NARRATIVE HISTORY DOCUMENTATION: A TOOL-KIT

Based on the Methodologies Used in the Herstories Project and the Community Memorialisation Project

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The Community Memorialisation Project, Sri Lanka

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Narrative inquiry is an interdisciplinary method that views lives holistically and draws from traditions in literary theory, oral history, drama, psychology, folklore, and film philosophy. The method assumes that people construct their realities through narrating their stories. The researcher explores a story told by a participant and records that story"
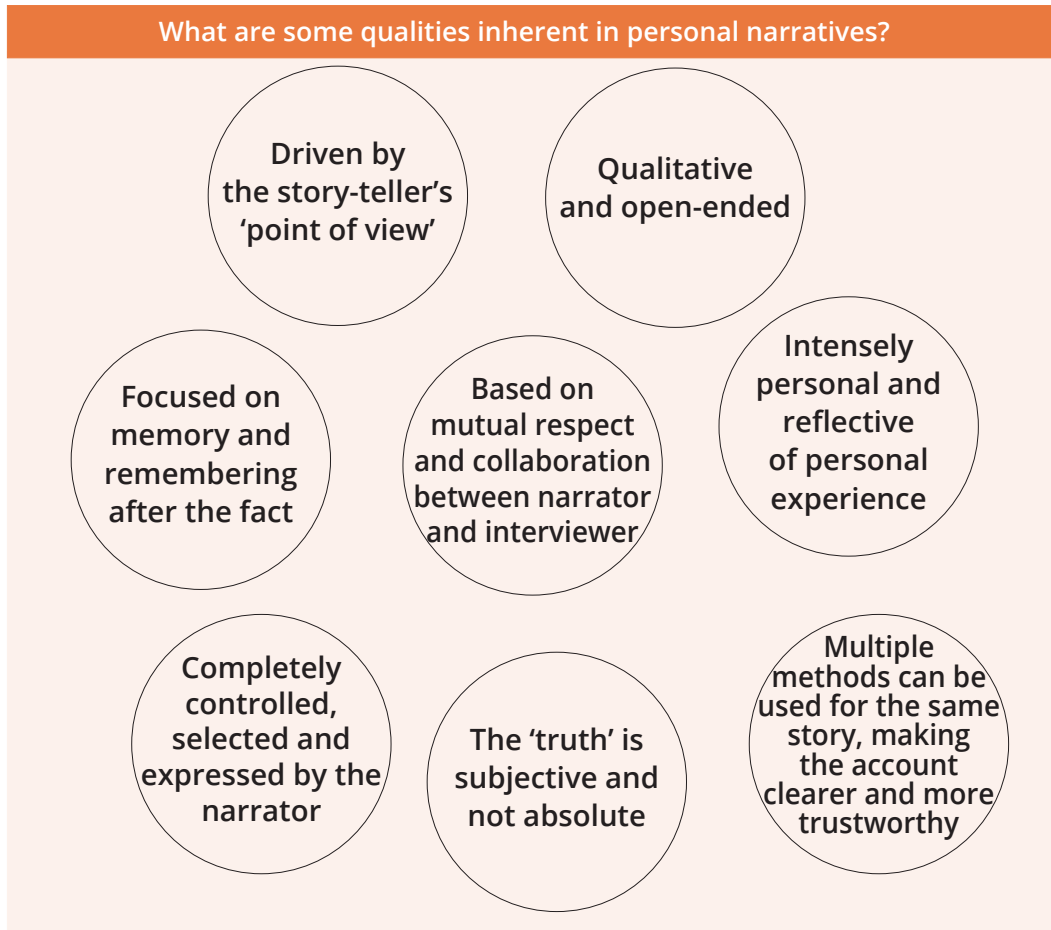
- (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) [1]

The Herstories Project[2] (www.herstoryarchive.org) and the Community Memorialisation Project[3] (www.memorymap.lk) share a set of tools, grounded in the protocols for oral history narrative documentation. The primary purpose of the projects, is not only to document personal histories of individuals and thereby preserve historical memories, but to also acknowledge and facilitate multiple 'truths', challenge the single narrative and bring marginalised narratives to the fore. In doing so, the projects extend the use of these personal histories to generate a public discourse on dealing with the past through awareness and empathy. They encourage negotiating the present context through acceptance of the experiences of oneself and of the 'other'. Through these actions, the projects hope to contribute towards preventing violent conflict in the future by bringing about a shared awareness of the costs of violence.

This tool-kit sets out the methodologies and techniques used in both projects along with the ethical and practical considerations as well as the guidelines that enabled their use. They were not especially created for the projects but adapted and developed further or designed using techniques used in psychology, non-verbal expression, story-telling and creative writing for the process of collecting people's narratives. It also uses mediated art forms such as video, photo essays, art and sculpture as a means of expressing stories further for dissemination and archiving. It is not a definitive guide to oral history, human rights documentation or narrative inquiry, and in no way supposes that the processes used in these two projects are perfect methodologies. While the Herstories Project and the Community Memorialisation Project is not without challenges or limitations, they have tried to ensure responsibility and best practice by following the protocols and due diligence as much as possible. This document is based on the ethical considerations, challenges and moral dilemmas, hands-on experiences and learnings that shaped the Herstories Project and the Community Memorialisation Project.

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2. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The Herstories Project and The Community Memorialisation Project use life history, narrative and non-verbal methodologies in documenting peoples' personal histories.

What are some qualities inherent in personal narratives?

- Driven by the story-teller's 'point of view'
- Qualitative and open-ended
- Focused on memory and remembering after the fact
- Based on mutual respect and collaboration between narrator and interviewer
- Intensely personal and reflective of personal experience
- Completely controlled, selected and expressed by the narrator
- The 'truth' is subjective and not absolute
- Multiple methods can be used for the same story, making the account clearer and more trustworthy

While using life history formats in narrative documentation has its benefits, it is not without limitations in the context of human rights or eye-witness account documentation. Life histories focus on crucial moments or incidents. Life histories enable the narrator to reflect on these fateful moments with all the complexity of indecision, confusion, contradiction, and self-awareness that capture the nuances of life. With self-documenting or self-expression, they go beyond providing specific information or facts about past events as a purely historical account might; instead it allows for narratives that are more focused on feelings. It also provides the space for narratives to evolve with time, depending on the narrator's present life-situation, as they reflect on their past experiences. As each of these 'stories of one' are archived as a collection, they provide a mosaic of a specific era in history or a specific group of people. It is particularly useful in collecting women's histories because it provides a safe space, relatively free of male influence in which to voice their lives. This process is also valuable because it is entirely based on trust between the story-teller and the researcher; a collaboration that necessitates a relationship established over several visits. It requires active listening that gives the narrator power and control over his or her voice. The 'telling' of an experience is therefore cathartic and leads to a sense of release enabling the narrator to begin dealing with trauma simply by providing an 'addressable other'.

As a collaborative process, it depends on the narrators being comfortable enough to truly explore and deal with their traumatic memories in the presence of a stranger. It is sometimes not private - as curiosity of onlookers, awareness that 'something is happening' behind closed doors, children listening in despite attempts to safeguard them from expressions of trauma, and in extreme cases intrusion by persons with authority, result in a selection bias or even changes and fabrications of aspects of the narrative. This can threaten not only the nature of the (subjective) 'truth' shared, but also the security of the narrator over a period of time. Translations and transcribing can also alter the narratives or lose its essence, by 'processing' the information. As memorialisation through auto-ethnographic life history formats are always 'looking back' into a person's past, from within the socio-economic, political and security context of the present, it can affect the veracity of the documentation. "Like any method that relies on participants' accounts, narrative may suffer from recalling selectively, focusing on subsets of experience, filling in memory gaps through inference, and reinterpreting the past" (Ross & Conway, 1986) [4].The life history format and its focus on the individual, can also make generalising difficult. This form of documentation is grounded in the notion of personal truths, and therefore, it never fully becomes a verified testimony making its legal usage in human rights cases problematic. This method of documentation is also extremely time consuming, laborious and emotionally difficult on the narrator as well as the documenter.

However, narrative self-documentation provides personal histories with depth, nuance and a holistic expression of experience that a structured and closed interview format or a commission of inquiry may never be able to achieve. It creates space for the narrator's full voice. It may also enable the narrator to feel relevant, acknowledged and increase their self-esteem. Therefore auto ethnographic or self-documentation methodologies are extremely powerful in capturing personal histories in post-conflict, transitional societies.

