Presenting Life Histories:
A literature review and
annotated bibliography

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Abstract

This select annotated bibliography reviews a range of approaches to the analysis and presentation of life history research. The aim is to introduce readers to the life history method, as well as similar and interrelated approaches, and to identify strategies and tools that are available to researchers that employ this unique qualitative methodology.

Section One introduces the life history method, discussing its origins and the reasons for its rise in popularity in the past decades. The section also clarifies the terms used to define and describe the method, and outlines the methodological and theoretical choices that confront researchers wishing to employ life histories. Section Two lists and briefly describes books, journal articles and online resources that should be of general interest to researchers using life history methods. This section includes articles that put forward a critique of this qualitative method and flag up some of the many ethical issues that researchers are bound to face in the collection, interpretation and presentation of life histories. Section Three forms the bulk of the annotated bibliography. Grouped according to the method used, it identifies the various ways that life histories are analysed and presented, providing examples from constructionist, realist, action research and testimonial approaches. A 'Matrix of Presentation Styles' ties together the annotate bibliography to demonstrate a menu of options available to researchers. The bibliography ends with a recapitulation of what has been presented and discusses the future of the life history method in social science research.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

This select annotated bibliography reviews a range of approaches to the analysis and presentation of life history research. The term 'life history' method is used here to refer to the collection and interpretation of personal histories or oral testimonies, collected during an interview process, for the purpose of understanding "the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future" (Roberts 2002: 1). The texts reviewed, while in no way exhaustive, hail from a range of disciplines and a variety of theoretical and philosophical positions. The aim is to introduce readers to the life history method, as well as similar and interrelated approaches, and to identify strategies and tools that are available to researchers that employ this unique qualitative methodology.

1.1. Contents and Structure

Background

This first section introduces the life history method. It discusses the origins of this research method and the reasons for its rise in popularity across many fields of inquiry in the past decades. The popularity of the method in so many areas has given rise to a diverse terminology to define and describe it. This section clarifies some of these terms. It also outlines the many methodological and theoretical choices that confront researchers. While this broad range of approaches to analysis is part of what makes this method so interesting, it also presents researchers with a number of challenges.

General resources

This section lists and briefly describes books and journal articles that should be of general interest to researchers using life history methods. A number of them provide useful literature reviews and insights into the analysis of life histories. Volumes of particular interest are presented with chapter breakdowns. Relevant academic journals and online resources are also listed, as well as a short listing of resources for researchers interested in qualitative software options for the analysis of life history research. Lastly, this section includes the abstracts to a few articles whose authors put forward a critique of this qualitative method and flag up some of the many ethical issues that researchers are bound to face in the collection, interpretation and presentation of life histories.

Presenting life histories and oral testimonies

This section forms the bulk of the annotated bibliography. Grouped according to the method used, it identifies the various ways that life histories are presented. Researchers working in narrative analysis, who take a 'constructionist' approach (Roberts 2002, 7) generally present life histories in a uniform way. While much of the research reviewed in the realist perspective follow a few main approaches (thematic text boxes, single person focus, collaborative text), several examples present more novel methods, such as the quantification or graphical representation of life history interviews. Many of these studies may be referred to as 'action research' wherein life histories are intended to inform a wider range of action by the research participants, often in collaboration with researchers, ranging from local community development initiatives to lobbying government. Latin American testimonial literature is reviewed at the end of this section, and may be the clearest example of using life histories to promote direct action and re-write local history. This review of academic texts is followed by some examples of how non-governmental organizations and development agencies use life histories and oral testimonies (often in much less rigorous forms) in their publications.

Matrix of presentation styles

This table ties together the bibliography in a simple fashion to demonstrate a sort of 'tool kit' or menu of options that are utilised by and available to researchers. It shows that the analytical strains identified in the first part of the bibliography correspond with different ways that research can be presented. How findings are presented depends very much on the audience one is appealing to, whether it is an academic community, policy makers, the media, civil society, or the general public.

The bibliography concludes with a recapitulation of what has been presented and discusses the future of the life history method in social science research.

2. Overview of the life history method

2.1. Background

In the past three decades, interest in life history research – the collection and interpretation of personal histories or testimonies – in the social sciences has continually grown (Roberts 2002). The popularity of this research method suggests a growing reluctance on the part of many researchers in the social sciences to infer too much from survey-based studies. For some, life history research reflects a turn away from objectivity and a privileging of subjectivity and positionality (Riessman 2001). For others, life histories provide a rich source of data that enable researchers to explore the life course and to examine the relationships between cause and effect, and agency and structure. This renewed interest in the individual reflects a wider populist shift, and is associated with post-modernism (Paerregaard 1998). In the social sciences, this shift, and the surge of interest in the life history method, can be attributed to a number of factors, which Roberts (2002, 4-5) outlines in the following way;

1. A rejection of positivism (the idea that social sciences can uncover empirical reality/truth through standardized methodologies)
2. A growing interest in the life course
3. An increased concern with lived experience and how to best reveal it
4. A rise in the popularity of qualitative research and disillusionment with static approaches to data collection

Life history research, which has its strongest roots in sociology, is used in a wide variety of disciplines including feminist studies, psychology, history, and literary and cultural studies. It is also increasingly being utilized in a number of substantive areas such as in family studies, migration, political change and education. The 'narrative turn' has moved into the field of international development as well, a focus ushered in by the publication of Slim and Thompson's Listening for A Change (1993), which advocates a research method and philosophy of political action with, and on behalf of, vulnerable groups. [1] Through the analyses of life history narratives, academics and practitioners in a range of social science fields are provided a perspective that, although narrowly focused on an individual, family or small group of informants, is more holistic than what can be inferred by observation, or using other methodological tools, such as surveys. Many of the studies reviewed here focus on gender and feminist issues, migration, and poverty. Feminist scholars employ the method primarily to uncover the diversity of women's experiences and to project women's voices into areas where they have previously been ignored. Studies of migration and poverty use the

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[1] The book's publisher, Panos, an independent information and communication organisation, has been at the forefront of developing and publicising oral testimony techniques in development practice and research.

method for similar reasons, but also because this method can reflect temporality and life trajectories.

In the more traditional view, life histories are seen as useful primarily at the 'exploratory' stage of research where information is scarce and conceptualisation is limited. Similarly, it is seen as a valuable complement to larger studies in that it can provide detail, and bolster findings from other forms of research. Using life histories in conjunction with other quantitative and qualitative methodologies is the approach most commonly taken by researchers who seek to influence policy makers. Life histories can be used either alone or in conjunction with other methods. For example, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) has adopted a Q-squared approach, whereby life histories are collected in conjunction with quantitative panel data and other forms of qualitative data (e.g. from focus group discussions and key informant interviews) (Baulch and Scott 2006).[2]

Using data from life histories to inform our understanding of chronic poverty is uniquely useful for a number of reasons. Life histories are relational. They have the potential to link macro and micro processes. Life history interviews allow individuals to discuss not only themselves, and their lives, but also the social, economic, and political spaces that individuals inhabit. Thus, they can be used to communicate how structure and agency intersect to produce the circumstances of a particular person's life. Lastly, life histories capture processes of change. For example they can be used to map an individual's poverty trajectory and to identify the key poverty drivers, maintainers and interrupters. Additionally, a life history approach can illuminate pre-existing knowledge of poverty, refute common but damaging misconceptions (Kothari and Hulme, 2004) and generate counterintuitive findings, thus stimulating new areas of research.

The life history approach has the potential to deliver researchers powerful insights. However, like other approaches, it confronts researchers with choices (research design, interviewing process, analysis, and dissemination of findings) and a corresponding set of challenges.

2.2. Clarification of terms

Perhaps the first challenge confronting those who wish to understand more about life history research is the problem of differing use of terms – oral history, personal narrative, biography, life story etc. – and their often interchangeable usage (Roberts 2002, 3). As Bertaux notes, "generally speaking, there is a certain terminological confusion in the field, as these [various] terms…have been used almost interchangeably" (1981, 7). This stems largely from the fact that the popularity of life history research (as it is referred to broadly here) has developed into a wide network of research that has its roots not only in sociology and anthropology but also in other areas, such as feminist and literary studies, as well as being linked to cultures with rich oral histories, personal and community testimonies. As follows, this particular methodological style has gone by various names, and umbrella terms such as narrative inquiry, biographical method, life history research etc. are often used to simplify this vast field of research. Denzin reflects that "there are many biographical methods or many ways of writing about life. Each form presents different textual problems and leaves the reader with different messages and understandings" (1989, 7). However, the choice of language/ terminology does vary between disciplines and does to some extend denote different approaches.

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[2] See also Q-squared. http://www.q-squared.ca. This website presents material which builds on an international conference on Q2 methods: "Cornell/Toronto: Q-Squared in Practice: A Conference on Experiences of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Poverty Appraisal, University of Toronto, May 15-16, 2004."

The most common distinction is made between the 'life story' and 'life history', which Roberts (2002) simplifies as such: the story is the narrated story by the author/teller, whereas the life history is the later interpretive, presentational work of the researcher. This distinction is, of course, very difficult to uphold in reality because the person directing the interview influences the process from the very beginning.

Below are outlined some of the key differences between common terms employed within life history research. The following list of terms has been drawn from Hatch and Wisnieski's (1995), Denzin's (1989) and Roberts' (2002) very useful discussions of terms in this field.

Box 1: Life History Terminology

Biographical research: Research undertaken on individual lives employing autobiographical documents, interviews or other sources and presenting accounts in various forms (e.g. in terms of editing, written, visual or oral presentation, and degree of researcher's narration and reflexivity).

Ethnography: Written account of a culture or group.

Family history: The systematic narrative and research of past events relating to a specific family, or specific families.

Narrative: A story, having a plot and existence separate from life of the teller. Narrative is linked with time as a fundamental aspect of social action. Narratives provide the organization for our actions and experiences, since we experience life through conceptions of the past, present and future.

Oral history: Personal recollections of events and their causes and effects. Also refers to the practice of interviewing individuals on their past experiences of events with the intention of constructing an historical account.

Case history: History of an event or social process, not of a person in particular.

Case study: Analysis and record of a single case.

Life history: Account of a life based on interviews and conversation. The life history is based on the collection of a written or transcribed oral account requested by a researcher. The life story is subsequently edited, interpreted and presented in one of a number of ways, often in conjunction with other sources. Life histories may be topical, focusing on only one segmented portion of a life, or complete, attempting to tell the full details of a life as it is recollected.

Life story: The account of a person's story of his or her life, or a segment of it, as told to another. It is usually quite a full account across the length of life but may refer to a period or aspect of the life experience. When related by interview to the researcher it is the result of an interactive relationship.

Narrative inquiry: Similar to 'biographical research', or 'life history research', this term is a loose frame of reference for a subset of qualitative research that uses personal narratives as the basis of research. 'Narrative' refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a personal unity by means of a plot.

Testimonio: The first-person account of a real situation that involves repression and marginalization.

2.3. Analysis of life histories

Not until life histories are analysed can their unique contributions to knowledge be communicated and understood. The role of the researcher then is to analyse the texts collected, and bearing in mind important ethical, moral and cultural considerations, interpret and communicate what has transpired in the interview process. Through the analysis of life histories we can learn under what circumstances individual agency and structural conditions meet and interact, as well as how changes occur. While the use of life histories can be an empowering form of social research, because it privileges voices often excluded in other forms of research, the reflection of personal and social life that this method presents are not

unmediated, but are communicated to a given audience by the researcher who collected the material (Riessman 1993).

Just as there is considerable diversity in the definition of personal testimony/life history/narrative in social research, large methodological variation also persists (Riessman 2001). This is magnified by the inherent difficulties of the method. While life histories are most appealing when presented as a story, with a beginning, middle and end, the oral reconstruction of one's life, often narrated over a series of interviews and under a variety of circumstances, is not always expressed in a logical or coherent manner. Moreover, issues of memory, truthfulness (validity), impact of researcher on subject etc. all complicate the matter further. For a number of reasons, therefore, researchers often have a difficult time reconstructing the life history into a form that will be understood by the audience it is intended for, while remaining true to the life it tells of.

Miller (2000) has outlined a useful way to discern between the most common approaches to the analysis of life histories.

1. Narrative: The emphasis in this approach is on the active construction of life stories through the interplay between interviewer and interviewee. The finished text is the result of the collaborative project, and the informant's viewpoint treated as a unique perspective, mediated by social context. Analysis is of the interview itself, or the informant's view of reality, the themes that emerge from the narrative, how they reconstruct the past and meaning. Involves the microanalysis of the text, to get at the perceptive and contextual nature of 'reality'.

2. Realist (inductive): This approach uses grounded-theory techniques of interviewing. Researchers begin with a hypothesis and through a series of interviews produce the facts that will be incorporated into theory. Interviews go in series or rounds, starting with unfocused interviews and returning with more specific questions once generalizations from the first are drawn up. Interviews stop at the point of saturation, when no new ideas are being generated and the theory has been supported. Analysis takes the form of categorizing the information gathered into 'building blocks' from which theory is constructed. This information is then validated against further empirical material- transcripts or new interviews. (This is a very lengthy process and as such, there aren't many examples of its use. See Znaniecki's The Polish Peasant (Thomas and Znaniecki (1920/1990)).

3. Neo-positivist: This approach validates pre-existing theory against empirical reality. Previous work or a literature review on the topic of interest generates the form of the interview and the questions that will guide it. The aim is to fill gaps in the research, or to provide a more holistic or nuanced perspective to phenomena. Theory is generated during research through an ongoing interrelation between a systematic data collection and data analysis. This approach depends on the data collected for theory building, rather than on existing theoretical approaches (see for example, work by Daniel Bertaux).

For the latter two approaches, there exists a circular movement between research and theorisation, whereas in the narrative approach, the focus is on the construction of a given reality (see Miller 2000, 14-17). Whereas the approach of narrative analysis take an interpretive approach, the realist and neo-positivist approaches follow as closely as possible the traditional norms of qualitative research, which stress the importance of validity and reliability in data collection and dissemination (Denzin 1989, 49).

A reason behind the earlier limited use of life histories within the social sciences is that the method was seen to be lacking when upheld to rigorous standards of reliability and validity. This question continues to confront researchers (particularly those who seek to influence

wider debates) with challenges. One response has been to emphasize the validity of life histories studies, by for example checking findings against extraneous sources (official documentation, additional witnesses etc.).

2.4.   General Resources

Atkinson, R. (1998) The Life Story Interview. London: Sage Publications.

Atkinson provides a useful introduction to life story interviewing; the uses of life stories, how to generate data from them, and the art and science of the life story interview. First, he places the life history interview into a wider research context (its history, broad usages etc.). He then provides specific suggestions and guidelines for preparing and executing the interview, and also includes useful recommendations on how to collect the information desired, and transcribing and interpreting the interview. The book includes a detailed life story as an example for readers to draw upon.

