

## INTERPRETIVE FIELD JOURNAL 2

**Name: Megan Huff**

**Date and Time of Journal Entry: 3/28/2008 4 PM**

**Name of Interviewee: Morna Bagchee**

**Place of Interview: Watsonville, CA**

**Date and Time of Interview: 3/28/2008 2PM**

### **A. INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES AND EXPERIENCE**

**Write this part of your journal within 1/2 hour of the interview. If you are not near a computer, write your thoughts longhand and then transfer them to the computer. Write as many pages as necessary. Let your thoughts flow. The idea is to capture your thoughts immediately.**

**Make sure you cover the points below but this is not a questionnaire. There is no particular order. Whatever makes most sense. Use the prompts to help you remember and write about your performance and what you experienced as an interviewer. An average response to this section of the Journal might be 2-3 pages, double spaced; but I encourage you to be comprehensive and thoughtful, and not focus on length. PLEASE ILLUSTRATE YOUR ABILITIES WITH CONCRETE EXAMPLES FROM THE INTERVIEW**

Describe and explain how you:

- developed your interview guide and applied it
- selected an interviewee appropriate to the assignment
- set up the interview, contacted and communicated with the interviewee
- conducted the interview in a conducive site and time, free of interruption and noise
- explained the process to your interviewee
- discussed the issue of permission, disclosure, protection
- followed ethical guidelines
- developed a line of questioning
- phrased questions: type, quality, and effectiveness(e.g. open ended, specific, leading, thoughtful, knowledgeable, dumb) – please provide concrete examples
- generated responses to your questions (e.g. narrative, reflective, story-telling, rambling, laborious question/answers, non-communicative, etc.)
- used a two sentence format, comparative questions, and follow up questions
- listened carefully to the stories and gave space for the interviewee's agenda
- responded to new or unexpected information or failed to pick up a clue
- probed and deepened the conversation
- clarified prior knowledge for the "outside" listener
- requested clarification if needed
- expressed appreciation, empathy, and responded with sensitivity did not interrupt or make distracting noises or interventions
- developed comfort, deepened trust, or experienced tension
- handled the equipment
- how should you improve, and what you would change next time
- Anything else that is distinctive and important to comment on

Enter your reflection below. Use as much space as you need.

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Breanna and I worked collaboratively on this assignment and we chose to interview a family friend of Breanna's because we thought she had an interesting story. She is an immigrant from Ireland and she moved here with her Indian husband. We developed an interview guide that focused mainly on her immigration experience and also her interracial marriage, two aspects of Morna's life that we found interesting. From there, we decided we needed some contextual information; so we had sections on Morna's formative years in Ireland as well as her life now that she is here and has experienced life in both countries for a significant amount of time. Before we arrived at Morna's home for the interview, Breanna and I discussed who would ask what questions from the Interview Guide so it would not seem so awkward and I definitely think that helped. Once there, we followed the Interview Guide pretty closely and asked clarification questions. In this interview, I found it a lot more helpful to have an Interview Guide because Morna is a quiet woman so it helped to have the questions right in front at least for me.

Since Morna knows Breanna better than I do, Breanna did the interview set-up work so Morna would not be contacted by a stranger to interview her. I think all parties involved were grateful for that. A couple of days before, Breanna confirmed the interview with Morna and we were set. The interview took place in Morna's living room with her sitting on the couch so she would be comfortable and she turned off the radio before we started recording. We explained that this was more like a conversation as opposed to the type of interview one would see on television. I think that helped her feel a little less like she was being interrogated. Since Morna is a quiet person, we did tell her that she was free to discuss anything as long as she was comfortable telling it to us. I am not aware that we broke any ethical boundaries in our interview.

Breanna and I developed a line of questioning based on what we thought would be interesting to an outsider and expanded with contextual questions from there to get the full story. We asked several different types of questions ranging from closed-ended ("When and where were you born?") to reflective ("What was your family's reaction to you marrying your husband?"). I feel the questions we asked were effective enough to accomplish our goal, which was to find out

about her unique experience. The responses we received from Morna were amazing, many preconceived notions that I held were destroyed. Sometimes they were very short, but once she got comfortable, she told us stories about how she met her husband, the IRA and more. When we asked her what she thought her legacy was, I could tell she got a little emotional when she was reflecting upon it. In my opinion, when she got her words out, the answer was beautiful.

