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What happens when an interview is filmed? Recording memories from conflict

Cahal McLaughlin

Introduction

When oral historians and filmmakers set out to record stories using interviews, they are aware of how the agenda can be established by working conditions. Some of these we have a degree of control over, such as how the questions are posed, the nature of the immediate environment, and the level of trust between interviewer and interviewee, although even these can sometimes be very limited; and some of which we don't control, such as how recent the experience being described is and how long the participant has time to invest in the interview.

With filming, the agenda is also influenced by choices that stem from decisions taken about the how the camera is held (hand-held, tracking, or tripod), how the picture is framed and composed, who is in the frame and who is not, how the subject is focused, how light impacts on the image, where the microphone is placed and what sounds other than the human voice can be heard. During the recording, the very presence of the camera and microphone, as well as who else is present, influence how the story is told. As John Ellis has pointed out, this event is, 'an interaction between individuals at a particular time, each individual bringing to the situation their own expectations and understandings of what is going on, and how that will define how they ought to, and want to, behave.'¹. Here he identifies what oral historians have recently emphasized,

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¹ John Ellis, *Witness and Self-Revelation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 45.

that is, how the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is profoundly affected by the subject positions each brings with them and/or takes up². Editing also has a major influence, so that the length of the shots, the images preceding and following the shot, the accompanying soundtrack, the rhythm and the pace of the story, all set the tone for how meaning is constructed. Of course, the filmmakers' intentions are not always read as planned by viewers, but that is another subject.

I would add that the degree of trust required is of a higher standard than other media, in that participants in oral and written recordings can be less easily identified (this, of course, is not so if the participants are named). An image of one's face, as contemporary airport security cameras illustrate, is a unique identifier. It is also the case that we tend to remember faces before names when identifying others. While silhouettes can be used in certain circumstances, they can potentially diminish the contract of believability and the degree of engagement that viewers might establish. The consequence is that negotiations, arrangements and contracts are required to address this heightened awareness of recognition. This is particularly the case in research projects that take place in societies with legacies of widespread violence, where identification with a particular experience might suggest a political position and therefore vulnerability to danger in the present.

In this contribution I wish to explore how these medium specific conditions influence the interview and the interviewer-interviewee relationship by making use of films that I have worked on in Northern Ireland and South Africa, both of which experience

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² This theme is taken up extensively in Sheftel, A. and Zembrzycki, S. (2013) *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice*. Palgrave Macmillan. New York.

continuing instability related to their violent pasts. I will look at how participatory practices were required in order to build trust with those who had experienced violence and trauma in the process of recording and screening their stories. I will use case studies that show the need to adjust methodologies as contexts change: collaborating with individuals and with organisations, considering different exhibition requirements, and, most importantly, establishing participatory arrangements that offer as much collaboration as possible under each set of circumstances.

I will use the term ‘film’ to describe the act of audio-visual recording, because of its relatively common usage over time by documentary filmmakers, despite technological developments from film to analogue video and, currently, digital video. While there remain substantial differences in film and video recording, such as the quality of picture and costs, their effect on the enquiry undertaken here is very limited.

Participatory practices

Before examining in detail some of the production processes that I have been involved with, it is important to explain that most have a basis in collaborative or participatory practices. The relationships developed in these projects have a similar ethical approach to the concept of “shared authority”, to use Michael Frisch’s phrase,³ and are similar to the participatory practices of the National Film Board of Canada’s ‘Challenge for Change’ programme⁴. However, the degrees of collaboration with

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³ Michael Frisch, *Shared Authority: essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1990).

⁴ Barbash and Taylor recount the collaboration with Togo Islanders, who were invited to approve the final film edits before public exhibition. See Barbash, Ilisa and Lucien Taylor, *Cross Cultural Filmmaking: a handbook for making documentary and ethnographic films and videos* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 88.

those interviewed differed from each other for a variety of reasons that I will return to, depending, for example, on whether I was working with an organization or with individuals.

In each of the four projects that I use as examples, the *Prisons Memory Archive*, (PMA, 2005), *Unheard Voices* (UV, 2010), *We Never Give Up* (WNGU, 2002) and *We Never Give Up II* (2012, WNGU II), co-ownership agreements laid the basis of relationships with the participants. In two cases, this involved a third party, which acted as producer - WAVE Trauma Centre, Belfast, in the case of UV, when we recorded the stories of people who had lost a loved one during the 30 years of political violence known as the Troubles; and the Human Rights Media Centre, Cape Town, in the case of WNGU and WNGU II, when we recorded those who had survived violence during apartheid in South Africa and were campaigning for reparations. There are several reasons for these agreements. Apart from the ethical approach of establishing a trusting relationship when addressing politically and psychically sensitive issues from societies emerging out of violence, we were also aware that some of the constituencies that we were working with had a mistrust of mainstream media representation, with many individuals explaining that they would not have participated if the film had been for broadcast; we wished to allay their concerns by offering, ultimately, a veto over use of their image and voice. Further, since all of these memories result from traumatic experiences, the use of co-ownership, or shared authority, helped to minimize the possibilities of restimulating trauma for the interviewees⁵.