Bertaux, D. ed. (1981) Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences. London: Sage Publications.

This text provides a succinct survey of contemporary uses of life history materials in the social sciences, with a particular focus on its usefulness for the discipline of sociology. It compiles the work of an international group of writers who were using this method just as it was re-emerging in the social sciences. Bertaux in his introduction points to a 'new wave' of sociological studies using life stories and a key theoretical issue in the volume – 'the relationship between individual and collective praxis and sociohistorical change'. The studies employ a very broad range of theorization including forms of Marxism, social psychology and socio-historical perspectives. The papers demonstrate for Bertaux how macrosociological questions, such as social mobility, class formation and migration, can be addressed by a method deemed at best only suitable for micro sociological analysis.

Bertaux, D. (1995) "A Response to Thierry Kochuyt's 'Biographic and Empiricist Illusions: A Reply to Recent Criticism'". Biography and Society Newsletter: 2-6. Research Committee #38, International Sociological Association.

Most researchers of life histories do not assume objectivity, but see the 'truths' that emerge from interviews as subjective representations of reality. Bertaux disagrees. He locates himself in the realist tradition and believes that every life history contains a "large proportion of factual data that can be verified", for example with the dates and places of biographical events. He argues that life histories collected from the same social milieu can serve as documentary sources for understanding a certain social reality or phenomenon of interest. This approach entails taking a number of biographies from the same social context, which together yield a more robust body of evidence. Each life story should confirm aspects of the others until the point of saturation has been reached and theory has been formed. Representativeness in this approach does not refer to the broadness of a sample, but in the knowledge of subjects who are well informed on the topic under study. This approach serves as the basis for the 'grounded theory' model he uses, wherein life histories are collected repeatedly in a process that eventually yields new theory.

Bertaux, D. and M. Kohli (1984) "The life story approach: A continental view". Annual Review of Sociology, vol. 10, pp. 215-37.

The value of a life history perspective is that it allows us to look at old issues with new eyes, to open up new fields of inquiry, and develop new modes of analysis. This is a very useful review of the use of the life history literature in continental Europe, which charts its origins and re-emergence in sociology. Two main trends are observed. In Germany and the Anglo

countries, life histories are collected in order to understand more about the "symbolic in social life and meaning in individual lives" (215). The approach to collection and analysis used by these studies are what Bertaux terms "objective hermeneutics". The second main trend, which pertains more to Latin countries both in Europe and the Americas, considers interviewees as informants, and uses life histories in an ethnographic fashion, and to get accurate descriptions of life trajectories within certain social contexts in order that patterns of social relations may be identified and the process that shape them better understood.

In line with its 'continental view' the paper, and this review, is organised by country.

United States; Sociologists in this country approach life histories in the symbolic interactionism tradition of the Chicago school. Most studies focus on forms of social deviancy. Methodologically, the main emphasis is on direct observation, regardless of which theoretical framework is being employed.

Poland: In the interwar period, two scholars (Znaniecki and Kryziwicki) developed an innovative form of data collection. They created a public competition, advertised in local newspapers, for the authoring of memoirs or autobiographies on topics that were of interest to them (such as, 'life as a young peasant', 'the experience of unemployment', 'an industrial worker'). Thousands of narratives were collected in this way, the best of which were compiled in books and have over the years generated much scholarship. This method has been revived several times since its initiation, and the narratives are kept in archives at an institute in Warsaw.

Germany: Here we find two trends: one is the "cultural or life-world approach to Marxism", the other is the interpretive research stemming from the phenomenological tradition. The author reviews four different German studies, which demonstrate how the approaches are different, as well as how they are increasingly converging. The review emphasizes the contributions to methods of data collection (for example, Schultz's model for the narrative interview) in Germany.

Italy: Life histories are gathered, and published for mainly political objectives, such as to publicly attest to how the poor are forced to live. Franco Ferarrotti is perhaps the best-known scholar using life history methods in Italy, and is exemplary of the merging of political self/activist with scholar/research. His research, in the post-war period focused on the lives of those living in communities where large industrial projects were being developed in pursuit of national economic development. His later work, in the 1980s, when this review was written, focused on the lives of rural migrants living on the outskirts of Rome. Bertaux reviews a number of Italian contributions, all of which are of the activist-research sort.

France; This school is deeply structuralist, influenced by the work of Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Foucault and Bourdieu. One of the first French texts on the subject noted that most lifelines are broken, that the trajectory assumed in the researchers narrative is dishonest. To overcome this problem, this school favours 'topical life stories', wherein narratives are gathered from a single social milieu and which focus on practices rather than on perceptions or feelings. From this, sociologists can infer certain patterns in these practices, and what the "sociostructural relationships that are generating or constraining them" are (226). This is what Bertaux calls the 'ethnosociological' approach. The key methodological point in this approach is that of 'saturation'. The researchers gather information continuously; changing the research and questions as they go along, and only stopping once the cases start to confirm the validity of the sociological interpretation. Without this practice of 'saturation' generalizations cannot be inferred.

Britain: Bertaux suggests we look at Plummer (2001) for a good overview of the approaches used in the Anglo world. Reviews only two studies in this section, including Paul Thompson et al's 1983 study of fishing communities.

Latin America: Readers are referred to Camargo et al. 1982, and points out the main tendencies, including a discussion of Balan, Browning and Jelin's book (see below).

Clandinin, D. J. and Connelly, F. M. (1994). "Personal experience methods" In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 413-427). London: Sage.

Through narrative inquiry researchers hope to understand more about why people do what they do. Experience becomes the starting point for social science inquiries and, ultimately, offers the possibility of individual and social change. Three sets of methodological questions are investigated. The first is to do with the field experience, which they see in terms of the relationship between the participants and researchers – a relationship wherein issues of negotiation, collaboration, and sensitivity are important. The second set of questions has to do with data collection or field texts. A number of methods are described: oral history, annals and chronicles, family stories, research interviews, autobiographical writing, letters, conversations, and field notes. The final set of questions has to do with creation of the research text. These questions concern voice, presentation, inquiry purposes, narrative form, and audience.

Creswell, J. W. (1998) Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions, London: Sage.

This book explores the philosophical underpinnings, history and key elements of five qualitative inquiry traditions: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. The author relates research designs to each of the traditions of inquiry and compares each of the research strategies for theoretical frameworks, writing an introduction to studies, collecting data, analysing data, writing the narrative, and employing standards of quality and verifying results. Five journal articles in the appendix are illustrative of the different approaches described.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) (1994/2000) Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2nd revised ed. London: Sage.

A very comprehensive textbook that addresses important issues in qualitative research including major perspectives, strategies of inquiry, methods of collection, modes of analysis, interpretation, and the future of qualitative research. It contains chapters on biographical method, narrative, interviewing and documents.

Geiger, S. (1986) "Women's Life Histories: Method and Content (Book Review)". Signs, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 334.

Feminism as "the theory of women's point of view" is by definition, an area of study that lends itself particularly well to a focus on life history research because it allows for the exploration of the diversity of women's varying experiences and perspective. This approach also provides a greater understanding of women's lives in different points in their life cycles within particular social and cultural settings, is potentially invaluable for cross-cultural comparisons, and helps to deter facile generalisations and the experiences of women. The author also notes that the subjective nature of this approach is strength rather than a weakness; it allows subjects to (re)present themselves, and in so doing, constitute what the researcher understands about 'reality'.

Feminist scholars in the West have made use of women's autobiographies, diaries, journals and the like to explore the various ways in which women perceive themselves and their environments. This form of research however, is restricted only to those women who are literate, thus excluding a great majority of the world's women, who in effect, have remained silent.

The paper reviews historical life history narratives, before the era of the women's movement, such as "Narrative of a Slave Girl" and "Baba Karo". A section reviewing work dealing with 'Inter- and Intracultural Variation in Women's Life Stories' follows. Includes a treatment of Codere's "A biography of African society, Rwanda 1900-1960" and LeVine's "Mothers and Wives: Gusii Women of East Africa", Atiyya's "Khul-Khan: Five Egyptian Women Tell Their Stories". The next section is on 'Women's Consciousness and Life History as Testimonial", which includes a discussion of such works as "Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman".

Miles, M., and J. Crush (1993) "Personal narratives as interactive texts: collecting and interpreting migrant life-histories". Professional Geographer, no. 45, pp. 84-94.

Drawing on their own work collecting the life histories of Swazi women migrants in South Africa, as well as a review of the methodological literature on life history approaches used in the African context, the authors urge geographers to adopt the approach in order to "uncover lost geographies and [vent] alternative voices in academic texts".

The authors urge us to see the results of life history interviews, as 'interactive texts' that reflect a collaborative effort between the researcher and the informant. After a review of the literature, which has been "been written by Western outsiders for other outsiders" (85), they explore the collaborative nature of life history research. They also usefully question the perceived merits of conducting life history research from an 'insider' perspective, which is assumed to produce a more rigorous analysis that the more common 'outsider' status of the researcher can achieve. While the authors acknowledge the merit of the insider position, they also note that it may have its own drawbacks, and that an 'outsider' position may have its merits. In both cases (insider or outsider) the researcher must be critical of what the silences and inconsistencies may be in the narratives produced.

Drawing on the literature, they outline several areas of comparative advantage for pursuing biographical research; first, life histories are 'corrective' to the Eurocentric and androcentric trends in academia which have a silencing effect on the peoples studied; second, it provides a more holistic and rich approach than standard questionnaire-based interviews; third, they may help to expose not only what people did, but what they wanted to do and what they now think they did (Portelli, 1981); fourth, they expose the logic behind individual action and the constraints that shaped an individuals choices; fifth, they give voice to groups that are marginalized or dispossessed.

Miller, R. L. (2000) Researching Life Stories and Family Histories, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

The author demonstrates that biographical research is a distinctive way of conceptualising social activity. The three main approaches reviewed in the book are the realist or inductive approach, the neo-positivist approach, and the narrative approach (see above). See the next section for a more thorough explanation of the useful distinctions that Miller draws.

Plummer, K. (2001) Documents of Life 2, London: Sage.

This text can be used as a reference volume for those interested in life accounts and biographies. It outlines clearly most of the ways lives can be studied and thought about. All the chapters focus on what Plummer calls the triple focus of biography, history and structure,

following the approach that the author subscribes to, 'symbolic interactionist' and 'humanist'. The book covers methodological issues as well as dispensing practical information and advice.

Chapter Breakdown:

1. For a Humanistic Way in Social Science
2. Sighting a Diversity of Life Stories: From Resource to Topic
3. Accessories to a Life Story: From Written Diaries to Video Diaries
4. The Auto/biographical Society
5. 'Chicago' and the Making of a Sociological Method
6. Getting and Doing Life Stories
7. Thinking about Life History Data
8. Writing Life Stories

Portelli, A. (1991) The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History, Albany: State University of New York Press.

A classic in oral history methodology, this volume is groundbreaking for the insights of the author into the important role played by memory. In his struggle to reconcile memory to event through interviews with informant surrounding the death of Luigi, Portelli analyses the various modes of working class story telling (for the stories told are different), but most importantly, "the real and significant fact which these narratives highlight is memory itself". He has reminded researchers in this area that interpretations of memory must be central to analysis of life history interviews.

Riessman, C. K. (1993), "Narrative Analysis", Qualitative Research Methods, Series 30, Sage Publications, Inc. London, UK.

Narrative analysis "has to do with how protagonists interpret things, and we can go about systematically interpreting their interpretations" (5). Thus, because this approach privileges human agency, it is best suited to studies having to do with subjectivity and identity. From a sociological perspective, they are particularly useful because of what they may reveal about social life, for example with eye for gender or racial inequalities. Chapter Two focuses on models of narrative analysis, using three different studies to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the various ways of interpreting and communicating first-person accounts. The first, a study of Ginsburg (1989) is typical of the life story approach in that it summarises the gist of what those interviewed said without discussing the process of how the author moved from spoken to written language. Readers see only brief excerpts or snapshots of the women's lives, as sequenced per the desires of the author, arranged to present and support the argument. The author interprets the story for the readers and as such, the study privileges the authors' interpretation, weaving the narrative into the primary, author's narrative. The second study, by Bell (1988) emphasises one case, and uses the structural approaches of Labov (1982) and Mishner (1986) to explore how the stories within one narrative are linked. Using Labov's method of transcription and structural categories to construct a text from the interviews, the author reduces it to a core narrative. She studies the sequence of stories, the thematic and linguistic connections between them to see how the individual tied together significant events and relationships in her life. The third study reviewed is Riessman's own.

All of Riessman's publications can be found online at http://www2.bc.edu/~riessman/papers.html.

Riessman, C. K. (2001) "Analysis of Personal Narratives" in Gubrium, J. F. and J. A. Holstein (eds) Handbook of Interviewing, Sage, London.

There is considerable variation in how investigators/researchers employ the concept of personal narrative, and relatedly, what methodological assumptions they work under and what strategies of narrative analysis are utilised. The life history approach, wherein narrative refers to the entire life history, is most commonly associated with anthropology and social history, and is exemplified by Barbara Myerhoff's (1978) work on elderly Jews in California. Stories told usually merge with the analyst's interpretation of them, and often are indistinguishable.

Labov (1982) presents a very different and more restrictive approach. Here personal narrative is gathered in response to specific questions and circumstances and are organised by the author to expose common structures in texts collected. Riessman describes Labov's approach as taking the "discrete story as the unit of analysis" (2000, 7), which appears to draw on the hermeneutical approach

A third tradition, where extended accounts are collected by the researcher over lengthy periods of time and narratives are seen as coming out of the process (a real co-production). Analysts working in this tradition rely heavily on detailed transcriptions, attention to structural features that emerge from the text; and often compare collected narratives to each other, interpreting the similarities and differences between life stories.

Roberts, B. (2002) Biographical Research. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

This book examines the methodological and theoretical developments associated with biographical research in sociology, oral history, ethnography, biography, and narrative analysis. The author includes numerous examples of biographical research from his own work and other studies, and addresses important areas such as the collection and interpretation of materials, uses of biographical research, oral and written accounts, the interview relationship, the construction of the story, memory, and audience. Chapter Breakdown

1. Introduction: Biographical Research
2. Uses of Biographical Research
3. The Life History
4. Autobiography and Biography
5. Auto/biography and Sociology
6. Oral History
7. The Narrative Analysis of Lives
8. Memory and Autobiography
9. Ethnography and Biographical Research
10. Conclusion

Slim, H. and P. Thompson (1993) Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Development. London: Panos.

Drawing on case studies from around the world, this book describes how community members and community organisers can use oral testimony to amplify the voices of the people in their communities who do not have access to the corridors of power. It includes practical suggestions for collecting, transcribing, translating, and disseminating oral testimony. It also explores the limitations, ambiguities and ethics involved with collecting and using oral evidence.

Yow, V. R. (1994) Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists. London: Sage.

