

Introduction: Telling Environmental Histories

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The farmland in the valley was green, the creek running through it lined with eucalypts—a reminder that once this stream flowed through a forest. The rolling hills were beguiling. Some of them were covered in regenerating bush: new growth shooting straight from the ground while alongside blackened trunks told of recent burning. In the upper canopy, branches bursting with green leaves masked the charring and the scorched soil was once again covered in leaf litter. Vibrant birdsong almost drowned out environmental historian Tom Griffiths as he relayed a moving narrative of the events of 7 February 2009 to a group of historians from Australia, the US and UK. The fires of ‘Black Saturday’ burnt through 4500 square kilometres of land and claimed 173 human lives, including 10 from the small community of Steels Creek. It was to this

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area that Tom, who has written eloquently about the history of fire in Australia and co-edited a collection of stories from Steels Creek,¹ had guided us on a beautiful late spring day in November 2015.

This group of historians had gathered in Melbourne, Australia, to begin a three-day workshop exploring the nexus of oral and environmental history. Our intention was to consider the ways in which attention to memory and story-telling enhances our understanding of the relationship between place and story, settlement and sustainability, environment and change. Our journey to the site of the Black Saturday fires and our vantage point in Steels Creek, with views through recently regenerating bush to the valley below, embedded us in the more-than-human world.² We ventured into nearby forest where stands of mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) abut temperate rainforest, a legacy of the Gondwanaland period of the Australian continent. Within a 20-kilometre radius we had traversed an area of recent ecological disaster, heard powerful stories of human tragedy and survival, witnessed the extraordinary recuperative power of the natural environment and wandered through remnants of Australia's deep time landscape.

Humans have been making sense of this landscape for millennia, shaping it with fire, stone, axes, ploughs and tractors. They have cared for it, denuded it, tended it, lived within it, creating it in their minds and with their hands. They have told stories about its birth, and its capacity to ignite with devastating ferocity. In the decades prior to 2009, settler Australians also demonstrated a striking capacity to forget the “frightening and awesome natural force” of fire and the “age-old elemental battle amongst the stringybark”.³ In the wake of Black Saturday, the work that Tom Griffiths and Christine Hansen undertook was in part to remember earlier iterations of this event, and the interrelationship between humans, fire and the ‘forests of ash’. Bringing together oral history and environmental history, they examined the intimate relationships between people and place, between individual and cultural memory, and their webs of connection with the natural world.

Over the subsequent two days of the workshop we convened at La Trobe University—only a 40-minute drive from the areas devastated by Black Saturday—to read and talk through papers by each of the participants, all of whom were working at the nexus of oral and environmental history. The field trip to Steels Creek had provided a poignant backdrop against which to consider the entanglement between humans, the ‘natural’ world, memory and change. Those papers, reworked and enriched in the light of discussion and exchange, are part of the collection gathered here.

The Gondwanaland vegetation we encountered on our field trip was a reminder that although the Australian continent appears isolated, it has been connected—and continues to be so in its botany and its people—with the Indian subcontinent and the lands around the Indian Ocean. The ancient and continuing botanical connection has survived despite the great differences in recent history, including colonisation of most areas by Europeans in the last three centuries. In Australia, there has been recent immigration by people from South Asia and the Indian Ocean, but European ‘settlers’ have retained demographic as well as political dominance in this as in other temperate colonies. Tropical colonies in Africa, across Asia and South America felt the heavy political impact of Europeans but have retained a demographic and cultural dominance of resident populations, although often expanded with the forced migration of unfree labourers. In former western colonising nations and in both types of former colonies, environmental history and oral history—that is, historical accounts recorded from the memories of everyday people—have flourished. Yet they have taken different forms in each.

In considering how to engage even further with the questions around how oral and environmental history can inform each other, it has been important to recognise this diversity of forms. It is impossible to cover all variations, but we have extended the range of countries and communities represented in the volume, and included chapters from authors unable to attend the workshop. One dimension of that extension has been to draw on authors from one region—the Indian subcontinent—which allows a comparison between the two broad types of colonial experience. The other dimension has been expansion of the category of ‘settler colonial’ to include Canada, where, in addition to debates over indigeneity and ‘settlers’, debates about the languages of memory occur as they do on the Indian subcontinent.