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⁵ Renos Papadopolous, who worked with survivors of Bosnian concentration camps, argues that 'The healing effect of story-telling, in its multiple variations, has always been a well known phenomenon'. (Papadopolous 1998)

Collaboration with participants usually began with an initial meeting to exchange views on the project, such as the motives and subjectivities of both parties, what we hoped to get out of the relationship, where the resources lay, what the film might look like and who the intended audience might be. Another crucial aspect was to discuss how the film would be produced. This involved what content the participant wished to contribute, how the images and sounds might be recorded, the aesthetic choices on offer, how narrative is created using editing in sound and picture, and how the length of the film could impact on their contribution. We also discussed exhibition possibilities and anticipated audience responses to the final film and to their contribution to it. Running as a thread underneath these explanations and discussions was an intimate exchange of trust. Each person explained, asked questions and listened. We expressed our preferences and compromises were reached in order to progress. This essential building of trust was crucial to the laying of a foundation for an enduring relationship that was to take us on a journey along recollections that ranged from poignant to painful to humorous to revelatory.⁶

Ireland

When we set out to produce the PMA, an online archive of recordings inside the Troubles' prisons⁷, we were aware that we were inviting those who had been in conflict in the past to share the same screen space. Difficulties that participants had to consider included whether such 'sharing' amounted to toleration or agreement with

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⁶ More detail on the films and their collaborative processes can be found in Cahal McLaughlin, *Recording Memories from Political Conflict: a Film-maker's Journey* (Intellect: Bristol and Chicago, 2010).

⁷ www.prisonmemoryarchive.com

‘other’ points of view, a sensitive subject in a society entering from, but not yet out of, decades of political violence. Negotiations took several years and involved the building of trust with several constituencies who passed through the prisons’ gates – prison officers, prisoners (loyalist and republican), relatives, probation officers, chaplains, tutors, artists, solicitors, journalists, etc. My own subject position could not be disentangled from the name I carried, which suggested an Irish Catholic upbringing. This was, to a degree, compensated for by my being based at Royal Holloway University of London at the time. This suggested a combination of insider and outsider identity, since I had an Irish Gaelic name and worked in an institute that bore the name of the monarchy. While not referred to on most occasions, the obviousness of it played out in one situation when I was informed that certain people would not consider taking part ‘because of your name’.

We had a clear idea that the empty prison sites would be used not only as stimulant for participants’ memory recollections, but also as key visual and audio markers for future viewers. In other words, the cells and corridors, the watch towers and exercise yards were to be seen in the background as the participants walked and talked their way around the site. The recordings were not intended primarily for a linear, intercut documentary and therefore were unlikely to require visual cutaways. The only cuts anticipated were when the participant wished to stop recording, when they said something they wished to withdraw, or a technical glitch had occurred. Otherwise the uninterrupted recording would be made available in its full measure. Out of 175 recordings that we completed in Armagh Gaol and the Maze and Long Kesh Prison, some lasted only twenty minutes, while others lasted four hours.

We chose hand held camera operation, with radio microphone sound recording. The first enabled flexibility as the participants moved in and out of buildings, hesitated and turned quickly, pointed to something off-screen, which the operator moved the camera to observe before returning to the participant. We chose cameras that rested on the operators' shoulder, so that point of view was usually level with the participant's eye-line, though differences in height between participant and operator was not always consistent! We chose radio microphones, so that participants were free from cables and were able to move about more freely, including turning their backs on the camera operator, while their voices continued to be recorded. The participants were to be framed in a medium close up for most recordings, but would inevitably change to a wider angle to accommodate quick movement or because it enabled a view of what was being discussed. We wished to minimise the number of crew and equipment during the recording: previous experience had taught us that a one-to-one relationship would offer the best potential for building confidence and revelation in an intimate exchange, creating more of a conversation than an interview. Broadcast crews can involve several people, including camera operator, sound recordist, director, interviewer, producer, assistant, etc. Some of these job titles can be held by one person, for example director and camera operator, but there are usually at least two or three in a broadcast crew, so the participant could feel outnumbered and unsure whom they were addressing. As well as attempting to avoid intimidating the participants by the number of crew, there was the possibility, and even hope, that the participant would move freely around 360 degrees; and the larger the crew, the more likely that one of them would get into the camera's view as it moved about.

