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“Oral History and Emotions”

Behind the Transcript, Beyond the Recorder: Notes from the Diary of a Research Assistant

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Introduction

The documents of oral history are always the result of the relationship of a shared project in which both, the interviewer and the interviewee are involved together, if not necessarily in harmony.

Alessandro Portelli¹

The “shared project” of oral history underlines what makes it “different”. The content of oral sources, Alessandro Portelli argues, depends largely on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of questions, dialogue, and personal relationship.² Charles T. Morrissey underlines that the key question in assessing an oral history transcript is really not how much material does it provide for history, but rather, how well did the interviewer do with the circumstances affecting him and the material he had to work with.³ An oral history interview transcript or an audio recording thus needs to be looked at as not merely a source in itself but also what made this source possible at a particular time and space. This calls for exploring and studying traces which lie behind the transcript and voices which remain unheard in the recorder.

¹ Alessandro Portelli, “What makes Oral History Different,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 70.

² Portelli, *Ibid.*, 70. Also, see Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985).

³ Charles T. Morrissey, “On Oral History Interviewing,” in *The Oral History Reader*, 113.

Oral historians have widely discussed the power dynamics within an interview situation and also varied forms of negotiations which take place in the presence of translators and Research Assistants.⁴ In such discussions, we hear the implication of the presence/absence of a Research Assistant (RA) in an interview space from the lens of an oral historian who is often an “independent” or “dependent” interviewer in the situation. What this study wishes to introduce is what having-and-being an RA in an oral history project brings to various relationships that evolve in an interview space while doing oral history. What does it mean to be an RA rather than an interviewer in his/her own right in oral history projects? What does it mean for oral history projects to rely on RAs?

This article attempts to make visible the emotional labour and painful contradictions that can be involved in RAs’ “work” with oral history projects. It needs to be emphasized that there are emotional consequences not only for the interviewer and the interviewee but also those who mediate this conversation as an RA or a translator for whom listening involves “work” for which he/she is also paid for. While the existing literature on oral history discusses how a translator’s presence influences the interview,⁵ there is a silence on the kinds of dilemmas the presence of the interviewer poses for the translator or the RA. How does working with RAs co-produce, and impact on the various relationships that evolve in the space of the interview? Does it impact the narratives we hear or the translations we read?

⁴ Amongst the most recent work, see Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki ed., *Oral History Off the Record: Towards an Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁵ See Nadia Jones-Gailani, “Third Parties in ‘Third Spaces’: Reflecting on the Role of the Translator in Oral History Interviews with Iraqi Diasporic Women,” in *Oral History Off the Record*, 169-83.

In this article I put together and reflect upon my experience of working simultaneously in three different kinds of oral history projects between 2014 and 2016. The diary notes I use as an archive in this article were written during my initial forays into these oral history projects as an RA. These diary notes were personal and it was only later that I decided to put these together in the form of arguments for writing a paper for a conference on oral history in 2016. Apart from the diary notes, I use here the notes scribbled during and after the interview sessions, the pre and post interview off-recorder conversations with people and a few thoughts on my comforts and discomforts as a female during the fieldwork in an urban space. This article thus looks back upon the traces which are hardly noticed after the transcripts are “ready.”

The three research projects I focus on in this article each had a different thematic focus, different settings and expectations from the role of an RA. In the first project, I was concerned broadly with looking at the linkages between poverty and education through life stories of women in an Industrial Training Institute [ITI] in the NOIDA region of Uttar Pradesh [UP] in India.⁶ The second project was on exploring life stories of engineers from Dalit backgrounds in private companies in NOIDA.⁷ In the third project, I assisted a non-Indian researcher trained in geography in taking oral history interviews in the Gurgaon region of Haryana with a range of people from garment workers, domestic workers, and automobile workers to landlords, property dealers, trade unionists and municipal councillors. The focus of this project was on studies of

⁶ The interviews were taken under the Transnational Research Group’s broad project “Poverty and Education in Modern India.”