There are good reasons for building the conversation between the former colonies in temperate and tropical areas. There has been great depth of oral accounts in Indian environmental history, but because it has been conducted by anthropologists, sociologists and ecologists rather than historians, it has not often been recognised by historians from the west. In India, however, this rich body of oral accounts has usually been considered collectively, in class or caste analyses, and so it is seldom seen as ‘oral history’ by Indian historians. So, a conversation will be of value to all sides. Furthermore, there have been innovations in Indian analyses—using visual representations as one example—which offer exploratory pathways for oral and environmental historians everywhere.

Yet there are clearly many regions absent from this volume, including the diverse ecologies and societies of Africa, South East and East Asia, and tropical Southern America. While each has fostered unique forms of both environmental and oral histories, they have common themes with those of the tropical and formerly colonised regions. One of these themes has been that of displacement of human and non-human species caused first by imperial land use and more recently by national parks, conservation and eco-tourism. Another has been deforestation and similar damage generated by monoculture and extraction for globalised trade. Yet another theme is the ecological impact of development and urbanisation in post-colonial nations as well as that arising from the distortions of colonialism. Another theme again has been the impact of warfare, leading to massive damage to ecologies as well as to human populations. Yet for each of these themes, in each region, research in oral history and environmental history have tended to proceed in parallel rather than together. Our purpose in this volume then is to explore—using just a few areas—the ways in which these two productive methodologies could be brought into effective conversation.

In many countries, oral history—as both a methodology and a subject matter—and environmental history are now thriving sub-fields of the historical discipline. Each has its own journals, its own conferences, and a large number of practitioners researching, writing and theorising about various aspects of their field. And within each field, there are those who engage with themes of the other: oral historians often write about place, attachment and meaning, but much less about the human/nature inter-relationship and the way these change. Environmental historians have used oral history to talk to people about landscape change, but have rarely problematised the nature of memory, story-telling or the interview relationship.

This collection is the first devoted specifically to exploring the intersections of oral history and environmental history. Oral history offers environmental historians the opportunity to understand the ways people's perceptions, experiences and beliefs about environments—places in which people have lived, worked and played—change over time. Oral history brings attention to memory and story-telling, and in particular to the stories that everyday men and women tell about the environments they move into and across. It brings the opportunity to explore dimensions of class and race and gender into the experience of places. In turn, the insights of environmental history challenge oral historians to think

more critically about the ways an active more-than-human world shapes experiences and people, the mutually constitutive relationship between people and places that is a core understanding of environmental history. The integration of these approaches enables us to more fully and critically understand the ways cultural and individual memory and experience shapes human interactions with the more-than-human world, just as it enables us to identify the ways human memory, identity and experience is moulded by the landscapes and environments in which people live and labour.

Oral historians have been increasingly attentive to the complex ways in which people experience and remember place.⁴ Places carry collections of meanings built up through patterns of behaviour and interaction, and through the wider connections people bring to their places of significance.⁵ Geographer Doreen Massey has argued that places can be seen as nodes in networks of meaning through which people link the meaningful places of their past and present lives.⁶ Drawing together this work by anthropologists and geographers, oral history grounds abstract ideas about place by locating the memory of particular experiences in particular places; they are embodied and affective memories, reflecting years of knowledge and a strong sense of locale, emotion and identity.⁷

In the context of climate change and the recognition of a new, human-induced geological age—the Anthropocene—environmental history takes up the challenge to think about nature, people and place differently.⁸ However, environmental historians have generally been slow to integrate oral history methodology and insights into their histories.⁹ As with geographers and ecologists who have used oral history to chart environmental change,¹⁰ the tendency has been to weave interview material into an environmental analysis without critical reflection on the nature of the source, the significance of memory or indeed the methodologies used to collect such material. Exceptional studies show how rich interpretations of environmental change can be when considerations of memory and story-telling are incorporated into historical analysis and the usefulness of integrating oral history to deepen an understanding of environmental change, experience and meaning.¹¹

One reason for the lack of work that critically engages these approaches is their differing intellectual traditions. Oral history as an intellectual field in the British academic arena emerges from social history; it prioritises the human story—human experience, memory and meaning are its central concerns.¹² ‘Nature’ is a given, something upon

which humans act but which has no inherent agency itself. In India, interviewing the members of subaltern or marginalised groups has been widely pursued, but although historians have been involved, this rich body of interviewing has been most often undertaken by researchers in anthropology and sociology. In each of these strands of Indian environmental scholarship, there has been more attention to the collective and less to the individual processes of memory and retelling. So, although extensive interviewing has occurred, it is often transformed into collective and structural analyses. The closest perhaps to the approaches of social history have been in comparative literature, which has inquired into oral forms of literature as well as into the long-time depth of written Indian languages, alongside the more recent literatures of European languages.