The briefings before each recording involved explaining who we were, what the project entailed, and the agency that participants could claim in the session. We were to operate a life-story approach, which we evolved to encourage the participant to set the agenda and they responded with varying degrees of engagement with the process. Some found it more liberating than others, for example by co-directing the filming in the choice of where to go, what to say and when to say it, pausing when necessary, always knowing that the operator would follow their initiative. A good example is that of an ex-prisoner, Josie Dowds, who recounted raising her new-born child in prison and the moment she had to give him up (this can be seen at <http://prisonsmemoryarchive.com/armagh-stories/>). She began this sequence by walking along the top floor of the prison wing, her back to the camera, her hair blown sideways by a gust of wind from a broken window. The camera operator, Deirdre Noonan, followed her from behind as she descended the stairs to the next floor and then the next. A moment of creative inspiration occurred when Deirdre paused at the middle landing and tilted the camera up to take in a wide view of the first floor lined with cells, before returning to where Josie had been. The latter had moved on, so Deirdre followed down the stairs, catching up with her as she walked the length of the ground floor. Because the operator had been briefed that there would be as few cuts as possible, she kept recording as she descended the stairs and moved to catch up, keeping the image as steady as possible; we hear her breathing heavily with the effort. If this had been recorded for a linear film, I believe that Deirdre would have cut the recording at this point, rushed after Josie, and resumed recording once she had caught up. As Josie takes up the story again, Deirdre faces her with the light behind, creating a silhouette. The opportunity to move beyond Josie arrives as she steps back slightly, enabling the operator to place the light behind her and allow Josie to be seen with her

face light. During this new sequence, Josie moves along the corridor, stopping occasionally, as she seeks out the cell that she and her child were placed in. Deirdre steps gently around her, careful not to make any sudden movements, and attempting to keep the cell in frame and the light behind the subject.

The sequence ends as Josie moves off edging past the foot of the stairs. The operator moves alongside, momentarily cut off by the staircase, but restoring Josie to the frame on the other side of the staircase; this is an exceptional example of co-direction in choreography of movement as the interview arrives at the memory of the moment of letting go of the child⁸. This sequence validated our methodology of including the participants as co-authors. Because of the briefing beforehand, Josie had confidence in the camera operator following her lead, so that wherever she moved or positioned herself, Deirdre would continue to record her words and her movements from the most advantageous position. Not everyone co-authored to this degree, but those who did co-produced exceptionally rich recordings of their experiences.

On some occasions, the participant found it more helpful to remain in one place. A prison officer's widow, Carolyn, began by entering the Control Room, tears welling up as she re-entered the space that her husband had worked in: he had died recently of natural causes. She talked a little, but then expressed the wish to move on. When we arrived at the bottom of a set of stairs, she requested that she be asked questions, rather than take the lead in what to talk about. As she was one of the few participants whose previous experience did not involve moving around the prison, I asked her if she preferred to do a stationary interview. She agreed. The background of the hallway

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⁸ <http://prisonmemoryarchive.com/armagh-stories/>. For more information on the editing and response to the Armagh Gaol recordings, see Jolene Mairs, Dyer, 'Unseen Women: Stories from Armagh Gaol,' in *Challenging History in the Museums: International Perspectives*, edited by Jenny Kidd et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

was fading paint and the daylight from an open door shed diffuse light, which was preferable to the high contrast sunshine outside. She answered gently probing questions, based on what she had previously talked about. We talked for twenty minutes, before moving off to explore more of the prison. Nothing more substantial was said, but enough had already been recorded to satisfy her wish to remember sharing life with her husband, who had been under constant threat of attack because of his occupation. Carolyn was able to compose herself, focus on the topic and tell us what she wanted to say by standing just outside the Control Room rather than moving about (see *We Were There*). This is one example of where a participant decided to take up one position, rather than move about the prison site. In one other case, the participant was part-invalided and wished to sit down; in another, the participant chose to focus his story on the death of his hunger-striker brother and remained seated on the bed on which he had died. For others, the choice seemed to result from a desire to concentrate on the experience being addressed and for whom movement seemed a distraction. It was important that each participant felt as comfortable as possible in their chosen position or movement.

