

## **Keeping Track of History: The Relevance of Oral Traditions and Material Memory from a Feminist Perspective**

Sarasi Ganguly<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract:**

It is often said that men and women have very different perceptions of situations. Strangely, this perception is overlooked when recounting the past and how certain situations unfolded. When there is a conversation around any kind of conflict, the focus shifts to the battlefields, the statistics of people losing their lives or getting displaced, and finally, what changes the outcome brings. But the insides of houses far away from the battlefields are often neglected. This may raise a question: What about the people living away from the conflict and trying to keep everything normal? What about their side of the story and their voices that might have seen the situation differently? This research will focus on the principal question, “Can the idea of collective memory help reshape the historical landscape of post-independence India?” The idea will be to explore the fields of oral traditions and material memory to rethink and re-evaluate the idea of history as we know it and the potential of changing narratives. This essay seeks to explore the subject through a feminist lens, where women and the hidden histories of women in conflict can be studied through material culture. India’s colonial and post-colonial history is open to interpretation through various cultural angles. One of them is how women became a part of the freedom movement and adjusted to the changes that followed. While matrilineal trauma and memory have been examined in memory studies, using material heritage can bring out stories buried within families. This research will aim to take the stories out of history books and place them in common households.

**Keywords:** material memory, culture, cultural studies, feminist history, memory studies, oral history, Intangible heritage

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<sup>1</sup> Sarasi Ganguly is a final year Postgraduate student at School of South Asian Studies, Pondicherry University, India.

“নারী ছলনাময়ী, নারী জন্ম অভিনেত্রী। কিন্তু সে কি শুধু পুরুষজাতিকে মুগ্ধ করবার জন্যে? বিভ্রান্ত করবার জন্যে? বাঁচবার জন্যে নয়? আশ্রয় দেবার জন্যে নয়?”

- Ashapura Debi

The above quote by one of Bengal’s foremost feminist writers can be translated as: “A woman is secretive; she is a born actress. But is she only there to please the male gender? To lead them astray? Not to sustain or shelter them?”

In almost all of her books, women are not merely protagonists. They are anti-heroes, mothers, daughters, rebels, and a lot of other characters combined into one. But all of Ashapura Debi’s women are fighters. They speak of their rights, they fight a strict household to read a book or raise their children with modern ideas of nationalism, and they read English in a world where women reading any literature was considered a one-way ticket to eternal doom. Today, a hundred years after these women established themselves in Bengali literature, they are remembered as the image of the feminine spirit. They are regular women who dared step out.

The conflicting world of gender is complex and layered. It becomes an even more difficult task when there is an attempt to look at the past through the lens of gender. The sociological implication of gender in the study of the past is often based on how women and men perceive an event and what are the principal differences. One of the key questions that can be asked is - *How does the role of a female witness of an event differ from their male counterparts?*

Interestingly, if we attempt to understand a woman’s viewpoint in history, we may be able to form a bridge between ‘**their past**’ and ‘**their present**’.

The past is often easier to look at when it can be narrowed down to a few instead of many. Before deep-diving into the world of women as a whole, it may be a good idea to look at individual women's lives. Let us take the example of one of the most famous families of Bengal, the Rays. We often remember the Rays through Satyajit, looking at the works of his father and grandfather, who had begun no short of a revolution in the Bengali culture. At the same time. It was *Suprabha Ray*, Satyajit Ray’s mother, who was the protagonist of the family (Sengoopta, 2016). A woman ahead of her time, she took up the responsibility of her brother’s family along with her young son after losing her husband. Though she is remembered as the wife of Sukumar Ray and mother of Satyajit, her lifelong love for arts and music contributed directly to her son's genius. This loss of identity is a characteristic feature of women across time. At the same time,

it can be noted that Suprabha Debi's talents were recognised by people of certain socio-economic strata, perhaps because of the family name she carried. Not all women are lucky to have this.

Remembering women in connection to a family name has been a common tendency in history. This leaves a major gap in the memories of women, where they are never recognised solely for who they are. And this is the main focus area of this paper. It is an examination of *why women and their memories lack historical recognition and whether there is a way to keep track of these memories*.

The past is not very kind to intangible memories, and people are often forgotten beyond a certain point in time. In spite of this, everyone deserves a chance to keep their story alive, be it through themselves or the generation which is coming after them. At this point, it can be a good idea to look into alternative sources of history to pick up the scattered pieces and attempt to put a large jigsaw puzzle back in place.