Environmental history in the west and in the developing tropics may have more roots in common. In both, this arena of analysis emerged from the early engagement of European expansion with Chinese and Arabic scientific approaches, generating the rationalist sciences of the Enlightenment. In both the colonising and colonised world, environmental history was yoked to the developing environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but also draws heavily from ecology and environmental sciences, which themselves arose from botany and zoology during the same movements.¹³ Only some work, notably that of Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, and later Richard Grove and then William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, has engaged with the critical role of colonialism in environmental change.¹⁴ Many others took these disciplinary engagements to more simplistic consequences: in the west, environmental history seeks to decentre the human and foreground the agency of the more-than-human world; humans—if they appear at all—are often portrayed as a homogenous, destructive force upsetting the natural ecosystems believed to exist prior to European expansion. A dominance of ‘declensional narratives’, which lament the loss of an imagined ‘pristine’ pre-colonial non-human environment, drive many environmental histories that have emerged from these ‘settler colonial’ roots in North and South America and in Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific.

Yet if romanticisation of pre-colonial environments has been carried on by colonising ‘settlers’ in the ‘settler colonies’ of the temperate zone, it has also been practiced in the environmental histories in the tropics, although in these cases the pre-colonial landscape was imagined to have been harmoniously peopled by small-scale village agriculturalists

and forest harvesters. There, the ‘colonial watershed’ approach in environmental histories to environmental history has argued that it was the impact of European colonisation—bringing capitalism with its bureaucratized land taxation, cash economies, mono-cropping and plantation exploitation—which caused a sudden, catastrophic break with past stable environmental conditions. This ‘watershed’ approach had some parallels with the ‘declensionist’ narratives of the temperate ‘settler colonies’, where a stable and idealised ecology was imagined to have existed before colonisation. In the colonised tropics, however, the simple dichotomies between dominant European colonisers and colonised Indigenous peoples simply do not hold. What does ‘settler’ mean in South Asia, for example, which for many centuries has seen wave after wave of mobile peoples taking up land and political dominance over already resident peoples, sometimes through exploitation and sometimes through conciliation? The complex questions about what a ‘settler’ might be and who might be ‘Indigenous’ has been brought directly into recent environmental law-making of both the temperate and tropical post-colonial worlds where, in all cases, ‘Indigenous’ peoples have been identified for particular roles, despite seldom being guaranteed access to serious political power.

For both environmental history and environmental sciences, there has been a particular focus on industrialisation: the ‘great acceleration’ in carbon usage and release, in global population and in urbanisation. Some critique of this view has emerged from archaeology, which has demonstrated the environmental impact of both early agricultural and hunting/gathering societies.

Oral history, however, brings a different critical question to challenge the western declensionist assumptions. This critique asks: what happens to oral history when the human world is decentred and the more-than-human world is given real agency? What does it mean for environmental history to take seriously the embodied and affective nature of memory and its gendered, racialised, classed nature? And even, as Meera Oommen asks in this volume, what does it mean for both if animal memory is considered alongside and in interaction with human memory?

For many in the formerly colonised tropics, however, the questions have shifted attention to the far longer time depth of human–environmental impacts, which were occurring well before any colonial ‘watershed’. Without minimising the impact of colonialism, this shift has broadened the recognition of environmental change in much recent work.¹⁵ With such a greatly extended time depth in

human–environmental interaction, attention to human memory and oral history may at first seem less useful. Indian environmental history has certainly turned to different tools, one being archaeology, which rely little on the short timeframe of oral history. Another frequently used resource, however, is literature—and the recognition of orality in long-surviving literatures, even after they have been transformed by writing, is an important field which is necessarily informed by the emerging approaches of oral history and memory studies.

In both the colonised and colonising world, humans have been recognised as observers of and actors in ecologies for millennia. While much of this interaction has been documented in archival or material records, analysis of recent decades allows historians to access human memory and emotions to better understand this interaction, even as it might have occurred in the distant past. Moreover, it allows us to access the perspectives of the many groups who seldom have power to contribute to the written record—the economically and culturally marginalised, the colonised, the displaced and the excluded.¹⁶ As the authors in this volume note, oral history reveals stories which conventional archives do not yield and, in turn, the stories we uncover change the ways in which we read the archive.

