WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY IN THE PHILIPPINES, NOW? KEY ISSUES AND IMPORTANT POINTS TO CONSIDER

Fernando A. Santiago, Jr., PhD
Department of History
De La Salle University
Oral history is not a compartment but a data gathering technique of the historical discipline.

Defined as “research into the past that records the memories of witnesses to the past in order to draw on direct and personal experience of events and conditions.” (Michael Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman and Tim Futing Liao eds., *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, 2004, 770)

It brings recognition to the “inarticulate” for documents tend to reflect only the experiences of the famous and the powerful, while the masses are often not part of the historical record.
THE INTERVIEW

“INTERVIEW”

Defined in the Merriam Webster Dictionary as “a meeting at which information is obtained (as by a reporter, television commentator, or pollster) from a person.”
“ORAL TRADITION” AND “ORAL HISTORY”

“Oral tradition” and “oral history” are not synonymous. Rather than collecting stories that have been handed down from generation to generation, oral history involves the recording of an individual’s spoken memories.
Oral History in the Philippines
and the
Marcelino A. Foronda, Jr.
Center for Local and Oral History,
De La Salle University
Nine Fold Vision:
1. Collecting documents, souvenir programs, photographs, books, pamphlets, monographs, and letters of prominent persons related to local and oral history.

2. Setting up and maintaining a local and oral history archives, which is the repository of cassette tapes, video tapes, transcriptions of interviews with eminent personalities, as well as of pictures, publications and other valuable materials related to local and oral history.

3. Conducting research and writing on the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the towns, provinces and regions mentioned above. Topics may also include the People's Power revolution of 1986, the coup d'etat of 1989, or the Japanese occupation in towns, provinces or regions.

5. Publication of bibliographies and occasional papers on the areas mentioned above, as well as the publication of the CLOH Newsletter to inform readers about the activities of the Center and of the activities of scholars, students and others along the lines of local and oral history.

6. Spearheading the publication of a projected annual Philippine Journal of Local and Oral History with the assistance of other academic institutions and cultural agencies.

7. Conducting seminars, symposia, and conferences on local and oral history.

8. Acting as a clearinghouse of information regarding documentation, research and writing of the history of towns, provinces and regions.

9. Administering and selecting the recipient of the DLSU Center for Local and Oral History Prize for distinguished contributions to the field of local and oral history.
NOTABLE ORAL HISTORIES IN THE PHILIPPINES


Key Issues

- Scholarly Standards for Interview and Transcription

  - Various Approaches to Interviewing
    - Open Question with Prompt-Supported Answering and Interviewer Listening
    - Single Question Aimed at Inducing Narrative or SQUIN
    - Heavily-Structured interview based on Kvale’s Process Typology

- Transcription Methods
Memory

- The Construction of Memory
  - Flashbulb Memories
  - Memory by Schema
  - Eye Witness Memory

- Memory Loss
  - Memory Inhibition
  - Trauma
  - Alzheimer’s Disease
  - Aging
Addressing the Limitations of Memory

- **Lessons Learned**
  - Time is not on the side of the oral historian for the passage of time affects the precision of memory.
  - An interview made soon after an event may be more reliable than one that is done long after it. (this will prove to be significant in ordering the reliability of sources)
  - Flash bulb memories are not necessarily reliable.
  - An oral historian should be sensitive and not pressure his/her interviewee into embellishing his/her stories.
  - An oral historian should try to understand the mindset of the subject.
  - One should be aware and considerate of the limitations of memory.

- **Selective Sampling**
IMPORTANT POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Oral history can be promoted and its issues addressed by encouraging dialogue among practitioners through conferences and seminar-workshops.
- The community of oral historians must identify the “best practices” in conducting interviews.
- The community of oral historians must be “nurtured” through the establishment of oral history centers.
- Local historical organizations and societies must be encouraged to learn the techniques of oral history research.
fernando.Santiago@dlsu.edu.ph