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THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW – A RELATIONSHIP AND SPACE OF TRUST[1]

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The oral history interview is a "multi-layered communicative event". It is a unique, active event, reflective of a specific culture and of a particular time and space. Interviews, more precisely biographical interviews, are the tool I have been using for decades. The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is, therefore, an essential question for me. I interview people to find out what happened to them, how they felt about it, how they recall it and what wider public memory they draw upon. Focused on the biographical narratives, as well as in-depth and repeated interviews, I have constantly faced ethical and moral questions in accordance with my role as a listener, and as a partner in the interview, but also as a scholar with the goal of using the interview in my scientific work. In my text, I would like to develop Hourig Attarian's inspiring ideas on self-reflexivity, which brings to light the grey zones that we encounter in our work. This is often a difficult and fragile process. It is central to the connections that I create with the interviewees in my projects. These people always affect the course of my work, but also me personally. This balancing act is an exercise. I try to understand my own limits, I try to push my own boundaries, and assess how each of these circumstances impacts my research.

Keywords: oral history method; biographical interview; relation; vulnerability; trust; emotions

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The oral history interview, more precisely biographical interview, is the tool I have been using for decades in my research. The oral history interview is a "multi-layered communicative event" (Abrams, 2016: 13). It is a unique, active event, reflective of a specific

1 This text was written as part of the project APVV 16 0345 *Current Images of Socialism*.

culture and of a particular time and space. It is a process where both actors are searching how to tell and how to listen. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee is an essential point for me. I am interviewing people to find out, similarly to Lynn Abrams, "what happened to them, how they felt about it and how they recall it" (Abrams, 2016: 78). What interests me is the dynamic that develops between the actors in the interview and how that is impacted by cultural memory of the interviewee's country.[2]

Focused on biographical narratives, as well as in-depth and repeated interviews, I have constantly faced ethical and moral questions about my role as a listener and as a partner in the interview, as well as being a scholar with the goal of using the interview in my scientific work. When I am conducting interviews, I become aware of the vulnerability of my partners in the research process, the interviewees and their families and of my own vulnerability as well. Ruth Behar reminds us that "[to] write vulnerably is to open a Pandora's box" (Behar, 1996:19) and Hourig Attarian wrote that self-reflexivity brings to light the grey zones we encounter in our work (Attarian, 2013: 77–80). Without sharing this grey zone, it is impossible to provide the entirety of information and the complex experience we obtained from an interview. I decided to share here some of the challenging issues which I have faced and tried to solve in the course of my research.

For me, an interview is an event where, through the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee,[3] a memory narrative is actively created in a concrete moment. It is created as a response to the whole series of external references that are brought to bear in the interview; the interviewer's questions, the interviewee's familiarity with media representations of the past, personal prompts, and many other factors. To understand the interview itself, it is important to look for answers to such questions: who is telling, why, when and to whom?

The relation of the interviewer and interviewee and emotions are the crucial determinants in my work. My interviews are emotional – some more, some less, nevertheless, emotions are a part of my research. I try to study the emotional contours that shape my listening in different situations. I constantly negotiate how I listen, what I can and cannot hear, what I am able to understand and what I am not. For me, the emotional relationship that develops in the interview has a lasting impact on both the people involved. I am aware that the stories I have heard changed the sense of myself (Attarian, 2013: 78).

I WAS HONOURED TO LISTEN TO THE ENTIRE STORY

The first situation I want to share in this paper happened during my long-term qualitative research in the Jewish community in Bratislava (from 2006 to 2017). It was focused on Holocaust survivors' memory. This research was a continuation of my

2 I am referring here to Aleida Assmann's concepts of communicative and cultural memory. For me, communicative memory is mainly a social network and thus can be understood as a social construction through which interpersonal relations and conversation are created and sustained. Cultural memory is carried by the symbolic media, and functions as a collective symbolic construction that is kept in motion through social communication and is strengthened and appropriated through individual memories (Assmann, 2016 :19).

3 Valerie Yow, Joanna Bornat as well as Henry Greenspan wrote about the interview as a collaborative effort or as a two-way process. See Yow (2006: 64), Bornat (1998: 191), Greenspan (2010: 217–262).

previous work which began in the mid-1990s. At that time, I had been working in the oral history research team in Slovakia, which conducted, for the very first time, Holocaust survivors' testimonies.[4] The experience I want to recount is connected with the interviewee's and interviewer's emotional boundaries, and trust and vulnerability issues. I want to be reflective and as vulnerable as possible in that moment.