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3. ETHICAL CONCERNS IN DOCUMENTING LIFE HISTORIES

3.1 Ethical concerns: Unintended and unexpected harm

A researcher is capable of harming an interviewee without intending to do so. Most of the time, social science research does not entail a risk of physical harm, with the exception of gender-based violence, domestic abuse as a result of sharing a story, and security concerns within conflict contexts. However, there is a possibility of a great deal of psychological and/ or social harm that can occur. It is important that a researcher or archivist considers the possibility of such unintended outcomes when approaching a community or individual.

Some examples of potential harm include:

❍ **Psychological Trauma:** Re-living a traumatic experience without the necessary support or consistent counselling in dealing with trauma, fear or death; Passing on trauma to children, by retelling stories in gruesome detail; Acting out in silence when not able to grieve openly.

❍ **Stigmatisation:** Although individuals will be open, willing or even eager to document their experiences for a variety of reasons such as hoping for a sense of justice, accountability or simply to be heard, they may not fully consider the social stigmatisation that might follow, even years after the account is made public. This is especially severe in cases of gender-based violence, abuse and torture.

❍ **Increasing vulnerability:** Marginalised or disenfranchised community groups maybe vulnerable to physical, psychological, social, economic and systemic repercussions. In a post-conflict context, especially in highly militarised ones, the danger of physical harm in sharing eye-witness accounts can be severe.

❍ **Failing to respect cultural traditions:** Respecting cultural traditions of when, who, how one approaches, addresses, sits, touches or photographs individuals can cause harm to the narrator at a later date.

❍ **Changing contexts :** Openness and willingness maybe a temporary phenomenon, with changing political or social contexts negating the context when the narratives were collected. This is not easy to anticipate.

❍ **Negatively influencing or strengthening unequal power dynamics:** There is a potential risk when an outsider attempts to create 'opportunities that gives voice to the voiceless'. It may upset unequal power dynamics by further marginalising or physical threatening those with less power. Especially in the case of women's narratives, this may be counter-productive.

3.2 Ethical concerns: Contesting narratives

Oral history projects, especially those dealing with historical narratives may produce contesting narratives of the same set of incidents. There are several possible reasons for such variations in what is perceived as 'the truth'. These could be memory, limited or segmented personal experience of a larger set of community or shared experiences; projecting dangers or opportunities of the present context on to the past; untreated trauma; security concerns; personal politics and ideological beliefs. Community based dialogue to resolve contesting narratives is important, but only with care and consideration about harm or violence it may fuel. If contested narratives are likely to negatively impact community cohesion, the support

structures required to stabilise or manage such situations should be in place following the researcher's initial risk-assessment.

❍ **Credibility/reliability of accounts:** The reliability of first-hand experiences, leaving aside those that are observances or second-hand accounts, may never be completely reliable or verifiable for a variety of reasons, both contextual and personal

❍ **Truth is subjective and it is not necessary to establish 'absolute truths':** While truth-seeking may be one of the objectives of collecting historical narratives, as long as 'absolute truth' is not the goal, creating a platform for multiple truths can be a stated and clearly defined objective. This puts the onus of 'truth' on the individual and not the collective or archive as a whole[5]

❍ **Time-lapse from eye-witness period and fading memory:** It is best that stories, especially in the case of human rights documentation are collected in the immediate aftermath of an incident or period of conflict, as time will alter and change memories until some disappear

❍ **False memory or collectively entrenched stories:** There is a danger that false memories can exist around the same set of incidents or collective experiences based on perspective. However, in some cases falsified memories can become collectively endorsed and entrenched through repetition over time. As such, an entire community may believe an altered narrative, rejecting minority narratives that do not corroborate the widely held 'public memory'

❍ **The right to forget :** There is a moral and ethical responsibility to let those who want to forget their experiences, forget them. It is a personal choice and as such, remembering should never be forced

❍ **Ambiguous narratives:** Be cautious in situations where 'victim-perpetrator-survivor' narratives are nuanced (e.g. ex-combatants). In such cases, openness and non-judgemental listening is imperative and should be approached with great care

3.3 Ethical concerns: Ownership and moral authority

Once permission is granted for a narrative to be shared publicly (even if they always retain the right of withdrawal), its ownership can become a source of tension. When archived publicly (at the National Archives or online) does a narrative belong to the 'public' as a historical archive? In a community like Sri Lanka, where online presence of one's story may not always be accessible or the person may not truly understand the nature of its 'publicness', how much would a story owner be truly able to control the public life of the narrative?

❍ **The right to a story :** A story may have been shared at a specific time, in a specific context. After that 'moment' has passed, and the context has changed, would the descendants of the 'story-owner' have the right to remove such a story from the public domain? This is a debate currently going on within online oral history academic circles about the validity period of a public story's ownership[6]. This is especially the case with online archiving. The consequences may be completely unanticipated, decades after the archive is established

❍ **Editing an archive:** There is a danger of inciting racial tension or violence by publishing a story with pejorative or racist opinions, or unsubstantiated rumours, or assumptions. This is especially valid in the stories that identify presumed wrongdoers by name, based on hearsay. This is an ethical dilemma: does the curator of the archive have the moral authority to dismiss someone else's story

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based on his/her judgement? Is the inclusion of such a story, problematic as it promotes the very opposite of what the archive/project intends? In most cases, anything handed into the archive as a personal narrative is sacrosanct, and no one has the authority to dismiss it from the archive, thereby erring on the side of the historical importance and relevance of documenting all narratives. However, a case can be made to remove or redact if it is obvious that the story is not a personal one, but slander or racist, made with the intention of inciting violence. If someone is simply sharing an experience (i.e. "then they called me a [racial slur]"), it should be included without question as the racial slur affects the course of the person's history. However, if it is slander (i.e. 'those [racial slur] should be chased away from here, we will kill them if they come here), is a more incendiary story and could cause harm to the story owner or to others. The project team should decide whether such violence and racism are also a valid opinion of equal value to be added to the archive or not. There is no prescription except that when making a decision the country context, multiple and contesting opinions and the goals of the archive should all be considered on a case by case basis

3.4 Ethical concerns: Gender and class dynamics

If narrators are approached without taking into consideration cultural practices and domestic gender dynamics, then gender and class disparities may be negatively influenced.

Some of the gender and class dynamics encountered in project implementation were:

❍ **Gender-based roles:** Some gender roles may vary based on ethnicity, race, country, community and religion. For example, women may be subordinate to their husbands or other males in the family, which may mean that in that specific community, men are required to be present at all interviews

❍ **Gender-based assumptions:** It is also possible that in some places women may be expected to remain quiet and allow the men to answer questions for them. Or it may mean that women do most of the talking, as men consider story-telling or sharing experiences a feminine trait.

❍ **Cultural/gender power disparities:** These may make it difficult for female researchers to conduct interviews, especially with men. It is important to be sensitive to such power dynamics and act accordingly

❍ **Experiences of gender- based violence:** It is also possible that narratives of gender-based violence or sexual violence during conflict can leave lasting psychological and physical scars on women and men that require the interviewers to have specific and specialised training. The potential harm in such situations is not to be taken lightly, particularly if support structures are not already in place within such a community

❍ **When approaching sensitive issues:** It is imperative that the interviewer has an established support system or secondary follow-up mechanisms in place for referrals when approaching delicate and painful issues such as violence, torture and rape. It is unethical and irresponsible to proceed with the interview if such a system is not in place

❍ **Class dynamics:** Class dynamics cannot be tackled or altered without an on-going and long-term process of dialogue oriented towards a cultural and social shift in attitudes and practices. Therefore, short term interventions such as story-telling or interviews where outsiders enter communities, should not attempt to change or alter existing behavioural practices without longer-term support structures or programmes

3.5 Ethical concerns: Selection bias and interviewer-intrusion

Choosing the narrator might be based on what the researcher wants as an outcome, and this can be problematic. It is not unethical to choose sources based on relevance and for unique experiences, but it is unethical if that selection bias creates a set of narratives or testimonies which may be misleading if presented as a representative whole without qualifying the methodology or selection criteria. In a process where narrators volunteer or snowball from known narrators to those they may introduce, or narrators randomly volunteer through known religious, social or non-governmental organisations, this is less of a concern. However, the selected location in itself might mean only a certain type of stories are accessed and this in turn frames the archive [7].