This is a practical outline and review of types of research studies in oral history. It contains an interview guide, information on research principles and record keeping, as well as reviews of key texts at the end of each chapter.

2.5   Journals and Online Resources

Auto/Biography http://www.sagepub.com/journalsProdDesc.nav?level1=N00&currTree=Subjects&prodId=Journal201802

Biography http://www.uhpress.hawaii.edu/journals/bio/index.html

Centre for Life History Research, Sussex University http://www.sussex.ac.uk/clhr/

Family and Community History http://www.fchrs.com/pages/journal/journal_of_fachrs.htm

Forum: Qualitative Social Research www.qualitative-research.net

International Journal of Oral History (not available on-line)

International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/HistoryWorld/Modern/?view=usa&ci=9780198202509

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography http://jce.sagepub.com/

Journal of Narrative Inquiry (formerly Journal of Narrative and Life History) http://www.clarku.edu/~mbamberg/narrativeINQ/

Life stories/Recits de vie (not available on-line)

The Narrative Study of Lives http://www.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId= Book4090

Oral History (the journal of the Oral History Society) http://www.ohs.org.uk/

The Oral History Review http://caliber.ucpress.net/loi/ohr?cookieSet=1

PANOS: Mountain Voices http://www.mountainvoices.org

Qualitative Sociology http://www.springerlink.com/content/0162-0436

Signs http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/Signs/home.html

Words and Silences – Bulletin of the International Oral History Association http://www.ioha.fgv.br/ioha/num15_2/writing.htm

2.6. Resources for Qualitative Data Analysis Software

A much discussed topic in qualitative research is the process of 'coding' data (referring to how the data are 'sorted', categorised by 'codes' which summarise or order the material. Coding is normally a continuous process that the researcher is involved in as the data is gathered and analysed. Coding is useful not only because it helps greatly to summarize and

organize the research findings, but it also can guide the gathering of further research and aid the process of formulating new concepts and theory in relation to the research question (the close examination of gathered material provides new insights and ideas) (Roberts 2002, 11). Qualitative software has been developed that can help to ease the task of coding. Some resources for researchers interested in the process of coding more generally, as well as programmes such as NVivo, Stata and NUD*IST more specifically, are listed below:

Bernard, H.R. (1995) "Qualitative Data Analysis—Text Analysis", Chapter 11, pp. 463-522 in Research Methods in Anthropology: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches, 2nd edition. Walnut Creek, CA, Alta-mira press.

Coffey, A. and P. Atkinson (eds) (1996) Ch 2 and 6 in Making sense of Qualitative Data, London, Sage.

Miller, R.L. (2000), pp. 150-153 in Researching Life Stories and Family Histories, London, Sage.

The following websites represent only a few of the vast online resources available to researchers who are interested in using qualitative data analysis software. The main programs in use, NVivo, NUD*IST and Stata, all have their own websites and instructional online aids to help guide researchers through the process. A main site is listed first, followed by online resources compiled by researchers or teachers.

QSR International http://www.qsrinternational.com/
Vendor website for the worlds largest producer and distributor of qualitative software. Researchers may learn about, purchase, and seek assistance for a number of different software packages including NVivo, NUD*IST, and XSight.

QUARC (Qualitative Research and Consulting)
http://www.quarc.de/software_overview_table.pdf
An overview of available software (ATLAS.ti 5, HyperResearch 2.6, MAXqda, The Ethnograph 5.08, QSR N 6, and QSR Nvivo) in an easy table format, with links to software websites.

Website of James W. Drisko, Professor at the Smith College School for Social Work
http://sophia.smith.edu/~jdrisko/qdasoftw.htm
A very useful guide to the qualitative data analysis software and resources available..

Indiana University, University Information Technology Services, Stat/Math
Centre http://www.indiana.edu/~statmath/other/nudist/overview.html
An overview of Nvivo.

2.7. Critiques of Life History Methods[3]

Cary, L. J. (1999) "Unexpected Stories: Life History and the Limits of Representation", Qualitative Inquiry, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp.411-427.

The author first used life history as a research method in her master of education thesis at a Canadian university. She now believes that the issues and questions that arose from that experience were mired in a critical perspective that reflected realist assumptions. Increasing dissatisfaction with her efforts to work through the life history data gathered in 1995 has led her to problematise the methodological implications of studying research participants' lives this way. Main points discussed include questions and issues with voice and collaborative

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[3] These entries are drawn directly from the paper abstracts, with little or no editing.

methodologies, the epistemological assumptions that frame life history research, and a discussion of victory narratives within the redemptive culture of the human and social sciences. And, just what do we do with "unexpected stories"?

Goodson, Ivor (1998) "Storying the self: Life politics and the study of the teacher's life and work" in W.F. Pinar (Ed.), Curriculum: Towards new identities (pp. 89-98), Garland, New York.

By analysing the dilemmas that led to a decline in life history methods in the social sciences, this paper discusses the use and misuse of life history as a contemporary research method. For example, the author posits that life stories are too often decontextualised and used to represent the research participants in an idealised or romanticised light. He presents an argument against the use of many of the approaches to presentation surveyed in this bibliography, such as for example, the use of text boxes. The author suggests that one way that such pitfalls or tendencies may be avoided is to present life stories alongside data collection. Presenting data on the socio-historical context of the life history lends it methodological validity and safeguards it from being too easily decontextualised. The last section examines the rehabilitation of life history methods and puts forward a number of arguments as to why life history methods are particularly suitable for what Harvey (1989) called the "condition of post-modernity."

Goodson, Ivor F. (1995) "The story so far: personal knowledge and the political", International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, Vol. 8, Iss. 1, January 1995 , pp. 89-98.

This paper looks critically at a number of forms of inquiry that are now developing in the field of teacher education. The narrative method is a genre that has emerged forcefully in the past decade as ways of seeking to represent the lived experience of schooling. Because of their potential, the new genres of research require close scrutiny. Whilst they have obvious strengths, they also have weaknesses, which may prove incapacitating. If this is so, we may be advocating genres of inquiry in the name of empowerment, whilst at the same time effectively disempowering the very people and causes we seek to serve (90). To help the process of identifying the cultural place of stories and narrative, the paper seeks to link the emergence of such genres inside teacher education with broader cultural patterns within contemporary societies. In particular, the use of personal stories in the global media is examined; and as a result, a series of questions is asked and issues are raised. Whilst the pace of change at the moment is rapid, a good deal of evidence points to an increasingly aggrandizing centre or state-sponsored "voices" at the level of interest groups, localities, and peripheries. From the perspective of these groups, these efforts may look like steps to the empowerment of oppressed aboriginals, physically and mentally challenged persons, gays and lesbians, and other deserving groups. This is all long overdue, but we need to be aware of the overall social matrix of these activities. Empowerment can go hand in hand with overall social control.

See Section 3.4 for more on critiques of the life history method.

3. Presenting Life Histories

3.1 Alternative Approaches

A number of the papers reviewed in the general resources section above demonstrated the various analytical and theoretical approaches taken by researchers using this method. A final concern for life history researchers is the audience or readership they hope to influence or

enlighten. This following sections review a number of the ways that material from life history interviews can be presented.

Some of the work presented here relates directly to the approaches to analysis. The first section reviews examples of narrative analysis, which as an approach flows directly from the analytical perspective defined by Roberts (2002) and others as 'constructionist'. Researchers hailing from this perspective emphasize how the story that is told to them is formed and shaped by narrative conventions and stress that the final text is the result of a collaborative effort between researcher and respondent. Whereas these researchers reject the representations of life histories as objective realities, the bulk of the work presented here comes from researchers who take a 'realist' position. The orientation may be defined as 'realist' because of the authority given to the researcher to provide an objective account of the lives and context of the respondent (Charmaz 1995, 31). Generally speaking, these researchers hold that there is some objective knowledge of reality that can be gleaned from life histories; that stories reflect a lived reality that can make an important contribution to knowledge. These two philosophical positions help to organize the following section only very loosely, as there is so much overlap in and diversity to the approaches that researchers take both in the analysis and presentation of life history research.

The best way to present findings from life histories varies depends largely on the audience for whom it is intended. Scholars and researchers whose work is aimed at an academic community tend to rely on smaller samples, and are more intent on mining individual interviews for the meanings and truths they convey. In general, purely academic studies, whose authors are concerned with the narrative analysis of life histories, are more likely to focus in depth on the experiences of the individual and the meanings they construct through the telling of their personal testimony. Authors using this approach will often leave the final text largely unedited, leaving the respondent to speak for themselves, perhaps with a brief introduction or summary from the researcher. Texts taking this approach may often include a textual analysis in which the final transcript is analysed for its subjective meaning. Researchers taking this approach generally fall into the 'constructionist' camp. Rather than presenting the story as an objective reality to be verified and proved, researchers emphasize how the story is formed and shaped by narrative conventions and in collaboration with the researcher. Attention is paid to inconsistencies and ambiguities, and the assumption made that the interpretation given, as well as the story told, is only one of a variety of possible ways of telling/explaining an individual's life.

On the other end of the spectrum, many researchers take a generally 'realist' approach to the study of life histories. This theoretical position holds that there is, embedded in the life history, some objective knowledge of reality; that there is an empirical, material basis for individual experience and that stories reflect a lived reality that can be communicated via the research. Whereas constructivists take an interpretive approach to the analysis of life history material, realists generally follow as closely as possible the traditional norms of qualitative research. Researchers informing policy use the information more selectively; pulling from the data the information that supports what is already known, or what is being argued. In order to influence policy, the analysis must be suitably rigorous. Fitting findings from life history interviews into a broader study, often combining it with other qualitative and quantitative methods, lends this method a robustness that policy makers may be more inclined towards.

Researchers hoping to influence policy makers or a wider audience, such as those in the 'realist' and 'neo-positivist' approaches described above (see Miller 2000), set the life history within the parameters of a larger analysis. The life histories are recounted selectively according to the argument of the author and purpose of the document. Short quotations may be displayed within the text or in text boxes (see for example, Bird and Shinyekwa 2003), but for the most part, the informant's biography is told in the language of the author rather than as a direct narration, and the researcher chooses discriminately which components of the life

history is emphasized. As shown in the annotated bibliography below, methods of presentation used by researchers hoping to engage with policy makers tend to present their findings in more accessible ways; thematic text boxes, single-person focus/case study, and graphical representations.

Lastly, NGOs, civil society organizations, and development agencies often use the life history method more informally. Anecdotal evidence, or short biographical sketches, used in policy reports or on organization websites are used to elicit empathy, support for issues, and to demonstrate the success of policies and projects. In seeking to attract a given audience, it is often that case that the initial/ongoing text is altogether lost or subsumed by the voice of the narrator. Readers thus are at a loss for further specifications about whether and how the authors have engaged with the data, gain substantive insights and arrive at theoretical conclusions. This is most commonly the case in the reports and on the websites of NGOs and development agencies that use biographical sketches and anecdotal evidence to elicit support for their programs, both from the general public and from donors.

Also included here are a few examples of what may be termed action research, where life histories or testimonies are taken in a deliberate fashion to amass evidence of crimes against individuals or communities. This kind of research is often directed at seeking eventual legal recourse for crimes, such as in the case of Guatemala (see Hanlon below), or to document the collective memory of a people.

3.2 Narrative Analysis

Agar, Michael (1980) "Stories, background knowledge and themes: problems in the analysis of life history narrative", American Ethnologist, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 223-239.

Agar uses just one section of a life history narrative he has gathered to demonstrate three different ways the text can be analysed. Borrowing from psychology, he uses the development of schemata to determine the structure and central theme(s) of the life history, which enables him to slice up the story of this one individual into different, though interrelated, parts. The organization of the story can take different forms depending on the text at hand, and the perspective of the researcher. One way to do it, using a linguistics perspective, is to treat the text as a 'disembodied entity', independent of the context in which it was maintained. Using this approach, the text is analysed for its structure, using phrase structure rules as guidance.

A second orientation is less linguistic, and more ethnographic. This perspective analyses life histories in terms of contextual themes or schema, and is interested mainly in the hermeneutical problem that arises when the researcher is an 'outsider'. By analysing the text within the context in which it was produced, its contributions both to the ethnographer, and to the audience it is intended for more generally, is made more accessible. The third approach is associated with cognitive anthropology, which uses language as a means to understanding the informant as a person, as well as the culture in which they are situated.

Key words: cognitive anthropology, discourse, life history, methodology, urban America

Behar, R. (1990) "Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman" Feminist Studies, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 223-258.

A common misconception about life history texts is that they speak for themselves, and can be used as a neutral tool through which to demonstrate certain phenomenon. This assumption tends to produce life history studies that speak past the text, rather than to them. To avoid this tendency, the analysis and reproduction of a life history text requires that the researcher interpret the text using the same cultural themes that the informant relies on the

construct the story. Analysing the life history against itself, and within the culture and system of social relations in which it was produced, helps to guard against treating the life history as 'a disposable commodity of information'.

Representing the life stories of non-Western women is a particular challenge for feminist scholars and anthropologists who should be careful to avoid representing what Chandra Mohanty (1990) refers to as universal images of the "Third World woman". These representations, of third world women as ignorant, poor, truncated etc., are a reflection of Western women's self-presentation, and a projection of negative characteristics from the self on to the 'other'. Life histories, although they have been used to support facile generalisations and bolster negative stereotypes, can also, as subjective documents, offer rigor and integrity. Tapping into the "unfulfilled promise of life histories" (Freeman and Kranz, 1979), requires that new standards and methods of analysis, that go beyond the bounds of conventional social science principles, must be developed. The task should be to interpret and analyse stories on their own terms, and endeavour to bring to life the narrator as a person (223).

Key words: life history, Mexico, feminist studies, representation, culture

Capper L. G. B. (1999) "Appalachian Women's Stories of Migration from West Virginia to northeast Ohio: A Narrative Analysis of Interviews and Personal Observations". http://www.marshall.edu/csega/research/lindacapper.pdf

The author draws on four in-depth and open-ended interviews conducted with Appalachian women migrants. Loosely structured, the women were asked simply to discuss their Appalachian heritage and migration experiences in the interviews. This information is used by the author to first offer brief descriptions and biographies of the four interviewees, and second, to discuss the experience of migration with reference to the themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes are bolstered by interviews with a number of other women who did not meet the criteria for the study but who served as key informants with regards to these recurring themes.

Although the author specifically chose middle-class women to interview in order to avoid the trap of a 'culture of poverty' analysis that is so common, themes of 'stereotypes, poverty issues and education' did arise. For this reason, it was perhaps particularly important that the paper relied so heavily on the words of those interviewed.

The short paper includes lengthy (one or two paragraphs) sections of the interviews that are cushioned with general remarks by the author. This is followed by a conclusion, or discussion. Much of the paper is made up of what the respondents themselves said, in their words.

