'This, too, is history'

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'This, too, is history': oral history, the 1947 India–Pakistan partition and the risks of archival re-ordering

by Anindya Raychaudhuri

Abstract: Drawing on interviews from my oral history project focussing on the 1947 India–Pakistan partition, in this article I critically examine the process through which an individual oral history interview becomes part of an archive. I suggest that this process involves an extraneous stabilising, or re-ordering of meaning. The way we use oral histories that we collect, I argue, risks reinforcing some of the problematic political power dynamics that oral history has hoped to combat. The process of incorporating an oral history interview into an archive is a process of ordering, ironing out ambiguities of meaning, voice, authorship and authority.

Keywords: archive; power; order; disorder; consent

In March 2012, I was travelling around the suburbs of Kolkata, West Bengal, India, interviewing people as part of my oral history project on the 1947 India–Pakistan partition. During this time, I met and interviewed a man called Ananta. He was born in Dharmaganj village, Barisal district in what became East Pakistan in 1947, and is now Bangladesh. In 1947, as India gained independence and was partitioned at that same moment, Ananta, along with his family, was forced to flee his home. They found land as part of a government-funded refugee rehabilitation scheme in Adi Shoptogram, a village about sixty kilometres north of Kolkata. Ananta is a potter. In Barisal he used to make clay and earthenware pots for cooking and water storage, but after crossing the border he switched to making statues of Hindu gods and goddesses because these sold better. His life has been a hard one and it has left its mark on his body. He is not sure how old he is but thinks it must be about 100. Towards the end of the interview, after he had shared many of his partition memories with me,

I asked him to reflect on the experience of being interviewed. As part of my pre-interview briefing process I had explained to him that I was based in the UK, that people in the UK and around the world would hear his words and that I was going to write about him and his stories in a book. I asked him how that made him feel. In his response, Ananta showed a sophisticated awareness of the inevitable distance (geographic, temporal, hierarchical) between the production of his memory (his narration) and its construction, preservation and dissemination as part of an oral history project that is, ultimately, much more mine than it is his:

> It feels good that my voice has travelled so far. How can that not make me feel good? Someone who is as cursed as me, my voice can go to that place. What am I, if not cursed? What I was, what I have become, and what I will become? How much longer, how much longer shall I live, that's what I think now.[1]

What is interesting is Ananta's ambivalence. He says he feels good, but the question actually elicits a series of uncertainties about his life and his future. Ananta has consented to reveal at least some of his stories to me. He has agreed that I can report his stories under his proper name, but his hesitant ambivalence at the thought of crossing the many lines of power that differentiate him from me betrays a real fear of the consequences of this crossing. Ananta, as he appears in my archives and in my writing, is not and can never be the same entity that lives and breathes and speaks in Adi Shoptogram. In fact, the Ananta that appears in my writing serves as the limit-point of the reach of Ananta the man, so it is poignantly appropriate that my question elicits from him a reflection on his mortality.

Ananta's answer forced me to think more critically about the transformation that an oral history interview undergoes as it transitions from a single interview, complete in and of itself, to becoming part of a wider oral history archive. What price do our interviewees pay so that we can curate an oral history archive? In what ways does the archive, ostensibly there to highlight the voices of the interviewee, actually work to silence it?

My understanding of the oral history archive is informed by Jacques Derrida's recognition that the archive as a concept exists 'at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority', which means that it is a place 'where law and singularity intersect in *privilege* [original emphasis]'.[2] Ann Laura Stoler has made a similar argument about the specific privileges that are manifested in colonial archives, which, she says, are 'cross-sections of contested knowledge [...] both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves'.[3] The colonial archives that Stoler is focussing on are in many ways different from the oral history archive that is the object of my study here, but the differences can also be exaggerated. Both our archives are 'cultural artifacts of fact production, of taxonomies in the making'.[4] Like the archivists that Stoler writes about, the work that has gone into curating my archive is also at least as much 'an extractive enterprise' as it is 'ethnographic'.[5] My archive is not colonial in the sense that her archives are; her archives unlike mine are 'products of state machines, [...] technologies that bolstered the production of those states themselves'.[6] Equally, however, there is undeniably a colonial dynamic between Ananta and me (working on behalf of a Scottish university, on a project funded by the British Academy, where most of the findings will be reported in a language that is alien to him). It might be an uncomfortable thought, but the process of collecting interviews and curating an oral history archive shares much with Bernard Cohn's notion of an 'investigative modality', which 'includes the definition of a body of information that is needed, the procedures by which appropriate knowledge is gathered, its ordering and classification, and then how it is transformed into usable forms such as published reports, statistical returns, histories, gazetteers, legal codes, and encylopedias'.[7] I might be producing articles and monographs instead of statistical returns and gazetteers, but otherwise the similarities are evident. I decide what information is needed in my archive, the procedures by which this will be gathered, ordered and classified in my archive and the ways in which this archive will be reported

In this article, then, I interrogate the oral history archive as an institution for 'determining, codifying, controlling and representing the past' on terms which are defined not by the interviewee, but by the interviewer.[8] As Lindsey Dodd has argued in her article in this issue, an oral history interview is characterised by a radical contingency, with the potential content of any interview being ultimately determined by a range of factors beyond individual control. The oral history interview is, therefore, a disorderly object. I read the archiving process, in contrast, as one of ordering, in which the disorderly individual interview is transformed into a subordinate part of an orderly whole. This process is reminiscent of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has called being 'made over by old colonialisms'.[9] It is crucial for practitioners of oral history to be conscious of the archival power of re-ordering, so that we do not render our interviewees even more powerless than they already are. It is not necessary for me to establish the subalternity of my interviewees to recognise that the archive that I have curated and the published works that I have produced mirror 'the narrative of stabilization and codification' that Spivak has identified as 'epistemic violence'.[10] This ordering and stabilisation can be seen in a number of ways including translation, transcription and the practical implications of the research ethics framework which determines how an interview will be collected, and under what name it will be read.