⁷ The interviews were taken under the research project, “History of Dalit Movement & Labour Movement in India” of the Integrated Labour History Research Programme at the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, NOIDA.

land, labour and urban development in Gurgaon.⁸ In all of the three projects, most of the interviewees were migrants from UP and Bihar. My familiarity with the region and the language spoken there provided me with the flexibility as well as limitation in shifting between the insider and outsider status in my conversations with them.⁹

Access

As Alessandro Portelli says, “The field situation is a dialogue, in which we are talking to people, not studying “sources;” and that it is largely a *learning* situation, in which the narrator has information which we lack... There's a lot more to be learned by leaving ourselves open to the unexpected than by a repetition of our own conceptualizations.”¹⁰ Each interview situation is a text in itself requiring different modes of access. While the requirement of an institutional letter explaining the purpose of the interview was common to all the three projects, each project called for approaches specific to their themes in locating the interviewees. In the project on exploring links between poverty and education, the interviews were conducted at the campus of National Vocational Training Institute for Women in NOIDA during the last months of their ITI course in which most women were very anxious to get jobs. However, it was not planned to focus on these months of their academic year. Given certain institutional rules and regulations, I could interact

⁸ The interviews were taken for the doctoral research project of a non-Indian researcher on Land, Labour and Urban Development in Gurgaon.

⁹ For a comprehensive understanding of how the ‘insider’ status of a translator allows participants to carve a ‘site of resistance’ see Jones-Gailani, “Third Parties.”

¹⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (New York: SUNY Press, 1990). See Introduction, p. x-xi. Also see Portelli, “On the Uses of Memory, as Monument, as Reflex, as Disturbance,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 49, no. 30 (2014).

with these women after taking permissions at various levels and then a teacher was asked by the authority to “choose” girls who could be interviewed. In my off-recorder conversations with them, these girls perceived the interviews as something which would provide them with links for a job or would “solve” their problems (*dikkat*). In spite of all the explanations about the purpose of the project, such expectations continued even in the post-interview calls. Given the “non-event” context in which the interviews were taken, such expectations were very much part of the “unexpected” from the perspective of the interviewees.

In the second project, my intention in speaking with the first generation educated Dalits who undertook technical education in reputed colleges was to explore how they make sense of their lives as they “exit” from agriculture and enter modern offices as engineers. It was suggested to me to contact Human Resource [HR] Executives of the companies and explain the purpose of taking oral history interviews before speaking to any employee (Dalit/non-Dalit) of the company. The HR executives’ reluctance to share any detail about the identities of the employees made me then approach interviewees through employees of the company at food outlets outside the office spaces during lunch breaks. My presence, as an interviewer, in their office space was looked upon by the interviewees initially with doubts about the purpose of the interview, and then, with subsequent sessions, with expectations of job networking in the city.

While the interview situations in the two projects discussed above expected me to maintain secrecy about what an interviewee spoke about, or regarding the mediators who referred the interviewees names, these expectations were hardly part of my experience in the project in which I assisted a non-Indian researcher. In this project, I was required to confirm time

and venue by speaking to a list of the interviewees given to me by the researcher. The researcher's list often included names referred by a range of mediators, mostly trade-union members and their contacts. A brief information about the "chosen" interviewees and in some cases, specific details about their roles in a strike, etc., along with a set of pointers, were all shared with me before going for the interviews.

Unlike my fieldwork experience in the first two projects, I never encountered a sense of suspicion about the recordings of the interviews taken with the non-Indian researcher. In addition, most if not all of the interviewees were comfortable with the presence of the recorder. One of the interviewees said, "What will he do taking this recording to his own country?" I observed this sense amongst them that the recorded interviews would be "taken away". It seemed that there was no fear of the recordings being leaked to the people they talk about in the interview. Jane Mace¹¹ and Marjorie Shostak¹² discuss the issue of the wider audience whom the interviewees talk to or address their story.

Interview location

Oral history requires multiple sittings with an interviewee in same or different locations. The location of the first session of the interviews were, in most cases, decided with the aim of having an introductory session and fixing appointments with the interviewees for subsequent interviews. Location was one of the crucial factors in deciding the themes which could be taken up during the interview.

¹¹ Jane Mace, "Reminiscence as Literacy: Intersections and Creative Moments," in *The Oral History Reader*, 393-40.

¹² Marjorie Shostak, "What the Wind Won't Take Away: the Genesis of Nisa—The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman," in *Ibid.*, 402-413.