Since 2006, I have been visiting the Holocaust survivors' Senior Club at the Jewish Community Center in Bratislava. They usually met, and continue to meet on Wednesday mornings. At that time, I led the Holocaust Documentation Center (HDC)[5], which is housed in the same building as the Jewish Community Center. On my first visit to the Senior Club, I was introduced to the club members and gave a presentation about my work. Some of them knew me from the previous oral history project. We were partners in the interviews, or they were aware that I was part of the research team. Some of the survivors saw me for the first time. I presented the main goals of the HDC and spoke about my own research work. The lady who led the Senior Club explained to me before the meeting that club members didn't want to speak about their experiences during the Holocaust at club meetings. However, she was convinced that sharing of their common experience could help the survivors live their lives with better quality.

At the end of my first visit I asked if they were interested discussing the home and homeland issue next time. They agreed. That was the starting point for new research. The Senior Club members created something like a focus group where they discussed various topics. Step by step we were creating together a space of trust.

After 2008, they decided to share their Holocaust stories in the club. They invited me to the audio-taping. It was an especially challenging research situation. I interviewed a survivor and the other club members were the audience. The Senior Club members honoured me with their confidence and I taped a few interviews with people who had never made a Holocaust testimony. I conducted these interviews surrounded by other Holocaust survivors, members of an in-group (Aviram, 2009: 2–3), with similar memories. I was aware of their key role. They helped the interviewee withstand the telling, but they also helped by listening at the same time. As I was focused on the communicative memory (Assmann, 2016: 13) of this special group, I felt this group-recording to be crucial for my research (Thompson, Bornat, 2017: 320). A narrator, a Holocaust survivor, a traumatized person, needs a listener. However, primarily, the narrator needs "bravery support, and the emergence of a self-help community to create a more open and forgiving climate the necessary cultural framework for trauma narration" (Abrams, 2016: 184). The Holocaust survivors' Senior Club members and I accomplished this. During this collective interview, I experienced a situation that I wish to share.

One of the people who decided to deliver their Holocaust testimony for the very first time was Ms. T. She had not given an interview to any research team which carried out oral history research in Slovakia up until that time.[6] The day before our interview was scheduled, some of the club members called me. They explained to me that Ms. T. lost

4 The project entitled Oral History: Fates of Those Who Survived was the very first project in Slovakia after the Communist regime fell in November 1989. More see: Vrzgulová (2018: 55–56).

5 The Holocaust Documentation Center was established as a Civic Association in 2005. I was the Director of the Center from 2005–2017. For more information, visit: www.holokaust.sk

6 In Slovakia, two oral history research projects were carried out in the mid-1990s. The first was entitled Oral History: Fates of Those Who Survived and the second was a Milan Šimečka Foundation project (1995–1997), which was a part of the international Yale University research. The video testimonies of the second research were a part of what is now the Shoah Foundation Institute – Visual History Archive.

her small son during the initial selection in Auschwitz and she would not discuss this. They warned me not to go deeper into the selection issue in the camp during the interview. I understood the situation. The interview went successfully. The interviewee spoke slowly, but with determination. There were long stretches of silence, a silent cry and sorrow. Her description of the arrival at the Nazi camp Auschwitz-Birkenau was brief; only a few sentences. She said that immediately after arrival they took things out of her hands. Men were separated from women and this was the last moment she saw her parents and her husband. She stayed together with her sister. She spoke her story looking into my eyes, observing my behaviour, my reactions. I taped the interview. The next week I received another warning. Ms. T. wanted to tell me her whole story. "Are you prepared?", the head of the club asked me. To be honest, I was not sure, but I agreed. At the club meeting, I sat close to Ms. T. surrounded by the rest of the club members. She said: "I want to tell you the whole story." At that point, she went directly to what happened upon her arrival in Auschwitz.

I thought that I needed to be strong. I needed to be able to fully control my emotions. However, my interviewee probably saw the fear in my eyes and my unspoken wish – please, please do it quickly! She only said a few sentences. The content was as follows: When she arrived at the camp, she had a blanket in her hands. But there was somebody in the blanket – her little baby. The small package was taken away from her. She lost the baby and survived.