The disorder of a partition remembered

While an oral history interview is always disorderly, it is particularly appropriate that oral histories of partition should be so. In 1947, as British rule over the Indian subcontinent came to an end, the land and its people were divided into two new states broadly along religious lines. Punjab in the West and Bengal in the East were divided in two. West Punjab, along with Sindh, Baluchistan, North-West Frontier Province, together with East Bengal, formed the new state of Pakistan with a majority Muslim population. This was a state of two halves, separated by hundreds of miles of India, which had a Hindu majority. While the apparent symmetry of a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India can be destabilised in many ways – both states were officially secular on independence, and India remains so – there also persists a hegemonic perception of the binary identities of the two peoples in national-religious terms. In 1971, East and West Pakistan divided again, leading to the independence of Bangladesh, further complicating the nature of religious and

national identities in the Indian subcontinent. Partition led to perhaps the single largest population migration in human history, with about eighteen million crossing the newly created borders.[11] The level and scale of violence was unprecedented: between one and two million were killed and hundreds of thousands of women were abducted, raped and forced to convert.[12] The emotional losses were also huge, as people had to leave ancestral homes, communities where they had often been living for decades or even centuries. In the words of Zahid, 'We had lived there for seven hundred and fifty years, and then to be uprooted in six hours – leaves very bitter memories, you see. It is very painful to think of it'.[13] Most were unable to take any of their property with them. Some deliberately chose to leave everything behind because they were convinced they could come back at a future date. Millions of people became destitute overnight.[14] Returning home proved impossible, as conflict between the two states intensified, leading to multiple wars in the past six decades. If the twentieth century can be seen as the century of decolonisation, then the 1947 India–Pakistan partition is one of its most seismic moments.

Between 2011 and 2014, I conducted 160 interviews with people who have personal or family stories about partition. I conducted these interviews in India, Pakistan and the UK, and cumulatively my interviewees represent a diverse group in terms of religion, age, gender, national and class backgrounds. The interviews took the form of loose, semi-structured interviews, almost always taking place in the privacy of the participant's home. Interviews were conducted in Bengali, English, Hindi, Kashmiri, Punjabi and Urdu (occasionally with the help of an interpreter). One of the things that become clear very quickly was that for most of my interviewees, partition was experienced as a moment of complete disorder. The dangers posed by communal violence, the precariousness of forced mass migration, the proletarianisation that partition often involved, all of this is perceived as forming a characteristically disorderly contrast to the orderliness of the memories of life before partition.[15] As a moment of decolonisation, the disorderliness of partition is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's analysis of the disorderliness of decolonisation. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes, 'Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder'.[16] Ananta, like most people who are old enough to remember life before 1947, remembers the pre-partition world as idyllic, marked by a profusion of material wealth and an orderliness of life:

It was a good place, Bangladesh, ours – how could it be bad? Bangladesh, our golden Bangla. Our house was on almost two, two and a half *kani* [a unit of area] of land. A betel-nut garden. Have you seen betel nut? The betel-nut garden was so big that if you entered it through one way, you would have to leave through another area, you wouldn't be able to leave through the same way. We had a betel-nut gar-

den like that over there, then wasn't it golden? We wanted for nothing, back then.

This remembered orderliness is contrasted with the disorder of partition, first from the trauma of losing one's home, and then of having to migrate to another country:

When partition happened, then the killing and the cutting started […]. We left at once, escaped and then crossed the border. First by boat to Barisal, then by mail train to the border, Khulna, then the border, Kattapur, then to Bangaon. They searched us so much – didn't let us bring anything, the Muslims searched us. […] From Bangaon, we went to Sealdah, and from there we went by train to the camp, Dhubulia refugee camp. Government helped us and we were there for two or three years, our Indian government. We couldn't bring anything, food or anything, and the government helped us. […] There were twenty-five groups in the camp, a huge camp. About fifty, sixty families in each group […]. From the camp they brought us here in Adi Shoptogram. We were the first to come here, my grandfather and father brought us here. I am the only old one here now. […] Why did it all change? Because of partition? Why did partition happen? Because of Hindustan-Pakistan.

Jogesh similarly describes his family's experiences while living on Sealdah station in Kolkata as ultimately chaotic and disorderly:

A few days after we moved to this country, my grandparents, their three sons and one young daughter, my *Mashi* [mother's sister] came to this side. They were living in Sealdah station at the time and while there, my *Mashi* developed cholera. In such circumstances, to come and live on Sealdah station, it was unbearable. They weren't right in the head either. I mean, what to eat, what to do – that was always an issue.[17]

The disorderliness is so fundamental that it is difficult to represent it in language. The interviewees use euphemistic words such as 'unimaginable' or 'unbearable' to signpost the limits of language.