### **Reconnecting Histories: The Role of Material Memory and Oral Traditions**

In the introductory chapter of the collection *Feminism and Cultural Memory*, editors Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith (Gender and Cultural Memory Issue, 2002) discuss the various characteristics of feminine memory. Their approach to the study of cultural memory through a gendered lens talks about the autobiographical memory of women, which often includes trauma responses, generational memory and a socio-cultural angle. Among this, a takeaway point is *Paul Connerton's 'act of transfer'*, an individual or group's way of **looking at a shared past to constitute identities**. Based on this idea, there are multiple areas of reconnecting history through the idea of shared feminine memory.

If we look closely at Connerton's 'Act of transfer' idea, the use of **material memory** becomes clearer. Objects are **vessels of tangible memory** that can be touched, felt and preserved (Connerton, 1997). From family heirlooms to ritual items or a piece of jewellery that is the only true possession of a woman when all is lost - material memory can be anything likely to be passed on to the next generation as an identity. It is something that is a witness to a very important event or perhaps a commonplace object that has earned sentimental value; the possibilities are endless. One of the most relevant examples of material memory is the possessions that women were able to bring with them during the Partition of India. While some were lucky to carry back their jewels, most had to settle for a utensil or a gold coin. But these were held on to with stubbornness, something that they would remember on difficult days.

Studies conducted across time indicate that a lot of migrant families, who have faced the trauma of migration firsthand, talk about the incident in a disconnected manner. But a woman is most likely to mention one item she had on herself when leaving behind a country that she called home. So it can be said that more than a vessel of memory, the study of material memory through a woman's point of view is a study of their emotional response to conflicts and how they survived what was often unsurvivable.

**Oral traditions**, in this context, become the most personal of memories among women to remember and, to some extent, accept their situation - good or bad. Since ancient times, folklore has been the main source of intergenerational memory, allowing a social group to identify with their surroundings. These stories are now studied as an extremely important part of cultural memory. And what are folklores, if not oral traditions? Stories narrated by elders of the family (individual or social) to the younger generations; something to remember the past by.

Carriers of memory are often different between the two genders. If we consider a micro-level, i.e. a family - the man of the house will remember a certain incident differently than his spouse. The readings of 20th-century feminist literature, be it autobiography or fiction that are women-centric in nature, show a slightly different trail of memory than their male counterparts. Recounting of violence, political trauma, migration crises, or abuse reflects a very spatial memory and allows for reconsideration of the incident.

Material memory and oral narratives have both become *instruments of change in the reading of feminist history*, literature and conflict. It is no longer the conflict that is highlighted but has taken a **more individualistic approach**. Perhaps it brings the idea of a home into a conflict, how the women who were limited to their peaceful household were fighting an internal battle while preparing for another battle outside. Heirlooms, photographs, stories and family legends were the instruments of their freedom, a way to retain their identity when their future seemed more uncertain than ever.

### **The Question of Conflict**

Urvashi Butalia's work on women and material culture has revealed some major gaps in understanding conflicts from a woman's perspective (Butalia, *Partition and Memory*, n.d.). She talks about the Partition of India 1947 as a dark chapter of history with even darker, often forgotten undertones. For the longest time, the fate of women in one of the biggest migration crises of South Asia was limited to numbers. The incidents of violence were never formally recognised, let alone talked about in history lessons. A similar situation was faced by the

victims of gender-based violence in the two World Wars and other wartime crimes of the 20th century.

If we go back to our childhood, for most of us, Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* was perhaps the first deep dive into the world of personal and generational trauma that came with the Holocaust. Moving from Europe to South Asia, fictional works by Ashapura Debi and Mahashweta Debi were the first examples of feminist literature in Bengali that directly focussed on conflicts of the time. These stories mainly focused on national movements to the Bengal famine and how individual women survived indoors and outdoors. Today, the works of these authors can be read not merely as narrations of a woman's point of view but as recollections of the author's own lives in a politically turbulent time.

South Asia has been a region of conflict since the formation of the region. The generational trauma of partition in India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka's violent history of the civil war and Bangladesh being born out of an internal political fight - too many instances affect the geopolitical scenario (Alexander, 2014). In all these events, the participation of women has been thorough yet hidden. Women have always been fighters in these events, yet their contribution gets hidden behind the happy lens of creating an environment safe for their male counterparts. This could bring us to the question - *Were women seen merely as peacemakers and not revolutionaries?* Conflicts have to be read and understood at a more individual level through the use of newer ideas of reading history and using more extensive historical data. Although retelling histories have given recognition to women's movements and contributions to the South Asian political map, a lot of stories remain untold.