This has been of particular relevance in Indian environmental studies. Across the subcontinent there is a strong interest in active and urgent environmental conflicts. As pointed out earlier, many studies have now been undertaken to record the voices of the subaltern peoples who have no access to power—not only under the colonial British but also under the various local structures of power, before and after Independence—enacted through caste, religion or race as well as class. Just a few of the specialist areas in which the work of Indian historians can readily be identified as environmental history would include wildlife studies¹⁷; artisanal fishers in coastal environments¹⁸; rivers and water, including recent dams and hydropower¹⁹; forests and Adivasi land rights²⁰; grazing, ‘nomadism’ and herders²¹; mining²²; and urban studies, including communal violence and the communalisation of urban spaces.²³ All of these are often explorations of the gendered relationships between humans and the more-than-human world.²⁴ This work is frequently based on extensive ethnographic work, including formal and informal interviewing, with subaltern groups across a number of generations, yet the authors of these studies have generally analysed such material in the collective structural analyses of religious, caste or class groups and the third-person style of economics, geography or sociology.²⁵ However, some recent analyses—based

in anthropological methodology but attentive to historical analysis of memory—have begun to explore their narrators’ perceptions to a far greater extent than has been the case in earlier work. Examples are Ajantha Subramanian’s *Shorelines* and Annu Jalais’s *Forest of Tigers*, both of which demonstrate the strengths of cross-disciplinary approaches in linking oral and environmental histories.²⁶ Meera Oommen’s chapter in this volume takes this approach in an ecological and geographical study that recognises the important role that memory has played in shaping identity building and contemporary decision-making.

The history of political campaigns or identity movements has been more often associated directly with recording and analysis of memory. In India, a substantial body of oral history recording has been undertaken by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, intended to illuminate the long campaign for independence, and there have been parallel studies in Pakistan and Bangladesh. These, however, all align with a theme that is readily recognised by ‘environmental’ historians: that of borders, Partition, displacement and ‘lost places’. Memories—and imaginings—of places have formed a major part of the many historical studies around formal independence from Britain accompanied by Partition in August 1947²⁷ and then the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. Furthermore, analyses of memories of emplaced experiences may not be expressed only through academic writing. In India, documentary film continues to be an important medium for analysis as well as communication of narratives of displacement.²⁸ Finally, expressions of memories of environment, including that of catastrophe, may not be in either oral or written form but in graphic or performative media. The Chitrakars of West Bengal, for example, have recorded their memories of the 2005 tsunami—and the meaning they ascribe to it—in painted scrolls.²⁹ While the Chitrakars do sing and speak to their audiences as they present—and sell—their scrolls, it is the graphic which conveys most fully their complex cross-cultural analysis. An important innovation in the engagement of memory studies and visual representation has been the Eaglenest Memory Project, undertaken by wildlife biologist and historian Nandini Velho and graphic artist Anjora Noronha, who have worked with the communities living in and around a forest wildlife sanctuary in the foothills of the Himalayas in western Aranchal Pradesh, India. Velho recorded and Noronha sketched the stories of villagers, and these are then drawn together to be discussed with the story-tellers. This has developed into an analytical collaboration to understand more fully the history of a forest.³⁰

Establishing a critical understanding of our subjects and sources is a central tenet of the historian's craft. If environmental historians are to draw on human memory and emotions, we need a critical insight into how memory is formed and shaped by ongoing events, emotions, fears and hopes.³¹ Furthermore, we need to understand the ways the historian's involvement in the creation of her or his sources shapes the archive we create.³² If we are to explore what environments mean to people, as we need to do as historians of memory and orality, then we need to recognise the diverse types of 'environments in environmental histories' and the differing forms of 'environmental history' that have emerged. These range from the analyses of changes in vegetation, species and landscapes through to urban histories, disease studies, disaster studies, heritage and environmental justice.³³

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Each of the articles in this book explores the way that changing environments and changing human societies are entangled with each other. They take up some of the key issues across the wide range we have outlined here. As we have explained, the geographic areas of focus are the developed industrial economies of the UK (Skelton, Dudley), Canada (Chatterjee and High) and the USA (Valk), the colonised settler environments of Australia (Twigg, Holmes, Frawley, Anderson) and the post-colonial tropical settings of India and Bangladesh (Oommen, Lakshmi and Sharma, Goodall). Some consider industrialised and others deindustrialised urban spaces (Chatterjee and High, Valk, Lakshmi and Sharma, Skelton, Dudley), while a number consider watercourses and rivers in both urban and rural environments (Frawley, Goodall, Valk, Skelton, Dudley). Some papers compare the perspectives of Indigenous peoples with settlers in both colonised and post-colonial settings (Oommen, Frawley, Goodall). Other papers consider the questions around gender and rurality in both developed economies and developing economies (Holmes, Oommen). Questions around migrancy, access, and environmental justice in urban and rural conditions are addressed in many papers. Each of these authors argue that the memories and even the language chosen by participants can offer insight into the more-than-human world. Oral history, in seeking out those people who are most often powerless to shape the written record, allows a glimpse of the people most directly affected by environmental crisis, change or injustice.