We used different formats for a couple of our questions. For instance, we asked some clarification questions as follow up because we knew if we did not understand then another person listening might not understand the concept she was talking about. We also asked a comparative question when we asked Morna if there were any differences in American culture and Irish culture. One of our extra questions was a two-sentence question about the IRA. We were thinking of terrorism today and made a connection with the IRA, so we used the framework of the first sentence articulating the thought to ask the actual question about the IRA. I think we listened carefully to Morna and gave her time to expand on her thoughts. I do not really think Morna had an agenda, so that is an issue we did not have to deal with.

I went into the interview with a very open mind, so I think I reacted to surprising information in a very genuine way but I do not think I offended anyone with my reactions to this information. I think we deepened the conversation by having extra questions prepared that did not necessarily fit into any of the categories on our Interview Guide. I expressed appreciation several times to Morna for her agreeing to be interviewed and her graciousness in opening up her home to Breanna and me. I do not think I could have shown true empathy because I have never been anywhere near her situation, but I did try by listening intently and showing appropriate emotion. I think we experienced a little tension when the interview first started because Breanna did not know Morna very well, I did not know her at all and Morna was supposed to be sharing some potentially intimate details with us. I think once Morna knew she could trust us, the tension disappeared.

I think we handled the equipment well. There were not any major malfunctions and we conducted a sound test before we started recording “on the record.” I think I still need to improve on my intervention skills in follow up questions. I always feel like I am interrupting and could be missing something important. I think Breanna did very well in this area, however. I think it is interesting to note how big of an impact being an “outsider” can be. I think Morna and I might have felt some of the same feelings about having a conversation with a complete stranger. As the interview progressed, however, I got so interested in hearing her story that I did not want to interrupt to ask questions.

## **B. CONTENT**

**Describe and discuss the following points (not in this order necessarily), using concrete examples, quoting from the interview where effective. An average response to this section of the Journal might be 2 pages, double spaced; but I encourage you to be comprehensive and thoughtful.**

- what you learned about your interviewee’s life-life growing up, non-employment of married women, grew up in “normal” Irish family, growing up centered around Catholic (~4:30), liberal family (~11:15), immigration experience
- what you learned about the interviewee’s community
- what you learned about your interviewee’s connection to larger historical events, if any-
- what larger issues emerged in this interview – historical, sociological, gender, racial, class, economic, cultural, etc. –presence of IRA(~36:20-specific incident ~40:30), interracial marriage (~14:30), racial discrimination (~35:00 )
- any ethical issues that arose-my interest in discrimination (~34:00, ~50:20) (might have been hard for her to talk about), but at that point, I was fishing for content to meet time requirements for assignment
- what questions arose for you, what you would like to explore further and why-World Trade Center construction? Irish civil rights movement specifics (~43:00) what impact did independence have on the Irish people? (~50:35)
- what impact telling this story had on your interviewee – how do you know
- Did the interviewee reflect on her/his own words at any time or draw any insights that they weren’t expecting (go back to “legacy” section ~44:30) (“musical culture” ~46: 25 and a little before)
- what emotional, psychological, and intellectual impact this process had on you and how you see your own life in relation to this story more emotionally and psychologically draining than first interview. A lot tougher with a person who is a little reluctant to talk because she does not think she is exciting enough. I also learned about some negative stereotypes that people held against both Irish and Indian people (~47:30)
- Anything else that is distinctive and important to comment on

Enter your reflection below. Use as much space as you need.

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This interview had a very different dynamic compared to my first interview. Therefore, my findings have a different perspective. For instance, I had to learn a lot about the life of our interviewee in general because it was the backdrop for her specific experiences and I knew nothing about her life other than she is an immigrant and she is involved in an interracial marriage. Some specific things I learned about Morna is that her childhood centered on the Catholic religion and its traditions and that her family, like many others, was liberal in its views on interracial marriages.