In the next section, there are three case studies highlighted. These are personal stories of three women from coinciding timelines, where material and oral memories became the main source of their identity to their families. It goes on to prove the idea that memories are often preserved better when there is something tangible present. And in the context of rethinking the past, stories also become a very tangible item of memory.

### **Looking at Stories through a Gendered Lens**

In April of 2020, when the pandemic started spreading its ugly tentacles in India, I moved back home from my university. After the initial shock of my life being indefinitely on hold, I made peace with the situation. I believe at some point, my parents did so too. But then came that life-changing moment that I feel has been a significant feature of every person's lockdown story. Going through old photographs and papers in my house, I came across a monochrome picture

of a woman who looked familiar as I struck up a conversation with my mother, a new world of possibilities opened up in front of me.

The case studies in this paper have been taken from a social media project, The *Memory Gazette*. It was started as an initiative to focus on material memory and domestic heritage of South Asian origin. The idea was to bring out the lesser-known stories of families and individuals, covering history through a more personal lens. From household idols to typewriters and dusty old bookstores, the project succeeded in highlighting a number of fascinating stories that help us understand history in a more gendered and personalised way.

The **three case studies** highlighted here focus on three women from different parts of West Bengal. They had different lives and stories, but they all overlap in a certain area - preservation of memory. Due to constraints in research, the cases are being presented in a personalised manner, taking the help of family members and personal anecdotes. The observations from the same will be explained as a common sub-topic.

### **1.1 A World of Her Own - Lila Ganguly**

Born in the historical French colony of Chandannagar, West Bengal, Smt. Lila Ganguly was a prodigy by the time she was six years old. As a toddler, poverty forced her to move to a boarding school, and she started living in the Prabartak Nari Mandir. This is where her story began, a quiet path lined with successes and struggles merged into one. At 13, she became the first girl in town to ace her matriculation exams and earn a first division. Soon after this, she started working as a teacher in the school where she was growing up. As her life grew distant from her family, the school and all the people in it became her real family. At 21, Lila Ganguly graduated B.A. Honours and went on to complete her double Master's degree in Bengali and Sanskrit. With her fluency in languages and love for teaching, numerous girls of Chandannagar found their way into her life as young students looking for guidance. At one point, she was the headmistress of a school and a full-time tuition teacher, dedicating her days to teaching students and taking Prabartak into its glory days. With a husband, two young children and an ailing father-in-law at home, she became a superwoman with unlimited energy and an undying love for languages.



**Fig. 1. Photograph of (Late) Smt. Lilabati Ganguly. From Banerjee, Bratati. Featured in *The Memory Gazette***

In her final days, my grandmother, Lila Ganguly, developed dementia and forgot much of her eventful life. She was limited to a room with not much left to interest her. But on the good days, she would wake me up in between afternoon naps to talk about what happened at school that day. Or perhaps her sudden lapse of memory would lead her to ask me, “Am I not supposed to go to school today?” The school had been her temple, a place where she belonged, and no one could take it away from her. Sometimes, my 82-year-old grandmother would wake up at night and recite flawless Sanskrit shlokas as I completed my homework, thinking I was a student who needed her help. Till the very end, she was a teacher who believed that her world consisted of shaping young minds for the future.

The lapse of memory has always been an identifier of women’s memories. The painful parts of it are often buried away, causing gaps in narratives that are difficult to place together. For every accolade she earned, a personal struggle went unrecognised. Lila Ganguly was applauded for running a school and household together, but it was in her twilight days that she would reminisce about the poverty she lived in and the desperation of a father who had to send his elder daughter away to a boarding school. Her son and daughter would talk about the trouble they had at home, their mother running from pillar to post, compensating for lost time with the family because a teacher’s job was not the most glamorous in the mid-90s. She could never stop to think about her own tragedies because another success story was expected from her, another feather to be added to the school’s cap. The conflict here was very personal and worth remembering because she was not the victim of any external situation but her own. It was a

responsibility that was placed on her very young shoulders, and she continued to carry it for the next 50 years.