Key words: narrative analysis, women, migration, poverty

Johnson, Lauri (2002) "'My Eyes Have Been Opened': White Teachers and Racial Awareness" Journal of Teacher Education, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 153-167.

Uses a life history approach to examine the narratives of six teachers. Autobiographical narratives were collected over a series of semi-structured interviews. These were supplemented with the author's observations and notes of contextual factors. In the final interview, the author shared her own impressions and the themes she had noted thus far, asking the participant to comment on the process of constructing an autobiographical narrative. This provided participants with an opportunity to validate (or reject) the authors' initial interpretations as a sort of 'member check'.

Each narrative was analysed with reference to what Polkinghorne (1995) refers to as storied

narratives, or vignettes, which were categorised and coded in order to make comparisons. The three common themes that emerge are discussed with reference to the demonstrative parts of the teachers' life stories. The author narrates, using brief quotes from the teachers to illustrate. This section is followed by a description (from the author's own participant observation) and analysis of the contexts within which teachers are situated in. Lastly, the participants' views of themselves as racial beings are examined. Although the author again pulls selectively from the narratives and vignettes to demonstrate, she attends more to what was missing from the narratives, what Anderson and Jack (1991) refer to as "the absence of a presence" (162). This approach is particularly suitable to the topic at hand, the 'invisibility of whiteness'. The failure of white teachers to see themselves as 'racialised', or to locate themselves within a racial hierarchy is reflected in the silences in their responses to how they view race as a social construct.

This paper concludes with implications and suggestions for policy, and a call for further research that relies on personal narrative.

Key words: narrative, race, teachers

Kazmierska, Kaja, (2003) "Migration Experiences and Changes of Identity: The analysis of a narrative". Forum: Qualitative Social Research, Vol. 4, No. 3, Art. 21, Sept. 2003.

As part of a series of articles that deal with the narrative of the interviewee, this author uses the academic literature on migration and identity to situate the biographical analysis. Although the entire life history has been collected, the author chooses to concentrate only on the parts that relate to the respondent's experiences as a labour migrant and her corresponding shifts in identity. To do so, the author bases her analysis, in part, on the procedure for narrative analysis outlined by Fritz Schütze (n.d.). In using this biography to understand the processes of identity change that correspond with migrant experiences, the author focuses on only those aspects of the narrative that are related to the collective aspect of the narrator's experiences.

The paper begins with some of the author's first impressions after reading the text of the interview, such as the role of language (the interview was conducted in the interviewee's second language – German), the skill of the interviewee in describing her life experiences using symbolic categories, and the narrator's self-presentation (her ability to speak objectively about her identity issues and emotional life, and personal growth). The author notes that the commentaries provided by the narrator on her own life are extremely useful in guiding the analysis of it.

The paper emphasises three stages of the biography, which map onto identity shifts and are used to illuminate the effects of migration on identity: first, as a young girl; second, as a new migrant; and third, the period of settling permanently. These sections are presented in the following manner: a section of 'quoted self commentary', supplemented by statements that are built into the author's description of and commentary on the interview and her analysis of it, which is then situated within the relevant academic literature.

Key words: migration, identity, marginality, biography, autobiographical narrative

For more on the same woman interviewed above, but demonstrating different approaches:
http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-03/3-03gueltekinetal-e.pdf

Kumar-Nevo, Michael (1996), "What's the Problem? Listening to the Stories of Mothers from Multi-problem Families" Clinical Social Work Journal, Vol. 26, No. 2.

The article offers narrative analyses of stories of three women, mothers of multi-problem families, whose children's development is at risk. The narrative analysis reveals the women's subjective perception of their situation of stress and of the methods of assistance available to them. The article examines the contribution of the narrative approach to the understanding of the point of view of the distressed segments of the population as a means of creating an alliance in assistance reception relations.

The interviews on which this paper is based were narrative interviews that used the intersubjective approach (Corradi, 1991), which emphasises the presence of the interviewer and which views the interview as a dialogue between two subjects.

The interviewees are asked to tell their story, as in a play, and to bring to centre stage a full description of the events in as much detail as possible. The aim is not to obtain "true" details about objective reality, but rather to reveal the meaning, which the narrator gives to the events in her memory. In every story of this kind gaps can be identified, for example, events that are ignored by the narrator, or contradictions within the narration. These gaps are not viewed as undermining the ordered sequence of the story, but rather as an additional kind of material for analysis of meaning of exactly the same kind as the factual material that was presented. Following Lacan (1988) the absent is present, especially at the stage of analysing the material, in which both the gaps and the contradictions invite questions as to their meaning.

Key words: narrative, women, multi-problem families

Luborsky, Mark (1987) "Analysis of Multiple Life History Narratives", Ethos, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 336-381.

This study analyses the life histories communicated by participants in a retirement transition study. Guided by two open-ended and general questions, twenty-seven life histories were collected over a minimum of three interviews per person. Using Agar's (1980) concept of 'themal schemata' (reviewed above), the author divides up the life histories with reference to the cognitive templates used by the participants. Complementing this, the author uses Moore and Myerhoff's (1977) concept of guiding metaphors that participants use as analogies to describe the cycles of their lives. Two distinct templates, corresponding to gender, emerged from the narratives. Male participants made use of nature analogies in relating the cycles of their lives (growth, maturation, death). These analogies counter the "social definitions of retirees as adults who have been discarded" (372), instead imparting a sense of continuity to the life course. For example, participants tended to define their retirement as "the natural order of things", thus de-emphasising the derogatory meanings associated with ageing in Western culture and thereby engaged in contributing to an "alternate definition for retirement" (373). The second template, employed by women respondents, is that of 'moral maturation' and is characterised by themes of becoming 'independent' and establishing an identity. Narratives were organised with reference to periods of psychosocial development marked by stages of increased independence and maturity. Luborsky's analysis focuses on the 'nature template', which allows him to flesh out the links between life histories and larger social processes. In particular his focus is on the rejection by participants of the negative connotations about retirement held by society at large and accordingly, an active process of positive self-definition that the narratives illustrate.

Key words: American, retirees, templates, guiding metaphors, analogies

Patai, D. (1988) "Constructing a Self: A Brazilian Life Story", Feminist Studies, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 143-166.

Patai draws on her skills as a literary critic to translate the oral narratives she collected from Brazilian women into a text that seeks to "retain the tone, style and favour of the original" (145). In her experience, women interviewee's give their stories a coherence and unity that does not actually match the complexity and incoherence of real life. This is similar to the way that literary texts are constructed. The very act of telling one's life invites structure and allows the subject to identify patterns and themes that they were previously not overtly aware of. She is interested in how the interviewee verbally constructs an image of her life and creates a character for herself, becoming a protagonist in her own story.

The author keeps the lengthy, poetry style transcription of this woman's prose to illustrate how the subject's speaking style is the product of an oral rather than literary culture. Working with the life histories of illiterate people, researchers often force the narrative into a text that resembles prose, and much is lost. Redundancy (which most researchers would edit out) for example, illustrates how in oral cultures, events tend to be placed within the context of human relations. In oral cultures, informants tend to evaluate the self within a group (for example, Marialice frequently uses such phrases as 'in the order of the poor', meaning 'among the poor', but in a positive sense). If this life story were to be transcribed in the form of prose, much of this illuminating repetition and redundancy would be lost. The author urges researchers to be sensitive to the contexts in which interviews are gathered and moreover, be sensitive to "the worlds themselves. These texts are not transparencies; they are dense with their own sound even as they invite us to glimpse the world within which they take shape" (165).

Key words: role of researcher, oral history, women, Latin America

3.3 Text Boxes

Bird, K. and Shinyekwa (2003) "Multiple Shocks and Downward Mobility: learning from life histories of rural Ugandans". CPRC Working Paper 36. Manchester: Chronic Poverty Research Centre/Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.

Life history interviews are a useful way to understand trajectories into and out of chronic poverty, as experienced by individuals and their families. This paper is framed within a broader qualitative study on poverty dynamics in rural Uganda, but is based primarily on the findings from 24 life history interviews collected from heads of households in three rural areas. The authors begin by contextualizing the research with findings from the larger study and elsewhere, showing that socio-economic inequality has increased, disparities between the rural and urban sectors have widened, and that in particular, the incidence of poverty in northern Uganda has increased. Chronic poverty is then defined and discussed before the parameters of the research are described and a visual map representing the interlocking problems faced by the chronically poor is presented.

Each of the three study sites, two of which were purposively chosen because their inhabitants are so poor, are described and discussed, further laying the groundwork/ describing the context for the life histories. Life history interviews were collected from individuals in three communities through semi-structured interviews. Most of the informants were poor, but a number of people not defined as poor were also interviewed in order to identify factors that protected from poverty and to demonstrate the differences between chronic and transitory poverty. The life history interviews helped the researchers to identify the path-determination of individuals' lives and pinpoint which choices, or the absence of choices, led to or maintained poverty. The information gathered enabled the researchers to

plot the life trajectories of each individual and their household, showing when and why they declined into poverty or moved out of it.

The second half of the paper deals with the findings that came out of the life history interviews. A wide variety of, often interlocking, factors were found to be associated with falling into and staying in poverty. The themes to emerge from the research relate to the 'drivers' of chronic and severe poverty, and the downward trajectories they lead to. Interviews with the elderly bore this downward mobility out; these informants portrayed a much more prosperous and comfortable life as youths. Using the dataset produced by the household surveys of the larger study, findings from focus groups, and other sources of data/research, the author's frame their findings from the life history interviews thematically. As such, the drivers and maintainers of poverty, as well as people's perception of poverty are discussed at the aggregate level, generalizing the findings from the individual life histories. Accompanying these themes are a number of text boxes which contain more specific information, for example the main points that emerged from focus groups, or the story of an individual who is representative of a vulnerable group, such as the widowed, elderly, or sick.

Presented in this way, information from life history interviews can be usefully conveyed to policy makers. The research showed that the chronically and severely poor are not only comprised of vulnerable groups but is a more widespread experience suffered by individuals and families that are pulled into poverty due to recurrent and composite shocks and personal tragedies, and that poverty is maintained because of an absence of choices and opportunities. In light of the findings, the researchers urge NGOs and government programs to pursue the sort of legal reform that would establish social protection for those who are vulnerable to and experience chronic poverty.

Key words: remote rural areas, Uganda, chronic poverty, social protection, shocks, vulnerability, life histories

Dodson, L. (1998) Don't call us out of Name: the Untold Lives of Women and Girls in Poor America, Boston, Beacon Press.

Dodson used focus groups, interviews and surveys, offering money in exchange for cooperation, in this study on the lives of young poor women in America. The aim of the study is to counter the mainstream explanation for the poverty and marginalisation these young women experience: that they are trapped in a 'culture of poverty'.

The books starts with the author discussing her own experiences and observations, and what she learned from listening to her female colleagues when she was a young woman working in factories and low service industry jobs. As such, she is highly critical of the 'canon of objectivity' in social science research, and contends that scholars seeking to gain knowledge and deepen their understanding of social realities must be conscious, which entails what she calls 'crossing over'.

Fifty life history interviews were collected from a diverse (both ethnically and geographically) group of women in the Boston area. The sample reflects the population of women receiving state welfare payments in the 1990s. She has altered certain distinguishing features of the histories (for anonymity) but for the most part the stories are as they were told. She drew themes out of the (triangulated) data collected. Interestingly, the four focus groups and the life history interviews were analysed with the help of what she calls an 'interpretive focus group', a 'new study technique' in which the data is methodically presented to the group for their analysis (the focus group is made up of the demographic group in question).

Her research compiles interviews, surveys, observations and focus group studies. Each chapter starts with a quote. The author weaves the narratives of respondents into her own

(describing the situation of the interview, the interviewee's appearance). In most chapters/sections, she includes a section of 'quick notes', comprised of short quotations from several women to further demonstrate what it is that is being said in the general text.

Francis, E. (2002) "Rural Livelihoods, Institutions and Vulnerability in North West Province, South Africa", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 28, no.3.

By using life histories as the primary source of information, this paper examines how and why rural livelihoods have changed in the North West Province of South Africa in the past four decades. It relies on 41 life history interviews from two villages in the region. This data was supplemented by interviews with individuals located in the local and regional institutional context, in order that the links between institutional frameworks and rural livelihoods could be analysed. The paper begins by laying the contextual groundwork; introduces the study, describes the region and the settlements from which informants were pulled; as well as a discussion of the differentiation that has deepened in the area.

The first life history presented is that of Lucas, who is the most successful person in a group of five more well-off households that were included in the study. The author narrates Lucas' biography, using his quotes to guide it, set within a text box that spans several full pages and charts his life in brief from birth to present. This is followed by the author's analysis – she points out the strengths of the life history in reflecting the wider processes of interest. The earlier part of his experience portrays a common experience by middle-class black South Africans in the twentieth century. The later part of his life underlies the importance of social networks, information and access to the state in his ability to be upwardly mobile. His story demonstrates the importance of 'flexibility and responsiveness to new opportunities in the livelihood strategies of the successful', as well as demonstrating the depth of differentiation between households.

The author goes on to discuss the other informants (five households) in this 'Category 1'. This pattern is repeated for each of two remaining categories (descending order from best to least well-off). In the second category the households of a father and daughter-in-law serve as a case study, and the life history produced spans three generations (the father's family, the father, his daughter-in-law) and demonstrates the role of domestic relationships and multiple earners in rural livelihoods. The third family is more typical of rural livelihoods and shows the important role that remittances from migrant family members and pensions play in being able to maintain the basic sustenance of a household.

The last third of the paper is an analysis of the findings. All of the life histories shed light on the risky rural environment and the strategies employed to deal with this riskiness, with varying degrees of success. Factors contributing to the increased differentiation in the region include institutions governing resource access and contract enforcement, together with labour and commodity markets. Responses to decreased livelihood opportunities take the form of livelihood diversification, wherein the most important strategies employed include increased access to information and social networks as well as the state. Some households responded to risk by clustering around the primary and most stable income earner. The links between institutions, vulnerability and livelihoods point to the urgent need for institutional reform that can provide more livelihoods for those in the rural sector, thus reducing vulnerability to risks.

3.4. Single Person/Household Focus

Delcore, H. D. (2004) "Development and the Life History of a Thai Farmer Leader"
Ethnology, vol. 43, no 1, pg. 33-60.

In the anthropology of development, the contributions of poststructuralist theory have been marred by tendencies toward discursive determinism and an inadequate theorising of agency. The life history approach is a strategy for probing the cultural politics of development in a way that better addresses the reality of development actors. Development does not just determine what counts as knowledge or truth, but also opens opportunities for individual cultural experiments. Using the life history of a Thai farmer, Delcore demonstrates that the development process is not the 'discursive straightjacket' often made out as, but can be a process that is used as a tool for personal and political projects that "transcend the discourse and material process of development identified by post-structural analysts".