All the interviews with the women in the ITI were taken at different locations within the residential campus of the institute after an introductory session with them outside their classrooms. After a few sessions, they were comfortable with meeting me in their hostel rooms, terrace or canteens for subsequent sessions of the interview but in absence of their roommates or friends. There was an interesting exception though. One of the interviewees called me at night after the first session of the interview to let her roommate also sit when I took her interview. This was because her roommate taunted her saying that she was being interviewed since she is poor and from an uneducated family. She told me that her roommate assumed that the interview had something to do with finding a good job which she was hiding from her. This troubled her and hence the last session of the interview eventually turned into an accidental group interview. The locations of terrace and canteen provided possibilities for a more relaxed conversation when the interviewees wanted me to “chat” switching off the recorder. These off-recorder conversations were also the space in which they revised certain things they said on the recorder. Inconsistencies, corrections and modifications give multiple voices to the interviewee’s narrative.¹³

In the second project, the engineers, after the initial interview session in their office spaces, modified some of their responses to questions on caste. The initial conversations did not have a mention of caste in their responses in spite of some of the questions referring directly to the theme. They might have wanted to hide if not forget what Portelli says, “traces of

¹³ For a study of the ways in which Polyphony becomes a way of analysing different voices and giving space to a multiplicity of viewpoints see Joanna Bornat, Parvati Raghuram and Leori Henry, “Oral History Voicing Differences, South Asian Doctors and Migration Narratives,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 49, no. 30 (2014): 60-66.

experiences” of caste speaking to a person (myself) within the office space. What made them hide their experiences in the initial sessions of the interviews in the space of the office? Was caste a secret in their everyday in the office? This silence not only brought forth strong links between the interview locations and content of the interview but also opened up new avenues of inquiry in the project.¹⁴

While interviewing with the non-Indian researcher, the locations of the interviews were at times fixed beforehand by him, or his approach was to explore the location, talk to people randomly and figure out who was “appropriate” to be interviewed for his project. The latter approach was deployed primarily during interviews about land acquisitions. Our initial experience in the field made us see village elders (mostly male) as repositories of information. These old men were usually found sitting in groups at *Dharamshalas* (Hindu religious rest houses) around *hookahs* (smoking pipes). The interviews about land acquisition eventually turned out to be the narrative of a group of males, except for one or two cases.

Interviews allow us to hear, if we will, the particular meanings of a language that both women and men use but that each translates differently.¹⁵ The questions around land were never reciprocated by the females in the houses we approached for interviews. During the fieldwork, an elderly man sitting at a *hookah* corner asked me, “Why are you concerned with the questions around land? You are a woman and you should not roam around in the village asking such questions.” I often encountered such situations while exploring the village for interviews. I wrote

¹⁴ For an understanding of roles silences play in shaping both our research projects and outcomes see Alexander Freund, “Toward an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History,” in *Oral History Off the Record*.

¹⁵ Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses,” in *Ibid.*, 165

to the researcher asking, “What kinds of access do a female/male RA provide and at the same time prevent in doing fieldwork/taking interviews?” A part of his response was, “I think a lot of my ethnographic work on land politics was done with young men around my age – socialising, going to pubs, going to weddings, hanging out as a group of men in the village, chatting, playing cards etc – I don’t know for sure – but I imagine that this avenue of research would be much more difficult (although certainly not impossible) for a woman to engage in.”¹⁶ During many interview sessions in Gurgaon, I observed women holding themselves back from crying out their pain in the presence of a male researcher not only in the space of their house where other family members too were present, but also in other interview spaces.

The *hookah* corners were often the location of male interviewees for questions around land acquisition, and the house for interviews of women. The males in the house always came forward to speak with us on questions around land and would also prefer sitting around during interviews which were specifically conducted to document women’s experience. When we asked a woman sitting at a shop in the afternoon (because her husband was taking a nap) questions around land, she said, “If I speak about land and my in-laws come to know about this, they would think, am I not getting enough to eat that I am interested in issues concerning land in the family?”