Memory works in mysterious ways for different people. For Lila, it was in the fading memories that her identity would shine through. Her lifetime of stories and incidents became the single string of sanity that helped her regain consciousness from a subconscious state of mind. She never cared much for the certificates that adorned the walls of the house she built or the people who would come to visit her some 25-30 odd years later to present her with another award. All she cared about was what happened to the school and how it was doing. Sadly, she could not remember that the school only remembered her presence through shared stories and knowledge of the books that she wrote during her days as the headmistress.

## **1.2 Head of The Family - Kalyani Chatterjee**



**Fig. 2. Photograph of (Late) Smt. Kalyani Chatterjee. From Ganguly, Jaba**

Janai is a small town in the Hooghly district of West Bengal that not many people are familiar with today. But it is in this small town that the story of a matriarch begins. Smt. Kalyani Chatterjee was born into a family of ten children into a not-so-affluent family. In this situation, she knew her role - to get married as soon as possible so her father had one less daughter to worry about. At 11, when she travelled to Chandannagar in a bridal procession into the locally popular and politically active Chattopadhaya household, she was not sure what was expected from her. The rumours in the locality were that she was too old to be a bride, and perhaps this



was her second marriage. But the simple girl's life changed when her mother-in-law, Radharani Debi, stepped in to welcome her.

The Chatterjee household was bustling with people when Kalyani arrived. She had nearly sixteen people to cook for on her first day as a bride and a very different image of how things worked. So when she was summoned to the kitchen by her mother-in-law, she was nervous. Radharani Debi was a woman of grit and power, clearly stating that her family was her first priority and no one should step out of line. Young Kalyani sat down for her lessons as a new member. Instead, she was welcomed with a thin copy of *Bornoporichoy* (translation: Knowledge of Alphabets, a book written by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar for beginners of the Bengali language). This was a welcome gift from her mother-in-law, who explained to her that she wanted all her daughters-in-law to learn to read and write before learning to cook. Kalyani's life would never be the same!

Years later, she would narrate the stories of her mother-in-law reading pages from books like Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath* or snippets from nationalist newspapers, as the wives cooked in the kitchen and started conversations around India's freedom struggle and what the Chatterjee family stood for. Chandannagar's identity as a French colony often overshadows the many stories of nationalist revolutions in the town. Kalyani's household was not merely a place of progress in women's education, it was a safe haven for numerous freedom fighters who sought shelter from the British. Radharani Debi raised a family of women who would stand up to British police and not let them search the house on the pretext that no male member was present. The 11-year-old girl from Janai became the flagbearer of quiet nationalism in the Chatterjee family and, later on, a feminist icon for the locality.

From a timid girl to a matriarch, Kalyani Chatterjee did not care much for material possessions that her family had married her off with, except one. Her uncle, a professional jewellery maker, had made a beautiful pair of armlets for her to wear on her wedding day. This stone-studded armlet was one of her most precious possessions that she had kept safe throughout her life. Towards the end of her life, she passed it on to her eldest granddaughter Jaba. She believed that a woman has to take the lead of the family, and if daughters are not cared for, no family can grow. Jaba was the closest to her grandmother, listening to stories of her facing police raids, hiding women who were being tormented for not bearing sons and talking to freedom fighters who would call Kalyani 'Ma' before leaving the house.



**Fig. 3. Armllets of Kalyani Chatterjee. From Ganguly, Jaba. Featured in *The Memory Gazette*.**

Jaba Ganguly, my mother, takes great pride in talking about the Chatterjee family and its intricate connection with Chandannagar and the nationalist movement. She talks about her grandmother with a mix of adoration and awe, claiming that she was the bravest person she has ever known. The pair of armllets are a reminder of what she learnt from her grandmother; that courage is the purest form of emotion that exists. The armllets have become a symbol of Kalyani Chatterjee's life in a complicated political environment. But it never interfered with her living a colourful life and raising a family that believed in service to the nation they called home. Here, the memory of the armllets overlaps with the memory of a woman who never backed down in the face of adversity.

### **1.3 Stories to Go Back to - Rani Prabha Talukdar**

Like many grandmothers and great-grandmothers, the date of birth of Smt. Rani Prabha Talukdar remains a mystery. Official documents mention that she was born in 1928 (perhaps 1929), with her place of birth being Chittagong, now Bangladesh. She grew up in a common Bengali household in a large family, married young and lived a fairly quiet life. But a single story about her stubborn and headstrong nature earned her the adoring title “angry young woman” of the family.

