

Journal of the Canadian Historical Association Revue de la Société historique du Canada



“Don't Speak For Me”: Practicing Oral History amidst the Legacies of Conflict

Joy Parr

Volume 21, numéro 1, 2010

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1003040ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1003040ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association / La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Parr, J. (2010). “Don't Speak For Me”: Practicing Oral History amidst the Legacies of Conflict. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 21(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1003040ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet essai revisite l'idée voulant qu'il soit possible de partager l'autorité dans la pratique de l'histoire orale, particulièrement lorsqu'il est question de sujets difficiles ou traumatisants ayant profondément marqué les témoins, qui ne savent alors pas quoi raconter à l'interviewer. Il explore les réflexions des anthropologues, des ethnographes et des traducteurs en regard de la relation entre l'interviewer et les interviewés.

“Don’t Speak For Me”: Practicing Oral History amidst the Legacies of Conflict¹

JOY PARR

Abstract

This article revisits claims that it is possible to ‘share authority’ in the practice of oral history, with particular reference to disturbed and disturbing sites, in which witnesses have been marked by difficult times and may not ‘know what they will tell’ the interviewer. It also explores reflections by anthropologists, ethnographers, and translators on the politics of such relationships.

Résumé

Cet essai revisite l’idée voulant qu’il soit possible de partager l’autorité dans la pratique de l’histoire orale, particulièrement lorsqu’il est question de sujets difficiles ou traumatisants ayant profondément marqué les témoins, qui ne savent alors pas quoi raconter à l’interviewer. Il explore les réflexions des anthropologues, des ethnographes et des traducteurs en regard de la relation entre l’interviewer et les interviewés.

How should oral historians retune our practice when we are conducting research amidst the legacies of conflict? Guided by what anthropologists and oral history practitioners have written about their field work, I have been reflecting on the issues involved in collecting and presenting the testimonies of participants and witnesses whose lives were shaped by such legacies. My own historical research engaged these questions, sometimes in unexpected ways. I work now as a health geographer amongst residents unsettled by environmental change and the uncertain aftermath of industrial activity. I began as an historical researcher learning of and from the child immigrants who came to Canada between 1868 and 1924 to work as agricultural labourers and domestic servants.² I listened to them and followed the rich and rare paper trail of letters and case records left in the files of the state and philanthropic institutions that had sponsored their migration. I knew elders who had come to Canada as Home

Children when they were my neighbours in rural Ontario. However I only established relationships with them as human subjects after we met in Britain, when they were visiting the British orphanages in search of home and I was reading the case records documenting their displacement. From my start as an oral historian, I was interviewing people carrying a considerable legacy of pain, labouring under burdens of barely suppressed and thoroughly repressed memories. This point of departure gave a distinctive turn to how I weighed my responsibilities to the profession and to those who helped me, as well as how I framed my pedagogy as a graduate teacher.³ Lately, I have published *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953–2003*, a book founded in six case studies; five rely upon oral histories, my own and from public repositories.⁴ Our colleague, John Milloy, a Trent University historian of Canada's aboriginal peoples, writes that on ethical grounds he did not seek out oral histories for his research on Indian residential schools.⁵ Ten years ago, amidst the water contamination in Walkerton, Ontario, I too chose, on ethical grounds, to work from the documentary detritus alone, a decision I still do not regret.

Donna Haraway, in her “scholarly comedy,” *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™:Feminism and Technoscience*,⁶ invokes the modest witness, a creature whose genesis dates from the Scientific Revolution, as testifier “to matters of fact.”⁷ “S/he is about telling the truth, giving reliable testimony, guaranteeing important things — while eschewing the addictive narcotic of transcendental foundations.” To render accounts that mirror reality, this kind of witness must be invisible, the modern, “legitimate and authorised ventriloquist ... adding nothing from his mere opinions, from his biasing embodiment ... inhabiting the culture of no culture.” Haraway critiques this pretence of modesty as a trick to distinguish the modest witness from the curious gawker, whose authority is authenticated by the naked, “unadorned [and] factual” qualities of her/his rhetoric. The resulting account thereby “ceases magically to have the status of representation and emerges simply as the fact of the matter.”⁸