These chapters also tell us about how oral history resources might be used in an engaged comparative manner with archival and image resources as well as with datasets from the natural sciences. The oral histories

themselves might be gathered in a range of differing ways: during formal interviews, in focus groups, with couples, while riding a tractor, traversing far-flung fields, fishing or surfing—or even while being fished out of the river after falling in! As Karen Twigg observes, “One of the least appreciated benefits of oral testimony is that it propels historians out of archives and into the field, offering the opportunity to see—directly and immediately—how ideas and attitudes expressed in an interview are reflected in the surrounding environment” (p. 229). Each author discusses their methodological approach. Some draw on long, wide-ranging life history interviews, others on short, focused engagements crammed into the spaces available in participants’ busy lives. Many of them record not only the nature of people’s engagement with their surrounding environments but also the voice of the more-than-human world itself: noisy industrial cities, flowing rivers, bird song. A number of chapters draw attention to the soundscape of their interviews and the environments they encounter (Chatterjee and High, Dudley, Skelton, Twigg). In Marianna Dudley’s discussion of the sonic environment of the Severn Bore, she asks, “Speaking, and, critically, being heard, gives humans agency. Can an inclusive understanding of oral sources that includes environmental noise also work towards recognition of nature’s agency in the histories we produce?” (p. 99). Finally, these chapters suggest some of the varied outcomes of using oral history methodologies in environmental history inquiries. The results might be in formal reports to policy and management bodies (Frawley, Goodall) or they might be in museum exhibitions (Lakshmi and Sharma), scholarly writing, education, poetry or theatre. Lakshmi and Sharma draw attention to the very different outcomes that a prioritisation of oral history and narrator perspective bring to conventional museology. Most museums focus on material objects—which might be considered relics of environments—and around those objects the museum arranges quotes and fragments of memories, almost like decoration. Instead, the survivors of Bhopal, the worst industrial accident in history, have demanded a museum that prioritises their understandings. This leads, as Lakshmi and Sharma demonstrate, to a very different way of understanding how the catastrophe has shaped not only the past and present but also the futures of the people who were affected.

In some situations, oral history will offer empirical data which can be aligned with the studies by ecologists of the presence of species of plants or animals and their interactions with each other. Examples might be the memories of fishers regarding the changing catches of particular species of fish (Frawley) or of bird watchers about sightings and recordings

of birds (Twigg), each being cases where precise details might confirm identifications and interactions.

More often, however, oral history is a culturally inflected process. It reflects the ways in which people observe and remember as well as the conditions of their remembering and the forms in which they choose to retell those memories. While this means that memory does not always offer empirical ‘facts’, it tells us much more; it allows us to see what environments and the changes to them mean to people, and in turn allows us to see how they might decide to act in the present and future in relation to those environments.

One of the distinctive features of this collection is how many of the chapters take urban, industrialised environments as their subject. As Sörlin and Warde observed a decade ago, the field of western environmental history is dominated by studies of the impact of human activity on rural or ‘wilderness’ environments, with urban environmental history falling well behind in the publication stakes.³⁴ How can environmental historians see the ‘environment’ in cities? The awareness that human beings and their actions and consciousness are inevitably entangled with all ‘natural’ environments on the planet is at its most intense in urban environments. While we can consider the ‘built environment’ as one form of environmental history—discussed here by Piyusha Chatterjee and Steven High—another form focuses on the elements of city environments which are perceived as ‘nature’, however damaged and distorted they may be. ‘Nature’ in cities is one of the many intermediate or liminal areas where there is a very deep entanglement between recent human history and the material and processes considered to be ‘natural’. There is firstly the underlying geography and hydrology of the urban area—often simply not noticed until flood or fire makes its contours visible. Then there are the more-than-human life forms—some original plant, animal and insect life may be extinguished by city development but some thrive—such as pigeons, mangroves and rats, for example, and migrants, such as the originally rural ibis which now nest in Sydney’s rubbish dumps and forage aggressively across the city. The ibis were forced out of wetlands which have been pumped dry for intensive irrigated horticulture and found not just a refuge in the city but better and more reliable feeding in the cities’ school playgrounds, parks and rubbish bins. Now regarded as pests, these large-bodied birds fly out, all grubby after their nights among the garbage, to terrify small school children by snatching their sandwiches with frightening, long beaks. Understanding the ugly, the unwanted and the damaged as ‘environment’ and seeking out its