The Talukdar family moved to India before the 1947 partition and settled in Kolkata. Smt. Talukdar had a daughter by the name of Krishna, who was all set to get married. On the morning of the wedding, the mother of the bride realised that one of the most important items for the function was missing - the ancestral *sindoor-daani*, i.e. vermilion-holder. For married Bengali women, a *sindoor-daani* is one of her most important possessions - a dome-shaped wooden container in which she is to carry vermilion powder from her wedding day. In most families,

every new bride is provided with a new *sindoor-daani*, while some have an ancestral container that the mother passes on to the daughter.



**Fig. 4. Wooden *sindoor-daani* from Chittagong. From: Chowdhury, Diyasha. Featured in *The Memory Gazette***

The latter was the case for Rani Prabha, who wanted her daughter to have a *sindoor-daani* from a particular shop in Chittagong, which made the container for her wedding. Orders were placed and prepared, but some sort of logistical trouble ensued, and Krishna could not have the container in her hands on her wedding day. But her mother would not have it any other way! It was evening, and the guests had started arriving for the big moment. Rani Prabha held her ground, saying that she would allow the wedding to commence only when the *sindoor-daani* arrived from Chittagong. A mother holding up her daughter's wedding? The gossip game would begin in no time. Fortunately, luck was on the bride's side, and the *sindoor-daani* arrived before midnight, after which the mother gave her blessings to go forward with the ceremony. Years later, Krishna's daughter would also carry a *sindoor-daani* from that same shop in Chittagong on her wedding day. Thankfully, there was not much trouble with timekeeping owing to better modes of transport and communication.

This one particular story is something Diyasha Chowdhury, one of the great-granddaughters of Rani Prabha Talukdar, remembers her *Amma* by. The 90-year-old lady would exclaim with pride that she would not have that day any other way. And certainly not without that *sindoor-daani*. But the question is - why would a whole house of guests be held up due to a delay in

receiving a container? This is where the significance of material memory for women comes into play. A Bengali wedding has multiple aspects of material memory highlighted. Brides are to carry at least one item throughout the day that is connected to their ancestral heritage. This could be a nutcracker that belonged to an aunt or the mother's kajal container, and in case neither was available, a *sindoor-daani* belonging to the family. All of these are reminders of the bride's original home, where they belong, and where their identity lies no matter where they go.

In this story, Rani Prabha wanted her daughter to have a reminder of the home they had left behind. Chittagong was the place they belonged to, where the family's roots are. They may have moved away before the nations were divided up, but it did not mean the tragedy of losing one's national identity was any less. The brutality of a nation's partition and the memory of a place they might never find again is immensely powerful. Getting that one item from their homeland would be the perfect way to have a sense of belonging.

Smt. Talukdar sadly passed away in January of 2023 at the age of 95. The "angry young woman" is remembered with fondness by her large family of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Remembered as the woman who held up a marriage and yet had a sense of humour about it.

### Observations

The case studies above have three different angles -

1. Lila Ganguly - **Memory gaps and identity**
2. Kalyani Chatterjee - **Material memory through generation**
3. Rani Praha Talukdar - **Material memory as an identifier**

In the first story, no particular object has been focussed on. But the *oral narratives* from the person in consideration and the people who had been part of her life become the main sources of memory. Her *inner conflict indicates how memory is tainted with several colours* and can never be black and white. The formation of memories for women works very differently as they try to overlook a lot of aspects that, in hindsight, were the most significant details. They do not give much importance to hardships because what is a woman's life without a few hardships? The person's oral narratives and often scattered pieces of memory become the greatest source of understanding her psychological implications of a traumatic childhood and high level of stress in adulthood. Unfortunately, it was too late to recover all of her memories

to understand who the person was before she was lost to time. This is often the case with most women living through a complicated past, be it in terms of family or society.

Kalyani Chatterjee's story takes into account a small token, *a family heirloom, as a specimen of material memory*. Heirlooms are one of the most common examples of material memory, especially when discussing a woman's point of view. These are objects that stay within women of one generation to the other, giving each one who possesses it a sense of identity and belonging. The generational passage of memory thus becomes easier when there is an object to substantiate the claim. These objects are not quiet reflections of the past but often have more than one oral narrative to them. It becomes a way of honouring family traditions while bringing in sentimental value and a certain elegance of recounting history. In general, heirlooms can be termed as "positive reminders" of the past, something that people - women in particular - hold on to with admiration and love.