In turn, the memories of disorder render the testimony itself particularly disorderly, as the trauma acts upon the language, breaking up the interview, which is then unable to obey the conventions of narrative. In his recounting of the way in which his younger brother died, Zafar provides an example of the crossover between the disorderliness of partition and the disorderliness of the oral history interview:

I had a young brother. About two years old. They hit him with a spear in his stomach. He was injured in the bit that covers your innards. The intestines came out. They came out. I took him [to the first-

Zafar. Photo:
Anindya
Raychaudhuri.
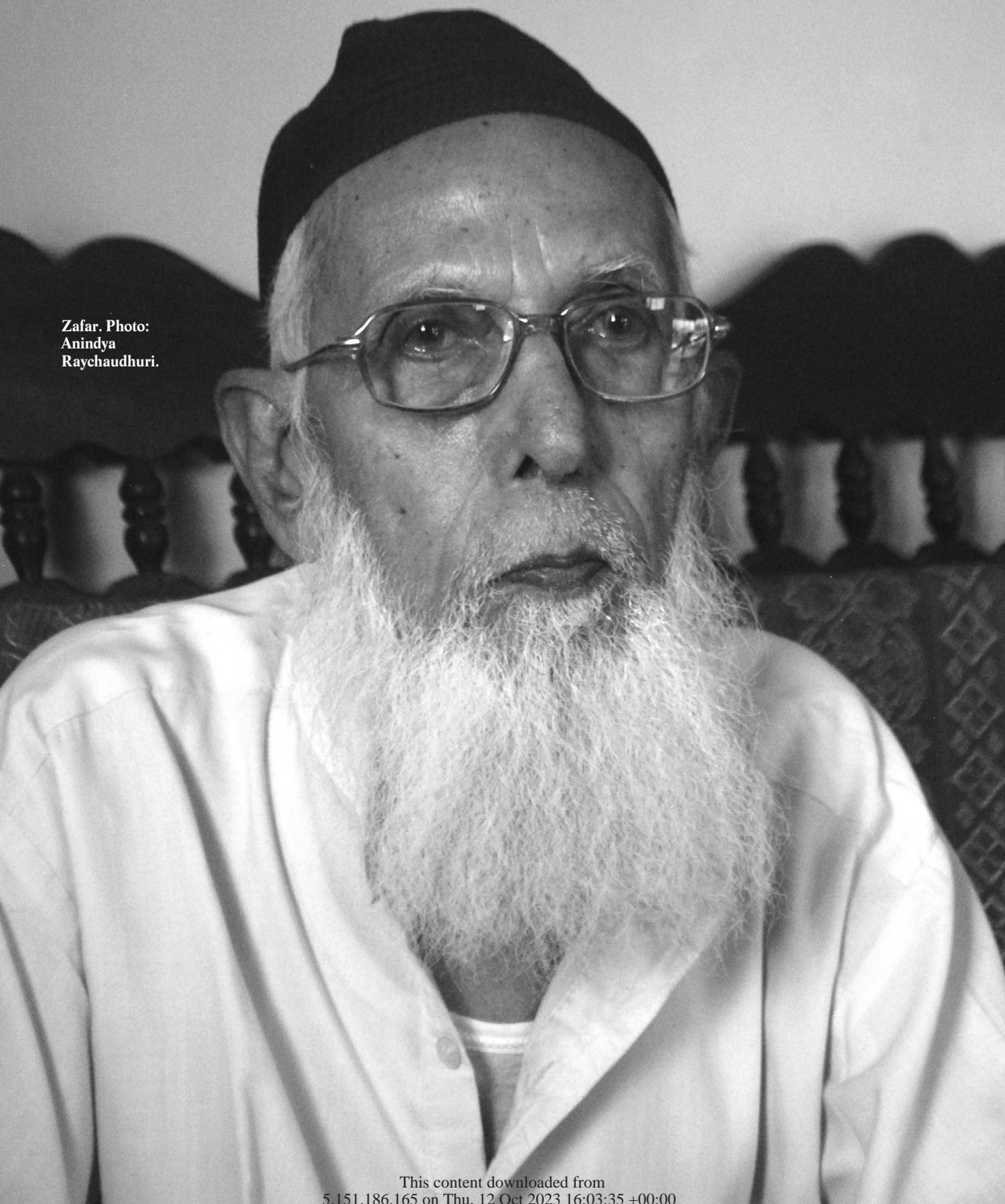
aid people], 'Do something for him!' They said, 'There is nothing we can do, his intestines have come out. He won't live.' I said, 'What then?' 'Don't give him water.' I asked why. 'It is like this – if he doesn't drink he will live longer. If he drinks anything, it will go into his stomach and come out through his intestines. The more exposed it is, the sooner he will die.' I said, 'That's good!' But he kept asking for water. If he has to die, why should he die thirsty [voice breaks down in tears]. If he has to die, why should I let him die thirsty. It will only mean he will die an hour sooner rather than an hour later. At least he won't be thirsty. But there was no water. The taps they had made were not working. The only water I could find was full of cigarette-ends. I brought that water and gave it to him, and he continued to drink it [voice breaks down in tears]. The consequence was around midnight, he became beloved of Allah [i.e., he died].[18]

It is no coincidence that it is when he is narrating moments of trauma that the fluency of his narrative breaks down. Zafar's language buckles and bends under the force of this trauma, poignantly representing the pain and chaos that he is describing. The twists and turns of Zafar's broken narrative reflect the lines on his face and hands, effects of a long and often hard life.

The disorderliness of oral history

Oral history is uniquely able to make the links between the macro-world of public history – of violence and population migration and international politics – and the micro-world of someone like Ananta lamenting the loss of their home, precisely because of this central disorderliness.

As an inherently disorderly, chaotic, contradictory entity, an oral history interview is particularly well suited for the representation of multiple contradictory positions. The apparently meandering narrative of an interview, its sometimes stop-start nature, and the often seemingly random ways in which memories emerge all mark it out as the distinctive object that it is. These contradictions can be seen in any interview, but they can sometimes be most easily identified in group interviews. As Graham Smith has pointed out, 'the pooling of memories between individuals' allows participants to 'engage critically with inherited ideologies'.[19] This is especially the case in the south Asian context, where collective conversations are perhaps a more naturalised part of everyday life than in Europe or America. It is also in these group interviews that the fault-lines of the contradictions that characterise oral history interviews are most explicit.