I kept crouching at the table, looking her in the eyes, tears running down my face. She fell silent and after a while, I said: "Thank you for your trust."

It was one of the hardest interviews I ever made.

To be an interviewer in a group of Holocaust survivors, a woman – a young mother – who was the age of their grandchildren, with no Holocaust background, with some professional experience and skills was a big challenge. It was an oral history interview where I was surrounded by 15 witnesses. My interviewee decided that I was able to hear the worst episode of her life, her fatal loss, which I would then be able to understand with empathy. I do not judge her. She trusted me. Perhaps she chose me as a "medium" (intermediary) to bring the story to the public space. During our second session, she had brought one of her private, secret stories to the audience (Abrams, 2016: 185). On the one hand, I felt honoured, on the other, I felt very vulnerable. I have had experience with these hard, difficult memories for ten years, and I know that stories about children are the most emotional. I know that it is sometimes impossible to hear them without feeling pain. After the session, Ms. T. thanked me publicly for my help and assistance. I will never forget this interview. It was not taped (there was no intention to tape[7]) and I was only able to write up my notes the following day. I thought it was important to assist my interviewee in voicing this horrible experience. That was my plan and I am glad that I carried it out to fruition.

Why had survivor changed her mind? Did she decide that I was the right person to talk to, that I would really be to understand her story? Actually, she did not tell me a story at all. She briefly described in a few words a crucial moment as an additional aspect of her memory from the previous interview.

I sometimes find myself reflecting about this interview. This was a situation where I experienced the literal meaning of Ellie Wiesel's words: "between the survivor's

7 In this concrete case, I became convinced that the interviewee wanted to tell the whole story only for my sake. Therefore, no recording was made, I wrote the notes after the interview.

memory and its reflection in words, his own included, there is an unbridgeable gulf" (Greenspan, 2010: 14).

I knew that I am not a psychoanalyst; I was not offering a talking cure to a patient. But I did attempt to create an environment where the interviewee would feel comfortable (Abrams, 2016: 84). This has been my attitude since I have been conducting interviews with Holocaust survivors.

Ms. T. was probably wondering how she should best communicate her experience and her fatal loss, as she searched for the right words. However, at the same time, she was struggling with the fear that the traditional idea of the woman-mother role, which highlights the mother as a person who protects her child at all times, could put her in "a bad light". Because she lost her child in one crucial moment, she wondered if I was able to understand completely what had happened on the ramp during the selection process that took place upon arrival.

Henry Greenspan highlights that Holocaust survivors do not recount in a vacuum. They are always telling to an actual or imagined audience of listeners. What survivors say, how they say it, and whether they say it at all, depends on their perceptions of those listeners, as well as on the ways the listeners have made their own hopes, fears, and expectations known (Greenspan, 2010: 42). At the same time, there is the impact of the wider social discourses (e.g. of cultural memory), and the influence of this context in which my interviews were done.[8] Testimonies play an important role in the construction of communicative and cultural memory in a country, thus they can also create new conditions for further research. Monika Rice examined and demonstrated how geopolitical context and public discourse in a country can affect memory (Rice: 2017).

This particular interview was conducted at the time when Holocaust survivors' fates were becoming a part of cultural memory in Slovakia. Memories of Holocaust survivors were published as books and documentaries, as well as part of films. They were present in the media and in educational materials as well. Ms. T. knew that I had been involved in Holocaust research for 10 years. She could be sure that I would understand what the arrival at Auschwitz looked like. She tested my reaction and values during the first interview. She was aware that there is knowledge about the Holocaust in Slovak society. I suppose that these were the facts which influenced her at the time.

There are many books and papers written by scholars as well as survivors, dealing with the same question. How could we understand stories recounting inhumanity, torture and brutality that surpass our understandings?[9] We can never understand because we did not experience it – "memories can be raw and emotional, either for the interviewee or sometimes for the interviewer" (Sheftel, Zembrzycki 2010: 192). I agree. We never fully understand, but we can listen with empathy and interest so that the interviewee feels comfortable and secure during the interview. We can try to create a space where the interviewees dare to share their memories and feelings. We can try to understand, and become closer to them. Holocaust oral history research brings about

8 Annette Wieviorka reminds us that it is necessary to study the conditions under which the testimonies were produced and how changing conditions can influence oral history narratives over time (Wieviorka, 2006).