- ❍ **Interviewee rights:** Interviewers must respect the rights of interviewees to forget, to omit, to self-censor and to withdraw at any time

- ❍ **Preconceptions:** Interviewers should avoid stereotypes, misrepresentations, and manipulations of the narrator's words

- ❍ **Accessibility:** Interviewers should strive to make the interviews accessible to the community, thereby returning the stories to their site of origin, if the narrators do not have any objections

- ❍ **Avoid leading:** Interviewers should avoid interviewer intrusion, leading the narrative through specific questions. The ethnographer might impose his/her values through the phrasing of questions or the interpretation of data, which is a concern with all forms of research but especially salient with oral history documentation methods. However, gentle prompts and clarifications are acceptable in order to further conversation.

3.6 Ethical concerns: Financial expectations

It is generally inappropriate to use money as a compensatory tool, especially in developing countries or post-conflict contexts. This is because any monetary transaction can have a coercive power and may be too much of an incentive for some people to refuse to engage even if they do not want to do so. This may cause people to take part in a project that they might not normally consent to simply because it will compensate them well.

- ❍ **No economic benefits or promises should be offered:** Interviewers should begin with a complete overview of the process and parameters of the project and specifically indicate that no compensation is offered.

- ❍ **No promises that are beyond project's scope:** Related to this are other transactional possibilities of participating, such as a promise of finding a missing person, providing any sponsorships for village festivals and children's programmes or promises of justice or accountability. Where possible, it is acceptable to connect a community to existing Government or non-governmental development projects. But this should never be promised at the onset

- ❍ **Providing information without promises:** Providing information on avenues of support, including financial support is acceptable as long as it is public information and is not seen as coercion or transactional. However, in cases where psychological needs are obvious, it is important to offer referrals (privately) to those in need, even if they do not ask for it

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3.7 Ethical concerns: Language, translation and transcribing

The use of language can present an ethical challenge in narrative documentation, especially in the context of translations or transcribing, using an interpreter at interviews, in recording or reporting on the interview in a different tongue.,. In a context such as Sri Lanka, translation is a challenge and neither the Herstories Project nor the Community Memorialisation Project has achieved perfection in this regard. "Neither is a merely technical task; both entail judgment and interpretation. In some way, when data have been translated and/or transcribed, they are not raw data any more—they are "processed data" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 7) [8].

- ❍ **Translating:** If translated from one language to another, the language of narration is the primary language. Can one use translated words as unmediated and unaltered narratives?

- ❍ **Interpreting:** How can one be sure that the interpreter is not altering the testimony, in cases of audio or video interviews? The best form of collection is therefore self-authored or non-verbal forms of narrative that has very little to no room for mediation or interpretation

- ❍ **Understanding context:** It is important to capture the nuances, the subtle meanings and silences and the feelings of the narrator in the process of translation and transcription. This is especially the case when transcribing from a recording: one must prioritise nuances and avoid the trap of words over feelings

- ❍ **Trust and maintaining control:** In situations where a translator is used, it is important to maintain the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee, and not let the conversation be driven by the translator. It is important to prepare together with the translator, so that they are aware not to become a distraction to the conversation

4. MITIGATING ETHICAL CONCERNS

Interviews and or auto-ethnographic narratives, like all qualitative methods, have ethical standards to follow. Adhering to oral history protocols is essential when collecting people's narratives. Given the ethical considerations outlined above which may or may not apply to every context, but in general, cut across most situations of post-conflict narrative collection due to the personal and conversational nature of interviews.

During the Herstories and Community Memorialisation Project implementation, the following procedures and practices were useful.

4.1 Guiding principles for narrative history documentation

Before documentation

○ **Planning documentation process:** Interviewers should document their preparation and re-iterate the protocols for life history and oral history methodologies for the project before beginning the project. Complete the ethics checklist and agree on the applicable oral history protocols suitable to the time/place of the project before beginning the process. Risk /security assessment should be done with the interviewee and interviewer in mind

○ **Planning access to communities:** Together with community leaders and persons of authority, barriers to entry should be assessed before engaging a community. The assessment may indicate that it is better to withdraw if engaging might have harmful consequences for the community

○ **Gaining trust and building relationships:** Before being introduced to the community through pocket meetings, several introductory meetings with government officials, NGO workers, and community leaders are necessary to share the objectives of the project, and earn their trust and approval. After a series of meetings with potential communities, and after hearing their feedback, the researcher may return to the community centres and to individual houses to begin collecting narratives

○ **Special requirements for working with children:** With regard to minors, signed parental or guardian consent is important. Their parents must be informed of what is planned, how the work with children will be used and all their questions need to be answered before engaging with children. Any psychological impact of difficult memories and experiences must be assessed and support systems should be available

○ **Special requirements when working with women:** In cases where gender-based issues are prevalent, it is important for the interviewer to seek out women leaders, or trusted supporters of the community and approach women indirectly at first. Reporting a crime, serious abuse or trauma should be considered with the trusted community leaders or the team, and the person in danger (if accessible). The researcher is responsible to Do No Harm (even in cases where the decision to report a case is considered).

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During documentation

❍ **Due process and information sharing:** At the beginning of each interview, information about the project, its objectives, the rights of the narrator, the use of the archive, the public nature of the material and any possible negative consequences of sharing life histories should be clearly explained. Any clarifications should be answered before proceeding with the interview

❍ **Provide guarantees:** Based on the narrator's requirement, absolute or varying degrees of confidentiality and anonymity should be offered and guaranteed

❍ **Informed consent and the right to withdraw at any time:** There should be signed consent forms for public displays or public archiving of each narrative and any further use. The narrators should be able to contact the archive directly at any time or through a local NGO or community leader who may be linked to the project. As such all contact information should be given

❍ **Interviewees must be happy with the location of the interview:** They should be offered alternative (public/private) locations although it is best to conduct interviews or story writing within narrator's homes. Private spaces away from outsiders' gaze offers safety for the narrator from any immediate consequences. This is especially important when collecting women's narratives

❍ **Observe and accommodate situational conditions:** It is important to respond to prevailing or dynamic changes in the environment of the interview. For example the movement of military in highly securitised contexts could be a threat to effective documentation. Checking often if the narrator is comfortable with the environment or would like to stop is useful in such circumstances. This also includes, making sure the narrator is comfortable with all those who are present collecting the story (camera crew, NGO leaders or community leaders that may have accompanied the researcher)

❍ **Avoid promises/reciprocity of any kind:** However, if there are avenues or opportunities for economic support, educational support, justice needs or developmental needs that are mentioned during the interview that already exist in the area or organisations that already work on their needs, it is okay to provide information or links. This is especially important if there are psychological needs that are obvious and must be addressed at once

❍ **Managing expectations:** It is important to set out what this can do in terms of justice or accountability in post-conflict contexts. It is important to say, especially if asked, that there is no information (such as about missing persons) or personal connections or petitions that can be made on their behalf by the project except to document narratives

❍ **Letting the narrative flow:** Avoid body language that might disrupt narratives or cause the storyteller to alter their story. Avoid leading or influencing the narratives

❍ **Be aware of cultural restrictions and act accordingly:** If it is culturally appropriate, maintain eye-contact. This helps make the narrator and the interviewer feel equal and collaborative. It is best to sit opposite the interviewee and practice active listening (including indications of empathy, understanding and comfort) at all times

❍ **Be cautious when translating and transcribing a conversation:** It is important that the presence of a translator or interpreter does not become a distraction during the interview. Techniques such a maintaining eye contact with the interviewee helps the interviewer retain control of the interview.

❍ **When encountering silence, do not push for answers:** The silence maybe an indication of deep trauma, it might be that the person is not yet comfortable or it might be an indication of being 'silenced' by an outside force. It is best to let the narrator's level of comfort guide the documentation. However, it is ok to provide prompts, or questions in various ways to try and encourage conversation, as long as the narrator is not visibly uncomfortable

❍ **Taping all interviews to avoid misinterpretation (with permission only):** asking the narrator to write her/his story on paper is also helpful. Self-narration is the most effective format for controlling one's own story and minimising mediation of any kind

❍ **Managing security, government, military, paramilitary or other interference:** in extreme cases a high degree of vigilance is needed. This might include destroying all names and addresses (which may lead to the identities of the narrators being lost). In such cases, the story will exist but the personal information will not

❍ **Identifying support mechanisms:** The researcher needs to establish back-up systems for security, psycho-social care and other types of assistance, especially in situations of potential gender-based violence or violence against children. It is not wise to proceed if these systems are not identified.

❍ **Triangulation of data:** Additional sources and many points of view can corroborate narratives. Trying to get multiple stories from the same area will corroborate the basic information, without seeking specific verifications.