There were several instances of larger issues that were discussed in the interview. One of our subtopics for the interview was interracial marriage and that brought up the idea of racial discrimination. At one point in the interview, she discusses how she accompanied her husband to “poojas” and her experience at her first one as “intriguing” (DVD 16:50). Morna also elaborated for us some of the things that were said and done to her and her husband when she was talking about living in England and the signs on rooms or apartments for rent that said “no Irish or coloreds” (DVD 34:51). A cultural issue that we dealt with for quite a bit was the IRA (Irish Republican Army). She gave us a lot of good historical background about the group, which gave me a better understanding of why incidents happened. She also recounts a specific instance that she remembers from her childhood when “they started blowing up customs posts on the borders” (DVD 40:15).

I think one potential ethical issue might have been my interest in specific incidents of discrimination. Specifically, towards the end of the interview, I asked Morna to elaborate on the religious discrimination shown towards Catholics. I thought about that question afterwards and how she might not have felt comfortable answering it because it was so close to home for her. On the other hand, at that point, I think I was fishing for more information to meet the time requirement for the assignment. There are a few issues I would return to if given the chance. I am

interested in the Irish civil rights movement compared to the American civil rights movement, so I would like to get specifics on the Irish civil rights movement. Another issue I would like to explore further is the impact that independence had on Irish people. For me, it is difficult to decipher how this process affected Morna. Since she was very quiet and shy during the interview, I could not tell if these emotions being displayed were because she was nervous or because she did not want to talk about the issues Breanna and I were bringing up. I think because she did not think she was “exciting” (DVD 57:09), she was impacted either positively or negatively.

This process was a lot different from the first one in that it had a different impact on me personally. Obviously, for the first interview, there was a family connection so it was more directly related to me and I had an emotional investment as well. For this interview, however, it was not like that. Even though I was involved in coming up with topics and writing questions, when we actually got there, the situation seemed to change for some reason. I felt this process was more psychologically draining for me because I had to deal with the silences and not knowing when was too soon to start asking another question as well as dealing with a person who seemed to be a little reluctant to talk definitely took its toll. Again, I think this has to do with her attitude that she does not think her life is interesting enough to talk about.

Some interesting preconceived notions that other people had about Morna when she came to the United States came up towards the end of our interview. I found them quite interesting and I am interested to know where the people Morna is talking about got the ideas. One that I found particularly funny was that a person once commented, “You must be feeling uncomfortable wearing shoes” (DVD 47:41). I think this might be a potentially interesting issue and warrant some more background information.

### C. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Analyze and interpret your interview. This is, perhaps, the most important part of the journal, where you now dig beneath the surface of your interview and explore it as a constructed text. Do not skimp on this part. An average entry might be 2-3 pages, using concrete examples to back up your insights and interpretations.

Here are some prompts. Consider:

- What image of her or his life does your interviewee project and what do you think about it
- What sense does s/he make out of the experiences s/he recounts
- Are there contradictions or silences, where are they and what do they mean
- What perspective or insights do you bring to interpreting the story
- What perspectives or insights do the readings bring to the story
- Are there particular perspectives – ways of knowing -- that help you understand this story (gender, race, class, sexuality, or other social categories of identity)
- Would your interviewee agree with your perspective – why/why not
- How do you feel about your role in interpreting this story
- Anything else that is distinctive and important to comment on

**In this section you are asked to apply readings you have done thus far. Look back at your reading notes. Draw relevant connections between your interview and issues of interpretation that oral history scholars raise in the readings. For example:**

As Anderson and Jack point out in their article “Learning to Listen” (24), moral language provides a clue to understanding the struggle women experience between social norms and internalized gender roles. This same tension is evident in Jane Doe’s interview on her experience as a professor at CSUMB. In her interview, Jane says:

----- (CD 2, Track 1, 20:35)

Then explain how the speaker is using moral language, where in the quote it lies, and what does the use of this moral language lead you to conclude.