First, the paper presents a brief discussion of the post-structural perspective in anthropology of development. Adherents to this approach critique the discourse and the representations it gives rise to, but as this critique notes, agency is often difficult to find in such analysis. In granting too much agency to the 'monolith' of the discourse, the adherents of this approach rob the 'subjects' of development of their agency. Second, the paper presents a discussion of life histories. "Life history remains a valuable tool for addressing some current concerns in the anthropology of development" (35) because it attends to individual and collective agency. As such, Delcore uses it to understand Berm's (the informant's) life itself, and not so much the narrative of it, because he's interested in using Berm's life as a corrective counter to more structural versions of development processes.

After discussing this 'structural interpretation of development processes', the author tells Berm's Story, beginning with a brief section on how they first met and what Berm's life, activities, habits, and work were like at the time of the interview. Then he starts at the beginning, with Berm's childhood. In sections following the phases of life transition, the author weaves together the story of Berm's life; his family history (rural, farmers, poor), his decision to migrate to Bangkok and the circumstances leading to his return to the rural area of his youth, his introduction to the NGO in question and subsequent engagement in their farming activities. The paper then goes on to discuss (still under the general heading, Berm's story) how Berm began and became very successful at practicing integrated agriculture (as promoted by the NGO) and how eventually he took on the role of 'development practitioner and thinker', which is the last section of his 'story', when he becomes a truly active participant in the project and works to spread the message to others…to the point where Berm saw his life as, "subsumed by the idea of development, which provided an idiom for self-understanding…Berm defined development as entire way of life" (45).

The paper concludes that Berm is an example of a small number of Thais who have applied their own social and cultural frameworks to the development perspective to pioneer new directions for their society. Structure provides both opportunities and constraints, but it takes people like Berm, with particular social and personal positions, to turn openings into change. Berm's story shows that he "was far from a mere tool of NGO development discourse, nor was he merely a modest villager empowered by NGOs, but an individual who constructed his identity in correspondence with his own understanding of development" (46).

Key words: development, life history, NGOs, agency, Thailand

Hulme, David (2003) "Thinking 'Small' and the Understanding of Poverty: Maymana and Mofizul's Story", CPRC Working Paper 22. Manchester: Chronic Poverty Research Centre/Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.

Hulme draws on the life history of Bangladeshi mother and son, Maymana and Mofizul, constructed from 26 interviews over a period of 12 months. Their life history is divided into two distinct phases in order to demonstrate how the family slid into poverty and illustrate how their impoverishment persisted. From this follows a discussion wherein the life history is situated within what is understood about chronic poverty, thus linking the nano-level account to the larger context in a way that may inform policy. Hulme's strategic use of what information to include, and how to present the family's story is done with his audience in mind, reasoning that policy makers and general readers would most likely not endeavour to read the full accounts he collected. The author includes a table which demonstrates succinctly the links between this family's experience and the larger societal and economic structure in which they live, focusing on the role of the state, market, civil society and family which facilitated Maymana and Mofizul's experience of chronic poverty and in some senses made possible their continued survival. A second table charts the loans taken out by the pair from family and community members over the course of the year to show how crucial these relationships are to the family's survival. His findings from the life history both confirm and challenge the current orthodoxy on chronic poverty, as well as bringing new insights to the debate.

Key words: female headed households, life history approach, Bangladesh, chronic poverty

Keegan, T. (1988) Facing the Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa. London: Zed Books.

Presents four life stories, collected from interviews with elderly men who lived through a period of great change and upheaval. The stories portray the experiences of families dealing with this change, and the struggle for security in the face of dispossession and oppression. The author recounts each man's story, beginning with the families into which they were born, how each family struggled to obtain access to land (share-cropping, labour tenancy, and in some cases by purchase) as well as subsistence through wage labour (aside from farming, such as mining and teaching) before and during periods of dispossession (around 1913, and again in the 1920s and in the late 1940s and 50s) wherein these means to livelihood were largely unravelled. The interviewees are poverty-stricken when the study takes place, after these waves of dispossession have occurred, and are dependent on a "barren wasteland" for their livelihoods. The stories bring to light the complexities of the labour process in agriculture, the ambiguous nature of relationships with whites, the ways in which kinship networks were used and redefined over the period, and the changing forms of struggle for security and autonomy by the men and their families.

The narrative method the author uses is part of that developed and used by the Oral Documentation Project of the African Studies Institute at the University of Witwatersrand. Although it presents a very valuable way of studying agricultural history in the region, as a narrative, and the author uses quotations to guide the narratives, there is little sense of how the narratives were constructed by the respondents themselves. The author does not relate to the reader how he put together the story, nor to what extent he is retelling the subject's narrative.

Key words: South Africa, life stories, older people, men, rural, livelihoods

Slater, Rachel (2002) "Differentiation and Diversification: Changing Livelihoods in Qwaqwa, South Africa, 1970-2000", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 599-614.

This paper draws on a larger study that collected the life histories of 40 respondents living in the Qwaqwa province of South Africa. The author uses the life histories of three respondents as case studies to illustrate the impacts of transformation in the larger economy, as a result the region's proclamation as a 'homeland' or self-governing territory, on the livelihoods of Qwaqwa residents, and to a lesser degree, of black South Africans living in 'homelands' more generally. Each story illustrates and represents the effects of differentiation on a certain segment of the population. The first story exemplifies the experience of entrepreneurs and traders whose livelihoods were worn down by increased competition. The second highlights the experiences of those living in remote, rural areas. The third case study demonstrates the experiences of urban workers whose livelihoods were weakened by de-industrialisation, causing their lifestyles and livelihood strategies to more closely resemble their rural counterparts.

Key words: South Africa, life histories, livelihoods, men, urban, rural

Slater, R. (2000) "Using Life Histories to Explore Change: women's urban struggles in Cape Town, South Africa" in Gender and Development, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 38-46.

This article examines the lives of four women who live in Cape Town, South Africa. After a discussion of the merits of employing a life history research methods in development, the author uses four case studies to explore the individual and collective experience of women who arrived in Cape Town between 1949 and 1986. The case studies exemplify the constraints faced by black South Africans (political, economic, social) during the apartheid era, and highlight how these constraints also take on a gendered nature, and differ depending on age.

Before going into detail about the four case studies, as is common the author sets out the context and discusses the 'structure' – the social, political and economic context – in which women migrated to Cape Town during the apartheid era. The four case studies follow; the author gives about equal weight to the lengthy quotations pulled from the narrative and to her own descriptions of the women and their lives/histories. Each woman's story, while they share many similarities, portrays a different picture of the experience of migration to Cape Town and survival in urban areas during apartheid.

The last section is fairly brief, and remarks on the knowledge that she gathered from studying the interviews and how they illustrated the important role that gender, age, and life stage played in these women's lives, as factors that in addition to the more general social, political and economic constraints of the apartheid era shaped their lives as women, and how they responded to and coped with their environment.

The paper ends by identifying the implications of the study for policy-makers and planners, and suggests that the life history method is a useful way to examine the impact of policies on different kinds of people.

Key words: South Africa, life histories, migration, women, urban

Vandsemb, Berit Helene (1995) "The Place of Narrative in the Study of Third World Migration: The Case of Spontaneous Rural Migration in Sri Lanka", Professional Geographer, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 411-425.

Following a literature review on the topic of narrative and migration, the author presents the migration story of a woman and her son in order to illuminate the causes and consequences of spontaneous migration from the south-western to south-eastern districts of Sri Lanka. She begins by recreating the circumstances of their first meeting and a brief biography of Amma and her son Gamini. This then extends into a broad review of the family's migration story as told to and recounted by the author. This is followed by a section wherein the author comments on the migration story, drawing out four main points in the story that stand out to the author both because they align with her knowledge of the migration process from a larger survey in which she is involved, and because these themes are related to the transferability (or generalisation) of the story to the wider community/society. Amma's spontaneous migration both deviates from and bolsters the conventional understanding of spontaneous migration processes.

The paper ends by discussing further the interviewing, editing, and writing process with regards to the challenges and benefits of pursuing narrative analysis in the field of human geography. The author notes the importance of the interviewer's influence, not only in the interviewing process, but also beyond that, and as such, the final product is also very much the narrative of the author's. This understanding relates to the author's choice to not tell Amma's story in its detailed content but to use her own voice to convey it in a short and simple form. In this form, among many, the author illustrates the advantages of narrative in revealing the context and complexity of migration which cannot be captured using the more mainstream methodological tools, but when used alongside them can broaden and make more holistic our understanding of wider societal phenomena and change, such as in the processes of migration.

Key words: Sri Lanka, narrative, migration

3.5. Graphical Representation

Balán, J., H. L. Browning, and E. Jelin (1973) Men in a developing society: Geographical and social mobility in Monterrey, Mexico, University of Texas at Austin.

This study was undertaken in 1965, and focuses on the migration, occupational mobility and the process of stratification in Monterrey, Mexico. The researchers conducted a survey using biographical questionnaires in Monterrey. In this ways, the researchers derived biographical information from 1640 men in the city and 380 in a smaller, neighbouring city. The data gathered was used to map out the life trajectories or migrants from rural areas who had moved to the city to access a better job market. The book is organized in a straightforward fashion; the first part sets the scene (portraying the transformation of Monterrey), and the second part uses the life histories of the men of Monterrey, and constitutes the bulk of the book. These are analysed in a chronological order (starting with family background, schooling, first and subsequent jobs, migration, spouse and children etc.). They use a 'life cycle' approach, by grouping respondents into cohorts by date and birth. In all, the authors have put together 80 birth cohort and career cycle tables that compile this information. This allows the researchers to examine the generational differences between men, for example looking at the effects of the respondents' fathers on the respondents and the effects of the respondents on their sons. The information from the tables is used to map the trajectories of the men into 'path diagrams' and coefficients. Authors frequently relate their findings from respondents back to their central data and research by others.

For reviews of this text see: Conning, A.M. (1975) Untitled Review in Demography, vol.12, no 2, pp.380, and Schaedel, R.P. (1975) "The New Urban Populations: Case Studies and Analysis" in Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs, vol. 17, no.1, pp. 109-116.

Davis, P. (2006) "Poverty in Time: Exploring poverty dynamics from life history interviews in Bangladesh", CPRC Working Paper 69. Manchester: Chronic Poverty Research Centre/Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.
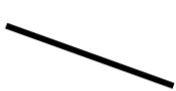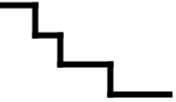
The author collected life histories in nine locations in western Bangladesh. The aim was to identify episodes of crisis in people's lives and the way that these crises were dealt with in order to inform a better understanding of informal forms of social protection. Twenty households were randomly selected for detailed life histories, out of which 242 life history interviews were conducted, 90 of which were more detailed and lasted between two and four hours. Davis has created an innovative model for how to map the life histories collected, producing diagrams that plot the trajectory of individual's lives. Oral testimonies were plotted, during the interview, on a vertical axis against time on the horizontal axis, onto which key events in their livelihood trajectories were mapped (see box below).

Because the size of the sample was so large, Davis was able to discern that many patterns repeated themselves; these he developed into eight ideal type trajectory patterns. This 'categorical data analysis' offers researchers the opportunity to bridge the qualitative/ quantitative divide, as well as contribute to research on the dynamics of poverty and assessment of social protection policies.

Box 2: Shob shomoy goreb chilam, e rokom cholche – We've always been poor, we go along this way
The Dynamics of Chronic Poverty in Rural Bangladesh

Qualitative life history interviews undertaken by Davis to investigate poverty dynamics in rural Bangladesh uncovered the rich temporal, spatial and social contexts of people's lives, and allowed the researcher to identify eight stylised life trajectory categories:

Trajectory pattern	Trajectory direction and depiction		
Smooth	Level	Improving	Declining
Saw-tooth	Level	Improving	Declining
Step	Single-step declining		Multi-step declining

Improvements in people's life conditions tend to happen only gradually, whereas sudden declines are much more common. As such, saw-tooth trajectories, where gradual improvements were interspersed with more abrupt declines, were the most common trajectory pattern among Davis' poor interviewees. Fuljan's story is a good example of a 'level saw-tooth' trajectory, demonstrating key characteristics of both 'declining saw-tooth' trajectories (e.g. effects of managing dowry costs) and 'improving saw-tooth' trajectories (e.g. division of property among brothers leading to benefits for some; life-cycle transition of sons beginning to work and contribute to the household income).

(Box 2 cont.)

Fuljan was married at the age of 12 in 1981 after her father died from typhoid during the 1974 famine. Both Fuljan and her husband came from poor families. In 1984 her mother-in-law became ill with a stomach ulcer and they had to pay 13,000 taka for medical treatment. To fund this her husband's brothers sold a handloom. In 1987 Fuljan herself became ill after a baby died before birth and 20,000 taka was spent on her medical treatment. In 1990 the brothers divided the family property and in the following years their position improved. In 1998 her eldest daughter was married, costing 10,000 taka in dowry and 4,000 taka other costs. To raise money for this, an advance was taken from an employer, 5,000 taka came from relatives, a goat was sold, and an NGO loan was taken out.

Now Fuljan is 33 and living with her husband, three sons, two daughters, and her 66 year old mother-in-law. Another daughter was married in 1998 and lived with her in-laws. Fuljan's husband works as a loom master, earning approximately 1,200 taka per month and her 17 year old son earns about the same working with a handloom. They own a small piece of land where the house stands, and their total assets are worth approximately 12,800 taka. Their house is in a bad state of repair and they are looked down on in the community as 'poor', but with both her eldest son and her husband working and contributing to the household income, Fuljan is optimistic that her life condition will improve over the coming years.

