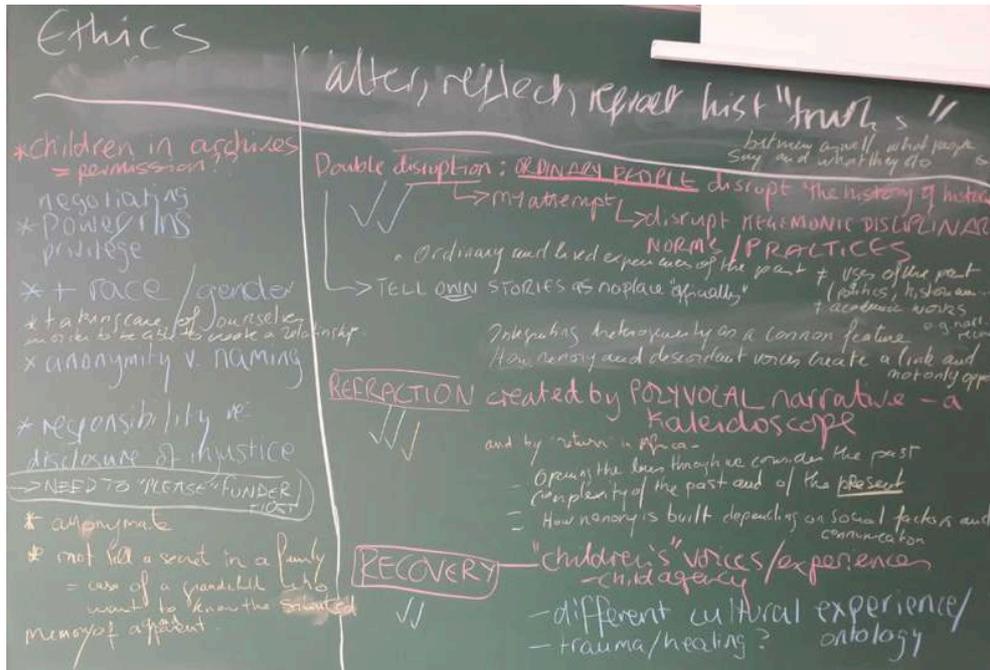
- 38 A large emphasis of our research involved drawing into focus the disruptive possibilities of 'minoritarian' histories (to use a term from DELEUZE et GUATTARI, 1988[1980]). Our case research illuminates a great variety of such disruptions. 'Amateur histories' articulated by ordinary people about the pasts they lived through might be doubly disruptive: first, by disrupting the content of history as written by historians with information and interpretation hitherto unavailable and unconsidered; and second, by disrupting the regimes of truth-making governing the discipline of scholarly history, by challenging dominant disciplinary norms and practices. Ultimately, and as proposed in the paper introducing this Special Issue, a function and motivation of

telling the stories that have no 'official' place in society is one of subject restitution and recovering neglected and silenced pasts. Disruption here may stem from the interviewees themselves: ordinary people who lived through a particular set of events feel that their experiences are not being represented, or have been misrepresented, by versions of the past which dominate. Thus, their interviews can be conscious articulations of anger which seek to challenge dominant versions of the past which constitute the 'regimes of truth' accepted by a given society about the nature of particular events and actions in the past. Disruption might similarly stem from our own attempts as researchers to disrupt the hegemonic grip of historical interpretations which, by common and self-referential accord, operate within existing frameworks – even if they adapt and develop those frameworks

- 39 In this disruptive research process, a refraction of historical knowledge may unfold through the multivocal nature of oral narratives that act as a kaleidoscope to create multiple variations of the same story that flow from the same initial set of past events: splitting apart a single narrative and shining light into experience from many directions. In this way, oral histories regarding disrupted pasts can help with generating work that is polyvocal and multi-perspectival: which refuses to commit to generalisations and categorisations of human experience, but seeks to find a way to permit a multiplicity of standpoints to co-exist – in history as in 'reality'. We maintain that this heterogeneity of storying the past should be integrated into analytical frameworks as a common feature, so as to foreground possibilities for refraction based on relationships between consensual and discordant voices: not simply as opposites but as intimately linked. This kind of effort is, of course, a core and critical practice of decolonization.