At once tacit and beyond reproach, the modest witness guides the research practice of the scientists and medical professionals with whom we work, and through the Tri-Council Policy Statement inflects our own practice by informing our relationships with the Research Ethics Board in some of our universities. Traces of deference to the proper comportment of the modest witness are abundant in the methodological literature of oral history as we seek to be known to deliver “the fact of the matter.” Edward Said, channelling Vico, notes how this “rhetoric of intellectual disinterestedness” serves political ends and demeans the people we study.⁹ We live in times when our practice is suspect. For example, a review recently characterized an eminent biographer as “far more sympathiser and intellectual co-dependent than even a mildly neutral

“DON’T SPEAK FOR ME”:
PRACTICING ORAL HISTORY AMIDST THE LEGACIES OF CONFLICT

oral historian.”¹⁰ We have taken refuge in methodology, hoping that a thick barrier of safeguards will protect us from what Johannes Fabian identifies as charges of “intellectual distortion, historical contingency and the lure of special interests.”¹¹ Such preoccupations with the techniques of knowledge procurement, arising from our need to defend our practices, will not treat the epistemological challenges inherent in communication upon which our work depends between those who do know and we who wish to know. They but represent as objective the very inter-subjectivities that we should be pursuing as analytical challenges.

Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, amongst our leading theorists and practitioners, worry that oral historians have adopted an approach that “too often fetishizes the interview process,” a practice that can occlude “the social and cultural processes that have shaped subjectivity.” They argue that oral history must be more than “an archival activity,” that it is necessarily “a deeply social practice connecting past and present.”¹² Valerie Yow parsed the way through “Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research” by acknowledging that we as oral historians enter domestic spaces and workplaces “as collectors and preservers of accounts of human experience for generations to come” and recognizing that narrators’ “evasiveness and omissions” can “destroy the credibility of the history we write, rendering it useless as a contribution to understanding the historical phenomenon under scrutiny.” Yow concedes that “in an on-going project the researcher wants to get something from the narrator to further a purpose outside the relationship” and serves as “a facilitator for the revelation of information of historical significance,” while simultaneously in a relationship of trust with the individual narrator. She finds her resolution in the fiduciary relationship that binds narrator and historian in trust “for a full, honest testimony.”¹³

Linda Shopes observes: “collaboration is a responsible, challenging and deeply humane ideal for some oral history work, but in certain kinds of projects, beyond a basic respect for the dignity of all persons, it seems not an appropriate goal.”¹⁴ She shares the concerns of a colleague reflecting upon her work with women of the Ku Klux Klan. Kathleen Blee suggests that such an invocation of trust “reflects implicit romantic assumptions about the subjects of history from the bottom up that are difficult to defend when studying ordinary people who are active in the politics of intolerance, bigotry or hatred.”¹⁵

One resolution Shopes offers is to narrow the frame of the research designs for oral history projects, to organize the task around an historical problem rather than a series of life-history interviews, and to define the universe of narrators broadly, persistently asking ourselves, “whom am I missing?” Her interviews thus reflect and reveal more broadly and deeply “both the internal complexity of the community under study and its relationship to a broader historical process.” Within this more closely specified compass, she counsels

courage: “approach interviews in a spirit of critical inquiry asking the hard questions that may cause discomfort, that address difficult or controversial topics, that may reveal ruptures in the community.” She insists: “oral history is long haul work.... It requires a commitment of years” to weather “complicated and at times contentious ... negotiation, give-and-take.”¹⁶