After documentation

❍ **Catalogue and prepare for archiving as soon as possible:** As part of the custodianship of the stories, the researchers should catalogue and add the story information to a master list as soon as possible. This catalogue can be selected from a variety of archiving processes as best suits the project

❍ **Share the completed story with the narrator:** As much as possible, in cases where a story needs to be processed further, take the completed story (video or photo-essay) back to the story-owner for their views on the acceptability of the edited version. In some cases, it may be possible to select photos, or story lines for video together with the narrator

❍ **Community dialogues:** These can further strengthen the cathartic impact of being able to share one's own story. It may create opportunities for reconciliation. If the context allows it, working long-term with the same communities is useful, especially in being able to hear and analyse others' stories.

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4.2 Responsibilities of the researcher

✓   The interviewer should be aware of issues involving his/her own safety when undertaking an interview. The interview or narrative is never as important as the interviewer or the interviewee. The Interviewer MUST conduct a context analysis of the project location to identify contesting narratives, security concerns, possible conflict touch-points such as ethnic/religious/political conflict potentials.

✓   Do not promote thoughtless stereotypes in selection, approach, types of questions or any form of indirect framing of the narratives

✓   The interviewer is responsible for providing contact details (and introducing all present)

✓   The researcher should carry all necessary equipment and forms with them (consent, feedback, business cards etc.). This must be in the local language. If unable to read or write, it needs to be read out and shared by someone the narrator trusts.

✓   Custodianship of the stories collected is with the project. It is the responsibility of the custodian of the stories to preserve the original documents written by hand, audios, videos and photos appropriately, until they can be given to a national archive or suitable institution for posterity (after cataloguing them). There should be an understanding that they are public documents and are only held in trust, not to be deleted, amended or changed in anyway (except where the narrator knows that they will be edited for a video or photo-essay for the public). Even in such cases, the whole interview, or all the footage should be archived.

✓   Self-care is the responsibility of the researcher. Active listening to hundreds of stories (especially about conflict experiences) can be gruesome, and emotionally and psychologically difficult. This necessitates self-awareness and self-care (mediation, counselling or working on feelings of survivor or perpetrator guilt by association, rest and relaxation)

✓   The project team are responsible for responding to any concerns or subsequent problems that narrators may face as a direct result of the project in the best way possible (some may require destroying a story, while others may even require involving the police or linking lawyers or human rights defenders to help someone directly victimised)

✓   Finally, it is the responsibility of the researcher/interviewer/ project curator to act in the 'spirit' of the project and in the spirit of the agreement between the storyteller and the story-collector in all matters concerning the collection, archiving, dissemination and use of the personal histories

5. TOOLS FOR GATHERING PERSONAL NARRATIVES

5.1 Letters
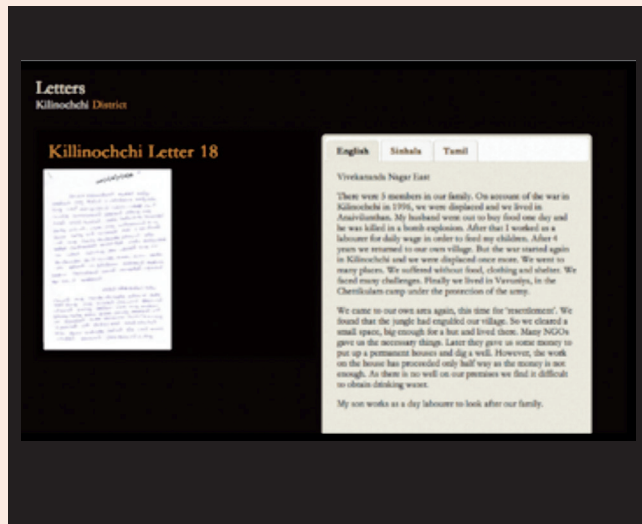
Hand-written letters: These were sourced primarily through community-based-organisations and community leaders known to the individuals that wrote them. Although, this is not an 'oral' history tradition, it is an effective tool for collecting personal narratives. The letter-writing format is one of the least mediated forms of personal narratives, as it can be archived or shared as it is - without framing and without editing - making it a direct message between the story-teller and the reader

The Letter format:

❍ Provides the narrator with an addressable 'other'. Even if there is no interviewer before them, they are able to 'tell' the story to someone else

❍ Makes it easier to archive and disseminate. As a hand-written document, it is a testimony with some historical value

❍ Offers the writer complete control, flow and choice of how to tell his/her own story.

❍ Enables the story-teller to write it in his/her own time, in the privacy of his/her own space away from possible coercion, manipulation by those in authoritative positions.

❍ It is useful for those seeking anonymity or those who are not able to appear on audio/video for cultural, security or other reasons.

Process:

1. **Introductory meetings:** Introductions are first made through local leaders, community-based organisations that they are familiar with or through neighbours who have already participated in previous documentation projects. After the initial introduction, each person is made aware of the project objectives, the archive, and public dissemination..

2. **Permissions:** After sharing details of where the story will be publicly accessible, explain and answer questions about this format.

3. **Directions:** If the letter writing format is chosen, the only guidelines given on how to write should be that,

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- o It should have some information about their personal and family history; the experiences that have impacted them; where they are today; and their future hopes and needs

- o It can be any length, addressed to anyone, about any aspect of the writer's personal story that he/she wishes to share. It is most valid as a historical narrative with the writer's name, address and date.

- o However, if the writer wishes to be anonymous and not use his/her name, then the date and the village name should be there to situate the narrative in time and place. However, it is also completely acceptable that the narrator gives no identifying information, even if it is then of limited validity as a historical document

4. **Collection:** The letter can either be given to the archivist immediately, or be mailed later as per the wishes of the writer

5. **Cataloguing:** The letter should be catalogued (with the catalogue number written on every page), scanned, and put into a clear folder and filed according to village, district or other chosen criteria

5.2 Trees of Life
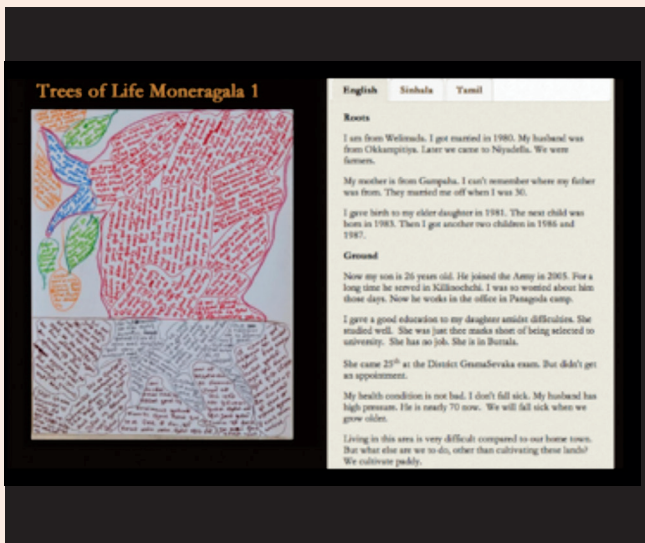
Visual expression through 'Trees of Life': Individual stories and conversations are captured in a visual, non-verbal format. The Trees of Life show the story of a person in the form of a tree that he/she draws as they reveal their personal story from the bottom to the top. These stories may span a lifetime or a specific time period chosen by the narrator. They include stories of their parents and siblings, their spouses and children, their experiences, their resilience and strength in moments of adversity; where they are today and their hopes for the future, for the country and for their children

The Trees of Life:

❍ Provide a framework to express one's experiences through an exercise that the interviewer and writer can do alone, with family or in a group. As the story-teller draws, documents and builds up his/her story while narrating the story and answering the interviewer's questions, the tree of life exercise becomes a collaborative process

❍ It is best done in a personal space, such as one's own home

Process:

1. **Introductory meetings:** Introductions are first made through local leaders, community-based organisation that they are familiar with or through neighbours who have already participated in previous documentation projects. After the initial introduction, each person is made aware of the project objectives, the archive, and its public dissemination.

2. **Permissions:** After sharing details of where the story will be publicly accessible, explain and answer questions about this format.