## Research ethics in practice

III. 5. Discussing the ethical dimension of our research, research group meeting 2017, Paris-Nanterre University



- 40 Across our discussions it was evident that the ethical dimensions of our research occupy us not only as requirements of our work and the gaining of formal ethics approvals, but because we are attuned to the power relations we are constantly negotiating in a number of ways. For example, working 'with' childhood memories, i.e. the memories that adults in the present experienced as children presents a set of specific risks and problems. This is particularly true when memory stories are brought into dialogue with other forms of historical data, such as archival sources, with which they may conflict in certain details or which might throw up sensitive information previously perhaps unknown to an interviewee (DODD, 2015). These circumstances generate particular issues around anonymity and naming, and add to the delicate balance between the desire to be named as a participant in one's own past and thus to exist on the historical record, and the need for researchers to be careful around issues of (for example) disclosures of injustices or of past secrets. These concerns relate to perennial questions of who is able to speak and to contribute to knowledge that circulates (SPIVAK, 1988). It is a truism to say that in the public sphere we are only able to engage with the words and voices of those who can and could talk. Those who have disappeared for various reasons are not recorded. They relate too to questions of authorship in the relationship between interviewee and interviewer. Who tells the story and in whose name? How can effective partnerships be constituted that refract and democratize notions of authorship? In sum, we found ourselves bound into a set of ethical problems around contradictions in our desires to please our interviewees and to transmit, share and develop information in ways that are meaningful to them, and our commitments to the regulations of our funding bodies, our institutions and our disciplinary norms and expectations.

## Conclusion

- 41 It is something of a bitter irony to be finalizing this Special Issue after several months in societal lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated policy responses. The strongly multi-sited character of our approach, with comparative cases explored France, Israel, the United States, Portugal, Angola, Egypt, Algeria, the United Kingdom and Namibia, has lent itself to a transversal consideration of multiple sources of information that in the present moment seems almost unthinkable. Nonetheless, we reflect here on our processes for drawing out both their complementarity and disagreement in terms of writings and representations of the past. In seeking to develop an in-depth and intersubjective knowledge of the forms, registers and expressions of troubled pasts and their modes of production and interaction, we also sought to reveal gaps, silences and points of conflict between formal and informal discourses and their diachronic changes. Our approach raises questions around identifying what the conditions might be for listening to the experiences of others, and for the development of mutual understanding, especially given the likelihood that past experiences of disruption may remain a divisive factor in the present. We therefore also reflected on new ways of restoring the complexity, crossovers and circulations of memory in a globalized world where access to sources, different interpretations of history and models seems to be multiplied. This possibility requires decompartmentalizing and decolonizing knowledge about the past by creating conditions for reading, listening and transmission that are not confined to academic spaces alone.
- 42 In part, then, our theoretical ambition has been to accommodate both memory as a source for the analysis of memory constructions, and memory as an object of history that exceeds words recounted in oral testimony. Reflecting on the different tools that allow us to highlight the complexity of the past in interactive ways, as well as to consider other ways of “listening” to this complexity and multivocality has led us to clarify the position adopted in our project, namely our intention to work both *on* and *with* memory (BAUSSANT, 2019, 36-37). *On* memory, since the aim here is to analyze information regarding the relationship that individuals and groups have in the present with the past; and *with* memory, since our corpus is partly based on oral sources and observations that concern ‘memory practices’, engaging the researcher’s own memory work (field notes after the fact, setting up mnemonic processes to recall observations, and so on) as well as that of the individuals and groups whose perspectives and experiences and we are researching. This is probably only possible by clarifying the ways in which we, as anthropologists and historians, grasp memory, through a questioning, here and now, of material and immaterial sources nourished or derived from the past – narratives, discourses, ordinary or extraordinary practices of actors, techniques and objects – and their effects in structuring, maintaining or eroding social groups, particularly in situations of rupture and conflict. Here we are invoking Maurice Bloch’s (1995) encouragement not to confuse memories and narratives; mnemonic facts are more than the narratives produced about them, and what constitutes a memory is not just one particular narrative, or even the sum of all narrative. This perspective leads us to pay attention to silences, forgettings and omissions, and other memorial forms anchored in places, practices and bodies (BASTIDE, 1970; CHIVALLON, 2012; SULLIVAN and GANUSES, in press).