Sushanto and Geeta are a married couple, both originally from East Bengal but now living near Kolkata. They speak in similar terms about the trauma of the loss of home that partition entailed, but differ sharply in their analysis of the reasons for it, as can be seen from this extract from their joint interview:

Geeta: We had to leave because of them […]. I am still angry, very angry at the Muslims.

Sushanto: She is angry, but I am not because …

Geeta: Not all people are the same. If I even see a blind beggar, I feel like giving it [money] to the Hindu, not the Muslim – I am still so angry, very angry. Because we didn't get anything, we lost everything there, became paupers. My mother and her three children – we lost everything.

Sushanto: Those who were rich were always fine. The haves and have-nots. The haves didn't lose anything, only the have-nots. Us and them, both lost, the have-nots here, and the have-nots there – this I have understood.

Geeta: I have little sympathy towards the Muslims, more anger.[20]

Rajinder and Gargi provide another example. They were both born in Lahore before partition, moved to India and now live in the UK. At one point in their joint interview, they mention their Muslim friends and paint a picture of a happy multi-cultural and multi-religious life as diasporic south Asians:

Rajinder: Not necessarily Pakistani friends, so there are Muslims from India. Dr Aziz and other people have, and the chap from Bangladesh actually, Hussein.

Gargi: Yeah.

Rajinder: So we have Muslim friends from different parts.

Gargi: Few Bengali friends, and what about Mr Ali, he is Muslim. He is from Guyana.

Rajinder: He is from Guyana.

Gargi: I am telling you about Muslim. He is Muslim, and he goes and looks after the temple. Every morning he goes and cleans it. Every evening he goes and shuts it. I think, remarkable.

Rajinder: He is the caretaker of a Hindu temple. Yeah, he is from Guyana. But I think most of the congregation of this temple are from West Indies, from Guyana, Trinidad and those places.

Gargi: They respect him so much.

Rajinder: They just call him Uncle Zai. But he goes to mosque, not very often. He used to go regularly but not now.[21]

Just ten minutes later in the same interview, however, the picture of Hindu–Muslim relations in multi-cultural Britain changes dramatically:

Gargi: We talk about the history of Muslim people, how they have been in the past. And in the history that they are always lying to each other and killing their own family members. Recently we saw that the Pakistani Bhutto was jailed and murdered.

Rajinder: What we feel is […] Hindus have more respect for life than the Muslims have. They don't have any respect for life. They just kill people. I don't think they have any feelings even. That they killed, cos, they say, in the history of these Maharajas, they killed their father.

Gargi: The history in India, yeah.

Rajinder: Throughout Mughal history you can see. So even in the West and the Middle East, Muslims, they just kill each other. They don't respect life. That's what I, my opinion is.

Gargi: But the Hindu religion, they respect everybody. You can see the politicians in India, we have so many presidents and, and they were Muslim and every, every, every religion is in Indian politics.

It is possible to come up with many arguments to explain these contradictions but to attempt to do so would be to miss the point. An oral history interview is uniquely able to articulate these complex, contradictory, disorderly feelings, allowing space for both points of view. The positive emotional connections that Rajinder and Gargi feel for Uncle Zai and the bitter Islamophobia they exhibit towards Muslims in general are equally important, and it is only the contradictions of an oral history interview that can acknowledge both truths. An oral history interview is able to accommodate a chaotic range of views, opinions and arguments because of this inherently disorderly nature. Following Fanon's theorisation of the disorderliness of decolonisation, it might be said that the disorderly oral history interview is particularly well suited to narrate a moment of decolonisation such as partition.

This, however, is also where the problematic power dynamics of an oral history archive can be spotted most easily. To what extent is the disorderliness of multiple perspectives allowed to exist within an oral history archive and to what extent is it dominated and flattened out by my curatorial voice? Once the oral history interview has been transcribed and entered into the spreadsheet or catalogue as part of a wider orderly archive, does it still possess all the disorderly potential that it once did? Or do these voices now matter only as a small part of a larger archive, whose importance rests on factors beyond the individual interview? If Stuart Hall is correct when he identifies the constitution of an archive as a moment 'when a relatively random collection of works, whose movement appears simply to be propelled from one creative production to the next, is at the point of becoming something more

ordered and considered', how might this orderliness render the interviewee alienated from their own testimony?[22]

Oral history and the re-ordering of the archive

To illustrate this, I will provide some examples of what I mean by the ordering of the archiving process. It is now a disciplinary commonplace that the transcription of an oral history interview is at best an incomplete representation of the actual interview. Writing in 1972, Raphael Samuel argued that

> The spoken word can very easily be mutilated when it is taken down in writing and transferred to the printed page. […] The imposition of grammatical forms, when it is attempted, creates its own rhythms and cadences, and they have little in common with those of the human tongue.[23]

Portelli agrees with Samuel's assessment:

> Oral sources are *oral* sources. Scholars are willing to admit that the actual document is the recorded tape; but almost all go on to work on the transcripts, and it is only transcripts that are published. […] Expecting the transcript to replace the tape for scientific purposes is equivalent to doing art criticism on reproductions, or literary criticism on translations [original emphasis].[24]

Samuel and Portelli are, of course, correct when they talk about the dangers of interpreting an interview through transcription, but the problem is more than a simple misrepresentation of the original interview in the transcript. Rather, the interpretation that the transcript represents all too often involves silencing disorderly ambiguities which exist in an interview and imposing an extraneous sense of order onto it.