Conducted from this stance, oral history is like ethnography. We cannot appease the modest witness. We are seeking not objectivity but a highly disciplined subjectivity. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes concludes, reflecting upon a long, controversial and distinguished career in ethnography, the question of “losing one’s objectivity in the field is really quite beside the point. Our project is centrally about translation and, like any form of translation, has both a predatory and a writerly motive.” As a student of Ireland, she turns for guidance to the insights of the Nobel Laureate poet Seamus Heaney. Translation, Heaney asserts, harkening to analogies from Irish history, can be like a Viking raid yielding imitations as a form of booty; or it can be a process of settlement. “In settling in with the work,” Heaney advises, “you stay with it a long time, identify with it in an imaginative way: you change it and it changes you.”¹⁷

For oral historians, this advice goes to Shopes’ judgment, which in our current conjuncture is of considerable moment: “It is a mistake to rely solely on visually skimming or electronically searching transcripts for a sense of what interviews contain or for specific information and useful quotes.”¹⁸ The use of digital indexing packages to facilitate such skimming, may be a cutting-edge technical version of what in the past could have merited condemnation as source mining.

Some anthropologists have gone down a similar path. For them this practice has meant “working as overseers of large teams of assistants on big research projects.” This practice, as Ruth Behar, a Jewish, Cuban, and American ethnographer, and other nay-sayers amongst the ethnographers contend, tends “to depersonalise one’s connection to the field, to treat ethnographic work (only a small part of which is done personally by the principal investigator) as that which is ‘other’ to the ‘self’ and to accumulate masses of data that can be compared, contrasted, charted, and serve as a basis for policy recommendations, or at least as a critique of existing practices.” Working with large digitized databases can be a refuge from charges of immodesty, a convincing attempt to defend against accusations of engagement unseemly for scholars. Some anthropologists have, instead, found safe havens from these threats in the “starkly unpeopled” terrain of high theory. Others “have retreated to history, to the quiet of the archives and the study of the past, where presumably an observer can do less damage, not have to be quite so disturbingly present.”¹⁹ This resort will not work for us as oral historians; we have already been there, done that. Anthropologists may respond that my argument merely has brought us back to where they were when James Clifford published his classic essay,

“DON’T SPEAK FOR ME”:
PRACTICING ORAL HISTORY AMIDST THE LEGACIES OF CONFLICT

“On Ethnographic Authority,” 27 years ago.²⁰ I can only respond that this is where oral historians find ourselves, and our question must be: what should we do now? What can we learn from ethnographers’ struggles with engagement? How are we appropriately to be present in that portion of our practice amongst participants and witnesses who come forward and engage us, for these may be both people who know what they would tell and who know what they would have us tell.

Clifford’s question was: “How, precisely, is a garrulous, overdetermined cross-cultural encounter shot through with power relations and personal cross purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more-or-less discrete ‘other world,’ composed by an individual author?”²¹ Shopes’ advice to us about specifying more closely our research questions while broadening our universe of narrators can make this challenge less daunting. Yet the issues that Ivan Karp and Martha Kendall highlight in their classic essay “Reflexivity in Field Work” remain. Field workers must be fair to the society they study and conform to the standards of their academic colleagues. This is a “profoundly alienated” mode of existence, which some anthropologists judge makes the greatest of their tribe both the “freest” and “the most troubled of the social scientists.”²² In *The Vulnerable Observer*, Ruth Behar, who amidst these conflicting obligations has distrusted her own authority, found the stance “constantly in question, constantly on the point of breaking down.”²³ Many ethnographers of the next generation follow the counsel of Philippe Bourgois “to venture into the ‘real world’ not just to ‘interview’ people but to actually participate in their daily life and to partake of their social and cultural reality.”²⁴ For them listening entails a “compassionate pact,” a “contract of testimony.” Anthropologists who follow this practice now tend to refer to themselves as “engaged observers,” bound by a joint responsibility to both voice and to listen civilly but critically while not eschewing the hard questions.²⁵ Such a concern with “retooling the interpersonal politics of research,” Kay Warren affirms, involves “an engagement with local agendas” and the “more interactive process subject to long-term, negotiation, reciprocities and collaboration,” which Shopes has advocated.²⁶ Engagement twinned with confrontation and hard questioning — this is surely a lonely and alienating route to commit to in field work.