- 43 In underlining the social role of memory we have sought to take into account, according to the scales adopted and their possible discontinuities (REVEL, 1996), the contextual, intersubjective and social character of memory/memories, the narrative and non-narrative dimensions relating to social and cultural practices, links to spaces and landscapes, and to the body and embodiment (SULLIVAN, 2016). Our comparative analysis has thus focused on different articulations between various forms of relations to the past, including the question of power relations, access to knowledge and the interrelational dimensions that structure narratives. In doing so, we identified a set of points of articulation for working together on the concepts of listening/collecting and their content, based on the various terrains and methodologies adopted; on the symbolic and material forms of memory, at different scales; on the identification and analysis of what has been lost on one side and on the other of what has been the object of a process of “recovery”; and finally, on the way in which our data reflect, break up or alter other forms of narrative. This approach differs from that adopted by some historians, particularly in France, who tend to be interested in memory not as “remembrance” but as political uses of the past, among other things to analyse what is pointed out as a crisis of the identities constituted by history (HAEGEL and LAVABRE, 2010): they have marked their mistrust of the sometimes instrumental, often labile and multiform character of oral sources, their degree of precision and credibility in relation to the written word (BAUSSANT, 2007; OLIVEIRA, 2010). Our approach is closer to the current of “Oral history”, as developed in the United Kingdom and Italy, which is based on oral enquiries to question the present of the past and provide another reading of social history, often via experiences that tend to be marginalized by historians (JOUTARD, 2015).
- 44 Perhaps precisely because in a globalized world confronted with multiple crises (nationalisms, conflicts and human displacement, terrorism, environmental), with a difficult work of mourning over past collective experiences (wars, Nazism, Shoah, imperialism and colonization, authoritarian regimes), and with the multiplication of sources of information and information about the past, we can try to go beyond historical memories and memory histories. Confronted with the multiplication of sources, we thus maintain that ‘the researcher’ might question this multiplicity and engage in a reflection on what such a corpus, dealing with processes of erasure, disqualification or historical marginalization of individuals and social groups, can teach us. This issue is particularly acute given that marginalization of narratives and voices is often accompanied by other forms of exclusion or discrimination – territorial, economic, political, age or gender-related, etc. – and remains closely linked to questions of violence and rupture which can lead to the maintenance and crystallization of the past in the form of resentment or “nostalgia” for authoritarian figures of power. Beyond individual experiences, the aim here is to work on these “nodes of memory”, inasmuch as they are also points of identification (ROSETTO, 2014) and, through a comparative approach, to unfold their diversity and complexity in order to make them legible and shareable within an academic space and a wider public space.
- 45 As a final thought, we affirm (again) that the importance of speaking of the present of the past is nothing less than the possibility of changing the course of history. To depict this significance we close with the pertinent and powerful image of a huge mural we encountered in Paris during the course of our team meeting in June 2017. Named ‘Les Trois Ages’ and painted by Gonzalo Borondo, the image shows three male figures – in

the absence of any female figure - depicting three generations: the eldest silences the next generation by holding a hand over its mouth; this silenced generation in turn silences the youngest generation by preventing them from seeing. In depicting her the silencing of experience and memory that can transfer trauma across generations, the mural encapsulates the concerns of our project.

ill.6. 'Les Trois Ages', painted by Gonzalo Borondo



Lindsey Dodd, 15 June 2017, Paris.

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## ABSTRACTS

The project 'Disrupted Histories, Recovered Pasts' forming the focus of this Special Issue has researched biographical experiences that have undergone a rupture as a result of brutal political, social and/or economic changes, linked especially with war, colonization/decolonization, migration and exile. These personal biographical experiences have tended to find themselves on the margins of national and/or academic historical narratives. In this final paper of our Special Issue we share the open-ended process of co-production, cross-case learning, and synthesis that accompanied case research, focusing especially on our systematic cross-case engagement, which involved sharing and theorising content and experiences across our case-studies, and the commonalities and differences we identified across our case-studies through this process. We outline the steps we took in this process to sharing what we know, find 'points of articulation' across our case-studies and to identify themes emerging across our research.

Comme mentionné dans le texte introductif de ce numéro spécial, l'une des ambitions transversales du projet de recherche « Histoires Perturbées, Passés Retrouvés » a été de mettre au point un moyen de « faire ensemble », que nous appelons ici « analyse croisée ». Étant donné l'étendue et la spécificité de nos études de cas, ce procédé s'est avéré difficile mais gratifiant en fin de compte. Dans ce texte conclusif, nous voulons partager la praxis du travail mené collectivement au cours des trois années du projet. Nous avons d'abord cherché à trouver des points d'articulations entre nos méthodologies, puis confronté la manière de « classer » les différents types d'informations recueillies et produites, et, pour finir, réfléchi à la façon dont nos matériaux d'histoire orale perturbent, reflètent, réfractent ou rétablissent des « vérités » historiques établies. Nous avons été attentives aux multiples façons dont les forces sociales s'unissent pour produire différentes formes d'oublis, contribuant à effacer des types particuliers de connaissances, de voix et d'expériences.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** oral history, disruption, memory, case-study, points of articulation, decolonization, synthesis

**Mots-clés:** histoire orale, perturbation, mémoire, étude de cas, points d'articulation, décolonisation, synthèse

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