One of the most obvious, if subtle ways in which transcribing an interview can be seen as imposing order onto it is in the way the interview is punctuated. An example is this harrowing extract from KR's interview. She was born in Pakistan after partition, but most of her extended family were killed during the migration to Pakistan. In this extract, she is talking about a recent discovery she had made. She had recently learnt that her mother was married at the time of partition and had had a baby daughter. Neither the husband nor the daughter survived the journey, and later on KR's mother remarried. KR has since migrated to South Wales, where she now lives:

> But now, I recently heard that which my mother never talk. She was already married there as well and she had the one little baby girl as well. She was newly married, her husband been killed. She never talked but my cousin now, two years ago he told me that she was married, which part she always hide from us. I don't know why—she never talked. He said

'Yes, *Khala* [mother's sister] was married and I was carrying *Khala*'s little baby. And I went to …' He was ten year old and he went […] the Sikh family they keep the baby. They said, 'How … you are boy yourself. You can't keep the baby so give us the baby …'. But that baby, he said, died after a couple of weeks over there because he was a so young baby she didn't have milk or whatever it is. Perhaps my mother don't want to know and talk, it hurting part of […] But my mother's husband been killed and she survived […] No, I never asked that [daughter's name], I never can. It was shock of my life to knewing that, we had the one sister, like half-sister, whatever. But it was shock to know that as well that she died, she never survived […] And I was thinking, Mum, she knew that would happen to the girl but how much that hurt had to be knowing that for the child to be died like that. But she never talked […] I don't think so. What happened I don't know but I don't know the name, no. Even I don't know my mother's husband's name and I don't know who was the family, her husband's family.[25]

This complex narrative involves three layers of quoting. KR is quoting from a conversation she had with a cousin, who was quoting from a conversation he had with members of the anonymous Sikh family. When listening to this section of the interview, part of the disorderliness arises from the ambiguities about where the cousin's voice ends and KR's own voice begins. In a transcript, however, these ambiguities are necessarily ironed out through the simple step of deciding where to put the quotation mark. On a linguistic level, the act of transcription serves to exert an ironing out of the disorders and ambiguities that exist in any oral history testimony. I have punctuated the above extract myself and therefore I have decided the limits between the voices. KR's testimony here reminds me of Zafar's description of his brother's death that I have quoted above. During both interviews, their testimonies were punctuated by the disorderliness of sighs, shudders and tears; in representing these voices in this article, these have been replaced with the much more orderly commas and full stops.

Many of the interviews I cite from here were originally in another language (Bengali or Urdu, for example) and, as Supurna Banerjee discusses elsewhere in this issue, it isn't always possible to highlight every ambiguity when interpreting or analysing each interview. An example is the word *desh* as used by Ananta, Jogesh and pretty much every other Bengali-speaking interviewee. The word is most often translated as country, as I have done above when quoting from my interview with Jogesh. In Bengali, however, the word is much more complex than this translation makes it seem. Bengalis use the word *desh* to mean country (as in India), state (as in West Bengal), and, especially significant for migrant populations, the original home, village or town where the family had to move from for economic or political reasons. It is not possible to convey this rich ambiguity in any translated transcription. The archived interview is thus just a little less ambiguous, and a little more orderly than the original interview.

A similar silencing occurs through the academic and archival conventions when it comes to attributing an interview to an individual, named person. The ability or inability of the subject to speak in their own name, from their own home, is of direct relevance to oral history. The problem, however, lies in the ways in which extraneous strictures are applied to the way we do oral history and the effect these strictures have on the connection between an individual interviewee and their testimony. My university, along with most other such institutions, has a highly developed infrastructure of research ethics. In my case, as in most others, this requires me to complete forms in order to have my research approved by the University Research Ethics Committee. Like most other ethics committees, these guidelines explicitly recommend anonymising data in order to protect the rights of the participant: 'Researchers should identify, and take as soon as possible, any opportunities they have to convert their data into an anonymised form and permanently delete any fully identifiable data'.[26] As JA Barnes argues, 'all social research entails the possibility of destroying the privacy and autonomy of the individual, of providing more ammunition to those already in power, of laying the groundwork for an invincibly oppressive state'.[27] Ethnographic research may or may not reinforce statist oppression, but the notion that research participants can only exert their autonomy by retaining their anonymity is deeply troubling and troublingly common in both those who conduct ethnographic research and those who police it. If we were to think of the process of anonymising a testimony as tantamount to dehumanising its narrator instead, then the connection between privacy and autonomy would necessarily be reversed. Elsewhere in this issue, María Cotera has written at length about what a revised, egalitarian ethnographic research methodology might look like, and how it would centrally depend on making space for the interviewee as a human being as opposed to merely a subject of research.

It is only fair to point out that the debate about anonymisation is much more contested in oral history compared to many other forms of ethnographic research. Donald Ritchie, for example, has pointed out that anonymity 'clashes with some of oral history's most fundamental objectives':

Having sought to give 'voice to the voiceless,' it is inconsistent to render them nameless. Oral historians conduct life review biographical interviews because they consider interviewees important as individuals and want to record their unique experiences and perceptions. […] Nothing based on anonymous sources can be proven, and the evidence remains at the level of rumor and innuendo.[28]

Aziz Fatima Qazi with a photo of herself as a child on the lap of Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi. Photo: Anindya Raychaudhuri.

These important debates about anonymity and anonymous sources within the discipline of oral history, however, have largely failed to influence the custodians of research ethics committees which affect the vast majority of oral history research. It is notice-able that the guidelines for authors for this very journal mandates that 'the name of anyone interviewed and quoted in an article should be replaced by a substitute name unless the author has written permission from the person quoted to use their actual name'.[29] The need for consent to use one's name is laudable, but it does make me wonder how it necessarily disenfranchises those who are unable to provide written consent. Consent is not independent of cultural factors, nor is it immune to 'lines of age, class, gender, education, religion, language, colour, and nationality' in the words of Alessandro Portelli.[30] I am able to conduct interviews in Urdu because I can speak and understand it, but I am not able to read it. It is clearly not possible for me to explain to my interviewee what a written consent form says when I do not share a written language with them. The demand that I can only use someone's real

name with written consent is not so much protective of their rights as exclusionary for anyone who is not able to provide written consent. If for educational or cultural reasons a written form is seen by a particular interviewee as disrespectful or forbidding, then there is a real danger that this person might remain excluded from the archive.