The majority of participants were recorded individually, but some preferred to be recorded along with someone else. Reasons varied from the wish to share the experience of returning to the prison with another ex-prisoner, or the wish to repeat the experience of visiting with another family member. We attempted to restrict the number to two for technical reasons – the cameras had two microphone inputs and we wished to minimise the equipment that operators had to carry around with them, because of the potentially long periods of recording; some individual recording

sessions lasted up to four hours⁹. Although we were aiming for medium close-up framing, when there was more than one participant this caused the operator to frame wider to keep both in shot. The participants, not infrequently, moved apart, forcing the operator to choose which one to keep in frame, although both remained on the sound recording. Gently panning between them was the solution when both spoke, but one person had to be prioritized if they spoke alone or both spoke in quick succession. We wished to avoid quick movement of the camera during a conversation, because of the risk of distracting viewers by setting up inappropriate camera dynamic. On one occasion, four participants wished to be recorded together. We chose two operators with two radio microphone inputs each. Problems arose when the participants moved freely about, as they were encouraged to, because crossing lines can lead to radio interference. Another issue that arose included the difficulty in camera operators monitoring the sound on headphones, as well as operating the camera. This occasionally led to either over- or under-recording of sound, although this did not make any of the recordings unusable, merely less pleasing to the ear. To address this, we could have used boom microphones, but this would have entailed doubling up the crew (one person to operate the camera and one to hold the boom), and we felt that this would have impacted on the intimacy of the relationship between recorder and participants(s). In retrospect, this is a decision that could have gone either way, but, because we wanted as consistent a methodological approach as possible, we used the radio microphones and kept the crews to a minimum.

When more than one person was recorded at the same time, and participants were given the option of being filmed alone or with friends or family, we found that they

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⁹ Holding a camera on the shoulder for up to four hours was a test that some operators found difficult to endure.

sometimes interviewed each other without any prompting. Two Probation Officers seemed to adopt the role of interviewer and interviewee as they walked easily about the site, while, in another case, one ex-prisoner used the opportunity to act as a guide to his sister, who had visited him regularly during his imprisonment, but who was now taken on a tour of the site. There was no consistent response to the camera presence, with some appearing less aware of what the camera operator was doing, while others turned to address the operator rather than each other.

The form and aesthetic differed considerably in another project based in Northern Ireland, when we worked with the WAVE Trauma Centre in producing a short film, *Unheard Voices* (UV), with those who had lost someone or been seriously injured during the Troubles' violence¹⁰. A residential weekend to become familiar with the production team and with each other was crucial to establishing trust; not only was this an opportunity to find out more about us and our motivations, but also for the participants to listen to each other, since they were going to share screen space and some of their stories might not sit easily with each other. We also followed this up with at least one individual meeting before the recording to discuss what, how and where to film. With a plan to have six 5-minute stories, our briefing with the participants involved deciding which aspect of their stories to prioritise and how they would like to visualise it. In one story, the participant, Lorna, decided to focus her story on how her husband, a police officer, lost his life in a bomb explosion and to return to the place of their first date as the visual story that would accompany her story. Two crew members were present, one to operate the camera and one to ask the questions, based on the briefing. We used a tripod and minimised equipment by

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¹⁰ For more details on this production, see Jolene Mairs and Cahal McLaughlin, 'Unheard Voices,' in *Documentary in a Changing State*, edited by Carol Mc Keogh and Djour O'Connell (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012).

relying on natural daylight rather than introducing an electrical lighting set-up, which might have undermined the informality we were aiming for. This entailed moving furniture to get the best advantage of light from the window on the participant's face, creating some shade to show texture on the skin, and framing close up to enhance intimacy for the viewer. Such an approach was used with each of the participants, creating continuity of style throughout the half hour film.

The visual sequences, which accompanied the interviews, aimed at self-contained mini-narratives, for example walking along the beach and driving to a memorial. These sequences were filmed separately and 'staged', in the sense that several takes were recorded in order to create the illusion that, for example, someone is naturally walking from left to right, in and out of frame, with the camera present merely as observer. Such 'staging' is common in documentary film-making and is a practice which reinforces the definition that documentary is a representation of reality, rather than a capturing of reality¹¹. Each edited section was shown back to the participant and consent agreed before combining in the final film. I will return to the editing process later in the chapter.

South Africa

In another project, I worked collaboratively with the Human Rights Media Centre, Cape Town, and the Khulumani Support Group Western Cape, in South Africa, producing two films, *We Never Give Up* (2002) and the ten-year follow up, *We Never Give Up II* (2012), on the issue of reparations after apartheid. When I first visited

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¹¹ See Paul Ward, *Documentary: the Margins of Reality*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 8.

Cape Town on a research trip, I had no plans to make a film (I carried a small camera as a research tool), but was asked to film one member seeking information on the police killing of her husband as she visited the house where he was shot dead by police. I didn't realize that I was being 'tested'. When later asked if I would consider working on a possible film on reparations, I was hesitant because of my outside status. 'What about South African filmmakers?' I asked. The reply was that filmmakers generally will not accede artistic control of their films, but that my previous work suggested that I would; my outside status as a European, white male, was countered by a preparedness to share authority. After several months of negotiation, we agreed to work together¹².