3. **Directions:** If the Trees of Life format is chosen, provide the following guidelines,

   o It is an interactive and collaborative exercise

   o It is a visual expression. As each part of the Tree represents a particular part of a person's narrative, they need to be done in a logical order. The roots represent their family/personal history such as place of birth, siblings, parents, schooling, marriage and details of children; the bark represents their life experiences - specifically those linked to violence and conflict if that is the purpose of the archive; the branches represent their hopes for the future; the leaves represent people that they value or have helped them; and the ground represents their life today

   o After the tree is nearly complete, it is time to move onto the 'fruits'. The person is asked to look over the 'tree' as a representation of their 'life story'. Having looked backed at their 'lives', they are asked to share good things

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that have happened in their lives, or what they feel about themselves. Most often this results in feelings of self-worth, and acknowledgments of personal strength and triumph over adversity, which is then recorded as the 'fruits of one's experiences'

o It is most valid as a historical narrative with the writer's name, address and date. However, if the writer wishes to be anonymous and not use his/her name, then the date and the village name should be there to situate the narrative in time and place. However, it is also completely acceptable that the narrator gives no identifying information, even if it is then of limited validity as a historical document

4. **Collection:** The tree is collected after it is completed. A copy of it should be offered and can be given if the story-owner requests it at any time.

5. **Cataloguing:** The tree should be catalogued (with the catalogue number written on it), scanned, rolled up in between tissue paper and put into an artist tube for safe keeping.

5.3 Memory-Capture Timelines
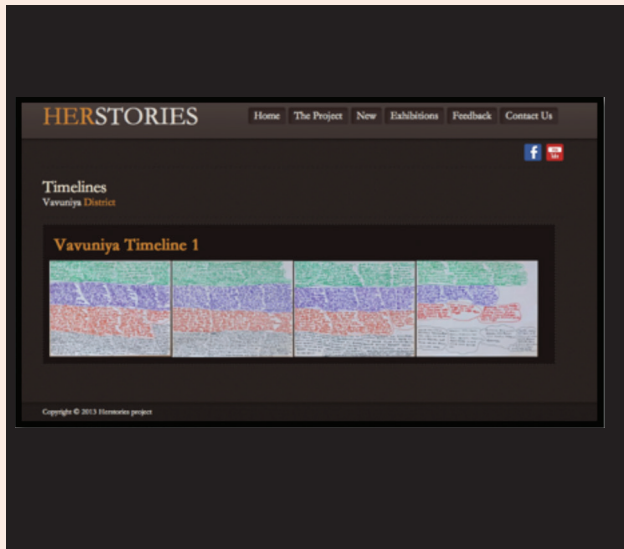
Memory-capture timelines document individual stories recorded through small group discussions. Large boards are laid on the ground, and each person records her/his history in a single colour. While each colour represents the story of one person horizontally, vertically each large paper represents a collective history of a specific place and time period. With 3-4 histories in one set of timelines, this showcases individual stories that build up to a collective narrative, illustrating the relationship between the collective and the personal in the process.

Process:

1. **Introductory meetings:** Introductions are first made through local leaders, community-based organisation that they are familiar with or through neighbours who have already participated in previous documentation projects. After the initial introduction, each person is made aware of the project objectives, the archive, and its public dissemination

2. **Permissions:** After sharing details of where the story will be publicly accessible, explain and answer questions about this format.

3. **Directions:** If the people opt to share their stories in groups, especially in the case of women's stories, the following directions are useful,

   o It is an interactive and collaborative exercise between the interviewer and the group of women/men. Therefore, a general discussion and rapport needs to be built up over time before beginning the process

   o There will be 4 papers laid out on the floor. Of these the first is about personal and family history, the second is about the experiences of war and violence (as per the goals of the archive), the third is about present-day circumstances and the final is about future hopes of each story-teller

   o The groups can either do each component simultaneously finishing one 'question' after another or each person can work on one of the four questions. As the four components can be seen as 4 questions – it is not necessary to follow it in order.

   o It is most valid as a historical narrative with the writer's name, address and date. However, if the writer wishes to be anonymous and not use his/her name, then the date and the village name should be there to situate the narrative in time and place. However, it is also completely acceptable that the narrator gives no identifying information, even if it is then of limited validity as a historical document

   o Although debate about common incidents and sharing might occur, it is best to encourage the participants to work on their own personal story.

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This limits the potential for contesting narratives to be adjusted and edited to reflect a 'common', sanitised and negotiated collective history as participants censor or write narratives that are more acceptable to the group

4. **Collection:** The map is collected after it is completed. A copy of it should be offered and can be given if the story-owners request it at any time.

5. **Cataloguing:** The map should be catalogued (with the catalogue number written on it), scanned, rolled up in between tissue paper and put into an artist tube for safe keeping. It is catalogued as one community narrative with one number, even though it might contain more than one story.

5.4 Memory Mapping for Children

This process engages children (aged 9-16) and village elders in an exercise of inter-generational dialogue. The product is a map - drawn by groups of children, then 'layered' with histories of their village, families, incidents of significance, and personal and collective experiences. It is further layered with the elders' narratives, thus preserving a moment of inter-generational transfer of memory.

In the case of the Community Memorialisation Project, these are children that had not lived through the war, or periods of violence. They were narrating the stories as hearsay, or memories passed down to them through parents, or of rumours they had heard but could not place with any accuracy on a map. In some cases, such as the map above, the children knew that 'empty spaces' meant something, but did not know what until their grandparents filled in 'gaps' in community memory.

Process:

1. **Introductory meetings:** Introductions are first made through local leaders, community-based organisation that they are familiar with or through neighbours who have already participated in previous documentation projects. After the initial introduction, parents or guardians are made aware of the project's objectives, the archive, and its public dissemination They are made aware of the nature of discussions with their children.

2. **Permissions:** After sharing details of where the story will be publicly accessible, explain and answer questions about this format. Parental consent is acquired before proceeding with the exercise. Parents are welcome to observe and remove their children if they choose to do so

3. **Special considerations:** It is best to have psycho-social support at these exercises. There are local government counsellors or social workers that could be included, if specialised psychologists are not easily accessible.

4. **Directions:** Children are brought together in a safe space such as a school yard, one of the children's homes or in a religious place that they know well. The children and their parents should be comfortable with the selected location. The optimal age group is 9-14 years. But it can extend from 7-17 without much difficulty. Ideally the groups should be from one area, and familiar with each other in order to produce a coherent map.

   o It is an interactive and collaborative exercise between the Facilitator and the children. Therefore, a general discussion and rapport needs to be built up before beginning the process. A few games, songs, ice-breaker activities are useful to build a sense of comfort

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o The grandparents and parents may observe the process but are not invited to participate until the first layer of mapping is complete

o Each group works on their own large map, with all the children drawing from various angles. They are asked to draw a map of their village, marking their houses, their friends' houses, schools, roads, familiar buildings, special memorials or sites of interest, as well as things that may no longer be there but they may have learned about from parents

o The Facilitator then asks the children to discuss what they know of sites they have marked and write up what they are on a card and paste it onto the map.

o The grandparents are invited to join the conversation. They are asked to look at the map and add places to the map that no longer exists (like an old destroyed church or an ancient dwelling that has been built over). The children ask the grandparents questions about such places learning about their histories in the process. This conversation may need to be facilitated at first until it flows naturally

o Following the facilitated inter-generational dialogue with grandparents, the children add the new information onto the map. However, not all the conversations will be noted down on paper, as the capacity of the children to write may vary. The grandparents or elders could be asked to write it down

o There is no need to add the children's names onto the map. Their ages and village name are adequate. It is hoped that children may continue the conversations about history at home with the elders as they may have more time to pass on memories

o Conclude the session by talking to the grandparents and parents about why it is important to talk to children about their histories and how the conversations can be focused on non-recurrence of war or violence

5. **Collection:** The map is collected after it is completed. A copy of it should be offered and can be given if the story-owners request it at any time. In this instance, it is acceptable to give the children school supplies such as a notebook or pencils as a present after the exercise is complete.

6. **Cataloguing:** The map should be catalogued (with the catalogue number written on it), scanned, rolled up in between tissue paper and put into an artist tube for safe keeping. This is catalogued as one community narrative with one number, even if it contains a collective history of many.