Ronald Grele and Alessandro Portelli offered us guidance along this path early on. By 1975, Grele had grown troubled by the irenic, unquestioning stance as collectors that oral historians had adopted from the community chroniclers who preceded them. He declared forthrightly that this sad condition “has resulted in a situation of endless activity without goal or meaning,” in “movement without aim Oral history interviews are constructed, for better or for worse, by the active intervention of the historian.” We initiate the conversation and we can understand the narratives that emerge by attending to (in the senses both of tending to and paying attention to) the relationships embedded there.

Grele notes three kinds of relationships: 1) in the narratives' "linguistic, grammatical and literary structure"; 2) in the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee, a process more akin to a performance than "a literary product created alone and as a result of reflective action," and "cannot be divorced from the circumstances of its creation, which is one of audience participation and face to face confrontation"; and 3) the relationships amongst the speaker, her own historical consciousness, and the interviewer, whose "cultural vision and cognitive structure" is the gateway through which readers and listeners have access to the narrator's world.²⁷ These relationships bind the historian in both the creation and the analysis of the narratives.

If we are privy only to the digitized transcripts produced from interviews, not the processes and context which informed their making, how will we make good use of the information accumulating in digital archives? When any witness is interviewed, we have an obligation to those to whom we listen to proceed deliberately, prudently and with all due care not to leave the memoirscape littered carelessly. How will these relationships with participants, which must crucially inform our analytical work, weather the profound transition to a different information technology, an excising transition which in the knowledge culture of our time is "both tacit and beyond reproach"?

Portelli candidly acknowledges that his field work is "a form of political intervention, because it encourages an effort at self-awareness, growth, and change for all those involved ... unlike hard data or archives."²⁸ As political work, he contends that "the interview implicitly enhances the authority and self-awareness of the narrator, and may raise questions about aspects of experience that the speaker has never spoken or even seriously thought about."²⁹ "Because people will not talk to you unless you talk to them, will not reveal themselves unless you reveal yourself," the oral historian must be an engaged interlocutor.³⁰ Portelli rejects the "view of political militancy as the annihilation of all subjective roles" for its ironic similarity to traditional historians' non-involved posture, the view from the Archimedes point, and Haraway's modest witness. He calls the ethnologists' "compassionate pact," the "contract of testimony" entailed by listening, an "assumption of responsibility" such that as the work proceeds "the historian becomes less and less a 'go-between' from the working-class to the reader, and more and more a protagonist."³¹ In Portelli's protean and powerful "There's Gonna Always Be a Line," his informant, Mrs. Cowens, the great-granddaughter of slaves, carried across the generations a burden of history which marked them both: "I don't trust you, you know.... So I was raised; my grandmother always told us I don't care what nobody say, I don't care how good they look, how good they talk, you gonna always be black. There's gonna always be a line." That line marked him, a European intellectual, and it registered the distance and difference between him and his African American interlocutor. I first heard this assertion, in a recruiting meeting for the Canadian

“DON’T SPEAK FOR ME”:
PRACTICING ORAL HISTORY AMIDST THE LEGACIES OF CONFLICT

Institute for Academic Research, from a First Nations physician raised in Toronto’s Regent’s Park who had referenced his father’s influence on his own life choices. Addressing me directly across the table, he said, “Don’t speak for me.” I did not doubt him, but I did not know I had. I have since learned that this sort of intervention is a common way in which settler Canadians learn of the line from First Nations colleagues and narrators. As Portelli notes, such civil and generous gestures at once affirm the line and speak across it.³²

Let us define vulnerable narrators as those who agree to speak with us not knowing what they will tell. Dori Laub, a Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, writes of these narrators as initially “testifying to an absence,” “a known event” that the narrator experienced but had not fully integrated into his or her consciousness, so that the listener is “the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.” The listener does not become the witness, but as witness to the witness, is the enabler of the testimony. Witnesses, like good campers, must avoid leaving litter behind, be both “unobtrusive, non-directive, and yet, imminently present, active, in the lead.” What does speaking across the line do to them or for them? What does it do to us and for us? How is this listening and its compact of testimony different?