historical trajectory is as important as seeking to understand the remote and pristine examples of ‘real’ nature.

Urban environments often include features of the natural world which still look ‘natural’ but are contaminated and polluted. Rhode Island’s Mashapaug Pond, discussed here by Anne Valk, is one such site. Residents starved of space and access to any other less dangerous natural environments might perceive and experience such places as ‘natural’ until the evidence of contamination becomes too obvious to ignore. The polluted Sydney waterways of the Georges and Cooks Rivers were like this during the 1920s–1970s when industrial expansion and the complete absence of any clean water controls produced toxic rivers. Yet, as Heather Goodall explores, oral histories recorded among people who grew up there show that people still fished the rivers and even tried to swim, or at least held picnics on their infilled and reclaimed banks.³⁵ Similarly, the views across the surface of the water are held with great affection. Mucking around in the polluted shallows even generated in some, as Anne Valk’s chapter shows, a desire for further study and led to eventual careers in scientific ecology and/or environmental activism.

This collection also brings alive the ways in which memories are contested and change over time, as well as highlighting tensions around outcomes that environmentalists might unquestionably consider ‘good’—cleaning up a heavily polluted river, for example—but around which conflicting experiences and opinions swirl. Leona Skelton’s discussion of the ambivalent memories surrounding the River Tyne beautifully illustrates the ways a heavily polluted river could still be a site for childhood play and adventure, and remembered for the activity and life it once carried. The same river, post clean-up and ecologically much healthier, offers greater opportunities for engagement with ‘nature’ but supports fewer jobs and livelihoods. Meera Oommen’s account of the diverging of memory between the Travancore people who remain on the plains and those who become settlers in Ranni exposes the way environmental challenges shape identity and memory, leading the settlers into bitter opposition towards ‘conservation’ initiatives. Katie Holmes and Deb Anderson both explore the ways farmers attempt to reconcile changing environmental conditions with earlier memories of variable climates. Anne Valk’s discussion of Mashapaug Pond explores other kinds of tensions within people’s memories as they endeavour to reconcile past memories with later information, leading to doubt and uncertainty as they re-evaluate earlier experiences. Similar tensions are evident in

Karen Twigg's consideration of the increased use of herbicides in the wheat-growing district of the Victorian Mallee, where some farmers struggle with the fear that they are poisoning the soil at the same time as feeling compelled by economic and soil-conservation imperatives to continue to use high quantities of herbicides.

The *invisibility* of pollution—in the water, under the ground—gives rise to myths and rumours that circulate through the oral history interviews, often repeated as facts. While the historian may seek to clarify the distinction, and has a responsibility to do so,³⁶ such rumours frequently reflect other long-held suspicions about the environmental record of large companies or governments and the disregard they have often held for the health and well-being of their workers or citizens.

In some circumstances, these are well-founded. Few more striking examples of this exist than the Bhopal disaster of 1984. Rama Lakshmi and Shalini Sharma discuss the challenges of memorialising the disaster; their oral histories also reveal other knowledge, namely “the groundwater contamination from [Union Carbide Corporation's] routine dumping of toxic waste in the factory premises, and leaching of toxic material that Carbide buried in the surrounding areas before leaving the site” (p. 137). Over 20,000 people have been affected. The collusion between Carbide, its new owner Dow Chemicals and the Indian Government “manifested in misinformation, lack of information and a process of decision-making that excluded survivors” (p. 137). The survivors are “moral witnesses” to the double tragedy of Bhopal.