Women would hardly sit alone for interviews within the space of the house. In most cases, her husband or a female friend took the initiative to “introduce” her to us and they preferred being around throughout the interview. Unlike the space of the ITI where women sat

¹⁶ E-mail message the author, 16 February 2016.

with me alone during the interview sessions and shared stories about their lives, the space of the interviews with women workers in Gurgaon was surrounded by family members or neighbors and friends. A critique of their married lives which came out overtly in the former, were spoken indirectly in the latter case, mostly in the case of domestic workers. The female garment workers were interviewed at the venue of the trade union offices on Sundays where they used to have their regular union meetings. The presence of co-workers and union members around often influenced their articulation of issues during the interview. While women spoke about issues in the family tied to their everyday at the workplace, men were silent on family issues except answering certain profile questions about members of the family.

Our presence at the venue of the meetings of the workers provided us access to speak to a number of workers, but there were limitations at the same time. The researcher preferred speaking with them through “direct questions” about work conditions and other issues at their workplace. Hence the interview questions were confined to specific themes. In spite of my interest to learn more about the workers beyond the “direct questions” referring to “what happened, why and how,” the researcher’s schedule constraints and his priorities to cover a range of voices limited the questionnaires to factual questions, the response to which might have been different otherwise. This is not to suggest that my interests were incompatible with that of the researcher but the time constraints on his part made us “extract” facts from the interviewees in many if not all the interviews, rather than talking about complex web of feelings and contradictions behind these “facts.” At times, I feared mishandling certain questions I was supposed to translate during the interview given the time constraint. Unlike the other two

projects, my interview strategies in this case were conditioned by the specific requirements of the researcher.

The change in the spatial location of the interviews throughout the day during fieldwork in Gurgaon was enriching in the sense of coming across contrasting situations on the same day; but at the same time, left me with severe emotional instabilities. The spatial shifts were mostly guided by the need to cover a range of experiences within a limited time frame of the researcher's project. After listening to the stories of land acquisition or legal battles around it or stories by women of their experience during the strike or their everyday at the workplace, I was hardly mentally or emotionally prepared to interview property dealers who would see the city of Gurgaon through the frames of "development" and "success." The encounter with "new" spaces for interviews was not just about a different physical setting. The journey from slums to sectors to middle class residential houses was emotionally disturbing for me. I had to distance myself from this disturbance to be able to do justice to my job as a translator. As a Research Assistant, I had to acquaint myself to different settings in a single day and build a rapport for interview with different groups of people. How does one deal with this emotional shift, along with the spatial, while working as an RA in oral history projects?

Language, Emotions and Questions

As Alistair Thomson argues, a crucial recognition among oral historians in recent years is that the interview is a relationship embedded within particular cultural practices and informed by culturally specific systems and relations of communication.¹⁷ Oral history interviews do not

¹⁷ Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History," *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 581-595.

merely require seeing and hearing but other senses, too, which are invoked during interview situations. While the interviews with women in the ITI and with the engineers which were taken by me alone gave me space to flow with the interviewees' emotions in the narrative, it was challenging for me to do so as a translator for the non-Indian researcher.

Suroopa Mukherjee observes that “one of the constant refrains one gets to hear in oral history practice is the ‘experience’ of ‘living’ through pain. How do we listen to pain? Are we equipped to listen to pain?”¹⁸ It was extremely difficult to do justice to my translation “work” while listening to the pains of the interviewee in the vernacular. While leaving the narrative un-translated for long would make the researcher a bit impatient, given his quest to know the interviewee's response to his questions, my job of immediately translating the narrative made me negotiate with my emotions. I had to distance myself from different kinds of emotions in that moment and translate not only her narrative but also her feelings into a summary. I observed that while I would translate and summarize her narrative to the researcher, the interviewee would not only listen to this translation carefully but also “recover” herself from emotions that went into talking to us about her pain. I often saw women wiping their tears hiding from us while I was translating her narrative. It was difficult dealing with the discomforts of articulating the narrative from the vernacular into the form of “information” for the researcher through translations during the interview. The necessity of the translations at that moment often felt like an unavoidable “disruption” in the flow of the conversation during the interview. Do such unavoidable

¹⁸ Suroopa Mukherjee, “Listening to Silence, Reading Between the Lines and Creating Archives, Why is Oral History Not an Independent Discipline?,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 49, no. 30 (2014) : 73-4.

disruptions affect the interviewee narrative? How could one unpack these disruptions which get hidden under the “translated narrative” for the purposes of research?