Both *We Were There* films structured their narrative around the stories of those who had experienced the racist violence of the apartheid state and used the more traditional intercut documentary form. At the start of each film, a half-day meeting with all participants was organized in the HRMC offices to discuss how the film would be produced; this included managing expectations, as well as the more obvious issues of structure, style and potential audiences. During filming, the producer, Shirley Gunn, conducted the interviews and the images were recorded in sit-down situations, with other images filmed later for use in the edit. One notable moment occurred in the second film when John, a survivor of torture at the hands of the police, described his experience when he was still a teenager. He is sitting in his living room and asks us, 'Can I show you?' As he steps off the seat and crouches down, he re-enacts the way he was trussed and hung upside down, before an electrical current was forced through his body. I had to zoom out quickly, but as smoothly as possible, to record this sudden

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¹² More on this process can be found in McLaughlin (2010).

movement and was relieved that the wide angle was sufficient to frame this emotionally powerful performance of his experience. Given that John uses English as a second language (his first is Afrikaans), he struggles to verbally explain the torture procedure, but makes it very clear by performing it for the camera. Such clarity for future audiences would not have been possible on audio or written text communication, without detailed questioning or explanatory notes.

On occasions, events occurred outside of the usual interviewer-interviewee exchange, which encouraged a more spontaneous interaction with someone other than the interviewer. For example, in the first film, we had been filming a survivor of torture, Brian, as he walked along a street in the lower part of Cape Town. By coincidence we were close to the Pensions Office that he had visited regularly to try to secure what he was entitled to, but had been denied. Spontaneously, we entered the office and he confronted a Pensions Officer, who was taking his lunch break. The anger that had been building up was released and he challenged the officer. Panning the camera back and forth between them, I was able to see both in medium close frame as one pleaded his poverty and the other obfuscated. It was a moment of 'liveness' in the film that complements the rest of the film's style of set-up interviews and cutaway images, allowing viewers to have more of a feel of 'being there' with the participants. The sense of engagement by audiences in the stories being told has many variables, including empathy, intimacy, visual evidence, trust in the storyteller, and circumstances of viewing. One aspect that may encourage such involvement is the sense of 'being-there'. An interview on its own, or with visual accompaniment (what might be called 'cut-aways'), is rarely as powerful in this inducement as a 'live' happening, i.e. not a pre-planned sit-down interview, but a 'chance' encounter, which

the audience feels is happening spontaneously in the moment. This may move the happening away from oral history towards documentary making, but, as the two examples above show, these need not be exclusive categories.

At each stage of the production process, we encouraged participants to consider how the material that they were contributing would be edited and exhibited, that is, how it might be seen by audiences outside of their community and the present, to consider how the interview, in Ellis's phrase, 'is not a conversation in the present so much as a message delivered to the future.'¹³

Post-production

It is useful to discuss briefly some examples from editing of the above film work, in order to address how meaning is constructed with the participants after the filming was over. Although the *Prisons Memory Archive* was not intended to be edited into a linear intercut film, some editing decisions remained to be taken. We decided to leave as much material as intact as possible; when a visually jarring moment appeared, for example when the operator bumped into a wall, we removed the visual judder, which we regarded as distracting, but retained the voice continuing the story. We also removed, by fading the sound and picture, the names of third parties, who may not have wished to be mentioned in a prison context years after they were released or had stopped working in the prison, especially given our inability to trace everyone mentioned. The exceptions we made concerned those who had died in the meantime or whose connection to the prison was already in the public eye. Each edited

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¹³ Ellis, *Witness and Self-Revelation*, 62.

recording was sent to that participant, who gave consent before making it publicly available. On several occasions, it was the participant who suggested removing the third party's name. We have had a small number of cases where participants have asked for their material to be either destroyed or have a moratorium placed on it. This is indicative of the sensitive nature of the recordings and their reception in a politically unstable society such as Northern Ireland, where the level of violence has been reduced considerably, but systemic tensions remain under the surface, occasionally surfacing. In one case, after a Prison Officer had been shot dead by dissident republicans, two ex-Prison Officers asked for their material to be withheld. In another case, one ex-prisoner asked for her material to be released only after she retired from work, because of the public profile that her post entailed. While both of these appear to be setbacks, and their loss deeply felt, they are also endorsements of our collaborative approach and provide evidence of our ability to 'share authority'.