As Davis notes, while social protection measures that help prevent or mitigate downward crises can help convert declining saw-tooth trajectories into improving ones, because they prevent what could have happened, they can be overlooked when tales of success via income generation dominate. In the Bangladesh case, the mitigation of negative impacts of illness (particularly of older people), dowry costs, social conflict, marriage breakdown and household dissolution all need to be kept as social protection priorities. Improvement is 'caused' by both upward drivers and the removal of downward ones.
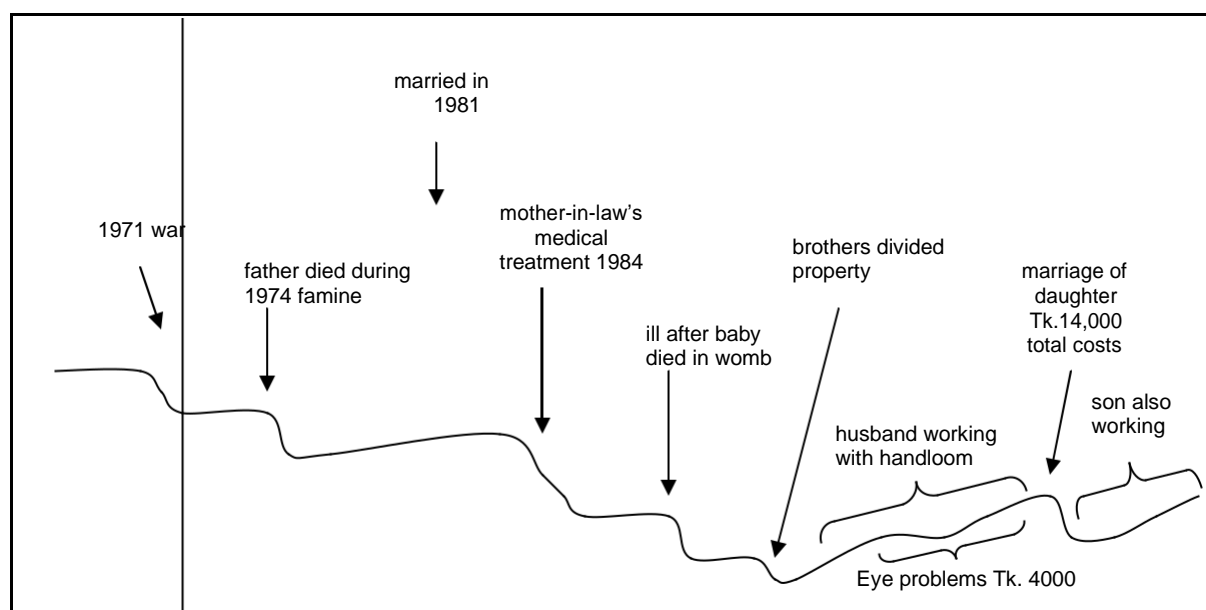
Source: Box developed by Karen Moore (2007) for second Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09, based on Davis (2006).

Goldthorpe, J. H. (1980/1987) Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

This classic study took a survey approach to collecting life histories. Goldthorpe and his team collected longitudinal data from over 10,000 men between the ages of 20 and 62 in 1972, and a follow up study of intergenerationally mobile groups in 1974. This study presents a

technique for visualizing socioeconomic life trajectories by representing many life trajectories on a single diagram. This allows viewers to see at a glance the patterns of men's flow of distribution in the socioeconomic structure.

Key words: Britain, life histories, social mobility, class, men

Hall, J. M. (2003) "Analyzing Women's Roles Through Graphic Representation of Narratives", Western Journal of Nursing Research, vol. 25, no. 5, pp. 492-507.

This paper describes an innovative technique of abstracting verbal data visually. As part of a larger triangulated (qualitative and quantitative) study on women's health in 1992, the researcher team employed narrative analysis to clarify the concept of 'role integration' with regards to the various roles (mother, spouse, worker) that women occupy. The semi-structured interviews collected in the study were read aloud to the team, and over a series of readings, the researchers developed a visual system that tracked and represented the information conveyed in the narratives. To represent the salience (to what extent the role occupied the respondent's life) of each of the three roles (mother, spouse, worker), circles of varying sizes were drawn, producing different sized circles for each narrative. Depending on the extent that roles were integrated, these circles overlapped, as in a Venn diagram. To illustrate whether the integrated roles were viewed positively or negatively by the respondent the area was shaded in a corresponding colour (for example, blue = positive, red = negative). Some of the narratives emphasised roles that were no longer being occupied, for example, as a result of divorce. To represent this, the researchers diagrammed 'shadow roles', using dotted lines in the circles. To illustrate the presence of others within a woman's role, for example persons assisting with childcare, 'pieces of pie' were incorporated to show to what extent a role was being shared, and was coloured according to whether women viewed this as negative or positive. These visual representations illustrated the multidimensional and complex nature of the women's roles in a way that narrative texts could not.

Key Words: women's roles, qualitative methods, narrative analysis, graphic representation

3.6. Testimony

Gugelberger G. and M. Kearney (1991) "Voices for the Voiceless: testimonial Literature in Latin America", Latin American Perspectives, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 3-14.

This paper provides an introduction to Latin American testimonial literature and identifies the major themes that run through the papers presented in two issues of this journal dedicated to this topic. One of the central themes of testimonial literature is the violation of human rights of members of the community by agents of the state, leading some to refer to it as 'resistance literature' (Harlow, 1987). It can be seen as a counterhegemonic discourse in that it fulfils a mandate to rewrite and retell/correct history and reality from the perspective of ordinary people. In this way, Latin American testimonial literature moves outside the boundaries of the other sorts of biographical research reviewed here. One of the contributing scholars defines testimonial literature as, "an authentic narrative told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of the situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her experience as representative of a collective memory and identity" (Yudice, 1985, n.p.).

Hanlon, C.N. and F. Shankar (2000) "Gendered Spaces of Terror and Assault: The Testimonio of REMHI and the Commission for Historical Clarification in Guatemala", Gender, Place and Culture, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 265-286.

The 1984 testimony of Rigoberta Menchú, 1992 Nobel Peace Laureat, brought much needed international attention to the plight of indigenous Guatemalans, and highlighted the violence

faced by women. This book-length testimony has been followed by thousands of previously silenced voices, many of which are compiled in a detailed report Guatemala: Nunca Mas (Never Again). More than six thousand testimonies collected by the REMHI (Recuperation of Historical memory Inter-diocesan Project) team and compiled in the report, which was released in 1998. In 1999 these testimonies were turned over to the United Nations sponsored the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), producing Memoria del silencio (Memory of Silence) which detailed in 3600 pages the wartime atrocities and American support for the Guatemalan army, and in less than a year collected and analysed an additional 14,000 testimonies. Taken together, these accounts represent "the notion of collective remembrance" which encompasses society as a whole. Testimonio, as it is known in the Guatemalan context (and throughout the Latin American region), is normally conveyed to an interlocutor who transcribes what has been said into a text that can be shared more widely.

The genre has deep roots in oral cultures, as "Maya peoples have used it for centuries as a way to communicate their struggles against outside forces" (268). Only recently have social scientists begun to use these reports and databases to explore the use of testimonio as a tool of shared witnessing, collective remembrance and individual recollection of victims of violence. The use of testimonio in research is important because of its "ability to open up areas of lived experience that might otherwise remain invisible" (270). These testimonies both powerfully assert and preserve collective experiences, but are important tools for advocacy and legal recourse; they have helped change public consciousness and influenced public policy.

An examination of these testimonio publications bear out the themes identified in research of the authors on transnationalism and refugees, and in another study, coffee production. The authors use testimony to demonstrate the liberatory and healing nature of the method, as well as what its great contributions are to accessing hidden knowledge. The main two themes to emerge from these testimonios pertain to 'gendered spaces of terror'; the sexual violence inflicted on women and girls, and the racialised nature of the violence exposed by the 'geography of political violence', which illustrates the different ways violence was perpetrated depending on location. Using quotations drawn from the testimonies the authors expose the gendered and racialised nature of violence as well as the experiences of violence in personal, social, and geographic spaces.

The testimonies gathered in Guatemala are given by individuals, and thus are an 'individual act of memory'. However, it is the individual life experience, which contributes to a collective memory, and it is the collective nature of this form of personal testimony that the authors stress. They urge other researchers to conduct 'action research' or testimonio, particularly with women survivors of war, to make their voices audible and to expose gendered spaces of terror in countries with violent histories.

Key Words: testimonio, gendered spaces, terror, Guatemala, collective history, action research

Scheper-Hughes, N. (1992) Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil, Berkeley: University of California Press.

This book is a prime example of how researchers use their work to act in solidarity with victims of violence (physical or structural), and to 'write against terror' while advocating on the subjects' behalf. In her early role as health worker Scheper-Hughes became the friend of three half-sisters, young girls at the time. She followed their lives over the years. Using these women as central figures, Scheper-Hughes depicts in full relief the environment around them. The author's focus is on life in Alto do Cruzeiro, the crowded shantytown where urbanized rural workers live precarious lives without decent housing, sanitation, or clean water, marred

by violence and death. The astounding death rate of children in the area, and how mothers deal with this common experience, is the focus of the text. She derives generalizations from the course of her informants' lives, and so she describes, in great detail, day-to-day events: poverty, childbirth, the illness of a child, the violent death of young men.

While the method underlying this study is ethnography ('the interpretation of human condition through field work'), the author consistently and convincingly ties individuals' demographic experience to change in the larger structural context in which her informants find themselves. Her ability to make these links derives from her strong grasp of Brazilian history, the length of her involvement with the community under study, and her use of personal histories. The main structural change affecting this community has been the replacement of tenant farm workers by off-farm wage labourers in the sugarcane zone of the Brazilian Northeast, and the consequent monetarisation of the means of subsistence. She presents "a highly subjective, partial and fragmentary-but also deeply personal-record of human lives based on eyewitness and testimony" (xiii).

Key words: Brazil; urban; ethnography; women; child mortality; violence; life history; testimony

3.7. Other presentations

Blee, Kathleen (1996) "Becoming a Racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi Groups", Gender and Society, vol. 10, no. 6, pp. 680-702.

A life history approach is particularly suited to this topic because understanding the sequence and pattern of life events are useful ways to identify what the causes and consequences of political affiliation are, and at which points personal biography and ideological worldview meet. Data was gathered from the extensive life history interviews of 34 women. Themes emerged from the interviews that expose the social and rational, rather than psychological and irrational, reasons behind women's participation in racist political groups. Each theme – conversion, selective adoption, and resignation, are discussed using quotations from the participants.

Key Words: life history approach, racism, political affiliations, women

Bozzoli, B. (1991) Women of Phokeng: consciousness, life strategy and migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983, London, James Currey.

This study traces the lives of 22 black South African women from a small town in western Transvaal, who go from childhood as daughters of relatively well-to-do peasantry, to their first experiences as domestic servants in the cities. This is the book-length treatment of the extensive oral interviews conducted with the respondents (some were interviewed up to four times) in connection with an oral documentation project at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The author crafts the book out of 70 transcripts which are treated variously as "documents, narratives, stories, histories, incoherent ramblings, and interlinked fragments of consciousness, conversations, and/or recital of facts" (6).

The aim of the study is threefold: to use women's stories as a source of information, to understand the effects of being female on the informants' lives, and to understand the formation of consciousness both on the personal level as well as with regards to group identity. Her central argument is that the complexities of South African social history cannot be captured by using a purely 'Africanist' (insider perspective) nor 'materialist' perspective (she broadly uses this to refer to outsider/academic methods of analysis and interpretation), but that in using oral testimony, these approaches can be combined to create a more holistic understanding.

The majority of the book details the chronology the women's lives. The prelude contains short sketches of the informants' lives. Following this individual attention, the women are treated more as representations of a collective experience. Long excerpts from the interviews are used to illustrate. Although the author does draw generalizations, she does to a large extent allow the women to speak for themselves. The respondents interpret their own lives, using their own categories and value judgments to do so, so that the reader gets a real sense of their identities and the processes shaping these identities. In all, "the women give us their version of how things look from below, how history is constructed in their eyes" (242). The focus is on how the women present themselves, as independent actors, who have made their own decisions, albeit within the confines of the social structures they are embedded in.

Key words: South Africa; women; life histories

Laoire, C. N. (2000) "Conceptualizing Irish Rural Youth Migration: A Biographical Approach", International Journal of Population Geography, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 229-243.

This paper uses a biographical approach to explore the life-path formation, and migration of rural Irish youth, between 1970-1990. The study used a target group of youths aged 25-29, who in the 1970s and 80s grew up in the area under study, north Cork. The author focuses on three key elements of the biographical approach in migration studies. First, that migration 'cannot be seen in isolation, as a one-off event' and is therefore is a part of individuals' biography (233); second, that migration decision-making is a complex and multi-layered process; third, that migration is, in this case, a cultural phenomenon (underpinned by societal norms).

The paper begins by introducing the research, and the literature that pertains to it. It then discusses the key principles of a biographical approach to migration. The study is based on a number of ethnographic methods, such as group interviews, life history interviews, personal observation, and discourse analysis. A life history questionnaire survey and official statistics complement these methods of data collection. The most important component of the study was twelve life histories collected, and utilized in an "attempt to let the people being studied tell their own story" (236). Using as set of 'trigger questions' to encourage informants to discuss their migration decision-making processes within a biographical context, followed by more in depth questioning with regards to the transitional periods in their lives, 'autobiographies' of individual life stories were produced. The resulting narratives were useful in that they highlighted the connections between structure and agency. The analysis of these interviews revealed the complexity of each migration decision, and the stories bore out much of what the academic literature on migration purports.

The author narrates for the respondent and uses occasional quotations to illustrate. Mainly, examples are used from this larger study to argue that a biographical approach is a useful way to gain insights into the decision-making processes surrounding migration. Three life histories are used as case studies to illuminate the three main points of the paper. Using examples as representative case studies strongly supports the paper's main argument; that migration should be conceived as more than a simple event, but as a multi-layered and complex process that may be perhaps best understood by using a biographical approach, which helps to illuminate the decision making process.

Keywords: migration, Ireland, rural youth, biography, life history

Lie, M. (2000) "Two generations: Life Stories and Social Change in Malaysia", Journal of Gender Studies, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 27-43.

Although feminist studies often utilizes life history method, there has been too little attention paid to the differences between women of different generations. Using a life history approach

to fill this gap, the author analyses how women's lives and the relationships between women of different generations have occurred during a period of social change that corresponds with Malaysia's rapid industrialization process. Of particular interest is whether the norms defining a 'proper woman' have changed in Malaysian society, and whether these norms are related to age and phases of life. Life history interviews are useful here because they inform us about the past as well as the present, each contrasting the other, and providing data on change and continuity.

To explore these questions, 37 young women working in foreign industry factories were interviewed twice, with a seven-year gap in between interviews. Additionally, 27 mothers were interviewed (once only), so that the life stories from two generations could be compared. The younger generation was interviewed for the first time at a time in their life course when they had not yet reached the age of marriage, and again during a time in her life course when the researchers expected the women to have married and stopped working, which would have shown that as a general rule factory work was a temporary phase and acceptable for unmarried women only. The interviews collected showed that this was not the case, but that women's roles were much more flexible than the researchers had imagined, and that women's roles had changed between the generations but that this did not seem to be a cause for concern. While some women had stopped working to become wives and mothers, others carried on both roles at once, and still others were unmarried and continued working.

The authors present this information using a familiar approach. They begin by discussing the life history method and its usefulness to this study in particular. They then deal with the processes of social change in Malaysia. This is followed by a treatment of the life histories collected from the older generation of mothers. Common themes are identified and medium-length quotations are used to flesh these out. One respondent is also used more thoroughly as a representative case study. This section is followed by the life histories of the 'modern daughters', following a similar presentation style. Here, several of the women's stories are briefly introduced and themes pulled out or emphasized. This is followed by a section deals with the findings of the second round of interviews that depict a relatively flexible environment for women. The respondents, through their testimonies, show how this younger generation enjoys the power to make decisions over their own lives because the range of options available to them is greater than in the generation of their mothers. The authors emphasize the differences in the choices available to women in each generation, as expressed in the contrasting ways that lives were presented by mother and daughters.