9 For example, Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (1996); Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (1985); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History: Writing Trauma* (2001); Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimonies: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1991), Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out. History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (2003); in addition to many others.

the dilemma of whether to be silent or cry. It is about bringing testimony and searching for words and meanings at a point when the narrator and/or the witness, breaks down, followed by a mix of silence and audible crying. It can last rather a long time. Should an interviewer intervene, or not? The matter depends on the dynamic of the interview. As G. Hartman says: "not everything in the interview…is controllable. In fact, the one dogmatic principle we have for the interviewer is: never take the initiative away from the witness" (Hartman, 2002: 497).

I have used all my skills and knowledge to create a safe space for my interviewee, a "testimonial alliance" (Hartman, 2002: 495–496). This concrete interview was completely an interviewee-led one (Sheftel, Zembrzycki, 2010: 194). The interviewee was in charge of the dynamic and the timing. My role was to listen to her and observe her non-verbal cues. She took on this role in a way that allowed her to share her story.

How should I interpret this experience? What lesson can be drawn from it? And what about the interviewer and her emotions? Is it unprofessional when an interviewer who is overwhelmed by emotions can barely continue the interview? Is it an irreparable failure when the interviewer does not hide her feelings? These difficult questions are not only connected to Holocaust research.

In my research, I want to be honest and open. In this concrete interview, I showed my vulnerability and the interviewee was able to tell what she had decided to tell. I am aware that it was my expertise in combination with intuition that influenced my decision at the actual moment.

As a listener, the impulses that shape my every interaction are the feelings I sense in the narrator and those that I myself experience. As for me, the emotions are no longer only abstract observations of what a narrator faces in his/her recounting. They are challenging key players affecting the narrator and the listener alike. It is necessary to look critically and deeply at this relationship using reflective analysis to better understand what such a narrator-listener collaboration offers.

Ms. T. recounted to me her "entire Holocaust story" and for her, it was a breaking point. After that experience, she decided to speak about her fate publicly in Slovakia. She gave several interviews, but you will not find the description of the first selection episode at Auschwitz that she provided in our joint interview anywhere. She did it once "publicly" (in a safe place surrounded by Holocaust survivors and me), and it was an important step for her. However, she does not wish to repeat what happened or go through the story again.

Today, I know what I should have done as follow-up, yet I did not do so. I should have gone a few days later to request an additional interview. I should have offered both of us more space for talking about this experience and our joint effort to bring her story to the public. However, I did not want to do it that way. At that time, I felt that the whole situation should be her time – so she could speak for the first time publicly with no further agenda.

CONFLICTING VALUES OF THE INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEWEE

The second challenging and instructive situation I experienced came in 2016. I conducted research focused on current images of socialism.[10] There were moments when I, as an interviewer, felt discomfort. I was facing a situation where I needed to make sure that

10 The author is a leading member of the research project Current Images of Socialism in Slovakia. It is

my personal values did not conflict with those of my interviewee. The question was: How should I react to such a situation and the potential for conflict?

I have carried out several pre-interviews and interviews related to "socialism memory" focused research. The gatekeeper in some cases was my mother, who is a teacher by profession. The interviewees she brought to participate in my research were mostly teachers as well. A challenging interview took place with one teacher from my hometown. We had known each other for years. I had created a picture about him long time before the research – for me he was the man whose values are close to mine. The biographical interview and subsequent semi-structured interview were very productive and interesting, full of valuable information, comments and thoughts. I felt good and satisfied because not every conversation has such an atmosphere. My interviewee represented himself in the interview as a critical person with a strong ethical code. My image of him after the conducted interview remained exactly the same.

When we finished, I switched off my recorder. We were talking and enjoying our tea. During this informal talk, my interviewee disclosed that he voted for a right-wing political party: the People's Party Our Slovakia (Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko, ĽSNS) in the recent parliamentary elections in March 2016.[11] I felt like I'd been struck by lightning but I made no comment. I have been involved for decades in Holocaust memory research as well as Holocaust education. I also participated in numerous discussions and presentations dealing with the increase of nationalism and extremism in current Slovak society. Therefore, I could not believe what I had just heard.

The image of my interviewee that I had created in my mind was one of a tolerant, fair and honourable person. From my perspective, his voting decision did not match this image. I was very surprised and disappointed at the same time. I thanked him for the interview and hospitality, trying to leave his home as quickly as possible. I was aware that these feelings were not at all professional, but I could not stay there any longer.