In *Unheard Voices*, the main editing decisions concerned how to leave out most of the recording to fit into a previously agreed (with the producers) thirty minute film. We decided on a simple structure of six discreet stories of five minutes each. Most of the cutaway sequences were internally consistent and, not only enriched the stories being told, but also served to cover the, sometimes, heavy cutting that had to be used to reduce one interview from, say, forty minutes to five minutes. A good example of this method is when Mark's story about recovering from the loss of both legs in a bomb explosion is complemented by a sequence in the youth club where he continues to work. The young people's training in the ring, pounding the bag, or skipping in a group, is juxtaposed to his story of loss and recovery from violence. Each visual sequence was chosen, not only to complement the story of its teller, but also to create

an individual aesthetic environment for each story, so that audiences make the clear move from one story to the next. Each discreet edited story was shown and consent gained from each participant, followed by a private screening of the full thirty-minute film in front of participants and their families before public release. Panel discussions have accompanied screenings over the last few years where issues of trauma, justice and story-telling have been discussed. Each participant has sat on at least one of these panels, with some attending all events¹⁴.

In the *We Never Give Up* films, rough edits were sent to Cape Town and participants viewed and responded with comments. Some of these edits were screened to full meetings of Khulumani Western Cape Support Group (numbering up to one hundred people) and suggestions sent to our edit team in London via the producer, Shirley Gunn. For clarity of communication, I related directly to Shirley, and we compromised when conflicts arose. One example occurred in the first film, when three women are sitting next to each other, telling us of the burning down of their township by apartheid state forces and loss of family and property. The story of the burnings is repeated by a single participant, while the others' stories are of different events. I suggested that two stories of the same event were not needed and that maybe we should edit out one. The response was unequivocal; the burnings had been the largest traumatic event experienced in the Western Cape during apartheid and required emphasis. Further, the interview with the three women was the only time when more than one participant interviewee was on screen, which represented the

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¹⁴ For more on the production and reception of this film, see Jolene Mairs and Cahal McLaughlin, 'Unheard Voices: Recording stories from the Troubles,' in *Documentary in a Changing State: Ireland since the 1990s*, edited by Carol McKeogh and Dáire O'Connell, 29-41. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012).

sense of community which was affected and which survived collectively. These were convincing arguments and the film remained stronger for retaining both interviews.

Conclusion

It is our experience that there are no templates for filming stories from conflict, nor easy guidelines for dealing with the relationship between filmer and filmed. Each participant experience, each subject position of the filmmaker, each relationship between them, and each exhibition strategy will influence how collaboration is established and how the stories are filmed and exhibited. However, some underlying patterns emerged from the principles of co-ownership and transparency, which were especially necessary given the sensitive nature of the experiences being related. Ultimately, the right to veto their contribution at any stage of the process gave participants confidence that their stories would be treated with adequate respect and created a legal underpinning of the concept of shared authority. Also, transparency about the projects aims, membership, structure, process, resources, and motivations was crucial in establishing the trust necessary in such painful remembering and vulnerable encounters. The significance of these collaborations can hopefully be observed on the screen, that is, the trust between the participant and the film-makers encourages a more informed remembering and more confident articulation of the memories.

With the PMA, a life-story approach was preferred to specific questions. Given the range of experiences, including prison staff and prisoners, a similar methodology was

Commented [A1]: perhaps "negotiation" might be a better term here? I notice you hardly use this term in the article but is it not more negotiating that you do, than merely collaborating? They are quite different terms.

required to allow for consistency in methodology and analysis¹⁵. This project also showed that returning to the site of an experience can stimulate not only the participant's memory, making it richer, but also enhance the viewer's experience of observing the memory being performed in the environment that it refers to. As one ex-prisoner said, 'It is amazing what you remember when you come in here.'

Furthermore, creativity may be enhanced by input from the participants; this is illustrated by the confidence shown by some participants in the PMA, who appear to become co-directors, and not just collaborators, while *Unheard Voices* contains visual sequences that were chosen by the participants and work effectively to help viewers understand not only what occurred in the past, but also to see and hear how that experience informs the present. In a similar vein, the *We Never Give Up* films were discussed with participants in advance of the recordings and potential images and sequences considered and agreed. The films were also shown to the participants before their public screenings and amended to best reflect what the participants regarded as suitable representation. By bringing participatory practices to the collaborations, the question of uneven privileges and access to resources that result from one's class, ethnicity, region of birth, and gender is made transparent and more manageable.

When the films were screened to their participants, a sense of validation and public acknowledgement was apparent. In South Africa, the premiere at the Baxter Concert Hall in Cape Town was a spectacular affair with buses from the outlying townships

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¹⁵ For more on the value of a life-story approach to oral history, see Selma Leydesdorff et al., Introduction to *Trauma: life stories of survivors*, edited by Kim Lacey Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff, and Graham Dawson (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2004), 12.

bringing families and neighbours into the centre of the metropolis. With the PMA, a prisoner explained that watching his own recording enabled him to reflect more fully on the experience than he had been able to hitherto.