Using the real name of the interviewee does connect their voice to their personhood, as Ritchie argues, but on its own it is not enough to destabilise the lines of power that I am discussing here. As Ananta's ambivalent hesitation with which I began this article suggests, there is a process of disempowerment that the interviewee undergoes when their voice is subsumed into the wider archive. In this sense, the presence of the interviewee's proper name is not so much evidence of the testimony's authenticity, as Ritchie argues, but rather it merely stands in for the distance between the interviewee and the colonial institution of power that the archive represents. When I cite Ananta's name in my writing, I am not so much returning his story to his ownership, but marking the exclusive space of the archive, the limit-point of academic discourse beyond which he is unable to enter, or at least only able to enter on my terms.

My interview with Ananta is reminiscent of Brian Noble's analysis of coloniality which 'can be thought of as the tendency of a "self" in an encounter to impose boundary coordinates such as those of territory, knowledges, categories' over an other in a way that serves to 'rationalize the dominant presence of this self within those coordinates and to make the presence of the other subordinate to it'.[31] Whether I use his real name or not, Ananta is only allowed into my archive on my terms, not his.

Ananta allowed me to use his real name, and so I have. In other cases (KR for example), my informants have asked me to preserve their anonymity and I have done so. These cases do not pose particular methodological challenges. The more problematic situations are the ones where an interviewee makes an explicit and unambiguous rejection of anonymity: Aziz Fatima Qazi of Karachi, for example, who began her testimony with a forceful and emphatic 'I don't want to be anonymous'.[32] During her interview she showed me, with understandable pride, a photograph of her as a little girl in Gandhi's lap. There was clearly a connection, for her, between the value of her testimony and the photograph. Similarly, Amarjit and her son Harbakhsh showed me a photograph of her husband, his father, as they were narrating his and their memories of partition. For all of these people, the photograph is authenticating in the way that Ritchie describes, but is also more than this; it is a tangible representation of their personhood, emblematic of the specific family and individual where the testimony is located, and to whom it should always be connected. The problem is that this connection can really only be articulated in an article like this. For most other purposes, in the archive and in the finished published forms (article, mono-

graph, and so on), the testimonies remain alienated from the photographs for reasons of practicality or publishing costs. At best, as they are here, these photographs are illustrations, devoid of the poignant emotion they have in the living rooms of my interviewees.

When I asked Sukhwant Kaur Pall to say her name for the record, she said, 'My name is Sukhwant Kaur Pall. My grandfather's name was Jeevan Singh Pall. And my dad's name is Puran Singh Pall'.[33] The construction of a genealogy when asked for a name is a powerful demand to be given a biography: that precise and specific narrative of origin which the interviewee is often denied. This demand is both powerful and powerfully disorienting, as it destabilises the easy methodological approach of either anonymising an interview or using the real proper name according to the informant's wishes. This demand for recognition is different from simply allowing the researcher to use one's real name. Part of the force of this demand comes precisely from the fact that it is not immediately clear how it can be met practically. When writing about Aziz Fatima Qazi or Sukhwant Kaur Pall, for example, I can include a footnote alerting my reader to the existence of this demand, but the spatial marginalisation of the footnote will always also marginalise the demand itself. The demand to be recognised as part of a distinctive line of inheritance is one that an explanatory footnote is ill equipped to fulfil. In practice, Ananta, who allowed me to use his real name, and Aziz Fatima Qazi, who powerfully demanded to not be treated as anonymous, will probably not be perceived differently by my readers.

As Spivak famously argued in 'Can the subaltern speak?', 'There is no more dangerous pastime than transposing proper names into common nouns, translating them, and using them as sociological evidence'.[34] The continuing insistence on anonymising data as an ethically superior approach to ethnographic research ends up, then, reducing the individual interviewee to a piece of sociological evidence. Rendering someone anonymous through one's research is not regularly seen as a problem by the various research ethics frameworks precisely because such frameworks are so often interested in the interviewee as a common noun – as representative of her race, gender, class, national or occupational background – rather than an individual with a distinctive biography and genealogy.

The process of taking all of these individual voices and incorporating them into an archive is thus a process of flattening out difference. No matter how sensitively handled, an archive is always a process of ordering. Like any process of ordering, it is not politically neutral. In choosing who and what should be allowed into the archive, what form this inclusion should take, how the voice of the interviewee might be translated, edited and interpreted, an archive is inevitably constructing a narrative of the history that it purports to represent. The problem, however, is that such a narrative will always exclude something. As