I was hardly able to listen to the taped interview, and I could not look at the transcript for two years. My disappointment was stronger than my professional interest. I was not able to continue with this interviewee. As a result, one piece of information I had received off record influenced my research for two years.

From 2016 to 2018 I was part of a civic initiative, Forgotten Slovakia, which was focused on right-wing party voters and supporters. During numerous public discussions, we tried to speak with them. We talked about the danger this political party represented for democracy. I met members of this party and dozens of its voters and fans. And gradually, I started to think about my interviewee and I changed my mind about renewing contact with him.

Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki wrote about their experience with a narrator whose memoirs included a racist perspective (Sheftel, Zembryczki, 2010: 208). They decided not to continue their research. Their research was community-oriented and there were additional reasons why they did not revisit their interviewees. However, they draw attention to Lawrence Langer's thought that our partners in research, our

focused on biographical narratives of those who lived under the government of the Communist Party in Slovakia. See: http://www.uet.sav.sk/?q=en/current-images-socialism.

11 I was shocked because – from my perspective – the leaders of this party are questioning the Holocaust in Slovakia, defending the wartime Slovak State and its representatives who were responsible for it. They share racist prejudices and promote violent solutions to current social problems. They are against the European Union values which are very important to me and I supposed the are important to my interviewee as well.

interviewees, are human beings and not heroes who are beyond human weakness. They are capable of being wrong, insensitive, and even racist (Sheftel, Zembryczki, 2010: 203). I agree, as scholars, that we need to try to understand our partners in research. We should ask "why"? Why the interviewees made an intolerant comment or supported an extremist policy program although their values and opinions appeared to be democratic, and how it is important to their identity.

Tony Kushner argues that by examining the life stories of Holocaust survivors, we need to draw our attention to finding the answer to why this opinion or attitude – racist, extremist – is a vital component of the interviewee's contemporary sense of self (Kushner, 2006: 291). I think this attitude is relevant for work with all biographical narratives.

From my point of view, the research with the teacher from my hometown remained unfinished because of my perception/my reaction of our conflicting values. On several occasions, I tried to rethink the entire research situation and my reaction. I decided to continue. I came back to the taped and transcribed interview after two years and searched for the answer "why?".

Why did this man decided to vote for right-wing extremists? After a few times listening to the taped interview and reading the interview transcript, I believe I found the answer.

My interviewee's character as created by himself in the interview was like this – he was a Christian, a proud Slovak, and he was socially aware. He was very critical about unsolved social problems in Slovakia. The same values were presented in a majority of the candidates' electoral programs and were also emphasized in the political program of the ĽSNS. However, only these right-wing party representatives spoke at the same time very critically about the ruling political parties in Slovakia and the Slovak National Uprising[12] – they called it a Black Day in Slovak history. After analyzing the interview very precisely, I became convinced that it was the combination of the criticism for the corruption scandals and unsolved social problems in the country as well as the party's critical attitude toward the Slovak National Uprising which influenced my interviewee's decision-making during the parliamentary elections in 2016.

The historical event known as the Slovak National Uprising is promoted in the public discourse of Slovakia as one of its most important historical moments. Slovaks fought against the Nazis and the totalitarian regime in Slovakia during WWII for human and democratic rights. Uprising representatives were behind the members of the Slovak Army, also civilian fighters – partisans. My interviewee had obviously had a bad experience with partisans, as he recollected during the interview: "...the partisan movement is a very problematic issue. I can say it responsibly. If citizens did nothing wrong to the Wehrmacht

12 The Slovak National Uprising (in Slovak, Slovenské národné povstanie, SNP) in 1944. The Uprising was an armed insurrection organized by the Slovak resistance movement during World War II. This movement was represented mainly by members of the Democratic Party, but also by social democrats and Communists. It was launched on 29 August 1944 from Banská Bystrica in an attempt to resist the German troops that had occupied Slovak territory. Its political aim was to end the authoritative regime of the Hlinka´s Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana, HSĽS) and incorporate Slovakia into a renewed Czechoslovak Republic. The center of the Uprising was Banská Bystrica. The Uprising ended after two months with the defeat of the rebel army, which then partly transformed into guerrilla warfare. The SNP was a crucial historical event of modern Slovak history which was re-evaluated after the Communist regime fell in November 1989 from different perspectives and ideological reasons. I wrote about the various interpretations (Vrzgulová, 2017: 297–312).

or did nothing wrong to Russian soldiers … we didn't have to worry about soldiers; because there was discipline in the army. And if the civilian went to complain to the commander, the commander could punish the soldier. But we were afraid of the partisans… there was an atmosphere of fear… as there (between partisans, note MV) was nobody who could help us."