Oral history enables us to recognise the complexities of entanglements between human societies and environments. It provides a foil and corrective for the emerging demands to commodify the natural world. Kanchi Kohli and Manju Menon address this issue in their recent book *Business Interests and the Environmental Crisis*, which charts the shifting conception of ‘nature’ into that of a body of ‘resources’.³⁷ A whole profession has emerged, known as Natural Resource Management, or NRM, and become a major strategy around the world to deal with environmental conflicts, through which contentious land use changes such as mining can be ‘negotiated’ with those affected, including Indigenous owners, by treating all participants as ‘stakeholders’ with an interest that can ultimately be quantified and monetised. NRM demands that ‘equivalence’ and ‘offsets’ or ‘compensation’ are given for environmental damage and change. But the values humans ascribe to environments can rarely easily be quantified and ascribed a dollar value; they are complex and messy.

In Australia, the debates surrounding the Murray–Darling Basin rivers—discussed here by Jodi Frawley and Heather Goodall—are about economic and environmental flows. But Aboriginal owners and others have been arguing for ‘cultural flows’, which incorporate all the messy values that are not included in these statistical categories. The ‘triple bottom line’ has ‘social’ included, but identifying what that might be is challenging—and ‘cultural’ is an even more complex category.

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This volume is organised into three sections but, as suggested earlier, each of the chapters may touch on themes and methodologies which resonate with chapters in other sections.

Rivers contains glimpses of rivers and the more-than-human world in three countries—Australia, Bangladesh and the UK—while a range of cultural perspectives are explored through the oral record. Authored by Heather Goodall, Jodi Frawley and Marianna Dudley, the chapters share an active exploration of water, but each also touches on questions around the migrancy of people as well as the mobility of waters, and challenges the deeply embedded assumptions that waters is a simple element whose ‘flow’ we can take for granted. The narrators (or ‘informants’) interviewed in research for each of these chapters see waters as productivist; whether they are seeking to use water and its products for profit, subsistence or pleasure, the people who tell their stories of water are not tourists or passive observers but instead want to engage actively with the water they remember and observe. Each chapter also touches on the debates about environmental justice and the question of access to the waters in culturally appropriate ways.

De/Industrialisation grapples with questions around industrial and deindustrialising landscapes—in which industry might be remembered as positive or negative, hated or mourned, and in which the tragic impact of toxicity outlasts generations in both the developed economy of the USA and the developing economy of India. Authored by Anne Valk, Rama Lakshmi and Shalini Sharma, Leona Skelton, and Piyusha Chatterjee and Steven High, these chapters have notable overlapping themes. One is the use of sound to consider how changing aural landscapes are created and lost, as well as to consider how to research the sounds of the past and reach an understanding of how they were valued in comparison with today. The intense and painful

debates over ‘restoration’ of damaged deindustrialising landscapes are foregrounded in a number of these chapters, in both developed and poverty-stricken developing environments. There are important questions about the landscapes that are not seen as well as the failure to hear the voices of the people who have been most damaged either by the poisons or the loss of jobs.

Living with Environmental Change traces the gendered perspectives of settler farming communities in marginal landscapes in Australia and India. The chapters are authored by Karen Twigg, Meera Oommen, Deborah Anderson and Katie Holmes. Each of the landscapes under study are coming under increasing pressure—albeit in different ways—from climate change, eco-tourism and intensifying globalising impacts, including economic pressures. One common dimension of these four chapters is the psychological and social strategies developed to deal with the challenges and disasters that threaten marginal farming land, from the onslaught of disturbed and opportunistic wildlife to drought, floods or cyclones. The beliefs and identities that are formed in both India and Australia in the process of enduring disaster shape the choices people make in the present about environmental policy. This brings these four chapters into direct resonance with those in Parts I and II.

Bringing together researchers in both oral history and environmental history from the UK, the ‘settler colonies’ of Australia, Canada and the USA, and from tropical and formerly colonised India allows insights into the parallel but differing approaches that have arisen in each. There are rich possibilities for historians to learn from each other in these situations, but these will only emerge if there is greater communication taking place between historians from these settings. Many more conversations of the type we have been able to open up here can only enrich the field.

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Our view from Steels Creek revealed a landscape shaped by human and environmental interaction, layered with memory and meaning, and saturated with personal, local and national significance. The landscapes discussed in this book and the memories they evoke are similarly eloquent. We hope that our collection helps advance our understandings of the entwined nature of the human and more-than-human world and the interpretive capacity of oral and environmental history to disentangle the threads of matter and meaning so as to reveal their webs of connection.