Through collecting and presenting the personal testimonies of these women, the study succeeded in restoring agency to the women who are often depicted as the anonymous victims of economic development. Whereas exploitation may be one important side of the story, another is how people relate to the new job opportunities provided by rapid industrialization, and to what extent they try to exploit them to their own benefit. Unlike other forms of research, using a life history method illuminates the conscious choices that people make, such as during times of social change.

Key words: Malaysia; women; life histories; generational change; socio- economic change

Richie, Beth E. (2001) "Challenges Incarcerated Women Face as they Return to their Communities: Findings from Life History Interviews", Crime and Delinquency, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 368-389.

This study uses a life history approach to illuminate the particular plight of women: in this case, women who have been incarcerated, whose situation is generally ignored in the literature. The author begins by describing the population under examination, which is disproportionately comprised of minority, poor and young women, and the particular

challenges faced by them. Although statistical information points to the need for certain policy measures, such as community reintegration programmes that should lessen the rates of re-incarceration, there has been an absence of qualitative research that can demonstrate more thoroughly why in particular the rates of arrest and re-arrest are so high for women in these demographic groups (low-income communities of colour). Analyses of women's stories, collected from 42 in-depth interviews, provide much needed insight into the disturbing trends the author reviews in the first section of the article.

The narratives are analysed using grounded-theory method, wherein findings are coded by theme and considered in relation to the literature on the topic. Seven themes emerged from the findings, which though complex, demonstrate with devastating clarity how the challenges facing women before entering the criminal justice system are identical to the challenges facing them upon their release from the system. Each section is made up of about half the respondents' own words alongside the literature reviewed.

In the final section of the paper, the author discusses the gendered and culturally specific challenges faced by recently released female prisoners within the broader social and institutional context. This ties together the factual review of the demographic group under discussion reviewed in the first section of the paper, with the themes that emerged out of women's own accounts, in a good example of how using life history interviews can effectively show how the macro and micro interact, where structure and agency meet. The women interviewed saw their lives as being very much impacted by the larger social forces around them. The paper concludes with recommendations for reform at the community level.

Key words: women; life histories; incarceration, USA

Rogaly, B., and D. Coppard (2003) "'They Used to Eat, Now They go to Earn': The Changing Meanings of Seasonal Migration from Puruliya District in West Bengal, India", Journal of Agrarian Change, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 395-433.

The personal testimonies of four individuals help to expose to what extent social relations between men and women and between socio-economic groups have changed due to an increase in seasonal migration in India. Interviews with two migrant workers, one former migrant, and the mother of a migrant, also help to avoid the reductionism that the authors note is common in the literature on the subject. This approach guards against the belief that labour migration is either emancipatory or oppressive because it relies on the reality that is depicted by those who experience this form of migration and their responses to it. In discussing their responses to the changes in migration patterns (more flexible, and therefore increased seasonal migration), the informants are generally ambivalent. Although the testimonies describe greater flexibility for migrant workers due to larger structural changes (the shift in the means of and ownership of production), no significant increase in social mobility has resulted.

After describing the research informing the paper, the authors set the scene with a section on seasonal migration and the changing social relations in West Bengal. This is followed by a section in which the authors select extracts of the interviews according to their interests. The extracts are presented (after translation) as more flowing and coherent than the oral transcripts actually were. Nevertheless, the biographical components of the paper (where each person's story is told, with a beginning, middle and end) are based fully on the accounts given by the informants themselves. Each narrative, told in first person form (indented and set away from the surrounding text), is about 3-4 pages long, and is followed by a discussion by the authors in which they flesh out the narrative further, and emphasize the points they feel are of particular importance.

Key words: India; West Bengal; seasonal migration; narratives

Staunton, I. (ed). (1990) Mothers of the Revolution, Baobab Books, Harare, Zimbabwe.

This is a compilation of thirty interviews with rural Zimbabwean women who tell the stories of their lives and of the country's liberation war (1978-1980). The author summarizes the main themes of the interviews, which the narration bears out: the domestic aspect of the war, and the wide range of women's roles.

The majority of the interviews were conducted in either Shona or Ndebele and then translated into English by a research assistant. As often as possible the words the women themselves used make up the text. In some cases, brief descriptions of the women and their backgrounds are included to "reflect their personalities, and provide the context of the experiences and the beliefs which gave them so much strength and resilience". The women's words have not been analysed, sifted through or put into an alternative framework of the author's choosing. Rather the book provides, in their own words, a context, a new perspective on the war, as it was remembered by women ten years after independence.

A shortened version of the book can also be found at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/post/zimbabwe/miscauthors/mothers1.html

Key words: Zimbabwe; women; conflict; life stories

PANOS' Voices from the Mountains series.
http://www.panos.org.uk/resources/booksection.asp?ID=1004

A series of publications that share Thompson's vision and utilize his approach in Listening for A Change: Oral History and Development (see general resources) entitled Voices from the Mountains record the oral testimonies of local people who are experiencing the effects of economic development on their unique physical environments and ways of life. With cooperation from community-based organizations, these publications provide an outlet for people to communicate their experiences and understandings of development related challenges. The aim of providing this channel of communication is to promote national development that does not further marginalize mountain peoples, and sustainable mountain development.

Ten regions are covered: in the Himalaya (India and Nepal); the Karakorum (Pakistan); the central Andes (Peru); the Sierra Norte (Mexico); Mount Elgon (Kenya); the highlands of Ethiopia and Lesotho; southwest and northeast China; and the Sudety mountains (Poland). Each publication contains a selection of the interviews gathered in the given locality. The full international archive holds the views and experiences of some 350 individuals, and represents a wealth of material. For more information go to: www.mountainvoices.org

Because these texts follow a rather standard format, a review of one will suffice here: From the Mountain: Oral Testimonies from The Sierra Norte, Oaxaca, Mexico.
http://www.panos.org.uk/images/books/ot_voices_mexico.pdf

Four Zapotec communities are featured in the publication, each of which is described in the introduction along with a description of the unique physical environment of the Sierra Norte region of Mexico. Before proceeding with the selected narratives, themes are identified and discussed in brief. These include: the strong bond the Zapotec communities have with their environment, migration as a way of life, collective cultural identity, and gendered perspectives on social change (women are more positive). Primary tensions are also addressed: between "individual advancement and collective responsibility, between protecting their environment and traditional culture, and taking up economic opportunities", and are all issues fundamental to those interviewed.

To introduce the personal testimonies are interviewers' remarks on the circumstances of their meeting, observations of the surroundings, the characteristics of the interviewee, and/or the topic being discussed/described. Fourteen testimonies are communicated directly, and transcribed so as to note the pauses and breaks in speech. Dispersed throughout the text are bold boxes containing quotations of respondents whose testimonies have not been covered in depth. They are generally older and their comments reflect the changes that have accompanied development and modernization as well as help to flesh out what has been communicated by the longer narratives. Each testimony is different, some beginning with the year they were born, or a discussion of their childhood and in story form recounting the main phases of their lives. Others voice more specific concerns and experiences, related to work, the environment, or local medicinal practices. The testimonies of older respondents usefully cover a broader swathe of time, sometimes referring the lives of their parents and grandparents, which the compare with the lives of their children and grandchildren, giving a sense of the change they have experienced in their lifetimes, and their responses to it. Some of the younger respondents have worked or been educated in Mexico City and highlight their conflicting traditional and modern selves. As noted in the editorial comments, the testimonies presented here were selected not only for their interest, but because they represent the range of views and experiences found within the overall collection of narratives. The contributors also note to what extent the testimonies were edited, for example their removal of repetitions or confusion, some re-ordering, and translations/ interpretations.

Key words: Mexico; mountain environments; oral testimonies; social change

Van Onselen, C. (1993) "The reconstruction of a rural life from oral testimony: Critical notes on the methodology employed in the study of a black South African sharecropper", Journal of Peasant Studies, no. 20, pp. 494-514.

This paper stresses the importance of including in a narrative analysis the roles and actions of the individuals that surround the principle narrator. By providing this kind of context, psychological reductionism can be avoided; an individual's actions cannot be seen as singular choices, but as the result of how the individual operates within their environment and through their interactions with others around them. This also helps the researcher/reader to understand the processes that push and pull the individual actor to make the choices he/she does.

See also Van Onselen's book, The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985, published in 1996.

Key words: South Africa; rural; oral testimony

3.8. Life histories in the work of NGOs and Development Agencies

Human Rights Watch

HRW (2005) Darfur Drawn: The Conflict in Darfur Through Children's Eyes'. Available at http://hrw.org/photos/2005/darfur/drawings/introduction.htm.

Human Rights Watch researchers Dr. Annie Sparrow and Olivier Bercault visited Chad in February 2005 to assess the issues of protection and sexual violence in the refugee camps along the Darfur/Chad border. While Bercault and Sparrow spoke with parents, teachers, and camp leaders, the children drew. Without any instruction or guidance, the children drew scenes from their experiences of the war in Darfur: the attacks by the Janjaweed, the bombings by Sudanese government forces, the shootings, the burning of entire villages, and the flight to Chad.

As Sparrow and Bercault visited schools in refugee camps in Chad, many children between the ages of 8 and 17 shared the drawings they had done in their school notebooks, often alongside their lessons in Arabic or maths. Schoolchildren from seven refugee camps and the border town of Tine offered Human Rights Watch's researchers hundreds of drawings in the hope that the rest of the world would see their stories as described in their own unique visual "vocabulary of war".

The pictures are presented on the Human Rights Website, and accompanied with the name of the child, their age and their own description of the drawing, such as,

> "In the afternoon we returned from school and saw the planes. We were all looking, not imagining about bombing. Then they began the bombing. The first bomb [landed] in our garden, then four bombs at once in the garden. The bombs killed six people, including a young boy, a boy carried by his mother, and a girl. In another place in the garden a women was carrying her baby son—she was killed, not him. Now my nights are hard because I feel frightened. We became homeless. I cannot forget the bad images of the burning houses and fleeing at night because our village was burned…"

Key words: Darfur, Sudan, Chad, conflict, children, testimonies, drawing

HRW (2002) "The Story of Fatima (taken from Human Rights Watch Interview no. 6, Cisawa, Indonesia, April 2002)", Refugee Voices. Available at http://hrw.org/press/2002/12/fatima_testimonies.htm.

Human Rights Watch also catalogues the interviews collected by researchers to inform reports on the status of refugees around the world. Personal testimonies, such as 'The Story of Fatima', are presented at some length by the interviewer but including some direct quotes. This example is the most comprehensive usage of the life history approach of the organisations reviewed here, despite that it focuses on only one part of the informant's life; her experience as a refugee.

It chronicles how this Iraqi woman fled the political persecution she faced in Iraq with her three children following the earlier migration of her husband to Australia. Using human traffickers, she travelled through Jordan, then to Malaysia and finally to Indonesia where she was apprehended and where she remained for several years, up until the time of the interview. She continues to wait to be reunited with her husband, but is stuck in the Indonesian refugee settlement, a process that provokes her anger at the UNHCR, "I thought that the UN was a humanitarian organisation. I still have not found the humanity. Why are the children guilty that they should be punished with this life?". The testimonial concludes with a postscript informing the reader the following this interview, Fatima was the victim of sectarian violence in the region, and continues to wait for resettlement.

Key words: Iraq; women; refugee; life story; testimonial

HRW (2002) By Invitation Only: Australian Asylum Policy, vol. 14, no. 10 (C). Available from: http://hrw.org/reports/2002/australia/.

This story above is one example of many personal testimonies collected by a HRW team to inform this report, on the experiences of refugees from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, seeking refuge as political asylum in Australia. The report traces the reasons for their flight – human rights abuses at home – and the obstacles they encounter in the process – Australian policies that block their movement. A total of fifty interviews were conducted in three different locations with refugees of varying ages, genders, and nationalities, each in private and each lasting from one to three hours. Personal testimonies, sections of which are set directly into

the text (in indented paragraph form) illustrate the push factors that drive refugee flight, as well as their difficulties getting to Australia, which often leaves them stuck in refugee camps in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. Based on the accounts of interviewees, HRW disputes the Australian government's assumption that asylum seekers will receive protection in the countries from which they fled, or protection in the countries they pass through en route to Australia.

Key words: Australia; policy; refugees; testimonies

Many of the reports produced by HRW aim to hold governments to account for human rights violations by influencing donors and the United Nations, the European Union, etc. to apply pressure on these countries to reform. They are often heavily informed by interviews. Another recent example is:

HRW (2006) Reconciled to Violence: State Failure to Stop Domestic Abuse and Abduction of Women in Kyrgyzstan. Available at http://hrw.org/reports/2006/ kyrgyzstan0906/.

This lengthy report concludes that although Kyrgyzstan has progressive laws on violence against women, police and other authorities fail to implement them. As a result, women remain in danger and without access to justice. Based on in-depth, firsthand interviews with victims of violence, the report tells the stories of women that have been physically and/or sexually assaulted by their husbands. The report also tracks what happens when women seek help from the authorities. Instead of attaining safety and access to justice, they are encouraged to reconcile with their abusers. The voices of the many women interviewed are woven into the text, often prefaced by short biographical notes, and usually in full quotes.

Key words: Kyrgyzstan; women; violence; testimonies

International Labour Organization (ILO)

ILO Global Report (2006) "The end of child labour: Within Reach", Report of the Director General, 95th International Labour Conference 2006. Report I (B). Available at: www.ilo.org/public/english/region/ampro/cinterfor/news/inf_06.htm.

The ILO estimates that the Asian region is home to the largest number of child workers (around 122 million) between the ages of 5 and 14. More than half of these children are engaged in work that is physically hazardous. The Global Report, "The End of Child Labour: Within Reach", uses the personal stories of those whose childhoods have been cut short by the employment they are forced to seek to help support their families.

For instance, stories collected from children in Jakarta who have been emancipated from their labour by The Indonesian Children's Welfare Foundation (YKAI) in partnership with the ILO, are woven into the general document. Thao started working as a domestic servant at the age of eleven when her father died. Her story is very briefly described, and her success and happiness as a student, now she no longer has to work, is communicated in a quote, "I never want to go back to work as a child domestic worker…". This is followed by a section on 'What can be done' which discusses the close links between poverty and child labour, and accordingly the hope that economic development offers as increasing numbers of people move above the $1/day poverty line in the region. Signs of success in the countries experiencing higher economic growth rates, such as Malaysia, China and Korea are promising, as the political commitment to education grows in tandem with economic embitterment.

(From http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/features/06/grcl_jakarta.htm.

Publications on child labour in Africa and Latin America take a similar form, e.g.
http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/features/06/grcl_uganda.htm;
http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/features/06/grcl_peru.htm).