5.5 Photo-Essays
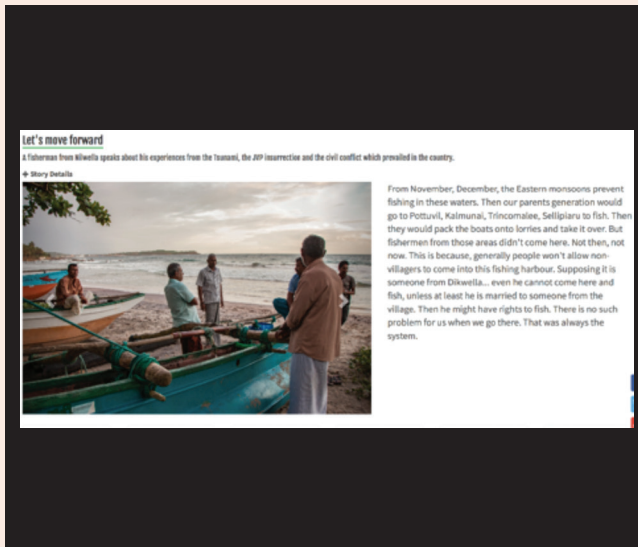
A small number of participants may be willing to be photographed. The essays showcase people as they share their stories in their own homes, or villages. The essays often include places of significance and objects of memory as the story-tellers walk around with the interviewer. Interviews are recorded in full, but the photo-essays are created from images paired up with quotations that are derived from the recordings. In some cases, it is possible to choose the images and quotations that the story-teller would like to be used together or on-site.. When presented for public consumption, this is a mediated form of narrative documentation, as there will be a selection bias, editing and framing of the story.

Process:

1. **Introductory meetings:** Introductions are first made through local leaders, community-based organisation that they are familiar with or through neighbours who have already participated in previous documentation projects. After the initial introduction, each person is made aware of the project objectives, the archive, and its public dissemination Permissions: After sharing details of where the story will be publicly accessible, explain and answer questions about this format. In the case of photographs, it is possible to photograph without showing the face, or identifying factors such as the person's home. Permissions to record conversations should be sought at the beginning and this along with permissions for public use can also be recorded on tape.

2. **Directions:**

   o It is an interactive and collaborative exercise between the interviewer and the interviewee. Therefore, a general discussion and rapport needs to be built up over time, before beginning the process

   o 'Tell me your story' is adequate to start the process with some individuals. With some, the dialogue needs to be facilitated: questions about their personal histories, questions about their experiences of violence, questions about their village or traditional arts and crafts, questions about their present circumstances and future hopes may help

   o However, the story goes where the narrator wants it to, and they should never be pressured to answer questions forcibly. The narrators are allowed to stop, ask questions or clarify the purpose, use and rationale for documentation at any time.

   o It is most valid as a historical narrative with the writer's name, address and date. However, if the storyteller wishes to be anonymous and not use his/her name, then the date and the village name should be there

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> to situate the narrative in time and place. However, it is also completely acceptable that the narrator gives no identifying information, even if it is then of limited validity as a historical document
>
> o If there is time, and the participants are willing, the interviewer can explain that a photo-essay is comprised of x number of images and quotations. Some images and components of the conversation may be selected as a preliminary set together, adding to the collaborative nature of the process

3. **Collection:** The photos are processed and the photo-essay is compiled much later. A copy of a specific photo, or the link to the photo-essay, or a CD with the photo-essay may be offered and can be given if the story-owners request it at any time.

❍ Cataloguing – The story should be catalogued immediately. However, the processing might happen later. All photos and unedited, full recordings should be stored and archived safely. .

5.6 Videos

Conversations can be filmed with those who are comfortable being recorded on video. These can be filmed at the narrator's home or as they walk through site of memory around their village. Some family members may also wish to participate and share in the story. Some may wish to tell their story on video but without showing their face. All options should be considered according to the wishes of the story-teller.

Although the entire footage of the interview is archived, stories will be edited to four to seven minute clips for public consumption. This is one of the most mediated forms of documentation and will reflect the goals of the project. It is also impossible to process and produce videos in collaboration with the storyteller as post-production occurs off-site. However, in dissemination or using personal histories for dialogue on reconciliation or non-violence, this is one of the most useful and emotive formats of expression.

Process:

1. **Introductory meetings:** Introductions are first made through local leaders, community-based organisation that they are familiar with or through neighbours who have already participated in previous documentation projects. After the initial introduction, each person is made aware of the project objectives, the archive, and its public dissemination

2. **Permissions:** After sharing details of where the story will be publicly accessible, explain and answer questions about this format. It is best to get permission on camera. It is possible to record the story without showing the face of the individual or any identifying features.

3. **Directions:** If the people opt to share their stories through video, then consider that,

   o It is an interactive and collaborative exercise between the interviewer and storyteller. Therefore, a general discussion and rapport needs to be built up over time, before beginning the process

   o 'Tell me your story' is adequate to start the process with some individuals. With some, the dialogue needs to be facilitated: questions about their personal histories, questions about their experiences of violence, questions about their village or traditional arts and crafts, questions about their present circumstances and future hopes may help. However, the story goes where the narrator wants it to, and there should never be pressure to answer questions forcibly. The narrators are allowed to stop, ask questions or clarify the purpose, use and rationale for documentation at any time

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o It is most valid as a historical narrative with the writer's name, address and date. However, if the storyteller wishes to be anonymous and not use his/her name, then the date and the village name should be there to situate the narrative in time and place. However, it is also completely acceptable that the narrator gives no identifying information, even if it is then of limited validity as a historical document

4. **Collection:** It is impossible to share the videos immediately. Footage can be shown if requested, especially if the narrator wants to confirm that they are filmed in darkness to shield their identity for example. However, if the participants request them, it can be given to them later or a link can be shared with them.

5. **Cataloguing:** The story should be catalogued immediately. However, the processing will happen later. The complete interview and footage should be stored safely as it is a historical, oral history documentation. The interview can also be edited down for public consumption for use in dialogues for non-recurrence. However, editing hours of footage down to minutes has its own ethical issues of 'narrative framing' and selection bias.

5.7 Audio interviews

Audio recordings can be at sites of incidents or in the narrators' own homes. This process is very similar to photo-essay interviews or video interviews, except for the visual documentation of the story-teller or their environment. While the entire footage is archived it is possible to edit audio clips to reflect the objectives of the archive/project. The entire interview can be transcribed, including the interviewer's questions or made into a coherent narrative 'story' by taking out the questions. This is a mediated form of narrative documentation. When archived or shared in full, it can be a very useful and versatile form of story capture with historical value.

Process:

1. **Introductory meetings:** Introductions are first made through local leaders, community-based organisation that they are familiar with or through neighbours who have already participated in previous documentation projects. After the initial introduction, each person is made aware of the project objectives, the archive, and its public dissemination

2. **Permissions:** After sharing details of where the story will be publicly accessible, explain and answer questions about this format. It is best to include verbal permissions on the audio recorder.

3. **Directions:** If the people opt to share their stories through an audio interview, it is useful to consider that,

   o It is an interactive and collaborative exercise between the interviewer and storyteller. Therefore, a general discussion and rapport needs to be built up over time, before beginning the process

   o 'Tell me your story' is adequate to start the process with some individuals. With some, the dialogue needs to be facilitated: questions about their personal histories, questions about their experiences of violence, questions about their village or traditional arts and crafts, questions about their present circumstances and future hopes may help. However, the story goes where the narrator wants it to, and they should never be pressured to answer questions forcibly. They are allowed to stop, ask questions or clarify the purpose, use and rationale for documentation at any time

   o It is most valid as a historical narrative with the writer's name, address and date. However, if the storyteller wishes to be anonymous and not use his/her name, then the date and the village name should be there to situate the narrative in time and place. However, it is also completely acceptable that the narrator gives no identifying information, even if it is then of limited validity as a historical document

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4.   **Collection:** The audio recordings are impossible to be shared immediately. However, if the participants request them, it can be given to them later or a link can be shared with them. They should be stored safely for processing.

5.   **Cataloguing:** The story should be catalogued immediately. However, the processing will happen later. The complete interview should be stored safely as a historical, oral history document. It should be transcribed fully. The audio interview can also be edited into sound bites for use in dialogue for non-recurrence but this has its own ethical problems of framing or selection bias. However, when mediated and edited, its historical validity is far less than when it is presented in its unedited and raw form

6 CATALOGUING, PUBLIC HISTORY ARCHIVING, DISSEMINATION AND FURTHER USE

6.1 Cataloguing and archiving

"Curation refers to the long-term care and management of historical documents, in order to ensure maximum access for the present and the future."

Nancy MacKay[9]

There are many established standards and protocols for audio-visual archiving and public history documentation. The documentation of people's histories goes beyond merely about collecting them. It is also about managing and processing the collection for preservation, reuse and research. While the processes of oral history archiving, especially in the digital age, are being problematised in many ways, this tool-kit will not refer to these on-going debates. This section will solely focus on the methodology used in the Herstories Project and Community Memorialisation Project in Sri Lanka.