In order to address the political and psychic risks to the participants, we considered trust to lie at the heart of the relationships in the above productions. This trust was built through personal relationships, before, during and after production, but, crucially, underpinned by a signed agreement, which gives the participants co-ownership and, ultimately, a veto over their contributions. There is, of course, a risk to the filmmakers of losing stories, either through a moratorium or permanently, but this is offset by the reward of encouraging some constituencies, for example prison officers, who normally are reticent to be publicly identified, to be willing to contribute their stories. The visual nature of the recordings, therefore, is both a way of enhancing the storytelling, but also may be a limitation if it leads to concerns about identification. Because of the scale of the Prisons Memory Archive and its ongoing use in a society which is on an uneven journey out of violence, the relationship of co-ownership and collaboration with our participants means that this project will continue to be 'live' for many years to come.

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Peer review reports

Reviewer 1

The piece is at its best when it focuses on the actual negotiations between the film makers and the subjects of the film. Thus the example on page 16, where the participants insist on including the scene with all three narrators, is great. And the examples on p. 7-9, where the camera people accommodate to the participants' choices and movements give us a new sense of "shared authority" and what it can mean in the context of a film (and returns us to Frisch's initial conception of that term—that it's shared interpretive authority in the process of the interview itself). Sometimes, however, the focus on technological choices and aesthetic effects takes us away from the theme of shared authority and in fact works against it—it's too much about the film maker's choices and not about the negotiations between the film maker and the subjects of the film. The organization by individual projects also doesn't serve the material well—a topical organization in which each topic cuts across and draws examples from the various different films would allow the author to build an argument rather than simply offering a range of examples. In the context of the OHR, it might also be helpful for the author to actually reflect more directly on how looking at practices in film can expand our sense of what "shared authority" can mean. That would situate his examples in a body of thought and explain their relevance to our readers.

Because I was unaware of the focus on subjectivity in the journal edition, I had underwritten this aspect. In this version, I have provided more detail of my own subject position, e.g. 'Catholic', white, male, and westerner as it relates to NI and SA. I have included more about how trust - and shared authority - was established with participants prior to, during and post filming. I have also related the tensions in these practices to more contemporary writing on inter-subjectivity and what happens in the filmic encounter during each production. While accepting the possibility of cross-cutting themes, I have decided to keep the structure coinciding with the films, because I feel each film was produced under very different conditions and provides significant different perspectives.

Reviewer 2

This is a straightforward essay that considers how filmmakers have to make special efforts to build rapport with narrators and to accommodate equipment demands. I would, however, take issue with portions of the opening paragraph. I do not think that interviewers always have control over “the nature of the immediate environment and the level of trust between interviewer and interviewee.” Even under “controlled” circumstance one has to adapt to the environment for all parties engaged in the interview to be comfortable, and the level of trust is something that one is always working to build and that rests on many variables.

I accept the point about ‘control over’ and have taken a more nuanced position. I have also tried to put more emphasis on the relationship between filmer and filmed, focusing on participatory practices – a common thread throughout the work. I have also strengthened the conclusion with more emphasis on research findings as they relate to the overall journal’s theme.

Proposed suggestions for revision:

I think reviewer 1’s comments are most fair and useful. In particular I agree on the point about the focus on technological choices and aesthetic effects sometimes puts aside the theme of shared authority, and that it would be good to highlight the question of negotiations more. I also think it would be worth including some reflections, perhaps in the conclusion, about how looking at practices in film can expand our sense of shared authority. As for the structure, the suggestion to do a topical organization rather than an organization by individual projects makes sense, though I think the article still reads nicely this way, so I leave it to you to decide if you wish to take up that suggestion.

Finally, here below I’m including the main part of our revised introduction draft, which might give you a better idea about the special section and its main themes:

During a one-day interdisciplinary seminar on the 1968 protests and oral history, held at the University of Warwick’s Institute of Advanced Study in 2011, we discovered that many oral historians face challenges and difficulties related to the interviewer’s

ambiguous position as either inside or outside the interview.¹⁶ What relationships make an interview possible, and what does it mean to rethink oral history as a process that begins from inside the interview? How does a focus on the 'inside' – i.e. inside the interviewer-interviewee relationship in terms of our personal and cultural predisposition towards our interviewees – change our perspective and our possibilities for thinking about oral history and its historical products?

These questions have recently come to be at the heart of the reflection on the practical challenges of oral history research: from the complex relationship between individual and collective memory to an approach to oral history as 'humanistic', i.e. centered on the encounter of two human beings and depending on their reciprocal (and sometimes conflicting) agendas; on their cultural and social backgrounds; on the interviewer's own ambiguous position as either 'insider' or 'outsider' in terms of age, nationality or gender; and on the silences, mistakes, and discrepancies between reality and 'best practice' intrinsic to the oral history interview. Oral history is also increasingly understood as 'processual': a product that does not end with the experience of the interview but includes, and is intrinsically affected by, what happens before, after, and within the interview, both within the interviewer and the interviewee independently, and in their relationship.