Amarjit Kaur and Harbakhsh Singh Grewal with a photo of her husband, his father. Photo: Anindya Raychaudhuri.
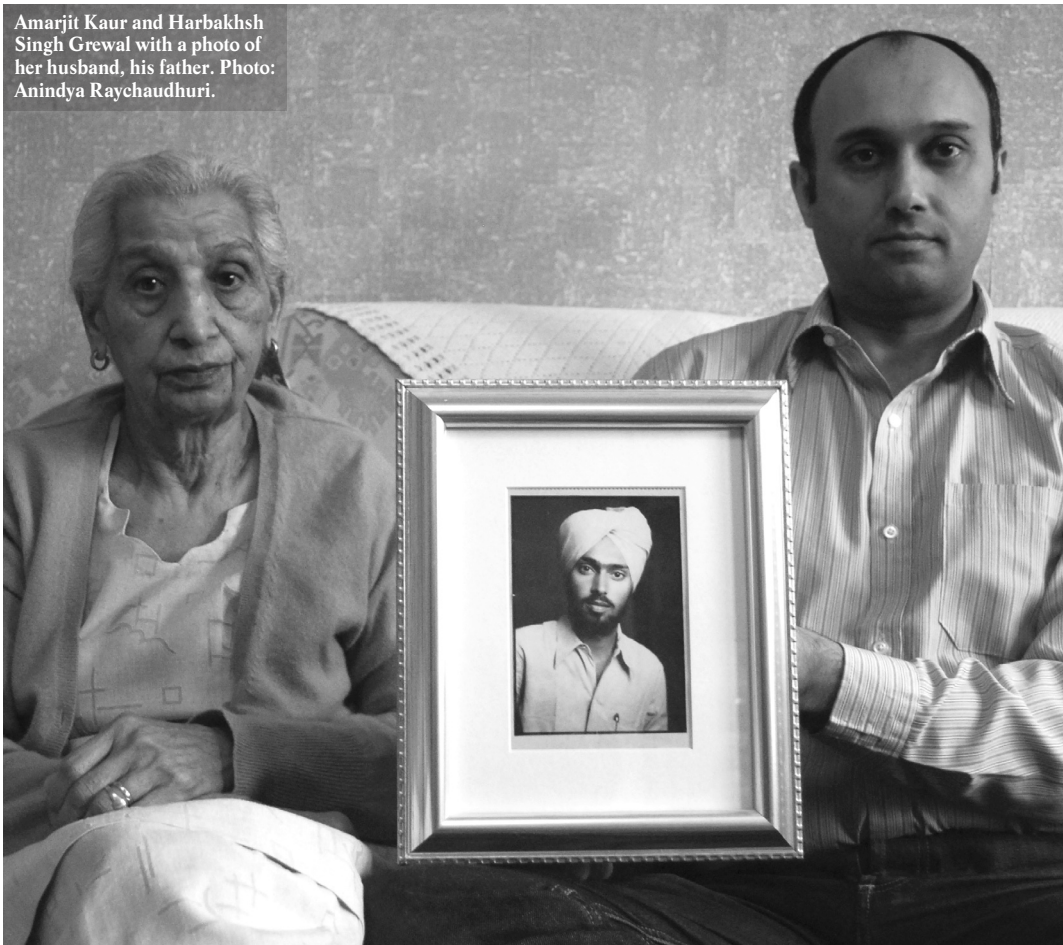
Stuart Hall puts it, an archive 'does not consist of simply opening the flood-gates to any kind of production in any context, without any ordering or internal regularity of principle'.[35] In my own case, I cannot conceive of any point on which all my participants would agree, from the obviously contentious (who is to blame for partition?) to the apparently less emotive (should we remember these stories anyway?). Any archive I create would inevitably impose my own singular narrative, my own ordering principle, over the multiple, fractured views of all my participants. The archive of oral history interviews that I have collected is mine, and my interviewees are only granted access on my terms.

To illustrate this, it is helpful to turn to Sara Ahmed's work on wilfulness in multi-cultural society. Ahmed frames 'the relationship between the individual and community […] in terms of particular and general will'. She quotes Blaise Pascal to underline her point:

Let us imagine a body full of thinking members. If the foot and the hands had a will of their own, they could only be in their order in submitting their particular will to the primary will which governs the whole body. Apart from that, they are in disorder and mischief; but in willing only the goal of the body, they accomplish their own goal.[36]

As Ahmed glosses Pascal, 'If a part is to have will, then it must will what the whole of the body wills. The body part that does not submit its will to the primary will causes disorder and mischief'.[37]

The relationship between the archive and the individual interview has the same power dynamic that Ahmed identifies in her work on wilfulness and diversity. The orderliness of the archive comes from the fact that the individual interview (its will, its voice) is subsumed under the wider collective will of the archive. An individual oral history interview is like Pascal's thinking member; if it had a voice or a will of its own then the body as a whole, the archive, would be in disorder. The process of archiving, then, can be thought of as banishing disorder by establishing a particular will. If Fanon is correct in associating decolonisation with disorderliness, then the ordering that archiving constitutes is reminiscent of precisely the kind of stabilisation that Spivak identified as epistemic violence. The entire process of archiving (translating,

transcribing, editing, sequencing, interpreting and so on) then involves the taking of the voice of an interviewee and making it over with old colonialisms, subsuming its will under a general archival will that is ultimately my own. Perhaps it was this sense of being subsumed under a bigger entity within which his own identity might be elided that made Ananta so ambivalent about being part of this project. The spectre of being silenced in an archive, not surprisingly, led him to meditate on his physical mortality.

Conclusion

Towards the end of my interview with H, he said of the stories that he was telling me:

> This, too, is history. What is happening now is history as well. This, too, is being written. People like you and me are writing it.[38]

I am particularly interested in the word *too* – the Bengali suffix *o* – in *eta o itihash*. What kind of hierarchies is H identifying in his use of the word *too*? Is he acknowledging the fact that his voice can only be an addition – a history *too*, as opposed to a history, or even History? The *too* surely implies the existence of a normatively mainstream history against which his testimony will always be compared and found inferior. This is the same anxiety that Ananta depicts when my question about his voice being transported to London makes him consider his own mortality. Do both of these men implicitly recognise the limit-points of their identity, and how in its transformation into the archive of history their voice will necessarily leave them behind?