The final story, with the use of another object, tries to *reflect on the relevance of spatial memory*. It is not so much the object in focus; it is the place of origin and what it meant for women of a particular family. It highlights a mother's absolute determination to pass on a piece of her home to the next generation. Here, the object plays the role of an identifier, something that the women of that family carry with them, reminding each other that their roots are from a land that they might never see again. It has a tragic undertone of a conflict that tore up a country but brings in the nostalgia of home and reminds the women that there may be some good things to remember after all. The Partition of 1947 and 1971 are two very sensitive subjects for families who have lived through it. This story is a reminder that even if one did not suffer the direct consequences of the partition, at some level, they were all affected and alienated by a nation's political turmoil.

### **Keeping Track Of History: The Representation of Women**

A few questions remain unanswered as we try to draw conclusions about the place of women in history. The stories mentioned above talk about ordinary women who had extraordinary lives in their own ways. So, has the volume of unnamed women throughout history become a major problem? Is the background participation of women in conflict situations the main reason that they are not brought forward? Or, perhaps, the women themselves believe that their contributions are not significant enough to be known by the larger group of people affected by the actions?

In her essay, “*The Everyday Life of the Revolution*”, Srila Roy talks about the *overshadowing of women in a revolution* is often an attempt to highlight the extraordinary contributions at a larger level (Roy, 2007). She goes on to talk about women from the Naxal era in Bengal who were active political participants but stayed away from the spotlight throughout the time. 1970s Bengal still remain one of the most fearful intra-state conflict situations that took the lives of hundreds of young revolutionaries in extra-judicial killings. But one can’t help but wonder if only the deceased were hero-worshipped for giving up their lives. Stories of the women who had been actively assisting in the movement are only heard from the men who lived to tell their tales of the Naxal era.

In 2022, the Mahsa Amini Protests in Iran against the hijab mandate were one of the key highlights of global political news. Thousands of women took to the streets to protest the death of a young woman in police custody, which snowballed into one of the most active protests in Iran’s recent history. Closer to home, the 2019 Shaheen Bagh Protests in Delhi was an extensively women-led movement of non-violent protest where women came together to voice their concerns over the new Citizenship (Amendment) Act. These protests fall under the list of several women’s political protests in recent years, from abortion rights in the US and Europe to healthcare rights in the UK. But the story of feminist protests is nothing new; neither is the participation of women in political situations. The question we have to ask in the context of this paper is: “*Is it important for women to participate in major political revolutions to be represented?*”

Many do not focus on the angle of memory and talking about the past. Re-reading historical instances at this stage requires a thorough investigation of women’s role beyond the house, even if they were physically limited indoors. The stories that we grow up listening to, from grandmothers, aunts and mothers, are not meant to be just bedtime stories. The cultural significance of women’s memory through material culture and oral traditions could be the starting point of an entirely new and unexplored chapter of history. **Tracking these smaller, seemingly-trivial matters could be the missing perspective** that history needs. At length, these could be the connecting areas of political conflicts, where a larger picture is presented by giving accurate representation to all levels of society. While it may not provide an easier resolution for existing and brewing conflicts, it can be the middle ground for conflicting parties to see where compromises can be made for the benefit of the greater number.

## Conclusion

The perception of memory is different in different disciplines. While psychology categorises memory into short and long-term, sociology focuses on how memory can be collective and individual. While talking about history, the question of memory often becomes a source of unwinding the secrets of the past. Not so much as secrets but the missing links of people and events. As important as it is to study archival data and textual evidence to reconstruct an event of the past, memories - tangible like heirlooms and everyday objects or intangible as oral narratives - each one of these deserves a place in the archives as well.

While working on this paper, I had the chance to discuss memories of her past with my mother. As someone who loves to tell stories, she would start recounting her childhood days with her grandmother and siblings, the days she had to play the role of a young mother as the eldest daughter of the family and how her life developed around books and music. Through her stories, I realised that we both had too many similarities and differences at the same time. Growing up as a single child, I started creating an identity of my own, but my mother never had the chance. Her life was and still remains around her family, her memories centred on the highs and lows of what other people experienced.

This paper is one of the first attempts I have made to try and understand **how to place women in the grid of history**. As mentioned in the title, keeping track of the stories and building up an archive of the lesser-known sources. Through material memory and oral traditions of families, I hope to find common ground where women will have the chance to find their identity and reconnect with their own stories, no matter how insignificant they may seem. I would like to believe that this is the case with a lot of mothers and grandmothers who never knew who they were as individuals because they never got the chance. That remains the real tragedy.

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