The complex web of asking-listening-registering-translating often carved an uncomfortable space between the vernacular and the translations during the interview. This was observed by the researcher, too. In an email, he wrote that “sometimes having an RA at all can prevent quite a lot of information as it can create a sense of overt formality which is un conducive to a relaxed conversation.”¹⁹ At the same time, he also wrote, “I think interviewing women with a woman RA often elicited conversations which were more open about sexuality, gender relations, non-traditional aspirations than if I were to speak with a woman on my own— where conversation would more directly be about the questions I was asking.”²⁰ He agreed with my observation that when he spoke with the female interviewees he didn’t know during the fieldwork, he hardly engaged with them in a conversation or dialogue and rather asked questions for information. “There are certain issues with being a white, foreign man with dodgy Hindi which can elicit a particular type of overtly formal conversation from people,” he wrote to me, “so having a female RA who someone can relate to by gender if nothing else, was helpful in having more relaxed conversations.”²¹ The dilemma of the presence/absence of an RA for the purposes of oral history interviews is evident here.

¹⁹ E-mail message to the author on 16 February 2016.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Furthermore, it is important to remember what Dana C. Jack says, “The researcher must always remain attentive to the moral dimension of interviewing and aware that she is there to follow the narrator’s lead, to honour her integrity and privacy, not to intrude into areas that the narrator has chosen to hold back.”²² During the interviews with women in the ITI, one of the interviewees always preferred to speak with me off recorder to share her pain of domestic violence and cry it out. It was only after some time that she asked me to switch on the recorder so that I could do my “work.” During an interview of a female interviewee in Gurgaon in which she was talking about her painful experience of divorce and the subsequent difficulties, one of the questions the researcher asked me to translate/ask was, “Why is she still wearing symbols of marriage?” Given the nuances of an intimate narrative within a certain cultural context, it was difficult finding ways to “translate” such a question. It is not only language but also the emotions ingrained into it which could prevent certain narratives to be part of a translated interview. We discussed it later that such questions evoke memories which may leave the interviewee with pains after we have “departed.” Luisa Passerini²³ cautions us against ignoring the problems of post-enquiry. She argues for the need to ask, what happens to this memory which we have evoked?²⁴

²² Anderson and Jack, “Learning to Listen,” 170.

²³ Luisa Passerini, “Memory,” *History Workshop*, no. 15 (1983): 196.

²⁴ The question resonates in Miroslav Vanek’s work on Czech oral history in which he places a distinction between journalism and oral history. See Miroslav Vanek, “Parallels, Divergences and Crossroads, Czech oral History and Global Perspective,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 49, no. 30 (2014): 51-2. Also see *Paul Thompson*, “The Voice of the Past,” in *The Oral History Reader*, 21-28.

Each interview was a chapter in itself teaching better ways to frame and reframe questions. The timings, locations and the level of rapport with the interviewees were crucial in deciding the ways questions were to be worded. I preferred making a list of themes on which questions could be framed during the interview rather than having a set of prepared questions. These themes were often re-shuffled and new themes were added as per the context. For instance, when I approached women at an ITI in NOIDA, my brief was to look at the linkages between poverty and education through life stories of these women. I was not prepared for their preoccupations with their family life.²⁵ This is not to suggest that they remained silent on their educational history: instead, the story of education was plotted around marriage in their narrative. The set of themes I intended to frame my questions around were no longer relevant to the “unexpected” context of the interview.

In the project on interviewing engineers from Dalit background, I had to approach them with questions on their experiences of working in the private sector companies rather than questions around caste (which was one of the major concerns of the project) to be able to get an appointment for interview. In addition, few interviewees asked me to summarise the questions of the interview before starting the interview on the recorder. It was difficult putting together a mixed bag of questions having no idea about the issues which the interviewee may find uncomfortable answering within the space of the office. At times, I encountered similar situations during interviews in Gurgaon. In most cases, the researcher would either brief me the themes to be covered beforehand or share a detailed list of questions to be asked during the

²⁵ James Clifford alerts us saying that there is of course, a myth of fieldwork and the actual experiences hedged around with contingencies rarely lives up to the ideal. See James Clifford, “On ethnographic Authority,” *Representations*, no. 2 (1983): 119.

interview. The specific requirements of the researcher's project sometimes gave a sense of certainty about what he wanted to get from the interviews.

