

## Handout 19: Selecting Narrators

Session: Narrator Selection

### Links to Oral History Interviews:

Al-Alem Bechnaq, Samira. "[A Regression towards the Lebanese Civil War: Samira's story.](#)" Interview by Jihane Francis. N.D. Lebanese Association for History (LAH)

Ṣabḥah, Maryam Mahmūd. [Interview by Mahmud Zaydan.](#) N.D. nn\_0226, Al-Nakba Collection, Palestinian Oral History Archive, American University of Beirut (AUB)

Shammās, Marie. [Interview by Mahmud Zaydan.](#) N.D. nn\_0191, Al-Nakba Collection, Palestinian Oral History Archive, American University of Beirut (AUB)

al-Zabadi, Muhammad Ahmad. "[Video Nakba Oral History.](#)" Interview by Rakan Mahmoud. July 21, 2009. [Palestineremembered.com](#)

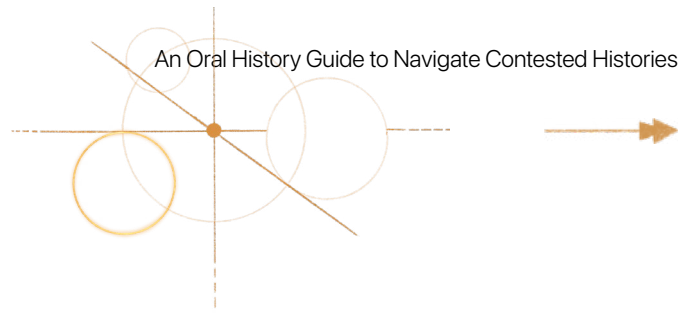
### Concept of "Shared Authority" according to Michael Frisch:

Though there's no such thing as a perfect narrator, some narrators may be more suitable than others for your Oral History project. This is not only because they may have particularly relevant or even new experiences to share, but also because they demonstrate a willingness and eagerness to partake in the collaborative process that oral history involves. Indeed, this collaboration is summed up in the term "shared authority," a central underpinning of oral history as a practice and the title of the book by Oral Historian Michael Frisch<sup>1</sup>. According to Frisch, "authority is shared in oral history by definition in the history-making offered by both interviewer and narrator." In this sense, shared authority is achieved in two ways: in its process as practiced during the interview in dialogue, the back and forth between two people in conversation that creates a narrative, and its product, the historical source itself. In other words this means:

- That the interviewer and narrator work as a team, as partners in getting a closer understanding of the past.
- That there is transparency and trust between the narrator and the interviewer, and that the interviewer emphasizes the importance of the narrator's role in getting a better understanding of the past.
- That they are co-creators, co-authors of the historical source, namely the recording, and that the conversation they are recording together, namely the Oral History, could not exist without both of them taking part. One way to think about it is through the word AUTHOR-ity (in English), sharing the AUTHORSHIP of the historical source.
- That the relationship between narrator and interviewer is based on respect, empathy, and awareness of (conflict or trauma) sensitivity.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (SUNY Press, 1990).





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### Guiding Questions for Interview Review:

When watching the interview - approx 20 minutes (a bit of the introduction, middle and the end), use the following questions to assess the choice of narrator and the degree of shared authority present in the interview:

- What evidence is there of the interviewer and narrator working together as a team towards an understanding of what happened in the past?
- What evidence is there of a relationship of empathy, respect, trust, and transparency between the interviewer and the narrator in the interview?
- Does the narrator demonstrate a sense of eagerness and strength - evidenced in their voice, energy, and eye contact - towards the interview process?<sup>2</sup>

### Guiding Questions for Group Presentations:

Prepare a 10 minutes presentation for the rest of the participants:

- Introduce the narrator to the best of your ability. What have you learned about her/him?
- Based on the questions above, how do you assess the choice of this narrator for the cited research purposes?
- Select an excerpt from the interview that illustrates your finding/s or that you find interesting to share.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: [Selecting Narrators, Baylor University](#)