**Enter your reflection below. Use as much space as you need.**

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The experience interviewing Morna Bagchee was very interesting and I think actually analyzing the interview will be another thought-provoking encounter with her very eclectic life. While Breanna and I found her life fascinating, I do not think Morna fully realized what an amazing life she has led. At the very end of her time with us, we asked her if there was anything else she would to share. Morna responded “Not really, but I don’t really consider my life that exciting” (DVD 57:07). I think Ruth Finnegan put it perfectly in her article “Family Myths, Memories, and Interviewing.” She explains what I think might be a reason why Morna does not find her life as fascinating as Breanna and I do. Finnegan explains, “Perhaps tellers are not fully

conscious that they are crystallizing their family's heritage, telling and retelling stories that express that family's being" (Finnegan 177). I do not think Morna was "fully conscious" that what she was telling was the story of how her family came into being. I think this had a major impact on the way the final product came out. I say this because I think by Morna's not being fully aware of the significance of this event, the information she was willing to share with us may have been greatly diminished.

Another aspect I of Morna's narration I noticed was what Alessandro Portelli would call her "velocity." Portelli explains, "An informant may recount in a few words experiences which lasted a long time, or dwell at length on brief episodes" (Portelli 66). A great example of this happened when Morna was describing her immigration experience. Her immigration experience has lasted the rest of her life. However, when we asked her if the experience was a positive one, she talked about it for less than a minute, the majority of which focused on her husband and not her. Morna answered our immigration question like this:

"Uh, oh yes definitely, um, since the time we left England the economy was not very good and at the time and, um, there was discriminations against Indians as far as jobs were concerned. Uh, my husband was lucky he had a good job and rank Xerox, Xerox Company, but, a lot of his friends were just joined, you know, had odd jobs, you know, not according to what their qualifications were. But, uh, you know, we did definitely have a lot more opportunity here. And, I mean nowadays, I don't think it would have made any difference" (DVD 31:33).

I find her response to this question very interesting because she focuses on such a huge event in her life as if it lasted for about a year instead of the majority of her life. Also, I think my perspective is a little skewed with her focus on the impact on her husband because I cannot see in those terms because I am not married, so I only think in terms of myself as one person as opposed to being a part of a couple. The more I think about it, I think the reason she focuses on her

husband so much is that he had the most to gain or lose from their immigration to the United States.

Towards the end of her article “A Cypriot Woman’s Life Story,” Elena Georgiou recounts that she “also began to feel the inappropriateness of the more linear perspective of traditional ethnographic work; that is, the power of the interviewer over the interviewee”(Georgiou 178). I definitely felt some kind of power when interviewing Morna, especially at the beginning of the session. I do not know if Morna sensed the power I thought I had and maybe that was the reason she was not as open as Breanna and I would have liked her to be. My sense of power could have been the reason for Morna’s reluctance to share about details at the beginning of the interview. As we settled down, though, the awkward silences seemed to decrease gradually. An example from the interview is when I asked about her what it meant to be an Irish woman. She responds rather tentatively:

“I mean, I was just, um (silence), I mean I don’t remember any feelings about being Irish. I was just glad I wasn’t English (laughter). But, um, (long silence) I mean, I gue, well, my family were kind of involved in politics. I mean, I always heard my grandmother talking to my father about different politics, but it never, you know, I never really knew what was going on until year later, but, um, (another long silence). But, I don’t really know what you mean” (DVD 00:55).

When I listened to the interview again to get the nuances of Morna’s silences right, I noticed that I kind of cut Morna off on the question before which might have given her a sense of my belief of power over her. However, as previously mentioned, the interview went more smoothly as we progressed. It might have had to do with my releasing of the power that I kind of sensed and that might have made Morna feel more at ease and open. In addition, upon this listening, I think the way we phrased the question might have thrown Morna off as well.

Several factors led to the interview to end up not as well as we had anticipated. Firstly, I do not think Morna was fully aware of the situation as Breanna and I would have hoped. Next,

Morna's velocity concerning an issue we had hoped would be a central theme in our interview. Finally, I think the interview did not go as well as we would have hoped due to the awkward silences because of my sense of power that diminished over the course of the interview.