First, it is important to record the context of the personal narrative. This might include its location, other descriptors and a series number. Essentially, one of the outcomes of such a process is that it is established as part of a 'collection' or a body of information that is specific, trustworthy and traceable. In these two projects, the cataloguing has focused on 'location' descriptors and numbering as a primary source of locating each personal narrative within the project archive.

CMP / MAT / ATU / WIL / 09				
CMP	MAT	ATU	WIL	09
Locate it within the project (in this case) the Community Memorialisation Project	Located within the project district (which is Matara in this case)	Located within the division (Aturaliya in this case)	Located within the village (Wilpita in this case)	Indicates that this is the 9th story to come out of a certain village, (in this case Wilpita)

Second, it is important to care for the material in its entirety and to establish clear links between its original site of archiving, surrogate collections and derivatives. There are many ways of preserving and using all the material, such as:

❍ By preserving and maintaining the original material as a physical archive

❍ By organising and managing it as a database with provenance and other descriptors such as the name, address, contact details, type of material, key words for content, date and location included

❍ By preserving it all in its original form and as a digitised surrogate collection. The use of technology can also extend and widen its use and accessibility

❍ By establishing clear connections between the original material and the derivatives (such as edited videos created for public consultation) through shared catalogue numbers and archiving in one location (such as at a National Archive)

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❍ By establishing broader public access to it, the collection becomes a 'living' archive

❍ By ensuring that the database is searchable and usable through themes, content type, gender, location and age group

Third, it is important to file and preserve authorisations that establish the validity of the material and prescriptions for its use:

❍ Any consent forms and permissions given should be filed, ideally against the catalogue number of the personal narrative

❍ Legal or other rights associated with the material should be noted in the archive

❍ If requested to ensure anonymity, the curator should be willing to delete all personal information

❍ Should the storyteller wish to destroy the original, there should be no questions asked. The material should be responsibly disposed. Identifying and tracking ownership of the narrative is another reason why a well-maintained database and securely filed consent forms are important.

6.2 Dissemination through exhibitions, websites, media and facilitated dialogue workshops

While there are many established best practices for the effective and ethical dissemination and use of archives, this tool-kit focuses on the methodologies used for the Herstories Project and the Community Memorialisation Project. Both projects created curated travelling exhibitions. The Herstories Project was taken to 6 locations in Sri Lanka and 6 locations abroad which are considered Sri Lankan diaspora hubs. The Community Memorialisation Project archive was taken to 37 villages in the districts of Mannar, Matara and Ampara where over 1200 people from 420 neighbouring villages, viewed it. The travelling exhibition always travelled as part of a facilitated dialogue process of a series of workshops on understanding conflict and non-recurrence of violence. To widen the public discourse on reconciliation and non-recurrence of violent conflict, the project also engaged the story-tellers that were willing to speak in public and the stories as cornerstones for talk shows on TV and Radio. In addition, an online website was created with the entire surrogate digital collection of the archive - www.memorymap.lk. It is best that an exhibition or web archive of potentially traumatic material is supported with a dialogue process or adequate explanations to help process the information effectively and without harm.

In using the archive further, there were several considerations:

❍ **Authenticity and accuracy of stories:** As subjective, personal histories, the veracity of each narrative cannot be clearly established. They are multiple narratives of personal truths that as a collection provide a general impression of incidents and facts of historical values.

❍ **Unedited and unmediated narratives are best:** Mediated stories are easier for public consumption due to its emotive, short and easily accessible nature. However, unedited formats such as Letters or Trees of Life are more historically valid as it is a direct communication between the story-teller and the viewer/ listener. It creates a greater sense of empathy and as an accurate transfer of memory as possible

❍ **Balance of viewpoints and truths:** Although logic would dictate that there should be a balance to the framing of the overall narrative through each individual story selected, it can be argued that those who have suffered more and suffered longer should have greater representation. There is no definitive solution to the

framing of the narrative, or if 'balance' might do a disservice to some by equalising experience. This is something to be aware of when curating an exhibition, as no prescriptive methodology can be given

❍ **Consent and anonymity for those who have requested it:** Where the participant has specifically asked for anonymity, the archive and the website should adhere to the protection of identity. However, if there is a security concern or prevailing threat to the persons, then it is possible for the curator to choose to remove all personal details from the archive even if permission has been given to share personal details

❍ **Storage and disposal of material should be carried out responsibly:** After an exhibition or workshop material should be stored safely or be donated to libraries and schools

When creating an online repository for the digitised material there are a few key factors to consider. These are lessons that were partially learned through the short-comings of the Herstories and MemoryMap websites. The design and look of the website might be based on taste preferences, but the function of the website should have the following considerations:

❍ **Detailed descriptors of the archive:** The website is generally a digitised collection that is physically housed at an archive elsewhere. Therefore, it is a surrogate collection and not the primary source material. It does not need to have the full catalogue of details (addresses, names) as with the master catalogue held with the original material at its physical locale

❍ **Easy to Search:** The material should be coded by gender, age group, location, type of product, thematic content, and catalogue numbers. If possible, the added feature of a 'key word search' will allow a more nuanced search

❍ **Coherent organisation:** As archival material, the catalogue numbers and details of how a story is located or fits into the larger conceptual whole, should be consistent. The organisation can be simple and easy to use as well as logically sound

❍ **Additional resources:** All material should have the necessary translations. The site should have additional resources such as articles, analyses and tools that might help understand the material further

Apart from the general concerns above, the following is a specific consideration with regard to the use of archival material for creating a wider dialogue through television or radio talk shows. It is best to follow-up and learn from the reception of the TV shows through listener tracking:

❍ **Creating listening groups:** In order to provide feedback to the project team of what resonated with listeners/viewers, groups can be created in random locations, and given media monitoring or response grids (see annexes). Ideally, these groups remain the same throughout a series, so that feedback is consistent with regard to socio-economic status, personal biases and education levels

❍ **Focus group discussions:** In addition to being listener feedback groups, these could also become focus groups that use the TV/Radio shows as a catalyst to discuss how each topic can be incorporated into practice at village level or within the family. The Community Memorialisation Project created listener groups but did not capitalise on their formation to actively discuss the TV/Radio shows further. Although this is time consuming and expensive, the impact of the TV/Radio programme using the archive may have been greatly reduced due to the lack of such facilitated follow-up/focus group discussions at village level

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7   OTHER RESOURCES

7.1 Self-care for researchers

Many researchers who work in post-conflict transitional societies may feel embarrassed or ashamed to admit to themselves and others, that their research may negatively impact their physical and mental health. Apart from the stresses of heavy workloads and deadlines that are normally present in projects such as these, the difficult nature of the stories that a researcher must constantly encounter may cause emotional stress that goes unnoticed. It is not often explored, but overtime, the other's experiences can be 'transferred' and become part of the researcher's own personal experience of conducting the project [10]. This may cause vicarious trauma, burn-out and feelings of guilt for what the other may have gone through. It might also cause disillusionment about one's own view of 'humanity'. In some instances the emotional and physical toll builds up over time; as a project of this nature can last a few years. It can be worse in conflict or post-conflict contexts where there is a constant battle to maintain vigilance and security. 'Self-care' is therefore something that a researcher should be aware of, practice regularly and build-in to their fieldwork.

A few strategies for self-care, especially during fieldwork, are:

❍   Build in periods of rest away from the project

❍   Practice daily relaxation methodologies such as breathing, meditation or exercise

❍   Avoid situations that might negatively impact one's mood, such as films and books with violent subject matter, negative news on social media or alcohol abuse

❍   Learn to identify signs of extreme stress, trauma and depression in oneself

❍   Seek help by talking to someone trusted, a colleague or a professional support network

❍   Keep a reflection journal during field work that will help 'unload' the day's emotional stress

7.2 Ethics checklist

Pre-interview document checklist		
1	Have you developed, do you have a copy and have you read the Interview/data collection protocol?	
2	Do you have an interview tool with you, attached to your notebook?	
3	Do you have a participant information sheet explaining your approach, their involvement in your research and how you will be maintaining confidentiality of their data?	
4	Do you have enough copies of the consent form?	
5	Have you received necessary permissions/ permissions letters from Community Based Organisations or Government authorities?	
Pre-interview considerations		
6	a) Does your study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities, victims of torture, eyewitnesses under physical threat, sexual violence victims)? b) Have you taken the necessary steps to 'do no harm' based on these particular vulnerabilities?	
6	Will the study involve the use of participants' images or sensitive data (e.g. participants personal details stored electronically, image capture techniques)?	
8	Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety in participants or those associated with the research, however unlikely you think that risk is?	
9	Have you got back-up systems to support such vulnerability? – security, psycho-social and data-protection policies etc.	
10	Have engaged in pre-interviews with community elders, leaders and explained the reasons for your mission? Have you invited them to accompany you to specifically challenging and vulnerable situations (interviews where there are gender concerns)?	
11	Have you done a risk assessment and conflict assessment for the locality where you are working? Have you done a socio-cultural assessment? Have you done a conflict analysis including understanding power dynamics in the area? Have you understood local gender dynamics?	
12	Have you completed a security/risk check for yourself and for the interviewee? Security check should identify potential spoilers/ violent factions in the area/ militarized or armed groups that might pose a physical threat/ potential for stigmatization and domestic violence as a result of interviews/ power brokers	
13	Do you have adequate language skills or language support?	