In addition, in many, if not all of the interviews on experiences of a strike, the researcher preferred excluding "facts" of the strike from the interview questionnaire due to time constraints. I often wondered if, apart from the constraints of the time, the reliability of the "facts" relating to the strike was also a concern. It needs to be underlined that subjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more visible "facts."²⁶ Portelli says, "The oral sources are not always fully reliable... Rather than being a weakness, this is however their strength: errors, inventions and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meaning."²⁷ Oral history is always "incomplete" and can never be "false," as the oral historian is not looking for confirmation of 'facts.'²⁸ Paul Thompson answers his question of "believe it or not?" for oral history narratives by saying, "we need both to believe and to doubt, to make sense of what we can believe and also of what we must doubt and to bring the two together in a new interpretation which fuses both history and memory."²⁹ Just as the interviewer needs to be aware of the emotional energy which may accompany telling, he says, she must also be respectful of the emotion invested in *not telling*. He

²⁶ Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 67.

²⁷ Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 2.

²⁸ Indira Chowdhury, "A Historian among Scientists: Reflections on Archiving the History of Science in Postcolonial India," *Isis* 104, no. 2 (2013) : 377. Also see Chowdhury, "Speaking of the Past, Perspectives in Oral History," *Economic & Political Weekly* 49, no. 30 (2014).

²⁹ Paul Thompson, "Believe it or Not: Rethinking the Historical Interpretation of Memory," in *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, ed. Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Ecklund Edwall (University Press of America, 1994), 12.

reminds us that memory contains both facts and myths and that both are meaning structures of consequences to the individual and to the listener.

There were moments during interviews particularly with women when certain questions were responded by the interviewees with a whisper or a gesture or requests to simply switch off the recorder. What was strikingly common in the interviews with women across projects was that they would often slow down or whisper or employ euphemisms while talking about sexuality. Given such gestures by them, I had to alter the content of the question asked by the researcher while doing translation: for instance, the question about markers of marriage as mentioned before. In addition, it was too challenging to translate the research questions of the researcher for different groups of interviewees in response to their questions about the purpose of the interviews. During interviews in the ITI, when an interviewee was narrating her stories of domestic violence off-recorder and crying out her pain, it was difficult to even think of an interview with a questionnaire.

Conclusion

An analysis of the stories behind the transcript and beyond the recorder as documented in my diary have attempted to foreground the need for taking into account the implications of mediations involved in doing oral histories through an RA's narrative. Unlike the first two projects, the presence of the employer in the third one made me realise varied limitations in my role as an RA. The simultaneous involvement in all the three projects made obvious the commonalities and differences in my roles as an RA, which were not very strictly defined. While I was aware that the interview situations would be demanding, both intellectually and

emotionally, I hardly knew what my boundaries were as an RA. From my very first oral history interview experience to the last one, I could see in retrospect through my diary notes how not only my role as an RA evolved with the “work,” but also I, myself, as an individual grew with this experience. The conversations with my project instructors about various anxieties while doing oral history interviews shaped my understanding of the “work” of doing oral history.

In all the three cases, my role as an interviewer, translator, transcriber and proof-reader provided me opportunities to hear and revisit the entire interview situation again and again. Each of these works evoked varied kinds of nostalgic emotions. The work of doing transcriptions and translations not only added layers of meanings to the interview narrative every time I would revisit the audio, but also complicated my understanding of the power dynamics within an interview situation. These different levels of “work” raised many questions and also regrets for having initiated certain conversations. The anxieties about “incompleteness” of the interviewee’s narrative often troubled me while doing transcriptions and translations. However, what I saw as “gaps,” “silences” or “mistakes” during the interview sessions surprised me later with new avenues to think about the narrative’s voice. One of the questions which remain unsettled to me is, “how do I deal with post-interview expectations of the interviewees as an RA in the oral history projects?” In other words, do our post-interview “responsibilities” end with the formal agreement signed as an RA with the “owners” of the projects?

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