There is a tragic irony in the fact that in Bengali, Ananta's name means limitless or the Eternal. The lines of power that inevitably marked my interview with him do not just affect the ways in which his testimony features in my work, but they simultaneously help to demarcate the limits of the limitlessness of Ananta's name. Every time I bring Ananta's voice into my writing, or into the teaching room of a Scottish university, I inevitably make him homeless yet again, just so that his nostalgic yearnings for a lost home can be played to an audience which is almost always entirely at home. It is poignantly appropriate that Derrida conceives of the archival process as one of 'house arrest'. As he puts it, the archive is the 'place where they [documents, interviews] dwell permanently', the 'domiciliation' which means that they 'are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged topology'.[39] Ananta's voice might dwell in my archive in Scotland, but *he* does not and cannot other than as a form of arrest over which he has no control.

As a discipline, oral history clearly needs to continue collecting and archiving interviews. For an archive to function, it equally clearly needs to have a semblance of order. Archivists and scholars have had many important conversations over how best to respect the rights of the inhabitants of our archives, and it is important that we continue to develop our archival processes in this direction. The problem I have discussed here, however, is one of a more fundamental order that is not necessarily solvable by more egalitarian archiving practices. If it is inevitable that an archive will impose an extraneous orderliness to a fundamentally disorderly interview, then the least we can do is remember the lines of privilege that our archives represent. The magnitude of this privilege is such that it will not be subverted simply through better archival practices. To do that, we would need to re-imagine more than the methodological processes of an academic discipline. We need to re-imagine a world in which Ananta's life is no longer affected by these power structures, and then, perhaps, his voice would not just be attributed to his name but could live up to the fullness of its meaning.

NOTES
1. Interview with Ananta (born c 1912), originally in Bengali; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Adi Shoptogram, West Bengal, India, 21 March 2012.
2. Jacques Derrida, 'Archive fever: a Freudian impression', *Diacritics*, vol 25, no 2, 1995, pp 9-63, p 10.
3. Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial archives and the arts of governance', *Archival Science*, vol 2, no 1, 2002, pp 87-109, p 87.
4. Stoler, 2002, p 91.
5. Stoler, 2002, p 90.
6. Stoler, 2002, p 98.
7. Bernard S Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996, p 5.
8. Cohn, 1996, p 3.

9. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization,* Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012, p 364.
10. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp 271-313, p 281.
11. Ian Talbot, 'The 1947 Partition of India', in Dan Stone (ed), *The Historiography of Genocide*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp 420-37, p 420.
12. Kavita Daiya, *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008, p 6.

13. Interview with Zahid (born 1920) in English; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Karachi, Pakistan, 13 September 2013.
14. Dipesh Chakrabarty, among others, invites us to critically view this trope as not universal but underpinned by particular caste and gendered tropes. See 'Remembered villages: representation of Hindu-Bengali memories in the aftermath of the partition', *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol 31, no 32, 1996, pp 2143-51. Chakrabarty's point is valid and my intention here is not to argue against his analysis. I would merely state, however, that by virtue of being one of the most prominent tropes of partition narratives, this view of partition as a seismic schism has necessarily affected the ways in which it is remembered today.

15. Multiple historians have challenged this view of partition as a disorderly interruption to an otherwise peaceful and ordered reality. See, for example, Joya Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, and Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, among others. My point is not to interrogate the truthfulness of this memory, but rather to illuminate how the way partition is remembered and then narrated in oral history interviews is marked by a disorder that is similar to Fanon's analysis of decolonisation.

16. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin: London, 2001, p 27.

17. Interview with Jogesh (born c 1945), originally in Bengali; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Ghoom, West Bengal, India, 25 March 2012.

18. Interview with Zafar (born c 1930), originally in Urdu; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Karachi, Pakistan, 12 September 2013.

19. Graham Smith, 'Beyond individual/collective memory: women's transactive memories of food, family and conflict', *Oral History*, vol 35, no 2, 2007, pp 77-90, pp 80, 88.

20. Interview with Sushanto (born 1934) and Geeta (born 1936), originally in Bengali; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Belgharia, West Bengal, India, 30 March 2012.

21. Interview with Rajinder (born 1934) and Gargi (born 1942) in English; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Beckenham, Kent, UK, 16 February 2012.

22. Stuart Hall, 'Constituting an archive', *Third Text*, vol 15, no 54, 2001, pp 89-92, p 89.

23. Raphael Samuel, 'Perils of the transcript', *Oral History*, vol 1, no 2, 1972, pp 19-22, p 19.

24. Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp 45-46.

25. Interview with KR (born 1959) in English; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Brynmawr, Wales, 16 October 2011.

26. University of St Andrews, Confidentiality and Data Protection [web page]. Accessed online at www.st-andrews.ac.uk/research/integrity-ethics/humans/ethical-guidance/confidentiality-data-protection/, 4 January 2021.

27. Cited in Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (eds), *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2008, p 212.

28. Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p 126.

29. Oral History Society, Information for Authors [web page]. Accessed online at www.ohs.org.uk/info-for-authors/, 26 May 2021.

30. Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p 8.

31. Brian Noble, 'Tripped up by coloniality: anthropologists as instruments or agents in indigenous-settler political relations?', *Anthropologica*, vol 57, no 2, 2015, pp 427-43, p 429.

32. Interview with Aziz Fatima Qazi (born 1931), in English; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan, 11 September 2013.

33. Interview with Sukhwant Kaur Pall (born 1949), in English; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Edinburgh, Scotland, 3 December 2012.

34. Spivak, 1988, p 306.

35. Hall, 2001, p 91.

36. Blaise Pascal (translated by WF Trotter), *Pensées*, New York: Dover, 2003, pp 132-33, p 132, cited in Sara Ahmed, 'Willful parts: problem characters or the problem of character', *New Literary History*, vol 42, no 2, 2011, pp 231-53, p 243.

37. Ahmed, 2011, p 243.

38. Interview with H (born c 1946), originally in Bengali; recorded by Anindya Raychaudhuri in Bilkuli, West Bengal, India, 8 January 2015.

39. Derrida, 1995, p 10.

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