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During the interview		
14	Could the data collection induce physical danger for the interviewee, their families or their village/tribe? Have you established mechanisms for personal data protection in such instances that you can share with your interviewee as proof of information safety? "Personal data" can be defined as identifiers: any information that could, in any way, lead to the specific identification of one unique person, such as name, social security numbers, date of birth, address, mails IPs etc.	
15	Have you explained the consent form and the right to withdraw at any point? The right to anonymity?	
16	Have you a tape recorder and any relevant equipment? Have you received express permission from the interviewee to record them?	
17	Have you made sure the interviewee is comfortable with their location and feel safe?	
18	Have you explained to the interviewees what will happen with their interviews, where they will be located and what they will be used for? This is important for managing expectations.	
19	Are you keeping a personal reflection or a participant observer account of each interview? Your reflection on the environment, any perceived barriers to communication, interference, persons accompanying the interviewee or hovering in the area etc. is useful in evaluating the interview in post-interview review.	
20	Have you provided the interviewee with contact details where he/she can reach the project team should they require assistance due to direct consequences of your interview?	
Post-interview		
21	Have you got adequately skilled transcribers and translators? Have you explained to them about not altering narratives? Have you got proofreading support?	
22	Have you identified what types of information you will prioritise? Do you have an alternative mechanism for storing the 'full interview'?	
23	Have you identified sources of verification or opportunities for triangulation of data?	
24	Have you identified a physical location for the safe storage of all material? Have you identified means of digitizing and archiving all material? Have you devised a system of cataloguing suitable for your project?	

7.3 Consent Form

1.	I have read and understood the information about the Community Memorialisation project, as explained by enumerator /story collector.	❏
2	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	❏
3.	I voluntarily agree to give my story for Community Memorialisation Project	❏
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	❏
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymization of data, etc.) to me.	❏
6.	The use of the data in sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	❏
7.	I understand that other audiences will have access to my story when archived on the website or at an exhibition.	❏
8.	Select only one of the following: • I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this story collection process will be used in reports, publications and archives so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. • I do not want my name used in this project.	❏ ❏
10.	I, along with the story enumerator/story collector, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	❏

Participant:

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Interviewer:

_____   _____   _____

Name of Enumerator   Signature   Date

34   NARRATIVE HISTORY DOCUMENTATION : A TOOL-KIT
      Based on the Methodologies Used in the Herstories Project
      and the Community Memorialisation Project

7.4 Listener Group Feedback Form

1. Name of listener (can leave blank)?

2. How old are you?

3. Where do you live (village and district)?

4. Are you male?   [ ]   Are you female?   [ ]

5. Name of show -

6. Date of show airing –

7. The show was on

    TV   [ ]   Radio   [ ]

8. In your impression, what was the subject/message of the show?

9. Who did you think the show was aimed at? Who will it appeal to most? Why?

10. Did you agree with the message of the show?

No	Somewhat	Not sure	Yes	Really liked it	WHY?

11. Did you agree with what the person 1 on the show said?

No	Somewhat	Not sure	Yes	Really liked it	WHY?

12. Did you agree with what the person 2 on the show said?

No	Somewhat	Not sure	Yes	Really liked it	WHY?

13. Did the show make you think?

No	Somewhat	Not sure	Yes	Definitely did	WHY? HOW?

14. Will you talk to others about the content/message of the show?

No	Somewhat	Not sure	Yes	Definitely will	WHY? HOW? TO WHOM?

15. Will you share the message/ content of the show with your children? Other children?

No	Somewhat	Not sure	Yes	Definitely will	WHY? HOW?

16. Will you tell others to watch this?

No	Somewhat	Not sure	Yes	Definitely will	WHY?

17. Will the message of the show change your behaviour in any way?

No	Somewhat	Not sure	Yes	Definitely will	WHY?

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END NOTES

1 Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. Educational Researcher, 19 (5), 2-14

2 The Herstories Project was initiated and development by the author, and implemented together with VIluthu Centre for Human Resources Development in 2012-2014. It collected 285 women's narratives from 7 districts, produced a series of exhibitions in Sri Lanka and abroad, and is archived online and at the National Archives of Sri Lanka.

3 The Community Memorialisation Project was initiated by the author and development and implemented together with Search for Common Ground, Sri Lanka in 2015-2018. It collected 350 narratives from Sri Lankans of all genders, ethnicities and age groups from 3 districts. It is archived online while travelling exhibitions promote dialogue on non-recurrence of violent conflict.

4 Ross, M., & Conway, M. (1986). Remembering one's own past: The construction of personal histories. In R. M. Sorrentino & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), Handbook of motivation and cognition: Foundations of social behavior (pp. 122-144). New York: Guilford.

5 Subjectivity is a complex phenomenon. The researches need to be aware that it is not a singular set of experiences of one person. It is often interpolated by one's community, one's many identities, and mediated by many contesting truths that are socially, culturally and politically relevant to the subjective 'person'.

6 http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/a-creative-commons-solution/

7 In the Herstories Archives and the Memory Map archive, although a certain balance was maintained with all regions and ethnic groups being represented, the choice of districts was based on access to the villages through community based organisations with whom good working relationships existed, networks on the ground with social mobilisers, and even weather, harvesting and practical timing requirements. In the case of the memory map archive, the working divisions were selected for the project by the Government Agent.

8 Tom Wengraf (2001). Qualitative Research Interviewing. Sage Publications

9 MacKay, Nancy, (2007). Curating Oral Histories: from interview to archive. California: Left Coast Press

10 The terms "vicarious traumatisation," "compassion fatigue," and "secondary trauma" refer to changes in one's world view, inner experience, sense of safety, attitude toward work life, and possibly behavior as described in May Benatar's article on vicarious trauma - https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/how-conducting-trauma-therapy-changes-the-therapist/

About the author –

Radhika Hettiarachchi is a researcher, curator and development practitioner. She is primarily engaged in the field of peacebuilding with expertise in memorialisation and oral history, as well as the arts as a means of creating space for civil society discourse on issues of gender, security, memory justic and reconciliation. She read English and Communications Theory at York University, Canada, and holds a Masters in Development Management from the London School of Economics and Political Science, U.K.

Acknowledgements –

About the project –

The Community Memorialisation Project is a joint project of Search for Common Ground and The Herstories Project along with district partners - Viluthu Centre for Human Resource Development in Mannar, Prathiba Media Network in Matara and Women Development Foundation in Ampara.

- The project capture individual and shared community narratives in order to prioritise and strengthen community owned memorialisation. Its primary objective is to facilitate an environment that acknowledges and preserves multiple histories, while encouraging empathy through inter-generational transfer and inter-regional sharing of memory to support peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

- Building on individual stories the project team works with the communities to share their stories and facilitate dialogue within their communities about why memorialisation is needed, why multiple narratives should co-exist, and how we remember, at the divisional level and between the participating districts. The process focuses on empathetic listening and acknowledgement.

- There is clearly a need for wider public engagement. This is based on web-based and social media based platforms to add, debate and engage with the stories as well as on questions of memorialisation. With the participants' permission, the project will share these life stories through a traveling exhibition, an online archive, and a physical archive at the national level, similar to its predecessor - the Herstories Project.

- The project will contribute to discourse and practice, through regular learning circles, sharing of practice notes, new processes of monitoring and evaluation tools devised for this project and recommendations for a memory policy, based on views and needs at a village or district level.

While the project will have a cathartic and empathetic impact on the participants sharing their life stories at an individual level, it will also facilitate their voices and needs to be heard, through its wide dissemination. The success of the project will be in attitudinal changes – about the need to hear and acknowledge the many personal truths that exist. At a wider level, it will contribute to how Sri Lankans memorialise and historicise our past, and to making processes of justice, truth and reconciliation inclusive.