NOTES

1. Tom Griffiths, *Forests of Ash: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Christine Hansen and Tom Griffiths, *Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012).
2. The term, while circulating from the 1950s, is most closely associated with Donna Haraway and her influential interventions into feminism and science, e.g. *Primate Visions* (1989) and *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991). It refers primarily to living species but more generally to wider environments, living and non-living. It is used in the latter sense throughout this volume.
3. Hansen and Griffiths, *Living with Fire*, 94.
4. Shelley Trower, ed., *Place, Writing and Voice in Oral History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Heather Goodall, “The River Runs Backwards,” in *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002); Deb Anderson, *Endurance: Australian Stories of Drought* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2014).
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8. For discussion of the idea of the Anthropocene, see Libby Robin, “Histories for Changing Times: Entering the Anthropocene?,” *Australian Historical Studies* 44, no. 3 (2013): 329–40. For an overview of the history of the changing understanding of ‘nature’ and ‘environment’, see Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde, *The Future of Nature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

9. Leena Rossi, "Oral History and Individual Environmental Experience," in *Thinking through the Environment*, ed. Timo Myllyntaus (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2011).
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- Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire, Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
15. Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Shifting Ground: People, Animals and Mobility in India's Environmental History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), Introduction, 1–38; Rangarajan, “Introduction,” in Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan eds., *India's Environmental History: A Reader*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2013): 1–34. In the Australian context, see Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2014).
 16. Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Peter Meusburger, Michael Heffernan and Edgar Wunder eds., *Cultural Memories: The Geographical Point of View* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011).
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 23. Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar, all films in the online TISS Centre for Media and Cultural Studies collection, *Remembering 1992*. <http://mumbairiots.tiss.edu/#/>. Accessed 10 August 2017.
 24. See one example: Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, ed., *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water* (Kolkata: Stree Books, 2006).
 25. Examples are the important analyses of Vasant K. Sabarwal (*Pastoral Politics. Shepherds, Bureaucrats, and Conservation in the Western Himalayas* [Dehli: Oxford University press, 1999]) and Arun Agrawal (*Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* [Durham and London: Duke, 2005]), which are both based on extensive periods of ethnographic interviewing, but neither of which discuss at any length the questions raised by memory or narrative style among their many participants. Exceptions include cross-disciplinary studies such as the extraordinary 2008 study by Gunnel Cederlof, *Landscapes and the Law: Environmental Politics, Regional Histories and Contests over Nature* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008) and biographical works such as Rustom Bharucha’s *Rajasthan: An Oral History—Conversations with Komal Kothari* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003).
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28. Indian Centre for Public History: *Doddabommasandra Lake* (5: 35), collaborations between Public History students and filmmakers for *Talking History* (Seven Videos), Centre for Public History, Srishti Institute for Art, Design, and Technology, Bangalore, <https://vimeo.com/talkinghistory>; Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar, *So Heddan So Hoddan (Like Here, Like There)* (Mumbai: Tata Institute of Social Sciences [TISS], 2011). Accessed 10 August 2017.
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 32. Alessandro Portelli *The Death of Luigi Trastuli And Other Stories* (Alberta: SUNY Press, Series in Oral and Public History) Chapter 3 'What Makes Oral History Different', pp. 45–58.
 33. For examples of work on these areas see: Debbie Lee, 'Listening to the Land: The Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness as Oral History', *Oral History Review* 37, no. 2 (20 June 2010): 235–48; Hugh A. Robertson and Tara K. McGee, 'Applying Local Knowledge: The Contribution of Oral History to Wetland Rehabilitation at Kanyapella Basin, Australia', *Journal of Environmental Management* 69, no. 3 (November 2003): 275–87; Grace Karskens, 'Water Dreams, Earthen Histories: Exploring Urban Environmental History at the Penrith Lakes Scheme and Castlereagh, Sydney', *Environment and History* 13, no. 2 (2007): 115–54; Loh Kah Seng, 'History, Memory, and Identity in Modern Singapore: Testimonies from the Urban Margins', *The Oral History Review* 36, no. 1 (1 January 2009): 1–24; Mark Tebeau, 'Listening to the City: Oral History and Place in the Digital Era', *Oral History Review* 40, no. 1 (1 January 2013): 25–35; Rina Benmayor, 'Contested Memories of Place: Representations of Salinas' Chinatown', *Oral History Review* 37, no. 2 (20 June 2010): 225–34; Jon D. Lee, *An Epidemic of Rumors: How Stories Shape Our Perceptions of Disease* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2014); Mark Cave and Stephen M. Sloan, eds., *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The*

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 37. Kanchi Kohli and Manju Menon, eds., *Business Interests and the Environmental Crisis* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2016).

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