Laub spelled out these “Hazards of Listening” in his advice to interviewers for the Yale Holocaust Archive.³³ These risks have troubled me, as they have other oral historians. Minimally, this process creates a “juxtaposition of stories” that is “not a historical narrative, and that, in some sense ... annuls historical narrative.”³⁴ In Europe, Central America, and Latin America “producing testimony has become a crucial therapeutic tool”; but Behar names the undercurrent of this predation, participant-observation, as oxymoronic: “when the grant money runs out ... go back to your desk, write down what you saw and heard. Relate it to something you’ve read by Marx, Weber, Gramsci, or Geertz and you’re on your way to doing anthropology” and oral history.³⁵ Or not.

Victoria Sanford, who works in violent fields of Central America, notes that “survivors come forward to give testimonies not only to denounce a violent past but also to claim a future of peace.”³⁶ Is our compact to cross the line to be “a passage through difference, or the Broken Promise”?³⁷ When “something powerful is at stake,” are there reasons and ways to practice amidst “actually existing social suffering,” to respond to narrators’ needs?³⁸ Liisa Malkki, who works in Rwanda and Burundi, counsels us to adopt “a caring form of vigilance,”³⁹ to simply listen without pretensions to being authenticating experts, investigators, or inquisitors who ask hard questions.⁴⁰ Is it possible through “a practical politics of solidarity” to be present merely, simply, circumspectly as an enabler of the testimony, in times and places where the “everyday is a state of emergency”?⁴¹

In “On Suffering and Structural Violence,” Paul Farmer, a physician and theologian whose practice has been divided between the Harvard Medical

School and the highlands of Haiti, draws a distinction between “explaining” and “making sense of suffering”: “Certain kinds of suffering are readily observable The suffering of individuals whose lives and struggles recall our own tends to move us; the suffering of those who are distanced, whether by geography, gender, ‘race’ or culture, is sometimes less affecting.” “.... Structural violence all too often defeats those who would describe it” because it is “‘exoticised’ as ‘lurid’,” because its sheer weight makes it “more difficult to render.” Facts and figures objectify the sufferers, render them anonymous without “voice, let alone rights, in history.” Case studies “reveal suffering ... but to explain suffering one must embed individual biography in the larger matrix of culture, history and political economy.” Farmer contends that we must create “more fine-grained and systematic analyses of power and privilege in discussions of who is likely to suffer and in what ways.”⁴² Here I borrow and recast Behar’s self-depiction in *The Vulnerable Observer*.⁴³ Oral history, like ethnography, is a:

...voyage through a long tunnel ... troubled by the insight that is always arriving late, as defiant hindsight, a sense of the utter uselessness of writing anything and yet the burning desire to write something ... At the end of the voyage, if you are lucky, you catch a glimpse of a lighthouse, and you are grateful.⁴⁴

Emerging from such a long tunnel, can an historian “act morally as a memory critic,” asking the hard questions? In such a conjuncture, is the modest witness due deference? Or, alternatively, should we listen “without looking for what [we] know is not to be found?”⁴⁵

In “Poetics and the Politics of Witnessing,” Jacques Derrida insists on this “fact of the matter”: that those who are in the presence of witnesses, which is the most we can claim as oral historians, are but “third persons,” the “addressees of the testimony.” The witness affirms:

... rightly or wrongly ... that was or is present to me, in space and time (thus sense-perceptible), and though you do not have access to it, you, my addressees, *you have to believe me*... [An] historian does not seriously, as a scholar, ask me to *believe* him or her. Bearing witness is not through and through and necessarily discursive. It is sometimes silent. It has to engage something of the body, which has no right to speak. With this attestation, there is no other choice but to *believe* it or *not believe* it. Verification or transformation into proof, contestation in the name of ‘knowledge,’ belong to a foreign space... no one *can*, which is to say, no one *must*, no one *ought* bear witness for the witness, replace the witness, defend the witness One *must* not bear witness *for* the witness. The judge, the arbiter, the historian also remains a witness of a witness.⁴⁶

“DON’T SPEAK FOR ME”:
PRACTICING ORAL HISTORY AMIDST THE LEGACIES OF CONFLICT

“Don’t speak for me.” Like Seamus Heaney, “you stay with it a long time, identify with it in an imaginative way: you change it and it changes you.” Still, that which is “sense perceptible” to the witness alone eludes us. As field workers, we may be lonely, alienated and alone, but amongst those who come to us from vulnerable populations we are but witnesses to the “essential solitude of the witness.” In this authority, we cannot and must not claim to share.

* * *

JOY PARR is Canada Research Chair in Technology, Culture and Risk in the Department of Geography at the University of Western Ontario. She had used oral history to research migration, industrialisation and de-industrialisation, household labour and spending, environmental change and embodied perception.

JOY PARR détient une Chaire de recherche du Canada sur la technologie, l’environnement et la vie de tous les jours au département de géographie à la University of Western Ontario. Elle a elle-même pratiqué les méthodes d’histoire orale lors de recherches concernant la migration, l’industrialisation, la désindustrialisation, le travail et l’économie domestiques, les changements environnementaux ainsi que les perceptions concrètes.

Endnotes:

- 1 This essay initially was presented as a Keynote Address to the 89th Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Le Société Historique du Canada, Concordia University, Montréal, 31 May 2010. My heartfelt thanks to Grey Osterud, a former American editor of *Gender and History* and a resilient and reflective field worker in oral history. Her freelance editorial work transformed this writing from plenary entertainment to scholarly essay when the task confounded me. I recommend her scholarly writing on the rural women of nineteenth and more recently twentieth century New York.
- 2 Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1980; rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).
- 3 I infer, from their early theoretical and methodological writing on oral history, that at least two of my former students (who may reject the inference) subsequently had to bridge the distance bequeathed by this unconventional formation. Nancy Janoviček, “Oral History and Ethical Practice: Towards Effective Policies and Procedures,” *Journal of Academic Ethics* 4 (2006): 157–74; and Alexander Freund, “Oral History as Process Generated Data,” *Historical Social Research* 34, no. 1 (2009): 22–48.
- 4 Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953–2003* (Vancouver and Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).
- 5 John Milloy, *A National Crime : The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879–1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999). Milloy is professor of history at Trent University. His speciality is the study of aboriginal Canadian history. In January 2010, he was appointed Director of Research, Historical Records and Report Preparation, for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and since July 2010 has continued as Special Advisor on Research to Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Commission.