This recollection suggests that he had a bad experience with partisans who operated in his village surroundings during the Uprising, although he did not provide a concrete example or story. However, this could be the reason why he gave his vote to extremists who openly criticized the partisans' movement.[13]

After a two-year break, I decided to revisit my interviewee. I planned to go deeper into our interview. I would ask questions that would be challenging for both of us, but I now felt more relaxed and prepared (Norkumas, 2013: 81–96).

CONCLUSION

The oral history method is a challenging way to obtain interesting subjective data and obtain recollections that are closely connected with the identity and memory of the narrator as well as the listener. As Alessandro Portelli reminds us, "What is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings" (Portelli, 1991: 52). This statement also exemplifies my position in the mentioned research activities.

To make an interview is a process where two persons are involved and attempt to build a relationship and a space of trust, where both can afford to be vulnerable. How successful they are in the process shows up in the result of the interview itself. The memories – both individual and collective – exist in a symbiotic relationship with the public memorialization of the past. We must always be aware that memory expressed in an interview exists within a field of memory work that is going on at many levels in our society (Abrams, 2016: 79).

In the first example, I showed that sometimes the interviewer has to enter a risky situation, has to show vulnerability and fragility, as well as empathy and desire to understand. This can be the way to create a safe space for the interview where the most difficult life stories can be shared. The example of repeated Holocaust survivor interviews with audiences of the in-group members described the procedure used for creating a space of trust. The emotions were the key players there and the interview was successful in the way that the interviewee desired and that the interviewer accepted. I found out that in some special cases, stepping out of my comfort zone helped me obtain an interview which the interviewee deemed as complete as possible. As an additional value, it provided valuable information about my own limits and skills.

The second example showed a situation where the interviewer's values conflicted with those of the interviewee. This finding took place off the record, after a pleasant and productive interview. I discussed how, in some cases, the interviewer is unable to continue the research with such an interviewee. I needed time to rethink the entire

13 The representatives of the right-wing ĽSNS have another reason for this criticism. The Slovak National Uprising was an armed protest against the political regime in the war-time Slovak State (1939–1945). The representatives of the current ĽSNS have strong views toward this war-time state; they admire its policy and political representatives, mainly the then President Jozef Tiso.

research situation, analyse the interview and find the answer: why the interviewee is following these concrete values and attitudes and why they are important for him. The finding of these answers was important for moving on in the research. It is useful to remember that the most difficult interviews are with people who are close to our lives and this teacher was such a person for me (Norkumas, 2013: 94–95).

The interviewees, our partners in the research, have their biases and opinions, as well as prejudices, as we interviewers also have. They could be challenging for the research we try to do. I believe that it is important to share them in our writing. To avoid discussion about these issues only obscures and misrepresents the stories we heard in the interviews. We have to search for the answers as to why our interviewees have particular values and opinions. Sometimes it can be a rather challenging, complicated and lengthy process. We have to have our expectations, ideas, and prejudices under control, and be calm and have distance at the same time, although it is challenging in some cases. We should not make moral judgments, we should try to understand people's lives, and how their experiences have formed their identities and values (Sheftel, Zembryczki, 2010: 204).

Making an interview is an adventure. We do not know how our views will coincide or conflict with those of our interviewees, and how we might react to such potential conflicts. This kind of research thereby demands "the highest level of both self-awareness and sensitivity to others," forcing us to constantly contemplate our methodological approaches and the ethical implications of our interviews (Yow, 1995: 66). We must not forget – "people are more than just a sum of their stories" (Sheftel, Zembryczki, 2010: 193).

To understand the interview situation and the interview itself is a complex process. We need to balance the interviewee-led attitude and the effort of deep listening in the interview. After more than 20 years of interview practice, I believe in long-term and repeated interviews with our partners in research. This is the way to collaborate in a relationship and space where sensitive and difficult questions can be discussed with trust, understanding and empathy. This is my way.

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