Oxfam

The Oxfam website (www.oxfam.org) contains links to each country in which the organization has projects. Readers can learn about these by looking at the 'program overview', 'stories and case studies', and 'papers and resources'. Many of these country profiles contain short stories about the people affected by their environments, be it a focus on poverty, conflict, declining terms of trade or fair trade, education, health etc. Accompanied with factual information, photographs, and maps, this anecdotal evidence and short biographical sketches help to enrich these profiles, giving them a much more human quality.

For example, stories from Angola are grouped under the heading 'Women Coping Alone'. Imaculada lost her husband during the war, she has three children…eventually she met another man, but he disappeared when she became pregnant. She says, "now I'm not looking for a husband anymore". Amelia's husband is a solder but she hasn't heard from him in months, "he said he wasn't allowed to take his family" with him. She is worried that if he marries another woman, "it will be hard for [her]". Maria and Rosalia are more optimistic. Although they are both widows, they feel it is "better to be alone that to have the annoyance" of men in their lives (citing as reasons, men's general laziness and destructive drinking habits). In addition to caring for their children, they both volunteer as community health mobilisers, helping Oxfam to develop a public health program in the area, "if we don't struggle, we don't get what we want. No one will do it for us". These biographical sketches and quotations are set alongside photographs of the women.

Similarly, the efficacy of Oxfam's work in the Philippines is illustrated using 'Nestor's Story'. This is a disabled man who, following a 2004 typhoon that devastated the area, has actively taken part in the community rehabilitation and restoration work that Oxfam helped to facilitate. The summary notes how grateful Nestor was to be involved in the project, and quotations from his peers remark on his "instrumental role in leading and inspiring others" despite his disability.

Oxfam is also working in various countries on Fair Trade initiatives, linking the global market with local vendors and farming cooperatives to provide better market access, farming and production techniques, and in general, better livelihood prospects to the people these projects serve. The section on fair trade rice in Indonesia introduces Iwan, a small scale farmer whose income was rapidly declining with each harvest, and charts his increased success as he became partnered with a local shop, connected to a local network of NGOs, to which he sells his rice. The last part of this section is accompanied with a text box containing a quote. Iwan says, "moving to organic production has made all the difference".

Oxfam (2006) "The call for tough arms control: Voices from the Democratic Republic of Congo", Oxfam Briefing Note, January 2006.

Publications on conflict may also uses the voices of those most affected. For example, this report focuses on the stories of survivors whose experiences reveal the individual trauma as well as the collective experience of the "human cost of the arms trade". Beatrice and Claire witnessed the murder of their parents, Benjamin has been irrevocably traumatised and damaged from his experience as a child soldier, and Natalie bears not only the physical

trauma of gunshot wounds but the deep psychological scars of being a direct victim of the influx of guns into the country.

The paper begins by discussing the roots of the conflict and the endurance of this lengthy conflict, which has been facilitated by loose arms control. This section contains Claire's story, her testimony of the day her father was shot during the occupation of Bukavu. Her rendering of the experience is told directly to the reader, set within quotation marks in her own words and accompanied by a photograph. Benjamin's story of abduction and experience as a child soldier is told in a similar fashion, as is Natalie's, in a section on 'the conflict now'. These jarring testimonies are followed by a lengthier treatment on the global arms trade and its impact on the conflict in the DRC, and proscriptions as to what should be done to take action against the proliferation of small arms.

Key words: Democratic Republic of Congo, violence, arms trade, testimonies

Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)

SIDA (2002) Perspectives on Poverty.

This recent publication includes the story of Zimbabwean couple Odila and Mathew Chivoko within the first section of the report, on the drivers of poverty. In a text box, Poverty – Where does it start – How does it end? which begins by noting that "if there is anything stable about [their] situation, it seems to be their poverty", a brief discussion of the family's situation over the past 15 years is described. Mathew works as a guard and gardener in Harare, while Odila remains with their five children in rural areas in the Midlands province. She supplements the household income by sowing and harvesting the family plot during the agricultural season. Combined, they make hardly enough to stay afloat. Odila's agricultural labours are unpredictable because rains are unpredictable and the family cannot afford the inputs, like pesticide and fertiliser that would produce a higher yield. Mathew's income, which should provide the basis for the family's move out of poverty, will remain at subsistence levels, "as long as general economic development in the country is low and high unemployment rates weaken the bargaining power of workers". Throughout the publication, quotations from the couple are presented in boxes, and used to highlight the complex, context-specific, and dynamic nature of poverty. On Poverty and Influence Matthew says, "development never reached us" because as village people, they have never had much influence. Odila's relative silence on the subject is noted, "she and her female friends can influence their husband's decisions, but both the traditional and modern systems of representation favour men".

The second section of the paper, on what measures can be taken to alleviate poverty, continues to follow the family's story. The couple's twin 18 year-olds, like 95 percent of Zimbabwean youth, did not receive high enough scores on their O-levels to enter the formal labour market or access further education. Education and jobs are fundamental to moving out of poverty, but the education systems is often biased against rural youths like Ana and Peter. Their grasp of English, in which teaching is conducted, is poor and they did not have access to the supplies, such as textbooks, that they needed. Although both had expressed an interest in professions other than farming, they will likely follow a similar trajectory as their parents.

The paper charts SIDA's poverty perspective and its poverty reduction strategies. It ends with a final text box which shows how the organisation's efforts are directed specifically at families like the Chivokos. "If the Chivokos had been allowed to express their preferences they probably would have voted for several of the Swedish programmes", which for example have pushed the issue of land reform every year in the past several decades with the

Zimbabwean government, among a slew of other proposals (health, education, infrastructure related). Like many families in Zimbabwe, the Chivokos have experienced a significant downturn in living standards in the past ten years, due not only to poor governance, but also because "planners and agencies have had insufficient knowledge about the dynamics of poverty, minimised consultation with the poor, and not tackled the lack of assets among poor people (especially land)". The paper concludes with a section on SIDA's programmes and projects, how country analyses should proceed, and what the likely outcomes of interventions based on these methods of analysis should be.

Key words: SIDA, poverty, policy, poverty dynamics, Zimbabwe, life stories

Save the Children, UK

One of the resources available on this organisation's website (www.savethechildren.org.uk/) is a number of Personal Stories that provide insights into the work of Save the Children from those whose lives have been changed for the better, as well as volunteers, campaigners, and employees of the organization. The archive of stories can be searched according to topic or region of interest and is updated frequently with new stories from around the world.

The story of a Tanzanian child, Zubeni, on The Human Cost of Health Fees is illustrative. Three introductory paragraphs describe Zubeni's situation; she lives with her mother, who is chronically ill in a rural village, along with her own three children. Complications with the birth of her triplets, requiring hospitalization, has plunged Zubeni's family into poverty. In order to pay for hospital bills, the family has sold virtually everything they own and rely heavily on the kindness of their community and neighbours. In her own words, Zubeni tells her devastating story, which is presented in italics. This brief story is followed by a short synopsis on Tanzania's health care system, which introduced fees for healthcare in 1994 under the proscription of the IMF and World Bank. The average cost of health care is then listed (consultation fee, hospital admission fee, antibiotics etc.).

The Tahirih Justice Center

The Tahirih Justice Center (2005) Annual report 2004-2005.

This report, by an organisation that provides legal services for women around the world is made up in large part by the stories of women they have successfully represented. Normally no longer than a page, and accompanied with a photo and quotation, they provide the reader with moving accounts of women oppressed by their social and cultural milieus.

The section entitled, Understanding the Challenges Tahirih's Clients Face follows a simple format: one paragraph on the issue (for example forced marriage, widow rituals, trafficking) followed by a woman's "story", which begins badly, but normally ends on a positive note, with the success of the centre's legal representation. These stories are often accompanied with tables that display relevant statistics, which flesh out how prevalent the situation of the woman's story is, for example on female genital mutilation. Each story is also placed against the backdrop of the woman's photo. Due also to the subject nature, and often the young and vulnerable age of their clients, these stories are gripping, often shocking, and definitely a powerful way to open up and in general, frame, the document.

Key words: women's rights; life stories

The World Bank

Narayan, D. with R. Patel, K. Schafft, A. Rademacher and Sa. Koch-Schulte (2000) Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us? New York, N.Y.: Published for the World Bank, Oxford University Press.

Voices of the Poor does not utilize a life history approach, but is included here to demonstrate the extent to which this 'narrative turn' has permeated development. Using the 'voices of the poor' is seen to lend the World Bank much needed legitimacy, because it is part of a broader response to critiques of a lack of accountability on their part, and inattention to the ways in which mega-development projects and the national economic plans that the Bank urges countries to adopt, sometimes lead to increased poverty and a disregard for what happens to poor people on an individual level.

The stated objective of the study is to 'gather the views of more than 60,000 poor people across the globe' to look broadly at poverty in order to determine what its causes and consequences are. In particular, poor people value their health, but in a variety of ways are denied access to good health. One of fundamental messages to emerge from the study is that poor people feel excluded, which is understandably the cause of anger and frustration on their part. Although they understand their poverty and often have ideas about what can be done, they are largely ignored or marginalized as key informants in the area of poverty research.

The report structure is simple. The authors want to say x, y and z about poverty, so to lead into every issue, they use a quote from a 'poor' person talking about that issue. For example, on water issues, poverty and health:

> A Bulgarian man says,
> "I am tired of going to the municipality [about
> the water contamination] and insisting that they
> do something. Of course we are ill."

> An Argentine woman says,
> "If two out of three children become ill and vomit...
> it is due to the water; even though you can add
> chlorine, you're never sure what you are drinking."

> Poor people speak about the lack of safe water as an acute deprivation and cause of ill-health. In all regions, people describe their daily struggles to get water for human use, but shortages are most widespread in Africa. Problems of distance, quantity, quality and safety of supply are mentioned, but also environmental hazards like flooding, siltation and pollution. For example, in Jamaica, inputs into banana farming are said to contaminate local water supplies.

This discussion continues until the next topic related to poverty, which follows a similar pattern.

Key words: poverty, policy, poor people's perceptions, exclusion

4. Matrix of Presentation Styles

The matrix below lays out in brief some of the ways that the findings from life history interviews can be presented and disseminated, depending on the audience the researcher intends to reach. For researchers who aim to influence policy makers, as well as groups involved in policy processes (such as civil servants, social movements, civil society, think tanks, the media etc.), it is particularly important to tailor the approach of the research to suit the tastes of the policy makers. Researchers work to adopt a tone that is in tune with those they seek to influence in order to increase the likelihood that their research will be met favourably and that policy adjustments will be made in accordance with findings. The ultimate goal is to use research to promote positive changes in a policy environment, and thus to benefit those whose voices are made audible by the research.

Studies that are directed at an academic audience are less intent on legitimating their work as 'truth' or fact-based, but are more interested in the subjective 'truths' of interviewees. In these publications, the analysis of life stories takes up the bulk of the work. Others, seeking to influence a range of policy makers, tend to avoid lengthy renditions of the interview text but display the findings in a way that is more accessible to a wider audience, such as by using text boxes or graphical representations.

Researchers conducting narrative analysis, who are less likely to direct their research at policy audiences than at the academia are, for example, more likely to include lengthy sections of a life history interview and engage in a hermeneutical analysis of the text. The neo-positivist and realist methods present their findings in ways that are more accessible to the policy audiences they wish to inform and persuade, often taking the form of thematic text boxes, short summaries, using a single case to illustrate larger issues, or presenting information graphically. Lastly, the use of life histories, or anecdotal life sketches that are common in the publications of NGOs and development agencies are used to add a 'human quality' to the research, to evoke compassion and understanding, in order to persuade and influence their main audience: the general public.

Table 1: Matrix of presentation styles

Types of Presentation	Sample Size	Approach to Collection	Approach to Data Storage and Analysis	Audience
Narrative Analysis	Normally a sample size of fewer than 10.	Taped and transcribed, the interview is seen as a collaborative project. Often the interviewee, who may be involved in analysis as well, may check the transcripts.	Narrative as text. The 'interactive text' is studied for its themes, patterns, schema, and silences. Normally aligns with the 'constructivist' approach.	Academics (e.g. anthropologists, sociologists, linguists etc.).
Text Boxes	Normally one text box dedicated to one life history and corresponding with the section under discussion e.g. Francis. Varying sample size.	Life history interviews. The findings are situated within a larger, contextual framework, often utilising data from other qualitative and quantitative sources.	Interviews are analysed for their content; what they illuminate about a given phenomenon.	Both academic and policy audiences. The aim is easy reading and a concise argument that utilizes the life history for specific purposes, such as to influence policy makers.

Types of Presentation	Sample Size	Approach to Collection	Approach to Data Storage and Analysis	Audience
Single Person/ Household Focus	Uses one or a very small number of life histories as a case study.	In depth life history interviews, structured around the key phases or moments in an individual's life.	A textual analysis of the narrative (as above) or to bolster an existing theory or understanding of a phenomenon.	Directed at a variety of audiences, from academics interested in narrative analysis to NGOs and development agencies geared at the general public, for example when single cases are used to demonstrate the efficacy of an intervention.
Testimonies	Ranges from a single person relating a collective experience (e.g. Menchu) to the collective as a whole (Guatemala: Nunca Mas)	Legal testimony through more structured interviews and surveys. The focus is less on the life history than on the particular experiences of individuals who have suffered violence and conflict.	To testify against perpetrators of violence and attest to and preserve collective experience.	Directed at national governments and local and international legal bodies, as well as to the conscience of a wider (global) civil society.
Graphics	Can be used for both small or large sample sizes.	Life history interviews that are somewhat more focused, normally on the transitions or phase that informants go through in their life course.	Presents findings in a visual form.	Directed at policy makers and a general audience as well as academic discourse. This innovative approach is methodologically difficult, but with great potential; a striking way to demonstrate findings to wide range of audiences.

5. Conclusion

The bulk of the material presented here has dealt with the question of how findings are presented by researcher to their target audiences. What is referred to as 'narrative analysis' takes the most narrow approach with regards to the audience they are appealing to, whereas realists or who intended for their work to reach policy making groups, civil society, influence academics etc. take a range of approaches, depending on what they believe will be the most likely to provoke interest from those they seek to influence.

The study of individual lives through life history research, narratives and oral history, has in the past two decades become increasingly prominent in qualitative social science research. This trend spans a great variety of empirical areas and is gaining prominence in new fields of study. This literature review and annotated bibliography has explored some of the ways in which this method of research is approached and has been presented by researchers hailing from a number of perspectives. Because the life history method is employed in such a multitude of ways and spans a great many disciplines and sub-disciplines, no shared

approach – theoretically, methodologically, or in regards to a framework for interpretation and presentation – is likely to emerge in the near future. However, as Roberts (2002) notes, "one of the features of current biographical research is a pragmatic eclecticism…in pursing the collection, interpretation, and presentation of lives" (169). While this characterization may be identified by some as exposing a relative lack of theoretical and methodological rigour in the method, others see great strengths in an approach that encourages such openness and flexibility in pursuing research and presenting findings.

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