- 6 Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- 7 Ibid., 15.
- 8 Ibid., 22–6, 33.
- 9 Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology Through the Looking Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 189; Giambattista Vico, *New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968); and Edward W Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 127–31.
- 10 Roger Morris, “Clinton: the paths not taken: Taylor Branch is far more sympathiser and intellectual co-dependent than an even mildly neutral oral historian,” *Globe and Mail* (21 November 2009), F11.
- 11 Johannes Fabian, *Anthropology with an Attitude: Critical Essays* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 13, 18, 19.
- 12 Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008), ix, viii.
- 13 Valerie Yow, “Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research,” *Oral History Review* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1995): 51–2, 57–8, 65.
- 14 Linda Shopes, “Sharing Authority,” *Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (2003): 109.
- 15 Kathleen M Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan,” *Journal of American History* 80, no. 2 (September 1993): 597.
- 16 Linda Shopes, “Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes and Possibilities,” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (September 2002): 596, 597.
- 17 Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 318–19.
- 18 Shopes, “Oral History and the Study of Communities,” 592.
- 19 Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 25.
- 20 James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority,” *Representations* 2 (Spring 1983): 118–46.
- 21 Ibid., 120.
- 22 Ivan Karp and Martha B Kendall, “Reflexivity in Field Work,” in *Explaining Human Behaviour: Consciousness, Human Action, and Social Structure*, ed. Paul F Secord (Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage Publications, 1982), 269, 270.
- 23 Behar, *Vulnerable Observer*, 21.
- 24 Philippe Bourgois, “Confronting Anthropological Ethics: Ethnographic Lessons from Central America,” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 1 (1990): 45; and Philippe Bourgois, “Ethnography’s Troubles and the Reproduction of Academic Habitus,” *Qualitative Studies in Education* 15, no. 4 (2002): 417–20.
- 25 Asale Angel-Ajani, “Expert Witness: Notes toward Revisiting the Politics of Listening” in *Engaged Observer: Anthropology, Advocacy and Activism*, eds. Victoria Sanford and Asale Angel-Ajani (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 87.
- 26 Kay Warren, “Perils and Promises of Engaged Anthropology: Historical Transitions and Ethnographic Dilemmas,” in *Engaged Observer*, eds. Sanford and Angel-Ajani, 220.
- 27 Ronald J. Grele, “Movement without Aim: Methodological and theoretical problems in oral history,” in *Envelopes of Sound*, Ronald J. Grele (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 127–54. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990); *ibid.*, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993); *ibid.*, *Excitable Speech: Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997); Elizabeth Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge,

“DON’T SPEAK FOR ME”:
PRACTICING ORAL HISTORY AMIDST THE LEGACIES OF CONFLICT

- MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Renate Holub, *Antonio Gramsci: beyond Marxism and postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- 28 Alessandro Portelli, “Memory and Resistance,” in *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, Alessandro Portelli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 52.
 - 29 Ibid., “Oral History as Genre,” in *Battle of Valle Giulia*, 4.
 - 30 Ibid., “Memory and Resistance,” 52.
 - 31 Ibid., “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *Battle of Valle Giulia*, 57, 72–3.
 - 32 Ibid., “There’s Gonna Always Be a Line: History-Telling as Multivocal Art,” in *Battle of Valle Giulia*, 37, 39.
 - 33 Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening,’ in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, eds. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57–8, 80, 71–3.
 - 34 Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 144, 110.
 - 35 Behar, *Vulnerable Observer*, 27, 5.
 - 36 Victoria Sanford, “Excavations of the Heart: Reflections on Truth, Memory, and Structures of Understanding,” in *Engaged Observer*, eds. Sanford and Angel-Ajani, 37.
 - 37 Doris Laub, “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival,’ in *Testimony*, eds. Felman and Laub, 88.
 - 38 Bourgois, “Ethnography’s Troubles,” 419.
 - 39 Liisa H Malkki, “News and Culture: Transitory Phenomena and the Fieldwork Tradition,” in *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, eds. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 94–9.
 - 40 Angel-Ajani, “Expert Witness,” 82, 87.
 - 41 Philippe Bourgois, “Foreword,” in *Engaged Observer*, eds. Sanford and Angel-Ajani, xii, citing Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” in *Walter Benjamin: Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken 1978), xi.
 - 42 Paul Farmer, “On Suffering and Structural Violence,” *Daedalus* 125 (1996): 272, 279, reprinted in *ibid.*, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). He cites Rebecca S Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 2.
 - 43 Behar, *Vulnerable Observer*, 3.
 - 44 Wieviorka, *Era of the Witness*, 131–3.
 - 45 Ibid.
 - 46 Jacques Derrida, “Poetics and the Politics of Witnessing” in *Sovereignities in Question* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 76–9, 82, 90–1.