The issue of the interviewer's position within the interview process, which was central to the discussions that took place during the Warwick seminar, was further explored during a number of successive events organized by the Warwick Oral History Network, founded in the wake of the seminar on 1968. Here the role of the interviewer again came to the fore in discussions about the range of variables (age, ethnicity, religion and gender) and the particular dynamics these can bring to the interview, both facilitating and impeding the quest to find out more about a person's life.¹⁷

At more or less the same time, scholars on the other side of the Atlantic were engaging in similar questions: thus a workshop – held also in 2011 and entitled "Off the Record: Unspoken Negotiations in Oral History" – led organizers Stacey Zembrzycki and Anna Sheftel to produce the landmark publication *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (2013), which focuses its attention on the interview experience, the oral historian's own practice, and the overall implications of the oral history

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¹⁶ The seminar was entitled 'Challenging dominant discourses of the past: 1968 and the value of oral history', and brought together students and researchers from a variety of disciplines who, if not all interested in the 1968 protests specifically, were united by a passion for oral history. The seminar proceedings have been published in a special issue of the Sage journal of *Memory Studies*, Volume 6 (1), January 2013.

¹⁷ A. Davis, A. Hajek and L. King. 2012. 'Gender, Subjectivity and Oral History, University of Warwick, 24 November 2011 *History Workshop Journal*, Vo. 73: 361-64.

relationship. Its approach was ground-breaking, not only because of its provocative quest for honesty, inviting the contributors to the volume to analyse the complexity of their role as interviewers, including shortfalls and discrepancies between theory and the reality of oral history practice. It also advocated a 'holistic' approach to oral history which makes self-reflexivity and the interviewer's background and subjective predisposition in approaching, experiencing and interpreting the interview a crucial factor, intrinsic to the oral history product.

During that same period, some individual articles that deal with related issues such as shared authority, intersubjectivity and ethics appeared in various journals.¹⁸ More recently, Zembrzycki and Sheftel continued their reflection on ethics and intersubjectivity in their contribution to the Oral History Review's anniversary section on the history of oral history, "Who's Afraid of Oral History? Fifty Years of Debates and Anxiety about Ethics".¹⁹ Clearly at this stage in the history of oral history methodology there is a growing interest in the interview process, the role of the interviewer in this process and the ethnography of fieldwork, and our special section contributes to this development. By placing emphasis on theory as a product of experience,²⁰ our special section analyzes the impact of self-reflexivity and identification on the interviewer-interviewee relationship within a variety of geographical and cultural research contexts, and focusing on the themes of sex(uality) and reproduction, on the one hand, and political violence and conflict, on the other. Conclusion - When we as researchers are confronted with such sensitive and complex topics, our personal, social and cultural predisposition towards interviewees (and the topic itself), as well as our position within the interview context as either 'insider' or 'outsider' (in terms of age, nationality, gender and class), become particularly relevant.

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¹⁸ See for example Erin Jesse, "The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings," in Oral History Review Vol 38/2, 2011; Alistair Thomson, "Moving stories, women's lives: Sharing authority in oral history," in Oral History Vol 39/2, 2011; Stephen Sloan, "On the Other Foot: Oral History Students as Narrators," in Oral History Review Vol 39/2, 2012; Celia Hughes, "Negotiating ungovernable spaces between the personal and the political: Oral history and the left in post-war Britain," in Memory Studies Vol 6/1, 2013; Mary Stewart, "Exploring family reactions to lifestory recordings," in Oral History Vol 41/1, 2013; Summerfield, P 2016, 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice' *Miranda*, no. 12, pp. 1-14, and also the special edition 'Performing the Self: Women's Lives in Historical Perspective' of Women's History Review, 2013.

¹⁹ Oral History Review, Volume 43/2, 2016.

²⁰ Off the Record, p. XVII

In sum, we intend to further the discussion initiated by *Oral history off the record* as follows:

1 - a shift from a central focus on self-reflexivity and on the interviewer to the impact of self-reflexivity on the interviewer-interviewee relationship. More emphasis will be placed on the specific challenges of and tensions within the interviewer-interviewee relationship with regards to the insider-outsider relation, personal identification, gaining trust, and sharing authority (me: during the filming process) (for Cahal: I think the last two issues are most relevant in your individual paper). What happens to the oral history product when the interviewer is, for example, an outsider/insider in terms of culture, age but also in terms of power relationships?

2 - a broader focus exploring a variety of socio-cultural contexts in different geographical environments. How does a humanistic approach to oral history work out in different, geographical contexts and in the two outlined themes (ie the private/intimate and conflict/violence respectively)?